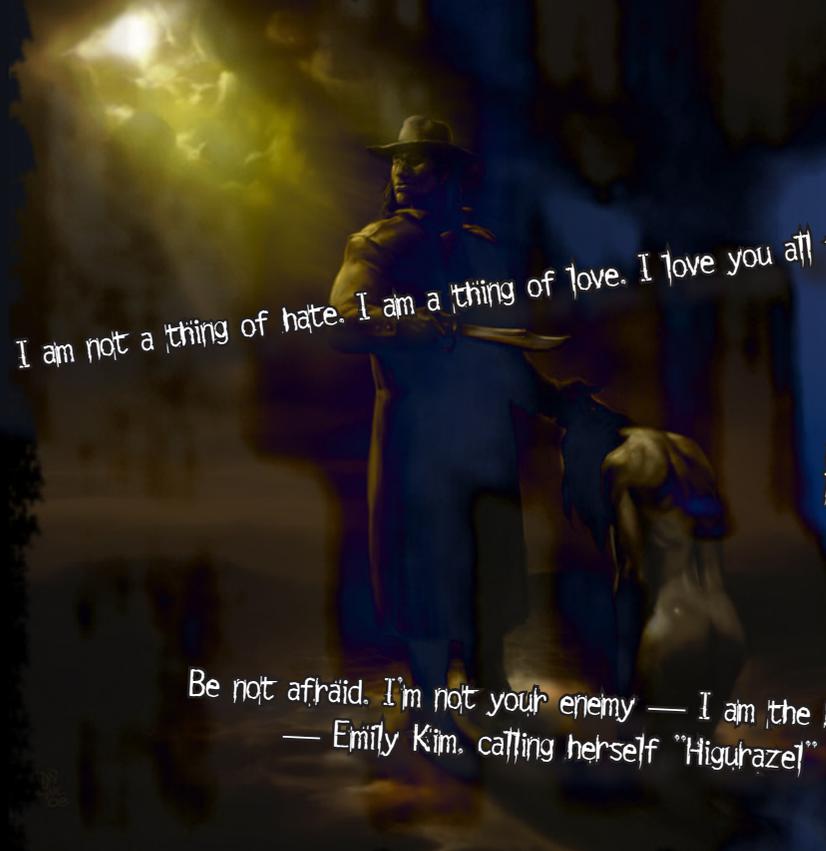


INFERNO™

the World of Darkness





I am not a thing of hate. I am a thing of love. I love you all so much.

I covet your flesh, your breath, your passion. I crawled into this vessel because I loved it so.

Be not afraid. I'm not your enemy — I am the best friend you never knew you had.
— Emily Kim, calling herself "Higurazel"

This book includes:

- An infernal hierarchy's worth of demons, from the lowly Whisperers to the terrible Archdemons
- Details on the pacts that mortals strike with demons, as well as rules for summoning demons or opening gates to Hell
- Rules on the Possessed, those taken over by hellish beings and twisted in the process
- A number of antagonists, from demons to Possessed to L'enfants Diabolique, those born with a trace of the infernal in their blood

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the World of Darkness®

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INFERNO™



MATTHEW MCFARLAND | JOHN NEWMAN
MALCOLM SHEPPARD | AND CHUCK WENDIG

RING OF KEYS

By Chuck Wendig

The house—really, just a cabin—sat on a ridge. The ridge overlooked a ravine, and at the bottom of the ravine ran a muddy creek, a serpent of churning clay-colored water that wound through the dark hills. Even now, in the morning, the early sun was already hot, bleached, bleary. A pair of buzzards circled one another overhead, black wings buoyed by exhalations of warm air.

A car approached. Sedan, silver, four-door. A rental. Plumes of dust rose behind the tires as it wound through the crooked evergreen spears and outcroppings of shadowed granite. It stopped at the cabin, tires popping on limestone gravel. The sun moved to hide behind the only cloud in the sky.



“Doesn’t look like a big place,” Greg said, poking about. He clicked on a dusty lamp next to a lumpy recliner. Fanned out a stack of hunting and racing magazines, then sighed. “You can give us an appraisal pretty fast, then?”

Barbara, with her plain-jane ashen hair and face like bleached saddle leather, clucked her tongue and wagged a pen. Her jaw worked hard at a stubborn piece of spearmint gum; even after the two-hour drive up here, Greg could still smell the stale mint.

“Can’t be too quick,” she said. “Tax purposes. Real estate purposes. All that. Honestly, I’m surprised. I heard you wanted to sell this little gem, and I thought to myself, well that is *just* a dang shame. Beautiful cabin, sittin’ pretty up above Buzzard Creek—”

"About that," Karen, Greg's wife, started. "It's dry up here, bone dry, I'm getting nosebleeds and I'm using a lot of moisturizer, but that stream below us, it's like whitewater rapids down there. Why is that?"

"Snowmelt," Barbara said. "Heck, there was snow on the ground just two weeks ago. But late spring hits, and so does the sun. Part of the dryness, though, is all the *thin* air up here, and you want to watch out for altitude sickness because—"

"Listen," Greg interrupted. "You're the real estate lady, do your real estate thing. I want to sell this place. I do not want to keep it."

"If you say so. I just know that this *little gem* is a real keeper, and obviously your father loved it very much; it feels very cozy and warm and just plain lived-in." Barbara made a frowny-sad-droopy face.

Greg'd had enough. "It looks lived-in because it *was* lived-in. Dad died of a heart attack in that chair *right there*, that's why there's an empty soda can on the table, that's why there's an empty bag of fucking Funyuns laying on the floor. So. Do you want to do business or not? You drag us all the way up here, all the way out to Assfuck Mountain to do what? Moralize at me? Sell me a place that's already mine thanks to the will they found under his goddamn mattress? Or do you want to be quiet and do your goddamn job?"

Karen, his rock, his steady, his anchor, put a calming hand on his shoulder.

The real estate lady looked stung, like somebody'd just slapped the gum out of her mouth. "You don't have to use such impolite language. We're polite people here."

"Fuck you. Get the hell out of here. I'll find somebody who wants to do the job."



Moments later, a door slam. A car engine. More gravel underneath tires.

Greg slumped into the recliner, springs squealing. He took a deep breath. Gritted his teeth.

"Rough day at the office?" Karen said, standing behind him. She rubbed her thumbs

over his temples. It was a joke, that question, something she asked him nearly every day. Funny—or, at least, funny to them—because he worked out of the house, in their attic studio.

Greg laughed a little. It felt nice, both the temple rub and the small smile that played at the corners of his mouth. "Mmm. Rough month. Rough year, rough decade. Let's recap, shall we? Dad divorces Mom ten years ago. Mom dies of pancreatic cancer. Dad buys a house, *this* house, this little bolthole cabin, and moves away to the approximate epicenter of nowhere. Oh, but before he moves, he tells me what a worthless waste of good semen I was, because he wanted a



"I just know
that this little
gem is a real
keeper."



hard worker and instead got himself a *watercolor artist*. Then he disappears for ten years. No phone calls. No letters. Not even a postcard from ol' Buzzard Creek down yonder. Then, *then*, the old man dies. Heart explodes, boom. He leaves his fortune—which includes this palatial estate and everything in it, all the animal heads and racing magazines I could ever want—to me. The worthless waste of good semen.

So. We get on a red-eye, and I can't get any sleep because some two-year-old dickhead does the Russian Kick Dance on the back of my seat for four hours. Am I missing anything?"

"One thing."

"Oh yeah? What's that?"

"The real estate lady drove us here, and now she's gone. With the car."

He chewed on the inside of his cheek. "Well, shit."



No cell phone signal. Zero bars. And Greg had decided months ago—as executor of the estate—to stop paying the phone bill at the cabin because he didn't think he'd need it. So, sure enough, the phone was dead. They were stuck.

"Do we have food or water?" Greg asked.

"A bottle of Aquafina and two half-eaten rolls of generic Mentos."

"Meal fit for a king, then. I'll check the fridge, see if there's anything in

there. My stomach's already rumbling. You want to get out the notebook and pen, and then we'll start up the inventory? Might as well kill time until the real estate lady realizes she left us to die on the top of this ridge. She'll be back."



Greg popped the fridge, and a gamy smell socked him in the face. He swal-

lowed a reflex gag and sucked in a lifesaving breath. Flies appeared; they orbited his head.

Didn't take long to identify the offenders. Wasn't the cranberry

juice or the shelf of mostly-empty condi-

ment containers. No, sitting on the lower

shelf were two packag-

es wrapped in butcher's paper: one labeled ELK, the other BEAR. Brown blood soaked through. Trails of it grew vicious red mold.

Closing the door with his foot, Greg staggered backward just as Karen showed up with the notebook from her purse.

"First two items on the inventory," he said, "two packages of spoiled meat. Maybe we can sell them on eBay."

"No food, then."

"Not unless you know how to kill botulism, no."

"Onto the inventory?"

"Onto the inventory."



The bedroom. Where his father had slept these past ten years. Bedposts

were lacquered pine stumps, twisted and knotty. Mattress sagged in the middle. No dresser: just piles of folded clothes against the wall, mostly flannel and denim, a bit of camouflage and blaze orange thrown in for good measure. Under the bed, three rifles, two shotguns. On the wall, an oil painting of some Indian scalping a grizzly bear, and two autographed pictures of John Wayne. Greg rubbed his eyes. He had gone beyond tired and careened into "awake and jittery" territory. He felt Karen come up behind him.

"Notice," he said, sweeping his arms in a dramatic gesture. "No paintings of mine. Paintings of deer and goddamn wolves everywhere. Indians all over the place, too, as if my dad wasn't a white, blue-collar plumber from Hammonton, New Jersey. John Wayne in this room. Gary Cooper and Red Buttons in the living room. All autographed. But not a single one of my paintings."

She wrapped her arms around his midsection. "Did you ever give him any?"

Well, no, Greg thought, *but it's not like the old man ever asked*. But he didn't say it. Instead, he asked, "I wonder what he dreamt about up here. Did he dream of regret? Was this his place of peace? His... what do the Cherokee call it? Happy Hunting Ground? You know, I basically don't know jack shit about my

dad. One big mystery to me. As I was, probably, to him."

"Add this one to the pile, then." Karen pulled away and jingled something in front of Greg's face. A ring of keys. Seven keys of varying sizes hung from a looped and braided circle of chicken wire. "Found this draped on an antique pepper grinder in the kitchen."

"What's it unlock?"

"That, my husband, is the question. Besides the front door, I've not seen a single lock in this place. Have you?"

"Not a one." He chewed on it, took the keys, peered at them for a good minute. "The front door doesn't even have a lock. Could be keys from back east, I guess."

"They were basically on the counter, though, with the pepper mill. Why leave out a set of keys from two thousand miles away?"

"I guess call Scooby Doo and the gang. Maybe they can tell us where Barbara is, too."

Karen winced. "I really don't think she's coming back."

"Yeah. Me neither." He checked his phone again. No signal. "Tell you what. I'm going outside. Gonna wander around, flap my arms, wave the phone about. See if I can't get some bars out there in the great wide open. Keep inventorying, I guess."



A ring of keys.
Seven keys of
varying sizes hung
from a looped and
braided circle of
chicken wire.



Karen kissed him on the cheek.
“Don’t fall into the ravine and die.”
“I’ll do my best.”



He found a trapdoor. If it could be called that. Not far from the fence line, near the ridge’s edge and only a handful of feet from a half-rotten outhouse, lay a concrete slab in the ground. A door—steel, rusted—sat square in the middle. Along the rim of the door, six locks, none the same size as the other.

“Okay. I’ll play,” he said, pulling out the ring of keys. Tried a couple in the bottom-most lock. The third one—a little brass key, all dinged-up—fit.

Before he knew it, a powerful sensation swept over him. He found himself on his hands and knees in the dust and dirt, frantically trying each key in each lock. Greg heard himself panting. Heard his heart drumming in his ears; arteries pulsed in his neck.

Then, the final key, the final lock. He felt calm again. A little dizzy. Up above, a magpie cried. Greg gritted his teeth, pulled open the door.

A dark chamber, encased in concrete, waited.

Greg looked around. Nobody in sight. Karen was still in the house, somewhere. Sucking in a breath, he descended into darkness.



“My paintings.”

It was the first thing Greg noticed. Others would have said it was not the strangest thing in the room, not by a long shot. But for him? Words could not describe.

On the far wall: purple, turbid watercolors, impressions of a coming storm.

To his right: the old farmhouse, with the barn that looked like it was sighing.

To his left: the lusty green banks driven through by a serpentine spear, the Delaware River in gray churn.

“I don’t understand,” he said aloud, and it was true. He’d painted these. These were the originals. He’d never given his father a single painting, not a one. Each of these three came from

a gallery in a small town not far from where Greg and Karen lived. Purchased by an anonymous buyer; not unusual, some people simply declined to leave their contact information.

He ran his hands over the glass, over the frames. A bright column of light shone in from the trapdoor above his head. Motes of dust whirled.

It was then Greg turned his attention to the rest of the room.

The chamber itself wasn’t very big. No bigger than a small living room—10 feet by 10 feet, all concrete. The paintings were bolted into the wall with thick iron anchor bolts. Two bookshelves sat against the walls. A braided rug—a spiral

“Okay. I’ll play.”
he said, pulling
out the ring of
keys.



of motley fabrics—lay dusty on the cold floor, and a well-worn wooden chair stood nearby next to a spindly golden lamp.

Greg turned on the lamp. Pale, wan light filled the bunker.

The bookshelves were filled with books. Weird books. Something called the *Grimoire of Honorius*. A little red book called the *Verkung Tablets*. *The Ialdabaoth Codex*. *Lark Demonde's Travels*. *Pantagrue* and *Gargantua*. An autobiography of someone called "the Chevalier Thélème." *The Ancient Lands Pentology*. *The Codex of Lies*. *The Key of Brass and Flame*.

Dad didn't read. Not books. Hunting magazines, maybe. Of course, Greg hadn't seen the man in ten years. But if he'd read anything, it'd be... books about Indians.

An autobiography of John Ford or Ronald Reagan. Not this stuff.

Then, something caught Greg's eye. Something sticking out of each book. He pulled at one—a small white bookmark came out. Handwritten at the top: "Blum and Gipp Auctions," and an address.

Greg pulled a few more out from the books. Same tag, same writing. He saw a white sticker on the lower left corner of the bookshelf: same tag, same writing.

A tag on the other bookshelf. A tag on the chair.

He pulled down his paintings: on each, a tag.

They all said the same thing.

Blum and Gipp Auctions, and the address. An address in the nearest town.

Greg had an idea. He reached down, pulled up the rug—

Yes, a tag dangled from underneath, the Blum and Gipp tag, but something else stole his breath. Beneath the rug was some kind of marking. A sign, a symbol. Painted in dark charcoal streaks; hard angles married with dizzying swirls.

And the floor was marked with patches of old blood, some of it gummed up with tufts of... animal hair. Maybe from a deer, maybe from a rabbit, Greg didn't know.

Then: flies.

They came out of nowhere, a vortex of fat-bellied horseflies descending through the trap-door's opening. Some of them crawled into Greg's

mouth and he spit them out, but he wasn't what the flies wanted: they landed on those patches of blood, on those charcoal streaks. They buzzed and fed.

Quickly, Greg ripped the tag off the bottom of the carpet then let it fall again. It landed, kicking up dust. His last image before climbing up out of there was the carpet squirming over a thousand wriggling flies.



His last image
before climbing
up out of there
was the carpet
squirming over
a thousand
wriggling flies.



Outside, the light of day seemed to wash it all away. Birds chirped. A breeze



stirred distant sage, and the scent of it was carried to him.

He looked at the keys. Seven keys, but six locks. One key remaining.

It nagged at him. Buzzed in his brain like a fly in the ear.



“Found some Windex,” Karen said, brandishing the bottle like she’d just won an Oscar. “Thought I’d clean as I inventoried. Is that a word, ‘inventoried?’”

“I, ahhh, don’t know,” Greg said, smoothing his hair back. “I’m going to take a walk. No signal outside, but maybe if I head down toward that dinky town we passed I’ll get near to a cell tower.”

Karen turned, squinted.

“You okay? You look like you—”

“Saw a ghost. No. I’m fine. It’s just all a little overwhelming. I’ll catch you back here in an hour or so.”



As he walked, dust kicking up behind him, the dry and sucking sun above, Greg kept seeing something in his periphery. Something following him. A red shape, a hot blur, like a thumbprint of smeared blood. He’d look, and whatever it was, it was gone.

A cloud of biting gnats formed a halo around his head.

He swiped them away and kept walking, descending past the treeline and into comforting shadow—a retreat from the growing heat of the day.



The town wasn’t much of one. A single cross-street with a four-way stop and a blinker on the fritz. A white-walled tavern sat nearby, windows boarded, blackbirds nesting in the eaves of the

sign out front. A few cabins sat smashed together, boards half-rotted. A vet clinic with a stucco wall seemed the only place that was open. Greg blinked bleary eyes, scraped his dusty-dry tongue against his teeth, and then saw it: far down the farthest street, a little square building

with a black roof. A sign out front read “Blum and Gipp.”



The bell jingled.

It was far bigger inside than it seemed on the out. Three aisles teetered above him: antiques, all bagged, all tagged, sat piled together in no discernable order. A ventriloquist’s dummy with a cracked skull slumped over a scratched up metal lunchbox, which leaned on a tower of moldy Boy’s Life magazines, which was half-collapsed against a wooden ice-chest with odd, hard-angled symbols scratched into it.

He looked at the keys. Seven keys, but six locks. One key remaining.



A man appeared: tufts of white hair coming out nearly everywhere but the top of the head, a round and almost pregnant belly hanging over a belt buckle shaped like the state of Colorado.

"I'm Henry Gipp," the man said in a crisp, quiet voice (Greg thought strangely of the sound of a new book's binding cracking with the first crease), and offered a hand.

Before Greg could grab it, a voice from behind him caused him to whirl on his heel:

"I'm George Blum," said a tall, handsome man, probably in his mid-40s—not a hair out of place, nary a stain on those white chompers. His eyes, cloudy gray, didn't look at Greg directly—instead they seemed to search his margins, the gaze sliding along.

"Listen," Greg found himself starting, stammering, his mouth smacking as he talked because he couldn't get a lick of moisture in there—

Gipp handed him a plastic water bottle. "You're thirsty. You need this. Relax. Cool off."

"Wet your whistle," Blum said.

Greg blinked. Henry Gipp hadn't had a water bottle before, had he? Never mind. Fuck it, he was thirsty. He grabbed for the bottle and squeezed it into his mouth.

Panting, he wiped his wet mouth with the back of his arm and started to speak again.

"It's stupid, but my father, he had this... well, I found some items, and they were all marked with—"

"Breathe easy, Greg," George Blum said, his smile never wavering.

"We know who you are," Henry said, nodding. "We knew your father quite well. Got along famously. Come with us, my boy. We have something to show you."

His eyes, cloudy gray, didn't look at Greg directly—instead they seemed to search his margins, the gaze sliding along.

They led him into the back. George behind him. Henry ahead of him.

They came to a door with six locks. Henry fumbled with six keys on a brass ring, one key for each lock, and he kept smiling back at Greg as he undid them.

(As Greg passed through the door, he saw more strange symbols, these like stars or snowflakes, etched into the door jamb.)

"Your father," Henry said as they walked, "loved you quite a bit."

"I doubt that very much," Greg said. It was hot back here—humid, too, which was odd. He felt sweat beading on his brow, around his collar.

"Pish posh!" George said, a strange chirp.

"It's like this," Henry said, pausing before a filthy red curtain that hung across another doorframe. "Your old man, just because he loved you doesn't mean he knew how to deal with you. I know he didn't keep in touch. Didn't call for, what, ten years? But he had his ways. Had his ways of *watching* over you. Keeping his finger on your pulse."

"On your pulse," George mimed.

"I don't know what you're talking about," Greg said, and he started to say something else, but Henry gave him this *look*, and he found his tongue bound to the roof of

his mouth. Henry just winked, and pulled back the curtain.



In the middle of a dark room, in the center of a blood-colored Oriental rug, sat a cage. Big enough to hold a big dog, but nothing larger.

Inside the cage, something watched. When it moved, a red haze—*like a bloody thumbprint*, Greg thought—shuddered and pulsed.

He heard the distant whine of flies.

His eyes watered. Sweat dripped down his back. He felt sick. Feverish.

"You'll be all right!" George said, clapping Greg on the back and smiling.

Greg's voice returned, a bare whisper: "What... what the fuck is it?"

"It has a name," Henry said, hunkering down by the cage and peering in.

"But I won't tell it to you. It wouldn't like that." Henry stroked the cage the way one might pet a lover's hair. "This is a funny thing, a funny scene right here. Because just about ten years back, your father stood where you are standing, and asked the same question you just asked us. He came in looking for... what was it, George?"

"Dresser of drawers, yessir. *Dresser of drawers.*"

"Right. A dresser. And we got to talking and walking, and he seemed a man in search of something.

Because we aim to please, we brought him back here to see if we had what he was looking for. We did. He took home this little feller, took him deep."

"I don't understand."

"That's the thing. You won't. Your old man, he wanted to know things. Was afraid to call you or see you, what with the thing with your mother dying and all. Plus all the things he said to you. Not-so-nice things. What's in the cage, Greg, it's something real special."

George chimed in: "Super-special."

"Gives you eyes where you didn't have eyes. Tells you things you couldn't know otherwise. The old man wanted to know about you, finally really *truly* know you, and this was his way of getting it."

The thing in the cage shuddered, made a faint whispery *clicking* noise.

Greg blinked. Felt smothered, dizzy, sick. "Why? Why would he do that? Why



"What's in the cage, Greg, it's something real special."



not just... call? Why not just write a, a fucking letter?"

"Can't answer that." Henry sucked in a deep breath through his nose. "Because I just don't know. But, I *can* tell you that our friend in the cage knows. It knows everything about your father. It got real cozy with him. Heard every thought of his. Experienced everything your father did. People are like locked doors, my boy. You just got to find the key to get in."

"We've got the key," George said, rubbing Greg's shoulders.

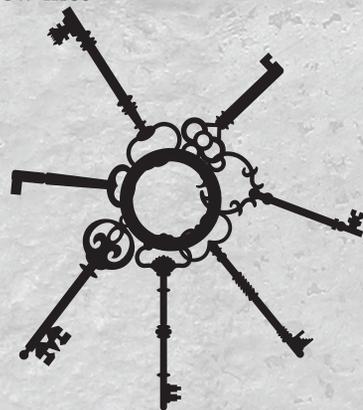
"How bad do you want the key?" Henry asked.

The world swooned. The red shape trembled, the cage door rattling. Greg gritted his teeth and made a choice.



"How'd you cut your hand?"

Greg looked down at his palm. The bottom hem of his t-shirt was swaddled around a dark brown blot. A few flies danced across the stain.



"Oh, I..."

Tell her nothing, and you'll get everything.

"Greg?"

"Wasn't paying attention. Ran my hand along a piece of fucked-up guardrail is all. I found the signal. A signal. Called information, got a cab coming in the next few hours."

Karen came up, felt his brow. "You're sweating."

"It's hot."

"You okay?"

"Never been better."

He wasn't sure it was a lie.

"I'm going to kill some more time outside. Get some fresh air."

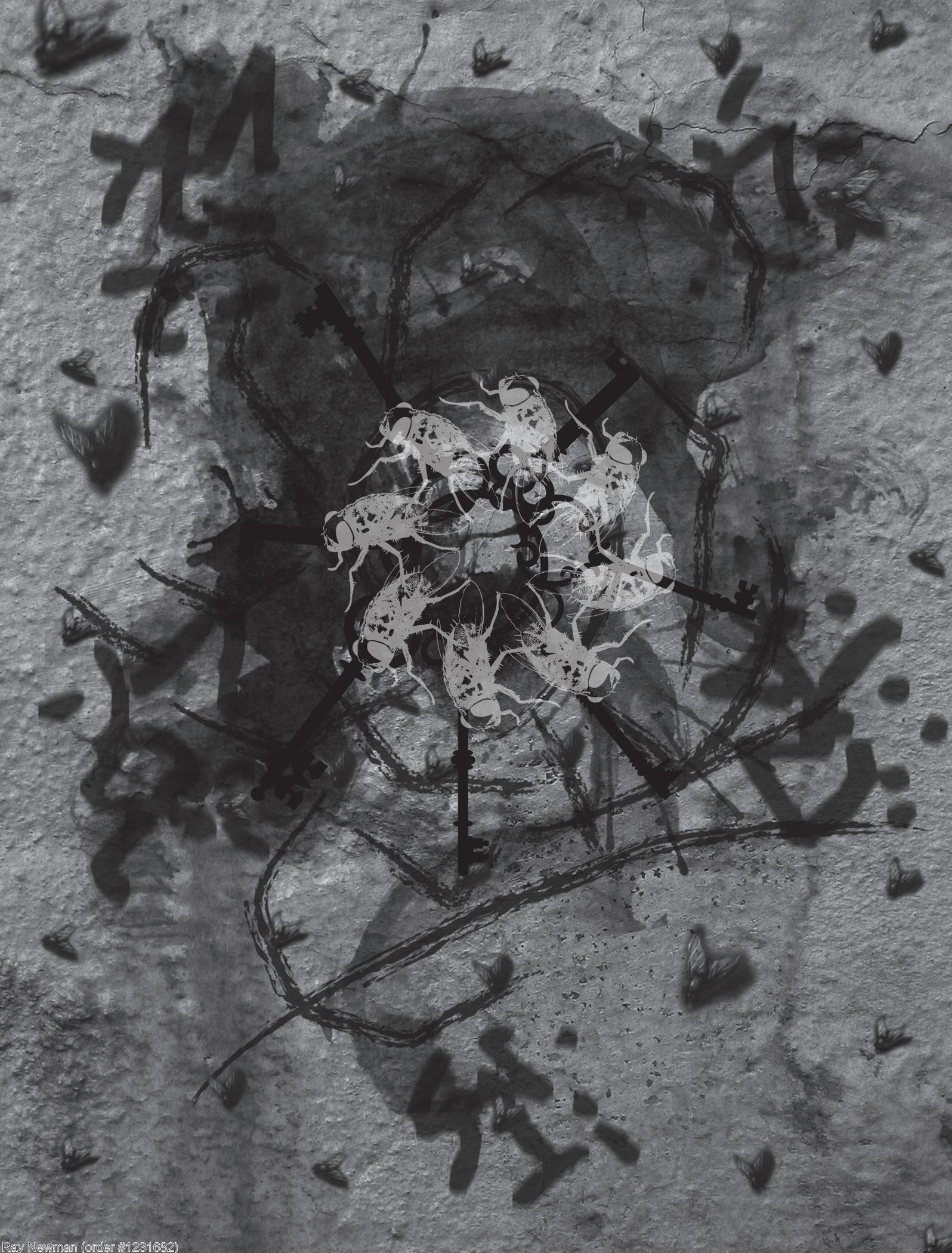
"Okay, babe." She kissed his cheek.

Go to the room. I have things to show you.

He walked out of the house, the ring of keys already jingling in his hand. A red shape floated in his periphery. Only he could see it. Only he could *hear* it.

And the kicker was this:

It spoke in a voice that was nearly—*nearly*—his father's.



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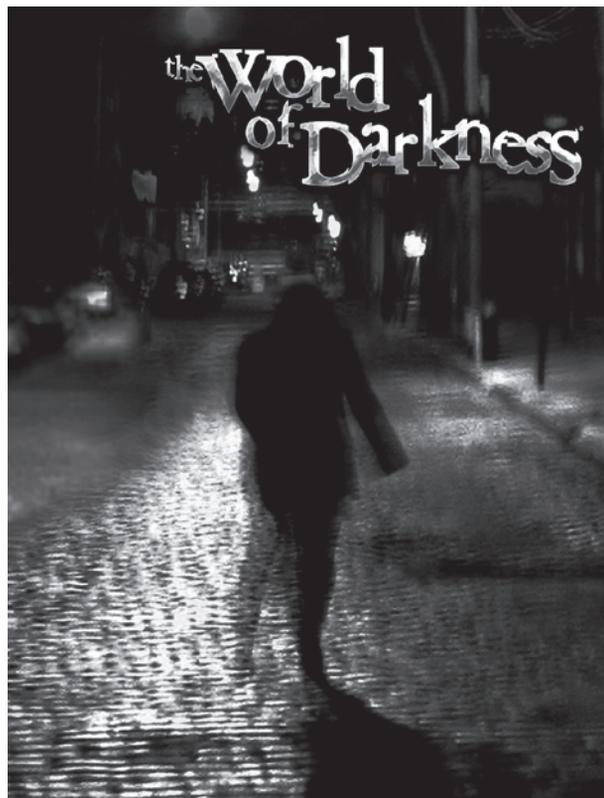
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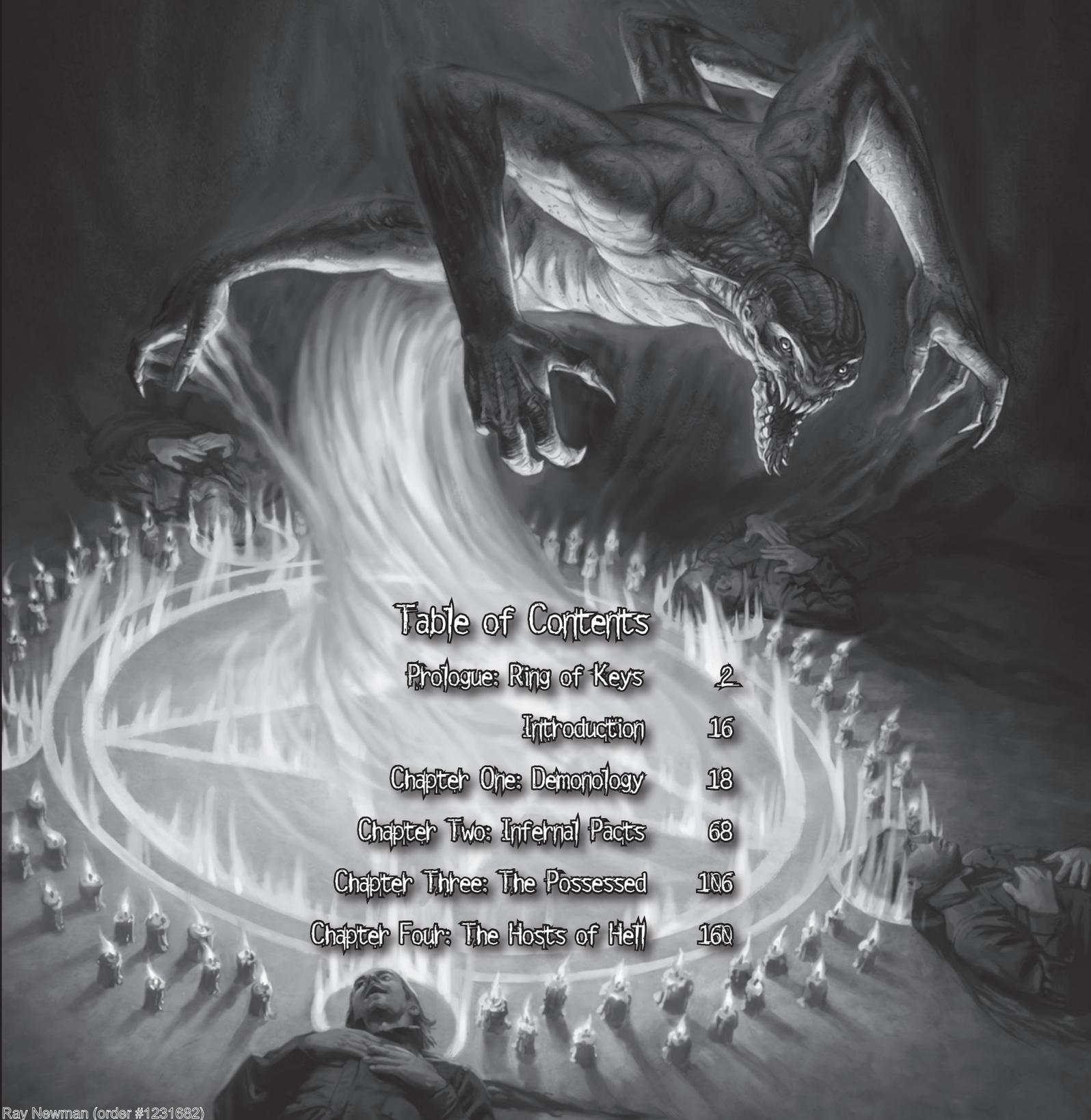


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Introduction

Pride is the common fore-runner of a fall. It was the devil's sin, and the devil's ruin; and has been, ever since, the devil's stratagem, who, like an expert wrestler, usually gives a man a lift before he gives him a throw.

—Bishop Robert South

We all have our demons.

For some, they're figurative: a gambling habit, a troubled son, a haunting past. But this book isn't about figurative demons. It's about the real deal, genuine entities from beyond this realm: a many-mouthed imp hissing and clicking in the corner; a long-limbed shadow whose face is a mask of locusts; a succubus with hungry fingers, diaphanous flesh and the unavoidable sour scent of mother's milk left in its wake.

One demon tempts: it promises secrets contained in a glass jar, secrets one can have if only he is willing to pay the price.

Another demon destroys: it rebels against all of God's supposedly good work, tearing at flesh and soil, gutting the virtuous and cursing those exorcists who hound it night in, night out.

A third demon possesses: it smells weakness, a kind of moral and emotional rot, and it finds the addict or the madman and bores its way into the soul like larvae into skin, and there it takes up residence; now two souls share one body, the human and the demon.

In the World of Darkness, demons are many things, but that doesn't mean they are not real things, oh no. That they wear many faces and seek many things (just like the mortal beings who walk the world—aren't we a complicated species, too?) does not mean they are any less sinister or any less seductive.

The demons are out there. Will you be tempted?

Infernal Indulgences

It might seem a bitter pill to swallow, and certainly any priest worth his salt in the World of Darkness would disagree vehemently (perhaps at the wrong end of a double-barrel), but demons are not evil. Or, more specifically, they do not do evil for evil's sake.

The theme of the Infernal is this: demons are inherently selfish.

They are driven by sin, consumed by Vice. Hell, they're not just consumed by it; they are the very *manifestations* of iniquity, born of dark desires and mad urges. A demon wants. That is all. Its Virtue is only a sham, a mask it wears to accomplish a temporary goal. But its Vice is what it is at the deepest core of its spirit. The titular inferno is not necessarily the literal flames of Hell licking at the creature's back—it is the terrible passions, so swift to consume, that drive the devils with single-minded determination.

For some demons, this is personal: a Wrathful creature seeks revenge against the family of exorcists and demonologists that sent it back to Hell so many decades before, or a entity born of Pride has become such only by bloodily clawing its way up the countless ladder rungs of Pandaemonium's awful hierarchy. For others, it is utterly impersonal: the demon does what it does because it knows nothing else. It pursues Lust because it is a succubus; another forces others to gorge because it is simple and weak and has a genuinely Gluttonous soul.

The Truth About Demons

Beyond being driven by their own undeniable indulgences, demons are:

Weak. That's right. They're weak. They may be physically or supernaturally strong, sure. If some wretched Duchess of Hell tears her way free from some

long-concealed Hellmouth, she may very well have the capacity to tear an entire town asunder, going so far as to burn the memory of her incursion from the minds of any who witnessed it, leaving only charred ruins and utter confusion in her wake. That, however, is not the type of strength we're talking about. Demons are spiritually weak, easily tempted, given over to powerful urges—even the most potent entity can be lost to childish whims or callous and callow needs.

Born of forbidden knowledge. Demons (or *daemons*) were once thought to be guiding spirits, intelligent ephemera, creatures of knowledge. But prevailing religious attitudes often perverted the meaning, just as satyrs became associated with the image of Satan, or in the way the snake was once a traditional symbol of wisdom but eventually became the sign of *corrupting* wisdom lurking lecherously in the Garden of Eden. Whatever the truth may have been, demons are still in some ways representative of wisdom and knowledge, specifically forbidden knowledge. Demons know things. Whether this is due to simply existing for a very, very long time or whether it has something to do with the original nature of demons as keepers of hidden wisdom remains unclear: what is clear is that a demon can offer knowledge that might be otherwise inaccessible or difficult to procure. A demon knows secrets. And it'll share them... at a cost, always at a cost.

Rebellious. Sin is rebellion against righteousness, Vice an insurrection against virtue. Demons are the embodiment of that rebellion, whether you see them as fallen angels rebelling against a broken God or a vicious nest of devils rebelling against the preeminence of mankind (*jealous, much, little demons?*).

Lies Told with Forked Tongue

And here, a cruel revelation: we've been lying all along. This book isn't about demons. It's about humans. Demons aren't really that interesting, are they? Oh, they're interesting in a religious, baroque, strange and supernatural way, but as characters they're fairly one-note when it comes to playable entities. What's interesting about demons are the humans affected by them, and this book has those in spades: demonologists carving sigils into their palms to summon some pale slip of a diabolical grub, gangs of exorcists viciously routing Infernal influence (no matter who it hurts), fools who weaken themselves so deeply that a demon is able to possess them and puppet their bodies for pleasure or pain, and those unfortunate monsters who have Lucifer's own heritage squirming around in their DNA like a pile of hungry worms.

Without humans, demons are meaningless. Humans are the arbiters of Vice; demons may embody those Vices, but demons have always been reflective of a human culture. Aleister Crowley spoke to an "abyssal demon" through an Ouija board, and the demon spoke in human languages and using human phrasings. The fallen angel Azazel supposedly taught women how to paint their faces with makeup. In Hindu lore, if a person is sufficiently selfish enough, upon

dying his soul does not move on to karmic reincarnation, and is instead born immediately as a demonic spirit. Demons are inexorably bound to humanity, which is why this book is as much about the humans who deal with and are affected by demons as it is about the demons themselves.

How to Use This Book

World of Darkness: Inferno is designed for players and Storytellers who want to use the demonic in their games. Contained within are many shades of the demonic, many themes and moods and story ideas to allow your games some degree of flexibility. It's as much *Hellraiser* (or *The Hellbound Heart*) as it is *The Exorcist*; equal parts *Silent Hill* and *Demon City Shinjuku*.

The Prologue: Ring of Keys shows the Infernal secrets that lie behind our expectations, and also gives a glimpse of just how far one is willing to go into a hellish existence to find a small kind of peace.

Chapter One: Demonology tears away the shadows and exposes demons for what they are: refractions of Virtue, reflections of Vice. The many faces of the Infernal are contained within, from the weak Whisperers to the more powerful Dominions. The taxonomy of demonology isn't just for the sake of determining diabolical authority; it gives hellish entities power.

Chapter Two: Infernal Pacts examines the nature of man's relationship with the Infernal—a classic horror trope is the summoning of and making pacts with demons from beyond this world, and this chapter covers that. What can a human learn from a demon? And what will the demon take in return? In addition, you'll find a handful of Artifacts "blessed by Hell" or stained with the corruption of the demonic.

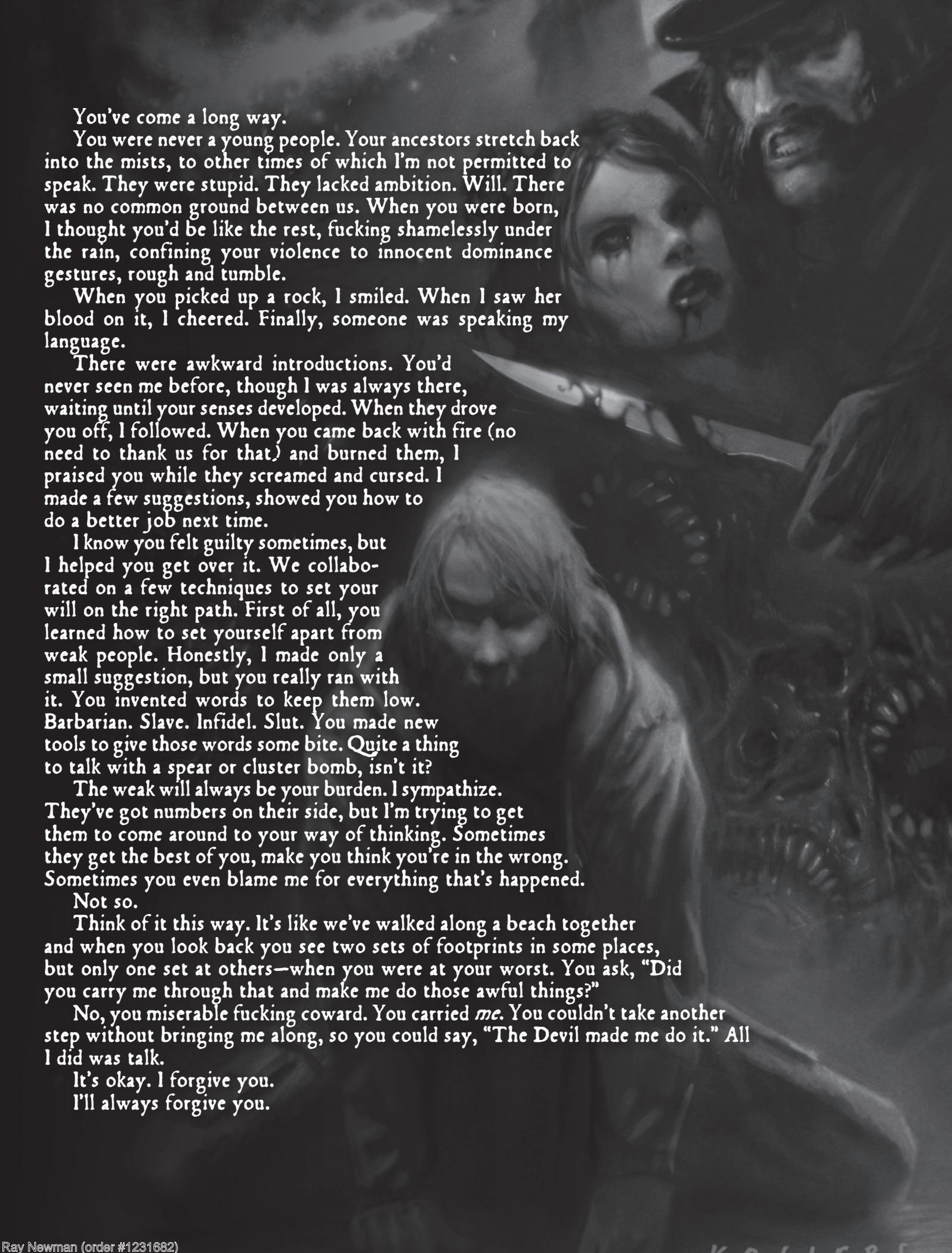
Chapter Three: The Possessed—Sometimes man's relationship with demons goes terribly awry. It's not about making pacts or deals. No, sometimes a human grows too weak or too sinful—he tears holes in his own soul, and through this vacant spot demons may crawl. When they do, the human becomes Possessed, with a host body that plays home to both human soul and demon. Who has control? You'll find character creation rules, as well as an examination of Infernal Vestments, those abilities that manifest from the demon bleeding out into the flesh of the host.

Finally, the book ties it all together with a big *grimoire* filled with antagonists. **Chapter Four: The Hosts of Hell** gives you a wealth of demons, Possessed characters, and those who have made pacts with Pandaemonium to gain cruel powers. In addition, you'll learn about the *Lenfants Diabolique*, those humans who awaken to discover an Infernal mote lurks in their bloodline, a twisted bit of DNA from long, long ago.

In the shadows, the demons gather. Do you hear the buzzing of flies? The whispering of parchment pages turning? The stink of blood drawn in great whorls and slashes on the wall? Will you make a deal with the demon? Open the book and find out.







You've come a long way.

You were never a young people. Your ancestors stretch back into the mists, to other times of which I'm not permitted to speak. They were stupid. They lacked ambition. Will. There was no common ground between us. When you were born, I thought you'd be like the rest, fucking shamelessly under the rain, confining your violence to innocent dominance gestures, rough and tumble.

When you picked up a rock, I smiled. When I saw her blood on it, I cheered. Finally, someone was speaking my language.

There were awkward introductions. You'd never seen me before, though I was always there, waiting until your senses developed. When they drove you off, I followed. When you came back with fire (no need to thank us for that) and burned them, I praised you while they screamed and cursed. I made a few suggestions, showed you how to do a better job next time.

I know you felt guilty sometimes, but I helped you get over it. We collaborated on a few techniques to set your will on the right path. First of all, you learned how to set yourself apart from weak people. Honestly, I made only a small suggestion, but you really ran with it. You invented words to keep them low. Barbarian. Slave. Infidel. Slut. You made new tools to give those words some bite. Quite a thing to talk with a spear or cluster bomb, isn't it?

The weak will always be your burden. I sympathize. They've got numbers on their side, but I'm trying to get them to come around to your way of thinking. Sometimes they get the best of you, make you think you're in the wrong. Sometimes you even blame me for everything that's happened.

Not so.

Think of it this way. It's like we've walked along a beach together and when you look back you see two sets of footprints in some places, but only one set at others—when you were at your worst. You ask, "Did you carry me through that and make me do those awful things?"

No, you miserable fucking coward. You carried *me*. You couldn't take another step without bringing me along, so you could say, "The Devil made me do it." All I did was talk.

It's okay. I forgive you.

I'll always forgive you.

Chapter One: Demonology

Demons are weak, really. They are flawed beyond mortal flaws, lowly, crushed under the heel of the purer things of this world. People defeat them every day, though they may not know the supernatural heart of an urge, a whisper or an errant twitch. In Hell, they might have palaces of brass and bone and lord over the souls of the damned, but in the living world, they are almost nothing: a trick of the mind, a foreboding darkness. It's all they are until a human, caught in the throes of personal malice, gives them a name—and power.

Without an evil will, they are nothing. But even though demons are weak, evil is strong.

Myths and Facts

The true nature of demons is a mystery; even the greatest occult scholars deal more in legendry than hard facts. Demons are liars after all, and their peculiar relationship with human sin makes it difficult to find objective accounts. Which myths are true? Let's break down popular descriptions for their veracity.

Cults and sorcerers summon and even command demons: True. The spiritual conditions that give demons power also subject them to restrictions. Some demons can be summoned and compelled to obey occultists. Other demons are totally free-willed, but *pretend* they can be bound.

Demons belong to hierarchies and have secret names: True—much of the time. A demon gains more power over the world when others define it. There may not be any true demonic hierarchy, but there are many classifications and names that exert a powerful hold on the Infernal.

Demons cannot harm the pure of heart: False—as far as anyone knows. Demons exploit sin. Despite stories of saints and bodhisattvas who can't be possessed, tempted or even disturbed, it's a rare thing to find the genuine article.

Demons are evil spirits: True. Demons are a class of spirit. There are many spirits in the World of Darkness. Demons suffuse virtually every spirit order, to the point where it's difficult to distinguish “true” demons from malicious spirits. It may be a difference of degree, not type.

Demons are fallen angels: Unknown. Demons have called themselves fallen angels, dark spirits and parts of the human psyche, depending upon the audience and their particular schemes. In the modern era, demons especially enjoy playing the part of rebels out to empower people who've been “enslaved” by conventional morals.

Demons are fragments of human vices: Somewhat true. As occultists know well, demons are inextricably tied to Vices. Some even begin their existence as magically compelled Vices. A touch of the Infernal twists them out of control. It should also be noted that a demon's mal-

Midway upon the road
of our life I found myself within
a dark wood, for the right
way had been missed.

—Dante Alighieri,
Inferno

ice isn't inherently linked to the human condition. Werewolves, ancient vampires and even spirits have fallen to demonic temptation.

Demons are liars: Very, very true. Demons don't lie pointlessly, but they do lie. They are skilled deceivers, to the point where supernatural powers can neither steal secrets from their "minds" nor detect falsehood. Ironically, this property actually helps supernatural demon hunters find their prey, as it is one of the few objective qualities that sets true demons apart from other spirits.

Demons possess the living: True. Demons also possess the dead, undead, spirits, animals, many supernatural beings, places and objects. Normal human souls and demons interact in strange, potent ways, however, giving birth to the Possessed.

Faith, religious symbols and holy places repel demons: True—sometimes. When a demon manifests in the world under certain conditions, it may be vulnerable to sincere faith, holy ground or religious artifacts.

Hell exists: Oh, it most certainly does.

What Demonologists Know

Not every occultist is a demonologist, but demons are so central to supernatural lore that you'd be hard pressed to find a serious student of the occult who hasn't made at least a superficial examination of the field. In game terms, this means characters with the prerequisite Occult dots automatically have some understanding of demons, though they'll filter the facts through their own belief systems. This general knowledge doesn't automatically confer the ability to summon demons, bind them or uncover specific weaknesses. As usual, that requires research (Intelligence + Occult) or a desperate search through one's memories (Wits + Occult).

If a character has the Skill Specialty of Demonology, add 1 dot to his automatic knowledge when you consult the following list of facts. The character knows the information at her current skill, plus all the information that precedes it.

• — **Rumors and hearsay:** The character doesn't know much in the way of definite facts, but Storytellers should feel free to provide clues and research leads to the more obvious story hooks in the chronicle.

•• — **Demons have the essence of certain sins within them:** Every demon specializes in a particular sin—in game terms, the manifestation of at least one Vice. Powerful demons are sometimes linked to multiple Vices. All demons want to give their Vices

a greater presence in the material realm.

••• — **Sins make demons stronger:** The character knows that in the mortal world, a demon's favorite sins sustain it and might even strengthen it. However, demons don't benefit this way from their own evil acts. Someone else must commit them.

•••• — **There is one demonic host with many guises:** The character knows there is no objective hierarchy of demons *per se*, but a class of malefic spirits that have common characteristics. She knows goetic demons and Wound spirits might both be demons, but that not all such creatures *are* "members of this class of beings, and that a mere "evil spirit" can transform into a true demon.

••••• — **The mortal world defines demons:** Demons take their power from occult lore, objects, places and people. These bind the demon into a metaphysical "shape" which improves its access to the world of matter, though they may also impose certain limitations, such as the ability to be bound by a ritual, or the need to be near a key object.

•••••• (usually Occult ••••• and the Demonology Specialty) — **Secret knowledge:** The character knows something about the ultimate nature of demons in the Storyteller's chronicle.

Supernatural beings who have been fully initiated into their respective societies know a bit more, as much as it intersects with their native lore. An educated mage knows true demons have many of the same needs on the Astral Plane as they do in the material realm, for example.

On the Nature of Demons

They are deceivers, capable of taking on innumerable forms. A demon can be a rogue fragment of a sorcerer's soul, a ghost whose thousand years of hate promoted it into the ranks of Hell, or even a voice in your head that whispers vile suggestions. To minimize confusion we use the term "true demon" to define a certain class of beings who may be born of evil spirits, places, people and things, but have qualities that set them apart from their origins. Don't be deceived, however. This designation isn't meant to imply other evil beings are *not* real demons, but that they aren't inherently the types of beings under discussion.

True demons are marked by certain needs and characteristics. We may talk of them as if they've come from Hell and latched onto something beyond, to corrupt it. This might be true, but then again, it's possible every-



thing herein grows from its origins. Perhaps every spirit has a demon inside, and the Whisperers are nothing more than projections of a malice-ridden human mind.

A Demon for Every Sin

Demons are specialists. Every demon is linked to a Vice and a specific manifestation. Powerful demons have broader portfolios. Demons can acquire other powers based upon the way they manifest, but they are all devoted to specific forms of malice. Some would say they *are* that sin, in the same way the spirit of a river *is* the river. Examples:

- A demon of Gluttony persuades a factory owner in a small town to cut wages and ignore labor laws to fund an ever more ostentatious estate. After the demon uses him up, it pushes a woman to burn down her own apartment building. Half a dozen people die so she can use the insurance money to pay off her drug dealer. This is a demon of Gluttony through property.
- A demon always persuades victims to burn their enemies to death. This is a demon of Wrath and fire.
- A mage conjures his Pride into a spirit-form (mages call this a goetic demon). As it takes on true demonic powers it learns to possess him. Unbeknownst

to the mage, he spends his nights using mind control spells to attract would-be lovers, before asserting his dominance with abuse and humiliation. This is a demon of sexual Pride.

The First Whisperers

In Hell, demons may be omnipotent, able to rain down every punishment ordained by God, the victim's sinful incarnations or the demon's infinite malice, without end. By default, a demon can exert only the lightest touch outside the Inferno, and only when someone has opened herself to contact through malicious behavior. The demon manifests as a voice, minor coincidences, discarded writings (including anonymous email) or a disturbing dream, but it can't force its will upon a victim or truly harm her in any way. It can only nudge and suggest. Clever demons masquerade as a victim's own internal monologue. There are many names for these manifestations. We'll use the generic term *Whisperer*. In the *World of Darkness*, some texts on demonology use this name as well. Here is how a *Whisperer* might manifest:

- After he hits his daughter for the third time, he hears a voice that says, "Get that knife from the kitchen and give the bitch a mark to remember this by."

- When the boss gets back from lunch she finds a text file on her computer's desktop. It says, "If you're too stupid to figure out who got on your system, you're too stupid to run this office."

- It's his job to drive the truck filled with food aid to the village, but the radiator overheats just as a corrupt colonel's convoy drives by. The colonel's afraid of attracting foreign attention by just stealing, but he's offered to pay the driver to divert supplies before—and this is the perfect opportunity.

A Whisperer's goal is to increase its power. It does this by persuading its contacts to indulge the demon's favorite sins or to give it a conceptual shape through occult research, art and ritual. If the demon is successful, it increases its foothold on worldly terrain and grows ever more dangerous.

The Shape of Evil

Demons are not like other supernatural beings. They are part of public discourse, and not just as metaphor. In the ancient world, we blamed them for disease, war, foul weather—almost everything. In the modern age, most people have rolled back the extent to which we blame demons for the world's suffering, but demons have not fled our fears completely. Many still believe in demons or have transformed them to fit the way we structure the world. One says a demon is a fragment of corrupted consciousness; another talks of poisonous memes.

The shape we give the world, and the place we give demons allows them to invade. This is not a matter of belief creating reality. In the World of Darkness, demons simply *exist*; they can't be banished with raw will or wishful thinking. Merely defining a demon doesn't give it power, either. The act must be linked to a moral violation or evil ambition.

Names and hierarchies aren't the only way for a demon to build power in the mortal world. It's just one method of many. All of them join the demon to our reality through a symbol, object or person associated with an evil act. Here are some examples:

- An occultist angrily looks for a way to kill his rival. The name "Makazirel" comes to him unbidden. He constructs a ritual using the name, and summons the Whisperer, who takes on the mantle of Makazirel, growing into the role as much as it is able.

- A woman sells her children for a fortune in diamonds. The diamonds give her Greed a concrete symbol, opening the way for a demon to inhabit them.

- A werewolf goes to the threshold of a Wound and binds a spirit with human blood to enslave it to

her pack's service. They'll use it as a spy and assassin to help win supremacy over rival werewolves. The callous Pride of the act changes the spirit into a true demon, and she soon discovers it has powers she never anticipated.

Once a demon gains a worldly shape it can take it again, as long as it can roughly replicate the conditions that gave it a new form. If someone finds the ritual to summon Makazirel again, it arrives with the same power. Grind Greed's diamonds into dust, and a cluster of emeralds that bought forced laborers in South America may host the demon next.

A World of Damnation

You are not a good person.

You live in the 21st century, during which we've documented evil down to its most disgusting particulars. We have no excuse to sin, because we can follow the social, psychological and historical costs of evil from year to year, day to day and sometimes even hour to hour. We've chronicled every human vice with more than scripture, legendry, rumors and homilies. There are dark taxonomies: lists and cautions that define fascism, psychopathy and all the other favors of malice, recorded in photos, microfilm, databases and transcripts. We've recorded the way a rapist's neurons fire and opened the mass graves left by genocides. We've noted subtler effects, as well. We've caught corporations ripping off entire countries while CEOs laughed to themselves about being "the smartest guys in the room."

You've read about the worst of the worst. That's what the news concentrates on, after all. You've seen all kinds of evil. You know what it does to people. Still, it persists. You tolerate poverty, starvation and violence, even when the causes are clear. National interests drive armies to far corners of the world, but in resource-poor places, people hack each other apart with machetes and you're not interested. There are still murderers and racists, gluttonous profiteers and corrupt cops. You've seen it all before, but it never changes, even when you *know* how to change it.

Is it that it's just too difficult, too risky or that you just don't care enough?

Object if you like. You have a family to feed. You have to make compromises. You can't be as good as a saint. You can't tell anyone else what to do. The world's problems are just too enormous for one person, or even a few to handle. Maybe you would have voted

for the candidate with integrity, but the other guy's going to cut your taxes, and what can you buy with righteousness? Maybe all these terrible things are just too divorced from your own experiences. You wouldn't know where to start. You just try to do the right thing in your daily life, don't you?

Perhaps, though, the truth is that you've never been tested. It's easy to do the right thing when the wrong thing isn't even convenient. These moral non-choices cannot even be rated as "good deeds," since they present no dilemma. Maybe you can imagine being presented with a real choice, though. Maybe the worst people rise to power and ask you to join the Party. Maybe they'll offer the bribe and you won't take it. Each and every time, your fantasy self can make the right choice, or privately, the wrong one, just for the deviant thrill or catharsis of it. It

doesn't matter. You probably think you'll do good if push comes to shove. Unfortunately, outside your sphere of experience, people make the wrong choice all the time.

Are you really any better than they? Evil doers probably experience pressures you don't, born of their environment, poverty, neurochemistry. Pretend to righteousness, but you just don't know what you would do. You have no proof. Meanwhile, every once in a while you make a little retreat from goodness—just a tiny step that can't hurt anyone. You laugh at a bigoted joke when the targets aren't around. Maybe you wince, but you don't want to cause a scene. You call her a dumb bitch for a quick laugh, because everyone else hates her, too.

Your life is full of these little failures. There's no excuse. You live in the 21st century. You know why

Multicultural Demonology

This section talks about the metaphysics of evil and how that affects how demons manifest. Don't get the idea you must settle on the nature of evil right away, or that you have to strongly adhere to one premise. If you want to mix and match ideas, consider the following options.

Demons Lie: Demons love to deceive people. They'll say anything that gets people to sin, but there is only one truth. In this kind of chronicle, most religions are false and demons promote them to make humanity more vulnerable. This is a real doctrine in some fundamentalist religions and thus has a lot of cultural traction. On the other hand, going with this might really offend your play group, so make sure they would actually enjoy a chronicle where, for example, Taoists are right and everybody else is wrong.

Evil is a Mystery: All religions are wrong. Demons have a hierarchy and nature that exists outside human writings, with the possible exception of some rare occult tomes. If you play a game with supernatural characters, the truth might be found within their secret mythologies. If demons are anti-*qashmallim*, corrupt Supernal emanations or the true creators of vampires you risk alienating players who are invested in a different set of legends, but at the same time, these provide instant resources for a chronicle that focuses upon gradually uncovering the truth about demons.

Evil is Personal: There are different demons for different people. If a Christian attracts a demon, that demon serves Satan. If an atheist attracts one, it's a mental illness with psychotic effects. If you go this route leave the ultimate nature of evil vague and concentrate upon what demons do in particular situations. When a demon arrives, it behaves according to the dominant mythology. The plot adheres to its rules, and the players can use prevailing cultural forces to their advantage.

Revel in Paradoxes: Demonic corruption might be capable of destroying logic and consistency itself. As a whole, the World of Darkness doesn't have a metaphysical premise unless the Storyteller decides it does. Accept the contradictions and even play them up, to emphasize how fragile human understanding really is.

it's wrong, and where your moral failures would lead if they were only a little more extreme.

The truth is that you're not a good person—or at least, not *perfectly* good. Demons love you for that. They know you've got the potential they need. You just need the correct *stimulus*.

The Ancient Problem

It's an exaggeration to say demons have no power against the virtuous, but it's not far off the mark, either. It isn't easy for a demon to escape the Inferno. If there is a gate, it creeps open only during atrocities. If there's a wall barring the way, sin creates a short-lived fracture. Demons seep out and flow toward evil. One day, something in the secret cycles of the universe might let demons tread mortal earth at will, but for now, immorality is the only thing that reliably opens a door to our world.

Religions, philosophies and, now, cognitive science have all tried to explain what makes human beings susceptible to what scientists call “antisocial behavior,” and moralists call evil. It might be part of the genome or locked in humanity's spiritual essence, or it might be something we all choose. All these narratives try to explain what evil is, and why it's so attractive. These stories are demons' stories, too, because demons and evil itself are of one essence. The nature of evil is the truth of the Inferno.

The Adversary

Satan. It's a word and idea with ancient origins. One etymology says it comes from the verb, “to accuse,” and in Hebrew, *ha-Satan* has that connotation. He is the Accuser, who tests faith *for* God. One possible root means “wanderer.” In Job, Satan tells God he comes “from going to and fro in the earth, and walking up and down upon it.” He's a being of this world, given the authority to travel it and test human souls.

Different strains of Judaism conflict over the role of Satan, but in general he is not the great enemy of God, but merely a being with a role to fulfill. This is not the only view, however. Some writings say Satan invented death, or was a prince of the *Grigori*: an order of watching angels who taught humanity arts and science but were ultimately corrupted by lust.

Some historians believe Satan was elevated from a servant of God to an enemy by Zoroastrian and Manichean influences. Both faiths (the latter is a

descendant of the former) say there are two powers, ruling good and evil, battling for the souls of all humanity. Modern Zoroastrians believe Spenta Mainyu tries to lead humanity to the truth and wisdom of Ahura-Mazda, the ultimate creator, while Angra Mainyu leads it to evil deeds. Manicheans (and possibly, ancient Zoroastrians) don't/didn't believe in a supreme, good God at all; there are only the twins of good and evil, battling through human hearts and subordinate spirits.

Perhaps this set the stage for the modern, popular idea of Satan as a rebel angel who swayed part of the Host to his side. Some traditions say a third fell and even claim to know the number—but the listed figures range from 200 to millions.

From this perspective, demons are fallen angels, or the spirits of a hierarchy that flows from the lowest imp to the root of all evil. Demons are part of an epic plan, and their success or failure at swaying human souls will determine the very character of the cosmos. If they capture enough of them, or inspire a few to perform some long-prophesied evil act, then the Adversary will come into the world—or God may destroy it to save the righteous.

The Jinn

In Islam, tradition holds that the Adversary Iblis was not an angel, but one of the *jinn*, an invisible people made of “smokeless fire.” The jinn, angels and humans are the three free-willed creations of Allah. Allah raised Iblis up to the power and beauty of the angels, but when he commanded them to bow before humanity, Iblis refused, saying “I am better than he. Thou createdst me of fire while him Thou didst create of mud.” Iblis thus became the first of the *Shaitan*, or evil spirits. Iblis swayed many of the jinn, though not all—there are still righteous jinn in the world who secretly help humanity.

One important difference between Iblis and his counterparts is that he is not Allah's enemy, because it would be impossible for an omnipotent being to truly have enemies. He is being punished for his pride, but also serves a purpose by being allowed to test human souls.

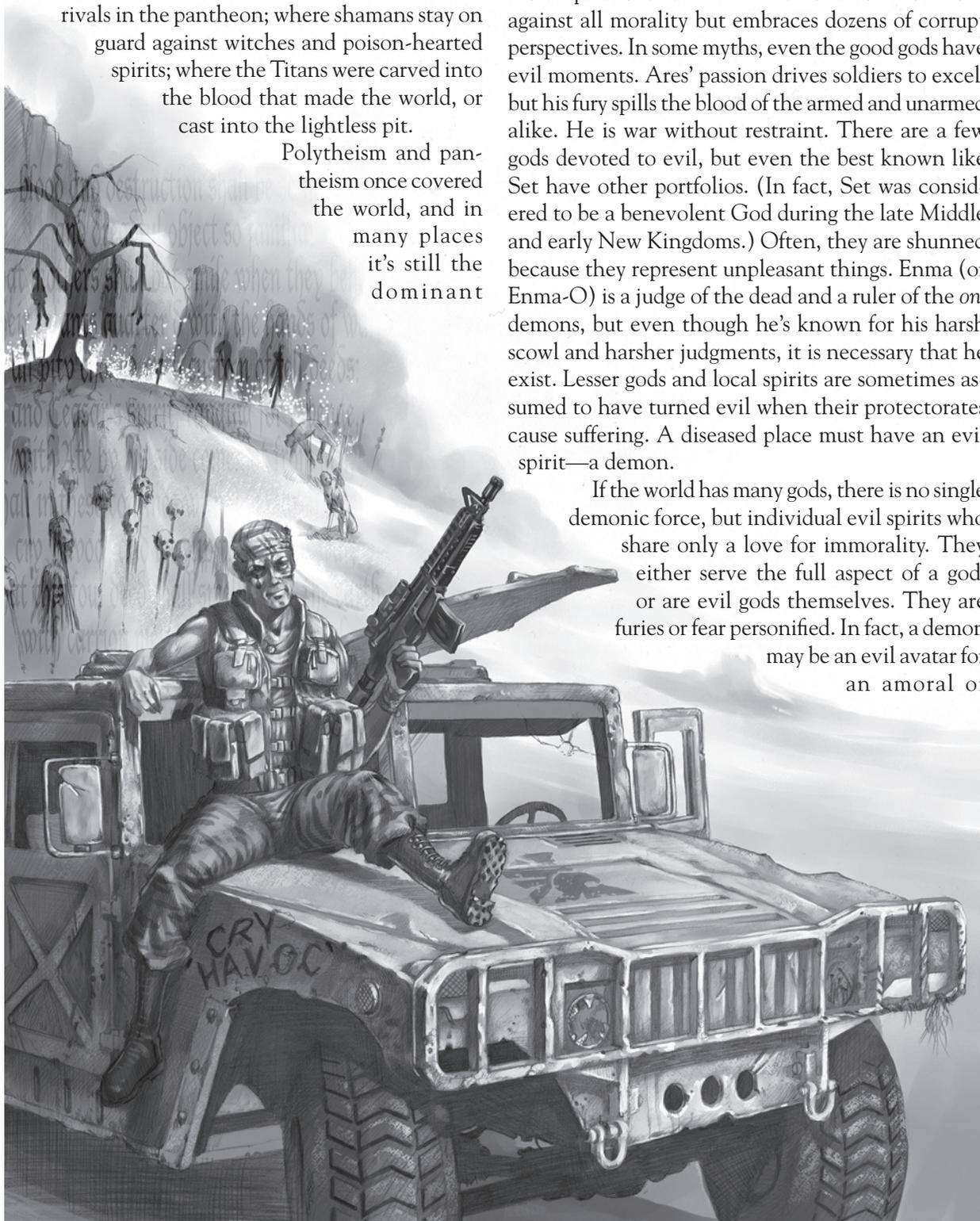
Dark Gods and Evil Spirits

If there is a God, He (or She) prefers to rely upon faith; proof is hard to find and never incontrovertible. Maybe there are many gods, ruling a universe in chaotic collusion. Good and evil are affiliations or aspects of the divine character. This may be a world where Set, God of Darkness sends evil forces against rivals in the pantheon; where shamans stay on guard against witches and poison-hearted spirits; where the Titans were carved into the blood that made the world, or cast into the lightless pit.

Polytheism and pantheism once covered the world, and in many places it's still the dominant

religion, even thriving beside great organized monotheisms and philosophies. In Japan, for instance, Buddhism is often the faith of funerals and quiet retreats, while Shinto is the day-to-day practice. Gods and theologies form complex relationships and inspire unstable theories as to how they create a picture of the cosmos. This complexity applies to moral questions as well. Evil is not a common front against all morality but embraces dozens of corrupt perspectives. In some myths, even the good gods have evil moments. Ares' passion drives soldiers to excel, but his fury spills the blood of the armed and unarmed alike. He is war without restraint. There are a few gods devoted to evil, but even the best known like Set have other portfolios. (In fact, Set was considered to be a benevolent God during the late Middle and early New Kingdoms.) Often, they are shunned because they represent unpleasant things. Enma (or Enma-O) is a judge of the dead and a ruler of the *oni* demons, but even though he's known for his harsh scowl and harsher judgments, it is necessary that he exist. Lesser gods and local spirits are sometimes assumed to have turned evil when their protectorates cause suffering. A diseased place must have an evil spirit—a demon.

If the world has many gods, there is no single demonic force, but individual evil spirits who share only a love for immorality. They either serve the full aspect of a god, or are evil gods themselves. They are furies or fear personified. In fact, a demon may be an evil avatar for an amoral or



even benevolent god that reveals itself when humans stray from righteous behavior. Hell is a particularly unpleasant part of the underworld, where dead souls shuffle through a pointless demi-existence, or suffer the tortures ordained by the gods of death. If this is the true nature of your World of Darkness, you may wish to omit Dominions from the game and concentrate upon Diaboli, as they lend stronger support to the idea that evil has many sources.

Poisoned Minds

Buddhists talk about “three poisons” that bar the way to enlightenment: greed, ignorance and hatred. Buddhism is one of many belief systems that don’t ascribe evil to an external supernatural force. In these mystical, psychologically-focused doctrines, evil comes from turning away from the path to enlightenment. Neo-Platonists said evil was not an independent force, but an absence of wisdom, just as darkness is the absence of light and not a force in and of itself.

Nevertheless, adherents don’t always deny the supernatural consequences of spiritual ignorance. The hells of Buddhist cosmology are filled with incarnations that must suffer for billions of years to work off the karma accrued from terrible crimes. The worst offenses not only cause others to suffer, but interfere with the goal of universal liberation. The most deeply condemned have murdered an enlightened being, or sowed discord in a legitimate spiritual community.

There is no divide between evil thoughts and actions, or mundane and supernatural consequences. A demon is the personification of one’s inner turmoil, but dark thoughts are transpersonal: they manifest in the universe at large. Some mystics say demons are thought-forms—what Tibetans call *tulpas*—that grow out of passion and will. According to tradition, a skilled mystic can create or dissolve a thought-form at will, but collective fancy and desire can spawn them as well. When a community tolerates the three poisons, they acquire ephemeral flesh.

This is not the only way demons are born in these traditions. Actions have consequences. When a sinner accumulates karma, universal law demands consequences. The more extreme the karma, the more extreme the response. Contrary to popular belief, classical Buddhism doesn’t believe karma is good or bad. Instead, it represents a mental and metaphysical attachment to the cycles of cause and effect that set the universe in motion. Nevertheless,

there is a consequence for every action, and when a deeply flawed person commits a terrible deed, the cosmic order condemns him to the Inferno. Some demons are the wretched incarnations of sinners, who experience as much suffering as they inflict. There are a few, though, who are universal law personified, and loose their unstoppable wrath upon the most immoral beings.

If these ideas are true in your World of Darkness, a demon acquires its traits from the sins to which it responds. Astral Diaboli make excellent models for thought-forms and demonic ghosts (also called Larvals—see p. 60) ably represent demonic incarnations, but when someone commits an offense that offends the enlightened principle enough, the Dominions enter the world. Demons are less interested in winning souls, because these are not part of the central premise of these belief systems. In them, there’s either no such thing as a soul, or it has a transpersonal nature, at one with the Godhead or the supreme principle of enlightenment.

What is Evil?

Throughout this chapter you’ll read about “evil acts” affecting a demon’s manifestations and abilities. That means that you, the Storyteller, have to design a moral standard for your game. It’s not easy, but it’s absolutely essential when it comes to exploring the themes demons are designed to support.

Contrary to some assumptions, the core Morality system in the World of Darkness does not, by itself, judge good and evil. Morality is about the struggle between idealistic compassion and callous pragmatism, and the price it exacts upon a character’s sanity. Even when a character violates Morality with the best intentions it exacts a strain upon his psyche. An *evil* act is more extreme and less excusable.

The basic game system for determining whether a character’s committed an evil act is straightforward. An evil act is a Morality violation that would apply to a score of 5 or less, and comes into being if the character either fails a Morality check or doesn’t have a high enough rating to even attempt it.

That’s the system. The complexity lies not in using it, but in determining what has the potential to be an evil act. They are always Morality violations (even when the character’s Morality has dipped below the point where a given action would disturb him) but not all Morality violations are evil—at least in the sense that this book explores.

In chronicles with demons, evil actions have five additional characteristics:

Choice: The character violates Morality out of choice, not absolute necessity. It doesn't need to be *easy* to do the moral (or at least amoral) thing at all, but the option still needs to be on the table. Self-preservation may not by itself be enough to excuse the violation, especially when self-sacrifice would prevent harm.

Extremity: Even though a more minor violation may qualify as evil according to our common sense morality, for the purposes of demonic influence evil acts are significant when they're violations associated with a Morality of 5 or less.

Harm—or Assumed Harm: Evil acts either cause real harm to others' mental, physical or social well-being, or the perpetrator believes they will. Psychological coping mechanisms like denial or willful ignorance do not mitigate the possibility of belief, but merely let the character engage in self-deception.

Malice: The character harms others out of raw hate, an unreasonable indifference to the consequences, or by deliberately blinding himself to what he has wrought. An accident doesn't graduate a sin to a full-fledged evil act even if it wreaks far more harm than the character anticipated.

No Remorse: The character can *regret* his act upon a purely selfish or practical basis, but not because it was wrong. He can fool himself into believing he did the right thing or get a deviant thrill out of it, but he can't really want to atone for what he did. In game terms, the character must fail the applicable Morality check. If his Morality is already too low to make a roll, he doesn't have this chance to avoid committing an evil act.

Defining Evil in the Chronicle

These guidelines still provide a great deal of latitude—perhaps too much to manage in a game that involves demons. That's why it's up to your troupe to set up additional standards. The ensuing discussion can get a little tense, so give yourself some conceptual distance from the real world by reminding yourself you're exploring evil as a supernatural element in a fictional setting. It doesn't need to be a realistic moral standard, and just because something isn't evil for game purposes doesn't mean it's not immoral.

Unless you're careful, the conversation could explore some unsavory elements the group really doesn't want to discuss. That's why we recommend you set the criteria for evil acts based upon the things your chronicle's characters might do and the situations they might encounter. It would be overly time-consuming and disturbing to establish complete guidelines. Your group's members probably know each other's hot buttons and basic, common points of moral outrage. It's safe to assume they'll view these as evil acts. These are the *players'* criteria—not their characters. After all, the characters have to have some risk of doing evil for it to be meaningful.

Stick to what could actually happen during play. Is revenge evil in your game? Is it evil to kill someone for committing horrible acts? Figure out the relevant acts that separate regular Morality violations from evil acts and you'll generate a set of precedents to guide your chronicle.

To enforce the theme of objective morality and head off disagreements, you should have group consensus about the "code" you eventually generate. The fact that you're dealing with personal issues can lead to explosive arguments, even among good friends. This is *not* a case where the majority rules, because the dissenting voices in the group may feel rejecting the values they want to bring to the game slanders *their* moral character. Don't go there.

Lastly, remember that demons don't appear every time someone commits an evil act. If they did, the World of Darkness would be awash in the Infernal,

Systems Are Soulless

It seems strange to reduce complex moral questions to a game system, doesn't it? It's definitely not for everyone, and Storytellers who feel rules that define evil would trivialize it or make the chronicle's grip on the theme feel less than authentic should dispense with them.

Also, it should be noted that some systems akin to Morality are even less about "moral" questions. One might represent a code of ethics of power rather than the conflict between compassion and pragmatism, such as the Wisdom system of **Mage**. Another could represent actions likely to trigger mind-affecting traumas, such as the Clarity of **Changeling**. The question of "evil" becomes rather murkier in such cases—though exploration of such topics can make for a rich, philosophical story if you're so inclined.



Good and Evil By Design

While most groups will probably approach these questions from the point of view of their real-world mores, you can always take a more speculative view. If you go this route, players won't discuss how actions measure up to their real world standards, but will ask what it would be like to play in a world where the metaphysics of good and evil are different from their own beliefs.

Use this approach to make one religion the "true faith" of your chronicle, or tailor objective morality to fit a particular theme. Create a world where everyone should follow the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path, or where pacifists are tools of the Devil. Make it clear this is a *fictional* exploration, unrelated to the way things may or may not work in real life.



and it would be a very different place—on the brink of Armageddon.

Supernatural Lore

The world's religions and philosophies have much to say about demons, but they all have one flaw: most adherents, including those who've written about demons, have little to no real contact with the supernatural. There are, of course, secret societies that do not suffer from these flaws. There are the immortal Kindred, who find themselves reflected in demonic lore, and wonder whether they've found their true ancestors. The Uratha, or werewolves, were born to battle spirits of disharmony, and preserve their knowledge in wolf-songs born of direct experience. Mages bind their souls to the fading sparks of universal Truth. Some fear and hate deceivers—but a few are willing slaves, willing to listen to what demons have to teach.

Vampire: An Ancient Evil

Solomon Birch's muscles burned from exertion, but only for a moment: the time it took for him to re-

mind himself it was only a mental flaw. There was no lactic acid in him to scream about fatigue, only blood. He leapt over a wall with new lightness as soon as he remembered he was no man, but Longinus' passion given flesh.

The fallback point was another block and, as he expected, Crone witches were there, casting carved bones to wrest knowledge from their wretched, false gods.

"The Brood's on their way," he said, breaking their meditations. "Five of them are the usual: insane, disposable cultists. But two of them..."

"Oh, we know," said the Chorus' head. "We asked Her, using the names you provided. There were visions. The number four figured prominently."

"Thank God demons know their own. The fourth rite is the efficacious one, then." Birch raised a hand to summon his student. She was already shuffling through vellum to find the invocation.

"Call Her what you like," said the Acolyte. "If She's a demon, you've compromised your faith for expedience in a time of war. Quite a coup for us, considering who you are."

He said nothing, but opened one wrist over the proper thurible. Before he committed his mind to the rite, he thought upon doctrines that could never be spoken of; how the Lord creates evil to battle evil, in squabbling armies that fulfill His design. Solomon Birch was comforted, and then he sang.

Three of the Kindred's Covenants have an occult focus, but the rest don't ignore esoteric matters, either. Vampires need look no further than themselves to find proof of secret laws underlying the world's structure. Carthians explore scientific explanations, but the results are generally unsatisfying. Vampires break so many rules that they practically demand parallel, incompatible schools of physics, biology and psychiatry.

Vampires don't often see direct evidence of the Infernal. Sure, Belial's Brood dedicates itself to demonolatry, but most members just grab that religion as a way to justify a bloodthirsty will to power. Kindred on the frontlines investigate and chronicle diabolical lore to get a handle on the enemy's ideology, but sometimes they find something more. A smart Kindred demonologist usually shares what she learns with her covenant alone. Demonology is usually irrelevant to nightly affairs, but when it matters, it *really* matters. That's when occult lore turns into currency. Occultists trade what they know for special favors. Negotiations are edgy things;



each party explores the edge of accepted doctrine. Is a demon a fallen angel, an evil god, or the Beast made manifest? The resulting compromises, rumors and rare personal experiences inform a typical ancilla's beliefs. Vampires with a fair number of nights under the Blood usually believe demons *might* exist, but that mortal legends are probably false or incomplete—just as they are about vampires. Some Kindred demonstrate powers beyond the common Disciplines and say demons taught them, but these vampires tend to be a bit unhinged, too. Vampires who believe in demons often say they have some relationship with the Beast, or even that the Beast is a demon. Certainly, a few vampires have heard it whisper, as well as roar.

Demons and the Covenants

Every Covenant has demonologists in its ranks, but only the Ordo Dracul, Circle of the Crone and Lancea Sanctum study demons in an organized fashion. Each has come to divergent conclusions, but in emergencies representatives have been known to work together very effectively.

Demons and the Circle of the Crone

Most Acolytes believe the idea of an overarching evil force is absurd. The supernatural world is just too disorganized to permit some dark thread to pass interrupted through thousands of gods and rituals. All the same, demonologists have seen the Infernal and noted common traits. Their research isn't as extensive as the Lancea Sanctum's, but it includes many things the Sanctified know nothing about, culled as it is from pagan occult traditions.

The most common explanation for demons is that they are not a separate order of creatures, but a malevolence aspect all spirits and gods possess. If you come to the bloody altar with corruption in your heart, *you* will bring the demon out of the god. According to the covenant, corruption has nothing to do with human values. Anyone who denies his true nature risks opening the dark side. Humans should be compassionate caretakers of the earth. Vampires should be the predators that pay the world's blood-price. To leave your niche is hubris; it invites doom.

Demons and the Lancea Sanctum

God made vampires to purify the world. They are wolves that devour the weak, unholy things that make Heaven taste so much sweeter by comparison. An unsophisticated mind might say they are like demons, but to Sanctified hardliners, this is blasphemy. A vampire might be a manifestation of *ha-Satan*, a creature sent to test mortals so only the purest might approach the throne of God, but a demon has no such motive. It's an avatar of impurity and spiritual blindness. It is the very disease upon which God's Kindred servants were made to prey.

The Sanctified believe demons are either literal servants of Satan (or perhaps some kind of lying demiurge) or a disorganized host who played the role of pagan gods in ancient times. To some, it follows that the gods of unbelievers are demons in disguise, but

Belial's Brood and VII

These sects (though in the case of VII, "sect" might be a misnomer) are both associated with demons. Belial's Brood's link is straightforward. *They* believe in demons, and have strange powers that either confirm they exist or indicate that at the very least strange bloodlines and powerful elders teach the Brood unique Disciplines. Some Kindred believe VII's members are victims of demonic possession. There's little proof of this, though it comforts some vampires by putting both enemies in a common, understandable structure, and explains reports of VII agents' unusual abilities.

Lesser demons cannot teach a vampire Disciplines, but this might be within the power of certain archdemons. What pacts do the Infernal demand in exchange for unlocking a demon in the Blood? It's a mystery, but vampires know that when one of them alters his essence through mystical means, the repercussions echo down the bloodline. Some Disciplines may be the result of pacts made in the ancient world, beyond the Fog of Ages, between blood-drinkers and forgotten demon patrons. If this is so, what will happen when the oldest demons awaken and claim their due?

diplomatic adherents are careful not to let that get in the way of political affairs. Fortunately, God gave demons secret names, rites and symbols to help the devout control them. He has revealed some of these through Theban Sorcery, but the Lord will hide secrets anywhere—even in the mouths of pagans.

Demons and the Ordo Dracul

The Ordo Dracul's demonologists care little for Heaven, Hell or polytheistic underworlds, but they know a vampire's soul, and that it can be refined to blaze with a purity no mortal saint can match.

The Covenant doesn't especially care where demons come from. It's what they do that matters. The supernatural world has no lack of inexplicable phenomena, but it's a Draconist's job to transcend it all. Demons are the enemy of personal perfection, however, so the Ordo Dracul keeps extensive records about what demons do. It records known powers and strategies. The other occult Covenants possess more raw knowledge, but often lack the Draconists' pragmatic focus.

Demons and the Invictus

The Invictus put little stock in altars and exorcisms but they know how contracts work, and how to distill the organized desire of a bargain into occult power. That's the important thing. Otherwise, they're willing to entertain all kinds of ideas about demons.

The Covenant treats demons as economic factors. What do they offer? What damage can they do? Some elders have yellowed papers that include demonic bargains, along with notes that list how the agreement paid off, the possible loopholes, and the fate of each party. The Invictus is well aware that some of these contracts would embarrass them and anger the Lancea Sanctum, so demonologies in the order usually relay properly "sanitized" information through proper channels.

Demons and the Carthians

Most Carthians know almost nothing, and their attitudes tend to keep them from learning. They think demons are bullshit. They're bogeymen designed to keep the neonates in line. Demonic symbolism is useful, because it paves the way to a Luciferian philosophy of self-improvement and revolution.

On the other hand, for every dozen undead Trotskyists who bellow about the "opiate of the masses" there's an older vampire who quietly takes notes and toes the party line not because she believes it, but because if fewer people believe it, they won't even *think* of making some very bad bargains. Those who actually believe—and there are a few who do—find

the notion of infernalism doubly damning, a slavery far worse than mundane obedience.

Werewolf:

War Against the Wounds

“A predator carves sickness from the world with her teeth, but she also gives prey the gift of fear. She cultivates their behavior with the precision of a psychologist. The herd learns to govern itself accordingly. Are you listening?”

She wasn't, because the moon bled power. The wind carried a rich scent, dense with information about scrambling rabbits, birds, lovers in the woods—but it all stopped with a slap. Anne looked up in time to see the elder pull her hand back. It had a strange shape, as if she'd been on the verge of drawing claws.

“This is important. Next time, I'll leave a mark.”

“Sorry.”

“It happens. The human in you confuses instinct with freedom. That's a mistake. Predators don't do whatever they want. They do whatever they must.”

“How can I tell the difference?”

“I can't tell you, but I can show you. Come across with me and be on your guard. The confusion you're feeling has a poisoned home. We're going there now.”

Pain. Anger. Death. To the Uratha, these are not sins. They're disturbing. They test a werewolf's commitment to Harmony and sometimes tear away the pretense of humanity, when one of Father Wolf's children gets in the thick of it, smells the blood and doesn't recoil, but inhales deeply and feels no human fear, but the pleasure of the hunt.

The Uratha are not human. They do not have human sins—but they have sins nevertheless. They know about demons, though their orthodox traditions don't talk about a great Adversary, or commandments from on high. Truth is fact, not faith. They look inside the Shadow and see the beauty of Harmony, or the ugliness of balance defiled, and define good and evil from there.

To werewolves, demons are spirits that have fallen so far from the natural order they should *not* exist, but even in a parody of true life, they've proven to be as adaptable and mutable as real, living things. They are too corrupt to survive in this world for long, so they create corruption, and breathe it like a nurturing atmosphere. They create Wounds in the world, and grow so

Werewolf Gifts, Rites and Demons

A werewolf's spirit-affecting powers affect Diaboli just as they would affect normal versions of the same spirits. Dominions cannot be summoned or otherwise commanded by Uratha abilities. Werewolves can, however, use the same rituals as ordinary human beings to interact with them.

foul even the First Tongue, the song of nature itself, fails to define them, and they teach their servants an ugly name: *Maeljin*.

Seven Sins to Devour the World

Modern Half Moons identify seven of the nine mightiest *Maeljin* with the traditional Deadly Sins. It seems a strange choice, given that the Uratha know there's more to the world than human points of view, but there's a reason: These demons exploit a form of moral confusion that affects only werewolves.

Virtually every werewolf was raised as a human, but when the First Change comes, their moral instincts contradict their upbringing. New Uratha are vulnerable to anyone—or anything—that offers to resolve the contradiction. In ideal situations, elders do their job and give the young werewolf an identity and purpose, but there are poor elders, and Uratha who run beyond their notice. These are the *Maeljin*'s best pupils. They send lesser demons—what mortal cultists call *Immundi*—to aid them, and *Whisperers* to tell them their new feelings are not signs of Harmony calling, but that their new state makes them *immune* to sin.

Their minds crumble. They overindulge in base pleasures that have already been amplified by inhuman senses. They murder on impulse. They flee their packs, or keep secrets from them, until they can't survive without additional help.

The *Maeljin* answer. There's an initiation, and terrible pain, and the Lords of the Wounds claim another slave: a *Bale Hound*.

This is how the *Maeljin* lead werewolves astray. Humans don't experience the kind of confusion that makes it easy for them to take control, but that's no comfort. People have many, many other weaknesses, and the *Maeljin* embrace more than

the seven sins. Where desire fails, deception and violence can succeed.

The Maeljin Hierarchy

There are nine Maeljin: Carnala, Lady of Lust; Mammon, Feeder of Greed; Maastrac, Master of Envy; Baalphebor, King of Gluttony; Lamashtu, Calipha of Pride; Beliar, Slave to Sloth; Asmodai, Queen of Wrath; Pseulak, Minister of Deception and Thurifurge, Architect of Violence. For the purposes of this book, they are archdemons, beyond quantification within the rules. They may project Whisperers to open the way for their servants and increase the world's suffering.

Below these lords, the Maeltinet are the patrons of lesser beings. They're totem spirits for corrupt werewolves, but won't refuse any being that sincerely worships them. Rules for these spirits are detailed in **Blasphemies for Werewolf: The Forsaken**, but the systems for Dominions who have evolved from Immundi will suffice. If you're running a **Werewolf** game, you may add the rules in this book to their roster of abilities.

At the bottom, corrupt Shadow spirits are their warriors, spies and go-betweens. Use the systems for Immundi in this book, adapt rules from **Werewolf**, or combine the two. They linger in pain and sin-ridden places called Wounds, which may be equivalent to Desecrated places.

For the purposes of this book, the Maeljin and their servants are demons. Are they one perspective upon a greater Infernal order? They share many similarities with demons from other traditions, so it's a strong possibility. If there is a pervasive, universal evil power in your World of Darkness, the Maeljin are its primal guise. The Uratha know best how to confront them on the battlefield of the Shadow, but if they are greater than even the Wounds they rule, they may have resources no werewolf can imagine: avatars on other planes, Whisperers, rituals and fell dreams to infect their spirits.

Mage: The Most Fallen

"Yog-Sothoth is the key, don't you know?" Angrboda chuckled and writhed in his shackles like a smooth white worm newly exposed to the daylight. Movran checked his chains and corrected a little rune, then bent down to the Scelestus' grimacing face.

"I've got that one in paperback. I read it when I want to cheer myself up with escapist fiction. I'm here

about something real: this." Movran shoved the wrinkled contract in Angrboda's face. That elicited a big, honest laugh. On his thin frame, it looked like a seizure.

Angrboda smiled. "Beezlebub? Asmodai? I deal in purity, Movran. Demonic bargains are so... worldly. The Abyss doesn't care if you deal in handshakes or rape."

"Could have fooled me."

"Minds break before the glory of the Beyond, and breaking minds opens the Lie-bound heart to that glory. It's a means, not an end. Demons mire people in the here and now. They aren't my friends."

"No need to let you live, then."

"Wait! I never said I couldn't help you. You see, we always like to keep tabs on the competition..."

The Supernal Realms are Truth, but they are not virtuous. Mages love Truth so much, and feel it in their souls so strongly, that they're liable to forget that. As Above, So Below. That law rules sin as much as it does magic.

Mages believe in all kinds of demons. Their existence is fact, not supposition. All the mystic orders keep records of the demons they've encountered. This broad knowledge doesn't necessarily make it easy to identify them, however. Demons creep through all the invisible worlds, wearing native shapes and familiar occult resonances.

Adding to the confusion is the fact that "demon" is a flexible term. Mastigos use the word to refer to goetic beings: personified Vices that are passionate and amoral, but do not necessarily serve the Inferno. More than one mage has referred to some slithering, soul-wrecking creature out of the Abyss as a demon as well.

The Awakened know true demons are something else, but there are so many kinds of spiritual evil they accord the Infernal no special attention. Therefore, even though many mages study "demons," the number of dedicated demonologists who study Infernal powers and pacts is smaller than one might assume. So much demonology is bound up with inconsistent legends and Sleeper superstitions that mages who are more interested in higher, Supernal knowledge tend to overlook it. Similarly, Mages have no universal laws against dealing with demons, though local Consilii may develop their own policies after some Infernal disaster.

Yes, mages are often ignorant—for mages. But ignorance on the Awakened scale is still usually better

informed than the average Sleeper occultist. Perhaps the truth about demons is collecting dust in some magus's library, unused for no other reason than its owner doesn't think it's very important.

Awakened Knowledge

Mages are methodical individuals with a thirst for knowledge, so their efforts to study demons have borne fruit. Awakened demonologists have gathered the following facts about demons:

They are not of the Abyss. Some mages would dearly like the Infernal host to be a symptom of the Fallen World, but even though the outer darkness seeps in through humanity's ignorance and mad moments, it is not the source of true demons. The Abyss pulls the cosmos toward indescribable chaos and the end of everything. Demons are not alien to reality. They are not impersonal forces.

Not all goetic demons are true demons—but some are. Sleeper goetia make little distinction between personified sins and visitors from Hell because in their case, there's usually no difference between them. Awakened goetia are different animals. Their spells often use demonic imagery to give their Vices form, but these goetic demons are usually passions, not sins. There are exceptions: goetic entities who reflect the most corrupt expressions of their creators' Vices, because the creators themselves have provided the darkest possible model.

Not all demons are vulnerable to Awakened magic. Mages know most demons are spirits of one kind or another. As such, mages can usually summon, command and banish them with the same spells they would use for other spirits of their kind. There are exceptions, however. Dominions are no mere elementals, thought-forms or hateful ghosts. Their Secret Names, power and guile make them immune to magical compulsion. Spells can injure them and protect people against demonic attacks, but when it comes to summoning Dominions, mages must use the same rites as Sleepers.

Stealing Supernatural Knowledge

"I can't read it."

"I thought you understood a dozen different ancient languages." Maya frowned, and clawed back the bills she'd put on the desk. "You brag about it a lot."

Darkness versus Darkness

Infernal demons are not of the Abyss. On the rare occasions when Hell and the Outer Dark make contact, the result is an intense enmity. The Abyss seeks a cosmos without meaning or form—at least not in the way humans understand it—but Hell relies upon the world, loves it even. The world is a furnace of sin, and demons warm themselves at it. Hell burns, but for demons, only sin provides truly comforting heat. For their lot, the Abyss' minions—their Scelesti, mad cultists and alien servants—despise the way Infernal corruption fixes a victim's mind upon flesh, sensation and the petty concerns of human minds and bodies.

Sometimes, one side blocks the other's agenda. They raise misshapen armies and weave poisonous spells—and find unlikely allies among anyone who has more cause to fear one side than the other.

"I'm allowed to brag. I know how to read all kinds of shit in languages Harvard nerds can bare construct 'See Spot Run' out of. They can't read this. I can't read this. Nobody can read this. That embarrasses them so much that the policy, far as I can tell, is to deny that this language even exists, though they find examples all the time."

"I need its name. Tell me how what you're saying is supposed to help me, Karl."

"I'm still better than those establishment bitches, because even though I can't read it, I know something that can."

"Something?" Maya pushed about half the money back to him.

"Oh, she looks like a person, but I have suspicions."

When supernatural societies learn something about the Inferno, ordinary people might learn it, too. The monsters and gifted humans of the World of Darkness don't keep secrets as thoroughly as they'd like to think, and sometimes underesti-

Three Sources from the Supernatural Underground

Here are three demonology sources that might fall into someone's hands courtesy of a supernatural secret society.

- **The Beast Book:** This stack of a dozen spiral bound notebooks is kept together with thick, dirty elastic bands and stored in an old US Postal Service bag. The lined pages of each book are covered in indecipherable scrawl—what the vampire cult called Belial's Brood calls "Beast Speech." It can be read only by vampires who have the special kind of madness associated with it... or anyone who understands the Dragon's Tongue. (Are both languages one in the same, then? Perhaps.) Anyone who can read it learns the secret names and Testaments of three Dominions of Gluttony. The Beast Book is currently in the hands of a woman who's addicted to vampire blood: the only person its undead author would never kill in a fit of hunger or anger.

- **The Invisible Laceration:** Writing in Vulgate Latin, this book's author identifies himself as the "Green Bishop." There are several passages in an unknown language that looks something like cuneiform or crudely painted runes. Werewolves would recognize many of these from their own glyphs and marks, but they've been adapted into some unique language: a liturgy that praises the nine Maeljin lords and lists their attributes in loving detail. The last chapter foretells the coming of the "Soulless One, who will be a wolf among men as the Christ, our enemy, is their shepherd." An educated antiquarian would say the book was written in Germany at least 800 years ago.

- **St. Ezra:** In New Mexico, the supposedly Catholic monastery of St. Ezra holds its namesake's body in a glass coffin. The local diocese has no record of this particular St. Ezra or the monastery and, if asked, calls the place a commune. The monks say Ezra is an "incorruptible," who demonstrated saintliness when his body never rotted. But the truth is that in some sense, Ezra is still alive. Every few nights, he opens his eyes and chants in an unknown language. Sometimes the brothers find his coffin open, and strange symbols carved on the walls. Last year, a visitor prayed with five monks before driving on. After that, all five of them could understand Ezra. They know he's some kind of occult automaton who exists to provide warnings and information about 66 demons "from the days of drowned Atlantis." They also know Ezra's been bound to repeat his warning 3,333 times, and has used up over 2,000 of these occasions. And who was that stranger, anyway?

mate the ability of normal people to spy on them, steal their writings and tap into their information networks.

If demons are the central antagonists of your story, tie supernatural societies into the plot. If you go this route, a werewolf isn't the primary antagonist. He's a dangerous informant who knows the names of the Maeljin. Mages' libraries are as important as their spells.

Supernatural mythology also provides ready-made hierarchies and legends for your demons.

Combine these with mainstream religious views or use them on their own, to emphasize that demons are so mysterious better-known belief systems can't describe them. Taking *Awakened Atlantis*, the *Shadow*, or *Belial's Brood* out of its native context in a *World of Darkness* game line adds an exotic edge to your story's demons but preserves ideas that characters can research, study and even use at their own peril. Even though demons enjoy playing the roles people expect of them, they're not so inflexible as to refuse victims who are intrigued by

unusual legends. If humans prostrate themselves to possessed vampires or swear upon a cursed Atlantean Artifact, demons will still love them, care for them and push them to utter damnation.

Tomes, Testaments and other Infernal Secrets

Demonology is not an organized field. If there are neatly indexed and categorized libraries, they're not available to the general public. This doesn't mean all demon lore is secret, though. In fact, one of the distinguishing marks of the field is that it is one of the most popular topics in the occult. Many people believe in demons, or are intrigued by them, and write down everything they research in notebooks, theses, religious pamphlets, web pages and more. It's easy for a demonologist to uncover all kinds of trivia, but hard to distill it into useful information. The world continually teases seekers with hints of the Infernal, without providing much in the way of knowledge that could be used to bind or banish real demons. Still, the information is out there if they know where to look, what to look for and how to interpret the symbols and metaphors that are so common to occult writing.

People write about demons in a number of ways. Practical demonologists have devised several categories for these works. For the sake of clarity, we'll divide them into Hierarchies, Mythologies, Secret Names and Testaments.

Hierarchies

Bahalul: Baronet, Vassal to Tophet, Master of the Gold-Melting Fire

Bezzaric: Earl, the Green Forge, the Two-Faced One

Byrof: Archduke, Warden of the Evil Counselors, Tongue-Cutter

An authentic Infernal Hierarchy is a list that sorts a number of true demons by name, position and focus. A small Hierarchy is about a page or two long and lists a handful of demons—no more than 10, usually. Larger examples can fill multiple volumes and list hundreds or even thousands of demons. As a general rule, the bigger the Hierarchy, the more likely it is to contain “filler” information: false entries the author added to conceal authentic information or disguise problems

with the Hierarchy's accuracy. If a demonologist believes Infernal forces array themselves around the Platonic Solids but has only 10 names for the Lords of the Dodecahedron, he might just invent two more to look consistent.

Hierarchies are very common resources but they're not very useful in and of themselves. Authors leave out demons' Secret Names, powers, signatures and appearances to save space and to hold back enough so that if a ruthless occultist finds the list, he won't just kill the writer. The demonologist holds back enough information to make himself worth leaving alive. This sometimes backfires, however, especially when self-appointed witch hunters are actually there to *destroy* Infernal knowledge, not collect it. If a Hierarchy's contents imply the author knows more than he's telling, then they need to dispose of him, too. An Infernal Hierarchy is a starting point for more serious studies. This is where an occultist first learns that Barbas, President of Hell, exists, and that he is a master of shapechanging and secret knowledge. The entry starts the researcher off in the right direction.

A Hierarchy defines the relationship between a group of demons. It tells the reader who outranks whom. It lays out an Infernal bureaucracy, order of battle—whatever fits the mythos its author favored. An occultist can use this in her favor, by threatening a lesser demon with the wrath of its superior, or comparing what it promises with what its place in the Hierarchy really entitles it to promise. It can also hint at the relative power of different demons in the Infernal chain of command.

Systems

Hierarchies provide equipment bonuses to dice rolls. An authentic Infernal Hierarchy provides a +1 to +3 bonus to any attempt to research or negotiate with a listed demon, though in the latter case, the Hierarchy must also list the demon's superiors. The bonus is based upon the Hierarchy's quality.

Hierarchies come in many sizes. For game purposes, there are three categories:

- **Brief Hierarchies** are no more than a few pages (or the equivalent, outside of print media) long. Practically speaking, they're short enough the Storyteller should actually write out the Hierarchy for use as an in-character resource. If the resource is accurate enough to provide a bonus, it's also unusually reliable, as there's no “filler.” Any roll that receives

the bonus also gains the 9-Again dice roll benefit. The disadvantage is that this bonus applies only to the 10 or so demons listed—no others.

- **Long Hierarchies** would take up a small volume's worth of writing—too much for the average Storyteller to reproduce verbatim. There is still only so much useful knowledge to wring out of one, however. If a researcher fails a roll while using the Hierarchy as a resource, reduce its bonus by 1. This indicates the occultist is running out of information that's relevant to her situation. If some far removed figure (not just an ally) gets his hands on the Hierarchy, it regains its original bonus, because to him, the information is still fresh.

- **Comprehensive Hierarchies** are multi-volume collections. Some of them are the end result of projects that tried to list every true demon in the world. Others were manic works of automatic writing that combine coherent sentences with page upon page of free association and paranoid rambling. Occultists can always find something valuable in such a huge Hierarchy, but the signal to noise ratio isn't good and can actually mislead the researcher. If any dice rolls that use the Hierarchy include rolls of 1 on the die's face, remove a success from the player's total. Resolve rolls for extra successes before doing this.

Mythologies

So the child took the ring, and went off; and behold, at the customary hour Ornias, the fierce demon, came like a burning fire to take the pay from the child. But the child, according to the instructions received from the king, threw the ring at the chest of the demon, and said: "King Solomon calls thee hither." And then he went off at a run to the king. But the demon cried out aloud, saying: "Child, why hast thou done this to me? Take the ring off me, and I will render to thee the gold of the earth. Only take this off me, and forbear to lead me away to Solomon."

—*The Testament of Solomon*, F. C. Coneybeare, Trans.

Only the most cynical demonologies call the origin stories and traditional legends of demons "mythologies," because that would imply they are false—but there are a lot of cynical demonologists, too. Demons lie all the time, so you would expect every old story about a demon to be questionable, to say the least, but paradoxically many contain at least a grain of truth. Maybe demons are so bound to the pliable, adaptable nature of lies that they are

bound to honor *any* story that somehow resonates with their natures. Maybe stories get more powerful the more people tell them—or maybe demons simply enjoy them.

Mythologies include parables in which a demon appears in fact or metaphor, creation myths that feature the demon as a trickster, a rebel or a god fallen from purity, local stories about what's *really* buried under that black statue—any story that reveals something about a demon and, in doing so, gives occultists a way to understand or even manipulate it.

A demonic Mythology helps summoners and exorcists construct the proper rituals for their respective tasks. In either case, a rite that somehow reenacts or responds to the myth is especially effective. Looking at the quote at the start of this section, we can see anyone wishing to lure Ornias should prepare a gold ring inscribed with the true Seal of Solomon. If an occultist wants power over Penemue, the Watcher who taught humans writing, he might persuade a beautiful woman (a sign of the Watchers' temptation and fall) to lie upon an altar, holding a paper and pen. Demons are creatures of habit and tradition. When they see the proper signs, they react accordingly, replaying the myth itself. No demonologists should expect robotic behavior, however; demons are quite capable of adding a little "artistic license" to these reenactments.

Systems

Depending upon its quality, a legitimate Mythology provides a +1 to +3 bonus to the following systems in Chapter Two:

- Rolls to lure the demon, if necessary
- Rolls to perform an exorcism, if the myth provides an example of the demon being bound, banished or otherwise defeated
- Social rolls to sense a demon's motives and anticipate its actions

The bonus applies only to demons mentioned in a particular myth.

Secret Names

Chris's throat burned. Something green crawled out of the circle. It had the face of a snake. The tongue had three forks instead of two.

"I heard you calling my name," it said. "Now tell me why it's not time for me to fuck a fresh wound in the back of your head."



He wanted to piss himself, but he put on the fakest smile in the world, held the paper up and said, “That would contravene paragraph four. This is your John Hancock, isn’t it?”

He was right—and wrong. It couldn’t do that to him, but there was a loophole. It did something else. Two hours later it left him alive, as they agreed. He only wanted to die.

At least his tongue was gone, so he couldn’t say that name ever again.

Whisperers have no real names, but desire them greatly. Diaboli—the demons of our corrupt world—have names much like those of other spirits because they are of much the same basic nature. Only a few demons draw their power straight from Hell itself. They tie those energies to a Secret Name. Without it, these Dominions couldn’t survive exposure to even the weakest virtues and natural order of the upper worlds. A Secret Name is a Dominion’s heart. Speak it, and the demon feels the vibration to its core. Issue a command, and the demon battles a compulsion to obey, usually by reducing the order to the most literal, perverse form possible.

A Secret Name is not really a word. Demons cannot be defined by pen and ink, or a wagging tongue. Think of it as more of a spiritual frequency: a carrier wave that transmits the power of Hell. It has a peculiar property, as it can be “embedded” into many forms of information: a spoken or written word, a series of numbers, even a picture. This doesn’t mean you can scribble or say anything and demand the demon treat it as a Secret Name. A demonologist must still learn it, and the source must be part of a line of transmission that consists of a chain of honest renderings, moving from the source of the revelation to the student.

For example, a Dominion whispers its Secret Name into the mind of a black magician. She hears the sound of babies screaming, sees bile green and tastes a mix of rotten flesh and copper. Her mind reeling, she writes down a word that will represent the experience: *Naberius*. She honestly intends to represent the name in this form, so anyone who invokes the name is really using the demon’s Secret Name, even though the name itself is a maddening flood of sound and images.

If the next person in the chain uses the Secret Name, he validates it. Thereafter, he may choose another representation of the name, though he must do so with sincere intent. Therefore, while Secret Names change from era to era and culture to culture, they never do so for trivial reasons. A scholar cannot change the name to hide it, or confuse others. The greatest demons' Secret Names take many forms, but in truth they are all one name, written to convey an indescribable, horrible essence.

This fact is the reason famous demon names—Asmodai, Belphegor and the rest—are not usually real Secret Names, even if there was some point in history at which they were used as such. They've been copied by many ignorant hands over the ages, most of whom never even used the name to call a demon. This is not *always* true; there's a difference between the name Belphegor as it appears on a random web page, and the same name when it's written down in a real black grimoire.

Secret Names appear in three forms. The first is a simple phonetic rendering that enables an occultist to speak or chant it. The second is a demonic signature: a series of exotic glyphs or misshapen words the demon may use to bind itself to a written contract. The third form is the demon's seal, which an occultist uses to exert authority over the demon. Knowing one form of the Secret Name does not impart knowledge of the others.

Systems

If a character learns one form of the Secret Name she can research the others. She must always begin with knowledge of one form of the demon's name, learned from a legitimate source. Learning other versions (such as the seal or signature) requires a standard Research roll (see the **World of Darkness** core rulebook, pp. 55–56). Its dice pool is Intelligence + the lower of the character's Academics or Occult Skill + equipment. The character cannot attempt the task without at least 1 dot of Occult. The number of successes required is listed in parenthesis, beside the effects of each form of the Secret Name:

Spoken (6 successes): Speaking a Secret Name imparts a +3 bonus to invoke the named demon. A few demons hate it when humans say their names, but many don't mind at all, because they *want* to be summoned. The call gives them a way to leave Hell and increase their power. They will, however, make a great show of offense at times, just to convince sum-

moners they're making them do something against their will.

Signature (6 successes): Occultists can't use the signature form themselves, but if they can convince a demon to sign a written bargain or mark a dedicated symbol of their agreement (a carving, perhaps—this form is more common in non-literate cultures) the demon *must* abide by the conditions. Demons are often quite comfortable doing this, because they usually understand the quasi-legal conditions of these contracts better than the other party. These contracts are the result of the negotiation phase (see the systems for summoning demons in Chapter Two). Nothing prevents a demon from using a fake signature that makes its promise meaningless, but one would hope a summoner who wants it in writing knows how to identify a demon's legitimate mark.

Seal (12 successes): The seal is one of the most useful forms of the Secret Name. Consequently, demons work hard to make it difficult to acquire. Properly rendering a seal requires a Wits + Occult roll with a penalty equal to the demon's Infernal Rank, as more powerful demons have more complicated seals. If the occultist manages to trick a demon into a confined space (a room, a bottle) or closed circle marked with the seal, the demon cannot leave until someone else damages the seal, creates an opening in the area of confinement, or it overpowers it with a successful Power + Rank roll, penalized by the seal-maker's Occult dots. (The demon can't attack the seal or borders of its confinement.) The demon may attempt escape on the first turn of imprisonment, once more in the subsequent scene and once again in the next hour, day, week, month and year. After that, the demon is imprisoned until someone else either damages the seal or creates an opening in the sealed area.

Confinement enrages demons, but it also serves as effective leverage for negotiations. Unfortunately, the seal also blocks a demon from providing pact services. If an occultist wants the benefits of a pact, he has to let the demon out—though he can apply conditions. Summoners should be careful to include provisions for their own safety, or the demon will surely take revenge. They should get them in writing with the demon's signature, if possible.

Testaments

A Testament is a lengthy description of a demon. A full Testament may list a number of the demon's



titles, the sigil used to summon it, the reputed abilities of the demon, its associations with planets and colors and numbers, and so on. Testaments intertwine with the other elements listed above. For instance, a detailed Infernal Hierarchy will contain a number of Testaments to varying degree. A Secret Name could be found within a Testament, though this is quite rare. In some cases, a demon's Mythology and Testament might be transcribed together.

However, the Hierarchy, Mythology and Secret Name are designed to assist the would-be demonologist. The Testament is something that benefits the demon most of all. The act of writing out a Testament can elevate a Whisperer to a Dominion, for example (see p. 61). Demons draw strength from human perception, and a Testament is a concentration of that perception.

Systems

A Testament may be used as a trigger to summon a demon; though the Secret Name is more effective, the Testament can be used as the basis for an invocation. Quoting a Testament respectfully may also grant a +1 or +2 equipment bonus to rolls made to negotiate with a given demon. (The bonus may even rise as high as +3 in cases of demons of Pride; they do like to have their honorifics mentioned.)

Cults

The attraction of a cult is understandable to some extent. It offers understanding and acceptance away from a less sympathetic world. It gives promises and hope to those who feel isolated and left behind. It is intensely personal and immersive, and to some extent may offer love for love—the love and favor of the cult's leader or patron in exchange for the love and efforts of the cultist. And it's a chance to indulge in behavior that would be considered unacceptable in the larger world, be it severe austerity or debauched pleasure-seeking.

When demons become involved, the benefits increase—though so too does the required participation. A cult can become all the stronger if it is given small, regular doses of genuine supernatural activity to reward its faith. And it's to the demon's benefit, as well: who better than a cult of mortal followers to deliberately indulge its Malapragis without question? Of course, cults can attract attention, and many demons don't have the full creativity to manipulate a whole group at once. Even so, there are a number

of diabolist cults scattered throughout the World of Darkness with very real patrons.

The following material may assist in devising the perfect cult for your game, whether as adversaries, potential contacts, or even pawns. Selecting a cult's age, belief system and patron may be a good beginning point to brainstorm the actual details surrounding the cult.

Age

Not all cults begin at the same time. Some have outlived their founders by centuries, possibly even millennia. The age of the cult can greatly affect its style and methodology, as well as emphasize different themes by its pedigree.

Ancient

Many cults pretend to be ancient, even though they're just modern recreations picking and choosing bits of old lore to suit their purposes. Truly ancient cults are quite rare, though frequently very dangerous. It's difficult for a religious organization the size of a cult to survive for decades, much less millennia without becoming something entirely different from its origin. In the case of a genuinely ancient infernalist cult, the demon can assist in keeping its followers "honest."

Ancient cults continually reinvent themselves to take on whatever modern methods they may need. A group that recruited from the soldiers of Rome might have evolved to draw members from the modern military, or it might have shifted focus to the soldiers of organized crime or corrupt police (or both). However, the core traditions frequently remain largely intact. In part, this is because of the human tendency to value "the old ways." An ancient cult's age can be a selling point—many people disenchanted with the modern world may believe the only real merit is to be found in the old practices of a "simpler" time. Age is pedigree, to some extent.

Of course, some cults endure the long years not by adapting their form and recruitment strategies, but by remaining isolated. Even then, the cult may be largely the same, but have undergone a shift in demographics. For instance, a group of demon-worshippers among the misfits and outcasts of the Appalachian Cherokee might have gradually bred more and more white settler blood into their lineage, shifting its ethnic identity but not its religious culture. This can make a truly old cult difficult to

identify—and if the ancient demon they worship is all the stronger for age, and grants all the stronger benefits to its servitors, the organization’s enemies may be caught lethally off guard.

Sample Ancient Cult: The Seven Names

The leaders of the Seven Names trace their pedigree back to Mesopotamia, where the cult founders venerated a monstrous demon with seven aspects. Most of the seven names are forbidden knowledge, with only the first—Pagash—being used among the entire cult. The teachings of the cult stress that a member must offer up seven lives to its unholy patron in order to achieve true blessings. This doesn’t exclusively mean sacrifices: this is also an exhortation to recruit new followers. The cult’s ultimate master is also the keeper of the tablets recording all seven names. These tablets are Artifacts that have endured through the millennia, and teach the Secret Name of the cult’s patron. The Cult of the Seven Names is currently led by Richard Kingston, a banker of African heritage who possesses a genealogical chart allegedly tracing his lineage back to Sumeria. The cult is well-organized and has a great deal of social influence in the cities where its members live; they know all the dirty ways to throw money at a problem or at people who can fix a problem for them. The Seven Names are referred to obliquely in a few works of occult lore. Their most dangerous enemies are the children of the full moon—for several of their patron’s names are known to werewolf oral history, and marked as an enemy of the Uratha.

Generational

Generational cults are family affairs. They arise out of a simple enough assumption: the best way to surround yourself with people who believe as you do is to raise them yourself. Though this isn’t an infallible philosophy—as many a parent has discovered—it can be reinforced with fear and brutality, or with preternatural rewards. Generational cults tend to keep their family members close, and carefully indoctrinate each new generation. They flourish in isolation, where it’s easier to keep family members from being exposed to other beliefs. Some do quite well amid greater society, however, keeping their family beliefs tucked quietly away.

A generational cult typically traces its origins back to a pact made between a patron and a clan patriarch or matriarch. The family’s welfare is often

of great interest to the patron, and may have been one of the bargaining chips prevalent in the original deal. Children born to the cult are sometimes offered as sacrifices to the patron, either in the ritual murder sense or as host vessels for possession. In some cases, the family practices inbreeding as a means to keep the cult “pure.” However, many other generational cults value conversion by marriage as a means to bring in new blood and new resources.

Generational cults have a distinct flavor that matches the origins of their pact. Some might be immigrants who brought an “old faith” with them; others, a classic American melting pot with a dark secret behind their self-made success. In some cases, the original founder has managed to hold on beyond mortal years, perhaps faking his death and claiming to be his own son every generation or so. Or maybe he’s bound up securely in the cellar, twitching and shaking because of the *thing* he’s got in him, brought out to the rest of the family on feast days. Crossing a generational cult is sure to be a memorable experience, no matter what the sins of the blood.

Sample Generational Cult: The Creytors

Anyone who’s anyone in the city knows about the Creytors. They’re old money, and have their name on a lot of city buildings. The media also can’t resist a photo op for one or more of the younger Creytors—the children of the clan are uniformly gorgeous, far more photogenic and appealing than the usual breed of nationally exposed heiress. They’re more respectable, too; there’s not a hint of scandal surrounding the family. Of course, that’s because nobody knows that the family’s fortune can be traced back to Josiah Creyton, who made a pact with a demon of Pride in 1840 to ensure the survival and prosperity of his name. The Creytors know their children are valuable resources, and expect them to bring in husbands and wives of excellent money... and pliable ethics. The prosperity of the family must be constantly maintained, after all. A character who winds up romantically entangled with a Creyton may find it’s not as desirable as the media might have one believe, even if the family approves. If they don’t approve—all Hell’s likely to break loose.

Established

An established cult is one that’s taken root in the last century or two. It’s been around long enough to have established a system of succession, but doesn’t have quite the pedigree of a genuinely ancient cult.



They're popular among those of a scholarly persuasion; most were founded upon an assemblage of older lore, and most have a reputation the cunning occultist can uncover.

Established cults are usually rigid in their power structure. Given their emphasis on pedigree and years, they can be abusive of newer, younger members until said members have "paid their dues," which turns them into hardened traditionalists themselves. They are also, interestingly, some of the most likely cults to have moved around in recent years; new cults often stay where they're founded, and truly ancient cults tend to seek out places where they can endure in peace for decades. An established cult is often comfortable enough in its traditions to pack up and move elsewhere, trusting in the old ways to endure wherever it goes.

**Sample Established Cult:
The Initiates of the Violet Curtain**

The Initiates of the Violet Curtain was established during the height of Victorian occult sensationalism. It was strongly influenced by the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn—in fact, its founders were intensely jealous of the Golden Dawn's notoriety and influence. This intense rivalry began to taint the Initiates' approach to magical practice, and thus attract the attention of Thofollus, a demonic patron of Envy. Tragically, Thofollus never allowed them to achieve a similar level of success and notoriety—after all, how could it feed upon their envy if they surpassed their rivals?

When the early 20th-century schisms in the Golden Dawn reduced that order's influence, though, Thofollus had grown accustomed to its pet order's influence. It then began influencing the order to feed upon itself, ironically perpetuating its existence. Gradually the demon would encourage a Temple Master to become so unhappy with his life that he would be willing to commit ritual suicide, passing his office on to the next. This would also become the methodology for the cult as a whole: attempting to ruin the lives and sanity of rivals such that any enemy of the Violet Curtain would commit suicide. As such, the Initiates have retained their focus upon hermetic scholarship, but have also evolved slightly into a death-cult; the "Violet Curtain" has become a term not only for the veil of transcendence, but for death itself.

New

Cults that are relatively new probably got their start within the last 10 years, perhaps as many as 20. The original founder is most likely still in charge. A new cult may still be settling into its traditions, figuring out what works best—experimenting, often in ways that are highly unpleasant to those in whom they take an interest. Even those that inherited a much older tradition may still be refining their treatment of that tradition, not yet fully confident they have the proper way. The "cult of personality" is almost certainly a new cult, assuming the personality in question isn't immortal.

New cults have a certain advantage of anonymity. They aren't likely to have their tells recorded in an ancient grimoire for any enemy of their patron to discover (unless they derived their practices from that same grimoire). Those searching for a newly formed cult have to pay closer attention to current events and street gossip, as there isn't quite as much recorded history through which to sift.

Sample New Cult: The Perdition Club

It meets in the back of a fairly well-known fetish club. Invitation only—and even celebrities have been turned down for membership. The Perdition Club promises the greatest, most hedonistic excess available: the finest and most beautiful partners, the most outrageous sex acts, and virtually no boundaries whatsoever. The festivities are regularly invoked in the name of "the Great God Bacchanal," and as it turns out, a demon of Lust began to answer to that name. The core members found themselves driven further and further as the spirit took them—almost literally. Now the parties are becoming more legendary than ever, and the rites more salacious. But it isn't enough anymore. The rites leave the participants feeling empty and hollow, soiled and incomplete the next day. Bacchanal has suggestions for what might go further, though, and gradually the rituals have been becoming increasingly depraved and formalized at the same time. The members are feeling a need for fresh blood, and it's occurring to them it might be worthwhile to... surprise a few new recruits with their membership.

Beliefs

The function of a cult as regards a demonic patron—food for the Malapraxis—is not necessarily the same as its function as regards its members. Many cults are ignorant of the true nature of their patron. The belief system of a cult describes what its members are getting out of it and why it was founded. It also provides a basis for rituals, which may be explained as deeply mystical or perhaps as pseudo-science. The actual details of a belief system vary widely, from deliberate indulgence in wickedness à la De Sade or bargain-basement Satanism to a rationalization of higher ethics and a superior moral standpoint. The simplest way to organize them is in their points of origin: whether modern creations, extrapolations of older traditions, or revealed directly by the patron demon.

Modern

Modern belief systems are founded upon the specific needs and desires of a modern believer. That's the core approach. Some of them still draw upon ancient (or allegedly ancient) traditions in an attempt to woo followers who want an excuse to consciously reject the trappings and conventional thought of modern society. Others begin with a more scientific approach—philosophy, usually, but sometimes an odd interpretation of physics, psychology or astronomy can spark a peculiar approach.

Some new belief systems are created with fairly good intentions—a genuine effort to attempt to frame existence in the context of what modern humans know. Many more are crafted with the specific intention of wooing followers who can be bilked out of money or services. Demons are capable of corrupting either, though naturally there's a little less work involved in the latter. Some cults with new belief systems even begin with a demon, then craft a new dogma in order to disguise the demon's true nature or make it seem more presentable to the cosmopolitan 20th- or 21st-century mind.

Modern belief systems are no less likely to attract demonic attention. As described elsewhere, demons thrive on the identity mortals ascribe them. Modern belief systems are a new approach to what they crave, but no less useful.

Sample Modern Cult: Church of the Star Angels

The Church of the Star Angels has its feet clearly set in New Age idealism. Its founder, David Cassiopeian (born David Greenblatt), describes the

faith as follows: “We recognize and respect each of the major religions of the world, but they see only part of the picture. The angels and divine beings they recognize are creatures more advanced than any centuries-old mythology can describe. As we learn more about the cosmos, about the vibrations emanating from Heaven that was once described as ‘music of the spheres,’ we become attuned to the Star Angels and their wishes for us. Eventually we will become like them.”

The Church is harmless enough, in its own way; “Cassiopeian” doesn't really believe his own spiel, but finds cult leadership an excellent way to get laid frequently and have the money roll in without actually having to do much work. It's this attitude that attracted a demon of Sloth to the Church, which has gradually been reaching out to David and his flock. For the moment, it feeds upon the fundamental desire they have to do nothing: to achieve enlightenment without actually having to think too hard. But it's getting a little hungrier, and has begun to whisper little suggestions in the voices of “the Star Angels.” And if the cult leader isn't prone to believe in his own creations, perhaps he'll make a good first sacrifice at the hands of the truly faithful...

Traditional

A traditional belief system is one that is either passed down from generation to generation in an older cult or devised from pre-existing traditional belief systems and customized according to the founder's own goals. A cult with traditional beliefs may still be a unique or largely unknown tradition, of course; this category refers to the internal traditions, not whether or not its dogma is recognized by sources outside the cult. That said, these beliefs tend to be derived more clearly from existing belief structures. Judeo-Christian apocrypha, Mesopotamian mythology and Nordic or Greco-Roman religion are some of the most popular sources for a traditional Western cult formed within the last century or so. Older traditional cults can come from anywhere, from warped animistic practices to variants on ancestor worship to degraded takes on Christianity or Islam. The key aspect of the cult is usually some sort of reinterpretation of existing lore, in much the same vein as Christian snake-handler sects derive their practices from a passage in the Book of Mark.

Traditional cults often have a greater library of lore available to them, though naturally much of it isn't likely to be accurate. This isn't always the case, of



course—some traditions are founded in general ignorance, directly devoted to one patron without framing their beliefs in a larger context. They also tend to be the cults most likely to appear in occult literature, which makes them a little easier to oppose—but also easier to recreate anew as a splinter group. A cult with recorded traditions is not reliant upon any given mortal founder or personality to thrive—nor is it even reliant upon any given demonic patron. A rite that drew the notice of one demon of Pride will serve just as well to attract another’s attention, particularly if no specific names are mentioned.

Sample Traditional Cult: Sons of Mercurius

The Sons of Mercurius have founded their faith upon a peculiar interpretation of alchemical lore. According to the teachings of their line, alchemy is a triple-aspected thing. At its simplest, it is a transformation of the body, a simple application of diet and exercise. The “median aspect” is the transmutation of the soul, refining out impurities and becoming an advanced spiritual being. This in turn leads to the final aspect, the Rebis, the divine androgyne—metaphorically a fusion of male and female, but actually a fusion of body and spirit. Achieving the state of Rebis is noted to grant the full ability to transform the world around oneself, including the famed transmutation of base metals. The Sons have every reason to trust in their tradition: they are led by a genuine Rebis, after all.

The actual nature of the cult is less noble than its members would have it. The Sons of Mercurius are motivated in part by pride, but largely by raw, naked greed. For centuries, the cult has opened its doors only to the wealthiest and the poorest, to those who have the most desire to turn themselves and the world around them to gold. The “guiding spirit” of the order, often equated to the mythical imp in the pommel of Paracelsus’ sword, is in fact a demon of Greed. The Rebis who leads the cult is a hermaphroditic Possessed (granted the Midas Touch Vestment). The Rebis is not immortal, and its transmutation powers seem to injure it when used too often—but this is explained to the cult as a tradition of passing on the refinement to others. Once the Rebis is ready, it will share its state with the next worthy applicant, passing on leadership at the same time so it may ascend into the higher world. Of course, the actual truth is that the host dies, and the demon takes over its next body... but why undercut morale?

Revealed

The traditions of a revealed cult have nothing to do with guesswork. These cults are built directly upon the word of a demon or a possessed mortal. They would be considered the most open and honest of cults if it weren’t for the fact that demons remain such inveterate liars. Not that the cult members know that, of course. The demon’s show of open revelation tells them what they want to hear, or specifically what the demon wants them to hear.

Revealed cults are often the most dangerous. Because the demon directly communicates with at least one member of the cult, it’s able to mobilize its members quickly against anything of which it can perceive they might not be aware. The demon also has its Malap Praxis sated early and often, making it all the stronger. The only real weakness of a revealed cult is that it is a bit easier to discover for what it is. The patron’s openness can work against it if someone is able to successfully interrogate a member, particularly if the cult’s enemy recognizes its patron’s name.

Sample Revealed Cult: The Hungry Guests

The teachings of the Hungry Guests are simple: You are what you eat. If you eat rich foodstuffs, then you will become rich. If you eat a hearty meal, you will become hearty. The cult was started when the Golden Prince of Fulfillment, a demon of Gluttony, revealed itself to a morbidly obese would-be cook named Evaline Leeds. It offered her the skill to become a fine chef and, even better, the ability to enjoy as much fine food as she wanted while remaining healthy. (It didn’t promise her actual weight loss, mind, and Evaline is still heavily overweight—but she doesn’t run the risk of heart disease or other ill effects as long as she maintains her pact with the Golden Prince.)

Evaline owns her own restaurant now, a trendy fusion place called Appetit. There she serves unfashionably immense portions, yet critics must admit the food is sublime for all its excess. Her restaurant has served as a recruiting ground for the Hungry Guests; Evaline extends invitations to “exclusive dinners” to those who seem likely converts. Members identify themselves with a tiny golden pin showing a heart resting on a plate; most are also overweight, thanks to the encouraged excesses of the Golden Prince. The Hungry Guests convene monthly to gorge themselves upon some of the most outrageous cuisine available, and members have been known to go to great lengths

to acquire particularly choice ingredients. Some of their feasts are simply irresponsible (such as feasting upon endangered species). Others are downright grotesque (such as one adventure in coprophilia), and the cult is moving into gourmet cannibalism as its latest and most exciting endeavor.

Patronage

For the purposes of this book, cults with actual supernatural patrons come in two distinct flavors: those whose patron is demonic, and those whose patron is not. However, even those with non-demon patrons can still feel the taint of Hell upon them.

Demonic

This is the default assumption for most demonic cults; most often, the demon or Possessed chooses to be the object of worship itself, or at the very least to have a mortal pawn be the center of cult activity.

The diversity of cults with an active demonic patron is equal to the diversity of demons themselves. Some of them began without patronage, only to draw a demon to them; others were founded by a demon that gave a target revelation in order to gather more food to itself.

Sample Demonic Cult: Blood of Berith

It started with a card game. Tommy Valiant lost everything, couldn't pay, and got the shit beat out of him. As he staggered out into the street, wondering whether he should just walk into traffic, a hobo pressed a piece of paper into his hand, whispering, "You're in need, son. Call on Lord Berith. He can help." The paper was full of some sort of summoning ritual and an odd diagram. Any other night, Tommy would have shoved the bum into a wall and thrown the paper away. This night, he was desperate enough to give it a try.

Since that first summoning, Berith has been damned good to Tommy. He's gotten a few favors out of the demon—in exchange for other favors, naturally—but the best one so far has been luck. Tommy wins card games now, a lot. And at his master's behest, he's started bringing other people into the fold, teaching them to forget about Lady Luck and start venerating a Lord of Fortune. The Blood of Berith has got a few soldiers in it, tough triggermen and ex-cons who needed a dash of luck to get their lives back in order. It's got a few seducers, too, men and women a little past their prime and a few

baby-faced teenagers all looking to catch the ultimate break. All of them were desperate. All of them are willing to do whatever Berith asks of them in order to keep the good luck coming.

Supernatural

Some cults have a supernatural entity of a different sort at their head. In some cases, this being has set itself up as an object of worship, revealing itself to its followers; vampires in particular have a fondness for this sort of endeavor. In other cases, the supernatural creature manipulates its followers much as a mundane leader would, to much the same designs. The supernatural nature of the patron is not revealed to the cult, though the cult still serves its purposes.

These cults, however, can still involve a demon's presence. A Whisperer can easily be attracted to such a group, and attempt to focus its influence upon the supernatural head. A demon doesn't have to set itself up as an actual patron to benefit from a cult. It simply needs to find a cult that fulfills its Malapraxia. A vampiric blood cult that involves ritual orgies of communion can be very attractive to a Lust or Gluttony demon, which might settle in without aiming to change a thing. Just a little more... enthusiasm or frequency, perhaps. In such cases, the demon might not be revealed to the supernatural cult head at all. In other instances, the two may enter into a symbiotic relationship, with the demon clearly in the less dominant position... at least, for now.

Sample Supernatural Cult: The Revelation of the Voice

The Revelation of the Voice is technically devoted to the service of the Veiled Demiurge, a creator-deity that is presented as wearing many masks but having only one true path of revelation. Said path is, of course, presented by Edward Minos (not his real name), a mage who is of the faction known as the Seers of the Throne. Like other Seers, Minos is dedicated to the service of the Exarchs, once-mortals now turned architects of reality who are said to govern the universe from beyond the mortal world. He founded his cult in order to further the goals of the Exarchs, and to some extent to try recreating a lesser version of their authority for himself on Earth. Unfortunately for him, a Whisperer of Pride has begun to influence him, and he mistakes its guidance for the voice of his masters. As he falls further from grace, Minos

may attract the attention of mages who oppose the Seers and of his own colleagues. But with a dedicated band of followers who come from many walks of life and the power of magic, he won't be easy to displace.

Gates to Hell

There are a hundred or more words for Hell, and its actual nature is hard for even the wisest mage or most far-roaming werewolf to deduce. Most agree it must be an entirely immaterial world, though what relation it bears to the other shadowy realms listed in occult works is uncertain. But just as demons can come from Hell and even take on flesh, it's possible for mortals to enter Hell—or more likely, to be dragged there. It's not a desirable journey. Dante may have wandered infernal paths in his sleep, yet that was but a dream, a shadow cast by the true Inferno.

Gates to Hell aren't a common occurrence. Compared to some of the other strange locations in the World of Darkness—spots where the spirit world rubs up into the physical, doorways once opened by the enigmatic Fair Folk, nexuses of necromantic energy—an actual gate to Hell is a rare thing. Hell is distant, in its own way, and the most direct roads

there are hard to open. Most people have to get there in the more usual fashion.

Generally speaking, humans and even supernatural beings don't have the power to open a gate to Hell in any sort of reliable fashion. Even demons have a hard time doing so. Yet gates can and do open. Most of the time, the area requires a Desecration rating of at least 6 for a gate to open (see p. 65). The following are a few ideas for how such a thing might be brought into being:

- An extended ritual, culminating in a sevenfold Deadly Sacrifice (see p. 91). The diabolist must accumulate 21 successes on an Intelligence + Occult roll to complete the ritual, which itself must be carefully researched. Optimally, the sevenfold sacrifice involves a killing for each of the primary Vices.
- A potent Artifact, requiring a Deadly Sacrifice to activate it on a particular date and at a particular time (such as the setting of Saturn at Midsummer).
- A broken incantation, a portion of which is published separately in each of seven potent occult grimoires, each one invoking the secret name of an Archdemon. The incantation must be recited at the center of a chamber specially designed to channel the energies of Hell—the central penthouse of a skyscraper designed by a diabolist architect, for instance.





Not Just a Day Trip

There are some supernatural beings well-versed in traveling through various immaterial realms. Mages, werewolves and changelings in particular all know paths to shadowy worlds not open to the mortal wanderer. However, Hell itself doesn't seem to follow the rules by which they abide. Skills and powers allowing one to navigate the Shadow Realm, the Astral or the Hedge don't apply to Hell. Once you're in, your abilities won't get you out.

Hell is thus treated as something more dangerous, if thankfully a bit more removed, than the unseen worlds described in other game lines. Naturally, this can be altered by a Storyteller with a taste for cosmology customization. Hell might be a suburb of Supernal Pandemonium, or it might be a deep recess within the Shadow carved out by the Maeljin and their relatives. By default, though, it's neither of those things—or if it is, its relationship to known otherworlds grants no real familiarity or survivability. In terms of simple gameplay, if you get into Hell, there is no known way out. That's why they call it damnation.



The Hellmouth Opens

A physical gate to Hell cannot remain open for long. Most can last for seven minutes at best. Though technically two-way portals, Hell wants to devour, to possess—it lusts and thirsts and covets, trying to take in without giving back.

While the gate remains open, any demons lurking in the vicinity of Hell are free to try escaping into the mortal world. They must succeed at a Power roll in order to escape, at a penalty of three dice—the power of Hell's desire to keep them there. Characters within five feet of the gate must succeed at a Strength test, contested by a five-die pool, or be drawn into the gate proper. A character pulled into the gate may attempt to escape with subsequent Strength tests, once per minute, until the gate closes.

The actual sight of a gate to Hell opening is maddening. The visions of the Inferno aren't limited to fire—the other side is a roiling mass of sin and spite. Each viewer sees something intensely personalized, the work of their brains attempting to categorize this primordial loathsomeness into terms more easily understood. One might see fire, maggots, writhing faceless children, any number of nightmares. Staring fully into a gate calls for a two-die degeneration check on Morality or the equivalent trait. Looking upon Hell isn't a sin in and of itself—but it is the pure raw face of sin, and just a glimpse will writhe its way into the viewer's soul as viscerally as a personally committed wrong.

Principalities and Powers

What are demons, really? The ultimate truth is a mystery known only to Hell and the Storyteller, but from a gameplay perspective, this uncertainty needs to stop somewhere. That's why this section describes the basic game traits for the Infernal host. Look at them from a utilitarian perspective instead of as a way to model their true nature in your World of Darkness. For example, even though we use Numina to describe many demonic powers, this doesn't mean demons exert the same kind of metaphysical influence as other spirits and ghosts. Demons may influence the world by infecting it with the laws of Hell, for instance.

That said, our default demons are spirits: immaterial beings that dwell on other planes of existence. Some of these are parallel to the real world, like the Shadow, or dwell in fancies, dreams and mysterious psychic currents, like the Astral Realms. Some demons may stalk a secret spiritual frequency some call Twilight. No matter the specifics, the fact is that demons cannot manifest in any of these places unless they're raised by ritual and sin and, even then, they can't enter material reality without a special Numina or certain spiritual conditions.

Here, then, are the game systems for demons.

Universal Abilities

All true demons have the following abilities. These are important clues for occultists, because they set the Infernal Host apart from other evil spirits. To learn these secrets, characters need to make extended Research rolls (see *World of Darkness*, pp. 55–56)

Invisible Worlds

If you primarily play in the core World of Darkness (without adding **Werewolf** or the other lines to the mix, for instance) you might be unfamiliar with the “invisible worlds.” These are other planes of existence (or perhaps states of being) beyond the material realm, but that are intertwined with them. Demons can appear anywhere and some favor specific invisible worlds, so here’s a quick rundown of what they are.

The Shadow is the spiritual counterpart of the material world. Everything but humanity has a spirit, and every place has a reflection in the Shadow. These spirits feed off each other and the resonance that flows from whatever they represent. There are also some strange spirits that have no counterparts, and weird hybrid spirits. Werewolves patrol the borders of the Shadow to keep spirit and matter balanced. Immundi (see p. 60) hail from the Shadow.

The Astral Plane is the realm of dreams and thought. All human beings (and perhaps other creatures) visit here when they dream. Spirits of ideas, aspirations and nightmares dwell here. Mages have the power to leave their own dreams and visit the higher realms of consciousness, where dream-gods and alien thoughts rule entire domains. Changelings can travel to other people’s personal dreams. It is almost impossible to bodily travel the Astral Realms; people go there in dream form. In this state, they suffer damage to Willpower points instead of Health, and once it’s gone, they wake up, exhausted. Deceptors (see p. 60) originate on the Astral Plane.

Twilight is a layer of the material realm where spirits and ghosts can move about in ephemeral form, invisible to normal perception. They can affect the normal world using certain powers. Ghosts, including Larvals (see p. 60) stalk Twilight.

Hell is not a part of any of these realms, but it can intrude upon all of them. The Inferno’s place in the cosmos is poorly understood. All anyone knows for sure is that it would be better if it did not touch any world, visible or invisible.

with a dice pool composed of Intelligence + the *lower* of their Academics or Occult Skills. Successful characters learn all the information associated with the number of successes they scored or fewer, compared to the thresholds listed beside the following abilities.

Aura of Corruption (3 successes): Demons leave their mark on everything they touch. It’s impossible to predict the general effects of a demon’s attentions, but in many cases they remain long after it’s either left or been banished. The exact effect depends upon the circumstances behind the demon’s presence and its favored sins. In game terms, this puts the effects of corruption at the Storyteller’s discretion, and paves the way for the dark relics in Chapter Two of this book.

The Dragon’s Tongue (6 successes): Demons understand all languages, including ancient, dead tongues and languages that are used in supernatural societies. Additionally, demons “speak” their own

language. It sounds like tortured glossolalia and cannot be translated or decoded. Strangely enough, it can be *taught*. Some old texts call the demon’s language the “Dragon’s Tongue.” See p. 126 for details.

Soul of Sin (9 successes): Within their own Vices, demons understand sin to a degree no other being can fathom. When a target shares one of its Malapaxis’ Vices, the demon immediately knows about every occasion upon which she’s indulged it, even when she has forgotten some or all of them.

Lord of Lies (12 successes): No supernatural power can detect a demon’s lies, half-truths or other deceptions, even when the power does not depend upon reading the demon’s “mind.” For example, powers that search for falsehood according to the threads of destiny (such as Awakened Fate spells) are useless. Anyone using such a power sees whatever the demon wants him to see. Some rituals and powers can

command a demon to speak the truth, but their users have no way of knowing whether these are effective. The demon might resist the use of such a power and, playing the part of a cowed, defeated spirit, spout a torrent of lies in a grudging, pained voice.

Keeper of Secrets (15 successes): No supernatural power can penetrate a demon's thoughts. (Perhaps this is for the best.) There are rites and powers capable of commanding a demon to reveal information, but without them, characters are limited to their natural guile and the demon's discretion. Powers can sense the presence of demons, but can never peer inside their thoughts and motives.

Traits

Whisperers are too weak to have most game traits (though they do have Malapraxes). The Possessed have a mix of demonic and human characteristics. As spirits, Diaboli and Dominions have the Attributes listed for Ghosts on p. 208 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, with the following adjustments:

- Demons do not have a Virtue or Vice, but a Malapraxis. A Malapraxis includes a Vice (and a Key; see below), but demons cannot regain Willpower by satisfying it. Instead, they regain Willpower when someone *else* indulges it.
- Demons do not have a Morality score because they are utterly immoral.
- Demons possess an Infernal Rank that governs their total power and supernatural influence upon the world.

Otherwise, demons use the simplified Power/Finesse/Resistance spread and any derived Traits, including Corpus and Essence, using the same rules. Reducing a demon's Corpus to 0 sends it back to Hell. It cannot return unless it is summoned, or worms its way into the world through a worldly being's sins.

Malapraxis

From the lowliest Whisperer to the greatest Dominion, every demon has at least one Malapraxis: a manifestation of a Vice that is the core of its corrupt being. Demons feed upon human evil, but their own Malapraxes are particular delicacies. Mystics postulate that every action and object in the world has its own secret flavor, a "resonance" that is the food of all spirit-beings. The object of a Malapraxis is the subtle vibration that cleaves closest to the demon's true essence. A Malapraxis has two elements: the Vice and the Key.

Vice: Choose one Vice from among the set used by the characters (**World of Darkness**, pp. 103–109): Envy, Gluttony, Greed, Lust, Pride, Sloth or Wrath.

Key: The Malapraxis' Key is an additional condition that mandates how the Vice is expressed. It can be a social situation, a type of object—almost anything a sinner could use, or experience when he acts upon the Vice.

Possible Keys

Elemental

Fire
Earth
Steel
Flesh
Darkness

Situational

Witching Hour
Prophecy
Vengeance
Blasphemy
Treachery

Institutional

Military
Families
Corporations
Government
Union

Victims and Subjects

Daughters
Clergy
Bankers
Soldiers
Lovers

Combine a Vice and its Key to create a phrase or two that describes the evil situations the demon wants to provoke. This is its Malapraxis. Here are some examples:

- Nictuku is a Diabolus (see p. 58) whose Malapraxis is Wrath in the Night. The demon urges people to use the darkness to cover their malice, and loves all forms of nighttime violence.
- The Whisperer called Datusara Oni encourages laziness and isolation in the guise of freedom. Although it often inspires workers to leave dead-end jobs, it also sways them away from taking advantage of new opportunities. Victims end up penniless and too listless and frightened to leave their homes. Its Malapraxis is Sloth and Labor.
- The high Dominion known as the Lord of the Three Fires has three Malapraxes bound to a common Key of Fire. When people start fires out of Greed, Pride or Wrath it feeds and grows.

As one of the examples shows, some powerful demons have multiple Malapraxes. They could have many Vices bound to a single Key, many Keys for a single Vice or a combination of both. Demonologies speculate that some Archdemons rule every Vice linked to a particular Key, or every Key linked to a specific Vice. Thus, Mammon is the lord of all Greed, and Pazuzu reigns over every evil act that utilizes, or is committed during a storm.



Effects

When an action fits under a demon's Malapraxis, it grows stronger. Some of these effects are listed in the sections for each type of demon, but the basic benefit for all demons except for Whisperers and the Possessed is that they regain spent Essence and Willpower points. The Storyteller can replenish these based upon her own judgment, but if she likes she can grant Essence or Willpower using the following guidelines.

- If a character satisfies its Malapraxis' Vice, the demon regains a point of Willpower.
- If the character satisfies any Vice under its Malapraxis' Key, the demon recovers a point of Essence.
- If a character loses a Morality dot, the demon regains *all* Essence.

These earnings are cumulative. The demon must be in the immediate "area" to benefit. This includes nearby Twilight, a parallel location in the Shadow or inside the thoughts of the character in question.

Infernal Rank

Every demon more powerful than a Whisperer has an Infernal Rank. This measures how much raw power it can project beyond Hell's borders. In game terms it limits the demon's traits and the power of its Infernal Influence. Rank could be a true measure of the demon's strength, or it might represent the tiniest shard of a leviathan.

Infernal Influence

Whatever else it might represent, a demon's Infernal Rank indicates the power it wields outside Hell. Some religions believe God gave the Infernal host authority over this world. If this is true, then Rank reflects the degree to which a demon wields it. This power is called Influence. While Numina are set expressions of a demon's abilities, Influence is more flexible. Demons can use it to perform any action their power, Malapraxis and vile creativity permit.

Infernal Rank

Rank†	Class of Demon+	Trait Limits*	Attribute Dots	Maximum Essence
0	Whisperer	0	0	0
1	Mandragora, Imp	5 dots	5-8	10
2	Servitor	7 dots	9-14	15
3	Lesser Demon	9 dots	15-25	20
4	Greater Demon	12 dots	26-35	25
5	Infernal Noble	5 dots	36-45	50
6	Archdemon	**	**	**
7	Greater Archdemon	**	**	**
8	Duke of Hell, Maeljin	**	**	**
9	Demon Prince	**	**	**
10	The Adversary, the Lord of Illusion			

† Each dot levies a -1 modifier on attempts to forcibly bind that demon.

+ Titles are examples only. Demons have many names.

* These represent permanent dots, not temporarily boosted traits.

** Demons above Rank 5 may be as powerful as the Storyteller wishes, or may send lower-ranked avatars of themselves.

Whisperers can't use Influence, but other demons can. Most demons possess 3 dots of Influence per Infernal Rank, but the Storyteller may adjust this up or down. An individual Influence can be up to 2 dots higher than the demon's Rank. Their Influences depend upon their natures. They encompass the following categories:

Key: Any demon might possess an Influence over one of its Malapraxis' Keys.

Vice: Any demon may also have an Influence tied to one of its Malapraxis' Vices.

Elemental: The Diaboli called Immundi have one or more Influences related to the natural world, technology or other phenomena that have reflections in the Shadow.

Conceptual: Diabolical Deceptors possess Influences over various dreams and ideals.

Historical: A few demons can manipulate anything tied to a certain part of history or folklore. This is common among the demonic ghosts called Larvals, who use it to curse their descendants, living enemies and haunts. Families and traditions tied to great evil can also have patron demons.

Influencing the Material World

Any demon with an Infernal Rank above 0 can exercise Influence in the material world, under one of the following conditions:

Corruption: A demon can reach through any object or place that has been affected by a demonic Aura of Corruption. The aura must have a lingering effect.

Desecration: A demon can exercise its Influence over any Desecrated place or thing.

Moral Degeneration: Whenever a character fails a degeneration check, a demon can use its Influence up or near the perpetrator for one scene at some point in the immediate future. Demons will usually follow and target the same victim over and over again, hoping to spark a cycle of moral collapse.

Possession: Demons may exercise Influence around anyone under the sway of the Possession or Supreme Possession Numina. This is one source of the legends of people being possessed by "legions" of demons. While one demon plagues a host, others use her as a conduit to assail the world.

Systems

To exercise a demon's Influence, roll Power + Finesse and spend 1 or more points of Essence. If the demon attempts to Influence another being's

thoughts or emotions, the target makes a contested roll with the higher of Resolve or Composure. Supernatural beings add their power or Supernatural Tolerance trait (Blood Potency, Primal Urge, Gnosis, Azoth or Wyrd, for example). Unlike other spirits, however, demons are not as adept at overcoming free will through brute force. The target of a compulsion may make a contested Morality roll at any point after the demon imposes its Influence. Thus, the virtuous are harder to control.

If the Influence affects a target's body, reduce the demon's dice pool by the target's Defense in the case of an external assault, by making a contested Stamina roll plus a supernatural being's power trait, if applicable, in cases where the demon attempts to directly manipulate the body. Targets of direct manipulation may throw off the Influence's effects with a Morality roll, just as for mental and emotional forms of control.

An Influence effect costs 1 point of Essence per dot. The demon can exert Influence to a degree indicated by its Influence dots, based upon the following table. Note that this table is a bit different from the one that accompanies the spirit rules in other books, to provide more concrete guidelines for what demons can and cannot do. If you prefer systems in other books, use them instead.

Level	Effect
•	Strengthen: The demon can enhance phenomena. Fires burn a bit larger, angry people get angrier and so on. The demon might apply +1 or -1 modifiers to rolls. The effect's duration is one minute per success.
••	Manipulate: The demon can make small changes. A Wrath demon could make an edgy person angry. A demon who loves fire could ensure that a stray spark ignites an oil slick. The demon can use its Influence as a shield (remove successes from an incoming effect or attack equal to its Infernal Rank) against appropriate threats (anger against pacification, fire against physical attacks), to inflict bashing damage. The base duration for non-damaging effects is 10 minutes per success. Damaging effects are instantaneous.



●●● **Control:** The demon can make forceful changes to its area of influence. It can make calm animals ferocious or turn a lit match into a fireball. The demon can modify certain dice rolls by +1 or -1 per success, or inflict lethal damage. The duration of non-damaging effects is 10 minutes per success. Damaging effects are instantaneous.

●●●● **Create:** The demon can conjure aspects of its Influence *ex nihilo*. A Wrath demon can make someone hate a specific person. A fire demon can summon flame out of nowhere. The demon can add or reduce Attribute dots, Health, Size, Speed or Structure if any of these fall under its Influence. These effects last for one minute per success.

●●●●● **Mass Create:** The demon can create wide ranging or multiple phenomena. Depending upon the Influence, it can cause riots or conflagrations. These affect a number of targets equal to the demon's Rank, or an area or thing with a Size of up to 20 x its Rank. The demon can also inflict aggravated damage upon a single target. Non-damaging phenomena last for one minute per success. (Damaging effects are instantaneous.) Alternately, the demon can produce one permanent phenomenon. This also generates one Rank of Desecration, centered upon the phenomenon.

●●●●● + Terrible powers whose parameters are left to the Storyteller.

Dark Numina

Like other spirits, demons have special powers called Numina. The **World of Darkness Rulebook** has a short list of Numina that are suitable for ghosts on pp. 210–212. Demons might have any Numina in that section, but Animal Control, Phantasm, Possession (which does not create the Possessed) and Terrify are particularly appropriate. This book introduces a few others, but the list is not comprehensive. The Infernal powers are a font of nightmarish variety. **World of Darkness: Book of**

Spirits is a compendium of Numina and spirit rules that would greatly help any Storyteller who wants a large slate of powers for her demon. **Mage: The Awakening, Werewolf: The Forsaken** and several of their supplements also list dozens of Numina and spirits that could be converted into demons (particularly the Diaboli described in this chapter). In this book, we've included a brief selection of old and new Numina to get you started, including guidelines for demons. If you adapt Numina from another source, consider similar modifications.

Whisperers are too weak to possess Numina and the Possessed have transcended the ordinary demonic state, but other demons might manifest the following:

Babel: The demon can make it impossible for its target to speak coherently. Spend 1 Essence and roll Power + Finesse + Infernal Rank – the target's Resolve (and a supernatural power trait such as Blood Potency, Primal Urge or Gnosis, if it applies). Every success prevents the victim from speaking intelligibly for a minute. Try as she might, she simply spouts random syllables. She may communicate only in the Dragon's Tongue, as this is not affected by the Numen.

Blast: The demon can hurl fire, thorns or other harmful aspects of itself to a distance of up to 10 yards per point of Power. This is an attack that inflicts lethal damage, but suffers no range penalties. The basic power costs no Essence to use, but the demon may increase the blast's dice pool by spending 1 point of Essence for every two extra dice.

Create Pact: This Numen allows a demon to enter into a pact with another person or creature. The target must possess a Morality score, even if (like a werewolf's Harmony) it does not necessarily represent human morals. See Chapter Two for more about Infernal pacts.

Legion: The demon can divide into several lesser forms. Spend 1 Willpower point and 3 Essence. Divide the demon's Infernal Rank any way you would like to determine the number of forms and their basic power. Divide its Attribute dots between each form, but do not divide Essence or Willpower. All component demons use the original's point total, drawing from the common pool. Each form possesses just one of the demon's Numina (and that Numina cannot be Legion) and the same Malapraaxis.

Hellform: The demon assumes a strong, fast and frightening shape. Classic Hellforms have horns, bat wings and scaled skins, but these are not the only possibilities. The demon might take the shape of a glass statue filled with green ichor and inhuman viscera, or a snakelike

spinal column topped with a deformed skull. When the demon assumes the Hellform, unnatural speed and strange limbs allow it to make an additional attack for every dot of Finesse over 3. Storytellers may also divide its Infernal Rank between bonus attack dice and Corpus.

Roll Power + Resistance. Each success allows the demon to maintain the Hellform for a turn. This Numen costs 1 Willpower (which does not add 3 dice to any actions) to activate, plus 1 point of Essence for every turn it functions.

Materialize: This Numen allows a demon to manifest in the material world by changing its ephemeral body into matter. Its powers function normally on the material plane and it fights and moves just as it would in one of the invisible worlds. Spend 3 Essence and roll Power + Finesse. Every success translates to one hour in which the demon can remain materialized before it must dissolve into ephemera.

Few demons have this Numen unless they fetter themselves to a Desecrated place or thing (see p. 64). Barring any ritual restrictions upon its behavior, a Diabolus can stay in Twilight after the Numen's duration expires by spending 1 Essence per hour. (This ability is useless for a Dominion, as it can already enter Twilight.)

Perfect Lie: When a demon uses this Numen successfully, its victim will believe anything it says, no matter how unlikely, as long as it isn't utter fantasy ("You ride a unicorn to work") or contradicted by anything the target knows to be true, such as telling someone he shot his wife, when he knows he didn't. Spend 1 Essence and roll Power + Finesse + Infernal Rank – the target's Composure (and a supernatural power trait such as Blood Potency, Primal Urge or Gnosis, if it applies). If the demon succeeds, the victim believes the lie for the scene.

Reaching: This Numen allows the demon to use other Numina and other demonic powers to affect targets in the material world while it remains in one of the invisible worlds. Roll Power + Finesse; any degree of success permits this for a scene. Few demons have this Numen unless they fetter themselves to a Desecrated place or thing (see p. 64).

Supreme Possession: A demon with the Numen can join with an ordinary human being (that is, one without a supernatural template) to become one of the Possessed. See Chapter Three for systems. Supreme Possession alters both the demon and its victim, so there is no need to translate the demon's current abilities. Instead, the victim's soul



(and the player's choices) defines the demon from that point onward.

Utter Damnation: This Numen gives a demon the power to destroy any nearby target whose Morality drops to 1. When this happens, make a contested roll between the demon's roll, Power + Resistance + Infernal Rank versus the target's Resolve + Composure, + a supernatural power trait such as Blood Potency, Primal Urge or Gnosis, if it applies. If the demon succeeds, the target dies instantly. He falls to the ground, rots away in a matter of seconds, or the demon drags him through a short-lived door to the Inferno. This costs no Essence, but the demon must immediately return to Hell.

Vestment: The demon can use a Vestment, just like one of the Possessed, provided it is within its Malapraxis' Vice. A demon can acquire only Vestments with dots equal to its Infernal Rank.

All the Disfigured Masks

Evil wears a thousand guises: innocent, horrific, decrepit, sensual—whatever suits its nature, agenda, and the arrangements that give it power. Nevertheless, it is possible to catalog common demonic aspects, as well as a rough hierarchy that may not reveal the ultimate truth behind the Infernal, but serves as a practical guide to anyone who might encounter them—as well as Storytellers who want to use them in their game.

How much do occultists know? It varies. Some demonologists are so committed to a religion or metaphysical system it blinds them to other possibilities. They are *certain* demons are fallen angels, or that they're nothing more than echoes of personal, spiritual darkness. They may not recognize demons that don't fit their preconceived notions, or they make false assumptions about their abilities. This doesn't always mean they're wrong, however. Demons thrive on the belief systems that define them but, in return, they're limited by those systems' rules. They flee crosses, circles of salt or psychoanalysis. It is interesting to ask whether these demons actually *believe* they're the legendary beings they emulate. Demons playing these roles usually treat the hierarchies and lore of their defining systems as fact, but nobody can really know whether a demon is lying, and the line between truth and falsehood is so tenuous for them, their beliefs may fit into some third category, beyond the ken of other beings.

This leads to another question: What is the ultimate nature of the Infernal host? We'll explore that later in this chapter. Treat the following hierarchy as a functional system to help you use demons in your chronicles—not the final truth.

Whisperers

Whisperers are the weakest demons in the world. Even if one of them is a prince in the Infernal hierarchy, it can extend only the weakest tendril of its essence into the world. Perhaps Whisperers don't come from Hell at all, but dwell in some blackened part of the soul. A Whisperer's weakness also makes it a subtle creature. There are no shimmering pentagrams or goutts of Hellfire to find—only a feeling, some soft words and ill coincidences.

Whisperers are the default manifestations of demons that don't have a special conduit outside of Hell. Nobody's written rituals to summon them. No spirit has twisted into the ill shape that allows this demon to replace it as a Diabolus (if this is how that process occurs) and no object or place resonates with its nature strongly enough to give it a worldly foothold. Therefore, a Whisperer's usual priority is to accumulate more power by teaching its victim blasphemous lore, encouraging her to sin, or finding a damned place or thing where it can take root.

Demons capable of more powerful manifestations will play the role of Whisperer from time to time, and never lose the ability to do so. This guise suits quiet efforts to corrupt prey. It's an especially effective tactic against arrogant demonologists, who might assume the Whisperer is the most powerful form the demon can take. This involves some risks for the demon. It can't employ its other abilities without either leaving or possessing the host and if it's banished or exorcised, it loses a Rank of Infernal power.

Lore

The "shoulder devil" represents one popular conception of the Whisperer. It sits across from the angel on your other shoulder as they debate the merits of virtue versus temptation. This is an old motif that finds its parallels in Islamic theology, where two "honorable recorders" (*kirama katibin*) accompany every person throughout his life. One records virtues and the other sins. Their observations decide whether a soul goes to Heaven or Hell. Of course, the honorable recorders are both virtuous, but the concept mutated across cultures. A Whisperer can pretend to be the angel



Mysteries of the Whisperers

Are Whisperers really sent from Hell? We largely assume so for the sake of describing them in a comprehensible fashion, but few things actually mark them as an external visitation. Consider how they gain a foothold in the victim's soul. The victim commits the sin and, in fact, acquires a Whisperer *instead* of a derangement. Most of its manifestations are no different from a shameful voice or dream. Even the odd coincidences and unusual messages might be hallucinations, or opportunities the victim herself seeks out, driven by her personal darkness.

Western demonologists of the old school are loath to admit it, but almost everything a Whisperer does might be spawned by the *victim*, not a traveler from Hell. More modern-thinking occultists and those from traditions that don't separate Hell from a man or woman's own soul are more willing to consider the alternative. Even overtly supernatural phenomena may spring from human spiritual capabilities that normally lie dormant. An evil act opens the door and lets the demon out.

Perhaps there is no fallen angel, no legion of dark gods—just the fruits of our own sin, and a deep denial of our ultimate responsibility.



or the devil, or a recorder of good or evil, depending upon its strategy.

Modern psychology can also explain the Whisperer. Some demons take pains to disguise themselves as their target's natural inner voice, but some revel in playing the role of a delusion. Demons are no strangers to madness, so they can replicate many schizophrenic symptoms with relative ease. On the other hand, too much madness is a bad thing. If the demon drives its victim insane, she can't distinguish right from wrong. If her moral choices are meaningless, she can't commit immoral choices that strengthen the demon inside.

Whisperers present themselves in a variety of other forms to exploit a victim's beliefs. One claims it's a shaman's guiding spirit; another says it's his prey's "will to power." It plays the vampire's Beast or Man, the werewolf's Primal Urge, the *daimon* beneath a mage's Gnosis. It will play the best or worst parts of any victim, as long as it claims a place within the most intimate thoughts and actions.

Manifestation

Every Whisperer is connected to a particular victim. Most targets are normal humans, but a supernatural template provides no special protection. A vampire or changeling is just as susceptible as an ordinary person.

A demon can manifest as a Whisperer only when its target commits an evil act heinous enough to cause Morality loss and not just any evil act keyed to a Morality of 5 or less. If the character fails the second check to determine a derangement (see **World of Darkness**, p. 92), she earns a Whisperer *instead* of the derangement. It silently attaches itself to her psyche. It can't read her mind, but is aware of everything the victim senses.

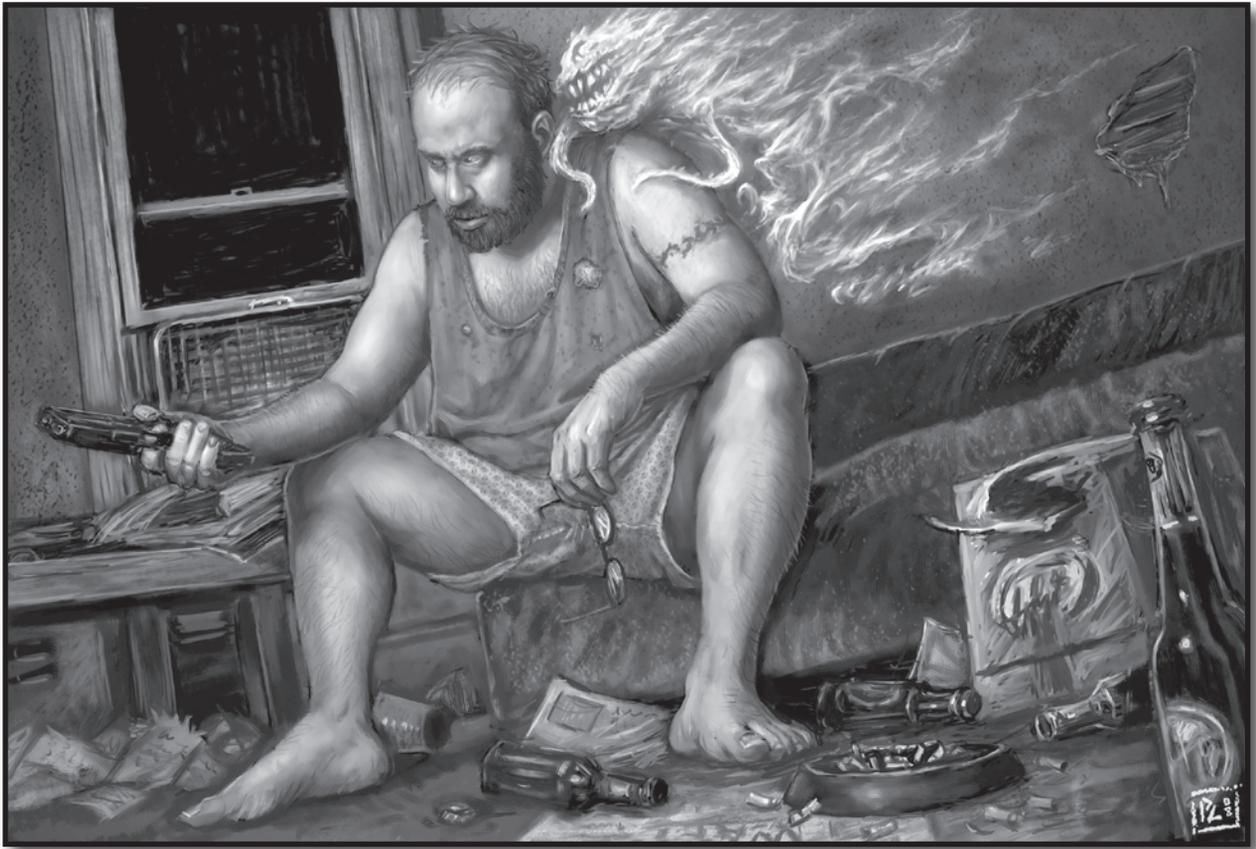
Abilities

Whisperers cannot directly harm or control anyone. They may speak or appear in a vision, but can never drown out the senses. They can cause small twists of fate, but never those that would immediately bring anyone to harm, or even make an immoral decision inevitable, or threaten harm if a victim sticks to the right path. They are too weak to even possess a spirit's traits. Instead, they have a small set of abilities they can use to communicate with and tempt their victims.

Whisperers have the powers common to all true demons: Aura of Corruption, the Dragon's Tongue, Keeper of Secrets, Lord of Lies and Sense of Sin. They also have the following abilities:

Dark Whispers: Whisperers can speak into their victims' minds while they're awake or dreaming. (The Whisperer cannot initiate or control a dream, but can speak in an existing dream.) This manifests as a voice of the Whisperer's choosing (including the victim's internal voice, if desired). The victim can consciously dismiss the voice for a scene, after which the Whisperer may return.

Faint Visions: A Whisperer can create a subdued vision while its victim is awake or dreaming. The



vision is an obvious product of the character's mind, like a lucid dream or daydream. It can't distract her from sensing or acting in the day-to-day world unless she allows herself to become sufficiently engrossed. The vision can't be disgusting or horrific, either; the demon is limited to things about which the character would conceivably be willing to fantasize. Whisperers can use this ability in concert with Dark Whispers to appear as a dreamlike phantom, and converse with their victims. The victim can consciously dismiss the vision for a scene, after which the Whisperer may return.

Inner Deception: A Whisperer can attempt to convince its victim it's a manifestation of her own mind. Some will masquerade as the signs of a mental illness; others prefer to counterfeit the target's own dreams and inner voice. Use ordinary social systems. The Whisperer harnesses its victim's abilities; it has the same Social Skill dice pools as the target, +1. Practiced liars and smooth talkers have more to fear than the socially awkward or honest.

Minor Shaping: Whisperers can cause minor twists of fate that give their victims an opportunity to perform an evil act, or to communicate through a worldly medium such as a fallen handbill, a strange banner ad on a web page, or a similar minor manifes-

tation. The Whisperer doesn't know what form any of these will take until it uses this power, but when it does, it has total knowledge of the situation it brought into being, including any opportunities to violate the victim's Morality. In the case of a message, the Whisperer can cause it to disappear through random "natural" means (the handbill's ink smudges, the web browser crashes, etc.) at any time. The Minor Shaping lasts for a scene.

Whisperers can use Minor Shaping once, after every occasion the victim rolls to prevent Morality degeneration (not just to determine whether she's committed an evil act). It may invoke the power at any point thereafter, but once it does so can't use it again until the character's next Morality roll, and can't "save up" opportunities across multiple rolls.

Defense

Characters attuned to the supernatural can sense the presence of a Whisperer with an Unseen Sense Merit or another supernatural power attuned to spirits or mental influence. If the power can reveal it, the user sees a dark distortion over the victim's natural aura and faint but foul psychic resonance connected to the demon's favored Vice. A Whisperer leaves no other supernatural marks.

Basic Whisperers are easy to banish. Exceeding the Whisperer's successes by 1 on an Exorcism roll (see **World of Darkness**, p. 214) or scoring a single success on a spirit-banishing supernatural power expels it from its host. If the power calls for a resistance Attribute, it has only 1 dot with which to penalize rolls. Unfortunately, as Whisperers gain power they grow ever more difficult to dislodge.

Infernal Evolution

A Whisperer is weak. It wants power and independence from its host. It can earn it through several avenues. It may corrupt its host, teach Infernal secrets or seize the beings called by her supernatural powers.

Transcendence through Sin

The most straightforward way for a Whisperer to evolve is to drive its victim to sin. Every evil act also increases its resistance to exorcism. Add 2 to its effective Resistance and *double* its dice pool for resisted rolls every time the host commits an evil act.

If a Whisperer's host commits more evil actions than its host's Resolve it transcends the need for her psyche. It becomes a Rank 1 Dominion if the demon had no prior foothold in the world, or adds 1 to its Infernal Rank if it was already a spirit.

The demon must choose to remain a Whisperer with its attendant limitations, or discard the role, in which case it loses the Whisperer's abilities, but can abandon its host. Some newborn Dominions try to immediately possess their former hosts, but most creep to an evil place or object to become *Malus Loci*, or simply return to Hell, where they await a future summoner or sinner to call.

When a sinner gives birth to a new Dominion, there's a moment of awful realization—she's brought darkness to the world. Interspersed with visions of Hell, a torrent of mad knowledge reveals the new Dominion's secret name, sign and sin. It gives an occultist enough knowledge to create rituals that would affect the demon. It also usually drives the former host mad. Make a Morality roll. Failure doesn't make the character lose Morality, but it does strike her with a severe derangement as listed on pp. 96–100 of the **World of Darkness** core rulebook.

Occult Exaltation

If its victim is an occultist, the Whisperer can urge her to name, define and empower it. Demonologists are split between the idea that the host creates a metaphysical image for the demon to inhabit and

the belief that the Whisperer merely teaches Hell's secrets. In every case, the Whisperer takes one risk: it teaches the victim its secret name.

The Whisperer guides its host through libraries, databases and mad meditations to create a working Infernal Testament (see p. 39). The game system uses the following modifications to the Research roll mechanics in the **World of Darkness** core rulebook, pp. 55–56. Success transforms the Whisperer into a Dominion. Only a Whisperer's host has the knowledge to perform this research.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + the lower of the character's Academics or Occult Skill + equipment. The character cannot attempt the task without at least 1 dot of Occult.

Action: Extended (5–15 successes; each roll represents 30 minutes of research)

Roll Results: The demon becomes (or enhances its power as) a Dominion. It acquires abilities based upon the following table.

Successes	Result
Nothing.	Add 2 successes to each threshold for every future attempt with the same demon. This is cumulative.
5-8	The demon earns 1 Infernal Rank and one Numina.
9-12	The demon earns 1 Infernal Rank and two Numina.
13-14	The demon earns 2 Infernal Ranks and two Numina.
15+	As for 13-14, but add one of the following: two additional Numina, 1 additional Infernal Rank, or one new Malapraxia.

Suggested Equipment: Internet connection (+1), religious library (+2), occult library (+3)

Possible Penalties: -1 for every point of Morality above 5, due to the disturbing subject matter shaking the researcher's concentration, and -1 for every point of Infernal Rank the demon possesses, as the more power it has, the more difficult it is to create a Testament that is more than a redundant description of the demon as it already exists.

Diabolical Union

Sorcerers and supernatural beings are risky targets for Whisperers, but they have the potential to be the most rewarding. Not only do they often have the knowledge needed to transform a Whisperer into a powerful Dominion, but some of them can summon

spirits with which the Whisperer is capable of merging, changing it into a powerful malefic being. The Whisperer becomes the spirit itself: a Diabolus.

The demon can't do this to just any spirit or ghost. Its host must influence that being with a supernatural power first. This binds the target entity to the victim's soul. The Whisperer rides that connection to its new host. Furthermore, the target spirit or ghost must be vulnerable to the transformation. The Diaboli section below details suitable entities.

If the spirit or ghost is a suitable vessel, the Whisperer might corrupt it. If the Storyteller wishes to leave this process to the dice, roll the entity's Power + Resistance. (If the spirit has somehow gained humanlike Attributes, roll Resolve + Composure instead.) If no successes appear on the dice, the Whisperer succeeds. Together, they transform into a Diabolus.

Diaboli

Diaboli are insidious demons especially capable of taking supernatural beings unawares, though they are a threat to anyone who passes too closely to haunted places or the invisible world of occult lore. They are spirits and ghosts that carry the demonic essence.

Many demonologists believe Diaboli were once "normal" spirits or ghosts, until a demon (a Whisperer, usually) corrupted them, devoured them and twisted their nature into Hell's service. Nobody is *certain* of this, however. There are Diaboli no tome records as ever having been free of corruption. Adding to the confusion is the fact that all Diaboli have immoral or at least forbidding portfolios. Ghosts that walk Twilight to protect children don't become Diaboli. Spirits of compassion are immune; so are the guardians of clean, wild rivers that have never witnessed evil at their shores. The candidates for Diabolical change were never pleasant spirits in the first place—but how can you tell the difference between a spirit that *acts* demonic and one that *is* a demon?

The answer varies from tradition to tradition. Among mages, practitioners of the *Ars Goetia* believe that, metaphysically speaking, the differences are trivial. They call all the spirits of Vice "demons;" Hell and Heaven are two of the places passions drive human beings. They must exercise the will to make the demon a vehicle to the destination *they* desire, instead of blindly following their impulses. Werewolves know evil things spill forth from Wounds in the Shadow. These sorts of creatures are most likely

Mysteries of the Diaboli

The Diaboli exude no special aura, no mystic sign of evil. Aside from their abilities and demonic motives, they're impossible to tell apart from other spirits. Are they really any different, or do all ghosts, Astral entities and Shadow spirits have a dark seed that flowers in the presence of sin?

There are certainly spirit choirs that are so bound to terror and impurity a typical person would call them "demons." Werewolves know of the Maeljin: avatars of Vice that turn morally weak Uratha into slaves. Mages give their worst obsessions form and call them "goetic demons." Any spirit from these orders could be a Diabolus. What if they *all* are? If the only difference is a set of abilities that blooms in response to evil actions, then the Diaboli are merely normal spirits that have changed in response to sinful psychic resonance. We talk about demons changing spirits using Diaboli to describe them in a coherent way, but that's only because it's convenient to do so. There's no evidence. The truth is up to you.

to be Diaboli. They are lords of hate, vengeful ghosts, Shadow reflections of places that have been wounded by atrocities.

A potential Diabolus is a flawed thing that carries the potential for evil within it. Not every entity qualifies; some spirits and ghosts never fall to demons. These include:

- Ghosts who are motivated by a selfless, righteous purpose. Ghosts who are merely obsessed with a good cause are corruptible, but those who are the echoes of a certain moral purity can't be touched. The Storyteller determines the exact criteria.
- Spirits that represent Virtues. Demons are the worst extremes of Vice, so there can be no joining with their opposites.
- Spirits that represent natural harmony, innocence or another quality that's incompatible with the corrupting nature of the Infernal.



- Spirits that come from the strange, horrific places beyond reality. The Infernal has no power over the Abyss and its spawn, or spirits like the Idigam. Demons are the spirits of intimate corruption, not the metaphysical desert of the un-realms.

- Representatives of an immovable principle—a spiritual pillar of the world. In the World of Darkness, this includes natives of the Supernal Realms, The True Fae's Arcadia and avatars of the Promethean Divine Fire.

Lore

Diaboli use the uncertainty surrounding their nature to deceive would-be summoners. For that reason, few myths separate them from their spiritual cousins. Even otherwise exhaustive tomes fail to distinguish this type of demon.

A few legends point the way. Shamans warn their apprentices that if they are not pure, the most savage spirits will lead them to ruin. A moral shaman attracts tricksters who guide him through life's lessons, but one with an evil burden meets a trickster who will fool him into defiling his spirit. Western ceremonial magic warns that when an impure magus exerts

authority over the spirits, they'll have free reign to indulge their evil impulses. Christian fundamentalists say the pagan gods are Satan's mask—that anything that isn't an angel is a demon.

Evil ghosts are described in many traditions but, again, it's difficult to entrench differences between destructive manifestations and inner evil. Hebrew *dybbuk* and Japanese *gaki* have all been described as monsters, but also as ghosts with unmet needs that might be placated with the proper actions. For instance, where one source says *dybbuks* escaped Gehenna, where the wicked are purified, another calls them lost souls in need of guidance.

Manifestation

Whisperers turn susceptible spirits into Diaboli. Otherwise, any character might attract one when he contacts a spirit to help him perform a potentially evil act. The Diabolical side of the spirit is quiescent until the sin plays out. Some mystics believe it slumbers until awakened by sin, but it may merely hide behind the spirit's expected behavior. In any event, the Diabolus takes an interest in the sinner. It isn't bound to him



in any way, however, and can freely roam its native realm in search of other victims.

Those rare works that describe the Diaboli often divide them into three classes. Although there is no consensus on these divisions or names, they are useful enough to describe below:

Deceptors are the product of sinful thoughts that manifest on the Astral Plane, the realm of dreams. They visit disturbing urges and dreams upon their victims. Goetic Deceptors are the most common of these demons, being a sorcerer's Vice personified and bent by the weight of his sins. They are not the *only* Deceptors, however. When people work toward a common, terrible end, the spirits of collective dreams and aspirations carry that darkness. The Astral forms of exultant genocide and remorseless political corruption are powerful Deceptors that may disguise themselves as benevolent beings. A genocide Deceptor may pretend to be a memorial for victims when, in truth, it revels in the joy of murderous bigotry.

Immundi are the impure Shadow-spirits that symbolize the tie between moral and spiritual corruption. For example, the Immundus of a toxic waste dump would represent the place's pollution and the venal motives that brought it into being. It is not enough for the Immundus to defile the worlds of spirit and flesh; it must do it by ruining the moral fabric and natural harmony of both places' inhabitants. Thus, an Immundus corrupts spirits as well as material beings, urging them to violate the natural order in pursuit of their most selfish desires.

Larvals are evil ghosts. Popular thought holds that anyone who enters into a demonic pact can become a Larval upon death, as can people who die while they're possessed or plagued by a Whisperer. Otherwise, Larvals are the Twilight echoes of unrepentant, evil individuals. Myths say some Larvals are so evil that Hell released them from torment to visit their sins upon the living.

Every Diabolus can shape its ephemeral body into classically demonic forms that reflect their favorite sins, but they usually prefer to look like normal spirits, representative of their type. They are still confined to their native invisible worlds, and cannot be seen without the use of special powers. Many of them do have Numina that give them the ability to appear in the material world, but simply being demons is not enough to give them a material presence.

Abilities

Diaboli are not much more powerful than normal spirits and ghosts. They use mostly the same Numina, must feed the same needs (though tuned to moral corruption and physical disaster) and travel the same realms. Their most important power is their intellect. Even the mightiest spirits and ghosts are simple at the core, devoted to the principles and obsessions that give them a supernatural shape. Ghosts are a few memories and passions burned into Twilight by raw psychic energy. Spirits are the flesh that feeling wears: the roughness of a stone, perhaps, or the acid sting of anger in the brain.

Diaboli are all that, and sin, too—but sin contains enough complexity to contain a mind of twisted genius. Demons have *empathy* for others. They understand the motives and dilemmas that harass an intelligent psyche, and are not blinded by the spiritual concepts they represent. Oh, a Diabolus of fire loves to burn and loves to urge his victims to put a torch to the world, but it is not *bound* to this outlook. It will allow a little drowning and smothering earth to help it on its way to some greater, more destructive fire. These demons love to play the assumptions of people who deal with ghosts and spirits, and use their single-minded simplicity to manipulate them. Diaboli play along until the target lets his guard down.

Diaboli have the powers common to all true demons: Aura of Corruption, the Dragon's Tongue, Keeper of Secrets, Lord of Lies and Sense of Sin. They also possess Infernal Rank and its Influence over their favored Malapraxes. Spirits gain an Infernal Rank equal to their normal Rank. Larvals begin with Infernal Rank 1. Consequently, Larvals are among the most ambitious, power-hungry members of the Infernal host.

Unlike Dominions, Diaboli do not possess secret names, though they may have other names of power they've inherited from their origins as (or in relation to, if they've always been Diaboli) normal spirits and ghosts. Larvals retain the names they had in life. Sometimes, these can be used against them.

Diaboli have the same powers they would possess if they were normal spirits or ghosts. In addition, all Diaboli possess the Hellform Numen (see pp. 53).

Defense

A Diabolus' weakness is its connection to the invisible worlds outside Hell. It can't repudiate its origins completely. The demon has exerted its foul will over a piece of nature, but hasn't overridden it to the point at which it can resist the rites and powers that affect normal spirits of its type.

Unfortunately, it's also impossible to use a supernatural power to tell a Diabolus apart from an ordinary ghost or spirit. Its worldly essence camouflages it from these abilities.

Infernal Evolution

Like a Whisperer, a Diabolus can transform itself when certain opportunities arise. Like all demons, Diaboli grow and change in response to the presence of evil. The following circumstances drive Diabolical evolution:

Demonic Fetter

If someone commits an evil act in conjunction with an object or place linked to an Immundi's spiritual portfolio it earns the power to possess that place or object, becoming a Malus Loci: an evil fetish or cursed place where spiritual boundaries (including Twilight) are no impediment to the creature's actions—but the spirit cannot leave that locus, either. Larvals may similarly bind themselves to their own ghostly anchors. In either case, a Diabolus who chooses an object for its fetter can't manifest in Twilight, the Shadow or any of the Invisible Worlds.

Fall to Whispers

A Diabolus may shed its spirit-form for a time to become a sinner's Whisperer. It's a risky move. The demon loses access to its spirit-form until it either achieves Transcendence through Sin or Occult Exaltation or is expelled from its host. In the last case, the demon suffers for its failure, losing a level of Infernal Rank and a dot from each Attribute. If either of the other conditions applies, however, it becomes a Dominion with a new Infernal Rank based upon the standard results for Whisperer evolution.

Transcendence through Sin

Like a Whisperer, a Diabolus earns power by promoting evil. Unlike a Whisperer, it does not depend upon the actions of a single person. Anyone who indulges in the Diabolus' Malapraaxis in its presence or as a direct response to its actions feeds it. The

Storyteller determines what the exact threshold for increasing its Rank is, but one useful guideline would be to grant a new level of Infernal Rank whenever the demon "collects" as many evil acts as its current Rank + 1. Unlike a Whisperer, however, it cannot become a Dominion this way. That option is available only if the demon Falls to Whispers and succeeds in increasing its power from there.

Occult Exaltation

Diaboli don't have secret names, but they want them—badly. A secret name means power, status in the Infernal hierarchy and the ability to respond to summoning rituals. To earn one, it must convince a sinner to write a Dark Testament. The Diabolus can provide the name. So can the author. It has no particular power until the author completes the Testament. At that point, use the systems on p. 30. Remember that the demon's current Infernal Rank penalizes the occultist's roll.

Dominions

While occultists may debate as to whether Whisperers and Diaboli are "true demons," no doubt exists as to the Dominions. They are straightforward manifestations of the Infernal—or as straightforward as you can expect from an order of master deceivers. They are the horned things that appear in pentagrams, the razor-toothed frog-things that act as black magicians' familiars and the Dukes, Presidents, and Ministers of hundreds of occult concordances.

A Dominion's greatest strength is its greatest weakness. It has earned a secret name and a place in demonology's lore. All Dominions can be summoned and bound by skilled occultists. This is no comfort, however, because few people summon demons for a truly good cause, and even fewer are wise and well-trained enough in the dark arts to control what they call. Dominions may rage against a clever summoner, but for the most part, an occultist's efforts are opportunity. Even demons hate Hell; the realms above are where real power lies. Hell is already corrupt; Dominions can't thrive there any more than a mortal could if he was forced to eat his own shit to survive.

Every Dominion is known to the worlds beyond Hell. Someone has written a Testament to its existence or a set of rituals for summoning it. Someone has heard its secret name in his head and wept, knowing he gave it a foothold in the world.



Lore

The Dominions are classic demons and evoke the best-known myths. They are fallen angels. They are pagan gods, grown bitter in the days after their worshippers' civilizations' fell. They are servants of the Earth Prison's ministries of punishment or the most evil reincarnations, who slew Buddhas and were cursed to suffer until a hundred universes died. They are the deformed, cast-out secret children of the old gods or their malicious titans. They are Satan's soldiers, ever mustering for the apocalypse.

Many cultures don't have demonologies, but those that do seem to have a mania for ranks and categories. They say Hell has baronets, knights, chancellors, archdukes, kings of continents, lords of particular mountains and seas. There are so many different, contradictory systems that a researcher might believe the ancients were liars or fools. How could they all be right?

In fact, they *are* right. To ensconce a demon within a system, give it attributes, a sigil and a name is to bring a Dominion from the depths of Hell—or exalt him from the ranks of Whisperers and worldly Diaboli. Hell is generous; it accepts the definitions, masks and powers people give it.

Knowledgeable Western occultists often use *Binsfield's Classification of Demons* as a practical nomenclature because it divides the Infernal host by sin. Binsfield was a 16th-century Catholic priest, but, even non-Christians often use the system because it corresponds with demons' real obsessions—most of the time. Dominions may have multiple Malapraxes, or even conceal their interests for the sake of weakening a target's moral defenses. The system divides demons by their ruling Infernal princes:

Amon: Identified with Satan himself. Prince of Wrath.

Asmodeus: Hell's high chancellor and prince of Lust.

Beelzebub: Lord of the Flies and prince of Gluttony.

Belphegor: Demon lord of invention and prince of Sloth.

Leviathan: The great beast of the waters. Prince of Envy.

Lucifer: Also seen as one with Satan, he is the prince of Pride, naturally.

Mammon: Hell's exchequer and prince of Greed.

While few demonologists really believe that, say, Mammon is the ruler of all demons of Greed, the Bins-

field system has enough utility that an occultist might call a Dominion a "Mammon type" as shorthand. Practical demonologists usually use other systems in conjunction with Binsfield's, especially where they specify places and behaviors. Anyone who stumbled upon these notes would find a morass of references to seemingly incompatible demonologies. No matter the scheme, the Dominions appreciate the attention.

Mysteries of the Dominions

Dominions are classic demons: horrific beings that taint souls and enter the world through evil covenants. The image has so much cultural power that it's difficult to separate myth from evidence—and evidence pointing to their true nature is in short supply.

For example, Dominions make broad claims about being ancient gods and fallen angels, but away from Hell, the demon's power appears to be a function of experience. It may be that in Hell every Dominion is a ruling demon that commands a legion of souls, but needs to carefully cultivate worldly ties. Alternatively, the great Infernal powers could have abilities that don't depend upon their interactions with the outside world, but if this is true, why hasn't an Azazel or Moloch laid waste to everything? Perhaps nobody's found the right ritual, or some higher, merciful power keeps the mightiest demons from treading mortal ground.

A more troubling idea comes from examining the life cycle of the demon as it climbs from Whisperer to powerful Dominion. In the Whisperers section, we pointed out that Whisperers might be products of a sinner's soul, empowered by some dark, uncommon potential. If every Dominion was once a Whisperer, then once again the lineage of demons traces itself back not to any Hell outside of us. We are the mothers and fathers of demons—and even if we aren't, our sins nurse them into a Dominion's full power.

Manifestation

Dominions cannot leave Hell of their own accord, though if a Diabolus or Whisperer graduates into one it is under no compulsion to return. Most of the time they must Fall to Whispers and trick someone into calling them through sin or ritual, or they must wait for an occultist to call them straight from the Inferno. Once summoned, a Dominion must adhere to the conditions of the ritual—usually. Some of these demons are tricky or strong enough to laugh at all but the most experienced occultists. Chapter Two provides rules for summoning Dominions.

On occasion, Dominions can bend these rules. This occurs when a powerful enough Desecration permits passage or when a doorway to Hell opens. These are uncommon, serious situations. Rectifying them is a major objective for anyone who would fight the Infernal.

The Dominions' Ranks include all the vile diversity one can imagine and more. Every Malapraxis, Hellform and tongue-twisting secret name exists somewhere in the pages of a moldering book, the magnetic data of a hard drive or the nightmares of a too-talented shaman. Despite this variety, it's possible to classify manifestations according to what the Dominions do. Demonologists do this regularly, and it's the source of many popular nomenclatures. To inspire the Storyteller, we won't cleave to any particular model, but we will categorize the Dominions by their behavior. The following categories are strictly informal, though a few pragmatic modern-day demon hunters might have scribbled them down in one form or another.

Defilers

Defilers poison places. They make trees wither and mothers miscarry. Dominions with this agenda often began as Immundi. They use their connection to material reality to create twisted woods and rotting tenements, using their Infernal Influence or mortal proxies. The Defiler's strategy is to make the world a sick, desperate place where people lose their respect for the world and each other.

Nemeses

One would think it would be out of character for demons to *punish* sin, but they do. Temptation must always precede the fall. When a sinner's served his purpose, it's time to send him to Hell. Nemeses subject their targets to a long period of worldly torment before they either kill them or arrange events so someone else will. Larvals often evolve into Nemeses to stalk the people who killed them or made them suffer in life.

Slayers

These Dominions kill as often as they can. Sophisticated demons look down upon Slayers because a dead soul isn't a damned soul, but nothing causes pain like the death of loved ones, or erodes empathy like the feeling that life is cheap and fleeting. Slayers are one of the most commonly summoned demons. Occultists raise them to murder their enemies or guard their valuables. Slayers are agile demons with a knack for brute force. Most can take material form.

Subversives

Subversive Dominions corrupt the social order. They want to make evil acts acceptable, even laudable. They nurture bigotry, political corruption and violence in any institution they haunt. Subversives typically specialize in a particular institution. One encourages a church to punish sexuality instead of practicing charity; another gets the police union to collect protection from local drug dealers. Subversives are less concerned with damning individuals than lowering the moral standards of entire subcultures. It takes work, but if the demon pulls it off, it promises him a veritable feast of sin further down the line.

Tempters

Tempters are the most common Dominions because attacking morals is as natural to a demon as breath is for a human. Other agendas require more planning; temptation demands only persistence. The demon's instincts do the rest. Dominions who are truly talented Tempters concentrate upon virtuous targets because, ironically, these can sin the most before they're "used up" by madness or suicide. Nevertheless, Tempters are never above leading darker souls astray when they want easy prey.

Abilities

Dominions have the powers common to all true demons: Aura of Corruption, the Dragon's Tongue, Keeper of Secrets, Lord of Lies and Sense of Sin. They also possess Infernal Rank and its Influence over their favored Malapraxes. Dominions have secret names. See p. 37 of this book and Chapter Two for information about secret names.

A Dominion's Infernal Rank is a function of its history. A newly freed Dominion has an Infernal Rank of 1 to 3, depending upon how well its Testament has been crafted. Dominions that have evolved from powerful Diaboli might be stronger. It would be inaccurate to call some Dominions "elders"—demons are not subject to time and individual identity in a

way any mortal can comprehend—but some have been summoned more often than others, or have dragged many, many people to Hell over the centuries. These acts earn Infernal Rank. Dominions also acquire new Malaprxes and Numina as they explore the world. Dominions' Attributes are a function of their Infernal Rank. Former Diaboli may exceed the maximums listed for their Rank, but if they do, they remain frozen at the listed amount until their Rank catches up.

Unless they possess a mortal using the Supreme Possession Numen, Dominions are spirits and use their game traits. Their precise Numina depend upon their Demonic sins and histories, though all possess Hellform. Former Diaboli retain their old spirit or ghost Numina. When a Dominion exercises Supreme Possession, the demon and its host transform into one of the Possessed.

Dominions have an unmatched degree of spiritual mobility. They can slide along Twilight, enter the Shadow, stalk the Astral Plane and even walk inside someone's dreams. The only realm that requires extra effort is the material plane. Even these purest demons are made of wicked dreams and spirit stuff, and cannot assume the flesh without a host to possess or a special Numen.

Infernal Evolution

Dominions approach the pinnacle of demonic power. Their primary goal is to win Infernal Rank by damning mortal souls. The more souls it condemns, the more powerful it grows. The Storyteller determines the parameters but, generally speaking, Dominions need to spark ever greater evil to attain the next Rank. Dominions can also use the following methods to build power:

Demonic Fetter

A Dominion can bind itself to any Desecrated place or object with a rating equal to or less than its Infernal Rank, or any *person* when his Morality is low enough to support the demon's presence. Subtract the potential victim's Morality from 10; if the Dominion's Rank is equal to the result or lower, it cannot necessarily possess the target, but it can remain in Twilight, shadowing him. This is a fate commonly suffered by occultists who don't know how to ritually dismiss a demon.

Fall to Whispers

Like Diaboli, Dominions may also Fall to Whispers, shedding most of their power to become an insidious voice in a victim's mind. As a Whisperer, a Dominion might be able to gain power by condemning

a mortal or driving him to compose a better Testament, but if it fails it loses an Infernal Rank and plunges back to Hell. It is also said that ritual sacrifice can increase the demon's power, but this might relate more to the sins these rites invariably require than any inherent supernatural power.

Once a Dominion earns an Infernal Rank of 6 or higher, most demonologists classify it as a member of a different order. There are many names for it, but one common term—and the one used in this book—is Archdemon.

The Possessed

A Dominion with the Supreme Possession Numen (and not all of them have it) can transform a mortal human into one of the Possessed. See Chapter Three for more information.

Desecration and the Malus Loci

There are houses in which parents have always beaten their children. There are guns that have lasted through a dozen suicides. They are more than demon-haunted places and things. They *are* demons. Some Christians say this world belongs to the Devil, and though the truth is uncertain to all but the most devout, when it comes to these Malus Loci, they may be right.

People instinctively know that sometimes evil leaves a lasting stain on the world. They knock down killers' houses and keep murder weapons under lock and key. They perform exorcisms at places with disturbing histories, and hire *feng shui* masters who channel poison energies away from them. Sometimes it even works.

Hell's Earthly Stains

When someone commits an evil act in the presence of a certain place or object, it suffers a Rank of Desecration. The object should have been central to the foul act, but almost any place will do. If people continue to do evil nearby, the Desecration rating increases. Usually, it requires increasingly more sin



Desecration Rating	Typical Evil Acts	Loses this Rank:*
1	Psychological abuse	...in one year
2	Physical abuse	...in five years
3	Murder	...in 10 years
4	An act of torture	...in 25 years
5	Prolonged torture	...in 50 years
6+†	Storyteller's discretion	Storyteller's discretion

* When the listed interval ends without at least an equally intense evil act taking place, the Desecration rating drops by 1.

† A place this Desecrated can support a doorway to Hell (see pp. 46–47).

and suffering to build further Desecration. Time heals the wound as well. Consult the table above.

Malus Loci

When a Diabolus or Dominion encounters a place or thing with a Desecration rating equal to or less than its Infernal Rank, it can use its Demonic Fetter power to anchor itself to the location, becoming what Western demonologists sometimes call a Malus Loci. (Those of you who own **Mage** and **Werewolf** should note this is not the same as the standard Fetter Numen.) It's a trade off; the demon can't leave its fetter unless it voluntarily returns to Hell, but it immediately earns special powers:

- A demon that anchors itself to a place such as a house, a stand of trees or a graveyard acquires the Materialize Numen. When it is not materialized, the demon resides in the local Twilight.

- A demon that anchors itself to an object (usually a movable item with a Size of 20 or less, though the Storyteller can make exceptions for evil big rigs and jet liners) acquires the Reaching Numen. The demon is trapped in the object's Twilight aspect.

In addition, a Dominion can bind itself to a less than saintly human just as if it was using Demonic Fetter on an object.

Desecrated places are excellent refuges for demons that have been ritually bound to perform a specific task, because it usually ensures they can't complete it. Very learned occultists specifically command demons to avoid Desecrated places, but most are not knowledgeable enough to do so. Of these educated few, some actually command demons to become Malus Loci to either imprison them or set them as guards over some

cursed place or object. Unfortunately, when the fetter's Desecration fades enough to dip under the demon's Infernal Rank it can no longer support its inhabitant. The demon falls back to Hell. Clever demons ensure the steady trickle of sin necessary to maintain the fetter's disgusting spiritual state. *Shoot*, whispers the demon-fettered gun.

Destroying a Desecrated Place

Given enough time, almost any Desecrated place or thing will lose the characteristic taint of evil, but in some cases that's not fast enough. In these situations, the following options are available. At the Storyteller's option, they do not function against Desecration ratings of 6 or higher without additional, special criteria.

- A Malus Loci can use its Infernal Influence to *reduce* Desecration levels of its domain, but it will usually do this only within the terms of a pact. These pacts usually include a promise to summon the demon or bar it from returning to Hell. Obviously, this is not any cautious person's first choice.

- It's possible to destroy a Desecrated object, or alter a Desecrated place to such a degree as to render it unrecognizable. Infernal inhabitants will no doubt interfere with these efforts and, even then, a demon's Aura of Corruption may leave lasting effects.

- Supernatural powers that alter mystical Resonance may be used to reduce the Desecration Ranks. This usually requires 2 successes (or levels of magical Potency) per Rank.

- Sincere, moral people can perform an exorcism or a similar cultural rite to cleanse the place. The standard threshold for success is 3 + (double the Desecra-



tion rating) If the effort succeeds, the target loses 1 Rank of Desecration.

- The simplest method ordinary people can use is to construct a memorial or teaching facility at the location, or present the object in a similar context. The facility should be designed to come to terms with the terrible things connected to the place or object. If a Desecrated knife is presented as evidence at a truly just criminal trial, or the cursed site of a lynching becomes an anti-racist teaching facility that accrued virtue might be enough to reduce or eliminate any lingering Infernal taint. The exact guidelines are left to the Storyteller and her group.

Archdemons

A demon with an Infernal Rank of 6 or higher is a being of such wickedness that all the worlds beyond Hell abhor it—even entities and realms that thrive on Vice and spite, but are not of the Inferno. These are the Archdemons. Perhaps they are the true lords of Hell, or they're just Infernal spirits who've acquired too much power to easily infiltrate mortal realms. Nevertheless, they are famous. Fragments of their names inundate every culture. They are Asmodeus, Aipaloovik, Ravana, Tiamat—but these are not their true identities. Like the Dominions, they have secret names. There are woodcuts, paintings, carvings, poetry and prose that all attempt to capture an image, but they invariably describe some impossible confluence of parts, or an aura the artist is hard-put to render in any form. They are animate darkness, or a hundred wings with ten thousand eyes, but they are more than even these. And in fact, this may be nothing more than Infernal boasting, or an ancient deception. Maybe their real power is that they can move as an invisible spirit, or take the form of a humble people with beautiful voices.

Mysteries of the Archdemons

Archdemons are true Infernal princes—that makes them famous. For Storytellers, they're an opportunity to use recognizable, real-world demons. Don't feel constrained by the classics, however, because their ultimate nature is not set in stone. They are merely demons too powerful for game traits. In fact, they might not even be unitary beings. What if all lesser demons are avatars of Archdemons? What if the truth is actually the reverse of our assumptions, and real minor demons are too weak to leave Hell at all? If that's the case, then every demon who stalks the world is an emanation of something too powerful and evil to conceive of, but all of them are still limited by their ability to inspire sin. If you pursue this assumption, a demon that attains the 6th Infernal Rank must return to Hell, but leaves behind Testaments and lore to prepare its return.

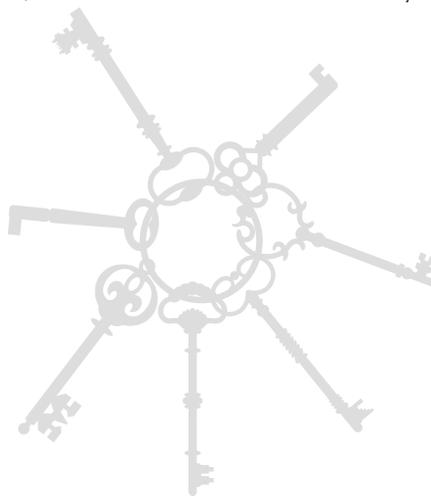
If demons don't just feed upon human sins but are born of them, the Archdemons might just be waiting for humanity to open the door with an irreversible affront to God, the implicate order, the true dharma, or some other hidden, inescapable moral judge. If sin is real, humanity has sinned terribly, and it's hard to imagine what could be even worse. Now, however, we are in a position to destroy ourselves and all life on the planet, and are on the verge of scientific breakthroughs that could create entirely new immoral acts. Whatever the case, in this situation the Archdemons are not yet born, but sleep in human dreams, waiting for an act so monstrous that they can finally claim the place prepared for them.

Archdemons cannot send Whisperers to the world and summoning is a difficult option. It's hard to find genuine rituals and even harder to design them from scratch. The vilest ones try, however, sending servants to dictate their complex Testaments and whisper their secret names to cultists. These resources are frequently incomplete or inaccurate. Demon hunters burn them and mad scribes write false translations. Rumor has it that every Archdemon has rivals in the Infernal host who compete for mastery of a sin. If known, a true ritual would be a momentous undertaking. It would demand complex chants and runes, and atrocities

to break the imagination of the most hardened black magician.

An Archdemon might be able to pass through a door to Hell, provided it lies within a Desecrated area powerful enough to support its Infernal Rank—but unlike lesser Diaboli and Dominions, the stories say it needs not remain within the boundaries of such a place. They prophesy that once the lords of the Infernal host gain the slightest foothold, the world is theirs.

No firm game systems govern the Archdemons. The manner of their presence and the consequences are in the Storyteller's realm.





"Have another one," she said, sliding the glass toward him. He knocked it back without so much as a nod.

"So where was I?" he slurred.

She shrugged. She didn't really care. He'd be dead soon.

"Right, I remember. So, it's the fourth quarter and I got three hundred bucks bet on this game..."

She looked around the bar. It was almost empty. The bartender was wiping down tables and flipping chairs up into his hand with deft, detached grace. The cop was across the street, waiting for the stragglers to come out so he could bust them. Two people were fucking in the bathroom, and their sounds, which would have been unnoticeable an hour ago, echoed through the vents into the bar.

"And then he throws a fucking three-pointer, and I—"

"Have another one." She refilled his glass. The bartender shook his head. He knew what was happening.

"Thanks," he said, and threw it back. He stood up, stared at her, and for one horrible moment she thought he was going to puke and ruin it all. But then he collapsed, his flabby body hitting the floor as though something in his spine had just snapped loose.

The bartender sighed and went to go expel the lovers. He'd let them out the side door. They wouldn't see the body.

The woman crouched next to him and drank in his dying breath, soaked in vodka and smelling of entitlement and hubris. She breathed it out again into a glass, stripped of oxygen, stripped of scent, stripped of the man's name and identity. All that was left was pure Gluttony.

The bottle tipped over and the last of the booze dripped to the floor. Something stood up out of the puddle, something insatiable. It looked at the glass and licked its lips, and then glanced at the woman.

"The dying breath of a glutton," she said. "You get that if you give me what I want."

The demon chuckled. "What you want? Why don't I just take your breath, too?"

The bartender locked the door, not even listening as the negotiation began. He'd seen this before, and he'd warned her, but her appetite was too great.

Chapter Two: Infernal Pacts

Demons are not powerless by any means, but they become more powerful when they receive permission for their actions. This chapter examines exactly what demons can do when they receive that permission, both in terms of manifesting in our world and making deals with the foolish, prideful or desperate souls that summon them. It also discusses Hell-touch items, Artifacts containing the power—and risk—of the demonic.

Summoning Demons

Evil is pervasive. Like water, it seeks its own level, sliding into whatever cracks may admit it. A crack in a person's soul is an opening for a Whisperer to exert its influence. A crack in one's faith can be enough for temptation to take hold. Demons slip in through the cracks in our world, the barriers between us and the unknown Beyond. Sometimes they do it on their own, attempting to possess susceptible individuals. And other times, those individuals hand them engraved invitations.

This section discusses the methods by which demons can enter our world, the motivations summoners have for inviting them, and the pacts such people make with otherworldly powers.

**You must have the
devil in you to succeed
in the arts.**

—Voltaire

In Case it Needs to be Said

This chapter presents descriptions of “demon-summoning rituals.” No, they don't actually work. They don't work because demons aren't real. Most especially the ones in this work of fiction. Carry on.

Deliberate Summoning

The first question that comes to mind when considering deliberately calling a demon into one's company isn't “how,” but “why?” The motives behind summoning a demon boil down to two essential traits: pride and desperation. That is, very few people deliberately summon a demon without an excess of one of these two things, because summoning a demon deliberately isn't easy. (Doing it accidentally is actually simpler in terms of preparation and expense, but it also means the “summoner” has virtually no control over the situation; this is discussed in detail in the next section.)

Pride

A would-be summoner might begin his research out of idle curiosity, but that alone is not enough to make someone delve into forbidden tomes in dead languages. It's not enough to induce an occultist to meet with unsavory characters in the back alleys of the Third World, giving up money, time and possibly blood for the answer to a riddle he just can't figure out otherwise. Curiosity might push an academic to *translate* a demon-summoning passage, maybe even try to read it aloud, but that by itself isn't usually enough to get any real results. Summoning a demon requires effort, and usually sacrifice—which is well, because, done properly, it also grants the summoner a bit of leverage when the fell creature actually shows up. A casual occultist won't summon a demon, because he doesn't really *want* to see one.

But a truly driven occultist, as he researches the ritual, becomes obsessed with seeing that demon. More, he feels he *deserves* to see it, that the demon should appreciate all the work that went into the summoning ritual and be the occultist's willing slave. And, in fact, if the occultist summons the right kind of demon, he might well achieve that goal, but he's just as likely to call something up that will manipulate him into letting it loose into the world of mortals for a brief but thoroughly enjoyable spree of mayhem. It might seem that someone who manages to unlock the secret to summoning a demon would know the risks, and sometimes that's true, but more often the summoner feels entitled to call up the monster. Entitlement does not breed caution. It breeds recklessness and, of course, pride. The prideful summoner looks at the risks but does not internalize them, because he feels it's inconceivable any loss of control, any unplanned disaster, any surprise could ever happen to *him*. After all, he's powerful enough to summon a demon! Doesn't that speak for itself?

That this attitude is toxic and potentially fatal should be fairly obvious. There's another issue at work for the summoner, however. If he's working from a book, he runs into one of the major problems summoners face: They don't really *know* the creatures they're calling up.

It's not that demons are fundamentally alien to human sensibilities. Some of them are, but those creatures tend to be so far removed from human influence that they can't be summoned anyway. Demons that interact with humans are often very accessible—they are demons of lust, sloth, pride and the rest of the “deadly sins,” which are really just shorthand for

desires and urges of ego. That summoners don't really know their targets isn't reflective of the difference in outlook between man and demon, it's reflective of the fact that the resources a summoner has on hand when researching the demon tend to be misleading, or at the very least filtered.

Consider an old and powerful Immundus, something that has been summoned several times over the centuries and has evolved into a unique and recognizable creature. A demonologist reads an account written by a Muslim scholar in the 18th century describing this being a *jinni*. The account details the summoning methods that work best for the creature, but the text is written from a certain perspective, namely that Allah is the only God and Muhammad is his Prophet. As such, the researcher might justifiably start looking into other Muslim texts of the time, searching for commonalities and potential weaknesses he could exploit when dealing with this powerful being. But, of course, the Immundus is a creature of the Shadow, and it doesn't know “Allah” from Adam. When the occultist performs the ritual, he might well summon the creature, but all his assumptions about it are wrong. That, obviously, does not put him on particularly solid footing when it comes time to make a pact (see below).

Pride, therefore, is something of a catch-22 where demon summoning is concerned. It takes a certain degree of pride even to attempt it, but more than any other personality flaw, pride winds up damning the would-be summoner. And when damnation comes, the thing demons seem to enjoy most is the look of utter surprise on the summoner's face.

Desperation

Many are the grieving people who, faced with watching their children, spouses or other loved ones die slow, horrible deaths from disease or cope with the ravages of age, pray to whatever higher power they think might help them. But their prayers go unanswered. The deities of human mythology, if they exist at all, operate according to a plan so obtuse, so obscure, that it is little different than chance.

Other avenues exist, of course. Demons possess the power to heal the sick, to cure disease, even to grant riches and comfort. They ask much in return, of course, but sometimes that's not a concern. Pride is a powerful motivator, but desperation—especially desperation born of love—propels people to do remarkable and terrible things.



A desperate summoner seeks out the same information as does a prideful one. She meets the same unscrupulous people in the same dark alleys, trades the same blood and sweat. But while the prideful summoner does it with a hint of disdain, perhaps making a list of the people who *dare* to make demands on him whom he can revisit once he gains the power rightfully his, the desperate summoner only wants to complete the ritual. Anything she has to do in the meantime is trivial. She can't afford to be distracted by concerns of whether she will survive the process, though she is more likely to pay attention to warnings about the demon's abilities (because she needs to be sure the demon can give her exactly what she wants).

A desperate summoner might not survive the process, but if she dies, it's typically because she agrees to give up her own life as part of the sacrifice for the pact (see *Sacrifices*, p. 91). More often, these summons agree to some truly horrific sacrifices, because the demons have so much leverage. A prideful summoner can weigh the pros and cons of accepting a pact with some degree of objectivity—he has some bargaining power because he doesn't have his back to the wall already. But a woman calling up a demon to cure her daughter of brain cancer? A man whose son has been kidnapped by insurgents? A professor facing eviction and destitution if he is rejected for tenure? Any of these people might get what they desire from a demon, but the demon can smell the desperation in their sweat as they complete their rituals. It hears the fear in their voices as they make their demands—not of the demon, but of what happens if it can't help them. And it grants their wishes, but it names its price and refuses to budge. It can save the little girl dying from cancer, but demands to be able to enter that girl's dreams for the rest of her life. It can slaughter the insurgents and deliver the soldier to safety, but only if the soldier's father agrees to become a war protester, withdrawing his blessing for his son's military service. The demon can get the professor tenure, but only if the professor agrees to teach a class on occultism—one that nudges students toward worship of the demon.

The only way such a desperate summoner can alter this deal is by self-sacrifice. Most demons will accept the life of the summoner in exchange for whatever favor the supplicant might want, because a life freely given is beyond price.

Rituals

Whatever the motive, before someone can summon a demon, he needs to know how to go about it.

Every demon has a particular method of summons. As demons grow more powerful by gaining worshippers and notoriety, their summoning rituals become more complex and personalized. At the same time, though, they become better defined. A demonologist willing to put time and effort into finding the proper ritual to summon up a specific demon stands a decent chance of getting some results, whereas a group of stupid kids who slaughter a cat in someone's basement probably just gain the notice of a pain- or cruelty-spirit, if that (and the spirit likely lacks the power to make itself known, in any case).

This chapter provides several examples of summoning rituals, but the Storyteller (or the player) is, of course, encouraged to create more based upon whatever demons are useful for the chronicle in question. The summoning ritual itself is a four-step process. All summoning rituals include these steps, though some are more important for some demons than others. Researching the ritual itself is *usually* a prerequisite to performing it, but since it's possible for a character to find, be given or inherit a summoning ritual, research isn't necessarily involved.

Research

Researching a demon-summoning ritual requires knowing where to look. While libraries and bookstores often have "occult" sections, much of the information to be found there is New Age claptrap, invented within the last fifty years by people with only the most tenuous grasp on the history of the occult. Libraries with rare or old books might have more to offer, but such tomes are generally kept under lock and key, and certainly never lent out.

An occultist who begins researching "demon summoning" with no specific agenda can probably find something if he looks hard enough, but someone with an idea of the kind of demon (or specific demon) he wants will have an easier time of it. Once the would-be summoner has a bead on the demon he wants, he must track down that demon's Testament. From there, finding a summoning ritual is a somewhat easier task.

We can't hope to cover all possible avenues of approach for researching a ritual here. The player might take the academic route, poring through tomes in libraries and hunting down references in obscure first printings, but he might also delve into the occult underground, searching for cultists and ex-cultists and deciphering graffiti that corresponds to no known gang's tags. The Storyteller needs to decide where the

demon's ritual *can* be found, and structure the clues backward from there (see sidebar).

Mechanics: Finding the ritual should be an extended action, of course, but the target number of successes, the duration each roll requires and even the dice pool depend upon the circumstances. If the summoner starts off with no clear idea what he's looking for, and simply combs the occult literature for anything he can use, the player rolls Intelligence + Academics as described for Research on p. 55 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. The target number is 20 successes, and each roll requires 4 hours of research rather than 30 minutes.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: If the player rolls a dramatic failure at any point, the character discovers a summoning ritual that is seemingly easy, or at least complete. The ritual, however, is a trap, designed to harm a would-be summoner or trick the summoner into acting as a lure (see the Hornet's Nest, p. 75).

Failure: No successes are gained toward the total.

Success: The player accumulates successes toward the total. When the player reaches 20 successes, the

character discovers a summoning ritual. Critical pieces of information are missing, however; the character knows little or nothing about the demon's personality and desires. The invocation and negotiation rolls (see below) are made at a -3 penalty.

Exceptional Success: The player makes considerable progress toward the total. If the player finishes the research with 25 successes or more, the character has learned enough about the demon to attempt the ritual with no penalties on the invocation roll or the negotiation roll (Storyteller's choice).

The Lure

The lure phase of the summoning ritual is designed to gain that demon's attention through an action or a collection of objects that resonates with it. Often this action or object embodies the Vice to which that demon is attuned. The lure for a demon of Wrath is likely to be violent, but quick and comparatively simple. The lure for a demon of Pride might involve extolling that demon's qualities at length, or assembling three-score worshippers to coax the demon into the physical world. A demon of Sloth is extremely difficult to lure, but given a comfortable enough resting

Researching the Rider in Shameful Dreams

To give you an idea of how researching a demonic ritual might progress, here is an example using the Rider in Shameful Dreams (see p. 79). As the researching character's player accumulates successes, the Storyteller can dole out information as described below. This way, the extended roll isn't reduced to just some throws of the dice—the character can, upon learning what he thinks is enough, proceed with the ritual. This is dangerous, of course, but demon summoning is never a safe avocation.

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Academics

Action: Extended — 15 successes

Research Time: One roll per 2 hours of research

Possible Modifiers: Computer Skill at 3 or more (+1), library of erotica (+1), no Computer Skill (-3)

Successes Information

0-3	Nothing.
4-8	Easily available dream interpretation guides that list the Rider as "a symbol of sexual repression."
9-12	The website listed on p. 79 and the information found therein.
13-14	Cached online information describing the Rider as perceived in the dreams of a repressed woman. She later poisoned her married lover and slits her own throat lying in his dead arms. Her ghost might still haunt the scene, if the Storyteller desires.



place, it might make an appearance.

The more powerful the demon, the more complex the lure. Performing a lure can be quite expensive (for Greed demons, especially), and can put the summoners in the position of doing illegal or immoral things. A comparatively weak demon has a correspondingly easy lure, but this raises another problem. A “general” lure runs the risk of attracting something other than the intended demon.

Consider: A high-ranked demon of Envy might require that the summoner manipulate a woman into physically disfiguring another, someone she finds beautiful and thus envies. The lure might be even more involved than that: Perhaps the disfigured woman must be a redhead, or have bright green eyes, or be over six feet tall, or possessing some other rare and distinguishing characteristic. The method of disfiguring, likewise, could be personalized—acid, fire, blade, broken bones, etc. A less powerful demon of Envy might respond to a woman tearing a photograph of the object of her jealousy in half, but so might a *spirit* of envy, or of hate, or a ghost in the area drawn by the activity, or anything else capable of homing in on such feelings.

Mechanics: The dice rolls required to perform the lure vary depending upon the demon in question. Sometimes a roll might not be necessary, and

sometimes the lure requires an extended action spread over days or weeks.

The Invocation

The invocation usually happens immediately after the lure has been completed, but for some powerful or prideful demons it is an ongoing process (i.e., the summoner chants the demon’s name for hours or days as he performs the ritual). The invocation always requires calling the demon by name. The demon’s Testament works for this purpose, though if the summoner knows the demon’s Secret Name, he has a much better chance of attracting the creature’s attention. Of course, not all demons relish having their Secret Names uttered by mortals, and this can put them in a murderous frame of mind when they appear.

Mechanics: The invocation roll is Presence + Occult.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The summoner mispronounces the demon’s name. He calls up *something*, but it’s not the intended demon. The creature might look or act like the targeted demon, but is under no compunction to do anything for the summoner. Negotiations can take place, but the demon is not bound to them. Lucky summoners who botch the invocation just end up dead after

calling up a hungry or vicious demon. Unlucky ones wind up bound in servitude to a vastly more powerful entity than they were expecting.

Failure: The summoner either mispronounces the summons (but doesn't call anything else up), or times the invocation wrongly. Nothing happens. Depending upon the nature of the lure, the summoner might be able to try again, but the roll suffers a -2 penalty.

Success: The summoner correctly pronounces the demon's name. The ritual progresses to the arrival stage.

Exceptional Success: The summoner manages to pronounce the demon's name exactly as the demon would like to hear it. The demon is favorably disposed toward the summoner; the player can apply a +2 to the negotiation roll.

Suggested Modifiers: Summoner is using the demon's Secret Name (+3), locale has been decorated in accordance with the ritual's instructions or the demon's preferences (+2), summoner has gathered at least 10 others who believe in and fear or worship the demon (+3), summoner has gathered at least 5 other followers (+2), summoner has gathered at least 3 other followers (+1), summoner has the Dragon's Tongue Merit (+2), ritual area is inappropriate for the demon in question (-2), summoner is alone (-1).

The Arrival

During this stage, the demon arrives at the ritual. This might involve a blast of fire and brimstone, or the shadows might grow deep and resonant. The demon's voice or scent might precede it. A demon of Lust might cause anyone present to feel so sexually aroused they can barely stand, while a demon of Sloth might lull those present to sleep with the sweet smell of honey. Whatever the demon's method of making its presence known, it is always dramatic. Demons like to make an impression. More powerful demons are often more subtle, though demons of Pride tend toward showy displays of magical force.

Animalistic demons might lack the intelligence to know what is happening, and attack the summoner on sight. Other demons might take offense to the summons (or the circumstances of the summons), and wound the ritualist. In any case, the arrival should be terrifying and evocative. No dice rolls are necessarily involved (though if the demon attacks, obviously some are).

Negotiation

Once the demon has been summoned, the summoner must open negotiations. Demons are bound by the laws of their summoning ritual to listen to a negotiator who makes the right overture, and sometimes this overture is even included in the summoning ritual. Just as often, though, summoners stop researching when they figure out how to *call* the demon, and never bother to learn how to stop it from killing them. For some demons, simple conversation works to open negotiations. For others, it's more complicated.

Opening negotiations requires a roll of Manipulation + Occult. This roll is modified based upon the demon's intelligence.

Animal: Demons with *animal* intelligence don't require negotiation so much as commands. Their inclination is to respond instinctively. A demon heavily tied to Wrath attacks, one tied to Sloth stays sessile (but digs itself in), and one tied to Gluttony immediately searches for food. Opening negotiations with such demons imposes a -3 penalty on the roll; they aren't interested in dialog.

Spirit: Spirits operate by a complex, but rational, set of laws. All spirits have bans by which they must abide, some of which cause them damage, and some of which dictate behavior. A demon that thinks like a spirit has absolute respect for these kinds of laws, and so as long as the summoner performs the action correctly, the demon enters negotiations with no complaint. Apply a +3 to the roll to open negotiations.

Human: Humans are tricky. They are capable of nuanced meaning, semantic tricks, loopholes and outright lies. As such, a demon with a human level of intelligence is difficult to negotiate with, but can also see reason. The roll receives no modifier unless the Storyteller sees fit to impose one based upon the circumstances.

Once negotiations have been opened, the demon may choose to make a pact with the summoner. Pacts and their requirements are discussed in detail later in this chapter.

Example Summoning Ritual:

The Hornet's Nest

The Hornet's Nest is a single Immundus, but it manifests as a swarm of horrible insects, each nearly three inches long. The hornets comprising the swarm are black, and sickly green fluid leaks from the stingers





at the ends of their bodies. On the rare occasions the Hornet's Nest has managed to manifest in the physical world, it typically kills the person foolish enough to summon it in less than a minute, pumping him full of venom until only an unrecognizable bloated mass remains. While it does so, the true worshippers of the Nest look on, entranced and elated.

The Hornet's Nest might have started its existence as a swarm-spirit, or an insect-spirit, but it quickly absorbed the properties of Wrath. Somewhere along the way it ingested a healthy dose of human aggression and sadism, and now it exists as a mass of stinging insects that not only cause pain, but have the capacity to *enjoy* it. As such, summoning up the Hornet's Nest is a foolish idea. The spirit is difficult to control, even with appropriate sacrifice, and doesn't think far enough ahead to do any real bargaining. Why, then, would anyone summon it?

Worshippers of the Nest exist, but they don't perform the summoning ritual themselves (not wishing to be stung to death). They pass along the ritual's particulars to other parties who might want to summon up a demon. The ritual itself is fairly simple, as such things go (see below), and so the cult places the appropriate texts in the hands of amateur occultists, feeds them some stories, usually secondhand, about the power of the demon to grant wishes of "pain and lust," and sits back to watch the fun.

The Ritual: Learning the ritual is fairly simple. Once the hapless summoner makes contact with the cult, he usually finds himself in possession of the ritual within a few days. In some cases, the cult finds summoners looking to call up other kinds of demons and "corrects" their rituals. Research rolls to learn the ritual are therefore not necessary.

The Lure: The Hornet's Nest requires pain to get its attention (the lure), but it has to be pain someone else is enjoying. It's the inflicting of agony—not consensual pain with a safeword, but actual anguish, the sort of pain that makes the victim wish for death just to end it—and the enjoyment of such that stirs the Nest. Obviously, doing so requires a living victim, but the victim does not have to die in the process. (Actually, it helps if the victim remains alive, conscious and able to scream.) Animals are serviceable victims for the ritual, but people are better, because their experience of pain is more nuanced.

The torturer can use any method he wishes to hurt the victim, subject to the modifiers listed below. The player makes a roll based upon his methods. Using carefully monitored doses of poison would call for

a roll of Wits + Medicine. Small jabs with a needle or blade might indicate Dexterity + Weaponry. The Storyteller needs to decide what dice pool is most appropriate for the circumstances.

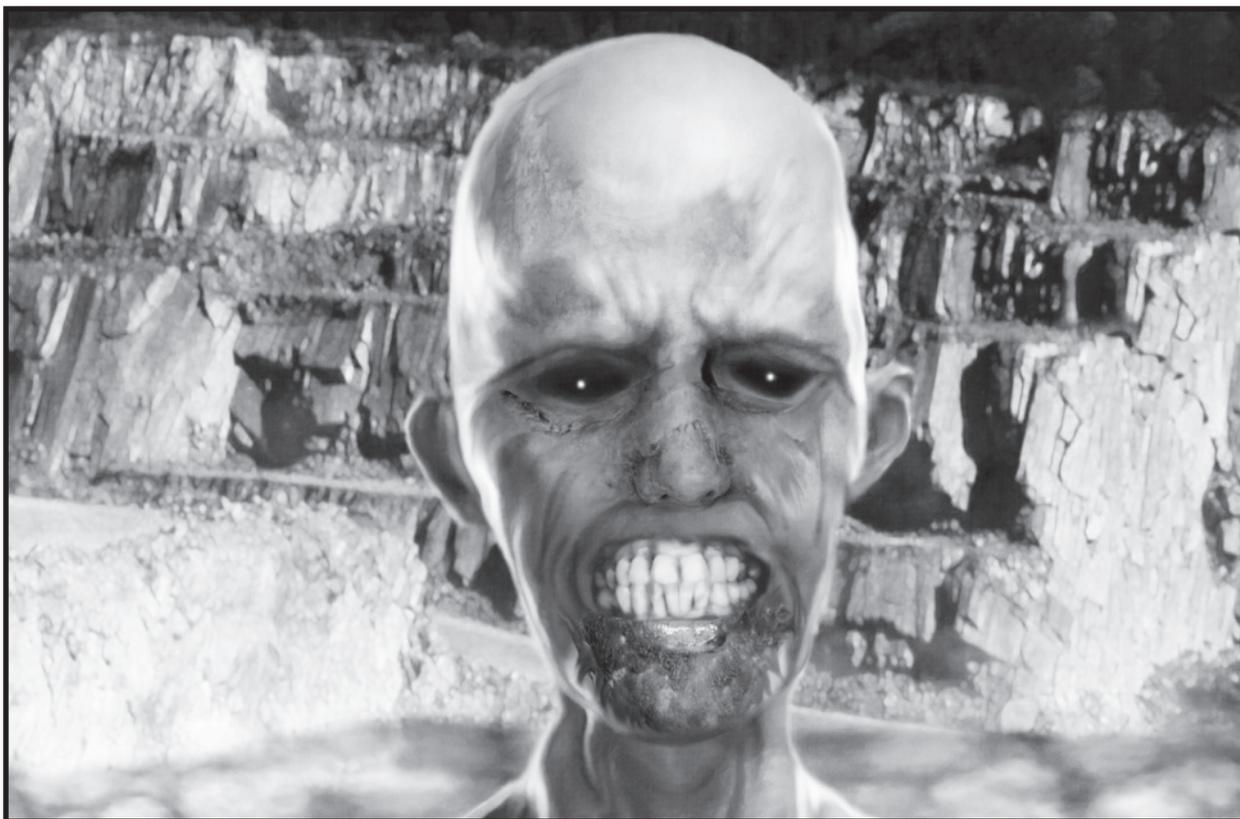
The torture is an extended action. The torturer's target number is the victim's Stamina + Resolve (plus any dots in the Iron Stamina Merit). The player makes one roll per five minutes of torture. Everyone breaks eventually, but the victim also suffers damage every turn. How much damage is a matter for the Storyteller, as it depends upon the methods used, but if the victim's Health track becomes full at any point, the usual effects take place. If the damage is bashing, the player rolls Stamina each turn or the victim passes out. If the damage is lethal, the victim immediately starts to bleed to death (or goes into shock, or cardiac arrest—the exact effect depends upon the circumstances). A dead or unconscious victim feels no pain, and thus is useless for attracting the demon's attention. The torturer, therefore, must choose a method that allows him to hurt the victim, but without causing too much damage. One method, of course, is to inflict bashing damage and then wait for a point to heal, but sometimes the summoner gets impatient.

The second factor, of course, is that the torturer has to *enjoy* what he is doing. This has to go beyond fascination or curiosity and cross over into perverted, depraved joy. If the torturer doesn't feel that joy, the Hornet's Nest isn't going to respond. As a guideline, a character with a Morality rating of greater than 4 probably can't muster the necessary enjoyment, but the Storyteller is the final arbiter of whether or not the pleasure is there.

The summoner does *not* have to be the one doing the torture, though it helps.

The Invocation: The ritualist must invoke the name of the Hornet's Nest (the Testament, at least; the cult has created more than one variant on the ritual, and it guards the demon's Secret Name closely) as the victim screams or cries in pain. The invocation requires only a Presence + Occult roll.

Arrival: Once the summoner has completed the lure and the invocation, he has only seconds to bring the demon under any kind of control. The Hornet's Nest can use the link established by pain and the enjoyment thereof to manifest for a few brief moments. Being the uncontrolled font of aggression it is, the demon immediately homes in on whoever was causing the pain and reveling in it and attacks, poisoning the pleasure the torturer felt and converting it to agony.



This invariably kills the person, and with his death the summoning ritual ends, banishing the demon again.

The Nest appears slowly, with hornets crawling out of the victim's mouth, ears and other orifices (the victim feels this, but usually is so lost in agony she doesn't remember it later, if she survives). The swarm doesn't sting the victim. Instead, it makes straight for the torturer. The summoner must bring the swarm under control before it reaches and attacks the torturer, which probably gives him only seconds to respond. If, however, the victim has been encased in a plastic box for the torture, the Hornet's Nest can be contained, probably allowing the summoner enough time to begin negotiations.

Negotiation: The torturer must make the victim scream, cry or acknowledge the pain while the swarm is still pouring out of her. (This isn't usually much of a problem.) At that point, the player makes the negotiation roll. The Nest is of *animal* intelligence. If the swarm has reached the torturer and attacked, however, the negotiation roll automatically fails.

Suggested Modifiers: Piercing damage to victim (+2 to torturer), poisoning victim (+3 to torturer), summoner is not performing the torture himself (-3 to invocation roll), victim is dead or unconscious (-5 to negotiation roll), victim is an animal (-2 to invocation roll).

Example Summoning Ritual: Sherman Miles

Sherman Miles died a very rich man. When he died, he was malnourished, cold and sick. His teeth were rotting out of his head and he couldn't walk because his left foot was infected and gangrenous. The men who wrapped him in a bedsheet, tied iron chains around his body and pitched him into a quarry probably cut his life short by only about a week.

But Sherman didn't die quickly. His body struck the water with such force his shoulders, hips and arms broke, but as he sank he had no thought of cursing the men who had killed him. He had no regrets about his life or about driving his family away. His last thought before drowning was, "How am I going to collect rent now?"

Sherman Miles was a slumlord before the term had any meaning. Extremely wealthy as a result of his inheritance, he set to work buying up land and leasing it to poor farmers. He refused to spend money when he didn't have to, and, as he saw it, he *never* had to. Potatoes were a good enough supper. Meat and vegetables were an extravagance. He took food from his tenants in lieu of rent, but made sure they knew it was a stopgap, not a payment. Miles may have been one of the greediest men on the planet.





And that, of course, is why he is a Larval now, as opposed to just a particularly unpleasant ghost. Anchored to the chains that dragged him to the bottom of the quarry, the ghost called out into the blackness for help. All he wanted was to have his deeds, his money and his possessions back. The blackness answered, and Sherman Miles became a demon.

Miles appears as an emaciated old man. Its eyes are rotted away, as are its teeth, and the bones in its fingers pierce hungrily through the flesh. Its ribcage juts through the skin, and its stomach is concave. Sherman Miles is as hollow in death as in life.

Miles wants to be summoned up, but does not wish to leave the quarry. It wants its wealth to come to it, and is quite happy to form pacts with treasure hunters, historians and occultists in order to facilitate this happening. Summoners beware: Miles is a shrewd bargainer, and a lifetime as a landlord taught it how to trick the desperate into making deals that benefit it more than them.

The Ritual: Haunting stories about the quarry in which Miles died are common, and the townsfolk (still mostly farmers) accept that the creature haunting that quarry is Sherman Miles. Any of the older people in the area might be willing to tell the story of who he was and how he died, but actual documentation is hard to come by. In part, that's because Miles died in the late 19th century, and recordkeeping in this rural area wasn't consistent. It's also partially due to the fact that over the years people who have summoned Miles have thrown such documentation into the quarry.

The summoning ritual isn't written down in books on the occult or demonology, but it is described in the memoirs and journals of local townsfolk. Finding it, therefore, would require not only research at a library in the area (in the local history section), but conversations with the townsfolk, and possibly travel to other areas to track down "grandma's diary."

Suggested roll: Intelligence + Academics (researching the ritual or Miles in general), Manipulation + Persuasion (interviewing townsfolk about the legend), Wits + Subterfuge (separating legend from truth), Dexterity + Larceny (stealing books that aren't for sale).

The Lure: Sherman Miles's lure requires that something that belonged to him in life be thrown into the quarry. The angry townsfolk who murdered him stole many of his possessions—furniture, crockery and the like—but left mountains of deeds, paperwork and other documentation. Miles was always more enamored of these sorts of things anyway; he loved

the notion that ownership of a small piece of paper equated to ownership of acres upon acres of land. Over time, many of the objects and papers that belonged to him have been thrown into the quarry, lost to the ravages of the years, or placed into storage. As such, a summoner wishing to call up the malignant spirit of Sherman Miles has his work cut out for him. Add this to the fact that when Miles makes pacts with people it invariably requires them to spend at least some portion of their time searching for Miles's possessions, and the pool of possible lures just isn't very deep.

Fortunately, though, Miles is a demon of Greed. Although none of the written accounts of the summoning ritual say as much, it is possible to lure it with new deeds, property or paper money. Using something Miles didn't own in life but that has a value of at least \$10,000 works as a lure. This applies a -2 penalty to both the invocation and negotiation rolls, however.

The lure itself does not require dice rolls. The summoner simply throws the objects into the quarry and listens for the splash.

The Invocation: "Sherman Miles," while it might seem to be the Secret Name of the demon, is actually a Testament. This is because becoming a demon changed Miles to the point that the man he was in life is little more than a mask for the incarnate greed that lurks in that black water. Miles' Secret Name is written down in at least one of the farmer's diaries that lists the ritual. The diary belonged to one of the men who murdered Miles, and the ritual is inscribed on the date ten years to the day after Miles's death. Written in the margin is a single word—the Secret Name.

Miles' invocation must be shouted into the quarry. No matter how loudly the summoner yells, however, the invocation never echoes. The dice pool and roll results are as listed above.

The Arrival: If the invocation is successful, a mist rises up from the quarry. The summoner hears the rattling of chains and howls of pain and hunger. And then the specter of Sherman Miles rises, its chains flailing wildly about its skeletal form as if blowing in a gale-force wind.

Miles doesn't usually attack summoners, since it enjoys making deals with them (and sending them out to find its remaining possessions). The only instance in which it becomes immediately aggressive is if more than 10 people are present. This calls to mind the mob that killed it, and the demon attacks, trying to pull them into the quarry and drown them.

Negotiation: As mentioned, Miles is happy to negotiate with summoners. No special action is re-

quired in order to begin negotiations. The summoner simply needs to address Miles in a clear voice. Miles is of *human* intelligence.

Suggested Modifiers: The summoner offers Miles a cash bribe (+1), the summoner is white (+1), the summoner has people acting as servants or assistants (+1), the summoner is asking for money (-4), the summoner is not white (-1).

Example Summoning Ritual: Rider in Shameful Dreams

There's nothing shameful about desire, unless a person finds his desire to be shameful. Many people are raised to believe sexual feelings are wrong, dirty or inappropriate before a certain age or set of circumstances make them allowable. It is this sort of logic that made Lust a deadly sin, and allows an entire race of demons to subsist upon these feelings.

Demonic lust is different than mere sexual fulfillment. Lust is about taking satisfaction in the victimization of others. This doesn't have to mean violence or rape; often, in fact, these are acts of Wrath. But a man who lies to a woman in order to bed her, knowing all the while that when the moment passes he will leave her, is definitely committing the sin of Lust. He leaves the woman ashamed.

These feelings of shame fuel the power of the Rider. This Deceptor was born in the Tenemos of a Master mage, a woman who used her command of Mind magic to suppress any "inappropriate" feelings she had. But she found it impossible to rid herself of her desires completely, and so she gave them a name and a face, and then cast them out into the Astral reaches. This collection of desires became the Rider in Shameful Dreams, and over time it grew powerful on feelings of regret and embarrassment from an otherwise fulfilling sexual encounter. The man who has a one-night stand with a woman with whom he would be embarrassed to be seen while sober, the young girl beaten when caught masturbating, the married woman who punishes herself when she fantasizes about kissing her sister-in-law—the Rider visits these dreams. It does not encourage the dreamers to act upon their fantasies, or to accept their feelings. It simply watches, accusing, recording, and then leaves, perhaps to report to a higher (or lower) authority.

The Rider takes many forms, depending upon the nature of the dream in which it appears. It is usually male, though sometimes appears androgynous. It always appears astride some kind of conveyance. It might appear as a boy on a bicycle, a knight on a horse, a

biker clad in leathers riding a softail. It watches the dream unfold, staring, remaining expressionless, and then rides off, leaving the dreamer with a feeling of exposure and violation to go with her shame.

The Rider is capable of entering the dreams of men, but prefers women and girls. Much of its personality comes from the repressed desires and shame of its creator, but its love of driving dreamers to depression and mental illness is demonic. It inhabits the Tenemos, looking for a way to infiltrate the dreams of the ashamed and lustful.

The Ritual: The Rider's creator confessed to what she had done some years after doing it. The mage to whom she confessed, a member of an order called the *Mysterium*, dedicated to the pursuit and recording of magical knowledge, wrote down the information and cataloged it, but made no mention of the mage's true identity. The mage herself altered her own memory so she would not remember creating the Rider, effectively cutting herself off from the demon.

The written account of the Rider's creation, though, sat in a library for years, until an attack by a hostile faction of mages sent it into the hands of a private collector. He wasn't able to make much sense of it, but made notes about his own dreams and wished the Rider would visit him and take the shame away. This, of course, was the beginning of the ritual.

The original book has been destroyed, but the story of the Rider has since appeared in dream interpretation guides, New Age texts and erotic fiction. A would-be summoner who wants to call up the Rider can find plentiful references to it, but finding a way to get its attention requires digging a little deeper. A website dedicated to helping sex criminals "fight the urge" includes a section on the Rider, with instructions on how to call it into one's own dreams—or someone else's. A researcher must beware, however. This web site is on every federal and state watch list in the English-speaking world, and anyone making a post to it can expect to be red-flagged.

Suggested Rolls: Intelligence + Academics (research in erotic literature or occult exploration of dreams), Intelligence + Computer (finding the right portion of the web site), Wits + Computer (avoiding leaving an electronic "fingerprint" in which the authorities might take an interest).

The Lure: The Rider can appear outside of dreams, but has to be given a "vector." Its lure is an appropriately shameful dream, that is, a dream of a sexual nature the dreamer feels ashamed for having had. Certainly magic exists that allows for dream manipulation, and so this kind of lure *can* be artificially



arranged, but for a mortal summoner about the best he can do is find a likely target and hope—or try to seduce her in a manner that leaves her ashamed of herself. This is, of course, horrible psychological and emotional abuse, and is grounds for degeneration, but it does lure the Rider more easily.

Someone must describe the dream in writing, but it doesn't have to be the dreamer. The dreamer must be referenced by name, and the account must include some reference to feeling ashamed or embarrassed over the dream *and* to enjoying it. If these criteria are met, the Rider breaks into the dreamer's mind the next time she sleeps, at which time the summoner may attempt the invocation... provided he knows she is dreaming.

This lure requires a great deal of setup. Seduction, of course, is described on p. 84 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. The Storyteller might require additional Manipulation + Empathy rolls to make sure the summoner is nudging the dreamer toward the right kinds of feelings. If, of course, the summoner wishes to use her *own* dreams to call the Rider, the process is much simpler (but more dangerous—see below).

Once the dreamer is asleep, the summoner must wait until she is dreaming to invoke the Rider. Timing this correctly requires a Wits + Medicine roll. If this roll fails, the invocation roll is automatically considered a failure.

The Invocation: Invoking the Rider is easier if the summoner is the one dreaming. The summoner simply turns to face the Rider and pronounces its name. Of course, this carries certain risks, too (see Negotiation, below).

If the summoner is observing the dreamer, he must whisper the invocation into her ear. He cannot touch her in any way, or the invocation automatically fails, and the dreamer awakens, drained of all Willpower (the Rider's punishment for the clumsy attempt at calling it).

Suggested Modifiers: The Rider is being called to the summoner's dream (+4), the dreamer is a virgin (+1), the dreamer is male (-1), the dreamer has been sedated (-3).

The Arrival: If the Rider is invoked while the summoner is dreaming, the arrival is comparatively subtle. The Rider eradicates all other aspects of the dream, leaving the dreamer and the demon standing on a featureless plane. The Rider does not attack the summoner and, indeed, makes no hostile overtures. But if the summoner fails to open negotiations, the Rider takes its revenge upon the fool who wasted its time.

If the summoner invokes the Rider from someone else's dream, the host's eyes snap open. She sits up and faces the summoner, and speaks in the Rider's voice. The Rider controls the host for at least the rest of the scene, and the use of the host's body for a certain length of time is a superb bargaining chip in negotiations. The Rider enjoys having a physical body, but while it possesses a host, it places her in a hazy, dreamlike state. While in this fugue, she understands what she is doing and may even believe she has some control over her actions, but is, in fact, a passenger in her own skin. The Rider, naturally, slakes its lust with the most shameful activities (to the host) it can, and then retreats into her dreams to bask in the feelings of shame.

Negotiation: If the summoner calls the Rider to his own dream, he must exert his control over his own mind. This requires a roll of Presence + Resolve. If this roll succeeds, the character reshapes his dream as he sees fit, and the player can make the negotiation roll normally. If this roll fails, the vista stays the same, and the player makes the negotiation roll at a -5 modifier.

In either case, if the negotiation roll fails, the Rider takes control of the summoner's body and keeps control as long as it wishes. It treats the summoner even worse than it would a dreamer (as described above), and might not even bother to eat or sleep while in possession.

If the summoner calls the Rider from another's dream, the negotiation proceeds as a simple conversation. Physical contact with the host's body wins favor with the Rider, and the Rider allows the host to witness what is happening, but grants her no power to stop it.

Suggested Modifiers: Summoner touches the host's body during negotiations (+2), summoner has bound or sedated the host's body (-2).

Accidental Summoning

Not every ritual needs to be exhaustively researched, or requires any kind of preparation to perform. Sometimes people summon demons without meaning to.

Fortunately, accidental summonings tend to call less powerful demons. This is because as demons grow more powerful, gaining followers and notoriety, they also codify themselves. A very powerful demon might well be confined to whatever Hell it inhabits unless a stadium full of people chant its praises—and how likely is that? Likewise, demon hunters might be able

to prevent such a creature from entering this world by destroying all copies of the ritual designed to call it.

But weaker demons don't need the pomp and circumstance. They don't need to be lured or bribed. The right set of circumstances opens a door, and a clever demon simply oozes through it. These circumstantial rituals don't call a specific demon, but rather a demon of a particular Vice. But once a demon has been summoned, it starts to develop its own ritual, and the circumstances around which it was first called probably inform that ritual.

Larvals, born as they are of human ghosts, almost never respond to accidental summoning, unless the event somehow involves their anchors. Deceptors and Immundi, however, are quite susceptible.

No game systems are required for this kind of summoning. If a demon responds, it is because the confluence of factors got the demon's attention and enabled it to enter our world. These kinds of events aren't generally repeatable, and anyone nearby when the demon appears isn't so much a summoner as a bystander. When a demon responds to this sort of "summoning," it usually is not powerful enough to form a pact with anyone nearby. At best, the demon can exchange favors (see *Minor Pacts*, p. 93). This is a guideline, not a hard and fast rule, however. It is possible for a powerful demon to respond to such a

summons, and forming a pact might allow it a greater foothold in the human world.

Below is a list of factors that can result in an accidental summoning, and following that are a few examples of how these might combine and what the results might be. Each factor lists a few Vices that are especially appropriate, but any of the seven Vices might appear with any of the factors. Likewise, these factors are just examples. Reading through this book, the Storyteller and the players are sure to come up with other possibilities that might get a demon's attention.

- **Blood:** The blood is, after all, the life. Many cultures believe some essential aspect of a living thing is contained in its blood. Blood might be consumed, spilled, burnt or mixed with other ingredients and thereby earn a demon's attention: **Common Vices:** Wrath, Lust, Envy.

- **Virginity:** The unspoiled condition, a simple thrust away from being lost forever. It's easy to see why virgins appeal to demons. The appeal of making something different, of taking away something that can never be replaced and leaving behind regret and questions, is highly tempting to demons. **Common Vices:** Lust, Envy, Pride.

- **Death:** Like virginity, life can't be regained once lost. Demons of an especially vicious bent are



attracted by death, as are Larvals (again, if their anchors are involved). Some demons, predatory Immundi especially, are more attracted to the deaths of animals than people. **Common Vices:** Wrath, Envy, Greed.

• **Money:** People's notions of what is valuable have changed over the years, but the idea that money—what began as a marker indicating an owed favor—has intrinsic value is one demons love. Money has no value on its own, and so hoarding it is a sign of nothing but greed. As such, it can make for a good lightning rod for certain demons. **Common Vices:** Sloth, Greed, Envy.

• **Magic:** Regardless of the source, performing magic takes a great deal of will. Imposing that will upon the world runs the risk of attracting attention, and sometimes that attention is demonic. **Common Vices:** Pride, Sloth, Greed.

• **Pain:** Physical pain is attractive to many demons, but emotional pain—grief, rage, betrayal—is also mother's milk to many Deceptors. Pain caused deliberately stands a greater chance of attracting attention, but demons might notice pain from any source. **Common Vices:** Sloth, Wrath, Lust.

• **Occult Symbols:** It's possible for a kid marking some graffiti to accidentally reproduce an occult symbol or two. Likewise, a linguist trying to decipher an ancient text might alter a character in *just* the right way to open a gateway through which something could slip. **Common Vices:** Pride, Greed, Sloth.

• **Herbs and Plants:** Just as some plants, such as rue and garlic, supposedly have curative and protective properties, others are baleful and attractive to evil forces. Naturally, many of these herbs are also deadly poisons. **Common Vices:** Gluttony, Envy, Sloth.

• **Supernatural Creatures:** While vampires, werewolves, changelings and other supernatural beings have no inherent connection to demons, many of them do have some knowledge of spirits or the Astral reaches—and the denizens of these places can become demons. Immundi and Deceptors remember their roots, and pay close attention to the inhabitants of supernature. **Common Vices:** Wrath (werewolves), Pride (mages), Gluttony (vampires), Envy (Prometheans or changelings).

• **Ambition:** Wanting something so badly that the means are unimportant, even if they are unethical—that's the kind of ambition demons appreciate. The desire becomes a motive unto itself, and then it self-perpetuates, until *wanting* is more important than *having*. Demons, of course, have

exactly this kind insatiable desire. **Common Vices:** Pride, Lust, Greed.

Accidental Summoning: The Gnarled Oak

The oak at the old playground, the one with the splintery wooden jungle gym and the rusty slide, is so twisted that when the wind blows it looks like an old witch dancing. And last week, a witch *did* dance there. She danced because she had finally won a feud she'd been pursuing for a generation, and she brought her enemy to that tree and stabbed him with her ritual knife so many times his chest looked like mush when she was done. But she used magic to keep him alive the whole time, and then she decayed his body to dust and left, finally satisfied.

But something followed her. It oozed down from the branches of the tree and sucked up the dust left from the victim's body, absorbed the bloodstain, and slithered off through the grass after her. It's a Deceptor heavily influenced by the Pride she felt in killing her foe and the Wrath that drove the knife. It won't stay on Earth long... unless it can get her to kill again.

Factors: Pain, Death, Supernatural Creature, Ambition

Accidental Summoning: The Birthday Cake

It was her sixth birthday, and all she wanted was a chocolate cake from that little bakery on the corner. She went into that bakery on the way to school sometimes, with her mother, and her mother would buy her a muffin or a bagel, and she'd look at those towering cakes behind the glass and *wish* her mother could afford one.

Her mother was afraid they wouldn't make the rent that month, and those cakes were expensive. So she gave herself to that baker, and he baked the girl a cake, free of charge. As her mother was coming out of the store, holding the cake, a man driving a truck dropped his cell phone and leaned down to get it. He bumped the wheel, his truck swerved, and it smashed the girl's mother against the wall, killing her instantly.

And in the long, horrible nights that followed, the girl did not sleep, for her first thought when it happened had been disappointment the cake was gone. It was a thought born of shock and horror, not of selfishness, but the girl had no way to understand that. And as she lay awake torturing herself, longing for her mother back, something crept out from under her bed and watched her, huge pale eyes staring

silently up. Someday it might get up the courage to speak to her.

Factors: Pain, Money, Death

Accidental Summoning: Masey

His name is Mason, but his parents call him Masey. He hates that, and he hates them. He hates it so much he said he'd kill them if they didn't quit it. They laughed and figured he was hostile because he was fourteen.

And then Masey asked a few people at school about poisons, and some girl mentioned belladonna (which Masey had thought was a porn star's name—and it was indeed, but also a poison...). He looked around online and ordered some with his dad's credit card, and then he looked up how to mix it with wine to mask the taste. He poisoned them both, and before he called the police to report them dead he sat down on the couch, smoked a bowl and played video games for eight straight hours.

Mason is petty, vicious, but most of all, lazy. He never noticed the symbols on the box in which the poison arrived. He never noticed the weird syllables his parents spouted as they gasped for life. And, obviously, he didn't notice the wet, hungry thing, like a tiny otter covered in blue-black fur, that crawled out of the wine bottle. It's been sleeping in his shoe ever since. Who knows what its bite might do?

Factors: Herbs and Plants, Death, Occult Symbols

In the Blood

Perhaps even more terrifying than a demon summoned by accident is a person who can summon demons with no training, no occult knowledge, and no particular inclination to do so. Such people are touched by the supernatural from birth, though the reasons and particulars of that influence vary. In terms of game mechanics, these people have the Dragon's Tongue Merit (p. 126), allowing them to speak the language of demons, and thus call them up without the need for a ritual.

A demon-speaker doesn't usually know she is using the Dragon's Tongue. To her, the speech sounds like her native language, even when coming from her own mouth. Demon-speakers discover their gift in various ways. Some, of course, encounter demons and speak to them instinctively. Others fall in with occultists, demonologists, mages or other individuals with an interest in the matter. Dragon's Tongue is similar enough to the language of spirits that a character who hears this language (perhaps hearing two werewolves

conversing in the First Tongue) might discover her Infernal ability.

In any event, knowing the Dragon's Tongue removes the need for the invocation and negotiation rolls in the summoning process. As long as the lure is produced correctly, the character can speak to the demon and open negotiations.

The character is also capable of summoning minor demons on purpose (as described above under Accidental Summonings). The demon-speaker needs to provide enough factors to get a demon's attention, and add at least a drop of her blood to the mixture somehow. She then calls out in Dragon's Tongue, and the player rolls Manipulation + Occult.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: A demon responds, but it is much more powerful than the demon-speaker was expecting, and not in the least impressed by her linguistic acumen. If she's lucky, it simply leaves. If not, it might attack or possess her.

Failure: No demons respond to her attempt to bait them.

Success: A minor demon, probably a Deceptor or Immundus, but possibly a Larval if she used an anchor in her attempt at summoning, appears. The demon-speaker can attempt to open negotiations, but the demon is too weak to form a pact.

Exceptional Success: The demon is more powerful, but still well-disposed toward the demon-speaker. The demon-speaker can open negotiations, and the demon can form a pact with her.

Suggested Modifiers: The demon-speaker's Vice is appropriate to the factors she uses to attract the demon (+3; Storyteller's discretion), the demon-speaker has regained Willpower from her Vice during the scene (+2), the demon-speaker has spoken with demons before (+1, non-cumulative), the demon-speaker has made a minor pact in the past (+1, non-cumulative), the demon-speaker is currently involved in a pact (+2), the demon-speaker has regained Willpower from her Virtue in the past day (-2).

Whisperers

A final method of summoning demons involves listening to the blandishments of Whisperers (p. 54). These minor demons are incapable of physically interacting with the human world, but can implant ideas and knowledge into the minds of human beings. Over time, a Whisperer can give a person all the information he needs to summon a demon.



Some Whisperers instruct human occultists in how to arrange circumstances that empower the Whisperer. This might allow it to grow in status and Rank, eventually enabling the Whisperer to be summoned into the human world and worshipped.

More often, though, the Whisperer is under the command of a more powerful demon, one that has a strictly defined summoning ritual. The demon, now so far removed from the pure form of its Vice that it cannot speak to humans without permission, instructs the Whisperer to nudge a likely candidate toward the ritual, to fan the flames of the target's Vice and plant the notion that a demon could help him reach his goals. Of course, many humans discount these notions, because whatever the particulars of their religion, they don't truly *believe* in demons. But Whisperers have ways around that, too. They might arrange for the person to bear witness to a vampire feeding or a werewolf changing shape, or some other comparatively minor demonstration of the supernatural. And with that exposed, the target knows the truth—there's power out there for the taking.

Learning from a Whisperer removes much of the guesswork from finding a ritual, but it also runs the risk of driving the occultist mad. Every time the occultist dreams or regains Willpower from his Vice, the Storyteller should roll the Whisperer's Power + Finesse. Any successes are added to the occultist's total to research, translate or uncover a demon's summoning ritual. Once the occultist has the ritual, the Whisperer can do nothing to help him perform it, but the Whisperer's influence does cut down on the chances that invocation or negotiation phase will fail. The player applies a +2 modifier to both these rolls.

Pacts with the Infernal

An occultist might enter into a pact with a demon for any of the reasons he might summon one. Some want power, some want a single favor. Most of the time the motive can be traced back to Vice, and so motive often informs the kind of demon being summoned. An occultist who wants the power to rend his enemies into flesh chunks is unlikely to summon a demon known for Sloth, after all.

As mentioned above, it is also possible to summon a demon for altruistic purposes—curing an incurable disease, for instance, or regrowing a lost limb. While it could be said that trying to change one's fate in this manner is hubristic, and therefore a mark of Pride,

that's a rather fatalistic attitude. A demon *can* be summoned for virtuous reasons, but it does mean that when the pact bargain happens, the demon needs a little more enticement to perform what the summoner has in mind. As mentioned, though, such summoners generally don't have much room to bargain anyway.

From the perspective of game systems, pacts have three components. The *Benefit* is the favor(s) the mortal gains from the demon. The *Sacrifice* is the price he pays for those favors. Finally, the *Duration* is the length of time the pact lasts. Each of these components is discussed in detail below.

The Benefit

Benefits are divided into two loose categories, *traits* and *services*. A demon can theoretically increase any trait on a character's sheet, though some demons are better than others. Demons can also grant supernatural powers. Services, on the other hand, allow the Indebted to keep his own body and mind clear of demonic taint... depending upon the Sacrifice he must make.

A demon grants Benefits in proportion to the Sacrifice made. The demon doesn't have any way to grant a larger Benefit than it receives in Sacrifice; it uses the energy of the Sacrifice to power the Benefit. Of course, a demon *can* grant a weak Benefit in exchange for a hefty Sacrifice. In fact, that's usually the demon's goal.

Benefits and their game systems are described below.

Increased Traits

The simplest kind of Benefit to understand from a game mechanics perspective is that of increased traits. A demon can raise any trait on the character's sheet, which also includes granting traits like Merits. Some traits, however, are more complex than others. A trait's "cost," where comparing it to a Sacrifice is concerned, lies not in the type of trait or the number of dots, but rather in how much the demon has to alter the world to make the trait work.

Put another way, it's a simple matter for a demon of Greed to make an Indebted into a shrewd bargainer. All he has to do is make the man smarter, sharper and more ruthless. This is reflected in game traits by raising Wits, Manipulation, Subterfuge or possibly Academics. But if the Indebted man just wants to be made *rich*, then the demon has to grant the Resources Merit... and that's harder, because that money has to come from somewhere. Where before the demon was



changing only one person, now it has to set in motion a chain of events that leads to one man coming into money.

For purposes of Benefits, traits are broken up into three categories: internal, mixed and external.

Internal Traits: All Attributes, all Physical Skills and Specialties, all Social Skills and Specialties *except* Streetwise, all Mental Merits *except* Encyclopedic Knowledge, all Physical Merits, Striking Looks. Increasing these traits requires a Minor Sacrifice, one per trait.

Mixed Traits: All Mental Skills and Specialties, and the Encyclopedic Knowledge Merit. Increasing these traits requires a Major Sacrifice, one per trait.

External Traits: All Social Merits *except* Striking Looks. Increasing these traits requires a Deadly Sacrifice, one per trait.

These divisions cover only the traits in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. If the Storyteller allows Merits from other sourcebooks, she will have to make the judgment call as to which category they belong. Note that the question isn't whether or not the trait could develop in a vacuum. A character couldn't learn a Fighting Style without some instruction and thus interaction with other people. The question is whether or not the outside world *must* be involved in order to make the trait increase work. Mental Skills, since they rely upon specific, factual knowledge of

the outside world, require a little more effort on the demon's part than Physical Skills, but not so much as Social Merits. For these traits the demon has to change events beyond the scope of the pact, and that requires a powerful Sacrifice.

For purposes of a pact, a trait increase involves raising that trait to any dot rating the character could obtain (which usually means a maximum of 5 dots). Ratings beyond this human maximum require a supernatural trait, discussed below. Each *trait* requires a Sacrifice, however, meaning that an Indebted who wanted Strength 5, Brawl 5 and Fame 2 would have to provide two Minor Sacrifices and one Deadly Sacrifice.

Supernatural Traits

Demons can grant Indebted individuals the power to wield Infernal magic. They are, however, limited to traits that resonate with their controlling Vice. Any demon can grant a human being powers that are mechanically identical to its Numina, provided the power is something for which a human being could find a use. For instance, a demon of Wrath grants a person the power to hurl blackened, stinking fire at his foes (the Blast Numen), but cannot bestow the Materialize Numen, since the Indebted already has a body. The Numina can provide an easy roadmap to the kinds of powers demons can grant.



Superlative Traits

Of course, if increasing a trait by a dot and increasing it to 5 dots costs the same, why would you ever take less than the maximum?

Answer: You wouldn't. The process of selling out to a demon is *meant* to be one fraught with extremes. The character becomes as strong, intelligent, beautiful or clever as he ever could be, without trying. But he doesn't earn it for himself; he trades away his soul (figuratively speaking) for this strength, and sooner or later that will come back to bite him.

And from the standpoint of "game balance," a character hampered by Sacrifices who has a few extra dice on a roll isn't invincible by any means. He's just got more moral (and temporal) baggage to deal with.

The Storyteller just needs to use some common sense in deciding which are applicable.

Beyond Numina, though, the demon can grant other powers as well. Below are 21 possible powers demons can grant. Three are provided per Vice, one requiring a Minor Sacrifice, one requiring a Major Sacrifice, and one requiring a Deadly Sacrifice.

- **Better than You (Envy):** The Indebted can't stand to lose. It's part of his self-identity that no one is better than he is at *anything*. This Benefit facilitates that unrealistic goal. The Indebted adds his Intelligence rating to his Initiative modifier. In addition, he receives a +2 modifier to any contested rolls. Finally, if a contested roll ties, he is treated as the winner, no matter what the roll in question usually stipulates. This Benefit requires a Minor Sacrifice.

- **I Knew That (Envy):** The Indebted cannot stand to utter the words, "I didn't know that." But with this Benefit, he never has to. With a touch, the character can absorb dots in Mental Skills from a target. This requires a contested roll of the Indebted's Manipulation + Subterfuge and the target's Resolve + Composure. If the Indebted wins, he absorbs a number of dots in Mental Skills equal to the successes rolled. The target can purchase these dots with experience points at half the normal cost, rounding down, but they are otherwise lost. The Indebted can also choose to absorb specific facts from the target—memories,

passwords and other information not governed by a Skill. This information must be relearned normally. This Benefit requires a Major Sacrifice.

- **All You Feel and See (Envy):** The Indebted steals all incoming sensory input from a target. The target becomes blind, deaf and unable to smell, taste or feel his surroundings. This renders the target unable to maneuver properly (as he can't feel his feet), and lost in a world of silence and pitch blackness. The Indebted can keep this person in this sensory deprivation prison as long as she wishes. During this time, she can use the victim's senses, seeing from his eyes or hearing what he hears, but since he's likely to be thrashing on the ground, this isn't altogether useful. Many Indebted use this power for murder and mayhem, stealing sensory input away when the victim is behind the wheel of a car or climbing a high ladder. This Benefit's effects last as long as the Indebted concentrates. The Indebted can affect any one victim she can see, even if she sees the victim through an electronic medium. (She must see the victim in real time, however, not a recording.) The Indebted's player rolls Wits + Manipulation in a contested roll against the victim's Resolve + Composure. If the Indebted wins, she can steal any or all of the victim's senses for as long as she wishes. She does not have to maintain visual contact after the power has been activated, but does have to concentrate (-1 to all other actions). This power requires a Deadly Sacrifice.

- **The World is a Banquet (Gluttony):** The Indebted can eat any organic material with no ill effects. This renders him immune to poisons, toxins, rotted food and any other baleful effects of his diet. The character *can* enjoy the effects of recreational drugs, but requires double the usual dose for them to have any effect at all. This can allow the glutton to experiment with substances whose doses would normally be lethal, provided he's careful. This Benefit requires a Minor Sacrifice.

- **Hunger Pangs (Gluttony):** The Indebted who accepts a pact from a demon of Gluttony never feels sated. Hunger is simply his default state from then on out. With this Benefit, the Indebted can transfer those feelings of hunger to a victim, and then multiply them many times over. The Indebted's player rolls Strength + Resolve - the victim's Stamina. If this roll succeeds, the target doubles over in pain (-3 to all actions for the rest of scene; if the character has the Iron Stamina Merit, this penalty is mitigated just as if it were wound penalties). This penalty is cumulative with any wound penalties suffered. The target also suffers 1 point of bashing damage per success on the Indebted character's

roll. Hunger Pangs can be used on anyone within line of sight of the Indebted. If the character wishes to use it on multiple targets, the player subtracts the highest Stamina +1 from the activation roll. This Benefit requires a Major Sacrifice.

- **Feast in Famine (Gluttony):** This horrific power allows the Indebted to kill his foes by starvation or dehydration simply by eating and drinking. As the Indebted eats a meal or imbibes a beverage, the target(s) waste away, dying emaciated or desiccated. The Indebted must first mark his victims. This requires that the Indebted touch the victims, and the player spends a Willpower point. (The Indebted can mark only as many people at one time as his Willpower rating.) After this, every time the Indebted eats or drinks, his player rolls Strength + Resolve – the highest Stamina among the currently marked victims. All marked victims suffer the resulting number of successes in bashing damage. In order to cause this damage, the glutton needs to eat one portion of food (approximately four ounces) or drink eight ounces of liquid. As such, the Indebted can chug a two-liter bottle of soda and stand a good chance of killing his victims, especially since range is not a factor once the victim has been marked. This Benefit requires a Deadly Sacrifice.

- **Possession Is Ownership (Greed):** If the Indebted can steal an object from a target without that target's knowledge, the target may forget he ever owned it. The Indebted steals the item as usual (and the player might need to roll for Stealth or Larceny as appropriate). At that point, the target's player rolls Resolve + Composure – the Indebted character's Manipulation. If the roll succeeds, the victim retains full knowledge of the item, and will respond to its loss normally. If the roll fails, the character forgets he ever owned the object, and even if he sees the Indebted character with it does not recognize it. An "object" for purposes of this Benefit is any item the Indebted character can move, so while it's possible to affect a car with the Benefit (by driving it away), the character can't steal a house. He might steal the deed, true, but that simply means the target will forget owning a copy of the deed; he still recalls owning the house itself. This power requires a Minor Sacrifice.

- **All I See Is Mine (Greed):** The Indebted owns everything he sees, if not in a literal sense, then in a spiritual sense. As such, he forbids material objects from granting their bonuses to other people. The player spends a point of Willpower and rolls Manipulation + Intimidation. If the roll succeeds, any bonuses derived from equipment (as opposed to environmental circumstances) apply *penalties* instead. This applies to

the damage bonus to weapons. The Indebted cannot, however, affect magical items or fetishes with this Benefit. This power requires a Major Sacrifice.

- **Filthy Lucre (Greed):** The character can poison money, gems or any other valuable, enabling him to kill people with their own greed. The Indebted must touch the item in question while the player rolls Presence + Stamina. If the roll is successful, the item becomes coated with a poison with a Toxicity rating equal to the number of successes rolled. The next person who picks up the item *with the intent of keeping it* becomes ill. His hand turns black and his skin breaks out in hives spreading across his body. The victim's player rolls Stamina + Resolve with a penalty equal to the poison's Toxicity rating. If this roll fails, the character immediately suffers the Toxicity rating in lethal damage. The Indebted can use this Benefit only on items with monetary worth but no other practical utility. That is, he couldn't use it on a cell phone, no matter how expensive, because a cell phone is useful regardless of its cost. But he could use it on a piece of jewelry, a wad of cash or even (at the Storyteller's discretion) a piece of artwork. This power requires a Deadly Sacrifice.

- **Voice of the Incubus (Lust):** The character's voice becomes so smooth and seductive that it entices those who hear it to acts of carnal abandon they normally wouldn't consider. In game terms, this Benefit changes the system for Seduction (see p. 84 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) from a contested roll between the seducer and the target to a simple action in which the seducer's player rolls Presence or Manipulation + Persuasion – the target's Resolve. Striking Looks and other "equipment" modifiers still apply, but the target is made much less able to resist. The target won't be convinced to do anything other than agree to a sexual tryst with the seducer, however; no matter how sexy the voice, the seducer can't convince someone to rob a bank or jump off a bridge. This Benefit requires a Minor Sacrifice.

- **Abuser's Charm (Lust):** One of the things that confuse people about abusive relationships is that the victim often defends the abuser, and returns to him time and again hoping *this time will be different*. Abusers, of course, thrive upon this attitude, whether they actually mean to change or not. The Indebted with this Benefit takes this same misplaced hope and channels it into a spiritual prohibition on behavior—someone he has harmed in the past is helpless against him. In game terms, if the Indebted has harmed a target within the past month (this includes emotional, physical, psychological and spiritual harm, some of which might be



up to the Storyteller to quantify), the target receives no Defense against him in combat. Also, all resistance traits are considered two lower when applied against the Indebted. This Benefit requires a Major Sacrifice.

• **Passion's Whirlwind (Lust):** Dante likened the desires of the lustful to a cyclone, and the Indebted with this Benefit can indeed throw a target into the depths of dangerous abandon. The character touches the target and the player rolls Manipulation + Presence (contested by the victim's Resolve + Composure). If the Indebted's number of successes equals or exceeds the victim's, the target feels a sudden surge in energy. All her desires, whether lustful or otherwise, are heightened to a degree usually enjoyed only by habitual drug users. During this time she suffers a -5 penalty to do anything except feed her lusts, but her Physical Attributes are all considered to be 1 dot higher (with the resulting increase in Initiative, Health and Speed). This effect lasts for 12 hours, but at the end of that time the unfortunate victim receives the wages of sin—death. The victim's player immediately suffers a number of *aggravated* wounds equal to the number of successes the Indebted's player rolled to activate this power. This probably won't kill the character, though it will certainly cripple her. But if the victim has indulged in activities that left her slightly injured, the resultant damage might well finish her off. This damage manifests as a heart attack or stroke. This Benefit requires a Deadly Sacrifice.

• **Air of Belonging (Pride):** Some people can get access to sensitive areas not because they have credentials, but because they look as if they should be there and they are too intimidating to stop. The Indebted projects this air, allowing him to walk past police barricades and into VIP lounges with nothing but a sneer and posture that asks, "You're going to stop me?" The player rolls Presence + Intimidation, with a negative modifier commensurate with the situation. Getting into a bar with a long line might impose only a -1 penalty, or none at all. Crossing a high-profile crime scene would be a -3. Getting access to a head of state might impose a -5. If the roll fails, the character is denied access and immediately loses a point of Willpower. This Benefit requires a Minor Sacrifice.

• **Larger than Life (Pride):** The Indebted character becomes so imposing that enemies cannot bring themselves to attack. The character does not physically change, but shadows loom heavy around him and the armies of Hell seem to be at his beck and call. Opponents wishing to attack him must succeed on a Resolve + Composure roll, with a negative modifier equal to the Indebted's Presence. The Indebted can spend a point

of Willpower to double this penalty for a turn. (This is relevant in case other opponents arrive later; they still must overcome their fear to attack the Indebted, but at the normal penalty.) Opponents who are immune to supernaturally inflicted fear are immune to this power. Characters in frenzy or Death Rage are *not* immune, but this Benefit immediately converts the frenzy into blind fear, causing the character to flee the area. This power requires a Major Sacrifice.

• **Lord of Demons (Pride):** The Indebted gains some power over minor demons. He is able to summon one up at will and force it to do his bidding. This requires the expenditure of 1 Willpower point and a roll of Presence + Occult, with a penalty equal to the demon's Rank. An Indebted *cannot* summon a demon whose rank is higher than his Occult rating. If the roll is successful, the demon appears for one scene, and does whatever the Indebted requires of it. Note, though, that this power does not compel loyalty beyond the duration of the Benefit, and so a character who mistreats his servants might discover they aren't immediately banished back to Hell when their time as his slaves ends.

The Indebted can summon a demon of a given Vice, but makes no other specification beyond that. An Indebted might call up a demon of Wrath for assistance in a fight, for instance, or a demon of Envy when trying to discover an opponent's weakness. This power requires a Deadly Sacrifice.

• **Eating Is Effort (Sloth):** The Indebted no longer needs to eat, drink or excrete. These basic responsibilities of life are just too much effort. The character does not, however, lose the need for sleep. Rather, such an Indebted probably spends most of his time asleep just because he is too lazy to stand up. This isn't always the case, though. A Slothful character might simply wish to avoid any kind of activity he doesn't find fun, rather than any activity at all (but he needs sleep either way). This Benefit requires a Minor Sacrifice.

• **Theft of Motivation (Sloth):** While a Proud Indebted intimidates his foes into backing away from a fight, a Slothful character makes them just too apathetic to bother. The player rolls Composure + Persuasion. Anyone in the immediate area (within a 50-foot radius) contests this roll with Strength + Intelligence. If the target wins, she may act normally. If the Indebted wins, any deliberate action (that is, any action the character intends to take; reflexive resistance and Perception rolls are immune) suffers a -5 penalty. The characters just can't muster the motivation to do anything. The Benefit's effects persist for one scene. This Benefit requires a Major Sacrifice.

• **Broken Heart (Sloth):** In Medieval times, “sloth” was often equated to despair or sadness—a failure to exult in the Lord’s glory. This Benefit allows the Indebted to hearken back to that interpretation, crippling a target with depression. The character needs only to look at the target to begin the process. The Indebted’s player then makes an extended and contested roll (Indebted’s Intelligence + Manipulation versus the target’s Resolve + Composure). Each roll represents one scene, during which the Indebted stares at the victim continuously. (He can follow the victim, if he’s so inclined, to keep him in view.) Constant surveillance isn’t necessary, but if the scene ends with the victim out of the Indebted’s sight, the Benefit’s effects end. The victim’s target is the Indebted’s Willpower rating, while the Indebted’s target number is 5 successes. If the victim reaches her target before the Indebted reaches his, the effects of the Benefit are cancelled. If the Indebted wins, the victim gains the depression derangement (p. 97 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). This derangement lasts for one week. If the Indebted uses this power on the target during that week (or on a target who has the depression derangement already), the derangement is “upgraded” to the severe version, melancholia. This resets the clock, so to speak—with no further intrusion, the melancholia lasts a week. If the target gains a derangement normally during this week (by failing a Morality roll after degeneration), the depression or melancholia becomes permanent.

Should the Indebted use this Benefit on a target who already has melancholia, either through use of this power or naturally, the target becomes suicidal. If not physically stopped, she attempts to kill herself within the next 24 hours. This power requires a Deadly Sacrifice.

• **Leap of Rage (Wrath):** With a snarl of anger, the character jumps forward and clears far more distance than he could normally. The character triples all jump distances (see p. 67 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). So, for a vertical jump, the character clears three feet per success on the Strength + Athletics roll. If the character is leaping at a target he intends to attack, however, the normal distances are multiplied by *five*. As such, a character wishing to leap up to an uncooperative ex’s balcony (20 feet in the air) and smack her around would require that the player roll 4 successes on the Athletics roll. This Benefit requires a Minor Sacrifice to obtain.

• **Blind Fury (Wrath):** The character enters a berserk rage, during which he feels no pain and strikes with terrifying force. The character can enter the rage with the expenditure of a Willpower point, or can

enter automatically following any action that would result in the character gaining a Willpower point for the Wrath Vice. If the character takes this latter option, he does not regain a Willpower point for Wrath, but if the character’s Willpower pool is currently full, he can still enter the rage this way without *losing* a point. While in Blind Fury the character suffers no wound penalties. If the character’s Health track is full of bashing damage, the player does not need to roll Stamina for the character to remain conscious—his own rage sustains him. If the character’s last Health box is marked with lethal damage, however, he still becomes incapacitated (see p. 173 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). Also, the character automatically makes All-Out Attacks (p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**), but receives a +4 to his attack roll. (He still loses his Defense, however.) Finally, the character’s unarmed damage is considered lethal while Blind Fury is in effect. Blind Fury lasts until the character has no remaining targets, and then abates. For the next hour, however, the player must roll Resolve + Composure whenever the character is so much as inconvenienced. If this roll fails, the Fury takes hold again. This Benefit requires a Major Sacrifice.

• **Shielded by the Blood (Wrath):** The demon grants the character immunity to physical damage so long as his flesh is stained with the blood of his foe. As long as the Indebted’s skin is smeared with blood from an enemy, any direct attack made on the Indebted inflicts no damage. Weapons and bullets bounce harmlessly off his skin, and fists connect with what feels like rock. For purposes of this Benefit, the blood touching the character’s skin must be from someone still living (or still extant, at any rate—an undead creature such as a vampire can be the Indebted’s foe) and must be no more than one hour out of the foe’s body. As such, the Indebted normally “activates” this Benefit by drawing blood on a battlefield—a simple punch in the nose is usually sufficient. The Indebted must be careful, however. Immersion in water, or even a sudden rainstorm, can render him vulnerable once again. Also, this Benefit provides no protection from accidental damage. A character trapped in a burning building would still burn, no matter how much blood was on him (unless someone deliberately set the fire to kill him). This power requires a Deadly Sacrifice.

Services

Some people make pacts with demons not for power or money, but for favors the demon can perform. These services are much less taxing for the demon than reshaping a person’s body, and so demons are usually pleased





to make such bargains (except for demons of Sloth, of course, who would prefer to get the Sacrifice without providing any Benefit at all). A demon can take any action within its power for a Minor Sacrifice (payment up front, obviously). If the Indebted wants the demon to do something it couldn't normally do, the price goes up to a Major Sacrifice. If the service is meant to extend beyond a single favor, the Sacrifice category either goes up one step, or an additional Sacrifice is necessary.

For example, an occultist calls up a demon of Lust and wants its help in seducing the object of his affection. The demon is capable of influencing the girl's moods, so nudging her toward being inclined to sleep with the bastard is well within the demon's power. This would therefore require a Minor Sacrifice. If the occultist wants the demon to handle the seduction and the consummation, the demon would have to be able to Materialize. Since this particular demon doesn't have this Numen, a Major Sacrifice is necessary. If the occultist wants the demon to not only seduce the girl, but later publicly embarrass her, he would owe the demon either two Major Sacrifices or one Deadly Sacrifice. But, if the occultist wants the demon to serve him for a set period of time, remaining insubstantial but acting as a kind of magical aphrodisiac to any woman upon whom he sets his sights, he could grant

the demon either two Minor Sacrifices or a Major Sacrifice. In this case, he's not asking the demon for anything it couldn't normally do; he's just extending the length of service.

Artifacts

Demons can sometimes grant Indebted individuals the use of magic items rather than altering the person directly. These "Hell-touched" Artifacts are discussed in detail at the end of this chapter. Each Artifact description lists the Sacrifice(s) required to use it or keep it.

Other Benefits

Storytellers familiar with other World of Darkness products might wish to translate spells, Gifts, Numina, Disciplines and so on into Benefits. This is perfectly acceptable. The source of a Gift-as-Benefit isn't the same (it's granted by a demon, not taught by a spirit) but the system might well work. Likewise, books such as **Skinchangers** and **Predators** have lists of supernatural Aspects for different sorts of characters, and these can be adopted as Benefits as well.

Just keep in mind that demons grant Benefits in order to further their Vice in the human world. Within that one parameter they can grant nearly any power one can imagine—provided the Sacrifice is good enough.

The Sacrifice

Demons want greater influence over the world of mortals. As mentioned in Chapter One, they can't thrive in Hell. They need access to human beings, so they can expand their influence. As such, Sacrifices are acts Indebted individuals take that strengthen the Vice of the demon in question. Some Sacrifices require giving up traits on the character sheet. Others place prohibitions on actions, or even thoughts. And, of course, it's possible to sacrifice other people to demons. The demons actually prefer this, because in addition to whatever the original Sacrifice was, they get to sup upon the resentment, fear and hatred of the victim.

As mentioned, Sacrifices have three degrees of severity. *Minor* Sacrifices limit potential, rather than stripping away actual traits. A *Minor* Sacrifice might require granting a demon access to the Indebted's body for a short time, but allow the Indebted to place restrictions upon what the demon can and cannot do with it. A *Minor* Sacrifice inflicted upon someone else can cause injury, but not disfigurement, crippling or death.

A *Major* Sacrifice can strip away traits the character already possesses. A *Major* Sacrifice might involve allowing the demon to possess the Indebted for an unlimited amount of time, or with no restriction upon what the demon can do while in possession of the body. A *Major* Sacrifice taken from a victim might involve amputation of a limb, violation of body or mind, or other permanent effects.

In order to perform a *Deadly* Sacrifice, someone has to be given over to the demon, body and soul. This sometimes requires consent, but the consent doesn't have to be informed, and the definition of "consent" is highly flexible. For instance: A girl catches her boyfriend cheating. He begs her forgiveness, promising her anything she wants if she'll take him back. She says "I want your soul." The man agrees, figuring he got off lightly. (What does it mean to "give away" your soul, anyway?) Later, though, when he discovers his occultist girlfriend has used his soul as currency in her demonic pact, he realizes what a mistake he's made. Maybe next time he'll think before he cheats, or before he makes a promise.

Minor and Major Sacrifices require a roll to avoid degeneration (2 dice), and, if this fails, the subsequent roll to avoid gaining a derangement. *Deadly* Sacrifices *always* result in degeneration (the loss of 1 dot of Morality), though the Indebted's player still rolls to avoid gaining a derangement.

The Storyteller and the players have a wide variety of latitude when it comes to Sacrifices and their game

effects. Below are 21 examples, three for each Vice, one for each severity of Sacrifice.

- **Competitive Streak (Envy, Minor):** The demon requires that the Indebted *wins*. The Indebted character must always spend Willpower on contested actions. If the Indebted has no Willpower to spend, she suffers a -1 modifier to such actions. She can choose to take a -3 modifier to a contested action rather than spending Willpower. If she can find a way to change the outcome of the contest in her favor, she regains any Willpower spent on it.

- **Death of Senses (Envy, Major):** The Indebted removes an eye or ear from another victim. In order to fulfill the terms of this Sacrifice, the organ must be made useless. That is, cutting off an ear isn't enough. The Indebted must destroy the hearing apparatus on one side. The demon might be specific as to how this Sacrifice is carried out, or it might not care, as long as the victim can no longer enjoy the benefits. The Indebted doesn't have to blind or deafen the victim completely; putting out one eye or ear is good enough.

- **Then No One Can (Envy, Deadly):** The Indebted kills a person in full view of the victim's lover. He dedicates the kill to the demon, and in the process draws upon the suffering of the surviving lover (who must survive in order to give his act true power) to fuel the Sacrifice. Of course, this leaves the Indebted with a mortal foe, but demons of Envy thrive upon this kind of enmity.

- **No Moderation (Gluttony, Minor):** Once the character has begun doing something pleasurable, she must spend a Willpower point to stop. This applies to food, drink, sex, drugs, music or any other activity she finds enjoyable. If she cannot spend the Willpower point, she *cannot* stop the activity, and must be physically restrained. Otherwise, she will continue to indulge until she is no longer able (drinking until she passes out, dancing until she collapses from exhaustion, etc.).

- **Pound of Flesh (Gluttony, Major):** The demon demands sustenance, and it wants that sustenance provided in the form of raw meat. The Indebted must provide at least one pound of flesh (no bone, no sinew) from a human source. This doesn't have to kill the victim, of course, but unless the Indebted takes the time to cut carefully and provide medical assistance, the victim will probably bleed to death. The Indebted can provide the flesh from his own body, of course.

- **The Path of Excess (Gluttony, Deadly):** The Indebted must kill a person by providing that person with a deadly amount of her chosen indulgence. This is obviously easier for, say, a heroin addict than a caffeine addict, but demons also don't usually attach



time limits, so it's possible to kill someone with food, nicotine or even exercise over time.

• **Punish the Rich Man (Greed, Minor):** The Indebted chooses a victim with more money or possessions than he needs, robs him blind, and leaves him in an unfamiliar area with nothing but the clothes on his back. Some Indebted carjack people driving expensive gas-guzzlers, others break into houses and kidnap the occupants. What happens to the victim after the robbery takes place isn't the Indebted person's problem, but if the Sacrifice is performed to the demon's liking, the victim is left far from home, and far from the comfort to which he is accustomed.

• **High Cost of Living (Greed, Major):** The character needs to pay a certain amount of wealth to the demon. The character can pay with a dot of Resources, but can also pay by giving up friends (Allies), information (Contacts), employees (Retainers) and even social standing (Status, Fame, or even Merits such as Barfly). Some turn of events always happens to deny the character these Merits after he agrees to the Sacrifice. Maybe his contact at the local police department is killed in the line of duty, thus stripping his Contacts (Police) Merit. He might find himself blacklisted from the bars in the area (and therefore his Barfly Merit disappears). These benefits cannot be regained—the character is prohibited from buying back these traits as long as the pact is in effect.

• **Laden by Riches (Greed, Deadly):** The victim must choose material possessions over his own life. A man who refuses to leave his burning home without rescuing prized books, a woman who won't give up her diamond ring to an armed attacker—these people are acting out of Greed. The Indebted can set up such situations, but if the victim gives up the possession to avoid death, the Sacrifice is invalid.

• **Too Eager (Lust, Minor):** The character looks just a little *too* enthusiastic when dealing with others, and it crosses the line from "excited" to "creepy." The player cannot spend Willpower on Social rolls for the character, except for rolls involving Intimidation. Even uses of Expression to convey thoughts through poetry or song are tainted, as are online or mailed correspondences. The character's word choice just seems *off* somehow.

• **The Beast Awakened (Lust, Major):** The demon has permission to possess the Indebted during sex. In addition to the frustration of never being able to enjoy sexual relations (since the Indebted doesn't remember the demon's actions), the demon always victimizes his "conquests." This doesn't necessarily mean rape, but the demon works to degrade and denigrate

the people the Indebted beds, and if it gets violent, the Indebted could wind up arrested.

• **Helpless (Lust, Deadly):** The Indebted must kill a helpless victim. While a bound and gagged target is a valid choice, some Indebted have used the elderly, invalids or children for this kind of Sacrifice.

• **Empathetic Deficit (Pride, Minor):** The character becomes incapable of seeing other people's positions, especially in regard to emotions. Apply a -5 modifier to all uses of the Empathy Skill, and a -3 to uses of Subterfuge, Socialize and Persuasion. The character simply cannot help putting every situation in terms of how it will affect her.

• **To Spite Your Face (Pride, Major):** The Indebted physically disfigures the victim, burning, slicing or breaking his face until he is hideous and unrecognizable. Thereafter, the victim suffers a -2 on all Social rolls where appearance is a factor (though he might gain a bonus on Intimidation rolls).

• **Free Will (Pride, Deadly):** The victim must agree to his fate. The Indebted is, of course, free to lie, threaten or cajole in order to obtain permission to kill the victim, but the victim must give consent for the knife to fall.

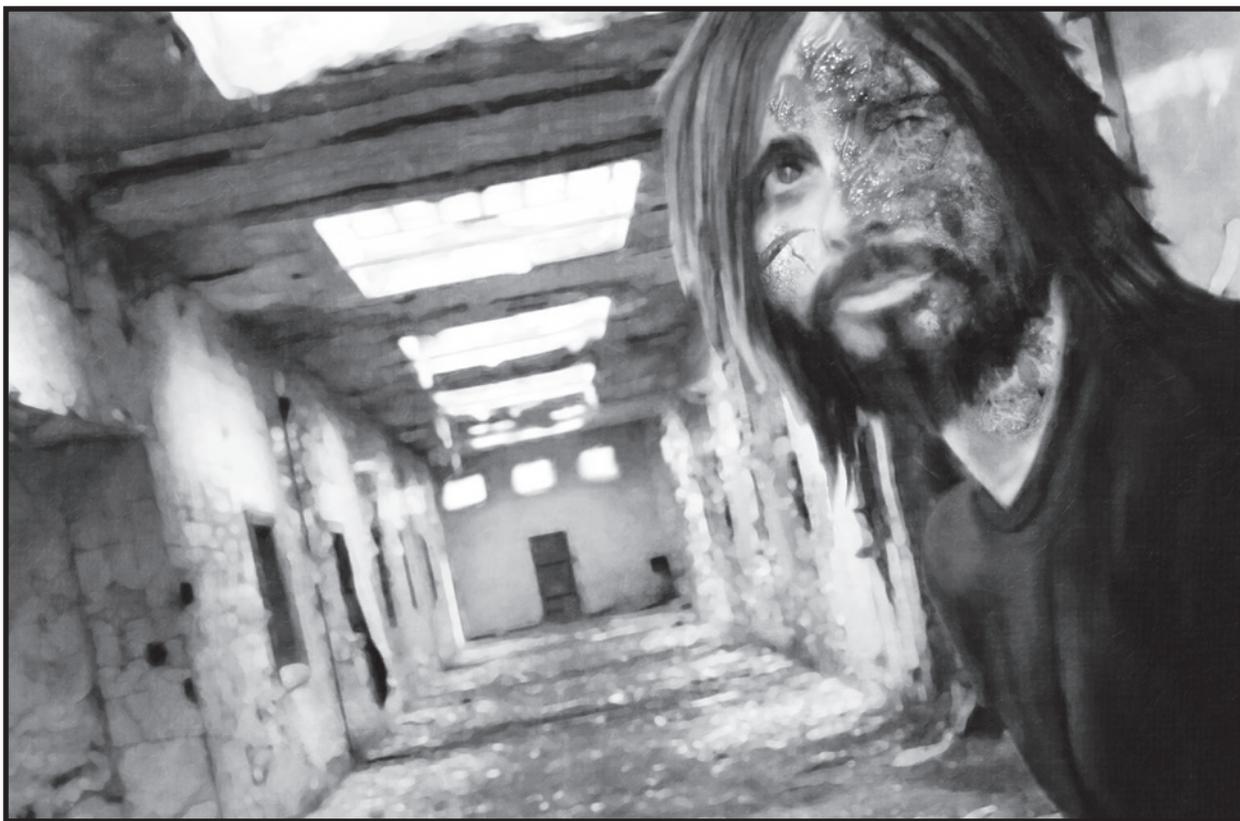
• **The Long Nap (Sloth, Minor):** The Indebted allows the demon to inhabit his body while he sleeps. He *must* sleep at least 8 hours per night, and during this time his body becomes completely comatose. He cannot wake up, and he regains no Willpower for sleeping.

• **Atrophy (Sloth, Major):** The Indebted loses a dot of Stamina, Strength or Dexterity. He must also cope with the effects this loss has on his derived traits; losing Dexterity might lower Defense, while losing Stamina lowers Health.

• **No Will to Live (Sloth, Deadly):** The Indebted dedicates a death to the demon in which the deceased could have saved himself but didn't put forth the effort. This Sacrifice is hard to come by, but it happens when a victim assumes someone will come to save her, that she is not in real danger, or that God will provide. It usually requires being in the right place at the right time, but that is appropriate for someone Indebted to a demon of Sloth, anyway.

• **Always Angry (Wrath, Minor):** The Indebted suffers a -1 on all rolls involving Composure. The demon keeps the Indebted in a constant state of anger, and this simmering fury makes it hard for the Indebted to concentrate or focus.

• **Random Violence (Wrath, Major):** The Indebted must attack a person unknown to him, and over the course of the next scene inflict more damage



to that person than he suffers. This usually results in a brawl to a knockout, but if the victim runs or surrenders before the Indebted, the Sacrifice is valid. Choice of targets is therefore important.

• **If I Die, You Are Forgiven (Wrath, Deadly):** The Indebted must kill an able-bodied person in a fight and dedicated the kill to the demon. For purposes of this Sacrifice, “able-bodied” means “of the same age, physical condition and general skill as the Indebted.” That is, an Indebted adult can’t kill a healthy child and expect the Sacrifice to be accepted.

Minor Pacts

Most pacts are permanent, but it’s possible to provide a lesser Sacrifice in exchange for a power that fades quickly. Normally, such pacts last from sundown to sunup, but depending upon the bargaining skill of the Indebted, they might last as long as a week.

The character performs a Sacrifice that is one step lower than listed for the Benefit. If the Benefit would normally require a Minor Sacrifice, the character can instead pay by losing a Willpower point and suffering a point of aggravated damage (which does not begin to heal until after the pact is ended).

Once a character has made and discharged a minor pact, though, the player must roll Resolve + Composure with a penalty equal to the number of

minor pacts to which the character has agreed in the past. If this roll fails, the character becomes addicted to the feeling of the pact, and before a month goes by he must begin working on another one. He can involve a different demon, which usually means starting the summoning process all over again, but often this is part of the thrill for the Indebted.

Supernatural Pacts

Supernatural creatures often believe they can approach demons on equal footing, as compared to mortals, who contact demons from a weak and ignorant standpoint. Likewise, many such beings believe they have nothing to fear from demons. A mage works Supernal miracles by means of his soul’s connection to the higher Realms—what need has he to fear Hell? His soul is already spoken for. A woman stolen away by the Fae, her soul ripped from her body and left hanging on the Thorns—can she even enter into a demonic pact? A vampire is dead, so what could he offer a demon?

These arguments are flawed, however, because they are based upon the premise that a demon wants human souls. Most demons lack the capacity to remove a soul, much less do anything with it. A demon wishes to expand its influence in the human world, for reasons discussed in Chapter One. As such, when a demon talks about owning a person “body and soul,”

what it really wants is to have that person *act on its behalf* in order to spread its influence. A supernatural being can do that perfectly well, perhaps even a little more effectively than a normal human.

Supernatural beings can summon demons as described earlier in this chapter. Some such beings have abilities that might allow demon summoning without the uses of lures and invocations, especially powers that can be used to summon “normal” ghosts and spirits. Such powers *can* work on demons, but any attempt to do so applies a –5 to the relevant dice pool. Alternately, the Storyteller might consider a dramatic failure on a standard use of such a power to summon a demon instead.

When it comes to entering into pacts with demons, the rules as written still apply to supernatural characters, with the following exceptions and additions:

All Supernatural Beings

A demon can grant an increase in the character’s “power trait” (Blood Potency/Primal Urge/Gnosis/Azoth/Wyrd), but doing so requires a Major Sacrifice for each dot by which the character wishes to increase it.

Supernatural beings have access to a resource to which mortals do not. This energy takes different forms—vampires drain Vitae from their victims while werewolves use spiritual Essence to power their Gifts. Whatever the specific form the energy takes, the Indebted character can “reserve” points of it as a Sacrifice. This reduces the maximum pool of points the character can hold for as long as the pact is in effect. One point constitutes a Minor Sacrifice, 3 constitute a Major Sacrifice, and 7 constitute a Deadly Sacrifice. The character must keep his pool of this trait at least as full as the Sacrifice demands. If his pool falls below this level, he has one hour to refill it or he starts suffering 1 point of aggravated damage per missing point each *minute* until he dies or he obtains the necessary power. Once he has, the aggravated damage heals more quickly than usual (1 point per minute).

Example: A vampire character enters a demonic pact, performing three Major Sacrifices. She chooses to Sacrifice 9 points of her Vitae pool (out of a maximum of 12; she has Blood Potency 4) to meet the demon’s demands. That means she cannot let her Vitae pool drop below 9 points. If she does, she has one hour to feed or else she starts dying as the demon takes her flesh to feed the pact. Fortunately, blood is not normally in short supply...

Vampires

Entering into a demonic pact automatically strips a dot of Humanity from the vampire. In addition, demons *can* grant vampires dots in Disciplines, Theban Sorcery and Crúac rituals, and Coils of the Dragon. These are considered *mixed* traits (p. 85).

Vampires sacrificing points of Vitae to fuel the pact constantly feel hungry no matter how much blood they ingest. All rolls to resist hungry frenzy suffer a –1 penalty.

Werewolves

Entering into a demonic pact requires a degeneration roll to avoid losing Harmony (roll 2 dice). Demons *cannot* grant a werewolf Gifts or Renown, but can grant rites and dots in Rituals. Doing so requires a Major Sacrifice. (Rites and Rituals are both considered *mixed* traits.)

If a werewolf sacrifices part of its Essence pool to power a pact, the character feels restless, nervous and constantly watched. Spirits, too, can sense the werewolf is no longer his own master, and this makes them even more nervous than they would be otherwise. A werewolf that makes such a bargain suffers a –1 penalty on all Social rolls to deal with spirits.

Mages

Entering into a demonic pact requires a degeneration roll to avoid losing Wisdom (roll 2 dice). Demons *cannot* grant a mage dots in Arcana, but can grant knowledge of rites. A demon cannot call down Artifacts from the Supernal Realms, but can arrange for a mage to come into possession of an existing Artifact. Rites are *mixed* traits, while Artifacts are *external* traits. The Dream Merit is an *internal* trait. Demons cannot grant the Destiny Merit.

A mage who reserves part of her Mana pool to power a pact has a constant feeling of unease, as though her Unseen Senses are never quiet. The character suffers a –1 to the Wits + Composure roll to detect supernatural phenomena with Unseen Senses. (Using Mage Sight does not incur this penalty.)

Prometheans

Entering a demonic pact requires a degeneration roll to avoid losing Humanity (roll 3 dice). Demons can grant the Promethean new Transmutations (including Pandoran Transmutations); these are *mixed* traits. In addition, demons can reveal details of a Promethean’s milestones. Gaining these details requires

a Minor Sacrifice (*internal* traits) for each milestone, and when the Promethean actually fulfills the milestone, he feels strangely empty from the experience. (The character also receives half the Vitriol he usually would for fulfilling the milestone, as a result of trying to “cheat” on his Pilgrimage.)

A Promethean who gives up part of his Pyros pool to fuel the pact is at the mercy of his humours even more than usual. All rolls to resist Torment suffer a -1 modifier.

Changelings

Entering into a demonic pact requires a roll to avoid losing Clarity (roll 4 dice). Demons can arrange for changelings to gain dots in Contracts, including Goblin Contracts, but they are considered *external* traits. The same is true of Tokens and Hollows.

A changeling who sacrifices part of her Glamour pool to power a demonic pact is grounding herself in the mortal world to a dangerous degree. All rolls to open gateways into the Hedge or activate Tokens suffer a -1 penalty.

Hunters

Hunters are normal human beings, for the most part, and the rules as stated above apply to them for purposes of demonic pacts. Demons can grant Endowments, but they are considered *external* traits.

Storytelling Pacts

Applying a demonic pact to a character isn't as straightforward as applying a supernatural template. “Indebted” isn't simply a Merit a player can purchase with experience points. Obtaining demonic Benefits must happen alongside Sacrifice, and that means playing out the conversation between the demon and the Indebted is an important part of the process. As such, it's a good idea to take some time to consider how best to run this scene. This section presents some advice and some principles for the Storyteller to keep in mind when a player's character takes on a demonic pact, as well as some thoughts on portraying Indebted characters as supporting cast.

Full Disclosure

Characters can be tricked into accepting demonic pacts and, certainly, demons can lie. That said, the *player* should understand exactly what is involved in a demonic pact, even if the *character* does not. Make sure before any dice are rolled or experience points

spent that the player knows precisely what's going to happen if her character accepts the pact. That includes degeneration rolls for Sacrifices, loss of traits and baleful consequences of Benefits. If the character is a supernatural being, make sure the player considers the other players' characters and whether they'll want to associate with an Indebted character. (There might be some good drama when the secret comes out, but that drama could become combat very quickly, depending upon the bent of the characters.)

One of the powerful themes of **World of Darkness: Inferno** is that damnation is often self-damnation. Demons are connected with the Vices for a reason—demons can grant power, but it's usually a short-term gain and a long-term loss. If a character agrees to the pact, it's usually because he thinks he can play the system and come out clear. Faust tried that, as did Macbeth and many other tragic characters. It never works out, and the player needs to know that.

Not Every Demon Grants Every Power

Demons are not omnipotent, and they have their limits. When running the negotiation scene with a player, bear in mind that while the demon might represent itself as being more powerful than it actually is, it has a finite amount of power to grant. There is no hard and fast rule on what kinds of Benefits a demon of a given Rank can bestow, so you might want to plot out ahead of time which Benefits the demon in question has to offer. Stay flexible and listen to player arguments on the subject, but if you decide a particular demon just doesn't have the raw power to grant multiple Attributes at 5 and powers requiring Deadly Sacrifices, then that's just the way it is.

Remember, too, that demons work to expand their given Vices. A demon of Sloth might not grant Athletics because it just can't fathom working up a sweat. A demon of Pride might not be able to fathom why a character doesn't want Striking Looks—shouldn't everyone want to be beautiful? If the demon sees someone whose motives lie elsewhere than the Vice, it probably won't agree to the pact.

Demons are Bastards

Likewise, demons cheat. They lie, they swindle, they work hidden clauses into agreements and they follow the letter of the law with the express purpose of getting the most appetizing Sacrifice for the least amount of work at their end. The player should, of course, realize that (as mentioned above), but that doesn't mean you should shy away from this attitude.



I Changed my Mind!

So, consider this: A bookish occultist, the sort of fellow who's never been popular but *wants* to be, summons up a demon of Lust and asks to be a real ladies' man. He agrees to three Deadly Sacrifices: One to give him Fame 3, one to give him Resources 5, and one to give him Status in a local university (tenure, honorary doctorate, seat on the board of trustees, and so on). In order to fulfill these Sacrifices, he needs to spread a rumor that will end up killing three people. He leaves the negotiation considering how he'll do this, who's having an affair with whom, who owns guns, who's volatile, who drinks...

And then he wakes up the next morning realizing he's *plotting to kill people*. Horrified, he wants to call it off—but he's opened the gateway. If he doesn't live up to his end of the bargain, will the demon just sit there, waiting for him to fulfill it? Is he now destined to make these Sacrifices whether he wants to or not? Will the demon become a Malus Locus, unable (and certainly unwilling) to return to its otherworldly home?

Any of these are possibilities, as is the notion that the occultist dedicates his life to putting the demon back where he found it while keeping other people from making his mistakes. If your characters experience a similar moment of clarity after the agreement but before the pact is actually completed, use it to fuel the story. However, consider some kind of reward for this virtuous behavior. **Inferno** paints demonic pacts as invariably ending badly, and so the reverse should also be true—temperance and humility should carry some weight in the story.

If you want to play fair by your players, and you've got players who don't have a good enough grip on semantics to notice potential swindles with word games (everyone's proclivities are different, after all), allow the player an Intelligence + Occult roll to notice potential double-crosses before they happen.

The bottom line is, though, that demons take every advantage they can, and you shouldn't shy away from playing them this way. During the research phase, before the summoning actually takes place, show the players what the demon has done to careless summoners in the past. Present how the demon tricks

people, how selfish and ungrateful it is, and which of its blandishments turned out to be lies. Give the players some warning about what this demon does, so that when they're face to face with it they aren't taken completely off guard. Again, it's appropriate for the characters to be unprepared, but it's not entirely fair for *players* to be treated that way.

The Arrival Should Get the Players' Attention

The arrival phase of the summoning (see p. 75) should be dramatic, moody and terrifying. Yes, demons can be subtle when they want to be, but when they are responding to a summons, entering our world with explicit (and perhaps foolishly given) permission, subtlety should be a last priority. Besides, the image of the demon ripping through the skull of the sacrifice, or rising up from the howling desert sands, or forming itself into a humanoid form out of a billion black flies—that image should tell the characters they are playing with forces far beyond their control.

Don't worry, in fact, if the manifestation methods are technically available to the demon given its Rank and powers. The demon can't kill anyone simply by appearing to a summons, and if the demon's impressive appearance makes the characters look back at their notes and say, "Wait, *which* demon did we summon?" you're doing your job as the Storyteller.

Running Negotiations

When the negotiation scene begins, you should already have an idea of what the demon can do for the Indebted-to-be and what the demon wants. It's all very well to say a given Benefit requires a given Sacrifice, but demons do not enter into negotiations randomly. If a character asks to be a millionaire, that requires a Deadly Sacrifice (because Resources is an external trait). What does the demon of Pride he just called up want that would be considered a Deadly Sacrifice? Is there a particular person it would like to see dead, perhaps someone who summoned it once before? It might just want the summoner to kill someone and get away with it (meaning if he's ever convicted of the murder, he also loses the Benefit). Consider ahead of time what the demon wants, and make those desires consistent with the concept and history you've designed for the creature.

During the negotiations themselves, pay close attention to the players. Let them finish speaking before answering (as the demon). Never, never inter-



rupt. Part of this is just basic manners, of course, but some of it is to allow them enough rope with which to hang themselves. As any con artist will tell you, a real mark always convinces himself, so have the demon make the offer, and then let the characters (and the players) talk it over. If the negotiation is happening one-on-one, don't let players whose characters aren't present give advice, but *do* let them answer questions about their own characters, game systems, or other information the negotiating player (or character) should know. The decision to engage in a demonic pact should, again, be an informed one, because when things go sour later, you don't want the player saying, "Wait, I didn't think it would be like this." You want the *character* to be saying that, while the player enjoys the drama of it all.

Write down the agreement so you and the players know exactly what the pact consists of. If the player is attempting to cheat the demon, decide whether the demon is going to fall for it (some Manipulation + Subterfuge rolls contested against the demon's Resistance are probably in order) or whether the demon breaks off negotiations and attacks or departs. Likewise, if the demon tries to cheat the characters, you might allow them Wits + Subterfuge rolls to notice.

At the end of the day, though, the negotiations should decide the terms of the pact. The Benefits and

Sacrifices are left a little looser than many of the World of Darkness game mechanics, and this is deliberate—the pact is something that should come about organically, in play, between player(s) and Storyteller.

Cementing the Pact

Once the demon and the character have agreed to terms, the character must complete the Sacrifice(s) required. As mentioned previously, most demons do not possess the raw power necessary to change the world in accordance with the character's desires without the spiritual force created by the Sacrifice. Demons cannot use random murders to power their interests, even if those murders are committed out of the demon's given Vice. A murder committed *in that demon's name*, though, provides a great deal of power, enough to fuel a pact. If the Sacrifices in question don't involve other people (the Indebted is giving up his own traits to fuel the pact, for instance, or knows enough about the demon to bring a sacrificial victim with him), then the deal can be completed right then and there. If not, the character needs to go out and perform the Sacrifices, and then return to the summoning site and invoke the demon again. (The entire summoning ritual is not necessary, as the open agreement creates enough of a connection between the demon and our world to facilitate its return.)



Like the arrival, this part should be dramatic and impressive. Going back to the examples above, the demon that emerged from a sacrificial victim's skull might grab the Indebted's head and burn a demonic sigil into his cranium—not visible from outside, but it glows in moonlight. The demon from the desert sands calls up a sirocco, blasting away at the Indebted until the changes take place. The demon constructed of black flies swarms the character, the bugs crawling under her skin and reforming her body in accordance with the pact. An Indebted character should want to change his mind at the last minute, or should at least be overwhelmed by the power wreaking havoc on his system. But the irony there is that only that character's acquiescence gives the demon the power to wreak that havoc.

Indebted Storyteller Characters

Of course, if you're introducing a Storyteller character who has made a demonic pact, you're free to simply assign traits, take the Sacrifices as read, and drop the demon-worshipping scum straight into the chronicle. Nothing is more reprehensible than a demonolater, right?

Certainly, any Indebted character has moral issues; that's just the nature of the pact. But as discussed in the beginning of this chapter, altruistic motives for summoning demons exist, and so a Storyteller character might initially have agreed to the pact for perfectly understandable reasons. Whether those reasons have remained valid as the Indebted character's life progressed is another matter, of course. Consider a woman who agrees to a minor pact in order to obtain money to save her family business isn't a total moral loss, especially if she loses traits for the Sacrifice rather than victimizing someone else. But if she later "upgrades" to a permanent pact because she loved the feeling of being a rich woman, then she's not just a black hat-wearing antagonist, but an antagonist with some depth and history.

When designing Indebted characters, whether as antagonists, foils or allies, take the time to decide upon what their Sacrifices were and how they were discharged. A group of characters might well become involved with the Indebted while investigating a murder performed as part of a Sacrifice. If the characters knew the victim personally, it might add to the horror of the situation to know what was purchased with his life.

Example Pact: The Hornet's Nest

The Hornet's Nest (described at the beginning of this chapter) doesn't normally grant pacts. It's more

interested in stinging summoners to death. But a forensic entomologist named Peter Kosinski managed to cage the demon and open negotiations.

Kosinski was an FBI employee responsible for estimating the date of death of corpses based upon the kinds of insects inhabiting the body. He was often called in to evaluate victims left in the woods, buried in inaccessible places and thrown down wells. He performed this job for more than a decade, and he was often called upon to testify in court as to his findings. Despite the highly technical and grotesque nature of his work, Dr. Kosinski was approachable, calm and quite able to put his discoveries into laymen's terms. As such, his testimony led to several convictions over the years. It also led to him coming face to face with serial killers, rapists, cannibals and other human monsters.

When Kosinski was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer at the age of 52, something inside him snapped. Murderers and rapists out doing their filthy pleasures, but *he* was the one God afflicted with this terrible disease. Searching for answers, he stumbled across the cult of the Hornet's Nest, who gleefully provided him with the ritual to summon the demon. Kosinski tracked down the mother of a serial killer he'd recently testified against, a woman who had tortured her son by locking him in a wooden box from the time he'd been a child. He kidnapped her, locked her in a similar box, and released a variety of poisonous insects and spiders into it. None of the bites were fatal, but all were extremely painful. Over the next eight hours he kept her screaming in pain and fear... and finally he heard the buzzing of hornets. He whispered the invocation and then flipped a switch. Steel plates slammed into place over the box, trapping the demon and terrifying the victim. She cried for mercy, and the Hornet's Nest was trapped into negotiations.

Kosinski had gone into the negotiations wanting only to be cured of his cancer. But as he spoke to the demon, he realized he had the potential to do much more. If he played his cards right, he wouldn't have to settle for sending the monsters of the world to prison. He could make them rot in *Hell*. Kosinski agreed to four Sacrifices: one Minor, two Major, and one Deadly.

The Minor Sacrifice was to cure the cancer in his body. For that, the Hornet's Nest demanded to experience his pleasure at killing. Whenever Kosinski killed a victim in the future, the Hornet's Nest would take control of his body at the instant of death and for five minutes afterward. During that time, hornets

would emerge from the scientist's ears and mouth (but the demon agreed this would cause no permanent damage).

The first Major Sacrifice was for the Encyclopedic Knowledge Merit. Dr. Kosinski was already knowledgeable, but he wanted to know something about everything. The Storyteller ruled that while Mental traits aren't really the Nest's forte, the nature of the Merit (i.e., knowing something about everything) is in keeping with its fragmented, swarm-like nature. For this Benefit, the Nest demanded that Kosinski's body be made a haven for insects. The creatures in question were similar to blood-borne parasites; they caused Kosinski no pain, but did make him tired, irritable and itchy. This had the effect of stripping a dot of Stamina (and therefore Health).

The second Major Sacrifice was for the ability to release a swarm of stinging insects similar to the Nest's manifested form. The creatures would wriggle out from under Kosinski's nails, eyelids and tongue when he invoked the demon's name. This is functionally similar to the Blast Numen (p. 53); the swarm stings a target and then dies, like honeybees. The Storyteller decided the roll to activate the swarm is Presence + Composure (the Indebted's strength of personality to call the demon, and his ability to resist screaming in pain and thus giving the insects the wrong target). For this Benefit, the demon demanded that Kosinski torture an innocent victim, preferably a child. The scientist initially refused, but when the demon was implacable in this, agreed, planning to visit this horror upon a child he knew was already exhibiting signs of being a sociopath (torturing animals, setting fires, etc.).

Finally, Kosinski agreed to a Deadly Sacrifice. He would torture to death an armed man. Kosinski knew of a police officer whose brutal arrest and disregard for policy led to a killer going to free long enough to kill again. Kosinski planned to poison him with a drug that would kill him over the course of several gut-wrenching, painful hours. For this Sacrifice, Dr. Kosinski would gain the Lord of Demons Benefit (p. 88). This Benefit is normally associated with Pride, but since Kosinski's Occult rating was low (only 2 dots), he was limited to summoning minor demons anyway, and the Storyteller reasoned that the Horner's Nest didn't mind selling out its fellow demons for a bit of power now.

The Nest agreed to the pact, and Kosinski opened the box. The demon swarmed over the scientist, but did not kill him. Rather, the bugs crawled into him, making a haven on Earth from his flesh. Kosinski left

in search of the victims of his Sacrifice.

Dr. Kosinski in a Chronicle: Kosinski is a man who entered a pact for selfish reasons and then tried to justify his actions by killing "monsters." Characters might find him sympathetic, until they realize that not only did he enter into the pact to save his own life, he enjoys the pain he causes. If the characters are supernatural creatures such as vampires, Kosinski might wind up hunting them. Alternately, the characters might be on the trail of the same predator Kosinski decides to kill. In any case, Kosinski is a sadistic Indebted character who can summon swarms of deadly insects at will—he makes for a superbly horrific antagonist.

Example Pact: Sherman Miles

In life, Sherman Miles (p. 77) preyed upon tenants with few options. As a Larval, it's happy to do the same thing. When Tamisha Arens asked for a boon, it talked her into an agreement that more than benefits him.

Tamisha Arens wasn't an occultist, or in any way interested in demons. She was a prostitute—an "escort," according to her page on a popular trading web site—and she received a phone call one warm spring evening from a young man who, she thought, just wanted an hour of sex. When she arrived at the hotel, however, he pushed a rag soaked in chloroform into her face, and the next thing she knew she was in a trunk, being taken out into the middle of nowhere.

Lying in the trunk, trussed up with duct tape, she listened as her assailant shouted a name—"Sherman Miles." And then she heard a splash, and a murmured phrase including the word "sacrifice." Just then, she found a small piece of broken glass and sliced the tape on her hands. The trunk was already unlocked, she discovered, and she crept up behind the unobservant summoner, shoving him into the quarry.

The summoning, however, had already been completed, and the item the summoner planned to use to activate the negotiation—a key to a lockbox that had once held some of Miles' papers—was in his pocket. Miles rose up from the quarry and demanded to know what Tamisha wanted. Terrified, she said she wanted to live. Miles, sensing it was dealing with a naïf, took her at her word.

"I will grant you life, then," it said. "You will not die, provided that you give me the lives of those touched by greed. I will give you the power to take their lives, but you must return to me all of their riches."

Tamisha, still not quite understanding that she had any choice in the matter, agreed. And then





she took the summoner's car and left the area. She returned to her life as a prostitute, but servicing a much higher-class clientele. And sometimes her clients wound up dead, their hands stained black and their flesh spotted with hives, their wallets, rings and other riches missing. Tamisha had, in the meantime, been stabbed, shot, strangled and struck with a car, but she always recovered, and she always would—provided she stayed on top of her payments.

In game terms, Miles Sherman provides Tamisha with the Filthy Lucre Benefit (p. 87). This is represented by an ongoing Deadly Sacrifice—she must kill a rich man with his own greed (normally, one would be enough, but read on). She also enjoys a Benefit called “Purchased Immortality,” which prevents her from dying by any means. Lethal and aggravated damage are treated as bashing damage, meaning the worst that can happen is that she falls unconscious for a few hours. But this Benefit requires another Deadly Sacrifice. Namely, she must dump the worldly possessions of the rich man into the quarry. When she agreed to the pact, Tamisha thought (insofar as she was able to think through the fear) that “worldly possessions” meant “whatever he has on him at the time of death.” But what Miles actually meant was, “everything of value the man owns.”

Since Tamisha was unable to obtain everything the man owned, Miles expanded the agreement somewhat. She could continue robbing rich men of their worldly goods (and their lives) until such time as she made up the difference between what she threw into the quarry and what her initial victim actually owned. Unfortunately for Tamisha, her first victim was a millionaire who owned property all around the country. Since she generally obtained only a few thousand dollars worth of merchandise at a time (more if she could steal a victim's car), and since Miles charged high interest rates on the money Tamisha “owed,” it was unlikely she would ever fully discharge her debt.

Tamisha in the Chronicle: Tamisha is, perhaps, a sympathetic character. Kidnapped to be a sacrifice to a demon, locked into a pact she didn't know she could turn down, the poor woman kills because she feels she has to. Is that enough justification for mercy on the characters' parts? She's also a prostitute who kills her johns, and the fact that her victims are wealthy means she's not going to be able to keep her activities secret for very long. Saving her, though, would require either a lot of money, or getting Miles to change its pact, and Miles likes to have people on the hook.

Example Pact:

The Rider in Shameful Dreams

Nate Hegel wanted to know everything about the female mind. He wanted to know how women thought, dreamed, desired and despaired. He just didn't want to have to actually *talk* to a woman to find it out, because women terrified him.

Nate buried himself in books, psychological case studies, and the Internet, learning all he could about differences in psychology between men and women. As his studies progressed, he started learning about dream interpretation theory, and discovered the Rider in Shameful Dreams (p. 79). What he thought at first to be a colorful symbol of repression and desire turned into much more the deeper he looked, and after more than a year of searching, he found out how to summon the being—but it meant talking to a woman.

Turning again to the Internet, he found other people with social phobias and formed a friendship with one such woman. Over the course of another year, he learned of her dreams, and finally one morning he got an email containing the words he'd been waiting to see—“I had a dream last night. I'm kind of embarrassed about it.”

It took some time, but he convinced his friend to set up a webcam while she slept. He was, he told her, doing research on sleep and dreams, and the data would be helpful. When she fell asleep, he whispered the name of the Rider—and his friend's eyes snapped open. The Rider had arrived.

They conducted negotiations over the Internet, Nate still not sure whether this surreal experience was taking place or whether *he* was the one dreaming. He asked to be intelligent, clever, charming and brave, and the Rider agreed. The next morning his friend was more phobic than ever, having been ravaged in her dreams by a demon, but Nate Hegel wasn't interested in her problems anymore.

The Rider granted Nate multiple Benefits. It increased the young man's Presence, Manipulation, Composure and Persuasion to 5, granted him the Striking Looks Merit (4 dots, of course) and the Voice of the Incubus Merit (p. 87). Each of these Benefits required a Minor Sacrifice, but the Rider allowed Hegel to pay one Major Sacrifice in exchange for the three Attribute increases. Specifically, the Rider took control of Hegel's friend. The actions she performed that night, after negotiations ended, weren't just in her dreams. They were very real, and they left her

exhausted, bloodied and unable to explain why. For the other two Minor Sacrifices, Hegel took on the Too Eager Sacrifice (p. 92), and agreed to allow the Rider full access to the dreams of his victims (in that someone he seduces regains no Willpower for sleeping that night, and always sees the Rider in her dreams).

Nate in the Chronicle: Nate might appear relatively harmless—he’s not killing people, after all. But he is doing much to spread the Rider’s influence. His conquests dream of the Rider and, because Nate is so eager to bed women (a trait much more obvious in retrospect), they often wind up feeling ashamed. Nate might seduce a character’s sister, daughter or wife, leaving her unharmed physically, but emotionally damaged and perhaps “marked” by the Rider in some way. Alternately, the characters might be friends of Nate’s first victim, and wonder why a shut-in went out on the town, engaging in sex with multiple partners before passing out near dawn.

Artifacts

Literature and cinema are replete with examples of magical items touched by Hell. Protagonists are usually asked to dispose of these objects, but often that realization comes after using the item and discovering how evil it really is. The World of Darkness, naturally, is home to many such items. Demons are sometimes able to create them as part of a pact, or at least lead an Indebted person to one.

Hell-touched Artifacts aren’t necessarily “cursed” in the sense that they bring misfortune upon those who use them. They are always baleful in some way, whether it’s to their users or to their targets. A Hell-touched Artifact is emblematic of a Vice, after all, and so what power it wields is always at someone’s expense. The only question is whether the wielder has to pay the cost.

Where do these items come from? All Hell-touched Artifacts have been influenced, empowered or even possessed by a demon at one point or another. A Larval’s anchor might be such an Artifact. An Immundus that spends some time inhabiting a device might leave when exorcised, but the device remains tainted. And sometimes these objects just appear from nowhere, placed into our world by Dominions.

How these Artifacts come into a character’s hands is another matter. A character might find one that appeared from nowhere or that a previous owner discarded. As mentioned above, a demon might create or make available an Artifact as part of a pact. In the latter case, the Indebted pays for the Artifact with a

Sacrifice just as he does for any other Benefit (and the sample Artifacts below stipulate what kind of Sacrifice is appropriate). A found Artifact doesn’t require the expenditure of experience points, however, since it’s likely to be a plot point rather than something the player chooses deliberately. If a player wants his character to begin play with such an Artifact, the Storyteller can choose to impose Sacrifices or simply allow the Artifact at no cost. This might seem unfair, since magical items normally cost Merit points, but then again, magical items don’t usually have the potential (and probability) to spell doom for the character.

Below are six examples of Hell-touched Artifacts. Each one contains a brief discussion of the item’s origins, its game traits (including what Sacrifices it might require to obtain in a pact), and how it might be used in a chronicle. Please note, though, that these objects aren’t mass-produced. Each Hell-touched Artifact is unique, and so two Indebteds aren’t both going to be carrying Restless Pendants. Then again, it’s possible that a demon of Pride or Sloth becomes so enamored of one type of Artifact that it produces several similar ones.

New Sneakers

The shoes are the kind for which kids shoot each other. They’re in style, they bear the signature of a major celebrity, and they symbolize, to those of lesser means, wealth and status.

Touched by a demon of Greed, these shoes bear a picture of a stylized gold apple on the soles. If the shoes are unclaimed, they take on whatever color scheme would entice a viewer to try them on. Of course, they are always a perfect fit.

The shoes never get dirty, smelly or stained, but if they are ever removed, they revert to the “unclaimed” status. As such, keeping them requires having them within arm’s reach at all times. Even that might get chancy. Again, people kill each other over shoes in some circles.

Systems: Once worn, the New Sneakers grant a +2 modifier to Social rolls to impress, persuade or intimidate others of comparable or lower social station. They also grant a +1 to Athletics rolls to run or climb.

Sacrifice: One Minor

Restless Pendant

This Artifact is nothing much to look at: a cracked moonstone on a silver chain. When someone claims it, however, placing it around her neck, the chain’s link



fuses, making it impossible to remove. If the wearer tries simply pulling it over her head, the chain shrinks to the point that it won't fit. And, of course, the chain is indestructible by normal means.

Removing the pendant is possible only with the intercession of a Sloth demon, and such demons are, naturally, difficult to motivate. The poor fool who provides a Sacrifice to gain the pendant very often winds up providing another to get rid of it.

Systems: The pendant does bestow some advantages to the wearer. The wearer never needs sleep or rest of any kind. The wearer regains 1 point of Willpower every 8 hours, whether she rests or not. Unfortunately, the wearer never feels rested, either. She exists in a perpetual state of runner's high or second wind, ready to collapse but unable to feel *tired*.

For every month the character wears the pendant, the player must roll Resolve + Composure. If this roll fails, the character gains a derangement.

Sacrifice: One Minor to obtain it, one Minor to get rid of it

The Devil's Lighter

A simple butane lighter with a cartoon devil on the side, this Artifact is deceptively powerful. Touched by a demon of Pride, the Devil's Lighter enables the user to exert control over the element of fire. The power this allows is intoxicating, however, and those who use the Lighter often become (or were already) pyromaniacs, living for nothing else than to stand in the middle of an inferno, untouched and howling with laughter.

The demon that created this Artifact guards it jealously. The Sacrifice he demands for giving it up inevitably involves arson, and he usually allows the Indebted to use it for only a short period of time. Unfortunately, that time usually ends while the Indebted is standing in a burning building, exulting in his power, allowing the demon to watch the fool burned to cinders, clutching the Lighter.

Systems: While holding the Lighter, the user is immune to damage from fire, no matter what the source. This effect extends to what he is wearing, as well. It also protects him from incidental damage from a fire, including smoke inhalation and touching heated surfaces.

Also, the character can shape and direct fire as he sees fit. Even a flame as small as the one the Lighter produces can be shaped and thrown as a gout of fire. To use this ability, the Indebted's player rolls Dexterity + Athletics – opponent's Defense. The attack roll inflicts lethal damage, and if the victim is wearing something

flammable, ignites him. The victim suffers 4 points of lethal damage per turn while burning.

After every scene in which the character uses the Lighter's flame-shaping powers, the player must roll Resolve + Composure. If the roll fails, the character develops the pyromania or pyrophilia derangement (see sidebar).

Sacrifice: One Major (allows the user to keep the Lighter for a month) or one Deadly (allows the user to keep the Lighter for a year)



New Derangements: Pyromania & Pyrophilia

Pyromania (mild): The character has a compulsion to light fires in order to relieve tension or as part of a compulsion. If the character is bored, frustrated or stressed, the player must roll Resolve + Composure. If this roll fails, the character must light something on fire. This can be as small as a piece of paper, and the character does not need to let the fire run wild—he can take reasonable precautions against the fire spreading. Sooner or later, though, a fire will probably burn out of control.

In addition, if the character sees a fire already burning, the player must roll Resolve + Composure. If this roll fails, the character stands, transfixed, staring at the fire. This roll must be made every turn until the player succeeds, at which point the character can tear himself away.

Pyrophilia (severe): The character's derangement has progressed from a compulsion to a sexual fixation. The character finds fires and setting fires to be sexually gratifying, and standing in the middle of a burning room is perhaps the most erotic experience he can imagine. The game system is as above, except that the Resolve + Composure rolls suffer a –2 penalty. In addition, the character feels the compulsion to set fires in any situation fraught with sexual tension.



Coveter's Mirror

This Artifact is a hand-held mirror with tarnished silver edges, about five inches in diameter. Created by a demon of Envy, it allows a person to assume the appearance and mannerisms of someone the wielder

admires and wants to emulate. The mirror does not function on people of lower station than the wielder unless that target is noticeably “better” in some way. So, a police captain couldn’t use it on a uniformed officer, unless the officer was, for instance, better looking (Striking Looks Merit), in better shape (higher Strength and/or Athletics) or a better shot (higher Firearms rating as demonstrated at the range).

In order to use the mirror, the wielder reflects the target’s face and whispers, “That’s me.” The wielder then takes on the face, build and mannerisms of the target, and keeps them for one hour. At the end of that time, the effect ends, though it can be immediately reactivated. Note, too, that the mirror doesn’t affect the target in any way, meaning the wielder should probably incapacitate him before assuming his identity (depending upon what he wants to accomplish).

Systems: The wielder’s player must spend a point of Willpower to activate the mirror. While the mirror’s power is in effect, the player might need to make Wits + Subterfuge rolls to behave as the target, but the mirror provides a +3 to such rolls. It does not, however, give the wielder any specific knowledge or acumen in Skills, meaning that if the police captain assumes the identity of the deadeye-shot officer, he’s out of luck if called upon to demonstrate his shooting skill.

Sacrifice: One Major

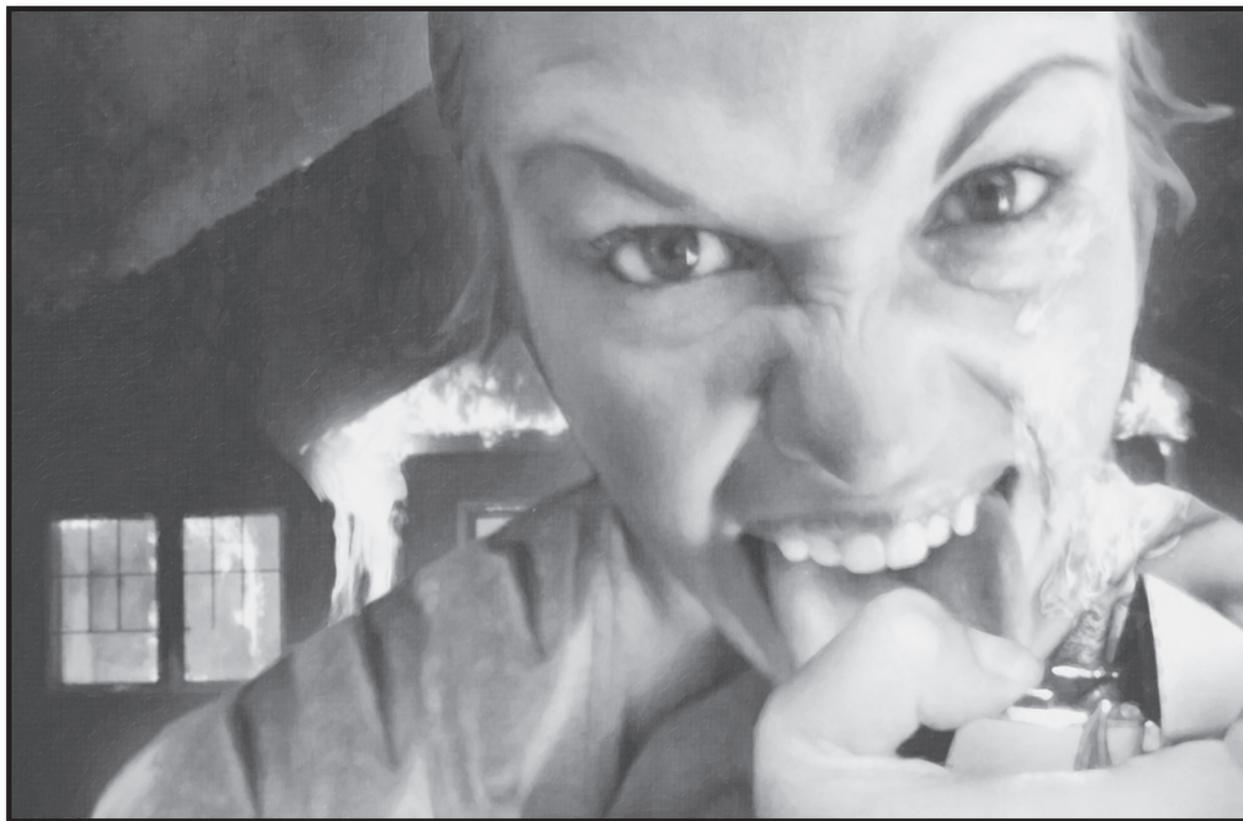
Katherine’s Mug

A demon of Gluttony created this Artifact. It appears as a simple ceramic mug, cobalt blue with a black base. It’s deceptively deep—looking at it, one would guess it holds only six ounces of liquid, but it actually holds twelve. It is therefore very easy to get drunk using the mug, especially given its special properties.

At a verbal command, the mug fills with any beverage with addictive properties. Naturally, it can create any alcoholic or caffeinated beverage, but depending upon the creativity and experience of the user, it can also create more rarefied draughts. This includes vampire blood, wine normally available only to the True Fae, and whatever other supernatural beverages one might request. The user has to know what he’s ordering—he can’t just say “Give me faerie wine” without having had some in the past, or at least knowing it exists—but beyond that, the mug can conjure anything.

Systems: The player must roll Manipulation + Socialize to order mundane beverages (no matter how exotic), or Manipulation + Occult to order supernatural beverages.

Sacrifice: One Minor



Ferryman's Purse

Stealing the coins from a dead man's eyes was once considered an act of great cruelty and viciousness. By denying the dead the ferryman's fee, the thief stranded the deceased on the banks of Acheron, to wander for one hundred years. Many occultists believe the unquiet ghosts tied to this world were buried without the means to pay for passage. Associated with the sin of Greed, this Artifact calls out to these wandering spirits with promises to pay their fee, searing lines of a contract onto the faces of two coins, an agreement between the restless dead and the user.

Systems: For the remainder of the turn any ghost that makes the pact can use the coins as its anchor. The act of tossing the coins on the ground allows the ghosts to manifest and defend the user. This Artifact works even in areas that appear devoid of spiritual activity; the lure of eternal rest awakens even long dormant shades. Any ghost that agrees to a deal is incorporated, permanently and irrevocably, when the scene ends. Storytellers can use the ghost provided to represent summoned specters, create their own ghost or use a ghost with a history in their chronicle. The user may safely draw a maximum of four coins from the Artifact during any one scene. Drawing more than four begins to tap the life force of the user for the additional necessary to summon so many ghosts

so quickly. For each coin past four drawn forth, the owner takes 1 point of lethal damage. See the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 208, for more information on ghosts.

Sacrifice: The Ferryman's Purse can hold a total of 20 coins at any one time. Each time the Artifact is used, two coins must be withdrawn and thrown to the ground. The act of calling up long forgotten shades and allowing said shades to manifest absorbs the power represented by the coins, which vanish at the end of the scene. A Minor sacrifice replaces two coins, a Major sacrifice replaces six.

Discipline Strap

This Artifact appears as a leather belt or strap; it could easily be a simple man's belt or a piece of riding or draft harness. Its material is supple but tough, perfect for wrapping around a fist or using as a lash. Just picking the strap up tends to suggest such violent uses, as befitting the Artifact's touch of Wrath. If used to beat a victim, the strap supercharges the user like a drug, refreshing his strength and will to cause harm.

Systems: The Discipline Strap isn't particularly useful as a weapon; it does bashing damage and adds no equipment bonus. It's best used to beat a helpless or unresisting target.

The wielder's player must inflict bashing damage on a target (preferably a human being) to activate the strap's power. Each point of bashing damage inflicted heals 1 point of bashing damage on the wielder, as her bruises mend and fatigue vanishes. If the wielder continues beating the target until the target begins to take lethal damage, she becomes immune to wound penalties for the next 24 hours, and doesn't need to sleep for another 48 hours. If the victim actually dies from the beating, the wielder gains a +1 bonus to both Strength and Stamina until the sun rises or sets next.

Sacrifice: One Major

Profane Peepshow

This Artifact of Lust takes the form of an old videotape, its handwritten label smeared to illegibility. A tiny mark etched into one side—a portion of the seal of its creator—is the distinct proof of the Artifact's identity. The other, less obvious proof is that the tape's contents cannot be recorded over; it always displays the same images.

When viewed, the tape's contents appear to be a scrambled porn movie. The colors are off, the

Restless Shade

Attributes: Power 3, Finesse 3, Resistance 3

Willpower: 6

Morality: 4

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Greed

Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Speed: 16 (species factor 10)

Size: 5

Corpus: 8

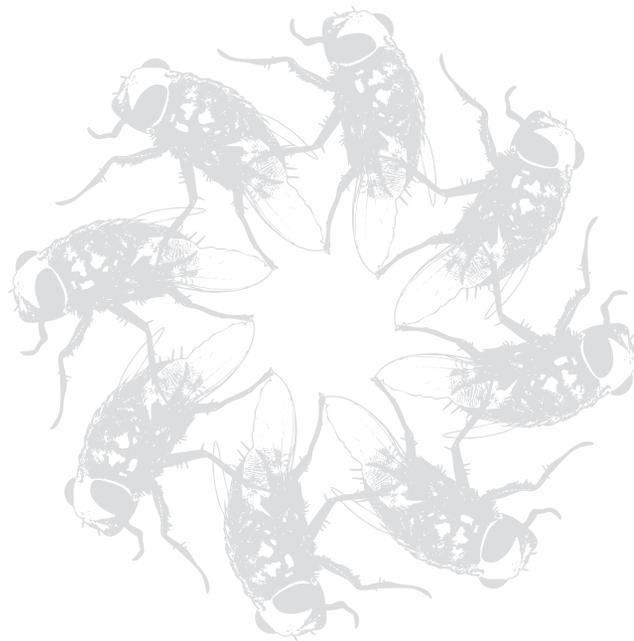
Essence: 10

Numina: (choose two) Animal Control, Compulsion, Telekinesis, Terrify

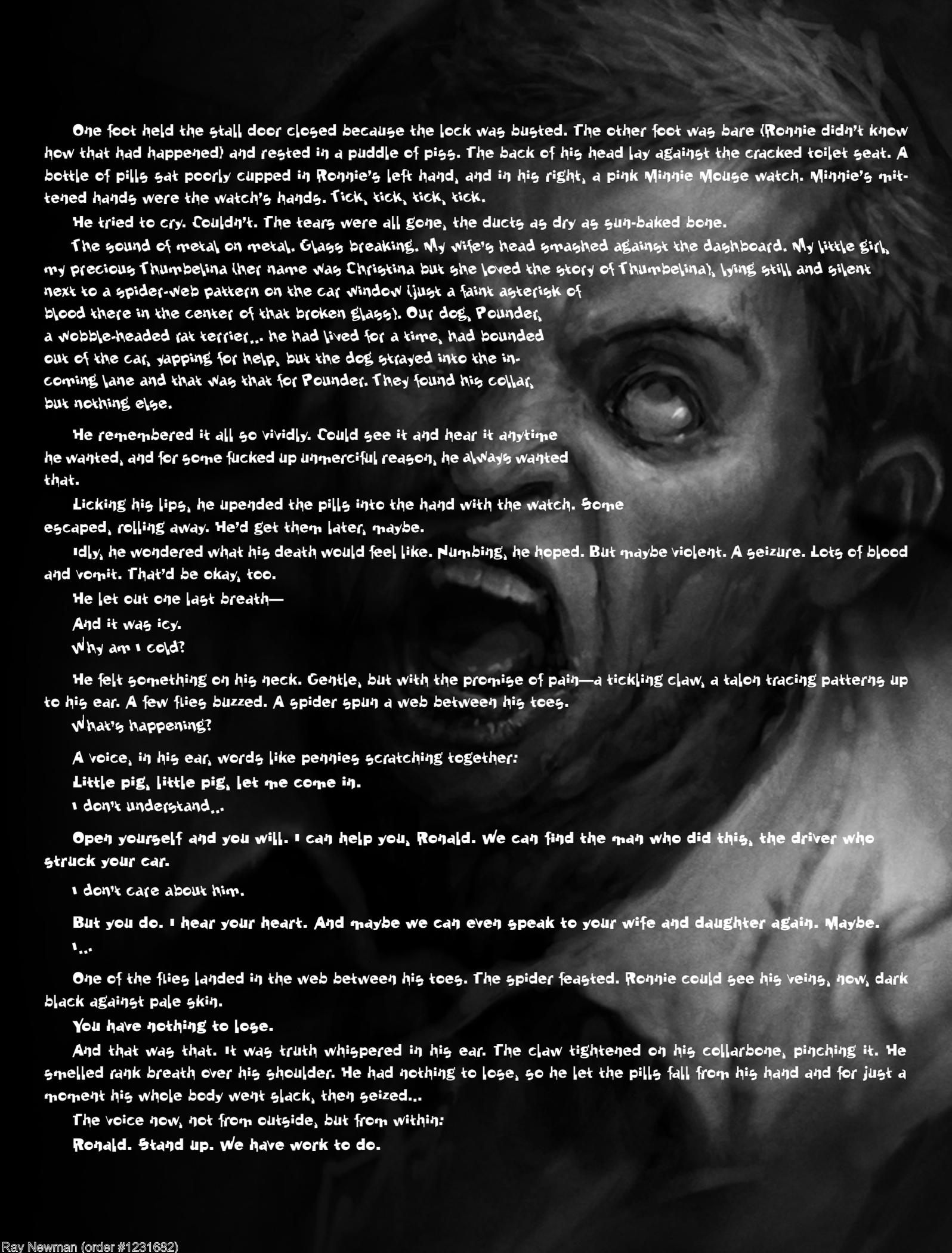
picture is bent and scrolls peculiarly, but a patient watcher can make out the shape of a breast or thigh or back. The audio is unmodified, though there's no real dialogue at all, just a continuous stream of groans and sighs and growls. But if you watch it long enough and try hard enough to make out what's going on, gradually a larger and more unwholesome image begins to take shape. The actors (of whom there seem to be maybe a dozen) seem to be unnaturally flexible, but also perhaps deformed—some of the appendages and patches of skin don't appear to be quite right. The combination is both intensely erotic and subtly repugnant, gratifying and shaming the viewer at the same time—with unusual effect.

Systems: After viewing the tape for at least half an hour, the viewer's player rolls Wits + Composure. Success grants stronger visions of the sickly erotic acts transpiring on the tape, which are hard to forget. The character gains a +1 bonus to Wits, Dexterity and Manipulation rolls, as the dark inspiration provides him with an extra aptitude for mental and physical "flexibility." However, the character also suffers a -1 penalty to Stamina, Composure and Resolve rolls, as the moans and images haunt his will and sap his strength. Both the bonus and penalty disappear after at least 8 hours of rest—assuming the character didn't indulge in any erotic activities (with or without a partner or partners) before bed. Such gratifications trigger exhausting dreams of the Profane Peepshow's images, raising the Resistance Trait penalties to -2.

Sacrifice: One Minor







One foot held the stall door closed because the lock was busted. The other foot was bare (Ronnie didn't know how that had happened) and rested in a puddle of piss. The back of his head lay against the cracked toilet seat. A bottle of pills sat poorly cupped in Ronnie's left hand, and in his right, a pink Minnie Mouse watch. Minnie's mittened hands were the watch's hands. Tick, tick, tick, tick.

He tried to cry. Couldn't. The tears were all gone, the ducts as dry as sun-baked bone.

The sound of metal on metal. Glass breaking. My wife's head smashed against the dashboard. My little girl, my precious Thumbelina (her name was Christina but she loved the story of Thumbelina), lying still and silent next to a spider-web pattern on the car window (just a faint asterisk of blood there in the center of that broken glass). Our dog, Pounder, a wobble-headed rat terrier... he had lived for a time, had bounded out of the car, yapping for help, but the dog strayed into the incoming lane and that was that for Pounder. They found his collar, but nothing else.

He remembered it all so vividly. Could see it and hear it anytime he wanted, and for some fucked up unmerciful reason, he always wanted that.

Licking his lips, he upended the pills into the hand with the watch. Some escaped, rolling away. He'd get them later, maybe.

Idly, he wondered what his death would feel like. Numbing, he hoped. But maybe violent. A seizure. Lots of blood and vomit. That'd be okay, too.

He let out one last breath—

And it was icy.

Why am I cold?

He felt something on his neck. Gentle, but with the promise of pain—a tickling claw, a talon tracing patterns up to his ear. A few flies buzzed. A spider spun a web between his toes.

What's happening?

A voice, in his ear, words like pennies scratching together:

Little pig, little pig, let me come in.

I don't understand...

Open yourself and you will. I can help you, Ronald. We can find the man who did this, the driver who struck your car.

I don't care about him.

But you do. I hear your heart. And maybe we can even speak to your wife and daughter again. Maybe.

I...

One of the flies landed in the web between his toes. The spider feasted. Ronnie could see his veins, now, dark black against pale skin.

You have nothing to lose.

And that was that. It was truth whispered in his ear. The claw tightened on his collarbone, pinching it. He smelled rank breath over his shoulder. He had nothing to lose, so he let the pills fall from his hand and for just a moment his whole body went slack, then seized...

The voice now, not from outside, but from within:

Ronald. Stand up. We have work to do.

Chapter Three: The Possessed

Some say we all have a little devil in us. That's true, to a point. That guy over there, he loves to eat. Doesn't care that he's diabetic *and* has a heart disease risk; the fatter the steak or creamier the donut, the better. Her, across the street? She breaks men's hearts. And though she'd never admit to it with spoken words, she thinks it all the time: she adores the way it makes her feel, because men are worthless and she is worth everything. Even that holy man just down the block, the pious priest in the dark coat despite the hot noon-day sun, he's got his devil—or, really, a whole *host* of them—inside. He believes himself so righteous, so perfect that it's easy for him to condemn anybody with weaker faith than himself (meaning, everybody) to eternal torment by what he believes are very real demons.

Everybody has a weakness. In the World of Darkness, this is best represented by one's Vice, be it Lust or Wrath, Sloth or Gluttony. We're all given over to moments of frailty, and some prefer entire lifetime slides down the slippery slope of self-indulgence. But these weaknesses, they're metaphorical devils. Figurative demons.

It's time to talk about the real thing. How is it a man finds his body, mind and soul have been taken over by something that calls itself a demon? How might a teenaged girl invite a devil, an impish little *qliphoth*, to overtake her so she may taste a measure of its power? How *does* one become possessed?

Becoming Possessed

This chapter is about creating and playing one of the Possessed, a human who now shares his mind and body with a demon—and it's quite possible the demon is the one largely in control. Certainly demonic possession is not a common malady of the spirit; the city streets and rural pastures are not home to thousands of invisible imps and archdukes gamboling about, waiting to claim a host body. Moreover, the conditions necessary to invite possession are somewhat special—not every human has become degraded enough (or is appropriately knowledgeable about and willing to touch the Infernal) to unwittingly or willfully chamber a demon within his flesh. But a rare few *do* meet those conditions, and woe to those who do.

Damaged Goods: Inviting Possession

Sin, says the preacher, is like a camel's nose. By the time the camel's got his nose in your tent, the whole body will follow swiftly thereafter. One might suggest the same is true for demonic possession: it begins long before it actually begins. An Arab fable about the camel's nose in fact ends with the sentiment, "It is wise to resist the beginnings of evil," and

Epecially important
Especially important is the warning to avoid conversations with the demon. We may ask what is relevant but anything beyond that is dangerous. He is a liar. The demon is a liar. He will lie to confuse us. But he will also mix lies with the truth to attack us. The attack is psychological, Damien, and powerful. So don't listen to him. Remember that—do not listen.

—Father Merrin, *The Exorcist*

that could easily be extended to, “It is wise to resist the beginnings of weakness.”

For it is weakness that often invites possession. Not subtle weakness, as we all have, but drastic, dramatic frailty—ragged holes torn in one’s soul whether by internal or external forces. Such holes start small, of course, and when the rips and tears are tiny, a demon has little way into the body—it’d be like trying to climb through the keyhole of a door instead of through the doorway itself. But as the holes grow, the demon has more “points of entry” into the human, a gateway allowing the entity to nestle in close to that person’s weakened soul.

Below are types of characters who have by force or by fate been opened to demonic possession. These are not exhaustive, but they represent solid origins inviting a selfish, hellish parasite into the soul. Certainly a demon can attempt to possess *anybody* (see below, *The Possession*), but these characters possess certain frailties that make possession particularly easy for the demon.

Whenever a demon attempts to possess any of the below types of characters, the demon gains the 9-Again quality on his roll (see *Resisting Possession*, p. 111).

The Chosen

You might as well call these guys, “The Cursed,” as they have been chosen by external forces to be vessels for demonic possession. Some have done little to invite such blight: a boy has parents who made a deal with dark forces to get something they wanted, and in return the demon gets the teenager to wear like a cheap suit. Or a woman cleans out the attic of her recently-deceased mother only to find a cherrywood box with a bone inlay—opening the box with the pewter key taped to the bottom is an accursed act, and it releases a demon into the body of whoever turns that key. Others are wholly responsible for the resultant possession. A scholar invites a demon into his body so he may possess the nigh-eternal knowledge the demon surely keeps. A fickle girl breaks the heart of a wannabe occultist and he cuts the throat of a local stray and curses her with something read out of a flea-market occult text—the result is that her flesh is taken by a skin-riding demon.

The Hateful

Hate is a powerful passion. It’s about that raw negativity seething within, and it will not be denied.





It's not just wanting to choke the shit out of the guy who cut you off in traffic; it's about a deep, growing pit in the soul, and the only way to fill it is to keep shoveling in thoughts of suffering and atrocity, or actually *causing* those things as a way to sate a limitless loathing. Those with such unmitigated antipathy have torn great, ragged chunks out of their souls, easy places for a demon to curl up. Whether they hate themselves or the rest of the world (or both) so completely doesn't matter. What matters is that the emotional pit more or less mirrors the spiritual pit from whence demons spring eternal, creating a dark sympathy. For the most part, the Hateful represent pure antagonists, so focused are they upon destruction and misery. That's not universally true, though—players may choose to create a character who possesses such feelings but recognizes the aberrant nature of them, and thus refuses to act upon them.

The Hopeless

Life is fundamentally a giant sucking hole. That's what the Hopeless would say if you asked them, and it's quite likely they would have a wealth of evidence to back up such a surly claim. They have not come to this conclusion lightly. They have, for whatever reason, been forced to the bottom of the barrel. A man loses his wife, his job and his house all in one week? A woman sees her fiancée murdered in front of her by a cadre of young sociopaths? A teenaged boy discovers he has a rare lymphoma that callously resists all treatment, putting him on the fast-track to a short life? The universal response to such stimuli is not necessarily crushing depression—everybody has a different reaction, but one *possible* reaction is a sense of utter hopelessness. It's a powerful doorway to demonic possession. The demon can attempt to offer hope if only the host will let the entity in, and if that doesn't work the demon still has a strong chance to force his way into the Hopeless character's flesh. (If the character does not possess the fortitude of will to resist, the demon will find little that stands in its way.)

The Innocent

Here is a sad fact: innocence is a kind of weakness. The problem is not with those attempting to remain morally pure; the problem is with those who are blind to the dangers of the world, who refuse to acknowledge the perils of evil or the wages of sin. Most of us learn the hard way about moral complications and compromises, the same way a child learns not to touch a hot

stove: we get burned. Some never learn this lesson, and thus they build up no defenses to the depredations of iniquity. This moral naïveté is a cavity into which a demon can crawl. Who in the World of Darkness can retain such an untested outlook? Children, for one. (Think of *The Exorcist*—one could argue that young Regan's innocence allows the devil to take hold.) The truly isolated may suffer such innocent ignorance by dint of that seclusion: a girl raised by her family in the wilds of Montana, perhaps, or a young man who's been imprisoned in the basement of his grandfather since his father died when he was very young.

The Mad

Madness is fickle, and can be a boon or a bane to a demon hoping to possess a body for its own. A manic-depressive has a soul lost in a great gray fog, a fog in which the demon can creep unseen. A schizophrenic may truly believe he is plagued by punishing angels, and so he is happy to let a whispering entity slither into his soul. (Alternately, though, a similar schizophrenic may be so resolute against the demons nobody else believes are real that he gains unnatural resilience when it comes to pushing back a possessing attack.) Those with one or more severe derangements are easy targets for a demon looking for a host.

The Selfish

We all *want*. We're all a little selfish at heart. A husband cheats on his wife. A dieter sneaks chocolate every night. A collector spends all his money—you know, the money he should use to buy food and clothes for his kids—on the Things he collects. That's selfish, lowercase 's.' But the world is home to those who are purely self-interested, self-indulgent ego-fiend narcissists, those for whom an altruistic thought or charitable moment remains truly alien. Their prevailing ethos is, "I want what I want, and I don't care who it hurts." On the one hand, this gives a demon a perfectly acceptable in: the demon can offer something the character wants, and the character will do whatever it takes to get it, resulting in possession. On the other hand, if that doesn't work, the demon has a kind of sympathetic connection: demons and devils are very much about want, about raw selfishness. And any time the soul forges a sympathetic connection with a demon, it makes it all the easier for that entity to take hold of the presumptive host.



Who's the Character?

Who's the character, here? The human host or the possessing demon? Well, technically, a Possessed character is a syncretism of both, and you as player get the joy of roleplaying both.

That being said, really, demons themselves are generally not that interesting, not to roleplay, not in the long term. Humans, though, most certainly are—they are creatures of vast complexity, and so it is truly the human that is the character. If the demon is exorcised during the course of play (presumably with the player's agreement), the human is what that person continues to roleplay.

That being said, one option is to “follow” a demon that moves from host to host over the course of a chronicle, burning out human hosts when they grow boring, complacent or rebellious. In this way, though, you're still roleplaying that mix of human host and demon possessor.



The Possession

The soul is the battleground upon which the struggle of human host versus possessing demon is fought. It is also the armor that defends that human against the Infernal incursion. If the demon can push past and dominate the soul (or have it handed over on a silver tray), then the prize is clear: the host's corporeal body.

A demon is generally bodiless at the time of the possession attempt—if it's not, it soon will be as it takes up residency within the flesh of the host. Its own soul now shares the body with the human soul. As to which is truly dominant... well, we'll get into that later in the chapter.

Vice Calls to Vice

Demons attempting possession find having a sympathetic connection with the target is key; in much the same way a voodoo doll purportedly works only

when marked with the hair and blood of the future victim, the demon must have something in common with its intended host. That something is nearly always a shared Vice.

Every demon has a Vice just as every human (and vampire, and werewolf) has a Vice, but for a demon, Vice is pretty much *everything*. As selfish creatures, their very existence relies upon sins that seem bound to their very beings. A demon's Virtue is only a masquerade, a mask it can wear or tool it will use to get what it wants. The creature's Vice, though—that's its very bread and butter.

A gray, withered phantasm of a demon, an indolent and invisible imp, will already have a sympathetic connection with a man so depressed he cannot rouse himself to rise from the couch or bed, or with a woman who has grown profoundly obese not because of her need to gorge upon food but because of her acute languor. Sloth speaks to Sloth—it's like the demon and the victim speak a shared language, whether or not they recognize it. A hate-filled spree-killer offers unwitting kinship to a fire-eyed demon whose chief Vice is Wrath. The prurient polygamist who relishes the sexual relations he is allowed to have with those in his compound may find a fly-covered, honey-tongued succubus now competes for his attention—and his flesh.

A demon may attempt possession of someone without the same Vice, but doing so is difficult for the demon. Not only does the demon suffer -3 dice on the attempt (see “Resisting Possession,” below), but in any struggle of dominance, the demon suffers -5 to any rolls made to subvert the will of the human host.

Resisting Possession

Dice Pool: Resolve + Composure versus the demon's Power + Finesse (or, if the demon is in corporeal form, the demon's Presence + Manipulation)

Action: Reflexive and extended (the target number of successes is equal to the character's own Morality score, and each roll is equivalent to one minute's worth of struggle)

A character feels ill and anxious during a possession attempt. He may experience hot flashes or cold sweats; it's possible a character will throw up or suffer minor hallucinations. Curiously, the character will be keenly aware that some “presence” is endeavoring to take control, though many who suffer such an attempt will dismiss it as a moment of lunacy or the result of a swiftly brought-on fever. Note that this struggle is

invisible to most anyone (excepting those with the Unseen Sense Merit as directed toward sensing the Infernal). Yes, the character may look conflicted or sick, but there exists little indication a battle for that individual's soul is being waged. At the moment possession actually occurs, stranger elements may be seen: the temperature in the room may lower unexpectedly, flies or other insects may appear seemingly out of nowhere, the air may become suffused with a strange smell like that of sulfur or of a heady musk.

Note that this system is precluded by the demon possessing the "Supreme Possession" Numina. That Numina has no rules in and of itself except in that it allows a demon to attempt possession using these systems, here. (More information on demons can be found in Chapter One.)

Suggested Modifiers: Character has a mild derangement (-1), character has a severe derangement (-2), character is attempting to do something other than sit or lie quietly and resolve the threat (-3 to the character); also note that a demon gains 9-Again to its attempt when aiming to possess any of the character types noted under "Inviting Possession," above.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character's will crumples like a paper cup under the invisible demonic assault. The character loses all Willpower points in the process.

Failure: The demon reaches the target successes first—the character is now one of the Possessed.

Success: The character reaches the target successes first—the character rebuffs the demon's attempt at possession. The demon may make another attempt after 24 hours have passed, though at a cumulative -1 penalty.

Exceptional Success: The character not only reaches the target first, but manifests a surprising rally of internal strength. The demon is pushed out and away, and may never again attempt possession upon this character.

Character Creation

Who is your Possessed character? A frail teen girl whose mind shatters in the middle of school as





To Roll, or Not to Roll

You might be purposefully creating a character who is already Possessed as per the character creation rules a little later on in this chapter. That's okay, and in just such an instance you don't really need to go through the mechanics of Resisting Possession (found on this page). It's worth *describing*, of course—how did the possession attempt feel? What was it like when the demon finally found that hole in your character's soul and wormed its way into the apple, so to speak? But if the goal is to create and roleplay someone who already exists among the Possessed, no roll is necessary.



a demon takes the reins? A haggard man who plots patiently to exorcize the demon that lurks within? A demonologist so thrilled with the chance to confront the diabolical that he gives in to the entity's every wish?

It's time not only to put dots on the page for your Possessed character, but also to give those dots context, a story built with conflicts that will drive your character's tale.

Generally speaking, you can follow along with the character creation rules found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** (p. 34). What follows are notes geared specifically toward the creation of a Possessed character.

Step One: Select Concept

If someone asks you, "Tell me about your character," they want you to describe her in, oh, about 50 words. The concept is not the summation of the character's history or traits, but is instead just a quick summary of *who* that character is at her core. Concept, as a general idea, should figure into the nature of the character's possession, be it the origins of that possession or of the demon that lurks within (but don't worry, we're going to conceptualize the demon-as-character a little later on).

A potential concept could easily be, "My character is a pastor who lost his faith after a missionary trip to Somalia. It was there he plunged into a deep

depression (Hopeless origin); an ancient bodiless demon chose him as host. Now he fights against the urges within, his faith renewed by the presence of evil." Straightforward, and it gives enough of a backbone upon which you can build the rest of the skeleton and musculature.

As noted, it helps to determine exactly what cavity in your character's soul opened him up to demonic possession (Chosen, Hateful, Hopeless, Innocent, Mad, Selfish); these do not reflect mechanically upon your character, but they most certainly reflect upon your character's core concept. The pastor example above plainly falls under the "Hopeless" category, for instance.

Steps Two, Three and Four

Choosing Attributes, Skills and Skill Specialties is just as it is in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. Assigning numbers (dots) to represent the traits, you're aiming to give the character abilities that make sense. Any traits work, as long as you can justify them as an organic part of the character. Most pastors wouldn't be keen on having dots in the Brawl Skill, but perhaps the pastor was once a boxer on the amateur circuit, or maybe you expect that since he's become Possessed it's been important to manifest a dot or two in that Skill to try to protect himself. Be prepared to defend any and all traits. The Storyteller may want to know, "Why does this pastor have a low Presence?" and you should have an answer ready. ("He compensates for it with a high Manipulation score—he doesn't seem to possess notable charisma in the pulpit, but he is very good at entangling his congregation in metaphysical logic.")

Step Five: Add Possessed Template

This is where the Infernal side of your character's soul—the *snake in the garden*, the *demon in the soul*—manifests. Demonic possession changes the mortal. The human now has a whispering (or screaming) voice inside that is wholly not her own, although some maintain a stubborn enough opinion that it could very well be their imagination or a strain of madness that won't be denied.

The supernatural traits and abilities of a Possessed character are never really her own. They are actually the demon's traits bleeding out, manifesting for either the character's own desires or for the demon's desires, depending upon who remains in control at any given time.



Vices

Technically, Virtue and Vice fall under Step Seven: Determine Advantages, but it's necessary to consider the Vice side of that equation right now. Why? Because Vice represents the core of the demon's connection with the human host, and from that stirs the demon's—and, by proxy, the Possessed character's—power.

If you look at the character sheet, you'll note that all seven of the Vices, those deadly sins, are listed. Each gets 3 empty dots, meaning that for the Possessed, Vices are actually given a numerical rating. One dot represents an *innate* connection to a particular Vice. Two dots represents a *lesser* connection to that Vice. Three dots represents a *greater* connection to that Vice. You'll use these to determine your character's Vestments, the supernatural aspects of the demon the character can harness. (More information on this can be found later in the chapter, under Special Rules and Systems, p. 117.)

You begin with 3 dots to distribute across all seven Vices. Your character's primary Vice (i.e., the one you write at the top of the character sheet) is also the primary Vice trait to determine advantages. Your character may never have more dots in another Vice than those dots possessed in that primary Vice. If your character's Vice is Gluttony and you distribute 1 dot to that Vice, no other Vice may have 2 dots until you raise Gluttony. You could put 2 dots in Gluttony and

one in, say, Sloth, but you could not do the reverse (2 in Sloth, 1 in Gluttony), because Sloth is not your character's primary Vice.

Thematically, though, it's important to see dots in these Vices as more than just numbers, as something beyond traits that give your character access to diabolical powers. Think of Vices as a very real representation of your character's wants, needs, frailties and addictions. A character with 3 dots in Wrath is basically either a hot forge swirling with raging embers or an icy motherfucker whose desire for revenge is as frigid as the slabs of carcass hanging in a walk-in freezer. However, a character with a dot in Wrath, a dot in Gluttony and a dot in Pride has altogether more complex urges and manifestations of those urges. Wrath may still be primary, and so he's still driven above all else by his need to punish, to claim vindication, but what happens when that urge is stifled? He eats (Gluttony). And he doesn't feel bad about it or how he looks or how he feels (Pride). Now, *technically*, the dots in these Vices represent the demon's innate traits, but they bleed out into the human's life—they manifest as urges he's maybe always had, or as desires that are frighteningly new.

Remember, too, that your primary Vice is almost certainly mirrored in the demon that lurks within. While there exists a good story in having a demon with a competing Vice, it also helps ensure the demon doesn't have a great grip on the human host. Demons seek a sympathetic bond, and Vice is nearly always the glue that holds that bond together (and also what keeps the demon's hand on the leash).

Experience Point Costs

These are the experience point costs for Possessed characters:

Trait	Cost
Attribute	New dots x 5
Skill	New dots x 3
Skill Specialty	3
Merit	New dots x 2
Morality	New dots x 3
Willpower dot	8
Vice	New dots x 10
New Vestment	10

Vestments

Vestments, besides being perhaps ironically named (vestments are the liturgical clothing of religious men and women), are the ways the demon's powers manifest. They represent abilities the Possessed character always has or can bring to the fore for a time. They're not one-off powers that operate as instant actions; no, Vestments are literally the demon coming to the surface. (Sometimes this is covert, other times blatantly overt.)

At the time of character creation, you choose Vestments based upon the dot ratings you placed in Vice (noted above). For each dot in a Vice, you gain one Vestment in accordance with that dot ranking. Vestments, like the Vice ratings, are delimited by Innate, Lesser and Greater powers. (More information on this can be found under Vestments, p. 129.)

So, a character with Gluttony ●●● chooses one Innate (1-dot) Gluttony Vestment, one Lesser (2-dot) Gluttony Vestment, and one Greater (3-dot) Gluttony Vestment.

Alternately, if your Possessed has Gluttony ●, Lust ●, and Sloth ●, then you choose one Innate (1-dot) Vestment for each of those three sins.

Step Six: Select Merits

A beginning Possessed character has 7 dots worth of Merits, distributed at your discretion. Once more, Merits should be in line with your character's concept, and you should be prepared to defend them to a curious Storyteller. The aforementioned pastor isn't likely to possess Fighting Style: Kung Fu, and is more likely to possess a trait like Inspiring or Meditative Mind. That being said, anything is possible, provided you've got a believable and interesting story to back it up.

You will find Possessed-specific Merits on p. 125 of this chapter.

Step Seven: Determine Advantages

Rules regarding Advantages can be found on pp. 90–105 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. However, you do have some considerations unique to Possessed characters.

Willpower

The fortitude of the will is key to the Possessed. Willpower helps a human keep in control of himself when the demon makes unreasonable demands of the body, but Willpower also goes to fuel some of the character's Vestments, making them manifest.

The Possessed therefore have noteworthy Willpower pools, more so than most humans (or even other monsters). The equation to determine a Possessed character's Willpower score is different, here. Effectively, a Possessed character has two separate Willpower pools. The first is the standard pool of the mortal, derived from Resolve + Composure as usual. The second is the demon's contribution, a secondary pool marked as "Infernal Will," equal to the dots of the character's primary Vice.

This can take a character's total Willpower above the expected 10-point maximum. He can spend only 1 Willpower point per turn, though, just like any other character.

You have access to both pools of Willpower to spend, but may *not* spend Willpower from the Infernal Will pool if the character's actions go against what the

demon desires. (Consider: the demon has little interest in the character pulling out a bunch of dusty old occult tomes and researching the entity's weaknesses in trying to uncover a way to exorcize the demon. You might want to spend Willpower on the Research action, which is fine—but you won't be spending it out of the demon's pool, the Storyteller reminds you. This is emblematic of the larger struggle between parasite and host: as long as the host is doing what the parasite wants, then their resources are shared. But once the host seeks to buck the trend, the demon is quite likely to rebel—it may force a struggle to take full control. See Force versus Free Will, p. 118.)

Another note about Willpower: it remains the object of an important thematic struggle between the character and the demon. Not only is it a resource that can be shared *or* competed for, but an important consideration is what happens when the Possessed needs more Willpower. Engaging in one's Vice is certainly an easy way to get it, is it not? In fact, that goes to fuel the Infernal Will pool in addition to Willpower—you'll find more information about this under Regaining Willpower, p. 120.

Morality

Your character begins with a Morality of 7, just like everybody else. It's a sticky wicket, of course, because it's easy to assume a character with a literal demon pulling the puppet strings would have degenerated rather swiftly. That's possible, but seldom the case. The human still has some measure of control, and the demon is in no hurry to drive the host mad or ravage the poor sod's soul—riding a horse doesn't mean running it ragged or shoving its head in the water trough until it drowns. Yes, some demons may prefer that angle (they are most certainly not human, and possess zero capability for human sympathy), but wiser creatures know subtlety is called for at least some of the time, yes?

That being said, the lower the human's Morality, the more pull the demon gains over the human host (see Force versus Free Will, p. 118), so it's still in the demon's interests to *eventually* winnow away the host's ethical foundations, at least to a far lower plateau. Maybe the human resists, and that's okay. Maybe he doesn't, though, and as such you feel it necessary to begin play with a weakened Morality score.

You may, as an optional rule, trade in points of Morality for experience points. You can reduce your Morality all the way down to 3 with this rule, gaining





Story Hook: Ouija Boards Talk to Demons

It's assumed that Ouija boards speak to ghosts. Whether some antique model or one of the newer "family-friendly" press-board Milton Bradley models, the assumption is that such a tool helps one communicate with those restless ghosts who have no voice of their own.

Bzzt. Wrong.

It's demons. It's always demons. Selfish creatures, lying creatures, demons wait invisible to speak to those willing to speak to them. They do so by mimicking the dead—sometimes by mimicking loved ones.

But the truth is, it's them. Sometimes they're in Hell or some blasted abyssal realm. Sometimes they're standing right behind you, watching your hand slide the icon across the wooden board.

They prove their power by telling you what's in your pockets. They write messages to you in a language you could not possibly know and, yes, that requires later verification through Google or through the library, but so be it—demons are nothing if not patient.

It goes back to the camel's nose theory—once you've done the Ouija board and spoken to the demon, or worse, once you've done so *alone*, the demon already has a handhold. Maybe he'll offer a pact. Maybe he'll whisper a secret ritual in your ear.

Or maybe, just maybe, while you think you're communicating with your dead grandfather, the demon will worm his way inside. Maybe that's how some people become Possessed.



5 experience points per dot reduction (so, going from Morality 7 to 6 earns 5 experience points, whereas going from Morality 7 to 3 earns 20 experience points). This must be discussed with and approved by the

Storyteller beforehand; a precipitous drop in Morality may go against what the Storyteller has in mind for this story, and can be troublesome if all the other characters remain at the normal levels for that trait.

Virtue and Vice

You should've already picked your Vice, so now it's really time to pick your Virtue. Virtue needn't be the perceived opposite of your character's Vice, though it certainly can be. (Gluttony and Temperance, for instance, make nice foils—the character values moderation and restraint as abstract notions, but can't help himself when it comes to emotional eating.) It's also interesting to see Virtue and Vice form a kind of strange partnership. Faith as a Virtue gives the character an inner core of strength, a trust in higher powers—but it can also bleed over to a sense of intense self-righteousness, manifesting as the Vice of Pride. The two are therefore not so much in opposition as simply two sides of the same coin. Does the character's Virtue offend the demon within? Or can the callous entity at least appreciate the value of it to suit its purposes?

Step Eight: That Infernal Spark

You now have a character. That character has been possessed by a demon, a demon that vies for control of the host human's body, aiming to subvert that individual's will.

You've still got a lot of details to go, though. Yes, the character sheet has dots on a page, but it's important to build a story from those dots, a story rife with conflict and wants and needs and fears. What is it your character fears most? How old is he? How do his 4 dots in Presence manifest themselves?

Of course, this doesn't take into account your envisioning of the demon within, though, does it? That leads us to...

The Demon Within: A Picture of Sin

You're responsible (unless you and the Storyteller have decided she's best to handle this part) for coming up with the personality of the demon within. Demons aren't human, not at all, but they can certainly *mimic* human nature well enough. Is the demon crass? Cruel? A brutal dictator or a smooth salesperson? The concept of the demon is part of the entire package; it's critical to know just what the voice in your character's ear sounds like. You can even conceive of your demon's history (perhaps it lurked in Sumerian graves

or made countless pacts with Renaissance magicians), though that's also something you may want to leave to the Storyteller if some sense of surprise and discovery is desirable.

It's worth noting that you don't really need to put dots on a page for the demon: while Possessed, a host's demon is really just the sum of the Vice dots, but it has access to all the human's normal traits, too. If you need quick and easy stats for the demon *outside* the body, however, a good rule of thumb is to multiply the sum of the character's Vice dots by 4, and the resultant number can be divided between the manifested demon's Power, Finesse and Resistance traits. Numina can be chosen from this book or from the **World of Darkness Rulebook** (p. 210). Most Possessing demons are considered Dominions, though you're free to tweak that if it serves your idea of a demon.

Special Rules and Systems

The demon enters the body, and to a degree it loses power—it is no longer a presence all its own in this world; it can no longer achieve things independently. Ah, but the entity now has a body that will do its bidding, a body that remains as nearly perfect camouflage for all the things—the little sins, the big sins—the demon hopes to achieve. The demon is allowed to stay, then, for as long as the human can or will fulfill the creature's wishes. In return, a measure of the demon's power still remains present for both of them to share—and who says demons can't share?

As a result, the Possessed are given over to certain unique systems and abilities, and you'll find all those proper mechanics below.

Properties of the Possessed

Upon becoming Possessed, the character gains a number of automatic benefits always available at no cost—these benefits are the result of sharing a body with an Infernal soul, a soul that has arguably been around the block for the last, oh, two or three millennia. These benefits include:

A Gift of Tongues

The Possessed can speak languages he has never learned. For each dot possessed in the character's primary Vice (1 to 3), the character gains a new learned tongue (as noted by the 1-dot Language Merit).

Why is this? Nobody knows for sure (and even different demons can't agree upon exactly from whence it comes). One theory is of course related to the Tower of Babel; some demons happily take credit for urging the citizens of Babylon to build a tower not to exalt God but to praise their own genius and ascend to Heaven of their own accord. The great tower fell, and of course the demons were present when mankind became fractured into its many nations and many tongues.

Another theory—one that's ultimately far more mundane—is that demons have simply been around for a long time. Most evidence suggests demons have existed since the dawn of mankind if not before. (Again, different demons tend to tell different stories.) By dint of being around for so long, the Infernal entities are bound to have picked up a language or three (or a thousand), and are thus able to share some with the Possessed host.

Infernal Erudition

Much as demons know many tongues, they also know many things. Some demonologists have suggested that demons know all things, but can reproduce and recall a thing only when it is the subject of a question posed by a human. This lends itself to the theory that demons did *not* exist before mankind, and that they are ultimately a result of man's selfishness and iniquity. (Then again, some demonologists claim this is a lofty notion, centered upon man because he cannot believe he is not the center of the universe—basically, the same thing as suggesting the sun revolves around the Earth instead of vice versa.)

As a result, the Possessed character gains the Encyclopedic Knowledge Merit for free; if the character already possesses it, the demon may lend its aid in a secondary way, with Eidetic Memory (also free). Both Merits can be found on pp. 108–109, **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

I See Demons

The host's body is truly shared—what the human sees, the demon sees, two souls peering out of one set of eyes. The eyes must therefore be useful to the entity coiled within, and demons would quite like to see other demons, thank you very much. (The Infernal competition, especially between demons of similar Vices, is seemingly endless, and often profoundly cruel.)

Every Possessed character gains the Unseen Sense Merit as focused upon demons. This manifests in a way unique to each character: one Possessed sees demons as





hazy shadows, another sees them as distortions. (Think of a heat haze or an odd refraction of light.) This Merit does apply to other Possessed, too—the witness effect is simply overlaid atop the other human host, like a shadow on an X-Ray or a ghostly figure.

Hell's Eternity

Demons are seemingly eternal. They can be banished from this world. Some even say they can be destroyed. Regardless, when the demon is entrenched in a human host, that human becomes ultimately immortal. He does not age, not by a single minute, while the demon is present. Some see this as a blessing, others as clearly a curse.

Force versus Free Will

The demon demands. It does not sit comfortably within the human host. It is not given to passivity. The demon *wants* things. That's the whole point of claiming a human host, frankly. It wants protection. It wants the camouflage provided by the cloak of mortal flesh. It wants to gain vengeance against its enemies, it wants to engage in the many pleasures available to man (those both tame and perverse), it *needs* to engage in its Vice and see sin done in its name or spirit.

Excision or Exorcism

What happens if the demon is exorcised or otherwise destroyed, but the human host remains? All the Infernal powers are gone. Poof. The character ages as normal. Any Merits gained as a result of becoming Possessed vanish into thin air. (No more speaking Aramaic, sorry.) Vices no longer have dots, and the character can no longer manifest the hellish Vestments. For all intents and purposes, the host is now entirely human, with a body all his own.

Sometimes these desires line up with what the human host wants. A succubus wants to engage in strange sexual peccadilloes; the human's perfectly fine with that, giving in gladly to his Vice of Lust. The demon whispers in the host's ear to *take what's rightfully his*, which maybe means grabbing that unattended purse or taking out one's frustrations and vindication with a fist to that cab driver's face. And

the human bows to that urge, because really he wants that, too. The whisper, the suggestion, the demand... it provides justifications for what the human's really wanted all along.

But it isn't like that all the time. Oh, no. Sometimes the human host would rather not engage in the ceaseless exploration of sin. The human has free will, at least in theory. He can choose to engage in his Virtue. He can choose to explore a wholly different sin, something that goes against what the devil inside wants.

Plus, sometimes the demon wants to put the human host in danger. Maybe it wants to send him to track down and murder another Possessed. Maybe it wants to throw him foolishly into battle against a whole gaggle of Larvals, those demonic ghosts. Could even be that the demon has grown tired of pleasure and now wants to experience its opposite, hoping to relish the pain the human host ideally will visit upon himself.

Bottom line is sometimes the human side wants to express his free will and deny the demon its choice. And sometimes the demon hisses, roils and writhes within, discontented with the host's callow rebellion. Sure, sometimes the demon will choose to pick its battles, letting the human have "this one" so the demon can have "the next one." But do not assume demons possess such human reasoning. They're creatures formed of sin and selfishness, and they want what they want *when* they want it. (Meaning: *now*.)

This means the demon will attempt to exert control. It will hope to dominate the human host into doing what it wants. Will it be successful? How to determine who wins the contest? Mechanically, it's the character versus himself: you, as the player, are pitting your own stats (Attributes) versus your own stats (Vices). Thematically, it is of course the human host versus the demon's will. What the demon wants (as generally determined by the Storyteller, though other options exist under "Storytelling the Possessed" later in this chapter), it's trying to accomplish. Below is the system for this contest of wills.

The Contest of Wills

Dice Pool: Resolve + Composure versus sum of all Vice dots

Action: Extended and contested (each roll is equal to one turn's worth of internal struggle; the target number of successes is different for both human host and possessing demon, see below)

The human host and the possessing demon are at odds. Perhaps the demon wants to continue manifesting a Greater Vestment regardless of the potential Burnout, or maybe it just wants the mortal to go north when the human host is hell-bent on going south.

The demon's target number of successes is the human host's Morality score.

The human host's target number of successes is 10 minus his Morality score.

Whichever of the character's "sides" or souls wins the contest is the side that effectively takes control for the next scene. How this control precisely manifests in regard to roleplaying (and also how potential Morality degeneration factors into the equation) is covered later in this chapter, under "Storytelling the Possessed."

Whichever side wins this contest has control for the scene. The opposing side may not attempt to wrest control of the host body for the remainder of this scene, not under any condition.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: If either side suffers a dramatic failure, that side loses the contest automatically. In addition, it gives the opposing soul an advantage: whoever suffered the dramatic failure operates at a -2 penalty during the next Contest of Wills.

Failure: The soul makes no progress toward exerting control.

Success: The soul makes progress toward exerting control. The first to the target number gains control for the scene.

Exceptional Success: One soul within the Possessed character resoundingly claims control over the host body. During the next Contest of Wills, that side gains +2 to its dice pool.

Suggested Modifiers (Human)

Morality at 8 or above	+3
Meditative Mind Merit	+1
Won the last Contest of Wills	+1
Morality at 3 or below	-3

Suggested Modifiers (Demon)

Human host has severe derangement	+3
Human host has mild derangement	+1
Won the last Contest of Wills	+1
Has Vice different from human host	-5

Spending Willpower

Both sides can spend Willpower during this exchange, gaining +3 to their respective rolls. This is the



only time (unless you subscribe to the optional rule found in the sidebar on this page) that the Possessed character may spend more than a single Willpower in a given turn. The human host spends Willpower from the normal Willpower pool, and the demon may spend it from its Infernal Will pool.

Suicide is Forbidden

One thing a demon cannot do: force a human host to commit an action that is plainly suicidal. The demon can't force the host to step in front of a moving train or stick a gun in his mouth. It may *want* to. But it can't. It can throw a human into a *dangerous* situation, yes—forcing the host body into combat with a powerful Diabolus is doable. The demon can even seek to force the host body to cause non-lethal (read: bashing) harm to himself (as it perhaps forces the host to smash his head into a bathroom mirror or punch a brick wall). But it can't ask for suicide, and it can't force the host's hand to incur lethal damage *directly* to himself. Indirectly is another story; the Storyteller is the ultimate judge of what actions would lead to certain death. (Note, however, that the demon can attempt to push a human host to Burnout—exercising its demonic powers too much leads to madness and/or accumulated damage.)

Example: *Damon's demon has asked him to sate his most perverse urges upon the prostitute before him. Damon complies; she's willing, she's paid, he's happy, end of story. Or is it? The demon has another demand: cut her pretty throat. She's seen too much and, besides, the demon is quite certain Damon will enjoy this*

brutal, yet elegant act. Damon refuses, and the demon demands. Time for the Contest of Wills. Damon's Morality is at 6, which means his target number is 4, and the demon's target number is 6. Damon's player rolls Resolve + Composure, for a total of 6 dice. The Storyteller rolls for the demon: Damon's player has bought a number of additional Vice dots, and so the Storyteller gets to roll a sum of all those Vices, which equals 6 dice, as well. It's a close contest that lasts four turns, but the human side of Damon wins out; the demon is defeated, but barely. Damon leaves the prostitute behind (so flustered he forgets to pay her), glad that the demon did not wrest control from him for the scene.

Regaining Willpower

The Possessed character's normal Willpower pool can reclaim lost points the same way any other character can (see Regaining Willpower Points, pp. 95–96, **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

Regaining Infernal Will, however, is a little different.

First, the only way Infernal Will is regained is through actions related to the Possessed character's primary Vice. Upon waking from a restful sleep, the demon does not reclaim lost Infernal Will—no, it's done only through action, through actions that specifically embody Vice.

When the Possessed character performs actions that play out neatly in line with her primary Vice, she regains Willpower, right?

Yes, but that regained point *first* goes to the Infernal Will pool, not to the Willpower pool. Only if the Infernal Will pool is filled does the character add Vice-gained Willpower to her own (human) pool.





Optional Rule: Double Down

The Possessed character has technically two sides: the human soul and the demonic entity doing the possessing, right? Both sides also get a Willpower pool: the human has her normal Willpower score, and the demon has an Infernal Will pool equal to the dots purchased in the primary Vice. And yet, the Possessed character can spend only a single Willpower point at a time, right?

Wrong... or, at least, it's wrong if you decide to invoke this optional rule (Storyteller prerogative). Assume that the Possessed character can spend 2 Willpower points per turn, provided 1 point comes from the Willpower pool and the other from the Infernal Will pool. In addition, the demon contributes Willpower only as normal, meaning the action necessitating Willpower expenditure is something that operates *in line* with the demon's desires. If the action is something the demon opposes (even if the demon doesn't invoke a Contest of Wills), then Infernal Will cannot be contributed.



Alternately, the Possessed character can regain *all* spent Infernal Will if the character's actions during the entire game session (i.e., "chapter") fall in line with her primary Vice and, in addition, she engages in *no* actions that would fall under her Virtue. This necessitates being truly Vice-driven, performing sinful actions from the start of the game session to the finish—at the close of the session, if the Storyteller deems it appropriate, the character's entire Infernal Will pool may be refilled.

Fooling the Demon

Dice Pool: Composure + Subterfuge minus the 2 highest Vice dots (maximum of 5)

Action: Instant

One question is: Of how much is the demon truly aware? Does the demon constantly peer out through the host's eyes, lurking in the mind, hearing the echoes of every thought that reverberates around the skull's chamber? While some demons remain profoundly

vigilant in their paranoid watch over their hosts, most grow a bit indolent within the host body. It's not exactly accurate to say the demon *slumbers*, but sometimes the itch within the host's mind or the feel of ghostly fingers and eyes playing about the room of his soul fades—it's as if the demon relaxes its grip, for a time.

This is especially true during times of relative dullness; when the human sleeps, eats, reads the newspaper, or does other things born of common routine, the demon is likely to fade into the background until something rouses its interest.

When the demon fades, the Possessed character's human side may work against it. It may contact other Possessed, or attempt to casually investigate the demon's history and legacy. A suicidal Possessed may take this time to eat his cereal, load a gun in his lap, and take a spoonful of bullets instead of Lucky Charms. Another may call a local parish to investigate the options for exorcism.

However, certain things *ping* the demon's radar, instantly rousing it from "slumber." One of those things is contact with any of its names. It doesn't matter whether the name is true or false, if it has ever answered to a particular title, name or epithet and the human comes across that name in print, or he thinks it, or he speaks it or hears it—*boom*. The demon instantly stirs and turns its unrepentant gaze toward the human's activities.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The demon becomes fully aware of the character's thoughts and actions. It makes an immediate control using Contest of Wills, and gains +2 to its attempt.

Failure: The demon becomes aware. It may not necessarily be aware of exactly what the human was doing; the character may be able to stop his activity or cease investigation, thus leaving the creature in the dark. But the demon is now fully roused from its languor.

Success: The character successfully tricks the demon; the demon remains faded into the background, unaware of what the individual is up to. Unless otherwise spooked, the demon remains ignorant for the remainder of the scene.

Exceptional Success: So convinced is it of the utter tedium of the human's actions, the demon fades into the background for the remainder of the scene. In addition, the character gains +1 to the next "Fooling the Demon" attempt.



Suggested Modifiers

Character is doing something out of routine	-3
Character is investigating the demon within	-3
Character is investigating another demon	-2
Character has a Perception (Wits + Composure) pool of 6 or above	-2
Character is doing something very routine (eating, sleeping, etc.)	+1
Character has a Perception (Wits + Composure) pool of 3 or below	+2

Blessed Attacks

Those of sufficient Virtue, faith or skill are capable of doing a unique kind of harm to the Possessed. Whether it has something to do with God, something to do with a general sense of righteousness or something to do with a deeper understanding of the weave and weft of the occult, certain “blessed

attacks” on the Possessed yield special results. (Refer to pp. 213–214 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for systems dealing with Abjurations, Exorcisms and Blessed Items.)

Abjurations

The system works much as it does when used against ghosts, with a few tweaks. First, the prayers and rites are reflected by a contested roll of the abjurer’s Resolve + Composure versus the sum total of the Possessed character’s Vice dots. Second, the Possessed character’s Morality score can aid or inhibit the abjurer’s roll—if the character has a Morality above 5, he offers +1 die to the abjurer’s roll, but a Morality below 5 causes a -2 penalty. Finally, the roll results are a hair different...

Dramatic Failure: The abjurer is overwhelmed by the selfishness or evil of the entity before him. He suffers 2 points of lethal damage and may perform no



further abjurations for the rest of the day. In addition, the abjurer is weakened against demonic incursion: for the next year, if any demon attempts to possess that character, it gains +2 to the attempt.

Failure: The abjurer is too weak in faith or skill to move the demon. The abjurer may make an additional attempt, but does so at -2 dice (cumulative per failed attempt).

Success: The demon is temporarily banished from the human host for one scene. The human host is without any demonic powers during this time and is a mortal being in every sense of the word. The demon will return at the start of the next scene *unless* the character burns a Willpower dot. Doing so banishes the demon for an additional scene (and, in theory, the player can continue to burn the character's Willpower dots to gain several scenes of "freedom").

Exceptional Success: As above, but the demon is initially gone for a full day (12-hour period). Spending Willpower dots to continue the banishment earns one more 12-hour period per point burned.

Exorcism

An exorcism works roughly in the same fashion as it does in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**: one or several trained exorcists engage in a contested and extended action, and a true battle of wills (external as opposed to the internal one undergone by demon and human host) takes place. Each side aims to winnow the Willpower of the other. The exorcist's pool is Resolve + Composure, while the Possessed's pool is the sum total of all Vice dots.

Each roll still equals five minutes—which means the Possessed character must be bound or held to a place. If the Possessed is moving around, the exorcists can continue to attempt the ritual, but let's be frank: five minutes is approximately 100 turns. That's a lot of time for the Possessed character to interrupt the ritual, and if the ritual is interrupted, its progress is lost and it must be reattempted.

The Possessed, when affected successfully by one of the many rolls in this extended action, suffers as if struck by holy water, burned by fire or otherwise harmed. The muscles tighten. The character may weep, spitting out awful profanity, spouting off in Latin or Aramaic or some other lost tongue (see the Dragon's Tongue Merit, p. 126).

See, when exorcising a demon from a Possessed character, and the exorcist loses Willpower, that's all it is. But if the exorcist wins a contested roll within the extended action, the Possessed loses more—the

Possessed loses 1 Willpower *and* suffers 1 point of lethal damage. So, while a Possessed has more Willpower to lose (Infernal Will is included, and is in fact the first to go), the character also starts to break apart physically: terrible sores, open cuts, vomit, tears of blood, seizures and so forth.

This of course means an exorcism can kill the human host as well as banishing the demon. This can be averted, but requires action on the part of the exorcists doing the ritual. If one of the exorcists (or someone accompanying them) performs medical aid on the Possessed as he endures the throes of the ritual, this might be able to mitigate the damage done. That individual must succeed on a Wits + Medicine roll penalized by the Possessed character's primary Vice dots (maximum of 3), with further penalties included if the environment is distracting, dark or otherwise perilous. Some exorcists care little for such mercy, however.

The roll results are the same as those found on p. 214 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, except here, total success (loss of all the Possessed's Willpower points) indicates that the demon is permanently banished from the host. If the human is still alive, then for all intents and purposes the character is now purely mortal once more. All powers and traits associated with the Possessed template are lost. The demon may not re-attempt possession of the character, but it may very well attempt to possess one of the exorcists (partly due to proximity, partly due to vindication).

Blessed Items

Sanctified items—a papal scepter with a chamber for a saint's teeth, Buddhist prayer beads from a supposed *bodhisattva*, a Zoroastrian *das* (sickle) supposedly touched by Ahura Mazda—work on the Possessed the same way they do on ghosts. They have a rating of +1 to +5, and this is added to any attack (though it bears repeating that many blessed items are not weapons, and so suffer from the -1 improvised attack ruling).

Damage done to a Possessed character by a blessed item is aggravated. The damage done is often strange, actually—the flesh sears, sometimes holy symbols are left as scars, sometimes the wound even catches fire for a moment. The demon within roils when touching a blessed item, and will quite likely force a Contest of Wills to get as far away from the consecrated object as possible.





as with blessed items, the demon will surely endeavor to wrest control of the host body.

However, if the human remains and takes his entire Health track full of lethal points of damage, the demon is cast out of the body. Of course, the human needs medical attention immediately, as his body has been run ragged with a stroke, heart attack, burns, or some other form of internal or external illness. Many humans won't live—but, of course, the demon is gone.

The demon, however, may return to attempt possession again, and gains +2 to the roll to do so while the character heals under medical care. Hence it's a good idea to have vigilant allies who might stand with the victim and protect him against further demonic incursion.

Consecrated Ground

The demon within cannot abide consecrated ground. Churches or other “normal” holy places are not consecrated—certainly a priest, pastor, rabbi or monk will consider it as such, but within the World of Darkness, it takes some kind of holy event to consecrate an area. Places where Jesus walked and healed people? A hilltop where a mighty demon was cast back to whatever dark realm from whence it came? The burial mound of a forgotten saint? These represent consecrated ground.

When a Possessed character steps foot in such a place, the demon within senses it immediately (but rarely before). Once per turn, the demon loses a point of Infernal Will—and when that is lost, the Possessed character starts to take lethal damage. Just

The Great Egress: Back to Hell

Perhaps it's time for the demon to go. So—how? How can a Possessed truly be free of the demon within? Ultimately, you as a player have likely created the character to be Possessed, and probably want to continue playing the game in that mode—but, then again, it's quite possible that your story very much revolves around a character arc wherein the individual is able to reclaim his humanity from the demon and cast the creature back to Hell.

Ultimately, it's probably a pursuit unique to each character, best left to a discussion between player

and Storyteller to determine exactly what constitutes a strong enough angle of redemption in a way that damages the demon's grip.

That being said, it's also nice to have some rules that could be used (or ignored!) to back up this "quest" for personal exorcism.

Assume that the character must go on a kind of pilgrimage, an internal and external journey that strengthens his will and Virtue against the demon.

This journey has no set time, but certainly isn't a quick one: the character can't just give some money to the homeless and *wish real hard* to make the demon go away. It requires time, sacrifice and effort. The character isn't Job, he doesn't have to persevere past the point where he's sitting in the ashes of his home with his family dead around him, but certainly some degree of pain and effort past the point of sanity is going to be necessary.

The character will need to be of Morality 7 or higher. The character will also need to complete a number of *truly* virtuous actions, the number of which is equal to the dots the character has in Vices. So, if the character has Gluttony 3, Sloth 2, Wrath 1, that means 6 truly virtuous actions are required. Every time the character completes a virtuous action, the player is offered a chance to "buy down" 1 Vice dot for 5 experience points. Spending those 5 points removes 1 Vice dot (though the dots from the primary Vice are always last to go). This lessens the demon's grip, but also removes the character's access to the Vestment purchased at that level.

Truly virtuous actions aren't easy tasks performed in alignment with one's Virtue. Each should comprise an entire game session, at least. It should necessitate some degree of sacrifice on the part of the character. A truly wealthy character with Charity as a Virtue who expends all his Resources dots gifting his riches to various women's shelters around town, well, that probably counts (especially if it reveals a genuine character change—now the character has to live on the streets himself, having given up the keys to his expensive condo in the 'burbs). A character who goes after a truly terrifying serial killer and brings him to justice (read: doesn't just shoot him in the head but actually subdues him and drags him to the cops) might count toward the Virtue of Justice, especially if the character performed this action at great cost to himself (almost dying, losing a loved one, getting thrown into jail himself).

Whole cabals of Possessed may work together to try to extirpate the demons that possess each other, carrying the mantle of liberation and deliverance together—arguably providing strength, though one weak link in that chain can hamper them all.

Remember, the demon has little interest in the Possessed character's redemption—it *wants* to remain in the body. It will do anything to stay—offer deals, push the character to commit grotesque acts in service to Vice, perhaps even force a Contest of Wills so as to "buy back" lost Vice dots. If all that fails, the demon may think the character a lost cause, and may try to force the character to Burnout or even push him into such danger that the host body will die. Yes, the demon will still be tossed free of the body, but the human is destroyed, too. Salt the earth, and all that.

Possessed Merits

What follows is a list of Merits available only to Possessed characters, unless otherwise specified.

Animal Familiar (• to •••)

Effect: The Possessed is tended to by an animal guardian; it's quite often a black animal, though it may also be an animal that is oddly-colored (an albino, for instance, or a creature whose feathers or fur shows patterns that are not common or ever found in nature). The animal is profoundly loyal, and will protect the Possessed at the cost of its own life (though if that happens, this Merit will need to be re-purchased). The character may still at times need to succeed on a Manipulation + Animal Ken roll to communicate her wishes (which are not purely empathic), but she gains +3 dice on this roll.

The number of dots purchased in this Merit indicate the general strength of the attendant hell-familiar. One dot is usually equivalent to something small (such as a raven). Two dots represent an animal with similar traits to a cat. Three dots provide the character with a beast similar to a dog. (Traits for these three animals can be found on p. 203, *World of Darkness Rulebook*.)

Demon Familiar. Imp (•••••)

Effect: The Possessed character has an embodied familiar with a physical body—a small imp. The imp, like the Animal Familiar above, is profoundly devoted to its Possessed master (really, it's more devoted to the



Imp Familiar Traits

Attributes: 5/4/3 (divide among Mental, Physical and Social)

Skills: 9/6/3 (divide among Mental, Physical and Social); the familiar receives a free dot in Brawl, Larceny or Stealth

Willpower: Equal to Resolve + Composure

Essence: 10 (10 max)

Initiative: Equal to Dexterity + Composure

Defense: Equal to lowest of Dexterity and Wits

Speed: Strength + Dexterity + 5

Virtue: Choose Virtue

Vice: Any. Most familiars share their master's Vice, but not all. A familiar regains *all* spent Willpower by fulfilling its Vice once per chapter, just as a mortal does for fulfilling her Virtue.

Morality: Familiars have no Morality score.

Size: 3 or less

Health: Equal to Stamina + Size

Vestments: Choose two Innate Vestments from the imp's primary Vice category.

Innocuous: Embodied familiars are very good at not being noticed by others. Anyone but its bonded master suffers a -2 penalty on Perception rolls to notice the familiar, unless it does something to draw attention to itself.

Through the Eyes: By spending a point of Willpower, the master of an embodied familiar can shift his perceptions to the familiar. He sees what the familiar sees, hears what it hears, and so on. He is oblivious to his own surroundings while viewing through his familiar, but still possesses tactile sensation (and thus he is aware of any damage or physical sensation to his own body). Ending this viewing is a reflexive action and requires no roll.

demon than to the human host, though imps *are* allowed to favor the mortal soul, instead). It will throw itself into harm's way *only* if the character demands it, however. The Animal Familiar does so without question or command, but imps can be a bit cowardly—an Imp Familiar needs to be *urged* into combat (or cajoled, or threatened).

If an Imp Familiar is slain, its Infernal spirit usually reincorporates and returns to whatever Hell from whence it came. Sometimes, though, it latches onto its master and feeds off his memories, drinking deep of the hunter's soul to sustain itself in ethereal form. In game terms, a Possessed character's player may, upon the destruction of his embodied familiar, choose to immediately spend 10 experience points as a reflexive action to preserve the demon as a Twilight Familiar (see below). Stats for the Imp Familiar can be found in the sidebar below.

Demon Familiar, Twilight (●●●●)

Effect: A Twilight Familiar is a spiritual entity with no proper physical body of its own. A Twilight Familiar is also known as a “fetch.” Twilight Familiars can temporarily manifest like ghosts (see Manifestations, p. 210 in *The World of Darkness Rulebook*), but their ephemeral bodies are otherwise invisible and intangible to the physical world. A Twilight Familiar must manifest or use Numina to affect anything in the physical world—except for its master, whom it can touch at will. (Its master can also see and speak with the familiar freely, even if he cannot see or hear into Twilight.) A Twilight Familiar often leaves behind a subtle sign of its presence, even when it is not manifested. A whiff of sulfur might waft from its location, or the lights may flicker in the room when the entity is present. A Twilight Familiar, when manifested, often represents its Possessed master's Vice: a Gluttonous character may have something that resembles a bloated, tumor-besieged bullfrog, while a Lustful character may instead be served by a lithe succubus or priapic incubus. Stats for the Twilight Familiar can be found in the sidebar below.

The Dragon's Tongue (● or ●●)

Effect: Demons have their own tongue, known colloquially as the Dragon's Tongue. What are the origins of this strange language? Why is it for some a series of hisses and clicks, while for others it is a mad susurrations of sibilant noises? Frankly, few know; some suggest it is a remnant language cobbled together from the Babel-speak of angels, of God, and

Twilight Familiar Traits

Attributes: 3/3/2 (allocate dots in any order among Power, Finesse and Resistance)

Willpower: Equal to Power + Resistance

Essence: 10 (10 max); the demon regains 1 point of spent Essence per day spent in its master's presence. A familiar can also regain spent Essence by witnessing (or causing) acts related to its Vice.

Initiative: Equal to Finesse + Resistance

Defense: Equal to highest of Power and Finesse

Speed: Equal to Power + Finesse + 5

Virtue: Choose Virtue

Vice: Any. Most familiars share their master's Vice, but not all. A familiar regains *all* spent Willpower by fulfilling its Vice once per chapter, just as a mortal does for fulfilling her Virtue.

Morality: Familiars have no Morality score.

Size: 5 or less

Corpus: Equal to Resistance + Size

Born of Sin: The Twilight Familiar is a base creature, born of sin and capable of calling that sin out in others. The familiar can manipulate the presence of its Vice, enhancing or manipulating its manifestation in a creature, mortal or otherwise. The target need not have the same Vice as the demon; he must merely be experiencing the emotion. A character whose Vice is Pride can still feel Lust for a beautiful woman, or Envy of a neighbor's new car, for example. The demon cannot create a Vice where none exists.

Enhancing a Vice, making an individual feel the emotion more strongly, requires the expenditure of 1 point of Essence and a contested roll of Power + Finesse versus the target's Resolve or Composure, whichever is higher. The familiar can produce a moderate shift with a success; mild attraction might become infatuation, or infatuation might become full-blown obsession in the case of Lust, but mild attraction cannot be

turned into full-blown obsession directly. An exceptional success, however, allows the demon to fan even the tiniest spark of Vice into an inferno. The changes last for one minute per success. The demon cannot enhance the same Vice in the same target more than once per scene.

Manipulating a Vice, changing its target, requires the expenditure of 2 points of Essence and a contested roll of Power + Finesse versus the target's Resolve or Composure, whichever is higher. Success allows the demon to slightly alter the target of a character's emotion. For example, a character feeling Sloth toward his work might have that laziness redirected toward laziness regarding investigating those weird sounds in the basement, or a man proud of his status as a player might instead be made to focus that Pride upon his ass-kicking prowess—which might cause problems if he's never been in a fight in his life.

Numina: Assign three Numina.

Anchor: The demon's master is considered to be its anchor to the material world, although there is no limit to how far a familiar can travel from its master. See Anchors on p. 209 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

When a familiar manifests, use the following modifiers:

Location	Modifier
Profane or blasphemous site (desecrated church, massacre location)	+3
Place associated with the demon's Vice	+2
Occult location (ley line nexus, pagan temple, etc.)	+1
Within line of sight of a holy symbol (cross, Star of David, statue of Buddha)	-1
Within line of sight of a church, synagogue, temple, etc.	-2
Holy ground	-3

of Adam and Eve. Others say it's more a conceptual meta-language, a tongue that is as much meaning as it is sound. All demons know it, but the Possessed do not automatically have access to it: it seems that, for some, once the demon has taken possession it cannot always parse its understanding of the Dragon's Tongue through the host's plainly human mind. However, those Possessed who purchase this Merit at 1 dot find that their minds *do* understand it, and can move their mouths to speak it. Those Possessed who purchase this at 2 dots find that they can communicate with all demons (within and without) all the more completely: they gain +1 to Social rolls with demons outside their bodies, and they gain +1 to any Contest of Wills rolls made against the demon *within* their bodies.

In regard to dealing with demons, this Merit allows the character to speak and understand the language of demons, allowing her to summon and negotiate with them without using the usual rituals (found in the previous chapter). Demons aren't necessarily impressed by this knowledge—some, in fact, consider it an affront. Likewise, this Merit does *not* allow the character to command demons; it simply removes many of the obstacles to talking to them. The game mechanics for using Dragon's Tongue to call and interact with demons are explained on p. 83.

Dragon's Tongue can be acquired at any point in a character's life. Some characters (seventh son of a seventh son) have it from birth, others gain this dubious blessing later, perhaps as the result of a curse or a failed summoning ritual. Dragon's Tongue can be purchased as part of a demonic pact, though the demon granting it generally works in a clause that prohibits the character from using the knowledge to control or take advantage of that particular demon.

Unlike the other Merits in this section, any character can purchase this Merit. In addition, characters with supernatural templates *can* purchase the Dragon's Tongue Merit.

Vice: The Wages of Sin

It may seem strange that, for Possessed characters, Vice is given dots—but, for demons, Vice is very much a living thing, perhaps not technically alive, but certainly potent and dynamic, as powerful as a dancing flame or a hungry virus. So what can these wages of sin do for the demon, and your proxy, the Possessed character?

Vice as Resistance

Supernatural resistance is key for a Possessed. Neither human nor demon wish for their mind to be hijacked by a *third* party—the body is already host to two souls, and a third cook in the kitchen will surely spoil the meal. As such, the dots your Possessed character has in her highest Vice can be added to supernatural resistance. So, any time your character needs to bolster resistance to a paranormal or supernatural power (mind control, for instance), those Vice dots are figured into the equation whether the resistance is reflexive, instant or extended.

Vices as Vestments

As noted under character creation above, each dot in a Vice automatically equals a dot chosen in an appropriate Vestment. Whether the character gains Vice dots at character creation or buys them with experience points later, any time you, as player, purchase a new dot in a Vice, your character gains a Vestment at that level.

The three levels, as noted earlier, are: Innate (1-dot), Lesser (2-dot), and Greater (3-dot). Innate Vestments are consistent, “always-on” abilities that provide a minor benefit related to the Vice in question. Lesser Vestments must be made manifest by the expenditure of Willpower, and (unless otherwise specified) provide a more specific and potent bonus for an entire scene. Greater Vestments offer the demon's true power, often in a more egregious and explicit way—these usually have a lesser duration, but a duration that can be extended if the human or the demon chooses so. The manifestation of Greater Vestments is dangerous, however, and can lead to Burnout (see Burnout, p. 147).

Vestments: Powers of the Possessed

What follows are Vestments geared toward each Vice the character may possess. You'll find the Infernal abilities listed for the 1-dot (Innate), 2-dot (Lesser) and 3-dot (Greater) versions of the Vestments. Remember: having 1 dot in Gluttony does not mean your character has access to *all* the Innate Gluttony Vestments. You, as player, must choose *one* for your Possessed character. However,

as an optional rule, you may choose to “sub out” 1 Vestment for another of equal Vice and dot-rating. Doing so, however, is not easy. First, it necessitates sacrifice. Literally. Your character must cause a number of lethal points of damage to one creature equal to 10 minus Morality. Yes, this indicates that characters of higher Morality can get away with sacrificing smaller creatures (a bat, a rat, a cat), whereas those with lower Morality must sacrifice something larger (a horse, a bear, even a human). Second, you must spend *half* of the experience point cost to gain a new Vestment (meaning 5 total experience points). Once both demands have been fulfilled, your character must sleep for at least 8 hours. Upon waking, the old Vestment will have vanished, and the Possessed will now be able to use the new Vestment in its place.

- **Innate (1-dot) Vestments** cost nothing to manifest. They are “always on.”

- **Lesser (2-dot) Vestments** cost 1 Willpower point to activate, and their effects last for a full scene.

- **Greater (3-dot) Vestments** cost 2 Willpower points to activate, and their effects last for a number of turns equal to the total number of Vice dots the character possesses in *all* Vices. A character can push this duration of effect (whether by the human host’s own choice or by the demon wresting control), continuing it indefinitely, but doing so is bad for the mind, body and soul. It is in this way that a Possessed character may suffer Burnout—see Burnout, p. 147.

Envy (*Invidia*)

Aristotle said Envy is essentially just the pain brought on when witnessing the “good fortune” of others—basically the reverse of *schadenfreude*, where one feels pleasure at the misfortune of those around him. In religion (Judeo-Christian in particular), Envy is very much a sin—it is the coveting of what others have, the desire to possess things that belong only to others (in the Bible: wife, horse-cart, ox, servant; in modern nights: mistress, sports car, condo, job). Thomas Aquinas believed Envy’s opposite is charity, saying, “Charity rejoices in our neighbor’s good, while envy grieves over it.”

Envy is linked with dogs, with the color green, and with the Moon above. Envy is ruled by the great beast Leviathan.

Innate Vestments (1-Dot)

Epicaricacy: Misfortune is delight to the envious, provided it’s someone else suffering from failure. Once per scene, the Possessed may choose a character other than herself: this target is cursed for the duration of the scene, suffering a dramatic failure on any roll that would normally be simply a failure.

Green Eyes: Green is the color of jealousy, and the character’s eyes sometimes flash an unnatural green hue. When looking into the eyes of another character, the Possessed gains a bonus to Subterfuge rolls equal to the dots in Envy.

Hellhound: The saying goes, “Two dogs with one bone seldom reach agreement.” Hieronymous Bosch portrayed the sin of Envy in his work as two dogs, perhaps owing the depiction to that old saying. Envy, as linked to canines, gives the character a curious leg-up with the animals: on any Animal Ken rolls made in regard to dogs, the character gains a bonus equal to dots possessed in the Envy Vice. In addition, the character gains a free Specialty regarding one specific breed of dog (i.e., “German shepherd”).

Liar’s Tongue: Lies are the cornerstone of the envious. They must lie to bring themselves up to everyone else’s level, convincing others of their worth, or confirming their enemies’ worthlessness. On any Subterfuge rolls, the character receives an exceptional success on 3 successes, not 5.

Never Last: The character will never go last in Initiative order. If the character’s Initiative score for the round puts him last, he is at least bumped up one rank so he now goes *second-to-last*.

Your Pain, My Pleasure: This is a true expression of *schadenfreude* made quite real: while in combat, any penalties suffered by opponents due to loss of Health are gained as bonuses to the Possessed’s own actions during combat (maximum of +3).

Lesser Vestments (2-Dot)

Anything You Can Do: (I can do better.) Envy is, in many ways, about one-upmanship. Proof of one’s own worth is made by establishing dominance over and ability above all others. This Vestment helps the character achieve that assertion: if another character within his line of sight attempts to perform a task using a Skill the character himself possesses, that character’s dice pool may not exceed



the dice pool of the Possessed character utilizing this Vestment.

Envy's Grasp: *I want what you have.* It's perhaps the most primal expression of covetousness. With this, the character may add his dots in Envy to Larceny rolls for the remainder of the scene, provided the Larceny Skill is used to thief or abscond with someone else's property. (It will work on picking locks provided the end goal is to steal something.)

Mortal Shell: At one point or another everyone has wished they looked like someone else. No matter how attractive or self-confident a person appears, there's a little voice inside her head that whispers she could be even more attractive if only she looked like her favorite actor/model/musician. Demons are more than happy to help their host indulge in this fantasy. By activating this Vestment the Possessed takes on the identity of any person of whom she has at least seen a picture. The demon reshapes the crude clay of the host and then goes a step further, influencing the actions of the Possessed so she not only looks like her idol, but also walks, talks and acts appropriately for the part. The final product is so convincing it can fool even friends and relatives.

The Quiet Curse: This Vestment isn't so much about causing misfortune as it is about ensuring a level of *reduced* fortune. Those characters near the Possessed character no longer gain the 10-Again rule on rolls, and, in addition, any 1's that come up subtract from successes gained. This happens to those characters within a number of yards equal to the sum of all the Possessed character's Vice dots. The character may exclude up to three individuals who will not suffer the effects of The Quiet Curse.

Tainted Countenance: Before joining with a demon, many of the Possessed desired to be important and powerful. They shunned the mundane, the everyday, longing to be something more than what they were. After the demon creeps into their soul, no Possessed ever feels mundane again. Even so, they sometimes find it serves their purposes to appear as one of the sheep. Activating this Vestment requires the Possessed to touch his target, though it works only on the unwary and can never be used in combat. With a handshake or a seemingly random touch on the shoulder, the demon reaches through the Possessed and channels the taint of corruption into the target. Although the target feels no differently, people with the ability to sense the demonic will incorrectly identify the

hapless character as one of the Possessed. By shedding excess Infernal energies in this manner, the actual Possessed is undetectable as demon-touched for the duration.

Without Merit: Social Merits are one way to gauge one's success—how much money do you have? How many friends? Are you famous? Use of this Vestments helps... lessen the impact of some Social Merits on those around the Possessed character. For the remainder of the scene, those within a hundred yards of the character suffer a loss to appropriate Social Merits (Allies, Contacts, Fame, Mentor, Resources, Retainer, Status) equal to the character's primary Vice dots. Say the Possessed has a primary Vice of Envy and has 2 dots in it. A nearby character with Resources ●●●● now has access to only Resources ●● for the remainder of the scene, or until he leaves the radius of effect. He tries to call his bank, and a bank error lists his funds incorrectly. Or he tries to purchase a big-ticket item and he finds he cannot. Alternately, a character with Status ●● in, say, the Catholic Church suddenly has *no* Status for the scene—he's done something to rub his superiors the wrong way, he can't affect decisions, he can't gain access to any benefits of belonging to the Church. It's temporary, of course: leaving the radius of effect or waiting until the scene is done ensures the Merits return to normal.

Greater Vestments (3-Dot)

Denunciation: Everyone has heard the phrase, "If looks could kill..." but it isn't just an idle threat for the Possessed. By summoning up every petty hatred, every jealous thought and imagined hurt the Possessed creates a searing ball of rage in her soul. The eyes of the Possessed turn a brilliant green, devoid of pupils and bulging with the intensity of emotion. The demon feeds upon the rage, transforming the energy into shimmering waves of emerald pain. Anyone standing within five yards of the Possessed suffers 1 point of bashing damage each turn and must succeed on a Strength + Athletics roll or be knocked down (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 168).

Envious Mouths: The character's hands develop a number of strange little mouths. They manifest differently for different characters: one's flesh opens into toothy suckers, another develops fibrous nematodes, whereas a third Possessed finds his palms the home of actual human mouths. Using hands in combat (Brawl) now does lethal damage.

In addition, each successful attack steals 1 of the opponent's Attribute dots (chosen by the Possessed character's player) for the remainder of the Vestment's activation. The character can steal only a number of Attribute dots equal to the dots possessed in her primary Vice. At the end of this Vestment's duration, the Attribute dots leave the character and return to the opponent.

False Pretenses: Making the extraordinary seem easy is a talent owned by a very small percentage of individuals. An artist that can paint a masterpiece in the span of a week, superstar athletes and even that IT guy everyone calls because he can always fix the problem with no apparent effort are all examples of this rare breed. Super-competency comes with a price, however. More "average" individuals are torn between admiration and jealousy for the talented elite and jealousy wins more often than not. So the average tear down the superstars by pointing out the slightest flaws, real or imagined, in their near-perfect performance. Demons of Envy don't like being upstaged, especially by mortals, so they tweak the probability of events to punish overachievers. While active, this Vestment affects anyone within five yards of the Possessed. Any character within the aura of Envy who rolls an exceptional success or causes more than 3 points of damage with an attack *must* re-roll their last action. The results of the second roll stand, even if they are actually better than the first. Characters with actions that trigger the Vestment feel a blow of ringing force that snaps their heads back, but causes no actual damage.

Repudiate Faith: From the viewpoint of the Christian mythos, the torment of hell is caused by the absence of God. The damned souls that populate hell aren't tortured by the demons, fire and ice of Dante, but by the knowledge God has turned His face from them. When a Possessed enters into a partnership with a demon, he feels some of this loss. The spiritual bulk of a demon doesn't fill the soul, it weighs it down. Even if he won't admit it to himself, the Possessed feels a constant nagging Envy of those who have found solace and power in the light. Demons can channel that Envy into a weapon when facing off against agents of the light. Any character with Morality 8 or higher within three yards of the Possessed or who attempts to move within three yards has her Speed reduced to one. Holy or blessed weapons lose their potency and begin to flake away, losing 1 point of Structure each turn. This aura of denial manifests as a thin, ground-hugging fog that dims ambient light.

Sour Grapes: The Possessed are far from the only creatures in the World of Darkness with access to unnatural abilities. Mages, changelings, vampires and more all have magics or inherent powers of their own, some of which seem far more powerful than the dark gifts granted to the Possessed by demons. Even more galling to the Possessed (and through them the possessing demon) is that, with the possible exception of vampires, most of these unusual entities don't *seem* to have paid nearly as high a price for their capabilities. So they reach deeper into the quagmire that is their soul, beseeching the demon within to stretch forth its hand to quell the supernatural. When this Vestment is activated, any ongoing effect within ten yards of the Possessed that could be qualified as "magic" (spells, Gifts, other Vestments, Contracts and so on) is disrupted. Assuming the duration of a disrupted effect hasn't ended before the Vestment expires, the magic returns and functions normally once Sour Grapes has ceased. Use of this Vestment doesn't stop new castings of the same magics; it just suppresses current ongoing effects. It also has little effect upon supernatural powers that could be considered innate to a creature's nature. Thus, an undead vampire doesn't fall over dead because the magic sustaining its frame is banished, and a werewolf can still shift forms. However, the vampire may find his hypnotic thrall over a minion disrupted, and the werewolf would lose the effects of a Gift heightening his strength.

Steal Vitality: Good health sustains both body and soul, and nearly every religion in the world stresses the importance of maintaining the body as temple. Society mirrors this conviction, heaping adoration and admiration upon people who strive to maintain a fit physique. Most Possessed seek the easy road to good health, just as they take the quick and easy path in other aspects of their lives. They shoot covetous glances at strong, healthy bodies and, in a pinch, attempt to steal that vitality. Each time the Possessed inflicts physical damage with her bare hands or a melee weapon she can choose to steal an amount of Stamina from her target equal to the amount of damage rolled. Witnesses to this kind of attack see an ephemeral taloned claw overlaying the hand or weapon of the Possessed that reaches into the victim and yanks out energy. The Possessed adds the Stamina to her own as temporary dots (ignoring the normal human maximum), but victims may not be reduced below one dot of Stamina. Recalculate any traits (such as Health) for both the Possessed and her target after a successful attack. Stolen Stamina is returned when the Vestment ends.



Gluttony (Gula)

Orson Welles perhaps said it best: “Gluttony is not a secret vice.” It’s about the need to consume more than one should, or even can: food, drugs, drink, anything that pushes one well past the point of satiation. Ignatius Brianchaninov, a Russian bishop, said, “Wise temperance of the stomach is a door to all the virtues. Restrain the stomach, and you will enter Paradise. But if you please and pamper your stomach, you will hurl yourself over the precipice of bodily impurity, into the fire of Wrath and fury, you will coarsen and darken your mind, and in this way you will ruin your powers of attention and self-control, your sobriety and vigilance.” Some early pagan sects actually saw Gluttony as a virtue, something of which to be proud.

Gluttony’s animal is the pig. It’s ruled by Jupiter, and associated with the color orange. Gluttony is the domain of the demon Baalzebul.

Innate Vestments (1-Dot)

Aura of Gross Indulgence: The character’s intemperance bleeds outward, manifesting in an aura that ends up differently for each Possessed: one may give off the rank smell of spoiled meat, another might have wretched halitosis, another may be bathed in a cloud of flies or a stink of sweat. Any locked in combat with the character suffer –1 to Defense and –1 to Initiative due to this pervading aura.

Camel’s Hump: The Possessed doesn’t truly have a hump (necessarily; he *may*), but it certainly seems as if he’s capable of storing untoward amounts of food and water in the host body. The character doesn’t suffer as swiftly from the effects of starvation or thirst: the character may go an additional number of days without food or drink equal to dots possessed in his primary Virtue.

In Excess: For the gluttonous, it’s all about excess, pushing one’s self to swell beyond normal limits. The Possessed with this Vestment may regain Willpower beyond what his pool (or Infernal Will pool) can support, but any points gained in such a way *must* be spent in the next three turns or cause damage (1 point of bashing damage per point unspent).

Sinful Girth: The character’s body swells and shifts: it may become pleasingly round or instead offer several odd lumps of fatty (lipoma) tissue. Either way, the result is the same: the Possessed gains +1 to her Health score. (Plus, as a non-mechanical side benefit, the character can simply consume more food than most others.)

Strange Regurgitation: In Hell, it’s said that the truly gluttonous will be forced day in and day out to vomit up reptiles and amphibians: snakes, toads, lizards and the like. As a cruel (but perhaps beneficial) foretelling of one’s potential fate, the character may once per scene take a single point of bashing damage to regurgitate *one* reptilian or amphibious creature. The creature must be Size 1 or less (i.e., able to fit out the throat and mouth). The animal is alive upon regurgitation.

Unnatural Consumption: The fiercely voracious are known to eat anything, and this Vestment makes that all the more true. The Possessed may consume poisons and toxins up to a Toxicity of 5 without feeling any ill effects. For poisons with more potent Toxicity, simply subtract 5 from the Toxicity level to determine its new rating.

Lesser Vestments (2-Dot)

Gourmand Grotesquerie: Meals prepared by the character during this scene using normal ingredients possess one unusual characteristic, chosen at the time of preparation: the meal can incur the effects of any one drug at a moderate dose, or it can instead act as a poison with a Toxicity of 5 or less. Note that cooking *in this instance* must be governed by the Crafts Skill, not Survival.

Hungry Kiss: The character’s tongue is like a starving worm—it wriggles about of its own free will and seeks to feed. If the Possessed kisses another person on the mouth, the character can steal 2 points of the target’s Willpower and convert it to either 1 point of Willpower, or heal 1 point of damage (lethal or bashing)—but not both.

Iron Jaw: Demons of Gluttony want to taste everything. Flesh, bone, steel, concrete; you name it, they want a bite. The fragile bone chompers of humans just aren’t up to the task of chewing through anything harder than peanut brittle, so the demon replaces them. For the duration of this Vestment, the teeth of the Possessed are transformed into metallic, gray ridges that can chew through anything the host can get his hands on. Each turn the Possessed worries at an object, he can gnaw through 5 points of Structure. Further, no matter on what the host is chewing he suffers no damage.

Sheen of Grease: The character exudes a faint oily sheen from his pores for the scene. This oil—which glistens in the right light, but looks mostly like sweat—is slick to those who attempt to grab the

character. Any grapple attempts on the character suffer a penalty equal to dots possessed in the Gluttony Vice. In addition, the character can *add* those dots as bonus dice on rolls attempting to escape from a grapple or other imprisonment (sliding out of handcuffs, for instance).

Swallow: Even after chewing, some objects are just too big to fit down a mortal's esophagus and some "foods" are actually more fun for the demon in one piece. The Infernal entity takes just as much pleasure from the slow digestion of a living, kicking animal as it does from the taste. Swallowing inanimate objects whole is also a convenient way of disposing of potentially incriminating evidence or hiding stolen goods. A Possessed with this Vestment can digest anything he swallows, without suffering harm, as a passive effect. This includes poisons, toxic waste and other dangerous substances. While the Vestment is active, the host can swallow objects (or creatures) up to Size 3 as an instant action. The Possessed can intentionally *not* digest one Size 3 or smaller object (or creature) he swallows, though this can be somewhat painful.

Voracious Bite: The character's teeth do not appear much different: perhaps a bit more pointed, certainly more *white*. But the effect is notable: the character may make a lethal bite attack (+1). This necessitates first achieving a grapple, however. Some Possessed, so consumed with their gluttonous ways, use this Vestment to actually take out chunks of an enemy's flesh to swallow. Some eat the flesh of others to reportedly gain their power; others do so only because they are hungry, and the meat of "long pig" satisfies the needs of gut and bowel.

Greater Vestments (3-Dot)

Beelzebub's Breath: The name Beelzebub is spoken with fear and awe by lesser demons, when they dare speak the name at all. Demons of Gluttony mimic the merest hint of Beelzebub's power by manifesting swarms of fat, glistening flies. On the first turn this Vestment is active, the swarm of flies pours forth from the mouth and nose of the Possessed, filling the air with a horrid buzzing. On the following turn, once the swarm has formed up, it can divide itself and attack anyone within five yards of the Possessed. The Size of the swarm is equal to the total number of dots in Vices the character possesses. When attacking multiple enemies, divide the total Size of the swarm by enemies present (round up) to determine the Size of the swarm attacking each individual. When the Vestment ends, the flies flow back into the body of the host, healing her for half

the total amount of damage (by type) caused by the swarm's attacks.



Swarms

Animals of Size 1 or smaller are generally best recorded in swarms, flocks and other groupings, as they are most effective in such groupings. This includes not just insects, but also most birds and small mammals such as rats.

Swarms are measured by their size in yards radius. A swarm generally inflicts 1 die of bashing damage to anyone within its radius. A swarm can inflict more damage by condensing. Every time the swarm condenses to cover half its full area, it inflicts 1 additional die of damage per turn.

Therefore, a swarm of eight yards in radius inflicts 2 bashing damage per turn if it constricts down to a four-yard radius, 3 bashing if it halves that again to a two-yard radius, and 4 bashing damage per turn if it condenses itself down to a one-yard radius. Though condensing doesn't happen all that often in nature (save in the case of creatures such as killer bees), it is an easy enough thing for most supernatural powers that command animals to bid them to do so.

Armor is effective against a swarm only if it covers one's full body, but even then it provides only half its rating. In addition, targets are distracted by the swarm, suffering -2 dice on Perception and Concentration rolls while they are within the radius, even if they're not specifically attacked.

The swarm cannot be attacked with fists, clubs, swords or guns. Only area-affect attacks such as those by torch affect it. Each point of damage inflicted by a flame or other applicable attack halves the swarm's size. Once the swarm is reduced below a one-yard radius, either all insects are dead or the few remaining disperse.





Discriminating Palette: In some parts of the world, tribes that performed cannibalism believed that by eating the flesh of an enemy they gained that enemy's strength. More peaceful forms of ritualistic cannibalism were performed when a family member died. The corpse was cooked and devoured by the family so the wisdom and knowledge of the deceased would be passed on. Gluttonous Possessed have been known to engage in cannibalism and, as described earlier, some even prefer their long pork alive and kicking. The possessing demon tastes the essence of the devoured flesh and sucks memories from the marrow of the bones. While this Vestment is active, any flesh or blood consumed from a sentient being (alive or dead) is digested for knowledge. The Possessed gains full use of any one Skill known to the donor, including any pertinent Specialties. Although the Possessed can only "borrow" use of one Skill at a time from any one person, snacking upon the meat of multiple characters grants the Possessed access to multiple Skills. So if, for example, the Possessed tasted the blood of three different characters he would gain access to one Skill from each. Characters who are victims of this diabolical feasting still retain access to the Skills.

Feed on Pain: Perhaps because gluttons are used to always taking more than their share, opponents find bodies possessed by Gluttony demons can absorb more damage than seems possible. Absorbed damage is broken down and processed just like anything else the Possessed "eats," though in this case pain becomes a delicacy for demonic consumption. Each time the Possessed takes damage, he may convert the incoming damage on a one-to-one basis to Infernal Willpower. The character can hold up to 3 temporary Infernal Willpower points over his maximum before the demon is sated and can absorb no more. If, in subsequent turns, the Infernal Willpower pool is reduced below its maximum (including temporary Willpower), the Possessed can convert additional damage until the demon is "sated" again. In quieter moments, some Possessed have wondered whether this Vestment is the origin of the phrase, "glutton for punishment."

Regurgitate: Not every Possessed glutton is a fat, slobbering mass. The possessing demon takes a portion of everything the host eats for itself; usually the tastiest morsels. One side effect of this demonic sampling is that the host never actually eats as much as he appears to. The other side effects are less pleasant. What remains in the stomach of the Possessed after the demon has taken the choicest portions is a

nasty, swirling mass of hard-to-digest remnants, bile and digestive juices. If the Possessed is attacked, the demon heats this noxious soup with Infernal fire until it boils over, spewing out of the host in a spray of acidic vomit. Each turn this Vestment remains active, the Possessed can hurl on anyone within three yards as an instant action. Directing the vomit is a ranged attack that requires a Wits + Stamina + Gluttony roll. Each success inflicts 1 point of lethal damage to the primary target and 1 point of bashing damage to anyone within a one-yard "splash" radius. Alternately, this Vestment can be used to recover items that were ingested, but not digested, with the Swallow Vestment.

Taste of Ashes: Gluttony is all about personal enjoyment regardless of the cost to the self or others. A true glutton can derive as much pleasure from a banquet of misery inflicted upon others as he does from a ten-course meal. The key to the thing is quantity. Subjecting an individual to torment just isn't as satisfying as the dismay of a crowd. While active, anyone within the Possessed's aura gains no pleasure from his favorite activity. Food tastes foul and squirms like maggots, clothes feel dirty and caked on to the skin, expensive toys are greasy to the touch and appear ill-used. These are all subtle sensations that register mainly in the subconscious rather than the conscious mind. The feeling is distracting at best and insidious to the mentally unstable. Anyone within five yards of the Possessed suffers a -2 penalty to all rolls from distraction and characters with a derangement suffer internal disquiet that forces them to roll to avoid triggering their flaw. Characters need make only one roll to avoid triggering their derangements no matter how many turns they remain in the area of effect.

Toad Bloat: Size amongst the gluttonous can be a measure of power; with this Vestment, the Possessed may add the dots held in the Gluttony Vice to her Size (which also adds to her Health score) for the duration of this Infernal ability. The skin stretches, the bones thicken. The character is oddly buoyant, though, losing no Speed in the process.

Greed (*Avaritia*)

Grubby hands reaching for material gain—that is Greed. Wealth, status, luxury, influence. Why is it a sin? According to Aquinas, "It is a sin directly against one's neighbor, since one man cannot over-abound in external riches without another man lacking them." And yet it remains an easy Vice to manifest, if not so

easy to maintain. It holds great reward: as *Wall Street's* Gordon Gecko puts it, "Greed is good."

Greed is linked with frogs and toads, and the color yellow. It's ruled by Mercury, and is embodied by the demon of Mammon.

Innate Vestments (1-Dot)

The Acquisition of Wealth: Some who have wealth are those who stole it; Greed, in particular, can help fuel this ability. Those with this Vestment gain the 9-Again quality on any Larceny or Subterfuge rolls made in the service of acquiring money or wealth.

Bribing the Soul: It's perhaps true that money cannot buy happiness, but it can damned sure buy a lot of other things. Once per game session, a character with this Vestment may trade in a single dot of Resources for *one* of the following effects: refill the Willpower (not Infernal Will) pool; heal all bashing damage; heal 3 points of lethal damage; +1 to Defense for the remainder of the chapter.

Greedy Insulation: The stories suggest those with the Vice of Greed will one day be cast into Hell and seared in boiling oil for the remainder of their castigation. The demon within offers some protection with this Vestment, a bit of... insurance. If the character takes damage from fire, assume the fire's Size and Intensity are one less (*can* be reduced to zero) for purposes of determining damage done.

The Hagglers' Pact: To the greedy, ownership is everything. It's appropriate, in a way, that the demon possesses the human, and the human longs to possess *things*—a chain of ownership that trickles down. With this Vestment, that ownership becomes easier on the Possessed character. When purchasing items, the character "lucks" into good deals or can haggle her way to a bargain with minimal effort (no roll). When deciding to purchase something, assume the Resources Cost is equal to one less than is stated (to a minimum of a 1-dot Cost).

Temporal Strength: The poster on the wall reads: *He who dies with the most toys, wins.* It is therefore paramount to keep those toys in good shape, yes? Any items owned specifically by the character (i.e., he purchased them in a transaction) gain +1 Durability and +3 Structure.

Toad's Boon: The sin of Greed is oft-associated with the frog or toad (though why this is remains unclear—some visions of Mammon have it as a reptilian being), and this Vestment provides a small benefit from frog and toad: the ability to hold one's breath indefinitely.

Lesser Vestments (2-Dot)

Blinded: The pursuit of more—more money, more women, more anything—with enough ruthless intensity is a kind of blindness. Only the goal of the quest registers in the consciousness of the pursuer; other people and events are vague outlines in the darkness beyond. The demon turns this kind of blindness to true darkness, greedily absorbing more and more of the light until only darkness is left. Light is sucked in bright streamers directly into the body of the Possessed. Indoors the process is relatively quick. Each turn the quality of light within ten yards of the Possessed is reduced by a quarter. Outdoors the process takes longer but is more dramatic. Storm clouds roll in, shadows lengthen and the sun seems to turn away from the Possessed. Each turn the quality of light is reduced by a tenth in the immediate vicinity (five yards). During daylight hours, outdoor light can be reduced only to about half its normal quality. At night, however, total inky blackness surrounds anyone in the affected area. The possessing demon can tune the senses of the host and up to three accomplices to filter the darkness, granting them sight, of a sort.

Miser: Pinch every penny 'til it bleeds. Never pay more than your share. Charity is for the weak. Misers truly believe in milking everything they own to the last drop. Misers are the source for stories about old men with hordes of cash under their beds who live alone in squalor, wearing the same set of threadbare clothes day after day until they die. A Possessed miser is just as stingy with the dark powers at his disposal, meting them out grudgingly, even to save his own life. When this Vestment is activated the host gains a +1 bonus to all attack rolls for each unspent dot of Infernal Willpower.

Moneyed Tongue: Wealth is often seen as a status symbol—he who owns the nicest car, the finest-tailored suit, the biggest house so often ends up at the top of the totem pole. With this Vestment, that becomes all the more true: a character can literally bring his substantial wealth to bear against others in social situations. The character may add his Resources dots to any rolls involving Intimidation or Persuasion.

These Golden Hands: Wealth can be a physical presence—bling on the fingers, for instance, or a nicely-cut pair of pants. The Possessed with this Vestment can add his Resources dots to Brawl rolls made during this scene as a bonus.



Greater Vestments (3-Dot)

Capital Gains: Simple success isn't enough for the greedy. They push and fight for more, more, more. Likewise, simply drawing blood doesn't satisfy their avarice. Everything counts in large amounts. The demon inside a greedy Possessed encourages its host by multiplying his successes. While this Vestment is active, any roll made by the Possessed that ends in failure or results in a single success can be bolstered. The character may roll up to 5 additional dice and add any successes to his initial roll. If the secondary roll turns up more 1's than successes the action results in a dramatic failure. By pushing for more, the demon has hindered more than it has helped.

Hired Hands: One of the basic tenets of Greed is that everyone has a price. The price might be higher for some people than others, but when you find that breaking point, people will do anything if the price is right. Questions about morality, about what is right and what is easy, all vanish when the price is met. Once you've taken a man's measure, once you've paid his price, he becomes a slave to your will. While this Vestment is active, everyone within five yards of the host hears a whispering in their minds. The buzzing voice of the demon speaks to the subconscious, bargaining and cajoling, offering up their heart's desires. The voice can be blocked out with a Resolve + Composure roll at a -3 penalty. If the roll fails, that individual becomes a slave to the Possessed. He will follow any command, even sacrifice his own life to protect him. When the duration ends, those people who fell under the sway of the Possessed will have no memories of their actions, only a lingering feeling that they've been cheated of their rightful due.

Midas Touch: The story of King Midas is a morality play, a cautionary tale about the effects of Greed. Offered a single wish by Dionysus, Midas chooses for his touch to transmute base objects into gold. Only after he turns his daughter to a golden statue does Midas realize he has been cursed rather than blessed. While this Vestment is active, the Possessed gains Midas' blessing. (The greedy don't recognize the curse.) Anything the Possessed touches begins to turn to gold. The transmutation takes a number of turns equal to the Size of the object touched. If the touch is turned against living targets, the Possessed must first succeed in establishing a grapple hold with a Strength + Brawl roll. Each turn the grapple is maintained the target takes 1

point of aggravated damage as flesh and bone turn to gold. Objects (or people) turned to gold revert to their normal composition when the Vestment's duration ends. This reversion doesn't "undo" damage caused to live targets.

Mammon's Grasp: *More, more, more.* Never enough, says Mammon, that greedy, needy beast. Not only does the character gain a number of dice to Physical attacks (Brawl, Weaponry) equal to dots possessed in Greed, but any lethal damage incurred to an opponent is transmuted to Willpower for the Possessed. (It first fills Infernal Will, then spills over into refilling lost Willpower.)

Middleman: Bargaining with demons is a losing proposition for most mortals. Even the lowest ranking demons have had millennia of practice at deception. For the Possessed, making a bargain with a demon is less a contest of wills and guile than it is a business deal. The possessing demon speaks directly through the host, setting terms, offering compromises and keeping a weather eye for treacherous loopholes. Activating this Vestment requires the expenditure of 2 Infernal Will, but the effect remains active for a scene. The Possessed gains a bonus to the Negotiations roll (see p. 75) equal to his total dots of Vice.

Petty Theft: Possession is nine points of the law. If you take something and no one catches you, it's yours. Even people who have more than they need engage in shoplifting, steal cash from charity donations and perform other acts of petty theft. Acting in this manner is one of the purest expressions of Greed. Demons are more powerful than small-time thieves and so raise their standards a bit. Instead of stealing loose change or DVDs they manifest Greed to protect their host body by stealing the bullets from a gun or the temper from edged weapons. While this Vestment is active, the first character in each turn who attempts to attack the Possessed with a firearm or melee weapon finds his attacks stymied. Guns run out of ammo, knives lose tensile strength and snap, and clubs shatter when they strike. Holy objects or weapons with other unusual qualities don't break, but the damage of their strike is reduced to zero.

Lust (Luxuria)

The pleasures of the body are the domain of this Vice: urges given free rein, passions that go well beyond being healthy and into addiction. Aquinas

thought of it as a “special kind of deformity,” a gateway to true perversions such as bestiality. All too often, people mix up love and lust, but as Stephanie Meyer (*Twilight*) puts it, “Love and lust don’t always keep the same company.”

Lust’s animal is the bovine, and its color is blue. Venus lords over Lust, as does the demon Asmodeus.

Innate Vestments (1-Dot)

Dark Side: Lust is the darker side of sex, and this Vestment is a darker shade than that; the Possessed may use sex as a social weapon, gaining the 9-Again quality to any Intimidation rolls made against the opposite sex.

The Embrace: Body to body: that’s how the lustful prefer it. With this Vestment, a Possessed may add her dots in the Lust Vice to any attempts to grapple or maintain a grapple.

Incubus Theft: So it was that an incubus (Latin for “nightmare”) would sneak into one’s room at night and cruelly invade one’s sleep by sitting on the subject’s chest, stealing breath, even instigating nocturnal sexual activity. In this case, a Possessed with this Vestment needs to do no such thing, but can by her very presence sap the restfulness of those around her. Any who slumber within a hundred yards of her will not gain a Willpower point upon waking. They suffer nightmares, and in them she is a prominent fixture.

Intimate Knowledge: It helps to know one’s victim inside and out. Simply by touching a victim, the Possessed may *without rolling* know the exact dots that subject possesses in one Social Skill. The Possessed chooses which Skill to examine, and may examine one victim this way only once—she cannot go back and attempt to know another Skill later. (Note that the character doesn’t actually understand dot ratings; that’s really for the player. The character comes to understand, “My victim is profoundly savvy when it comes to socializing,” or, “My victim has zero understanding of other people’s feelings.”)

Mother May I: It is a sickening thing, the succubus, a demon driven by Lust, yes, but often for a very damning purpose: to have a child. By stealing the semen of sleeping men, the succubus could impregnate herself with a child born of true sin. Here, the Possessed with this Vestment gains +3 Social rolls when dealing with children. They find the character very... parental. A dark irony, indeed.

Prurient Perfume: Your character exudes a potent, heady scent—pleasurable to those around

her. The perfume is a scent unique to the character: perhaps a whiff of salacious musk, a scent of luscious lavender or an odor of delicious vanilla (or other pleasing foods). The character gains +1 to Social rolls, and +3 specifically to Seduction rolls.

Lesser Vestments (2-Dot)

Cruel Ambrosia: The character exudes a sweet, fragrant milk from one of her orifices: usually the mouth, though other more... unusual exits are possible. This milk is a drug that, when consumed, simulates the effects of a potent hallucinogen. In addition, it’s addictive (see the Addiction Flaw, p. 218, *World of Darkness Rulebook*).

Excite: During the state of sexual arousal the body becomes flushed with blood, bringing warmth to the skin and increasing tactile sensation. Demons can create an artificial sense of arousal even in the most dangerous of circumstances, increasing blood flow throughout the body. Increased sensitivity and blood flow are most unwelcome for characters who have been injured in a fight. They feel pain more acutely and they weaken as their wounds seep blood. When this Vestment is activated it affects any wounded character within five yards of the Possessed. If a character has suffered even a single point of lethal damage, his wounds begin to bleed. Blood loss causes 1 point of bashing damage each turn and cannot be stemmed by any form of mundane first-aid. Wounded characters are also more acutely aware of their injuries; any wound penalties are increased by 1 die penalty.

Honeyed Tongue: The words that come off the character’s tongue drip with honey—the voice has a hypnotic tone, a gratifying lyricism that borders on music. The character may add the sum of all her Vice dots to any rolls utilizing the following Social Skills: Persuasion, Socialize and Subterfuge.

Purgatory’s Failure: In Hell, it’s said that the genuinely lustful will be made to walk through a tunnel of fire with flames that scour the sin clean from the vile fool’s soul. The demon has little interest, however, in ridding the character of sin, and so it offers this Vestment: the character is immune to damage from fire. Fire can still be distracting (it is awfully hot), and the character suffers a penalty equal to the intensity of the flame *if* she’s immersed in the fire. But she takes no damage at all. Combustible items still catch fire, including hair.

Sleep Paralysis: While this Vestment is active, the character may touch any number of sleeping



individuals—for the remainder of the scene, next to nothing will wake the slumbering victims. The only thing that will awaken them is if they take damage equal to lethal or aggravated—bashing damage does not rouse them.

Succubus Kiss: The voluptuous bat-winged succubus is the traditional Western mythological image of the lustful demon. Coming to men in their beds at night, the succubus would seduce its victims with honeyed words and sensual embraces. The demon would appear night after night, using the lure of pleasure to slowly drain the mortal of his living energies, literally screwing him to death. The demons that take refuge inside the blackened souls of the Possessed resemble these mythological creatures not at all, but it amuses the demons to play their expected role. While this Vestment is active, the Possessed can drain 1 point of Willpower each turn he participates in a passionate exchange with another character. What constitutes a passionate exchange is left for the Storyteller to determine, but it must include physical contact of some kind. Characters who are drained of Willpower as the result of this Vestment fall unconscious and remain that way until they regain a point of Willpower. (Sleeping usually does the trick.)

Greater Vestments (3-Dot)

Bloody Caress: The sensation of fingernails lightly scraping across bare skin can be sensual and arousing in the right circumstances. Too much scraping and scratching, however, quickly irritates the skin and turns an act of sensuality into an act of cruelty. Demons push their hosts to take the act of cruelty one step further, elongating fingernails to razor-sharp claws. With claws extended, even the gentlest touch of the Possessed draws blood, bringing a bloody contrast to erotic actions. When this Vestment is activated the Possessed gains a +2 bonus to Strength + Brawl rolls and causes lethal damage with unarmed attacks.

Flight of the Seducer: The Possessed has a set of wings, like any succubus who must alight upon her victim's windowsill or mantel at night. Each character has a unique set of wings, usually equally beautiful and horrid: leathery bat wings possessing an eerie grace, or a set of butterfly's wings whose patterns shift and dip like hallucinations. The character gains +3 to Seduction rolls, and can also take flight with a Dexterity + Athletics roll. During flight, she may travel at triple her normal Speed.

Hard to Catch: Not every easy conquest is one worth having. The games of seduction and demurrals, of thrust and parry that act as a prelude to sex can be nearly as exciting as the act itself. Some people play the game just for the thrill, with no intention of following through. They get their pleasure from the mounting agitation of the men and women they tease. While this Vestment is active, the host exudes a musk of pure Lust that is distracting, enticing and ultimately frustrating. Always just slightly out of reach, the Possessed can dodge as a reflexive action, her Defense is never penalized by multiple attackers and she can apply her full Defense against ranged attacks. Other than dodging and moving, the character can perform no other actions for the duration of the Vestment.

Heartbreaker: Beauty begs to be protected, to be cherished and loved. The idea of allowing harm to come to beauty causes an almost physical pain in anyone with an ounce of poetry in his soul. Even when beauty is cruel, it is to be admired. Demons of Lust find the ideal of unstained beauty a useful tool, while mocking it as romantic twaddle. While this Vestment is active, each point of damage taken by the host acts as a negative modifier to subsequent attacks that target the Possessed (to a maximum of -5). The possessing demon manifests, through the host, as a being of ultimate beauty. Witnessing that beauty marred by blood and the crude weapons of attackers pains onlookers so much they can barely stand to add to the defilement.

Masochist: For a small number of individuals, ecstasy and agony are intertwined. Only through the scourging of a whip, the slicing of flesh or the cruel kiss of the paddle can they experience pleasure. Demons, especially, delight in this form of Lust. The darkest desires of humans are nothing compared to the morbid fantasies or the capacity to find joy in pain of the meanest demon. Corrupted as they are, lustful Possessed share some of the demonic relish found in ecstatic agony. When this Vestment is activated the host gains a pool of bonus dice equal to the amount of damage he's taken. The type of damage doesn't matter. A Possessed with 3 points of bashing damage on his Health track creates the same 3-dice pool as a Possessed with 3 points of lethal damage. The pool of bonus dice can be used to increase any roll made by the Possessed. Each time a die is removed from the pool it's replaced only if the Possessed takes more damage and only recent, still painful wounds—i.e., those inflicted in the same scene—contribute to the pool.

Pain is Pleasure: Studies show that pain and pleasure produce nearly identical brain patterns. The emotions are two sides of the same coin and, for some people, a little pain mixed with pleasure actually increases their gratification. While this Vestment is active, the possessing demon muddles the signals sent to the brain that separate pain and pleasure. Any damage inflicted by the Possessed brings with it sharp spasms of ecstasy. It's easy for a victim of sensation to lose his composure and give in to pleasure, opening himself to further attacks. Each time a character is wounded by the Possessed he must succeed at a Resolve + Composure roll or forfeit his Defense for the following turn.

Pride (Superbia)

Proverbs 16:18: "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall." That very idea is the moral behind several of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and behind John Milton's story of Lucifer, *Paradise Lost*. Pride is thought to be the uttermost sin, and from such exorbitant self-love trickles all other iniquities.

That is, perhaps, why Pride is ruled by the king of demons, Lucifer. Its animal is the haughty horse; its color is purple, the color of royalty. Pride is ruled by the sun, the brightest celestial object.

Innate Vestments (1-Dot)

Authority of Man: The character is no weak being; now, when determining Defense, the character chooses the *higher* of Wits and Dexterity, not the lesser of the two.

The Deadliest of Sins: Pride, as Bidermann says, is the deadliest of all sins—and the blood of the Possessed is shot through with strains of very real arrogance. The character's blood is poisonous, with a Toxicity equal to twice his dots in Pride. Even a drop contains the maximum dose of venom.

Dominant Sphere: At the time this Vestment is purchased, the character must choose one Skill sphere: Mental, Physical or Social. The character's Pride is as such that, when the Possessed succeeds on a roll utilizing a Skill from that sphere, the character gains a point of Willpower (2 points on an exceptional success). However, if the character *fails* a roll using a Skill from that sphere, she loses a point of Willpower (2 points on a dramatic failure). Her Pride rewards her, but can also damn her.

Jack of All Trades: Those buoyed by their own self-importance might best be summed up with the

phrase: "I'm good at everything." This Vestment helps to make that statement a bit truer. When this Vestment is chosen, the character must select a Skill that goes along with it. This Skill is forever bound to the Vestment, unless the character subs out this Vestment for the same Vestment (though with a different Skill paired with it) using the optional rule noted above (p. 129). Every morning upon waking, the Possessed character may choose a new Specialty for that Skill. That Specialty lasts until the following morning, at which point she must select a new Specialty. (She may not keep one Specialty for more than 24 hours.)

Speed of the Steed: Pride is best represented by the horse: a haughty stallion, sure of its power and swiftness. The character adds twice his dots in Pride to his Speed.

Supremacy: At the time this Vestment is purchased, the character must pick one Skill (combat Skills excluded: no Brawl, Firearms or Weaponry). Any time that character uses this Skill to pursue her primary Vice or to perform an action specifically in line with the demon's wishes, that action becomes a *rote action* (see p. 134, **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

Lesser Vestments (2-Dot)

Armor of Contempt: One aspect of Pride is to ignore taunts and accusations made by people you consider as your lessers, even if these verbal sallies have some basis in truth. By holding yourself above the approval or disapproval of anyone other than your peers, you express, without speaking, your contempt for the average man. Demons take that contempt and wrap it around their host, encasing them in a hardened shell that protects the Possessed from physical harm. When this Vestment is activated, the skin of the Possessed is transformed from pliant flesh into a veiny white marble-like substance. The new skin of the Possessed reduces the total amount of any damage taken (regardless of source) by 2 (minimum of 1 point of damage taken) and the host body doesn't suffer wound penalties.

Arrogance: You can often spot them at a distance. It's something in the way they move, their mannerisms or the way they carry themselves that gives it away. An almost palpable aura of arrogance surrounds people who truly think they are better than everyone else. That air of arrogance makes others hesitant about approaching someone they feel will treat them with cool indifference. It isn't fear that causes people to hesitate, it's discomfort, almost





shame, with the actions of the arrogant. Demons can magnify that feeling of hesitation, making it nearly tangible. When this Vestment is activated, anyone who wishes to attack the Possessed must roll Resolve + Composure minus the Pride of the Possessed. If the roll is failed, the character may not attack and loses her action for the turn. If the roll succeeds, the character may attack normally but suffers a -1 penalty from that brief second of hesitation.

Eyes of Above: It helps to be better than anybody else, it truly does. Everything is so much... *clearer*. With this Vestment, the host finds Perception rolls are made all the easier, gaining a bonus equal to the sum total of all Vice dots possessed.

Goeth Before Destruction: One's vanity and arrogance can be a powerful shield against the realities of this world; utter delusion about one's preeminence can, in a way, protect a person against all the slings and arrows. For a Possessed character with this Vestment, this is powerfully true: her dots possessed in the Pride Vice are added as Armor against both bashing and lethal damage for the remainder of the scene. This does not stack with other forms of mundane armor, however.

Lord of the Beasts: Man and demon are plainly above beasts on the celestial chain of being, and this Vestment helps to prove it. The Possessed may speak to any one animal in that animal's tongue for the remainder of the scene. In addition, the Possessed may command that animal to do his will (necessitating success on a Manipulation + Animal Ken + Pride roll), even if the command demands the animal put itself in harm's way.

Voice of Thunder: The character's voice has a potent, echoing quality, a resounding roll of thunder ill-concealed behind the words. Whenever the character makes a Social roll using his spoken voice (Expression, Persuasion, Socialize, Subterfuge), she can add half of her Intimidation dots (round up) to that roll, as well. In addition, any Intimidation roll gains the 9-Again quality.

Greater Vestments (3-Dot)

Chain of Command: By dint of their Infernal partnership and their magnified sins, most Possessed believe they have the right to command common demons. These Possessed reason that they do more to champion the cause of Vice than any mere whisperer and, amused by this arrogance, the fiend inside them backs their host with demonic authority. While this Vestment is active, demons of Infernal Rank 2 or less are forced to comply with any command issued

by the Possessed. Even lesser demons don't appreciate a mortal lording power over them, however, and smart Possessed keep that in mind when issuing their "requests."

Denial: Many of the Possessed enter into their Infernal pact in exchange for immortality and not always from a fear of death. Some feel they are simply too *important* to die, that they have a destiny stretching before them of which they won't be cheated by simple mortality. So, in their hubris, they invite a demon into their soul and, behold!, they step outside the flow of time. In this, as in all their dealings with humans, the demons cheat and lie. Though it's true the host body no longer ages, death comes in many shapes and forms. Most Possessed come to a bloody end, either a victim of Burnout or of violence. Demons maintain the illusion of immortality even up to the point of death, propping up their host body with demonic fortitude. While this Vestment is active, no matter how much damage the Possessed has taken, she *will not die*. The Possessed will remain conscious and fully aware of the damage to her body. As soon as the duration ends, unless the Possessed manages to heal excess wounds, she collapses in a bloody heap of torn flesh.

Gloating Flesh: Taking care with one's appearance is a healthy form of Pride that seldom hurts anyone, unless it's taken too far. People who become obsessed with their appearance run the risk of becoming vain or of developing mental disorders such as body dysmorphic disorder. Those unfortunate individuals who have suffered some sort of accident, either of birth or chance, that scars or twists their features can hardly be blamed for wishing they just looked like everyone else. These tiny cracks formed by Pride in the armor of the soul provide a doorway for demonic possession. Demons will gladly trade the power to mend wounds, scars and blemishes for an earthly host.

Unlike other Vestments, Gloating Flesh requires no Willpower expenditure to activate. Instead, the Possessed spends Willpower to heal wounds. One point of Willpower can heal either 2 points of lethal damage or 4 points of bashing damage. Wounds healed leave no scars and the newly repaired skin takes on the rosy bloom of health. The drawback of using this Vestment is that, after using Infernal power to heal flesh even once, the very skin of the Possessed becomes corrupted. For as long as the Possessed retains access to Gloating Flesh, any wounds caused by holy or blessed weapons do aggravated damage

Icarus' Folly: Upon escaping their island prison on wings fashioned of wax and feathers, Daedalus, Icarus' father, warns him not to fly too high or the sun will melt his wings. Initially, Icarus heeds his father's warning, but eventually the sensation of freedom afforded him by flight goes to his head and Icarus flies higher and higher, reveling in power unknown to mortal men. Only when his wings begin to sag and droop does Icarus realize his folly. The wings fail and Icarus plummets into the sea, to his death. Pride goeth before a fall, indeed. Where Icarus failed, the Possessed may succeed. Upon activating this Vestment, the host body sprouts wings large enough to bear him aloft. The appearance of the wings varies from host to host; some wings appear angelic, some are bat-like and scaled, and some look like a strange hybrid of technology and flesh. For the duration of the Vestment, the Possessed can fly at five times his normal Speed.

Infernal Grandeur: The character manifests his Pride in all its diabolical glory (and the player should have a hand in designing exactly what this means, visually: Eyes of fire? Lashing tongue? Diadem of bone?). The character gains a lethal Brawl attack (+2), can add his Pride dots to any Social roll involving Intimidation or Persuasion, and anyone who attacks the character suffers a halved (round up) Defense score.

Lightbringer: It is said Lucifer was the wisest and most powerful of all the heavenly host. God granted him the honor of shining the first light of day over the Earth, driving back the hidden dangers of the night, earning him the title of Lightbringer. In time, Lucifer grew proud and sought to overthrow God and supplant Him on His throne. Defeated by the archangel Michael, Lucifer was cast from heaven, his light bursting to create the flames of the Inferno. Whether myth or truth, demons revere the idea of Lucifer, the first rebel, and shine a ruddy light into the darkness in honor of the fallen prince. When this Vestment is activated the Possessed begins to shine with a pale red light. The light glows brightly enough to illuminate a twenty-yard radius, yet is difficult to detect outside that distance. The luminescence cuts through any attempt at disguise (even disguises created through preternatural means) and reveals hidden objects or characters. The Possessed is assumed to succeed at any Perception test (including contested rolls) and automatically succeed at penetrating disguises or obscurations of any kind.

Sloth (Acedia)

Sloth: an aversion to work. It's about avoiding effort, about resting upon one's laurels while the rest of the world does what needs to be done. Catholic Catechism notes, "Sloth is the desire for *ease*," while Aquinas tells us the sluggishness born of Sloth allows the mind to ignore good things and commit to evil. (Evil, as one might know, is certainly easier than good.)

Sloth's beast is the stubborn goat. Its demon is Baalphegor, its color is pale blue, and it is ruled by Saturn.

Innate Vestments (1-Dot)

Bedsore: Those bound to beds or wheelchairs suffer from bedsores: hard-to-heal eruptions of the flesh. This Vestment doesn't really cause bedsores in a victim, but it does cause wounds incurred by the Possessed to... linger in much the same way sores do. Any lethal damage done to an opponent by the character takes twice as long to heal than normal.

Cut Price Effort: The ideal situation for the slothful is one in which someone else does their work for them, isn't it? That box is too heavy—wouldn't it be great if someone else would move it? That Excel spreadsheet won't write itself, but damned if it won't severely cut into a person's rest and relaxation... Maybe some *other* fool would like the job? A Possessed character with this Vestment has a bit of an edge in that department, gaining +2 to any Social rolls geared toward convincing others to do something the character doesn't want to do herself. One character might use Persuasion ("Pretty please? Best friends forever") while another might use Intimidation ("I'll break your little finger if you don't deliver this package").

Ease of Thought: Mental effort is so much easier. It requires little. It's an internal world, free of the frictions of daily life. Each morning when the character awakens, the player chooses a bonus from +1 to +5; this bonus applies for the next 24 hours toward *all* Mental rolls. Unfortunately, during this time the bonus becomes a penalty against all Physical rolls—so, if the character chooses +1 to Mental, he suffers -1 to all Physical rolls during this time (whereas +3 becomes -3, and +5 becomes -5).

Gray World: The world around the Possessed seems... sapped of its strength. Colors are muted. Everything seems covered in a filmy haze. Those within



sight of the character have a harder time resisting derangements: they suffer a penalty to their Resolve + Composure rolls equal to the dots the character possesses in her primary Vice.

Instant Gratification: Get it done, and get it done fast. All the better to go do something else, something... *easy*. With this Vestment, the time ascribed to any extended Academics or Investigation rolls is cut in half (so if a roll would normally equal ten minutes of time, that same roll equals only five for a character with this ability).

Something for Nothing: The slothful desire reward without effort, and this Vestment is that very thing. Any experience point costs are reduced slightly for the character—each cost is one less than normal. (If the final cost for purchasing a new Skill dot is 15, it's now only 14; a new Specialty costs 2 instead of 3 experience points.)

Lesser Vestments (2-Dot)

Enervation: For the duration of this Vestment, a character can attempt a touch attack against an opponent (Dexterity + Brawl); success on this touch attack removes 1 Willpower point from the victim. If the victim is reduced to 0 Willpower during this scene, the victim gains a mild derangement (permanent, unless solved through therapy or psychiatric medication).

Fester: An open wound is an invitation to infection. Generally, moderate first-aid care can significantly reduce the chances of infection to an acceptable level. Demons of Sloth magnify the potential for disease caused from attacks by their host due to inaction on the part of the victim. While this Vestment is active, each time the Possessed inflicts even a single point of lethal damage (from

any source) on a foe, that damage runs the risk of becoming infected. The potential victim must succeed at a Resolve + Stamina roll penalized by the Sloth of the Possessed. If the roll is failed, the victim becomes feverish and prone to exhaustion. For the remainder of the scene the diseased character must succeed at a Resolve + Stamina roll each turn before engaging in any physical activities. If the roll is failed the character may do nothing that turn that would require exertion, though she may defend herself as normal if attacked.

Griefstruck: Sloth is sometimes born of sadness: misery holds one in place, and in the throes of depression little can be done. The character gives off a potent aura of sadness, sorrow and interminable grief. This aura persists in a radius equal to 5 times the character's dots in Sloth, and those caught within the area of effect suffer from the severe derangement of Depression. The derangement's effects end if a subject leaves that radius, however.

Maladroit Victims: The enemy swings a camping hatchet and misses... severing his own thumb in the process. A victim tries to flee, but her ankle wrenches into a hard twist and she topples. Any caught within five yards of the character suffer the following effect: all failed Physical rolls are now to be treated as dramatic failures instead.

Radius of Languor: Wouldn't it be better if everybody just... slowed down a little bit? With this Vestment, a Sloth-driven character can demand such a thing by dint of the demon within. The character emanates a sluggish aura in a radius of yards equal to 5 times her Morality score. If a character's Morality is 5, then the radius of effect would be equal to 25 yards. Those caught in this aura feel as if the air is thick and humid and as if walking or running is a slog through swampy or soft ground. Everybody within that radius suffers a penalty to their Speed scores equal to twice the character's dots in Sloth—the character herself is exempt from this effect.

Swarmskin: As a side effect of their general indifference to cleanliness, slothful Possessed tend to attract flies and other insects. Buzzing swarms of flies alight upon discarded fast food containers, roaches feast upon unwashed plates, and little streams of ants trundle back and forth carrying the remnants of unfinished meals. If moved to defend its host from danger, the possessing demon can stir the insects into a living shield. While this Vestment is active, the demon causes the skin of the Possessed to secrete a tacky, sickly-sweet residue

from his pores. Insects are attracted to the scent and surround the host in swarms that make him more difficult to attack, granting the Possessed a +3 Defense bonus.

Greater Vestments (3-Dot)

Creep: Sloth can be likened to patience. Like ivy climbing up a wall, the slothful slowly but surely make progress toward their goals, even if that progress isn't apparent at first glance. Inch by inch, step by step they progress, finding ways and means not apparent to people who advance with unseemly haste. While this Vestment is active, the Possessed can move at half his normal Speed up vertical surfaces or across horizontal surfaces (even upside down) without fear of slipping. The Possessed can also become a nearly boneless mass, able to slip any bonds or squeeze through narrow (minimum of Size 1) openings.

Idle Hands: Have you ever been sitting down or lying in bed, comfy and relaxed, and see something across the room you need? How often have you wished you could just summon that item directly to you without having to get up? Most people will eventually get off their asses and go grab whatever it is they happen to require. They might grumble about it, but they'll do it all the same. Slothful Possessed have perfected laziness to a near art form, calling upon their demon to perform tasks without the effort of actually moving. While this Vestment is active, the Possessed gains the power of telekinesis. The character can lift objects of up to Size 5 that weigh 200 lbs or less. Skill rolls to manipulate objects with telekinesis replace Physical Attributes with corresponding Mental Attributes (Intelligence for Strength, Wits for Dexterity, Resolve for Stamina). Firing a gun, therefore, would become a Wits + Firearms roll. Unarmed physical attacks made with telekinesis ignore Defense, but not Armor and deal bashing damage. A faint smell of brimstone fills the air for the duration of the Vestment.

Laze: Apathy is, perhaps, best defined as just not giving a damn. To be apathetic is to realize you should be doing something, maybe even something vitally important, while at the same time not really caring enough to summon up the resolve. Everyone is apathetic about something at some point in their lives and a possessing demon can latch on to that feeling to aid its host. While this Vestment is active, everyone within, or who moves within, ten yards of the host is subtly encouraged to be apathetic. Characters may roll Resolve + Composure -2 to overcome



the compulsion and behave normally. Those who fail the roll are unable to spend Willpower. Any character so affected who tries to throw off the compulsion can reattempt the resistance roll each turn at a cumulative -1 penalty.

Miasma: One of the easiest ways to pick out slothful Possessed is by the reek they give off. Not every host with this Vice is a disgusting pig who hasn't bathed for weeks or months, but enough of them are to make it a valid stereotype. Their hair lies flat against their heads, oily and matted, their clothes have the delicate scent of sour milk and their skin is covered by rashes and blemishes. The body odor that accompanies them everywhere they go is enough to cause most people to avoid coming closer to the Possessed than they can help and makes the odds of them finding a job or having a social life next to nil. It requires only a tiny nudge from the possessing demon to turn up the stench to truly nauseating levels. While this Vestment is active, the Possessed sheds a foul odor that makes throats gag and eyes water. Anyone within three yards of the Possessed suffers a -3 penalty to all actions, so repellent is the smell. Additionally, the first turn the Vestment is active, each character within the Miasma must succeed at a Resolve + Stamina roll to avoid vomiting or inability to act.

The Immovable Object: To succeed through inaction is the ultimate dream of slothful Possessed. No faltering half-measures, no guilty procrastination, simply victory through stagnation. While this Vestment is active, the image of the possessing demon manifests over that of the host, a squat toad-like being in place of the frail human body that has to scramble to survive. As long as the Possessed doesn't move, not even to scratch his nose, he is completely invulnerable to damage and can't be affected by any sort of mental compulsion. If the host moves or is somehow forced to move, the Vestment immediately ends.

Twisting Horns: Sloth is sometimes represented by the goat: a lazy, stubborn creature that is often quite immovable. The character grows a pair of powerful ram's horns, barbed unnaturally with thorns that drip black ichor. The character may make attacks using these horns. The horns have a damage bonus of 3(L).

Wrath (Ira)

Wrath isn't just anger, but anger arising in vindication, anger that manifests to satisfy a raging soul.

Chaucer thought of anger as the "fervent blood of man" that is made to bring harm to those he hates. Many of the other sins are about enjoyment, about indulgence: Wrath as a Vice doesn't always create enjoyment, exactly, but it can create a certain brutal satisfaction.

Wrath's demon is Amon, and it is ruled by the warrior sign of Mars. Its color is a cruel red, its animal a raging bear.

Innate Vestments (1-Dot)

Anger Burns Hot: With but a glance at any source of flame the character may increase both its Size and Intensity by +1. The fire leaps, crackles, seethes.

Fleet Feet of Purpose: As with Swift Intercession (below), revenge is satisfactory when it is swift. Anger runs hot and fast, and demands immediate attention. Those with this Vestment can add both their dots in Intimidation and in the Wrath Vice to their Speed scores.

Skillful Demands: A mule or horse will work a bit harder when whipped or kicked, but only for so long. The Possessed character's abilities are a bit like that: once per day the character may impress his urgent and angry will upon a single Attribute + Skill roll. That roll gains a bonus equal to dots possessed in Wrath and gains the 9-Again quality. However, for the remainder of the day any rolls thereafter utilizing either the Attribute or the Skill suffer a damning effect: failures are now automatically considered dramatic failures during this time. The mule kicks back, so to speak.

Slayer of Men: A Hindu text notes, "Angry words are the slayer of men." The Possessed with this Vestment may make a ranged attack against a single individual (range equal to target's hearing radius) using Presence + Intimidation. The attack comprises harsh words, bitter invective and brutal threats. It hits like a fist or a kick; successes gained manifest as bashing damage.

Swift Intercession: Vengeance isn't a dish best served cold; for many, it's a dish best served fucking fast. A man cuts you off in traffic; well, better to beat his head in with a brick while he's right here, right now. Those with this Vestment get a bit of a jump on the act of vindication: the Possessed character can add the dots possessed in the Vice of Wrath to his Initiative score.

Wrath of the Wrench: Sometimes something doesn't work. The car sputters. The DVD player clicks and whirrs. The computer keeps giving that

wretched blue screen. Anger wells up—the urge to punish an inanimate object may be foolish, but it’s prevalent nevertheless. With this Vestment, a character can do that very thing and make it work: he gains a bonus to Crafts rolls equal to dots possessed in the Wrath Vice.

Lesser Vestments (2-Dot)

Bonded Weapon: A murderer lovingly strokes his favorite knife. A Marine Corps sniper names his rifle. A neighborhood vigilante marks his kills with hatch marks carved into the wood of his beloved Louisville slugger. The vengeful never wish to be without their favored weapon, and with this Vestment that’s certainly true. At the time of purchasing this Vestment, the character ties it to a specific weapon—not any .38 snubnose, but her *favored* snubnose (or axe, or crowbar, or whatever). When activating this Vestment, the item appears in front of the character, begging only to be picked up and used. At the end of the scene, the weapon literally dissolves into its cumulative parts and cannot be used again... that is, not until the character manifests this Vestment once more. The weapon always returns, eager to be brought to bear against her many enemies.

Fueled by Rage: It seems as if some people are just born angry. They spend their entire lives looking for a fight and when they find one it only intensifies their rage. Their anger is the only thing that gives their lives meaning and so they indulge it as much as possible. Wrathful Possessed learn to tap into the fury of the demon within and use it to bolster their fortitude. When this Vestment is activated, the Possessed gains an amount of temporary Health equal to her Wrath. Any damage suffered by the Possessed is first subtracted from this temporary Health before carrying over to her normal track. At the end of the Vestment’s duration, all damage absorbed by temporary Health vanishes and no long affects the host.

Ira Furor Brevis Est: Translation: *anger is a brief madness*. The character gives off an unnerving aura that affects those within a radius equal to twice the character’s primary Vice score in yards. Those in this aura suffer the effects of one *mild* derangement chosen by the Possessed. They cannot resist the derangement with anything but a point of Willpower spent; the effects last for one scene, as long as the aura itself.

Might Makes Right: No matter what the Bible might say, the strong are meant to rule. Strength comes in many forms. In a prison block physical strength determines who makes the rules, in the corporate world strength of will or personality creates leaders, and even among computer geeks, nerds and hackers the strongest minds dominate. Wrath can magnify strength, focusing mind and body upon the task at hand. Infernal Wrath tightens that focus to a needle point. This Vestment requires no expenditure to activate; instead, each point of Infernal Will spent increases one Attribute by 2 dots (this may exceed normal maximums) for the duration of the Vestment. Characters may apply this Vestment to only one Attribute at a time, and repeated uses of the Vestment do not stack.

Surprise, You’re Dead: Certainly some given over to this sin want to see the eyes of their enemies as they spoon-feed them their guts. Others just want the satisfying crunch of lead pipe against skull parts. With this Vestment, if the character successfully enacts a surprise against an opponent this scene, she can apply the Killing Blow rules against that target instead of having the target lose Defense.

Tooth for Tooth: The motto for the wrathful might simply be: “Do unto others as they have already done unto you.” That not-so-golden rule applies with this Vestment: any damage (bashing or lethal) done to the Possessed during this scene is mirrored upon the attacker. If an attacker thrusts a knife through the character’s belly, the attacker’s own belly starts to bleed. That attacker takes the same type and amount of damage caused.

Greater Vestments (3-Dot)

Blood Frenzy: There’s no such thing as a fair fight. When tempers flare and strong words give way to violence, only a fool stops to consider whether she’s being fair to her foes. The wrathful Possessed doesn’t expect a fair fight, but the demon inside her isn’t eager to be forced out of its host, so it incites enemies to mindless violence rather than reasoned attacks. While this Vestment is active, any characters who target the Possessed with violent intent find their minds filled with a red haze of fury. Overwhelmed with the compulsion to beat their foe bloody, they drop their weapons and charge the Possessed to battle in frenzied hand-to-hand combat. Characters can attempt to resist this compulsion with a Resolve + Composure roll at a –3 penalty. If



the roll fails, the characters must drop any weapons they are currently holding and move at top speed to engage the Possessed in unarmed combat. During their frenzy, characters afflicted by the rage must make an All-Out Attack each turn (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 157). The eyes of those affected by Blood Frenzy turn black and anyone staring into the inky pools sees his own reflection turn bruised and bloody.

Boiling Blood: The blood of the wrathful runs hot: anger isn't cold or precise—it's fiery, searing, and can be deadly. Those who manifest this Vestment find their skin growing blisters, turning red and dark like scorched meat. This doesn't hurt the Possessed character, though, and is in fact indicative of the roiling blood just beneath the surface. Those who make a successful close-quarters attack against the character (even bashing) are splashed with burning hot blood. This causes the opponent to suffer a number of lethal points of damage equal to half (round up) of what he caused to begin with. So, if the opponent causes 7 points of damage, he's

splashed with burning blood and takes 4 points of lethal damage (half of 7, rounded up).

Burning Wrath: Rage burns hot. It manifests as a glint of anger in the eyes, a rough edge to the voice and the drumbeat of blood pounding in the ears. Given fuel to burn, rage can overflow the body in acts of violence or sharp words spoken that can never be rescinded. Wrathful Possessed revel in their rage and in the rage of the beast dwelling in their souls. The demonic rage of a host spills over into the tools they use to communicate their anger, heating them with a hellish glow. While this Vestment is active, any weapon (or the knuckles of the host, if unarmed) wielded by the Possessed turns red-hot and smoking. In the case of firearms, bullets erupt into flame as they leave the barrel, leaving trails of smoldering sparks in their wake. Successful attacks deal an automatic 2 points of lethal damage in addition to roll results. The clothing and equipment of opponents that take more than 5 points of damage in any turn begin to smolder and burn. Characters can beat out the blossoming flames with a successful Wits + Dexterity roll. If the



roll is failed, the flames are considered torch-sized for purposes of damage (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 180).

Inferno: Perhaps it's because the anger within demons of Wrath burns so brightly that they seem to have the greatest affinity with fire. Of course, every demon has the theoretical ability to summon up hellfire, but demons of Wrath do so with the greatest ease and verve. Upon taking refuge in a human soul, demons of Wrath slowly extend their influence over the host body, tempering it with rage until the Possessed can withstand the heat of brimstone flames. With preparation of the host complete, the possessing demon calls out to the Inferno's flames and draws them to the material realm. While this Vestment is active, the Possessed may summon and command hellfire. The flames can be shaped according to the desires of the Possessed, taking the form of a wall of fire, a wave of rolling flames or handfuls of blazing death. The total volume of hellfire summoned at any one time may not exceed two cubic yards. Directing the hellfire is an instant action requiring no roll. Throwing handfuls of flame is resolved with a Dexterity + Athletics check. Hellfire burns hotter and fiercer than regular fire, increasing damage by +2, and hellfire may not be extinguished by any means until the duration of the Vestment is up. See the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 180, for rules dealing with fire.

Juggernaut: Stoked with hatred and fueled by cruelty, Wrath takes on a life of its own, becoming implacable. Rage begins to feed upon itself, creating an unstoppable force that sneers at injury, slowed only by death. While this Vestment is active, the skin of the Possessed is covered in scales the gray-white color of smoldering ashes. Upon activating the Vestment, the Possessed chooses one type of damage (bashing, lethal or aggravated) and becomes immune to that type of damage for the scene. Additionally, the host never suffers from wound penalties. Holy or blessed weapons ignore the damage restriction and inflict wounds normally. Rollover damage is exempt as well; if a character is immune to lethal damage but takes enough bashing damage that lethal damage begins to roll over, he would take that lethal damage normally. Being immune to blades doesn't prevent one from being beaten to death.

Spite: An eye for an eye, a tooth for a tooth. This is the commandment of Wrath. If a man injures you, the only possible response is to answer in kind. Only a coward allows his enemy to draw blood without suffering retribution. Revenge is not a dish best served cold; it's best served hot and steaming from the fires

of rage. Wrathful Possessed believe all of this and the demons inside them expect no less, arming their hosts for retaliation. While this Vestment is active, any time the Possessed suffers even a single point of damage he may make a retaliatory attack as a reflexive action, ignoring the standard turn sequence. The retaliatory attack is carried out with whatever weapon is at hand and obeys all standard rules. The reflexive action does not allow the Possessed a free move; he can strike at only those characters within range of his weapons. Retaliatory attacks do not exhaust the standard action of the Possessed; he may move and act normally during his turn.

Burnout

The human body was never designed to hold the kind of power wielded by the demonic entities taking refuge inside the Possessed. Whether humans were created by God or evolution, eventually flesh and blood begins to crumble under the onslaught of Infernal power: this is called Burnout. Rather than the slow and steady corruption of body and soul, Burnout is the direct consequence of pushing Vestments too hard or for too long, resulting in pain and obvious signs of possession. Possessed can suffer Burnout in one of two ways. Lesser and Greater Vestments require a Willpower expenditure to activate. If the Possessed doesn't want to (or can't) pay the cost he can tap directly into the power of his demon half instead. Tapping directly into that dark well of power is a very different experience than is focusing your will to gather it. It's the difference between sipping a fine whiskey and chugging raw moonshine. If the Possessed fails to control the energy that comes surging out of him, he suffers Burnout.

Pushing a Greater Vestment beyond its normal duration is the other way the Possessed can suffer Burnout. The Possessed faced by an arrogant holy man and his thuggish cronies knows the curling talons he's manifested are all that keep his enemies at bay. So he draws more deeply of the demon inside him, tapping more and more of its dark energies to maintain his weapons. Eventually there comes a breaking point and his flesh begins to crack like splintered marble. Steaming blood seeps out of the cracks and runs down his body in thin lines as he screams. The Possessed is paying the price in Burnout for pushing the limitations of his mortal shell too far.

Most of the time, Burnout affects only the body. It manifests in painful displays of the Vice shared by demon and host. The skin of the slothful might erupt



in rancid sores filled with squirming maggots. The envious might weep a bright green viscous fluid that burns like acid and the lustful might moan with pain and pleasure as unseen whips flay flesh from bone. Burnout can also affect the will of the Possessed. Instead of an outward display, the Infernal power corrupts internally, eating away at the very tenacity that keeps them alive. These wounds are just as deep and painful as physical torments and the scars never quite heal. Each time the Possessed sacrifices a portion of his will it increases his reliance upon his demonic “partner.” Some Possessed are little more than suits of flesh for demons, most of their identity and soul seared to cinders by Burnout.

Each time a Possessed either forgoes Willpower expenditure for a Vestment or pushes a Greater Vestment past its normal duration he runs the risk of Burnout. The Possessed rolls Resolve + Stamina to channel and contain the Infernal power. This roll suffers a cumulative -1 penalty for each turn a Vestment remains active, and penalties may stack. A character who can't pay the Willpower cost of activating a Greater Vestment who then chooses to maintain the effect beyond its normal duration will suffer some hefty penalties.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The Possessed loses control completely. Not only does the character suffer the results of a failed roll as described below, the character gains a temporary derangement selected by the Storyteller.

Failure: The Possessed loses control and suffers 1 point of lethal damage for each dot in his primary

Fiery Damnation (optional)

For troupes that desire a more dangerous form of Burnout, we offer the following optional rule. Instead of rolling to control the tempest of demonic power raging through them, each time a Possessed invokes Burnout the character simply suffers the failure result of the Control roll. Choosing to use this optional rule showcases the dangers inherent to the Possessed condition, though it does increase the chances of character death.

Vice. The physical form of damage caused by Burnout is tied to the primary Vice of the character (see above for examples). Damage caused by Burnout cannot be avoided in any way, save one. The character can choose to *permanently* lose 1 dot of Willpower to prevent physical damage. Failing a Burnout roll does not end the effects of the Vestment that caused it.

Success: The Possessed manages to maintain control.

Exceptional Success: The Possessed momentarily masters control of the surging energy. All penalties to resist Burnout are reset to -1 (though they increase normally on successive turns).

Freed by Death

When a Possessed dies of Burnout, the demon hiding inside is forced into the open. For the briefest of seconds the true, hideous form of the beast is revealed for all to see. The actions of a manifested demon during this period usually depend upon its Vice. Demons of Wrath tend to lash out, Pride and Sloth often shine briefly before vanishing, apparently either too proud or too lazy to act. Demons of Envy, Gluttony, Greed and Lust can be the most dangerous. These demons will attempt to possess any convenient host who happens to be near, regardless of that target's Vice.

A manifested demon remains active for a number of turns equal to its current Infernal Willpower. This is one of the few times a demon is truly vulnerable to physical attack by mortals. Treat the newly manifested demon like a Dominion with the corpse of its ex-host acting as the demonic fetter. Unlike a normal Dominion, the manifested demon is in a state of semi-limbo until the manifestation ends. The demon can attack, flee or use any Numina normally available to it. If the manifested body of the demon is defeated, it is forced, howling, back to the Inferno. An undefeated demon can attempt to possess a new host and, if that fails, will lower itself to the form of a Whisperer rather than accept banishment.

Storytelling the Possessed

Whether you're approaching this as Storyteller or as player, roleplaying one of the Possessed has its own special challenges. This section hopes to address those challenges, but don't be fooled by the header:

Storytelling isn't a task strictly limited to the Storyteller. The players all contribute to the story, often in a more meaningful way than the Storyteller herself. Players, this section is for you, too.

Face of the Demon

One of the biggest questions facing a Possessed character or whole troupe (including the Storyteller) is: who actually *plays* the demon? Who is the sinister voice whispering in the character's ear? Who is the one invoking the Contest of Wills?

The default answer is that it's a combination of both that character's player and the Storyteller. Seventy-five percent of the time, it's easy for the player to "be" his own character's demon—he may play the character in such a way that he's clearly listening to instructions or comments nobody else can hear, that sinister susurrations in the back of his mind. Some players will relish this possibility, having fun with an internal force taunting, tormenting and teasing them... as well as promising power, whispering dark compliments, needlessly boosting ego. Since the player helps to craft the demonic persona within, it's mostly no problem to handle the normal duties of playing a person with two minds in one body.

Sometimes, though, mechanics are going to come into play. Conflict and suspense are born out of a character not necessarily doing what is in that character's best interests, clearly going against the player's designs. The demon wants what it wants. Just as a player can't control when an opponent fires a bullet at his head or when a car comes careening down the road toward him, he can't always control the demon. The Storyteller steps in during such times. The Storyteller may or may not invoke the demon's voice, actually "playing" the demon's personality or instead just relaying the demon's wishes to the player without using any kind of internal, diabolical dialogue. It's the Storyteller who can offer "deals" on the part of the demon, or who engages in a Contest of Wills to determine who takes control of the host body. (And, if the demon takes control, once more the player should be expected to take back the reins, now roleplaying as if the human host is submerged beneath the Infernal Will of the possessing entity. If at any point the Storyteller feels the player is playing too human or too much in the mortal's interests, the Storyteller may demand a Willpower point be spent to continue that course of action.)

That, again, is the default. You do have other options, though...

Player Control

The player handles both the human and demonic aspects of the Possessed character. Think of it a bit like playing a character with multiple personalities, or a schizophrenic who hears the "whispers" of beings outside this plane of existence. Going this route necessitates that the player be very comfortable in regard to setting his character up for conflict: sometimes the demon and human souls might work in accord, but eventually the demon must want something in opposition to the human's own desires and plans (if only because the demon keeps pushing and pushing). It'll be a bit tricky, because it really is like playing two characters in one—but, then again, the Storyteller is in charge of playing... well, everybody who *isn't* the players' characters, so it's not really that strange to have a player handling two distinct personalities within one host body.

You can still relegate the actual oppositional rolling of an action like Contest of Wills to the Storyteller, of course: really, it's faster and easier. In addition, the Storyteller may step in at certain times and at least call for a Contest of Wills, just as he might call for a roll to resist derangement. Otherwise, all aspects of roleplaying the Possessed character lie in the hands of the player.

Storyteller Control

This (and the option below of using other players) is a bit more "authentic" in that it mimes the mode of control used in the story itself: in the story, the human doesn't control the demon, and outside the story, the player doesn't control it, either. The demon may be internal, but it's represented by an external force.

Here, the Storyteller handles it. All of it. He's the whispering voice. He's the one who pushes, nudges, shoves the character to do things. He's the one who brings a Contest of Wills into play.

This incurs some complexities, though. First, if the entire troupe is playing Possessed characters, the Storyteller now has to handle *all* of their demons. That's maybe okay if he's up for it—again, the Storyteller plays pretty much the entire world minus the players' characters, so what's three or five more? (And it's not like the demons are all chatterboxes, constantly gibbering in everybody's ears.) The other complexity is that it can start to feel as if it's the Storyteller directly against the player. Sure, the Storyteller controls all the antagonists in the game, but the demon is ultimately a very intimate one, and has a level of control over the host body that most other





enemies don't have. Storytellers, if you choose to go this way with the demon within, it may at times necessitate a gentle touch if the player feels as if you're using the entity to enforce plotlines or railroad the story toward a certain direction. This option demands a level of trust between player and Storyteller, to be sure.

Demon Guides: Other Players

Speaking of trust, here's a great trust exercise at the playing table: let another player handle your character's demon. They play as the "Demon Guide." Oh, but you won't be left out of the fun, because you get to play someone else's demon. (The Storyteller can either put everybody in pairs, and each in the pair plays one another's demon, or he can instead assign the Demon Guides in a circle—each player looks to his left and controls that player's Possessed demon side.)

It works just as it does above, with Storyteller control, except now another player is controlling your character's demon. He is the whisper, the urge, the sin implicit. He can call for a Contest of Wills; he can perhaps offer deals and pacts if appropriate.

This can be sensitive, of course: trust is absolutely critical between players to handle this sort of thing, and if trust isn't present, then at least a serious commitment to fun must be put on the table before play. This fails once people's feelings start to get hurt or once any kind of antagonism creeps out from the game world and onto the gaming table.

Devil in the Details

This is something to consider for both player and Storyteller—what does it mean to be Possessed? Outside the obvious physical and metaphysical concerns, what does it mean for the *story* you're all collectively trying to tell? It's important to start off on this question, to consider the fundamental elements that will go into the tale of the Possessed. And, because the Possessed are themselves creatures of a certain dichotomy (human and demon soul tangled up within the host body), we're going to frame a lot of the key questions and potential themes as factors that work in opposition to one another. Highlighting a certain pair of opposing factors helps frame your game in a certain way, defining the chief struggle of the character and coloring the tone of the game with broad strokes of theme and mood. Note that you don't need to choose one opposing pair in exclusion of the others, but it helps to hone the focus of your character's struggle and to highlight the conflicts inherent in the story.

Parasitism versus Symbiosis

Being demonically-possessed sounds terrible. The human host is subject to the demon's whims. An Infernal being is suckling upon the sin within the heart and mind. It's a creature from Hell! A vile, iniquitous thing!

Except... is it that terrible? Universally, consistently terrible? Not necessarily. Some hosts do just fine with a demon within, thanks. And why wouldn't they? A demon is selfish. A person can be selfish. If both souls within the single host body share a certain set of desires and goals, where's the problem? If the two can come to a kind of internal agreement, it doesn't matter whether they're wholly on the same page; provided they can give a little to get a little, working out deals along the way to help avoid any of that nasty "Contest of Wills" business, everybody wins.

That, right there, is symbiosis—two unlike entities living together in relative harmony. Technically, a tapeworm is an intestinal parasite, but if a man with a parasite thrives off of the weight loss the flat white worm gives him by living in his guts, and he keeps on happily feeding both himself and the worm, well, they've formed a kind of partnership (albeit a disgusting one). If the human is happy with what he gets from the demon within (power, knowledge, a comforting voice that justifies his most indulgent urges), then a similar relationship exists. And that's okay. Yes, you've taken one conflict off the table, but that doesn't mean a Possessed character is without conflict—it's just now the conflict is likely to be external rather than internal. It's the difference, say, between battling one's own wildly-spinning moral compass and battling a cabal of cackling *L'enfants Diabolique* (p. 179).

The other angle is the more obvious one: parasitism. The demon is a parasite. It lives within and feeds off the host, often to the detriment of the host (in this case, against the human host's wishes). Here, the struggle is very internal—it is a clash of wills, a constant nightly grapple over the host's health and destiny. In such a story, it's likely the story is less about invoking weird demonic powers and spinning sin to one's benefit, and more about looking for a way out, a way to push the demon to the margins and hopefully out of the body itself.

Master versus Slave

This dichotomy is similar to the previous, but bears a bit of text to offer an alternate glimpse: in the relationship of two souls bound within one host body, who is the master and who is the slave? The default answer to this is, of course, that the demon

is ultimately master—or, at least, seeks to be. While the human “controls” the body for the most part, it’s the demon that pulls the strings and makes the marionette dance. Right?

Not necessarily. It’s quite a serviceable plot to have the human be the master in this scenario: if the demon is weak or given over to being the “lesser” being in a hierarchy, it may stand to gain more by allowing the human to assert full control—though, if the demon *allows* that, is the human ever truly the master? Still, the human may have a powerful enough persona to constantly keep the demon in check: that doesn’t mean the creature within can’t get off a lucky win at the Contest of Wills now and again, but for the most part it means the *human* is the one exploiting the demon, not vice versa.

Damnation (Vice) versus Redemption (Virtue)

Morality is a sliding scale, right? A barometer of the character’s moral nature and sanity, bound up in a rating from 0 to 10, correct? Let’s imagine the entire story has an invisible scale, similarly from 0 to 10, and that scale is meant to measure the barometer of damnation versus redemption in the story, a balancing act of Vice versus Virtue.

First and foremost, keep in mind that this idea is thematically tied to Morality, but not mechanically.

If my character’s chief-most Vice is Lust, then engaging in Lust does not necessarily send my Morality plummeting. In fact, my Possessed character might avoid tackling his Virtue forever anon, spending night after night engaging in awful perversions... and yet, provided those perversions are consensual and do not constitute any kind of torture, it doesn’t equate to Morality loss. But to a degree the character is still damning himself, isn’t he? Not because he’s engaged in unconventional sex, but because he is *addicted* to that pleasure, because he seeks it unhealthily above other things, because it encompasses him. That’s the sin, and that’s the damnation. And it gives the demon just what it wants.

So, in such an instance, the “damnation” meter clicks up by one. If one of the Possessed characters engages in a behavior related to Virtue (specifically in opposition to the demon’s own dark desires), then maybe the meter ticks backward toward “redemption.” You don’t really need to keep track of this, of course, but the point is to gauge the tone of the game and of the characters’ actions, and you can start to... *color* the world accordingly. If the characters lean more toward damnation, the world slowly gives itself over to that tainted, corrupted veneer—the hazy reds and pitted rusts of a red light district, storm-clouds on the horizon, oily rain, anything that indicates a kind of internal *and* external contamination. Redemptive



acts may spawn a more redemptive mood—someone offers a bit of charity, the clouds part to let a sliver of sun through, a Storyteller character everybody considered hopeless starts to turn his life around against all expectations.

It's also important to know as a player—what's the arc? Are you going to play a character who, whether in line with or against his hopes, is destined for damnation? Will it be a true tragedy, wherein an individual helps engineer his own downfall (though never willfully)? Alternately, if redemption is in the cards (so you hope, at least), it may change the tenor of the game. The Storyteller knows to challenge the character with tests of will; Morality loss becomes, in a way, far worse than any threat to one's Health. Vice is sinister; it erodes. Virtue must stand naked against threat. Can it be done? Thus stands a potential character and story arc for the game.

Knowledge versus Ignorance

Once, demons (*daemons*, *daimons*) were thought of as creatures of knowledge and forbidden wisdom; this comes before the more traditional reimagining of demons as beings of sin and evil. But, even as selfish, indulgent sin-creatures, demons *still* represent a kind of knowledge. They've been around for a very long time. They seem to know things they shouldn't. Their intelligence is certainly inhuman.

By highlighting the struggle of knowledge versus ignorance, you're giving the story a certain twist. What is the nature of the knowledge the demon can provide? Does the demon want the human to remain ignorant so it can use its knowledge against him (or, because it fears the human will use his newfound knowledge against the demon)? Perhaps ignorance is truly bliss. One could suggest sin is in many ways an endorsement of ignorance, a gleeful refusal to acknowledge the consequences of one's own decadent actions. Does the human *try* to remain ignorant? This can be a key struggle for the game (as highlighted by any investigation-based story modes you might find below under "Demon Seed: Stories of the Possessed").

Authority versus Rebellion

Demons are, in some cultures, heralded as rebellious creatures. Whether this rebellion is positive (shirking the yoke of God's oppressive rule) or negative (willfully casting oneself into Hell and spurning God's blessings of love), it's still a level of profound disobedience.

Is the Possessed character, or the story about these characters, one highlighting this kind of disobedience? Is the demon within representative of an unorthodox way to bring existing power structures down? This represents a fairly external story: a human, oppressed by society (or the government or his job) finds newfound strength to fight back against his oppressors by taking a demon into the body. This is a steep cost, but sticking a thumb in the eye of authority—and hopefully tearing that eye from its socket—might be worth the price.

It can also be very internal, though. In looking at the demon and human pairing within the single host body, who is the authority and who is the rebel? Is the demon a cold authority, with the human constantly rebelling against the creature's icy grip? Or is it the other way around? The human's "authority" might represent a certain stagnation of character, a stultification of the spirit. The demon might be the mote of selfish chaos necessary for the character to break out of the mold and find some manner of purpose or destiny (though the demonic idea of destiny is rarely a positive one).

The Byronic Hero

This isn't a book about literature, but literature is awesome. So, it bears taking a momentary intermission:

Think of your Possessed character as a Byronic hero (aka, "anti-hero"). Lord Byron had his own Romantic ideal of a hero, and it wasn't what you'd expect: brooding, dark, rebellious. Goes against social mores. Often isolated from society. He isn't said to possess "heroic virtue," and in terms of the World of Darkness might be thought of as instead possessing "heroic Vice." In Byron's work, look to Childe Harold or Manfred. You might also look to Goethe's Faust, or even...

Lucifer himself. That's right, Lucifer in Milton's *Paradise Lost* is thought of as an anti-hero. Appropriate? Could be. This isn't required reading, and may be unrelated to your vision for a Possessed character or story, but if it piques your interest it could easily serve as inspiration for this game.

Demon Seed:

Stories of the Possessed

Looking at a book or film like *The Exorcist*, it's hard to imagine a good roleplaying game coming out of that story when looked at from the perspective of the Possessed character (Regan). It's one lone girl who spends a great deal of the tale bound to a bed, assailed by the rites of exorcism. Yes, a story focusing upon the exorcists, well, that makes for an easy setup, doesn't it?

The Possessed, however, offer a multitude of story options, many of which are born organically out of playing such characters. This section is geared not just toward giving those options, but toward providing concrete examples of putting these ideas into action with story hooks and options for groups of Possessed characters. Why would Possessed characters even want to come together? Examples await.

Investigation: Glimpses into Hell

Demons lie, or, at the bare minimum, casually leave out important pieces of truth. They *particularly* lie to the human whose body hosts them in the cases of the Possessed. And why wouldn't they? The last thing a demon wants is for the human to have an accurate picture of the entity lurking within. A study of the demon might reveal its origins, its weaknesses, its desires and its true name. Any of these things provide fodder for the human host to use against the possessing entity, right? The true name gives the human power. Other critical elements can contribute toward the Contest of Wills, too. Plus, if the human knows the demon's foibles, its enemies, its fears... then he can engineer events to trip up the creature, helping him gain advantage (or even summoning a pack of exorcists or demonologists who help him be rid of his hellish parasite).

Thus, one of the primary modes of play here is a story focused upon investigation. Attempting to plunge into the demon's story offers a way to slowly investigate and reveal the true nature of the atrocious thing twisted around the human's own soul. Of course, any story based around investigation runs the risk of becoming boring. The good news is Possessed characters already have one in-built conflict preventing them from easily investigating the demon within—the demon itself.

The demon will eventually figure out what the character aims to do. Once it realizes the human is flipping through the Termagant Grimoires in order to

potentially home in on the demon's true name, then *boom*—it's Contest of Wills time. The demon will pull out all the stops in order to prevent the human from digging into its story. Most will attempt to punish the human in some way: trying to force Burnout, urging the character into a dangerous struggle, or thrusting the human into a Vice-driven act that might put him out of commission for a time (heroin needle in arm, for instance). Alternately, some demons recognize you get more flies with honey (and demons love flies), and will instead try to distract the human or even cut a deal. If it can get the human away from investigating its nature, then that's perfect. Offer power. Offer knowledge. Offer indulgent distractions that play off the human's Vice. Some demons even carry the lie further—they offer to tell the human the “whole story,” and then fabricate a tale out of whole cloth.

This isn't the only conflict blocking the way of investigating the demon, though. External elements will continue to rear their ugly heads. A forbidden grimoire is protected by a cadre of bloodthirsty exorcists who care approximately *nothing* for the human host when it comes to banishing a demon. A powerful Diabolus haunts the basement library where all the old books and microfiches are found. A local demonologist who promises to deliver “full disclosure” about the demon within ends up dead, hanging from a light-post with a lit candle in his mouth and a crude sigil of Astaroth carved into his exposed stomach.

Alternately, it might be the demon urging investigation: the entity may want the host to investigate some of its enemies (or “competitors”), or may want to dig up some dirt on a passel of local summoners. Remember: demons in some cultures represent forbidden wisdom. It makes a handy theme for any game involving the Possessed.

Library of the Bridle

In San Francisco's North Beach, right on the cusp of Chinatown, sits a small used bookstore whose hidden library in the basement serves as a repository for forbidden knowledge, knowledge its proprietors say amounts to a kind of *bridle*—and what is a bridle? A bridle is a piece of headgear used to control a horse. The books and Artifacts and pieces of parchment kept below this old bookstore all serve to ameliorate the process of becoming Possessed. Makes sense, then, that all its proprietors are Possessed, too: men and women who have willingly taken demons into themselves and who have formed a very symbiotic relationship with the entities within. They serve as the guardians of this lost knowledge (or as they see



it, *lost art*), helping others to achieve what they have: demonic possession. For the right price—and after being deemed worthy—they will help a person find her “totem” demon, the Infernal avatar that marries perfectly with her human soul (“Two halves lost until now,” they say). It is, to a degree, a sham. Very few clients end up with the same level of symbiosis the proprietors themselves possess, and many end up on the leash of particularly brutal demons who ride their “mounts” too roughly, destroying them in the process. The proprietors promise power, wisdom, secrets—they act as the mouthpieces for their demons, luring fools into Faustian bargains. (You could, in a story, have the players create Possessed who were drawn into the act by the proprietors, thus having a common origin, or what about having the players control the proprietors themselves?)

Optional Rule: Strength in Numbers

Want to add an extra layer of power to cabals of Possessed characters? Try this:

The way a Possessed group is composed can (if you choose this optional rule) have a direct reflection upon the strength of the human or demon. Earlier, we discussed how Vice can be a sympathetic bond between demon and human, and it can also be a sympathetic bond between Possessed characters, but that’s not necessarily in a *good way*.

The character in a cabal of other Possessed may have his demon’s power fortified by others sharing the same Vice. Count up how many others have the same primary Vice in play: that number is added to the demon’s rolls during the Contest of Wills as a bonus modifier.

But it goes the other way, too—count up all the other characters in the cabal who have a primary Vice *different* than the character’s own. This number gets added as a bonus modifier to the human’s Resolve + Composure roll during the Contest of Wills. (The bonus may also be added to rolls made in a “Fooling the Demon” effort.)

So, both human and demon have reason to try to stack the deck, so to speak, with a cabal of people who strengthen their position and purpose.

The Circle of Bethlehem

Five of the Possessed have come together in the city of Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Prior to one year ago, they did not know one another. They each came to their demons (or their demons to them) in different ways: one an addict, one a madman, two from different pacts, and the final as the result of a familial curse. Each has learned the hard way that plumbing the depths and details regarding their individual demons is a wrong turn down a dark road: the demons know and punish them for such transgressions, or instead feed them shovelfuls of deception heaped upon fallacy. Ah, but only certain things seem to *ping* each demon’s radar—the demon is only so aware, only so clued-in to its host’s seemingly innocuous activities. These five characters have come together for one shared purpose: to uncover the truths about one another’s demons. They rarely meet. They speak or send letters and e-mails as coded missives. They’ve learned powerful ciphers, both numerical and occult. They study the demons of their allies within the Circle, each doing one another’s work so as not to rouse the suspicions of the demon within. It isn’t perfect. Some of their possessors have grown leery; but slowly but surely they unravel one another’s secrets. What happens when they reach a breaking point? What happens when the demons learn of their treachery?

Common Goals: The Devil’s Work

It’s a bit general, perhaps, but the Possessed often work together because they have a common goal or a common enemy. They come together with shared ideals in mind, and those shared ideals keep the cabal together and functioning—though, once a common purpose is lost (whether ruined irreparably or the goal is actually completed), cabals of Possessed had better find a new shared goal or fall to infighting. Demons can play well with other demons when they’re all moving toward the same purposes; without that binding factor, their selfishness is often too overwhelming to make it work. And while a Possessed character is the sum of human *and* demon, enough of that indulgence bleeds through to make working together difficult without meaningful circumstances.

What follows are some examples of Possessed cabals that have come together under different common goals.

The Abolitionists of Men

Some cabals direct their efforts toward the Vices they embody. The Abolitionists of Men is one such group: it, with the chattering and hissing support of

the vengeful demons within, helps others gain their revenge. It owns a wide tract of land. It's fenced in. It's got hidden cameras, traps, wild animals, you name it. The way it works is this: a person wants revenge. It gives it to them. First, the cabal kidnaps whoever it is who is the target of the vindication—a rapist, an IRS agent, a gang of thugs, an ex-husband, whoever. Second, it drops him into the fenced area, which is hundreds of square miles on every side. Then the act of Wrath begins. It is an act the client dictates: does she want to hunt down her target herself with the help of the cabal? Does she want to watch on the cameras as cabal members attack him, or as he's eaten by rabid dogs? Special needs can be met, at a price. Rarely does the cabal say no to even the most creative wishes of its clients. Most of the time, those who feel their revenge deserve it in some fashion—the human sides struggle when relative innocents enter the equation. But the demons within can be very, very persuasive.

The Doormen

It is well known that demons serve other demons—the lord of one Possessed is surely a slave to some greater and more awful entity. The Doormen is a broad cabal—a cult, really—of Possessed individuals who operate within the framework of the United States government. They operate well beneath the radar of authority, generally tending to their duties as would any government employee. Some are relatively low on the totem pole (postal workers, a secretary in the Department of Health and Human Services, a building inspector). Others sit much higher (generals, head of FEMA, state representative). These men and women are all Possessed. Their demons have helped them achieve their status, or offer them rewards in other ways (easy access to vices, for instance). They have zero interest in subverting the government or causing harm to state or country. Frankly, those goals are way too low. They operate in this human hierarchy so as to help bring forth the *Infernal* hierarchy. Government jobs mean access to places. A building inspector can go places most people can't. The head of a small agency has access to unusual resources, and perhaps knows another Possessed who can cover up the exploitation of those resources. It all forms a terrible chain with the goal of summoning forth powerful demons (Dominions, for the most part). They can get access to forbidden sites (places of atrocity, places of sin), powerful diabolical relics (a severed demon's hand that weakens the walls between worlds, an old LP record that offers a demon strength when it's played backward), even allies (a demonologist locked away

in a federal Supermax prison, a Possessed who's gone "off the grid" but could be tracked with the right application of law enforcement resources). There exists a faction *within* the Doormen, however, that strives to bring the conspiracy down. This nameless subset rebels against the group and against the demons, playing a fierce battle against all sides while trying desperately to remain hidden. It recognizes the harm the group is doing to the world by bringing such awful entities into existence, and works subtly against this harm.

The Seven Deadlies

There sits a small town not far from the rimrock, a town rightfully called Canyon's Edge. In that town live seven men, *prominent* men. Bankers, merchants, town council, and so forth. Each of these men is Possessed, and for each of the seven men is a different prevailing Vice. These men are demon hunters. Yes, they have demons within themselves, but human and demon work together to track down the truly monstrous—massive demons who should have never escaped Hell; terrible Possessed who lord over little towns like mad, frothing kings; vain little trust-fund babies whose blood pumps with the powerful heritage of Lucifer himself. They're vicious in what they do. They leave their jobs and homes on a hunt, packing up their rifles and pistols, and they bring down the big dogs with the might of Hell riding behind them. They think what they do is just. They believe they are serving a greater authority, perhaps even God Himself. They believe this because that's what their possessing demons tell them, and it's all a terrible lie. These demons are aiming only to eliminate the competition. Destroying the others helps them ascend Hell's hierarchy—but the demon hunters don't know that, oh no. They think they're clearing a path to Heaven. They believe themselves redeemed.

The Wharton Club

Sin is great, God is dead, everybody rejoice. That is the overriding ethos of the Possessed who belong to the Wharton Club, a hedonist's paradise of "do what thou wilt" hellfire club junkies. They have satellite clubs all around England and the United States, predominantly in London, Boston and San Francisco. They have a terrible reputation—local church groups have long been up in arms about the actions in which the club's members supposedly engage, and on plenty of occasions the police have broken in doors, roughed up members and destroyed property. The irony is that, ultimately, the Wharton Club isn't really hurting anybody. Yes, the members engage in unabashed hedonistic acts. Sure, they involve drugs.





By most standards, what they do is perverse, immoral, just *slathered* in sin like butter-drenched lobster. Everything they do, however, is consensual. If anybody gets hurt, it's because he asked for it—because he wanted to be cut or choked or accept a suppository of Oxycodone. And, for the most part, the members generally *don't* get hurt. Pleasure—from food, from chemicals, from sex, from anything—is the order of the day. And yet they have countless enemies. The moral crusaders, the religious right—all have made vicious attacks upon the Possessed members of the Wharton Club, causing far more pain and suffering than those who belong to the club in the first place. Moreover, exorcists have become involved—bands of brutal, self-righteous soldiers who will stop at nothing to see the Wharton Clubs burned to the ground and all the members buried beneath them.

Defense: Enemies at the Gates of Hell

Sometimes it's as easy as this: mutual protection. The characters don't want to die, or lose their souls, or whatever. They are beset by enemies, and they are ultimately weak and confused and filled with fear. Best, then, to band together.

In a story mode such as this, the characters needn't have many common threads binding them. Simply being the only Possessed in town might do the trick—they are forced together because they're dumb, lost, and in danger from various sources. They can get together to commiserate, but more importantly they can get together to keep one another from catching a bullet or a face full of blessed wine.

The Escapists

It's no good to be on the bottom. The Possessed members of the Escapists cabal know this all too well. The demons that possess these individuals are, ultimately, weak. They're the low fools in Hell's hierarchy, and that makes the demons accountable, subject to the whims of far more powerful Possessed and even other demons loose in the world. For the moment, the Possessed characters in this cabal have an agreement between human host and possessing demon: becoming enslaved by something bigger, meaner and madder sounds like a terrible time indeed. And so the Escapists are on the run. Permanently, it seems, as they gather pursuers wherever they go, almost as if they're forever cursed to be on the lam from forces greater than they. Ancient demons, powerful Possessed, grudge-bearing demonologists—all in pursuit, and some in tense and tenuous tandem. The humans of this cabal are not

without a backup plan, though. They recognize they cannot run forever; eventually their enemies will catch up. They conspire against their possessing demons to find a way to be rid of them all at once so they may be free from this awful, endless persecution.

Knights of Ashtoreth

So many Possessed are woefully vulnerable. They're fools, really. Thrashing about. Grasping at sin like so many dropped straws. Before they know it, they've stepped into one pile of shit or another: they find themselves bound to a cross, splashed with holy water and cut with sanctified knives, or they end up with Burnout, the Infernal awfulness within bleeding outward and rupturing body and mind. The Knights of Ashtoreth don't want that. They, with their patron "saint," Ashtoreth (or Astaroth), are guardians who stand against persecutors and inquisitors. (Really, they're a roving band of louts, drunkards and criminals, but they pretend to possess a noble goal.) More than one Possessed character has found himself being harried down an empty street by a van full of exorcists, only to have the Knights of Ashtoreth come and save his hide. They don't do so for free, of course. It's a bit like prison: they save the little fish from the bigger fish, but they still want their cut. Some they save come to work for them. Others find different ways to pay.

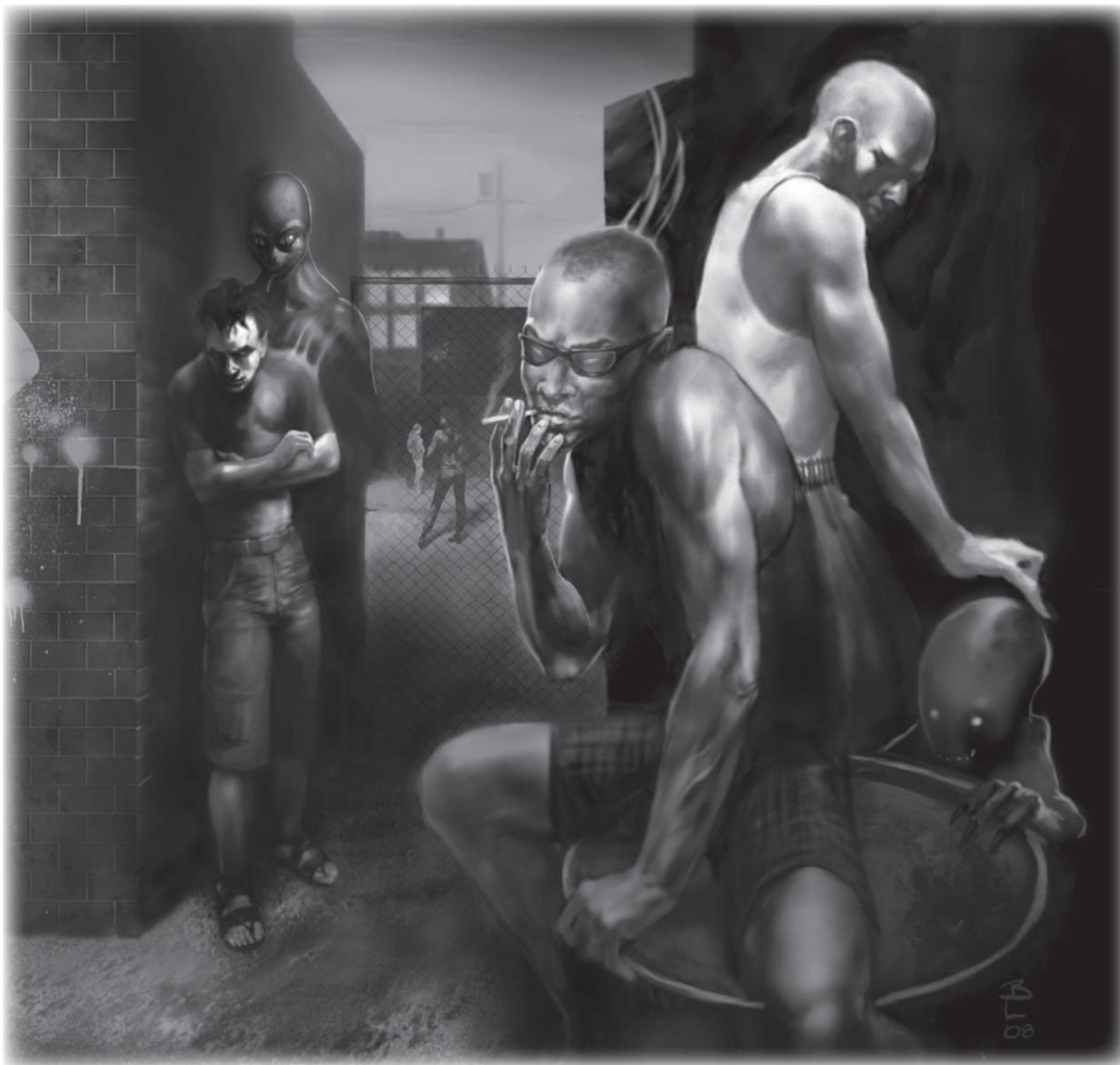
Redemption: Glimpses into Heaven

Where better to tell a story of redemption than with characters who are Possessed? Many of the humans who have inadvertently or willfully invited a demon into their flesh have done so because they hit rock bottom or were so blinded by selfishness they left great big ragged holes in their souls.

Think of it a bit like suicide. A rare few have survived perilous suicidal jumps (such as those made off the Golden Gate Bridge), and those who do survive almost always report a singular feeling: I have made a terrible error. They thought they'd hit rock bottom, but as they're hurtling through the air, their bones ready to crack on pavement or their lungs about to be filled with great gulps of water, they realize they *hadn't* yet truly hit bottom. A great sense of regret seems to infuse those who have swallowed a handful of pills or filleted their wrists.

Those who have reached the point of demonic possession come to realize a similar revelation: *that* was not rock bottom, but *this* most certainly is.

Yes, the demon can provide favors, secrets, knowledge, powers. Certainly the demon can even



be friendly, coercing with reward or actually finding a genuine sympathetic bond in the human's own addictions and urges.

But even then it still feels wrong. As good as it may seem in retrospect, the character always feels something... *off*. Something stained, something oily inside the soul, like a patch of dirt or a spot of blood that never comes out no matter how hard one scrubs.

Redemption, then, is a natural mode—the result of being Possessed for five days or five years. One day, the character hits that realization that it's time to do something. Just like a meth junkie deciding to stop tweaking and get his shit together, the Possessed makes a conscious decision to rise from the self-indulgent,

bottom-feeder life he's living and crawl toward the light. Does he do it? *Can* he do it? It's no easy feat. The demon watches. The demon doesn't want redemption (unless it does—see "The Lucky Ones," below). It stands in the character's way, pushing for control so as to dangle an easy fix or a quick taste of Vice before the Possessed so as to distract him from any quest for redemption. It is a path fraught with internal danger (the demon, madness, ignoring Vices) and external (other demons, the character's own enemies who care little for his redemption, demonologists, exorcists). Can the character make it? Does redemption mean learning to control the demon, finding symbiosis with the creature, or forcing the awful thing out?



World of Darkness: Emphyrean

Let's say for a moment you don't find demons... *scary* enough. They're too selfish. Selfishness is a human urge, really, and knowing too much about the demon within, well, maybe you're concerned that too much of the mystery has been removed. You'd rather your character be possessed by something truly alien, something *truly* and *utterly* incomprehensible.

You'd rather your character be possessed by an angel.

It'd be easy to devote an entire chapter to that, of course—but, we don't have the time or space in this book, and as it stands you want this right now. We don't blame you. So here's how to do it:

Flip a switch. You no longer have dots in Vices, but instead your Virtues are rated from 1 to 3 and contribute to Vestments (that you'll have to tweak using the demonic Vestments as a base; sorry!). Most other rules are the same. The angel still struggles to control the host body whenever the human rebuffs the entity's demands. The angel still gets its own Willpower score based off the primary Virtue. (We'll go ahead and call this, "Blessed Will.")

The big difference comes in the nature of the possessing entity. Demons are largely selfish; sure, they kowtow to an Infernal hierarchy at times, but even then it's to selfishly try to climb that hierarchy or at least survive while clinging to the burning ladder. Angels have a plan. And humans are not privy to it. Angels—*cherubim*, *seraphim*, *qashmalim*, whatever—have little interest in sharing their plans, and perhaps couldn't even if they wanted to. They communicate in broken messages, confused speech, weird sounds, ideas turned into frequencies. Maybe the plan comes from God. Maybe it comes from some distant reality, a magnificent plane of existence where all is bathed in holy light and all sits upon consecrated ground.

And what is the plan? Again, hard to say. Different angels seem bound to do different tasks, defined deeply by their unspoken direction. One seems committed to the primary Virtue—an angel of Charity not only forces its human host to give everything away, but to force others to do the same. An angel of Faith damned near destroys its host's mind while dragging it through a gauntlet of sanity-shattering religious experiences.

A different angel seems interested in ushering forth the Apocalypse. No reasons are given. It doesn't explain this; it pushes the character to turn events toward triggering some kind of Armageddon (assassinating a senator, hacking into Wall Street and causing an economic tidal wave through "tweaked" numbers, or simply burying seismographic records that could save a lot of people from a coming earthquake). Another angel might urge its host to simply *prepare* for the End Times; he fortifies his house, buys a fuck-ton of guns, stocks a shelter with perishables, and then starts bringing people (by gunpoint) into his house (to be saved!).

One Possessed character might be at the mercy of a *qashmal* who demands truly bizarre tasks: steal a parcel from an idling UPS truck, kidnap the secretary of a local pharmaceutical company, burn down a local bookstore, leave a box of dead rats outside a neighbor's home. All things that don't add up to the human, but the angel wants them done, which means they're part of some cosmic—and possibly horrific—plan.

Truth is, at least a demon works in a way that will probably give the human host what it wants some of the time, because sin is about gratification and pleasure. Zealously being forced to heel to an angel of Virtue... that's the domain of the truly mad, isn't it?

The Lucky Ones

They call themselves the lucky ones for one simple reason: they are lucky enough to be Possessed by demons that want to be redeemed. The entities within them claim to have been angels who tumbled from Heaven's graces not because of a desire to do harm or perform sin, but because they fought to deny God's wishes. They claim they are the literal manifestation of the original idea of *sin*, which is "hamartia," or "missing the mark." They do not do wrong because of pleasure; they do so because it is like an arrow always missing its target. These demons no longer wish to be that, and so they seek to do some good in repression of their selfishness. The humans are lucky, for the most part, but their demons still put the host bodies in harm's way in service of doing good. Sacrifice may be necessary, whether or not the characters desire it.

The Servants of Undoing

Angels are the real problem, go ahead and ask the Servants of Undoing. These Possessed believe—because their demons have told them so—that angels have long been the scourges of the world. It's angels who will bring about the End Times. It's angels who set in motion strange chains of events that lead to disaster, disease and death. Angels are jealous creatures, disgusted at the way mankind has misused this world. Is it true? Hard to say. Certainly these characters have seen evidence of what *could* be described as angelic intervention, but it's not like they've ever *seen* an angel. Plus, they have demons inside them, and demons are notorious for their lying tongues. What they do seems to be positive, on the surface—they're performing acts that are not sinful, and seem to be redemptive in the way in which they're protecting people. But is that a small and secret cost the possessing demons are will-

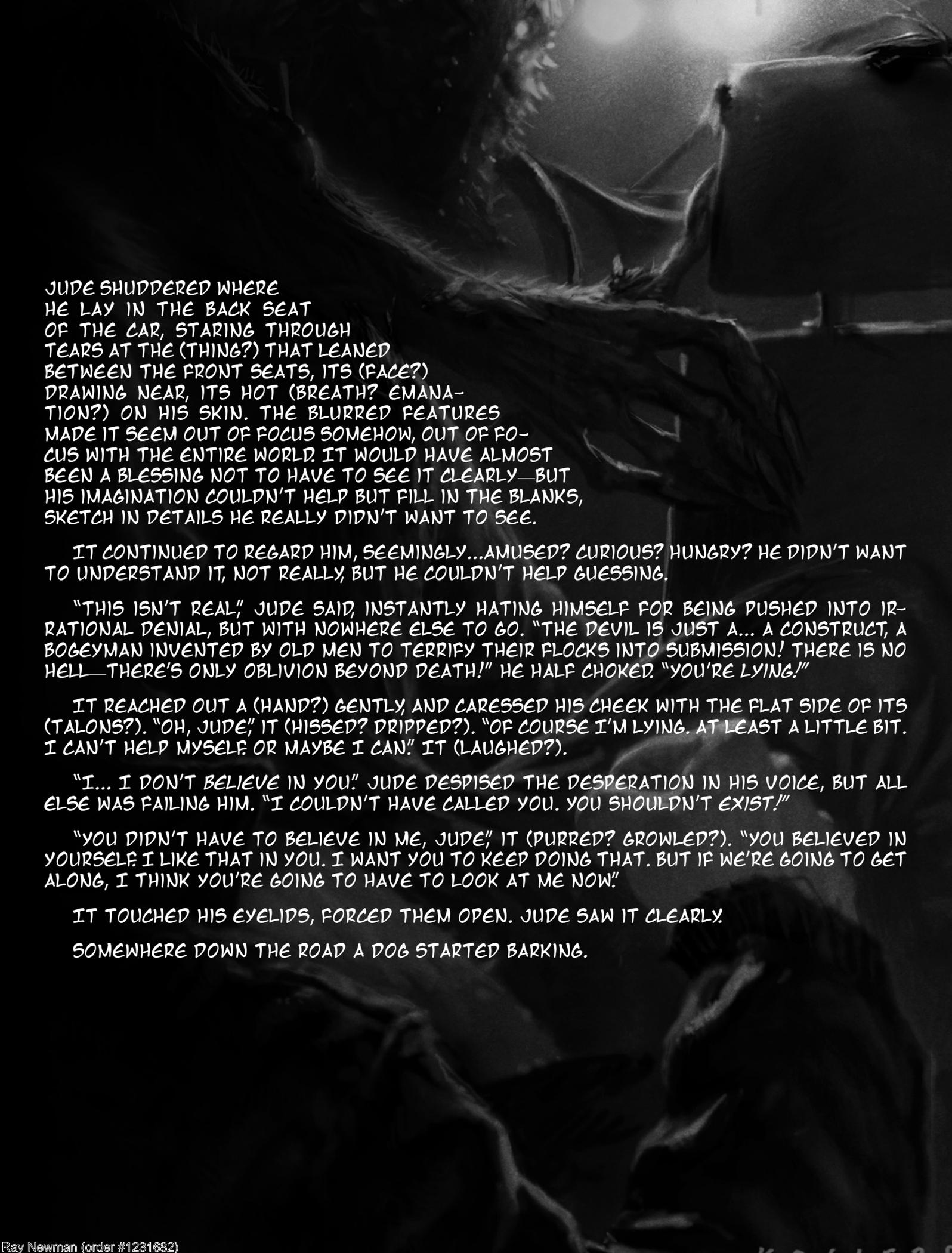
ing to pay so the characters undo the actions of what might actually be righteous angels? Are they actually serving a far greater, and far worse need by dismantling God's potential work? Is it all a lie? Are angels—and God—even real?

Sons and Daughters of Sarah

The Book of Tobit, found in the Roman Catholic Bible, tells the story of a blind man (Tobit), his son (Tobias), and a demon-plagued woman (Sarah). Sarah, whose first seven husbands were destroyed by Asmodai, the demon of Lust, prayed for death but was saved by the angel and by Tobit. The demon was driven away from her (though some translations note this as "out" of her) and she was able to marry Tobias and cure Tobit of his blindness. The group of Possessed who form this small cabal honor Sarah and the archangel Raphael by their actions: they have forged their own internal fortitudes to such a point that they are able to dominate the demons within, making them masters of the possessing entities. It's not universal, of course—once in a while a demon wrests control—but for the most part they keep the demons at bay. Strange to some, they refuse to try to exorcise the demons. Why? Because the power the demons provide is useful to them. They take those Infernal energies and try to bring them to the world to do good, not harm. They attempt to foster virtue, not vice, borrowing on the diabolical powers to do so. They have many enemies, of course: other Possessed do not care for their gross impudence, and certainly many exorcists feel the ends most certainly do not justify the means—demonic possession is demonic possession, and those who force the demons to serve them are evil, even if the result is temporary good.







JUDE SHUDDERED WHERE HE LAY IN THE BACK SEAT OF THE CAR, STARING THROUGH TEARS AT THE (THING?) THAT LEANED BETWEEN THE FRONT SEATS, ITS (FACE?) DRAWING NEAR, ITS HOT (BREATH? EMANATION?) ON HIS SKIN. THE BLURRED FEATURES MADE IT SEEM OUT OF FOCUS SOMEHOW, OUT OF FOCUS WITH THE ENTIRE WORLD. IT WOULD HAVE ALMOST BEEN A BLESSING NOT TO HAVE TO SEE IT CLEARLY—BUT HIS IMAGINATION COULDN'T HELP BUT FILL IN THE BLANKS, SKETCH IN DETAILS HE REALLY DIDN'T WANT TO SEE.

IT CONTINUED TO REGARD HIM, SEEMINGLY...AMUSED? CURIOUS? HUNGRY? HE DIDN'T WANT TO UNDERSTAND IT, NOT REALLY, BUT HE COULDN'T HELP GUESSING.

"THIS ISN'T REAL," JUDE SAID, INSTANTLY HATING HIMSELF FOR BEING PUSHED INTO IRRATIONAL DENIAL, BUT WITH NOWHERE ELSE TO GO. "THE DEVIL IS JUST A... A CONSTRUCT, A BOGEYMAN INVENTED BY OLD MEN TO TERRIFY THEIR FLOCKS INTO SUBMISSION! THERE IS NO HELL—THERE'S ONLY OBLIVION BEYOND DEATH!" HE HALF CHOKED. "YOU'RE LYING!"

IT REACHED OUT A (HAND?) GENTLY, AND CARESSED HIS CHEEK WITH THE FLAT SIDE OF ITS (TALONS?). "OH, JUDE," IT (HISSED? DRIPPED?). "OF COURSE I'M LYING. AT LEAST A LITTLE BIT. I CAN'T HELP MYSELF. OR MAYBE I CAN." IT (LAUGHED?).

"I... I DON'T BELIEVE IN YOU!" JUDE DESPISED THE DESPERATION IN HIS VOICE, BUT ALL ELSE WAS FAILING HIM. "I COULDN'T HAVE CALLED YOU. YOU SHOULDN'T EXIST!"

"YOU DIDN'T HAVE TO BELIEVE IN ME, JUDE," IT (PURRED? GROWLED?). "YOU BELIEVED IN YOURSELF. I LIKE THAT IN YOU. I WANT YOU TO KEEP DOING THAT. BUT IF WE'RE GOING TO GET ALONG, I THINK YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO LOOK AT ME NOW!"

IT TOUCHED HIS EYELIDS, FORCED THEM OPEN. JUDE SAW IT CLEARLY.

SOMEWHERE DOWN THE ROAD A DOG STARTED BARKING.

Chapter Four: The Hosts of Hell

When I am asked how many demons there are, I answer with the words that the demon himself spoke through a demonic: “We are so many that, if we were visible, we would darken the sun.”

—Fr. Gabriele Amorth,
An Exorcist Tells His Story

The variety of demons and the Possessed calls to mind words like “innumerable,” “countless,” and, it must be admitted, “legion.” Between Larvals and Immundi, Whisperers and Diaboli and Dominions and Archdemons and Possessed, ten Infernal Ranks and seven principal Vices, one could fill an entire book with demons alone and still hit only a few spins on each of the major archetypes.

The rules in this book are designed with the demoniac customizer in mind, the Storyteller with an interest in designing his own personal favorites. That said, sometimes it’s still nice to have a few ideas ready to drop into a chronicle as needed. This chapter includes a number of Possessed and demons of variable power levels, each one capable of complicating the lives of Possessed characters or adding a touch of the Infernal to another sort of chronicle.

As a final bonus, there’s also a new variant of demon-touched antagonist: *L’enfant Diabolique*, collectively known as *L’enfants Diabolique* or the Children of the Seventh Generation. These demon-blooded semi-mortals may add an interesting new wrinkle to a chronicle; a Storyteller may even choose to let a player portray one with a judicious alteration of the Possessed character creation rules.

Ove Waldemar

Quote: *Turn on, tune in, drop out.*

Background: Ove showed signs of the Vice that would come to rule his life from an early age. The time other children spent outside riding bikes, playing sports and climbing trees, Ove spent playing video games, munching on pizza and guzzling soft drinks. His room was an ongoing disaster that threatened to spill over into the rest of the house and, more than once, his family had to bug bomb the house to get rid of the pests attracted by Ove’s habit of stuffing leftover pizza crusts under his bed. His schoolwork was average, never bad enough to earn him wrath, but never good enough for praise either. Ove just kind of drifted through school with a C average and when he moved on to college he continued the trend. He signed up for a curriculum of Pharmacology classes (his best grades had always been the Bs in Science) and it was one of his collegiate buddies who introduced him to *real* drugs.

The only good explanation for why Ove hadn’t come into contact with drugs before college was his general apathy for seeking out new forms of entertainment that didn’t come in shrink-wrapped packages. Once introduced, though, drugs became the first real passion in Ove’s life. They were something he could do while playing games or hanging out with the group of friends he’d accumulated. In an odd sort of way, the desire to find drugs forced Ove to become social, breaking him out of his shell. To his surprise, Ove found that making friends was easy

for him, including the occasional tryst with a coed. If Ove drifted through life before drugs, it could be said he floated through life on a cloud of good humor after.

In a happy coincidence, the classes Ove was taking at college dovetailed nicely into his new interest. He became curious about the whys and hows of drug manufacturing and his grades soared to nearly acceptable levels. Upon graduation, Ove went to work for a chain of drugstores, peddling prescriptions to old-timers and the ill. His job was merely a means to an end, however, as his real passion remained experimentation with “party drugs.” By his late twenties, Ove had tried every kind of social drug easily available and was beginning to get bored with the whole scene. It was his girlfriend, Sherice, who persuaded him to put his education to work and design a new drug. So, in his usual desultory style, Ove experimented with combining drugs in new and different ways. Unsurprisingly, progress was slow.

For his thirtieth birthday, Sherice bought Ove a large supply of a plant harvested by natives of the Amazon. According to the seller’s description, the plant was used in the shamanistic vision quests of the tribes. Ove deconstructed the chemical composition of the plant and figured out a way to extract the hallucinogen. Cutting the stuff with opiates to ensure a mellow ride, Ove mixed up a batch of his first true pharmacological experiment and, along with an enthusiastic Sherice, tested the finished product. At first, the drug seemed an unbelievable success. It enhanced tactile sensation to the point that sex became one constant orgasm. Visual and auditory stimuli were softened. Sharp edges lost their focus and the sounds of traffic became a soothing lullaby that promised serenity. Then they started to come down.

The first sign something was wrong was the cramps that made them squirm in pain. Sweat from a fever came soon after, followed by violent nausea. Simultaneously wracked by cramps, near-delirious from fever and subjected to painful dry heaves, Sherice quite simply went mad. She staggered out of their bedroom and, engrossed in his own misery, Ove didn’t follow. He lay in bed, reeking of sweat for another hour before deciding maybe he should check on his girlfriend. He found her lying dead on the kitchen floor in a pool of blood, wrists slashed upwards in long crimson smears, a filleting knife still clutched in one hand. In that moment of awful discovery, a demon of Sloth called Pagor entered his

soul and Ove was too lazy to keep him out.

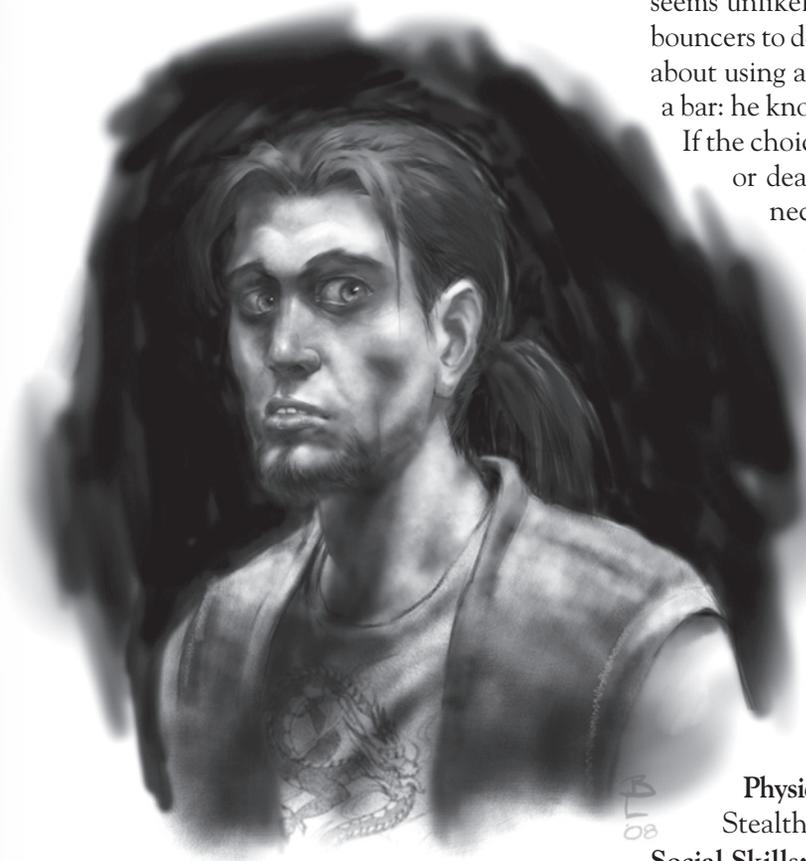
Description: Following the death of his girlfriend and his demonic possession, Ove fled his home and went on the lam. Of medium height and build, Ove holds his long, greasy hair back in a ponytail with a rubber band. Along with a change of location, Ove has made changes in his appearance meant to throw off the authorities he assumes are looking for him. In place of the slacker style of jeans and T-shirts he has worn all his life, Ove has begun dressing in the styles of the late 1960s and grown a nappy beard. Ove is genial and easy to get along with, even when he’s pushing the drugs he sells to pay the bills. A constant feature of area clubs, Ove can usually be found slouching in the most comfortable seat in the back of the bar. A regular schedule of bribes, product samples and a talent for lies has kept him out of jail.

Storytelling Hints: Not long after he settled in a new town, Ove went back to work at creating a new kind of designer drug. This time, thanks to Pagor, he had the knowledge of centuries to assist him in his work. Drawing equally upon occult texts, his pharmacological knowledge and carefully cultivated herbology contacts, Ove created a party drug with the qualities of ecstasy, LSD and heroin. Ove sells this special drug, which he calls Hook, only to repeat, trusted customers who express a desire for something new. Chemically, the drug appears no different than dozens of other designer drugs, but written into its composition are Infernal signs and symbols that exalt Pagor.

Hook is virtually a chemical Malapraaxis; each time it’s ingested the demonic traces race through the bloodstream of the user, acting like a prayer wheel devoted to the worship of Pagor. Other than the usual chemical effects, Hook acts as a Vice stimulant, especially the Vice of Sloth. Attracted by the Infernal resonance of the drug and by the energy generated by greater than usual indulgences in Vice, the lesser demons called Whisperers flock to Ove, waiting quiescently in Twilight for potential marks.

Ove can be introduced to a chronicle in a number of ways. Through his symbiosis with Pagor and the research that led to the creation of Hook, Ove has a fair knowledge of demonology and the occult, and what he doesn’t know he can usually find out through his contacts. Characters might be directed to Ove by seemingly random information that points his way (Whisperers at work, perhaps) or by rifling through the correspondence of another Possessed or demonologist. Obviously the drug, Hook, can





be used as a literal hook to draw characters to Ove. They might have witnessed the side effects of the drug firsthand or have a friend or family member suffer the same. Rumors about a new “superdrug” might make their rounds in the bars and clubs of the city to be overheard by socially adept characters, or the characters could be hired by Sherice’s family to track Ove down.

Approached at one of the bars in which Ove can typically be found, he appears a pleasant, if somewhat eccentric character. He’ll happily sell ecstasy, weed, LSD and other “soft” drugs to characters if he’s confident they aren’t police. Any mention of the word hook gets a raised eyebrow as the only reply, unless the characters have proven they can be trusted. With the proper introductions or a reasonable explanation for their questions, Ove will share his knowledge of the occult or demonology, for a modest fee. He will not, under any circumstances, agree to assist in summoning a demon or any other activity that might put him at risk (or that requires too much effort). If characters seem confrontational, mention the name Sherice, or appear threatening in any way, Ove will attempt to escape rather than fight or argue. If escape

seems unlikely, Ove will cause a scene and wait for bouncers to deal with the characters. Ove is hesitant about using any Vestments with overt effects inside a bar: he knows if he does he’ll have to move again.

If the choice is between freaking out the club kids or death, however, Ove will do whatever is necessary to survive. At Storyteller discretion, Ove can be accompanied by a wrathful Possessed named Julian and a lustful Possessed named Andrew to either challenge more powerful troupes or illustrate by example that some Possessed choose to congregate in groups.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 1

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 5, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Crafts 2, Occult 4, Science (Pharmacology) 4

Physical Skills: Firearms 2 (Pistols), Larceny 3, Stealth 3

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Persuasion (Pusher Jive) 5, Socialize 4, Streetwise 4, Subterfuge 5

Merits: Allies (Local Club Owners) ••, Allies (Vice) •, Barfly •, Contacts (Herbologists, Demonologists) ••, the Dragon’s Tongue ••, Resources •••

Willpower: 9

Morality: 5

Virtue: Faith

Vices: Sloth 3, Gluttony 1, Lust 1

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 10

Size: 5

Health: 6

Armor: None

Vestments: *Gluttony:* Unnatural Consumption (•); *Lust:* Intimate Knowledge (•); *Sloth:* Cut Price Effort (•), Gray World (•), Radius of Languor (••), Swarmskin (••), Idle Hands (•••), The Immobile Object (•••)

Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool
Raven Arms	.25 2(L)	20/40/80	8

Hook, Line and Sinker

Hook is a designer drug with Infernal side effects. Each dose affects the user for two to three hours, depending upon weight, constitution and tolerance. The drug creates feelings of relaxed euphoria combined with the audio and visual effects of a hallucinogen. These effects are mechanically identical to those of regular hallucinogens (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 177); only when the drug begins to wear off do the side effects come into play. Characters nearing the end of the drug's duration must roll Resolve + Composure. If the roll is failed, the character *must* take the next opportunity that presents itself to indulge in his Vice. This side effect is an intentional part of the fiendish design of the drug and has no set duration. It doesn't make any difference whether the user has to wait two hours or two weeks before being presented with an opportunity to indulge his Vice. The roll to resist the side effects of Hook receives a cumulative -1 penalty each time the drug is used.

When a character indulges in his Vice as a result of Hook, he risks the possibility of attracting a Whisperer. Whisperers know about the side effects of Hook and hang around Ove in hopes of following a user who fails to resist giving in to sin. A character who gains Willpower after sating his Vice must roll Resolve + Composure to resist the efforts of a Whisperer attaching itself to his psyche. The Infernal presence of the drug gives the lesser demons a window of opportunity to bind themselves to a character even without the loss of Morality. If a character loses Morality while suffering from the side effects of Hook, he automatically attracts a Whisperer rather than rolling to resist derangement.

Characters who attempt to analyze Hook can do so with a combined Science and Occult extended research action (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 55). The character must have a minimum Skill rating of 2 dots in both Science and Occult to properly research and interpret the results. The research dice pool is formed by adding Intelligence to the *lower* of the character's Science and Occult ratings. The extended research action can be conducted only as a teamwork action (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 134) if the primary actor has at least 1 dot in both Science and Occult. The target number for the extended action is 20 and each roll is equal to an hour. If successful, the research will reveal the chemical composition of the drug and the embedded demonic designs.

Finally, although it might seem odd, Hook is not an addictive substance. Sin without free will is of little to no merit to demons and for the Testament to succeed, Pagor requires humans ingest it without being forced to do so.

Erinyes

Quote: *Flee if you wish, mortal. Tonight vengeance flies on wings of fury.*

Background: Born of Nyx, the goddess of night, and taken into the service of Nemesis, the goddess of retribution, the Erinyes were the original avenging angels. Three in number, the poet Virgil names them Alecto, Megaera and Tisiphone. Though born from divinity, they are disfigured and hideous with a mane of tiny, writhing serpents, eyes filled with bloody

tears, fingers ending in cruel talons and leathery, bat-like wings. In the days when Greece and Rome were still world powers they were called upon to wreak vengeance in the name of the dead. The utterance of their names summoned them from Acheron, where it was said they practiced their tortures upon the souls of the damned.

Only the truly desperate would dare call upon the Furies (their Roman name), for if they believed they had been called under false pretenses, their Wrath turned on the summoner. As the years went

by their names were slowly forgotten and the cries for vengeance that opened a door for them into the material realm became fewer and fewer. Eventually the Erinyes were relegated to the realms of myth and legend. Bereft of purpose, without their duties to shield them from the corrupting influence of Hell, the Erinyes lost whatever spark of divinity they once had and became demons in truth.

Yet their fall from grace was also a rebirth. Demonologists of the Middle Ages learned their names, summoning them to Earth to taste the blood of humans once more. The Erinyes were so proficient at their murderous ways that the Testaments to their glory raised them above the other demons—until their essence could no longer be bound by a simple incantation. The path to Earth was again closed to them and they languished for a time, dwindling until a sinful imam, forsaking Allah, called upon their spirits to manifest in the body of his raped and murdered wife. The Furies found they could extend a part of themselves into the corpses of dead humans and exalt in righteous slaughter, though the joining was far from perfect. They discovered that, while wrapped in dead flesh, they could no longer feed upon the pain and despair of their victims. Instead they were forced to incite the Wrath of conscience in humans to regain their strength in pursuit of their quarry. Infinity mutable, the Furies adapted and soon were extending tentacles of vengeance around the world, manifesting simultaneously in multiple hosts.

Description: The Furies are summoned to manifest in the corpses of the newly dead. Not every corpse is suitable as a host, however, only those bodies that met their end through violence. Erinyes prefer to inhabit the bodies of women, but don't refuse to join with male corpses. The mingling of dead flesh and Infernal essence lends a cruel beauty to the cadaver, transforming

the features and countenance of the deceased into something sure to turn heads and attract stares. Only the summoner and the target of the Erinyes' Wrath see them for what they truly are: demons with fire-cracked skin, smoldering bat wings, taloned hands and hair made from the rotting corpses of snakes.

Storytelling Hints: Erinyes must be summoned in order for them to extend a portion of their essence to the material realm. Unlike other demons, the Erinyes have no interest in tempting mortals into sin and slowly building their power until they can manifest as Dominions. The Furies were made for different purposes and, even debased as they've become, remain true to that purpose over all else. Further, in the Inferno, the Erinyes are at least equal to an Archdemon in Infernal Rank, which would



make it difficult for them to physically enter the material realm through anything less than an open door to Hell.

Summoning the Furies follows the same rules found in Chapter Two as for summoning other demons. The main difference comes during the “Arrival” stage of the summoning. Erinyes can appear only as the possessing force in human cadavers. The body can’t have been dead for more than 24 hours and death must be the result of violence. Unless the demonologist’s research has revealed the entirety of these details, she may assume something went wrong with the ritual when no demon appears or, if the corpse she selected doesn’t meet the criteria, the body remains inert. The Erinyes aren’t the sticklers for detail some other demons can be. If the body used in the ritual isn’t exactly right, they’ll find one themselves, using the call as a peephole into the material realm. Assuming the rest of the summoning was performed correctly, the Erinyes will merge with the nearest suitable body and physically travel to the summoner. More than one demonologist has been surprised when, thirty minutes after an apparently failed ritual, the Erinyes burst into their ritual space.

Upon the Erinyes’ arrival, the Negotiations phase of the summoning can begin. Erinyes don’t make pacts; they provide only services, normally the bloody execution of a murderer. Summoners who prefer a more delicate approach are advised to seek a different messenger. Generally the only demand they make is that their summoner spread the Erinyes’ names. Subtly. Putting up a billboard with the names Alecto, Megaera and Tisiphone isn’t what they have in mind. Erinyes aren’t the fast food of vengeance. People worthy of the Erinyes brand of retribution must earn the right to summon them by finding their names and proper rituals through a genuine Testament. By encouraging humans to spread their names through subtle means, the Erinyes are ensuring they won’t be forgotten again. Despite their corrupted nature, the Furies remain basically true to their original purpose. A summoner who calls them up to murder innocents, lies about her intentions or distorts the truth can find herself on the receiving end of their Wrath. In manner the Furies are coolly aloof in their dealings with humans until they catch the scent of their prey. Their dreadful excitement grows the closer they draw to their target and, by the time they catch him, the Erinyes are nearly cackling with spite and visibly eager for the kill. The Furies

aren’t cruel, though they are merciless. They will dispatch their victim with as little fuss as possible, even providing a clean death to individuals who submit honorably. They *do* delight in bloodshed and pain inflicted, however, even going so far as to lap up the fresh blood of their prey. If the chase depletes their Essence, the Erinyes will attempt to incite humans to acts of Wrath to feed their Malapraxis.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 5, Manipulation 4, Composure 5

Mental Skills: Occult (Ancient Lore) 5

Physical Skills: Athletics 5, Brawl (Raking Talons) 6

Social Skills: Animal Ken 4, Empathy 3, Expression (Incite) 4, Intimidation (Demonic Wrath) 5, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Disarm (uses Brawl) ••, Fast Reflexes ••, Striking Looks (Host body) ••••

Willpower: 10

Malapraxis: The Erinyes are manifestations of rage over the death of a loved one and, with Nyx as their mother, are inherently creatures of the night. The Furies have Malapraxes of Wrath from Sorrow and Wrath in the Night.

Initiative: 11

Defense: 4

Speed: 25 (species factor 10)

Size: That of host body (assumed Size 5)

Health: 10

Armor: 4/4 (Armored in Death)

Essence: 10

Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Claws	3(L)	15

Demonic Aspects:

- **The Kindly Ones:** Despite their bloodthirsty nature, the Erinyes attempt to frighten off, rather than kill, innocent bystanders by revealing their demonic visage. This aspect follows the rules for the Numen “Terrify” (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 212), using the Erinyes’ Presence + Intimidation rather than the standard Power + Finesse.

- **Hell Hath No Fury:** Perhaps because no soul remains in the bodies of the dead to corrupt, Erinyes are immune to exorcism. Whatever powers the act



of faith that is required for an exorcism to succeed just doesn't seem to be as offended by a Fury animating a corpse as it is by possession of the living. The Erinyes will return to Hell only once their target is dead, if their host body is destroyed or if their prey commits suicide or goes insane. Faith does offer some refuge from the Erinyes: they may not set foot upon holy ground.

- **Armored in Death:** By extending a small portion of their essence into a host body rather than committing to a full possession, the Furies break some of the rules of demonic possession. As intermingled creatures of dead flesh and demon, the Erinyes use standard Attributes and Skills rather than Infernal traits. The dead bodies they inhabit are also fairly resilient. Erinyes are immune to all toxins, diseases and environmental conditions that don't harm the host body. They suffer no Wound penalties and the fiend within props up rotting skin, which gives the Erinyes an Armor rating of 4/4.

- **Hell's Angels:** In days gone by the Erinyes pursued their victims from on high, coasting on the night winds with the wings of bats. At need, and only at night, the Erinyes can force their host bodies to manifest wings for short periods of time. Spend 3 Essence and roll Resolve + Stamina. Each success allows the Fury the use of her wings for one turn. Erinyes can maneuver just as easily in the air as on foot and their Speed is doubled for the duration. At the risk of Burnout (see p. 147), the Fury can push the duration of the aspect for additional turns. (Treat any dramatic failure rolled as a simple failure.)

- **Marked for Death:** The name, or at least part of the name, of the intended victim is a requirement for the ritual that summons the Furies. This sets up a resonance between the target and the Erinyes. By spending a point of Essence, the Fury can always tell exactly which in direction the target is. Note that this aspect "thinks" only in straight lines; it doesn't take geography or obstructions into account.

Father Gently

Quote: *Ah, you know your Milton! It is a far better thing to rule in Hell.*

Background: Born into a moderately sized Roman Catholic family, one of Lewis Gently's first memories was of being scolded by his mother for playing doctor with a neighbor girl. By the time Lewis graduated from high school he had experimented sexually with both boys and girls and, upon one oc-

casion, an older man. True to the dogma he'd been taught as a child, Lewis began to fret about the state of his soul. His worries preyed upon his mind and when he started to have nightmares about the fires of Hell, he turned to the Church in desperation. Lewis found comfort in the acts of contrition assigned to him as penance by his priest, and to strengthen his resolve he signed up to attend seminary.

Upon his graduation, Lewis became Father Gently, taking the vows of celibacy with something akin to relief. Pouring his excess sexual energy into the duties of the priesthood, Father Gently rose through the ranks of the clergy and was assigned his own parish at the age of 35. The responsibilities of leading his parish soothed the beast of Lust that still lurked in his heart. Father Gently was popular with his parishioners and counseled love rather than fear. His education and personal charisma made him a captivating speaker and for five years the parish prospered under his care.

Part of his work as a priest was counseling young people who had lost their way from the light of the Lord. He spoke with teenage boys and girls about the power of forgiveness for their sins, enlisting the aid of social workers, therapists and rehabilitation centers for the worst cases. Not every teen was a success story, of course, and the one who proved his downfall was named Raena.

Raena was a beautiful girl, the daughter of Mexican immigrants. She'd been sexually active from the time she turned 13 and her parents forced her to meet with Father Gently. Nothing the priest tried to cure Raena of her condition seemed to help. He spoke earnestly to her about the venal sin of Lust, sent her to therapists and, out of desperation, counseled her parents into sending her to a summer-long Catholic retreat. All his efforts came to naught and by the time Raena turned 16 she confessed she'd had over 30 lovers, both male and female. Some children might have become sullen with Father Gently's efforts, but Raena seemed more amused than irritated. She spoke to Father Gently with frank honesty, was polite, cheerful and sometimes flirtatious. On more than one occasion, Father Gently was forced to send her home when he realized Raena hadn't bothered to don underwear beneath the short skirt she wore.

In Raena, Father Gently saw a mirror of himself and he couldn't deny the sensations the sight of her full bosom awakened in him. Every meeting with the girl was a test of his convictions, one he ultimately failed. It was a warm, rainy summer evening when

Father Gently heard a knock upon the rectory door. He answered to find Raena upon his doorstep, her clothing plastered to her body by the rain. Father Gently stepped back to let her in and she closed the door behind her. The sight of her standing there, dripping wet, gave him his first erection in over 20 years and he could tell she'd noticed. He turned away from her, embarrassed, and tried to regain his equilibrium. Then he heard the soft plopping noise of wet clothes hitting the floor. Unable to resist, he looked at her and was lost. As he entered the girl, with full knowledge of his sin, a demon of Lust entered him.

After that night, the demon inside him made sure Father Gently wasted no time making up for his years of abstinence. In addition to his affair with Raena, he fucked anyone who would have him, including the husbands, wives and children of parishioners. At the instruction of the demon, Father Gently defiled the holy objects of his church to ensure he could still handle them in the course of his duties. He didn't really expect his sexual exploits to remain secret for long and wasn't surprised to see the car belonging to the bishop of his diocese show up, unannounced. He *was* surprised when the bishop entered the rectory in the company of several muscular men and a priest Father Gently didn't recognize. The men pinned him to the floor while the priest pressed a tarnished cross into Father Gently's cheek, and the bishop gasped when Gently screamed as his skin smoked and sizzled.

The men dragged him to his bedroom and, while they busied themselves tying him down, the bishop explained to Gently that Raena had come to him, believing Gently to be possessed. She had made recordings of the words Gently spoke in his sleep and when the recordings were examined, it was confirmed to be the language of the Adversary. The nameless priest began to chant in Latin the words of the *Vade Retro Santana* and the exorcism began. Through that night and all the next day the priest wrestled with the demon inside Father Gently for ownership of his soul. Gently's body was broken and bruised, and when it became clear the exorcism would claim his life, the bishop offered Gently last rites. Father Gently spat in the bishop's face, then died, unrepentant. His ghost appeared the very next day.

Description: Seen either in Twilight or manifested, Father Gently looks much as he did in life. He wears the typical Catholic priest suit, complete with Roman collar. His brown hair is neatly trimmed and combed and his smile is genial. His eyes though,



his eyes are *wrong* somehow. Gently's anchor is the rosary given to him by his mother, hidden under the floorboards of the bedroom.

Storytelling Hints: Not long after the death of Father Gently, the church beside his rectory burned to the ground. Investigators called it arson, but after news got out about his proclivities, the list of possible suspects was so long the police gave up the investigation as a bad job. The combined scandals of sex, death and fire drove members of Father Gently's congregation to other parishes and the Catholic Church decided not to rebuild upon the same ground, hoping for a fresh start elsewhere.

Property values around the ruined church plummeted and the neighborhood started to decline as well—due in some part to the corrupting influence of Father Gently's ghost. Drug dealers moved into homes that used to belong to respectable families and the rectory was frequently used as a convenient place to get high or have sex. Oddly, the place remained clear of squatters; the few homeless who spent the night in the rectory claimed they saw weird shit in the place and heard unpleasant noises.

Father Gently sucked what Lust he could out of the infrequent visitors to his home, but it wasn't until





a drug dealer named Paulo arrived with a strawberry in tow that Father Gently got a taste of real sin. The girl with Paulo couldn't have been older than 14 and she'd agreed to have sex with him for some drugs. Gently used his Phantasm Numina to paint pictures on the wall of degrading sexual acts, by way of encouragement for Paulo. Instead of freaking out, Paulo, a little high, acted upon the encouragement. The girl was torn and bleeding before Paulo let her leave with her drugs.

When he sobered up, Paulo considered what he'd seen and done. He did a little investigation into the rectory and found the name "Father Lewis Gently" along with juicy details of the scandal that surrounded his death. He returned to the rectory again that night with a different girl and when the images reappeared, he called out the dead priest's name: once, twice, thrice. Upon the third call of his name, Father Gently spoke to Paulo in a voice the girl couldn't hear, offering sadistic advice Paulo gleefully followed. After Paulo shooed the weeping girl from the rectory, the drug dealer and the damned ghost struck up a deal. Father Gently would instruct Paulo in the finer arts of sexual perversion if Paulo would write Father Gently a Testament. Gently instructed Paulo to hide the Testament in the moldering study when he wasn't working on it, and so when Paulo was killed in a drive-by shooting, the Testament remained undiscovered, only partially complete.

Now, Father Gently is looking for someone to complete the Testament so he can merge with the demon sharing the remains of his soul and end his time as a Larval. People who figure out how to communicate with Father Gently find he is erudite in speech and manner. Although he's most interested in sex, Gently can discourse upon a wide range of topics thanks to his seminary education. Occultists would certainly find his views upon the soul, damnation and sin quite enlightening. Even in death, Father Gently remains unrepentant, insisting he wasted the best years of his life in service to an impotent God, denying himself the pleasures of the flesh.

Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 4, Resistance 3

Malapragis: As was his wont in life, Father Gently encourages sexual relationships that society might consider taboo. His Malapragis is Forbidden Lust.

Willpower: 7

Infernal Rank: 2

Initiative: 7

Defense: 4

Speed: 17 (species factor 10)

Size: 5

Corpus: 8

Essence: 15

Demonic Aspects: Aura of Corruption, the Dragon's Tongue, Keeper of Secrets, Lord of Lies and Sense of Sin

Numina: Corrupt Nature, Lesser Hellform, Phantasm, Telekinesis

• **The Name of the Father:** Anyone who enters the rectory and speaks the name "Father Lewis Gently" three times aloud is rewarded with the sensation of being watched. If Father Gently decides the person is worth the effort, he latches onto the power of his name spoken aloud to respond. By spending 2 Essence, Father Gently can make the sound of his voice heard anywhere in the rectory for the rest of the scene.

Preta

Quote: *Hate is all we have.*

Background: The myth of the hungry ghosts, known as Preta to Buddhists, Hindus and Jains is a fairly common one in Eastern religions. Different versions of the myth ascribe different origins to the hungry ghosts. Some stories claim they are lost souls, some say they are evil spirits and some seem to be morality tales in which the hungry ghost is the reincarnation of a sinner with low karmic balance as the result of jealousy. Nearly every version of the Preta is afflicted with an insatiable hunger for foul or disgusting substances such as feces, blood and rotten food to name a few. This horrid appetite is combined with features that make consumption a chore. Too small a mouth, constricted throat and other deformities make it impossible for a Preta to ever eat its fill even if it has unlimited access to the object of its desire.

The question of whether a Preta is a ghost or a spirit doesn't have an easy answer, especially as the Preta themselves don't seem to know or remember the truth. Some of them claim to have memories of a human life, but this could just be memories of the lives they are forced to watch. Whatever the truth, there can be no doubt the Preta endure a wretched existence, forced by their curse (or gift) to watch, and Envy, the pleasures enjoyed by humans, pleasures forever denied to them by dint of their mere existence. It's hardly surprising that for many Preta this Envy grows into a savage bitterness over time, a bitterness easily exploited by Infernal corruption.



Description: Preta are gray-skinned and humanoid in appearance, with obvious deformities relating to their condition. They might have tiny mouths and enlarged stomachs, arms ending in stumps that force them to eat upon all fours like animals, large teeth that interfere with chewing or long, skinny necks that make swallowing a painful chore.

Storytelling Hints: The existence of a Preta is one of endless hunger, frustration and Envy. The Preta are forced to watch as humans enjoy the simple things in life while they, the Preta, are required consume the foulest possible meals. The light of the sun chills their gray bodies and they hide from the light of the moon, which sears their ephemeral flesh. Preta are irritable and irrational in their dealings with humans, loathing them for their ability to find contentment. Even their Ban only serves to further distance the Preta from humanity.

The transition from hungry ghost to Immundi gives the Preta the means to vent their frustrations and a perverse hope of escaping their condition. Preta aren't immeasurably stronger than Immundi, but they are strong enough to make the lives of humans mis-

erable. Upon witnessing a sumptuous feast of which a Preta can't abide the taste, even though it knows the food must be delicious, the Preta can manifest and flatten the tires or break the car windows of the revelers as a form of petty revenge. They can ruin enjoyment of the feast by drawing upon their corrupted nature to suffuse the dining hall with foul odors, and they can curse. The curse of a Diabolus Preta is an echo of their existence. Victims who succumb to the curse gain no satisfaction from virtuous deeds and might come to Envy others who do. With enough time, the recipient of a Preta's curse becomes nearly as twisted and bitter as a hungry ghost, engaging in increasing degenerate acts just to feel *something*.

Immundi Preta are more capable of controlling their jealousy long enough to make substantive contact with a human. As Diaboli, Preta become more vicious, but they also have an easier time taking the long view. They will offer nearly any service they are capable of providing to a human who agrees to write a Dark Testament for them. From the Preta point of view, even life as a demon can't be worse than the torments they already endure.

Attributes: Power 2, Finesse 3, Resistance 1
Malapraxis: Constantly hungry, Preta Envy that which they can't have and sabotage the affairs and possessions of others to vent their anger. Their Malapraxes are Envy and Treachery.

Willpower: 3

Infernal Rank: 1

Initiative: 4

Defense: 3

Speed: 10

Size: 5

Corpus: 6

Essence: 10

Demonic Aspects: Aura of Corruption, the Dragon's Tongue, Keeper of Secrets, Lord of Lies and Sense of Sin

Numina: Corrupt Nature, Materialize, Lesser Hellform

• **Damnation's Path:** This Numen makes it impossible for its victims to regain Willpower without fulfilling their Vice. While under the Preta's curse, they no longer are able to regain Willpower by fulfilling their Virtue: this Numen does not prevent the virtuous act, but there is no mechanical reward. Fulfilling a Vice restores Willpower as normal. Satisfying a Vice that also leads to a degeneration roll returns *all* spent Willpower, whether the degeneration roll succeeds or fails. Spend 3 points of Essence and roll Power + Finesse in an extended and contested roll; each roll represents one hour. If the Preta gains the requisite successes between dusk and dawn, the victim is forced onto Damnation's Path. To fight off the spirit's influence, the victim rolls Resolve + Composure. The target number for success for either party is the victim's current Morality times two. If a Preta encounters its Ban during the duration of Damnation's Path, the curse is lifted and the Numen fails. Encountering a Ban during the "conversion" process likewise ends the struggle. A victim who successfully fights off the Preta's curse (via Ban or otherwise) is immune to this Numen for one lunar month.

• **Envious Stare:** Though they are more spirit than ghost, Preta exist in the same nebulous state of ephemeral existence as ghosts, called Twilight by some. Ghosts can perceive only people or things outside of Twilight that are near their anchor. As part of their curse, Preta can always clearly see the actions and possessions of humans.

Ban: If the Preta is offered food, freely given, it must partake of the meal and never return to plague the giver.

Azazel

Quote: *I'm not that kind of demon.*

Background: Hidden in the writings of Biblical apocrypha is a tale about fallen angels completely separate from Lucifer and his rebellion. The story goes something like this.

Exiled from the Garden of Eden, the children of Adam and Eve prospered and their numbers multiplied. Already tainted by the taste of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge, the children strove and quarreled with each other, lacking the wisdom to shoulder the burden of knowledge Eve's sin forced upon them. God took pity upon His children and sent a host of angels to teach them the ways of laws and justice to bring order to humanity. Called Grigori, the host, some 200 in number, descended from the heavens to do God's will. Chief among the host were the angels named Samyaza, Barqel, Penemue, Kokabiel and Azazel (who had served as Michael's lieutenant). The Grigori gathered the humans together and taught them about law and justice, spreading peace with their words. Their task completed, the Grigori turned their eyes toward the heavens, but the Lord, pleased with the work of his first servants, bade them remain on Earth to watch over the children of Abel.

The Grigori strode the Earth like giants among men, setting wrongs to right, creating a new paradise outside the walls of forbidden Eden. As the years passed and their thoughts dwelled more often upon mortal clay than celestial light, the angels began to physically desire the embrace of human women. The Lord had forbidden sexual union between His first sons and earthly daughters but, encouraged by their leader, Samyaza (who was angered by his exile from heaven), the Grigori rebelled against God's word and took human wives. Freed from the mandates of heaven, the Grigori taught humans more forbidden knowledge (perhaps paving the way for the Prometheus myth) including the secrets of enchantments, metals and weapons of war, astrology, astronomy and writing. In this way the evils of witchcraft, war and the sin of blasphemy were brought into the world. The children of the Grigori and mortal women were monstrous creatures that roamed the Earth pillaging the works of man and slaying any who stood in their way. Corrupted by their Lust for the pleasures of the flesh, the Grigori took no heed of the atrocities committed by their children, consumed

by indulging in their own passions. The cries of humans to be delivered from their misery echoed in the ears of God and He became wrathful.

Sending Uriel to warn faithful Noah of the coming storm, God flooded the lands of the Grigori, drowning their monstrous children and human wives. Taking flight on wings of light, the Grigori escaped the waters, but God tore the wings from their backs and scattered them on the four winds. The Lord emasculated the fallen angels, ensuring they would sire no more children and cursed them for their Pride and Lust. The Grigori were bound in the form of man to walk the Earth, sleepless and immortal, until the Day of Judgment. Landing bruised and lessened in the mud of the flood's passing, some of the Grigori vowed to walk the Earth as penance for their sins and so may yet receive the mercy of God's forgiveness. Others rose to their feet in anger, cursing the name of God, thus sealing their eternal damnation. Azazel was one of the latter.

Azazel had been responsible for teaching humans how to mine and shape the metals of the Earth. He also taught them the fundamentals of war and the use of weapons, which leads the apocryphal

texts to place the blame for war and martial violence squarely upon his shoulders. When the four winds scattered the Grigori, Azazel landed in the desert, where he dwelt for many years. The great wind that preceded his arrival combined with his size (even lessened, the Grigori stood taller than



most men) and his prodigious knowledge might be the genesis of stories told about the *jinn*. Ousted from his desert home by the crusader armies of the Christ, Azazel began to wander to world. Before setting out, Azazel crafted two swords for himself from ore taken from a meteor, to protect his fragile human body from bandits and murderers. Immortal or no, Azazel knew his first taste of pain when he landed, broken, from the skies and wasn't eager to experience the sensation a second time. The swords, named *Ego* and *Ire*, were crafted using lore still unknown to mankind today and they've remained with Azazel for cen-

turies, immune to rust and razor-sharp.

Description: Azazel stands seven feet tall, with classically handsome features like the kind found on old Greek statues. He has beautiful long blonde hair and pale blue eyes that absorb light rather than





reflect it. He carries himself with a haughty, wounded Pride and is subject to fits of strong emotion, be they anger, joy or despair. The Lord was thorough in His emasculation of the Grigori and Azazel is anatomically null.

Storytelling Hints: Unconcerned with the state of the world, Azazel goes where it pleases him and follows no moral code but his own. Technically a demon, he has nothing but contempt for the creatures that claw their way free of the Inferno into the material realm. If asked (and some have) he would say the demons that formed from the primordial ooze of universal evil have no more in common with him than shit stuck to the heel of a shoe has in common with the human trying to scrape it off. The Grigori aren't terribly fond of each other, either. Each blames the rest for their downfall and they avoid meeting if at all possible. Unimaginably old, Azazel has knowledge undreamt of by humans, but, like his human body, that knowledge is flawed. Human minds were never meant to contain eons of memories or multiple lifetimes' worth of experience and Azazel has forgotten more than he remembers. Even so, his "diminished" knowledge about the occult and weapons of war is the equal of any two human scholars combined.

Cursed with immortality, yet not blessed with invulnerability, Azazel can be slain. His flesh tears and bleeds just like any other human's, but the spirit within the crude material isn't so easily dispersed. Thinking to escape God's curse, more than a few of the Grigori attempted suicide to escape their human prison and found His will wasn't so easily circumvented. If Azazel is killed his body will reform, flawless, in 24 hours. The time between death and resurrection isn't peaceful for him, however. The Lord decreed the Grigori could never rest, never sleep and so, instead of tranquil oblivion, his time discorporated is spent in the fires of the Inferno. Those who defeat him banish Azazel from their lives. All memory of the conflict is wiped clean from the mind of Azazel and the minds of his enemies. Azazel reforms in a different part of the world, frustrated by his inability to remember those responsible for his torment. No recording of any kind or verbal account of the conflict registers in the consciousness of anyone involved, including Azazel. From Azazel's point of view, this is one more injustice, the denial of vengeance, heaped upon him by God.

Since he exists in the flesh, attempts to summon Azazel fail outright. Occultists or demonologists

who somehow learn of his existence are forced to physically track Azazel down. Nothing a human can offer him raises enough interest for Azazel to agree to serve them or divulge the knowledge they desire. On rare occasions, he may *agree* to share some of his knowledge, but he is unmoved by offers of blood, money or worship. Some of the other Grigori may have found amusement in gathering cults; Azazel isn't one of them. The only sure method of forcing Azazel to perform a service or disclose information is incredibly dangerous. With the proper rituals, bloody sacrifices and by speaking his true name in the Dragon's Tongue, Azazel can be bound.

The ritual part of the process is easy. Any demonologist or occultist worth his salt can cobble one together with a successful Intelligence + Occult roll. No simple research roll can turn up Azazel's true name, however. Characters who seek out this kind of knowledge must do so firsthand; the name is impossible to write down (it fades from any medium in a second) and can be learned only from someone who knows it. With the taste of his true name upon their lips, characters must then find Azazel. Research rolls can help with this process but, again, it will require more. Assuming the character has succeeded in the first two parts of the process, he now has to figure out how to keep Azazel still for the duration of the ritual. Given a choice, Azazel will die rather than allow himself to be bound to service. Preferably, Azazel will force the one who seeks to bind him into the act of murdering his human body, accepting his time in the Inferno for the assurance that all memory of his true name will be forgotten. If his would-be master happens to die first, that's all right, too.

If all the above elements have fallen into place, the ritual requires a Major sacrifice (see p. 91) and the occultist speaks the ritual—including Azazel's true name in the Dragon's Tongue. Mechanically, this is resolved by rolling an invocation ritual (see p. 74). With a successful ritual speaking of his name, Azazel is bound to perform one service for his new master for each success gained on the roll. If the roll fails, nothing happens and the character must wait until sunset to try again. On a dramatic failure, the Storyteller is encouraged to include diabolical repercussions. Once Azazel has performed the required services he is freed from the binding and the memory of his true name fades from the mind (or minds) of the one who bound him. Smart characters will make sure they are out of Azazel's reach when the binding expires.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 6, Wits 4, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 6, Manipulation 4, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 5, Crafts (Smithing) 5, Investigation 2, Occult (Demonology) 5, Science 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 5, Firearms 4, Survival (Desert) 3, Weaponry (Mastery*) 5

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression 3, Intimidation 5, Persuasion 3, Socialize 1, Subterfuge (Twisted Logic) 5

Merits: Ambidextrous, Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Fast Reflexes ••, Fighting Style: Two Weapons •••••, Giant, Quick Draw, Resources •••••, Striking Looks •••••, the Dragon's Tongue ••, Unseen Sense (Mastery*)

Willpower: 12

Virtue: Fortitude

Vices: Pride 3, Wrath 2, Envy 2, Lust 1

Initiative: 11

Defense: 5

Speed: 25 (species factor 8)

Size: 6

Health: 11

Armor: 3 (Goeth Before Destruction)

Vestments: *Envy:* Epicaricacy (•), Never Last (•), Mortal Shell (••), The Quiet Curse (••); *Lust:* The Embrace (•); *Pride:* Authority of Man (•), Dominant Sphere (Physical) (•), Arrogance (••), Goeth Before Destruction (••), Denial (•••), Lightbringer (•••); *Wrath:* Fleet Feet of Purpose (•), Slayer of Men (•), Fueled by Rage (••), Might Makes Right (••)

Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Special
<i>Ego & Ire</i>	3(L)	15	See Below

Demonic Aspects: Aura of Corruption, the Dragon's Tongue, Keeper of Secrets, Lord of Lies and Sense of Sin

• **Close to Hand:** The twin swords *Ego* and *Ire* are bound to Azazel by more than just proximity. Unless they are drawn or a character knows to look for them, the swords just don't draw attention and refuse to show up in any sort of security scan. By spending a point of Willpower, Azazel can summon the blades to him from wherever they might be. The only excep-

tion is if the blades are covered with blessed items or left upon consecrated ground.

• **Questionable Morality:** Azazel has no Morality rating because the morality of a fallen angel isn't easy to quantify. Roll 1 die to determine Azazel's current Morality for any Vestment that has an effect based upon that trait.

• **Unrepentant:** Exorcism can't drive the demon from Azazel because, as noted in the sidebar, he is the demon. The ritual can still cause him harm, however and he suffers the usual lethal damage (see p. 123).

***Mastery:** This indicates Azazel has an effective Specialty with every weapon and can apply the Unseen Sense Merit to any type of supernatural phenomenon.

Fallen

The truth about Grigori claims to be fallen angels is left for each troupe to decide. The entire story could be true, only partially true or a complete fabrication. There exist plenty of entities in the World of Darkness powerful enough to take on the guise and qualities of angels, including ancient spirits, the master mages called Oracles and the mysterious *qashmallim* to name a few. It's equally possible that the Grigori represent the next step in Infernal evolution for Possessed who manage to come to an accord and merge with their demons. What is known to be true is the existence of other demonic beings that call themselves Grigori. Azazel is not alone in his eternal wanderings; the names Samyaza and Barqel, at least, are known to occultists who study the Grigori myth.

Mechanically, the Grigori are basically extremely powerful Possessed that needn't struggle with an inner demon. They are the demon, just clothed in human form. Unless noted, aside from their inherent Infernal aspects and the ability to perform services if bound, the Grigori follow the same rules as other Possessed characters.

Guardian Fiend

Quote: *I don't think that belongs to you.*

Background: Other than for assassinations and dark blessings, demons are most commonly summoned to act as guardians. The types of demon most frequently summoned to perform this service are Dominions known to have served as guardians many times before. Their names are among the easiest of all demons to uncover, with a little occult research, and the invocation rituals are well tried and tested. While summoning up a being of pure evil from the Inferno can never really be thought of as safe, known guardian fiends seem to be a bit more tractable than most demons. Of course, this could all be a lure to trick inexperienced occultists into summoning up what they can't put down. Wise summoners (oxymoron though some would claim the term is) are still advised to take all possible precautions before calling up these "tame" demons.

Guardian fiends tend to be somewhat smaller in size than other Dominions, albeit every bit as fierce and deceitful as their full-grown cousins. Their smaller stature makes it easier for them to fit into the cramped vaults they watch and harder to spot when hidden in shadows. It's possible their diminished size

is a result of the intent behind their summoning. Humans are still very much creatures of instinct and are more likely to trust a demon they can, physically, look down upon than they are a 12-foot behemoth. Creatures of Greed, guardian fiends delight in the concept of hoarding and constantly prod their masters to gather more valuables. Though they are bound to guard the treasures put in their care, they aren't bound to kill every thief who attempts to steal them. Guardian fiends feel it's a waste to kill an especially talented or amusing thief (the demons wouldn't have much of a purpose without the threat of theft) and have been known to let humans off with a good scare, a stern warning and a few bloody wounds.

Description: No two guardian fiends look precisely the same. Some of them prefer to take on canine shapes, fitting to their service, others prefer the form of imps or even that of a human. The single identifiable feature common to all guardian fiends is their black, pupiless eyes.

Storytelling Hints: Retaining the services of a guardian fiend after the initial summoning requires a Minor sacrifice every third week. Unless their service has become odious or the demon is just ready to move on, guardian fiends are remarkably helpful about reminding their masters when the time comes for a

new sacrifice. Guardian fiends take nearly as much pleasure in the collections they are set to protect as those who summon them and, especially if the collection is added to on a regular basis, prefer service over languishing in the Inferno or pitting their wits against yet another occultist who wants to use them as a means to quick riches.

Guardian fiends that have performed the same type of service many times over have a keen insight into human occult practices and Infernal Artifacts. Getting



them to part with this information is the trick. Unless they've moved up in the Infernal hierarchy, guardian fiends aren't pleased at being summoned to explain how some new doo-dad works or how to pronounce the words in an ancient grimoire. Collecting or accumulating occult lore is far more interesting to these demons of Greed than sharing said lore.

Attributes: Power 5, Finesse 4, Resistance 5

Malapraaxis: Guardians encourage their masters to "acquire" ever more valuable possessions and wait just long enough before materializing for thieves to think they've succeeded. The Guardian Fiend's Malapraaxis is Greed through Theft and Hoarding.

Willpower: 10

Infernal Rank: 2

Initiative: 9

Defense: 5

Speed: 19 (species factor 10)

Size: 4

Corpus: 9

Essence: 15

Demonic Aspects: Aura of Corruption, the Dragon's Tongue, Keeper of Secrets, Lord of Lies and Sense of Sin

Numina: Create Pact, Greater Hellform, Materialize

- **Regenerate:** The demon can use Essence to regenerate Corpus. There is no dice pool for this Numen. Once activated, the demon automatically regenerates one level of damage per turn. It regenerates bashing damage first, then lethal. This Numen costs one Essence per turn. Aggravated damage must be healed normally.

- **Watchdog:** The demon can learn the general state of its surroundings in the area it's obliged to protect. Successful activation of this Numen allows basic information (presence of intruders, potential threats such as fires) up to 500 yards from the demon. Each additional success increases the radius by an additional 100 yards and increases the detail of information learned. One success could tell the presence of intruders, while 3 successes could reveal the species/nature and gender of those intruders. The Numen lasts as long as the demon remains in the trance, but it is unaware of and cannot react to the outside world, nor can it relay its findings while the Numen is active. Spend 1 point of Essence per round the Numen remains active.

Corrupted Familiar

Quote: *Yes, master.*

Background: Willworkers, werewolves and many other strange inhabitants of the World of Darkness have pets or familiar spirits that accompany them on their journeys. The black cat that walks widdershins three times around her meditating master is helping define the circle that will protect this night's working. The disembodied voice of a knowledge sprite that whispers in the ear of a researching occultist offers insight. No matter the form or shape, familiars serve by making the lives of their masters just a little easier. Even embodied familiars are easy to overlook; something about the magic that binds them makes them seem unremarkable. So familiars are often sent to spy upon rivals, foes or to scout the way ahead. Familiars are generally smarter, tougher and more capable than other creatures of the same species. The empathic bond that exists between familiar and master allows them to know how the other is feeling and a limited ability to share their thoughts. All of this adds up to a creature that is a ripe, almost irresistible target for Infernal corruption.

Many times the familiar's master is responsible for the corruption. The empathic bond is strong enough for familiars to suffer the same pangs of guilt or indifference that go along with committing a major sin. The bulwark that surrounds the soul of the master might remain too strong for a demon to use that sin as a backdoor to the soul, but the mind and body of a familiar is easier pickings. Possessing a lowly spirit or simple animal is much, much easier than forcing their way into a sentient soul and demons will take any port in a storm. Even familiars with righteous masters aren't immune to possession, though. Sometimes it's just a matter of being in the wrong place at the wrong time. A demon that has been forced out of another host will seize upon any opportunity to avoid being cast back into the Inferno. Really clever demons might even intentionally possess a familiar, using the empathic bond and trust between master and servant as a crack in the armor.

No matter how or why it happens, when a familiar becomes corrupted its master is usually soon to follow. Advice or encouragement that leads to temptation and sin is more likely to be heeded coming from a familiar than it is from a disembodied voice or alien urgings. The decline of morality that so delights demons is easier to arrange as the one thing





that rarely judges actions, only comforts. A certain degree of arrogance or naivety on the part of the familiar's master regarding the actions of his companion assists the hidden demon in its work. Used to being the controlling half of the equation, the master isn't likely to believe his familiar is leading him astray. Even if presented with hard facts, most individuals will continue to search for other alternatives rather than accept the idea that their beloved companion is intentionally steering them to ruin.

Description: A corrupted familiar retains the exact same form it had before the demon wormed its way inside, down to that spot of white fur on its tummy or a spirit's peculiar turn of phrase. No outward hint of the change can be found.

Storytelling Hints: Clever demons will monitor the relationship between master and familiar for at least a little while before attempting possession to ensure they can play their part convincingly. Drawing upon past memories of behavior is no substitute for firsthand knowledge. If this isn't possible, the demon will attempt to manufacture some reason for any peculiar behavior such as feigning illness, fright

or some other imagined malady. Demons are masters of picking up on subconscious body language and it won't take them long to get their act down pat.

After it is certain it hasn't aroused suspicion, the demon will begin to tempt its "master" with seemingly innocuous suggestions that lead to moral quandaries. A rival who has one-upped the master with a superior piece of work should be taught a lesson. Burning the rival's handiwork will teach him more respect. A girl who turns down the master's proposal for a date at the bar is obviously a snotty bitch who needs to learn manners. Arranging for her purse to be stolen or maybe a fight with her boyfriend seems a reasonable form of payback. The pettier the sin the better. Each time the demon convinces the master to go along with its schemes it becomes that much easier to convince him to give in to more serious violations. If the master ever hesitates or refuses to comply, the demon immediately recants the offered suggestion, validating the master as revered leader. Better to be patient or try a different tact.

If the demon's ruse is discovered it abandons all pretense of servility and turns nasty. It'll attempt to

escape if at all possible and disrupt its owner's affairs with small acts of vindictiveness or by offering the master's secrets to his enemies. If escape seems unlikely, the demon will do its damndest to take the host down with it by refusing surrender or straight out suicidal actions. It will taunt the master with reminders of past failures or intimate moments shared knowing its barbs will draw blood coming from the familiar form, even if, rationally, the master knows his true companion is gone.

Template:

For disembodied familiars add +1 to Finesse, Resistance (remember to increase the corpus of the spirit accordingly), Willpower and Defense. Replace standard spiritual rank with equivalent Infernal rank.

For embodied familiars add +1 to Intelligence, Stamina (remember to increase the health of the familiar accordingly), Manipulation, Willpower and Defense. If, previous to possession, the familiar had no dots in Persuasion it gains 2 dots and the Demonic Urging Specialty.

Bans don't have as much power over a corrupted familiar, though the demon will pretend this isn't the case. By spending 1 Essence a corrupted familiar can ignore the Ban restrictions of its host for one scene.

Corrupted familiars have a Malapraxis of the same Vice as the master with Guile and Petty Keys.

Demonic Aspects: Aura of Corruption, the Dragon's Tongue, Keeper of Secrets, Lord of Lies and Sense of Sin

Numina: Corrupt Nature, Legion, Lesser Hellform, Possession and whatever Numina are known to the original familiar

L'Enfant Diabolique

One might not expect that the realms of science and those of myth and religion might merge; so often, the two do not play well together. God and the Devil stay in their corner. Gravity and DNA remain in the opposite corner. They meet only as pugilists in the middle, duking out competing teleologies.

When it comes to the *L'Enfants Diabolique*—the Children of the Seventh Generation—some might wish the two could've remained separate forever.

Ah, but they didn't. And this is the reality of the result of such crass copulation: the World of Darkness is home to humans who have an Infernal pedigree. Sometime in the past, be it on the streets of Victorian London or just outside the fallen Garden of Eden, someone coupled with a monster, a *demon* of potent diabolical heritage. Such a creature took its pleasure from a mortal man or woman (though certainly some cruel mortal summoners bound the beasts and stole the pleasure all for themselves). From the seed of some bloated archduke or the womb of some seducer named Ashmodai or Lamashtu (or even from the spirit-made-flesh of Lucifer himself) is born a stubborn bloodline, a hellish family tree whose twisted branches refuse to die and will forever yield strange and stunted fruit.

These bloodlines exist, demonic families who may or may not know what secret monster lurks within the blueprint codons of RNA and DNA. Every child born of such a family does not manifest the traits inherent to the demonic legacy—no, one might say this gene is recessive, while another might say it simply hides and waits for the *proper vessel*.

It happens quite often on one's 23rd birthday (though for others, it may happen at the outset of puberty or during some tragic event during one's childhood—the loss of a pet, the death of a mother, a terrible car crash): the heritage reveals itself in myriad ways. One individual finds her dreams turn awful, offering a ceaseless nighttime parade of debaucheries and brutalities, many of which manifest days later—proof of nocturnal foresight, a gift of the blood. Another pushes back at a bully or a carjacker and what's left is a corpse burned blistering red by cold fire. A third finds himself tended to by a pair of imps, or a carpet of swollen horseflies, or a succubus to call his own.

Some are ushered into it by families all too aware that the seventh generation is so often a "rewarding" one: a perfectly well-to-do clan of socialites gathers in its Upper West Side condo in Manhattan to greet the daughter who has come home from college to celebrate her birthday. All wear red. They offer her a gift: a pale-eyed Rottweiler, her dog from when she was a child, a dog that died in a car accident, a dog that has now returned and *seems different* but loves her unconditionally. They hand her a straight-razor, sing happy birthday, ask her to cut the cake. The cake is plain cornmeal, and cutting into it causes bright red blood to flow from the clotting center.





These... people, they are not possessed. No demon lives within them. In a way, they *are* the demons, with just enough of their genetic makeup devoted to a link that surely connects them all the way back to Satan Himself. Things change for them after that. They feel different. They know they have power. Few truly remain human; oh, they look human forever anon, sure. But the internal barometer has changed. Human mores and norms, well, they just won't do anymore. It's as if the bloodline is a free pass, a justification to *do as you wish*. And just what is it they wish to do, exactly?

The Satanic Agenda

What, precisely, is it the Children of the Seventh Generation want? The easy answer is, "To promise a Satanic agenda." They seek to release demons. They facilitate pacts and pledges between Infernal and temporal forces. They promote sin. They endorse the rejection of God and Virtue.

Some truly heinous Children have helped to prove all the urban legends true, confirming the fact that Satanists live in the neighborhood. They kidnap children, but do not harm them—no, they raise them with all their twisted social mores, with some of the abductees gaining the privilege of playing host to a demon one day (and thus becoming Possessed). They also engage in ritual murder: those who slight them or who fit a certain profile end up sacrificed out in the woods, or in the middle of a farmer's cornfield, or even in the school gymnasium at midnight. Why do they do these things? What do they stand to gain? That remains unclear, but it is clear they're following direction from something or someone: demonic whispers? A singing, chanting voice deep in the blood that pumps within them? Or do they have leadership that walks among them, some central figure who leaves them instructions on little slips of paper and carved into telephone poles?

The Lucifuge: Those Who Deny

It's no surprise to find most who manifest the heritage of Lucifer and other powerful demons were basically selfish assholes long before their 23rd birthdays: one might be a spoiled brat who always gets her way, another might've been some little freak who took great pleasure in plucking the legs off various insects and other small creatures (even at age 8). But it's not universally true. Some are born into this bloodline with no interest in being what they are. What happens to them?

Well, unfortunately, if they're caught by their families or by other *L'enfants Diabolique*, they're either forced to commit acts that would degrade their souls or they're killed. (The story goes that when one dies, another of their heritage may be born, and when one is born, another must always die—the whole lot of them numbers 666 if you believe their propaganda.) And if they're not caught?

Enter the Lucifuge. In Milan, a woman known only as the Lady Lucifuge has been sitting atop a clandestine organization—a conspiracy, really—for the last, oh, 1,200 years. She has not aged a day. This Lady recruits from amongst those Children of the Seventh Generation, and those who join her must willfully rebuke the urge to commit evil and, in turn, destroy those who give in to evil. (Chief amongst those "evildoers" are the rest of the members of the Seventh Generation.) The members of this conspiracy have some of the same Infernal abilities available to them as to the other *L'enfants Diabolique*, but they ostensibly use those abilities to destroy those creatures of the night (vampires, sorcerers, demonic summoners) who bring evil to the world. Is it true they're hoping to redeem the fallen angel that is Lucifer by doing good in his name? Maybe.

(If you have **Hunter: The Vigil**, the Lucifuge is one of the many hunter organizations in that book.)

The answer is actually all three. *L'enfants Diabolique* do hear whispers from demons, caught as if floating on the wind. They also feel the blood within them stirring them toward certain inclinations or actions, as if the blood itself is alive with thoughts of the Infernal. Finally, they do have some degree of central leadership—a trio of blind men (one in Paris, one in Nice, and a third in Bordeaux) known only as the Chaldeans. Few ever meet them, and those who have met them work for them as deliverers of instructions—this small cadre works to bring instructions to those Children who would dare to complete the tasks assigned. Not all do, of course—some are more devoted to their sin than others. Those who truly rebuff their errant and immoral desires, however, are not long for this world: *L'enfants Diabolique* has little interest in allowing such heretics against Lucifer's blood to live.

Dread Powers of the *Diabolique*

The Children of the Seventh Generation do not have pre-established abilities shared between members. Each of its members is unique, born of a singular bloodline stirred from the depths of Hell. Each of the antagonists below has his own Infernal aspects he can manifest, and you're free to borrow these—or any of the hellish Numina or Vestments in this—to serve the antagonists you create.

Jessamyn Tremont

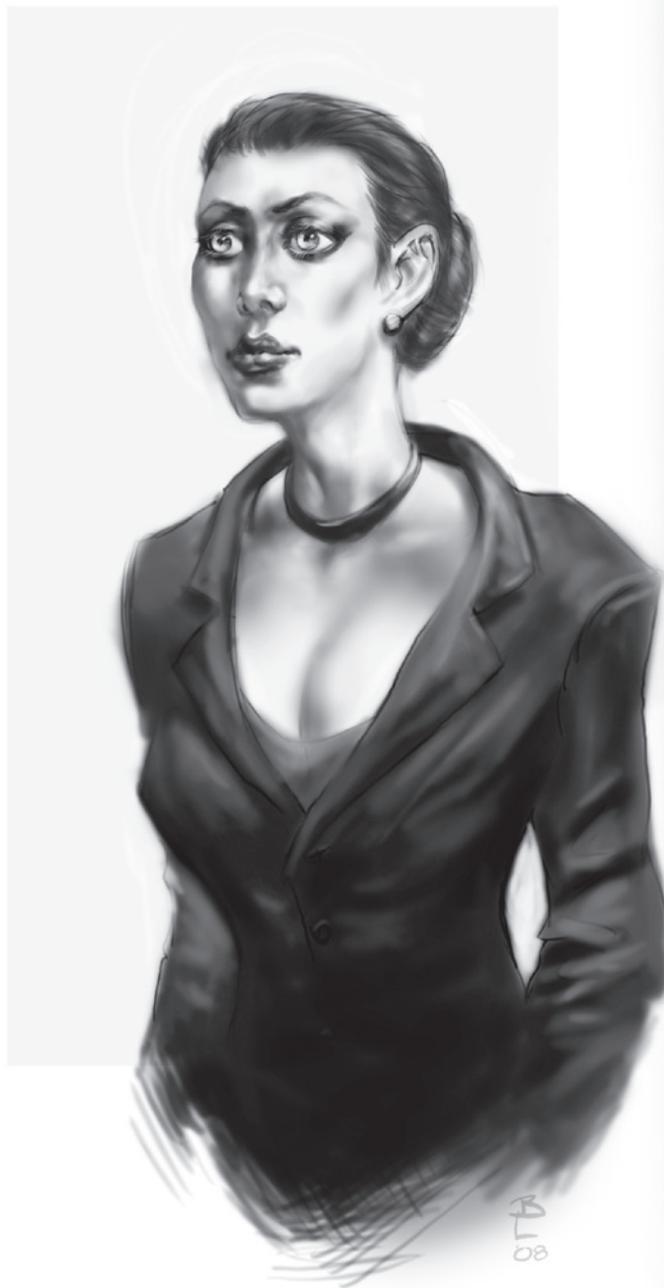
Quote: *Here is a dose of truth. Doing good things is meaningless. It's a thumb in the dike, a hand holding back a river. This is a short life we live, so enjoy yourself.*

Background: Jessamyn always tried to be a good girl. Her parents were wealthy, and acted as philanthropists. Every other night was some charity ball or a dinner for this or that aid organization, and Jessamyn was present for them all. She admired her parents mightily—they seemed to truly gain value and pleasure from doing good for others.

Jessamyn did good for others, too. She gave her allowance to the homeless. She worked for Habitat for Humanity one summer. She went to law school to work in social services to children. And all it did

was make her feel rotten inside. Yes, Jessamyn knew what she was doing was the good thing, the *right* thing, and all it did was make her feel queasy, as if she was wearing the wrong skin.

It all made sense on her 23rd birthday. She was in London at the time, taking a Spring Break week all to herself. She was celebrating her birthday alone, in a pub—men approached her. They told her all they knew about her (everything) and how they knew what she was feeling, and how it was *all* perfectly natural. They asked her to come with them, and she did, against her better judgment. They took her to a house in the country where more of them awaited. They told her what she was: a child of the



Devil, a distant member of the family tree made of blood and fire.

It felt right to her, but it didn't matter. She excused herself, walked for miles to get a cab, then got on a plane and went home. On the plane she found herself plagued by dreams of a dark and distant figure calling to her—a bright line shining behind. In the distance, three blind men murmured.

Arriving at home, she found her parents dead. No apparent cause of death—they were cold, mortified corpses, each with a note taped to the forehead. Both notes read: "Life is short. We hope you'll find us again."

She did, one year later. Now she belongs to the *L'enfants Diabolique*. She doesn't buy into their ethos wholesale, not yet—evil doesn't necessarily interest her, but for the first time she's grown quite comfortable with her own selfishness. It makes her feel good and, more importantly, it feels *proper*. She pushes back when they ask her to do truly terrible things, but she wonders whether someday she'll stop resisting.

Appearance: Jessamyn is beautiful, yes, but somewhat awkwardly framed—she's a bit tall, a bit gawky, with her fire-red hair pulled taut across her scalp. It's her eyes that do it: broad, wide eyes, as green as a jade coin. She usually wears dark clothing: black dresses, sharp-shouldered suits and the like.

Storytelling Hints: She's not a bad person, not really. She's not cruel or insulting. Actually, she's quite pleasant. And she'll remain as such until someone stands in her way. When that happens, it's all over. She'll drag him over the coals. She'll ruin his life. She's still a lawyer, after all, and has ways to twist the law to meet her needs.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics (Law) 3, Computer 2, Investigation 3, Occult 1, Politics 3

Physical Skills: Athletics (Running) 2, Brawl 1, Drive 1, Firearms 1, Larceny 1

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression 1, Intimidation (Threats) 2, Persuasion 3, Socialize 1, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Allies (Law Firm) 3, Allies (*L'enfants Diabolique*) 2, the Dragon's Tongue 1, Fleet of Foot 3, Language (Latin) 1, Resources 3

Willpower: 4

Morality: 5

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Greed

Initiative: 5

Defense: 3

Speed: 13 (with Fleet of Foot)

Health: 7

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool
9mm Luger	2(L)	20/40/80	6

Infernal Aspects

Hellfire (Intelligence + Dexterity – target's Defense): Jessamyn takes 1 point of aggravated damage, but conjures a searing whip of flame that lashes out and sears a single target. Success on the roll is taken by the target as aggravated damage.

Summon Whisperer (no roll): By spending a Willpower point, Jessamyn may conjure a lesser demon known as a Whisperer (p. 54) to do her bidding. It will perform any action she requires, regardless of how dangerous it is to the demon.

Carlos "El Cabra" Chavez

Quote: *What'd you say to me, cabron?*

Background: Abuse begets abuse. Carlos, growing up in the City of Angels, Los Angeles, saw his share of abuse. He was a scant, slight boy—too skinny, too many pockmarks, an awkward and foolish look to his face—and he suffered beatings for it from schoolmates and local thugs. His parents were no better. His father whipped him with a belt, his mother with a wooden spoon.

Cut to his impending adulthood: Carlos found exercise, carbo-loading and yes, steroids, and bulked himself up. Anybody who looked at him wrong got thrown a serious beating—and Carlos' cinderblock hands made short work of brittle bones. Carlos became what he hated most, a bully. And it didn't matter. Made him feel great, as a matter of fact. Someone saw him beating the king hell out of a drunken gym rat who thought to call him a Mexican (Carlos is fast to point out he is *Guatemalan*), and that someone was an underground fight promoter. It wasn't long before Carlos was in the ring in some dirty cement-floored sub-basement, cheered on by criminals and Hollywood types and brokers, breaking jaws with his big fists, shattering temples with his hard knees.

And all this was *before* Carlos learned of his heritage: somewhere, way back when, someone in his family fucked the Beast under an apple tree, and put a

little *demon* into the Chavez bloodline. For Carlos, this is perfect. It all makes sense. It gives him all the more reason and all the resources to act as much of a bully as he wants. These days, he still fights on the underground “boxing” circuit (with two of his opponents now dead), and he also acts as bodyguard to any prominent Child of the Seventh Generation who comes to LA to “do business.”

Appearance: Carlos’ entire upper torso is basically an inverted triangle riddled with swollen, grotesque muscle. His face is more than a little caprine: big ears, chin goatee, nose tilted downward. On the back is a greater indication of his nickname:

a great big hellish-looking goat with spiraling ram horns and fire coming out of its mouth.

Storytelling Hints: Carlos is an asshole. He’ll say whatever he can to get under someone’s skin and push them to fuck with him (because then he can beat them so hard their kidneys rupture). He’s also not that sharp. Once he was, but steroid use has submerged his intelligence beneath a rolling wave of constant rage.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Investigation 2, Medicine 1, Occult 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl (In the Ring) 4, Stealth 1, Survival 1, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Intimidation (Bodily Harm) 4, Streetwise (Drugs) 3

Merits: Animal Familiar (Bulldog) 3, Brawling Dodge 1, Fame 1, Fighting Style: Boxing 5, Iron Stamina 3, Resources 2, Strong Back 1

Willpower: 6

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 12

Health: 9

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Special
Brawl	0(B)	9	See Boxing Merit.



Infernal Aspects

Hell's Horns: By spending a Willpower point, vicious barbed ram's horns grow up out of Carlos' temples. He can make a ramming attack with these unearthly protrusions (Brawl). The horns are 2(L).

Worshipful Throngs: The bigger the crowd at Fight Night, the better Carlos is at breaking bad on some poor fool. For every 50 onlookers, Carlos gains +1 to any attacks he makes—doesn't matter whether they're cheering him or booing him. It all fuels his vengeful vanity. (Maximum of +5 bonus.)

Leopold Grimm

Quote: *I have so much I can give you, and so much I can take away. Be reasonable. I'll give you sixty seconds to think about your choice.*

Background: Leopold Grimm is not the boy's name, and he's not really a boy, anyway. He's at least a century old by now (but who's counting?), and has in that time taken on at least a hundred different names. Frankly, he barely remembers much about his life before becoming one of the *L'enfants Diabolique*, and why would he? That was such a dull, unpleasant time. He lives predominantly in the moment; that's all that matters.

Leopold is a powerful member of the Children, and has the ear of the Chaldean three. He's certainly the most prominent member found in the city, and he's the one responsible for tugging leashes and pointing fingers. He's the one who tells everyone where a prominent Malus Loci can be found, or where is the best place to try to free a long-forgotten Dominion. Despite his apparent tender age and boyishness, he's more or less a ruthless crime lord who gets what he wants, when he wants it. When Leopold is displeased, people pay a terrible price—and death is too low a cost.

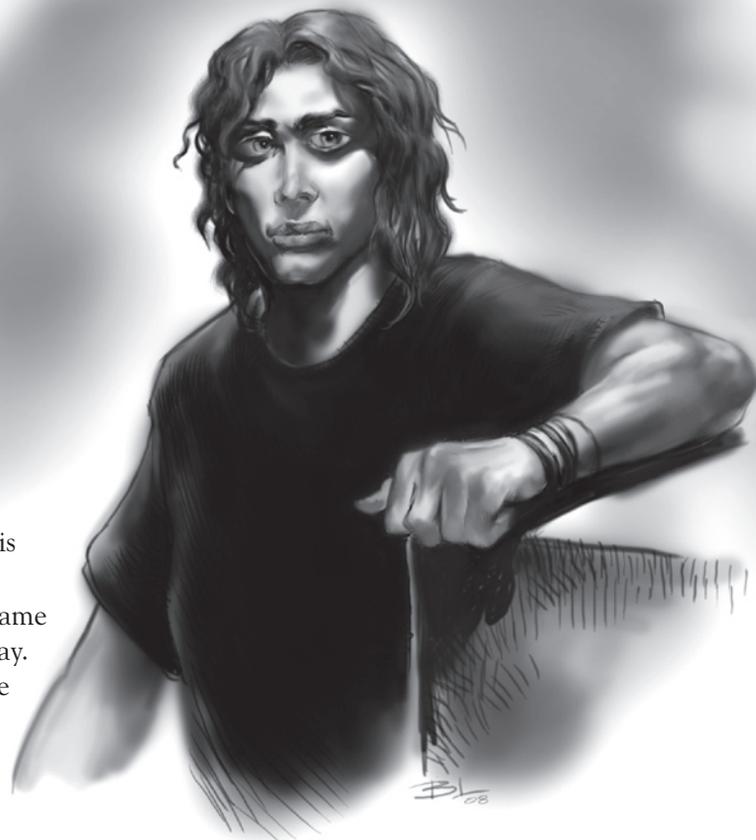
An important note is that Leopold came into his blood years before his 23rd birthday. He tells people the reason is plain: he is a more direct descendent of Lucifer, not of any of the archdukes or other Dominions, but has a powerful connec-

tion to the Lord of Iniquity. Whether it's true or not, Leopold has told this lie so long he has grown to believe it.

Appearance: Leopold is, at a glance, a doughy-faced pale teenage boy with dark eyes and an unruly mop of raven hair. But look closer and the eyes reveal a far older, far wiser creature: it may just be the hundred or so years he's lived or maybe it's his Infernal heritage peering back, but something in there is far more aware than it should be. His eyes are clear and frightening to behold.

Storytelling Hints: The thing is, Leopold *seems* reasonable. He pretends to be judicious, given over to thought and rationality. It's mostly a lie. He's a very impetuous, angry creature, and despite his age he's still given over to the whims and emotions of a post-pubescent teen boy. Women, actually, are his weakness. He's far kinder around pretty (or even not-so-pretty) girls, and is prone to making rash decisions (and thus mistakes) in their presence.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 5, Wits 3, Resolve 4



Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 4, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics (History) 3, Computer 1, Crafts 1, Investigation 3, Occult 5

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Firearms 1, Larceny 3, Stealth 3, Weaponry (Torture Implements) 4

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Intimidation 4, Persuasion 4, Socialize 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 5

Merits: Allies (*L'enfants Diabolique*) 5, Contacts (Mafia, Newspaper, Police) 3, Danger Sense 1, Demon Familiar (Imp) 1, the Dragon's Tongue 1, Encyclopedic Knowledge 1, Resources 5, Status (*L'enfants Diabolique*) 4, Unseen Sense (Demons) 1

Willpower: 8

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Lust

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Health: 7

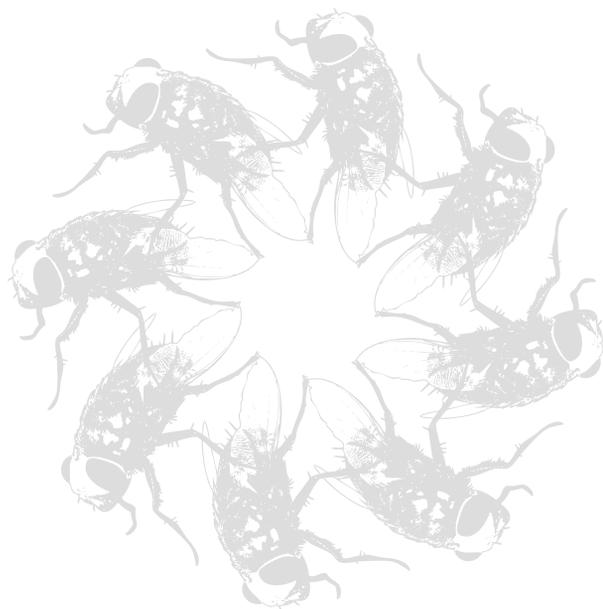
Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Special
Skinning Knife	1(L)	9	Uses in torture

Infernal Aspects

Perfect Lie (Manipulation + Subterfuge): When Leopold uses this aspect successfully, his victim will believe anything he says, no matter how unlikely, as long as it isn't utter fantasy ("You ride a pegasus to school") or contradicted by anything the target knows to be true, such as telling someone he killed his dog when he knows he didn't. It costs 1 Willpower point. The victim believes the lie for the duration of the scene.

Apocalyptic Form: By spending 3 Willpower points, Leopold can manifest his Infernal heritage in a truly demonic form: he grows black raven-like wings that allow flight (at thrice his normal Speed); he gains an increased awareness (+3 to Perception rolls); he grows surrounded by an inky darkness (during the day he gains +1 to Stealth, and +3 to Stealth at night); and he gains +3 to his Initiative score. He remains in this form for one scene and can manifest it only once per day. He *can* choose to manifest it more times in a day, but each time after the first he turns to this form he suffers 1 point of aggravated damage.



INFERNO™

POSSESSED

Name:

Concept:

Chronicle:

Age:

Virtue:

Demon:

Player:

Vice:

Group Name:

ATTRIBUTES

POWER	Intelligence ●0000	Strength ●0000	Presence ●0000
FINESSE	Wits ●0000	Dexterity ●0000	Manipulation ●0000
RESISTANCE	Resolve ●0000	Stamina ●0000	Composure ●0000

SKILLS

Mental

(-3 unskilled)

Academics	00000
Computer	00000
Crafts	00000
Investigation	00000
Medicine	00000
Occult	00000
Politics	00000
Science	00000

Physical

(-1 unskilled)

Athletics	00000
Brawl	00000
Drive	00000
Firearms	00000
Larceny	00000
Stealth	00000
Survival	00000
Weaponry	00000

Social

(-1 unskilled)

Animal Ken	00000
Empathy	00000
Expression	00000
Intimidation	00000
Persuasion	00000
Socialize	00000
Streetwise	00000
Subterfuge	00000

OTHER TRAITS

Merits

_____	00000
_____	00000
_____	00000
_____	00000
_____	00000
_____	00000
_____	00000
_____	00000

Health

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Willpower

0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0 0

Morality

10	_____	0
9	_____	0
8	_____	0
7	_____	0
6	_____	0
5	_____	0
4	_____	0
3	_____	0
2	_____	0
1	_____	0

Flaws

Size	_____
Speed	_____
Initiative Mod	_____
Defense	_____
Armor	_____

Experience _____

Vestments

_____	Envy	000
_____	Gluttony	000
_____	Greed	000
_____	Lust	000
_____	Pride	000
_____	Sloth	000
_____	Wrath	000

Attributes 5/4/3 • Skills 11/7/4 (+3 Specialties) • Merits 7 • (Buying the fifth dot in any area costs two points) • Health = Stamina + Size Willpower = Resolve + Composure • Size = 5 for adult humans • Defense = Lowest of Dexterity or Wits • Initiative Mod = Dexterity + Composure • Speed = Strength + Dexterity + 5 • Starting Morality = 7

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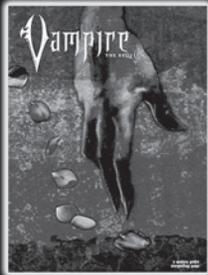
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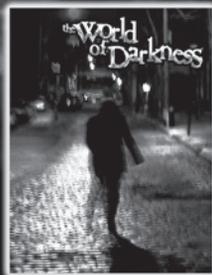
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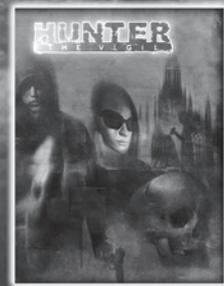
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