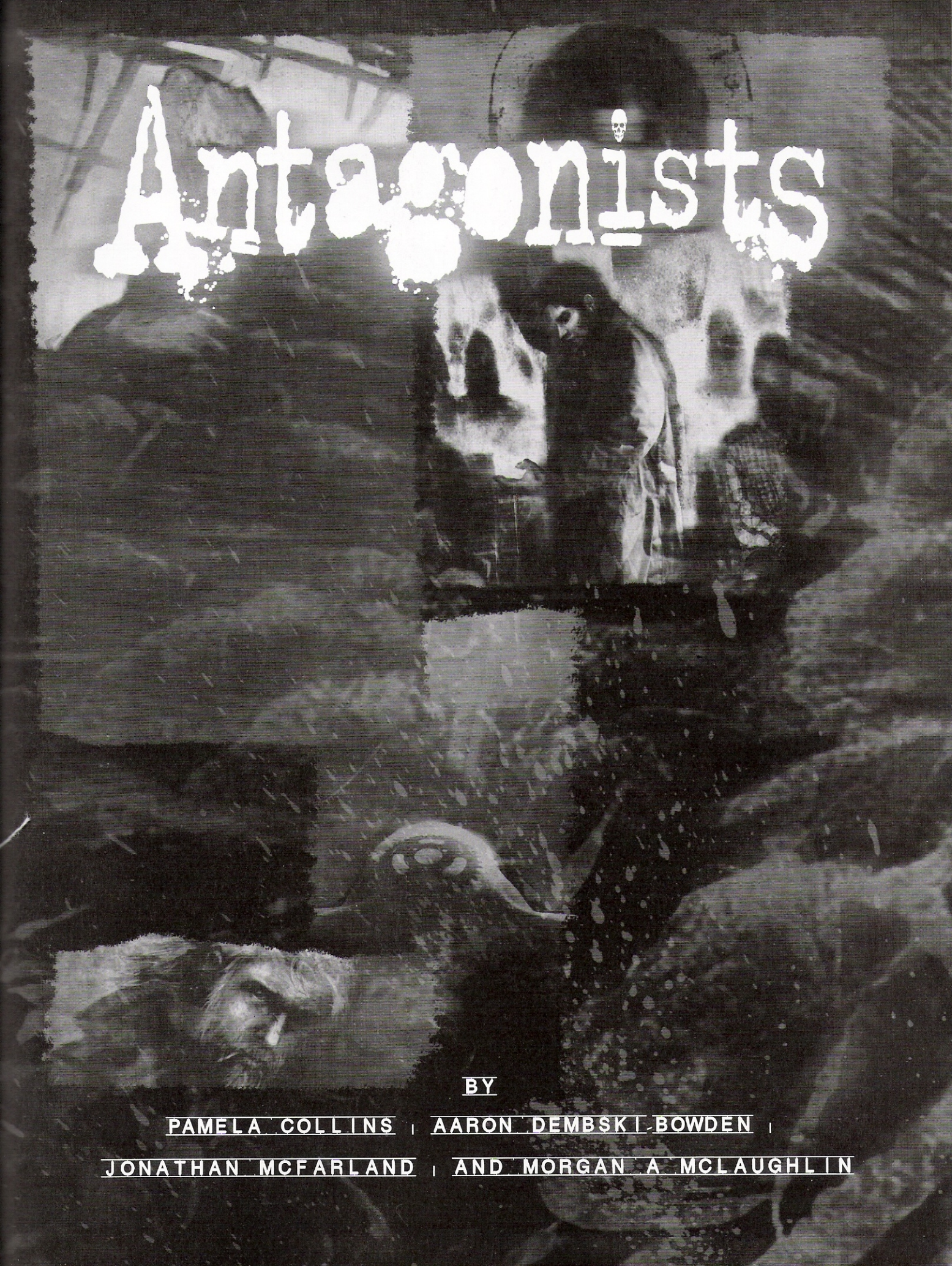


Antagonists

the World of Darkness





Antagonists

BY

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PROLOGUE: DETROIT MYSTERE

You shoot a man, he ought to stay down.

He'd heard the talk, but passed it off as a bunch of bullshit, a decision he currently regretted. Something strange had been going down on the streets of Detroit and Andre Langman was getting his first taste of it.

Until he saw the vacant eyes and stitched-up lips, Andre thought the thing coming at him was just another member of the Cadavres, the territorial rivals of Andre's gang, the Vipers. He fired, once, noting with satisfaction how cleanly the bullet entered his target's stomach. The shot knocked the creepy looking bastard back about two feet, but didn't stop it from walking steadily forward, a low, strangled moan coming from its sewn lips. It neither quickened nor slowed as it closed the gap between itself and the young man sporting the yellow bandana that identified him as a member of the Vipers. Andre swore to himself, squeezed off another two rounds. One slug caught the thing in its right shoulder, the other in its stomach, but it never so much as flinched.

Andre panicked then, unloading shot after shot at his pursuer. After emptying the clip with no response, Andre dropped the gun and ran. His legs pumped furiously as he wove through dark streets, dodging the half-hearted circles of illumination the streetlamps offered. Five blocks later, Andre began cursing himself for his pack-a-day habit, his lungs burning and struggling to process enough oxygen. Another five blocks and he felt his legs begin to give way, each breath a desperate gasp. With a final glance over his shoulder to confirm he'd shaken his pursuer, the young man veered into an alleyway and leaned against the rough brick wall, panting.

What the fuck was that? Andre asked himself. *No way a brother takes that many bullets and keeps on walking. And his mouth? Who messed him up like that?*

Shuddering, Andre wiped his face with his bandana. He stood there for a moment, back pressed against the wall, then he took a deep steadying breath and dropped his arms down to his sides.

"I guess we got a problem, Andre," a familiar voice said from the back of the alleyway. Andre began frantically patting his waist, searching for his gun, until he remembered he'd tossed it when that *thing* wouldn't fall down. A figure emerged slowly from the shadows, which, though dark and deep, didn't seem dark or deep enough to conceal a person the size of the man approaching Andre. Andre knew that man. Hell, Andre had killed the man himself, six weeks ago.

"Third?" Andre whispered. The man nodded. "Third. Shit! That's impossible. You're dead, man! I killed you."

"Like I said, Andre," Third said sardonically, "I guess we got a problem."

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Suzette dreamed of Saint-Domingue. She stood in the middle of a blood-drenched sugar cane field, the cane broken, trampled and littered with bodies. The corpses, both black and white, lay like discarded dolls, their limbs broken and splayed, or severed and kicked aside. On the horizon, flames leapt into the heavens from burning plantation homes. The smells of death and ash mingled in the humid evening air, clinging to Suzette's sweat-soaked clothes.

Suzette turned to the woman standing beside her, unsurprised to see the skeletal face beneath the *tignon* head scarf, the bare breasts like empty sacks above the black wrap skirt. The hollow eye sockets of Manman Brijit, wife of Baron Samedi, regarded the young *sorciere* for a moment; then the Loa raised a thick cigar up to her skull mouth, clenching it between her teeth, and pointed at the cane stand in front of her. Suzette looked out into the sugar cane expectantly, seeing nothing but smoke, fire and blood.

"Is this Haiti?" she asked, in the French patois that had not passed her lips in nearly 20 years, since she moved away from Haiti as a small child. Manman Brijit answered Suzette in the same familiar dialect, her voice surprisingly resonant as it issued from her lipless mouth.

"Not yet, but soon," and then she pointed again at the cane stand.

Suddenly, the sugar cane began to sway and shudder, as a band of men emerged directly in front of her. The men had obviously been slaves once, the tattered remains of cheap clothing hanging from scarred bodies. As they moved from the cane, the silver moonlight reflected off their machetes. Yes, Suzette noted, *they had indeed been slaves... once*. Under the bright moon, she saw their vacant white eyes, their mouths sewn closed. They walked, but in a slow, determined shuffle. Some lacked an arm, an eye, an ear, and nearly all sported deep machete or bayonet wounds; but they moved as though oblivious to these injuries. Suzette knew these creatures, knew how to create them, though she'd never made it through the whole ritual. *Zombies*, she thought, and shuddered.

From behind the undead slaves, a voice barked a sharp order in French, and the zombies all drew their machetes and began to march forward more quickly. They passed Suzette and Manman Brijit, ignoring the women completely, save for a single figure, which paused for a moment before Suzette. The man's eyes looked into Suzette's, and though he was dark as the night, dark as Manman's fine mink coat, his eyes sparkled pale blue. His unstitched lips curled into a smile and he turned on heel to chase after the band of zombies.

Suzette turned to Manman Brijit. "But what does this have to do with me?" she asked. "This happened over 200 years ago. What does this mean to me?"

Manman Brijit raised the cigar to her mouth again and took a puff. As she exhaled, the sweet-smelling smoke swirled around Suzette; she spoke, her dream-voice rich and deep as a man's.

"Child, it means, 'Don't cross me.'"

The thick, syrupy cigar smoke curled into Suzette's lungs, choking her. She gasped and clawed at her throat, as if trying to pry loose an invisible hand. Strangling, Suzette fell to her knees, the edges of her vision beginning to cloud.

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Suzette awoke in her efficiency apartment in Detroit, choking and gagging on invisible smoke. She touched her neck gingerly, finding it tender, and realized she must have been clawing at it in her sleep. She swallowed, her throat sore and parched. Shaking the dream from her head, Suzette hastily arose, meticulously washed her body in the coffin-sized shower of her tiny bathroom, and then carefully dressed in the batik wrap-around dress. She covered her long, black hair with a bright yellow *tignon*, just as her mother had taught her.

The slender, young black woman walked into the empty space meant to be her living room. Suzette owned very little furniture. *No one much living in this room anyway*, she thought wryly. The body laid out on the low table that served as Suzette's makeshift altar was still stiff and had not yet begun to rot, though she'd filled the room with sweet, fragrant flowers, just in case. The heavy scent of gardenias reminded Suzette of her dream and the swirl of sweet smoke from Brijit's cigar, and her hand went involuntarily to her throat.

"Don't be a child," Suzette muttered to herself, sharply. "That was just a dream, and Manman Brijit, she's only coming when you call her and not before." She breathed deeply, steadying her pulse, and began to prepare the body for the ritual. First, Suzette removed the corpse's clothes, cutting away the too-baggy jeans and boxers, and then the blood-stained jersey and undershirt. She unfastened the heavy gold bracelet from his wrist and heard it fall to the ground with a satisfying thud. Her narrow fingers brushed the dead man's soft face, lightly touching his long-lashed eyelids and full, cold lips, his smooth skin dark as morning coffee. *He was pretty*, she mused. *Shame about that*. She ran her fingertip sensually around the bullet hole just below his left clavicle. Finally, Suzette's searching hand came to rest on the most important item, the small leather *gris-gris* bag she'd given the young man a few days ago, while he was still among the living. Under her palm, the bag seemed to pulse faintly, as though remembering the now-stilled heartbeat. Suzette smiled.

And he died for me. Wasn't that sweet?

Patting the bag gently, Suzette rose and walked to the cabinet that held all her vodoun possessions, both the ceremonial and the practical. She carefully removed a large wooden bowl, stained dark inside with decades, perhaps even centuries, of use. She set the bowl on the floor beside her altar, then picked up her purse from the kitchen table and headed out the door to the butcher's. Live chickens were in short supply in downtown Detroit, but fresh chicken blood was cheap by the pint.

+++

The day before Trevian Williams died, 48 hours ago, he was having a good day. The petite woman sitting in his lap laughed throatily as he slipped one muscular arm around her waist. Her long, dark hair spilled over her shoulders, tickling his nose when he kissed the back of her neck. He watched, impressed, as she knocked back her glass of rum.

"Damn, baby," Trevian chuckled. "How do you drink that shit straight?" He cradled a half-empty 40-ounce against one knee. The smile on her pretty face faded slightly, replaced by a momentary grimace of irritation.

"It's not shit, Third," Suzette insisted. "This is good rum. Besides, if it's good enough for the Loa, it's good enough for me... or you." She took the cap off the bottle, filling her glass with about three fingers of brown rum before offering it to the man currently serving as her seat. The fragrant scent of the liquor wafted up to Trevian's nose.

"Have a drink with me, Third," the woman offered, her voice sweet and faintly accented. She raised the glass to her small, lush mouth, just wetting her lips, then leaned forward and kissed the young man deeply. He tasted the earthy flavor of rum before she pulled away again, proffering the glass.

"OK, baby," Trevian said, grinning. "What are we drinking to?"

"To Manman Brijit," Suzette answered, lips curled into a mischievous little grin.

"Who?"

"Manman Brijit," she repeated. Trevian "Third" Williams shrugged and raised the glass.

"To Manman Brijit," he said, then downed the rum in one motion. Suzette felt the air around her ripple gently, as if stirred by a faint breeze, and knew the Loa was pleased. *Good, Suzette thought. I'm tired of playing whore with these gang bangers. Seems like getting a man killed should be a little easier.* Third winked drunkenly at Suzette, who smiled back at him brilliantly, wondering how that pretty mouth of his would look when she finished stitching it closed.

As it turns out, Third's mouth didn't look nearly so pretty under the criss-crossed black thread, but he was long past caring about his appearance and Suzette was keenly aware that even handsome men seldom make attractive zombies. The bowl of chicken blood at her side, Suzette began tracing intricate *vévés* onto the dead man's bare chest. Even in the chill October air, her bare breasts glistened with sweat as she painted the appropriate symbols, sprinkling the powder as she chanted, invoking the power and aid of her family's favored Loa, Papa Legba and Manman Brijit. On the altar, next to the corpse, stood a small statuette of a woman with a skull face. In front of that statue sat a cigar and a nearly full bottle of rum, the first portion of which filled a wooden cup.

Suzette's tone, as she worked, was almost conversational, her invocations more like familiar invitations to well-known guests than supplications to powerful spirits. Suzette's Manman had always taken exception to that tone, as well as to Suzette's attitude that the magic of vodoun was something *she* controlled, rather than a power Suzette channeled *through* her.

"You demand where you should cajole," her Manman once told her, "and order where you should invite. You'll make the Loa angry, carrying on this way." Suzette wrinkled up her nose in distaste at this mock-subservience to invisible beings she was never quite convinced were real. Even as Suzette advanced in her vodoun training, she held on to her belief that maybe the Loa *weren't* real and that she alone was both keeper and source of the power. The ritual, well, that was just a formality when it came right down to it. The magic would happen because Suzette made it happen. That Suzette lacked any real reason for creating a zombie hardly mattered. Her true purpose was proving that she *could*.

Suzette's slim hands carefully painted the *vévés* in long, slow strokes, a lover's caress of blood and brush across Third's cold skin that seemed far more intimate than any of the hurried touching Suzette had tolerated from the man in life. Her goal involving Third had been singular, and sex hadn't figured into that equation — just enough promise to keep him interested, keep him wanting her, and make him feel territorial toward her. *He played right into my hands, too*, Suzette mused, *the fool. Like I cared any more for Andre than I did for him.*

Playing the men off each other was easy enough. Of course, not everything went as planned. Ideally, Andre and Third both would have ended up dead, but she'd overestimated Third's abilities. After finding Andre with "his" woman, Third only had enough time to hurl a few choice words before Andre had whipped out his gun and popped one clean through the other man's chest. Suzette had seen dead bodies before, even handled them, but watching someone die right in front of her was a new experience. At such close range, the spray of blood from Third's chest splattered across Suzette's dress, and she watched dispassionately as the young man fell to his knees and then toppled over face-first onto the ground. Andre and the rest of the Vipers moved to scatter, but Suzette simply walked over to Third's corpse and began trying to pull it to its feet.

"Help me move this body," she demanded, as Andre looked at her wide-eyed. A small smear of blood colored one of her cheeks. "Help me," she repeated. "You want the cops to show up and find him here?" At this, Andre and another man came to her aid, helping her haul nearly 200 pounds of dead weight back to her apartment.

"Now you just forget about this and don't worry about cops," Suzette told them. "I'll take care of everything."

A little less than 24 hours later, Suzette was making good on her promise to take care of it. A strand of hair drooped down from beneath her tignon, but she kept up her steady chanting, and never ceased decorating the body with the blood and the powder.

Well, Brijit, I made this man dead without your help, Suzette thought, as her mouth still shaped pleas to the Loa. *I can make him undead without your help, too.* She imagined she smelled the sweet, acrid scent of cigar smoke for a moment, but blinked it away like a bad dream. *Too late for playing mind games with myself. It's time.*

The *ti-bon-ange* of Trevian Williams watched from the empty air above as the little woman painted detailed red pictures on the body he had once inhabited. Third's spirit felt no cold or pain or hunger, not even any particular surprise at his ultimate fate. He did, however, feel anger, a burning red haze of hate that had to be answered in kind. Even as a ghost, Third kept a close hold on the concept of revenge. He tried to catch the woman's attention to no avail. His spirit was, after all, a little thing compared to the dead flesh she decorated or the life force she had captured in the small sack that still hung around the corpse's neck. The vodoun priestess only needed the *corpse cadavre*, or body, and the *gros-bon-ange*, the animating force that moved that body. The *ti-bon-ange* that made up Third's personality, memories and conscious thought had been dismissed to go wherever spirits go after parting from the body. The part of Third's spirit watching this ritual didn't know any of that, nor did he care. That body belonged to him and he needed it back.

As he hovered above Suzette, watching, Third smelled the pungent aroma of cigar smoke. Third then realized that a woman, if indeed the thing he saw could be called that, stood next to Suzette, looking up at him with a skull face and empty eye sockets. Suzette, muttering to herself in French, seemed unaware of the other woman's presence. The skull faced woman blew smoke up toward the ceiling.

"Come on down from there," she ordered in a deep, melodious voice. Third obeyed, finding himself next to her, breathing in the pleasant fragrance of her cigar. Side by side, Third and the woman watched Suzette finish painting the *vévés*, rise to her feet, and light a small fire in a bowl on the low altar. They watched her sprinkle a handful of powder over the flames and place a cigar into them, then begin a wild dance around the altar with its prone, dead centerpiece. She held a glass of rum in one hand and occasionally spit a stream of the dark liquid through her teeth. It splattered into the fire, hissing and crackling, while Suzette spun around and around.

"She's raising up that body, boy," the skeletal woman said to Third's spirit. "Gonna make it walk around and be her slave, just like her ancestors did back on Saint-Domingue, and she thinks she's doing it without my help." Suzette spat another mouthful of rum into the flames and Third saw the little sack around the corpse's neck shiver faintly, then begin, gently, to pulse. The strange woman moved her lipless mouth in what Third imagined she meant as a smile, her jaw shifting and her teeth grinding together lightly.

"You look like a strong young man," the woman continued, "and I don't suspect you like the idea of some girl using your body that way. I don't like her ingratitude, thinking she's too all-mighty powerful to need her people's gods anymore. You've got a healthy anger to sustain you, which should be more than enough."

Third realized then how tall the woman stood, towering over him and over Suzette, who still spun like a dervish around the altar. The woman reached out her hand, reached into the *ti-bon-ange* of Third, and pushed him gently toward

his corpse. He felt his spirit sinking back into his cold flesh and reveled in the sensation of filling up his fingers and toes. The skull-faced woman leaned over and whispered something into his ear.

Third's heart lurched once, twice, and then began to beat in a slow, regular rhythm.

Her ritual complete, Suzette sank beside the altar, exhausted, her eyes locked on the body before her. The *gris-gris* bag on the corpse's chest seemed to tremble, but the body itself did not stir. She'd done the ritual correctly, she *knew* she had. Her magic had been strong. The fire in the small bowl had mostly burnt itself out, but the cloying smell of cigar smoke and evaporated rum hung about the room like a miasma. Still, the corpse lay motionless on the altar.

Finally, Suzette dragged herself to her feet and leaned over the body. Still nothing. She cursed quietly, under her breath, but then, faintly, the body began to stir. One dark arm raised itself off the table slightly, then the other. Suzette smiled broadly, looking down at her handiwork, when the corpse's eyes opened suddenly. It stared up at Suzette, and she felt a brief moment of fear, because the zombie's eyes were a clear, pale blue.

Like in the dream, she thought momentarily, but brushed that worry aside in favor of self-satisfaction at her own accomplishments. *I did it. I made a zombie. I did it!*

"I did it!" Suzette exclaimed aloud. The body on the table moved its arm swiftly upward, one strong hand clamping around her throat. Her eyes widened in terror as the zombie sat up, its blue eyes still locked with hers as firmly as its fingers locked around her neck. The smoky cigar-smell filled Suzette's nostrils as she clawed at the hand, remembering again her dream. The zombie's lips spread into a gruesome smile, stitches popping all around its mouth. Its eyes held, not mindless obeisance, but clear, cruel intelligence.

Black string hung around Third's lips, little dots of blood seeping from the tiny holes surrounding his broad smile. He pulled Suzette's slight body toward him. She struggled against him, beating at him ineffectually with her fists, pressing her body against his for leverage. Third tightened his grip on her throat.

"Manman Brijit says hi," he said.

Three days after Third found him in the alleyway, Andre Langman went home to his gang. By the date of his return, he was burdened by considerably less free will.

The Vipers sat around the back of the club, playing pool and drinking beer, loud rap music blaring over the noise of conversation. Andre stood in the doorway, his head down, for several minutes before anyone noticed him standing there. His shirtsleeves and his jeans sported dark, stiff patches, but the club was too dim for his friends to notice.

"Hey, Andre!" someone shouted. "Where you been, man?" Andre looked up and began moving forward. His dead, vacant eyes were the filmy, gray color

of old pearls, his skin was pale and curdled, but even that couldn't compare to the horror that was Andre's mouth, thin lips stitched closed with heavy black thread.

Marcus put up a hand to stop Andre. Andre caught that hand in a slow, heavy motion, methodically twisting and squeezing. Even over the sound of Marcus' screams, the other gang members could hear the sickening grind of bone on bone, followed by a series of snapping crunches. Marcus continued to scream for another 10 seconds before Andre snapped his neck. The gangbangers reacted swiftly, pulling out guns and unloading at once into their former friend and brother. Bullet after bullet pierced Andre's flesh, but didn't even slow him as he grabbed another man by the throat, crushing his windpipe. The gunfire continued for no more than a minute before the club fell completely silent.

A few minutes later, Third Williams strolled into the wreckage, Suzette fluttering behind him like a slightly mad butterfly. Without looking back at her, Third indicated with a gesture that Suzette was to tend to the former-Andre. She cringed slightly but hurried to obey, the fear in her face mingled with desire.

"Ain't that a pretty sight?" Third murmured quietly, surveying the dead bodies. He counted seven total, a nice haul for the night.

Suzette no longer used an altar for the zombie ritual. She simply didn't have the space. Tonight, seven bodies lay stretched out in her living room, their naked bodies bathed in candlelight and the glow of Suzette's small bonfire bowl, their mouths sewn closed. Suzette moved from corpse to corpse, chanting and painting the *vévés*. She barely needed to think about the ritual. It just came that naturally now.

Third watched Suzette as she worked, admiring her bare breasts in the dim light. Manman Brijit stood behind Suzette in the shadows, also watching the ritual unfold and waiting for the moment to take her part in it. When Manman Brijit looked in Third's direction, he winked at her. Suzette jerked her head in the direction of his wink but saw nothing, giving Third a small smile instead, darting her tongue out to wet her lower lip.

Seven more bodies for the front line, Third mused. Don't feel pain and can't be killed. Won't talk shit, neither.

Suzette whirled around her apartment, stepping gracefully between corpses, while Third admired the moving curves of her body. Now that he had her in hand, this woman was certainly worth coming back from the dead for.

Smoke from Brijit's cigar circled the room. The waking dark-skinned corpses and the smell of sweet tobacco made the Loa long for Saint-Domingue.

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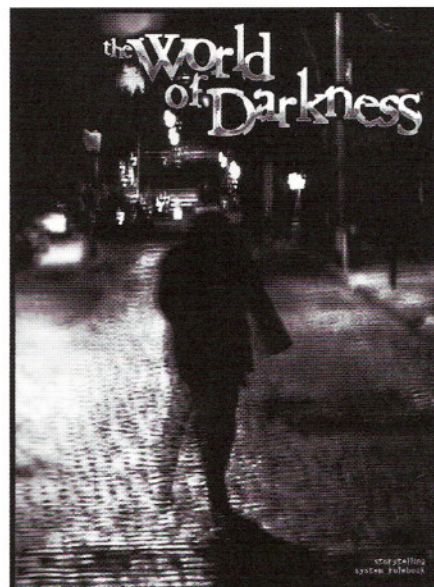
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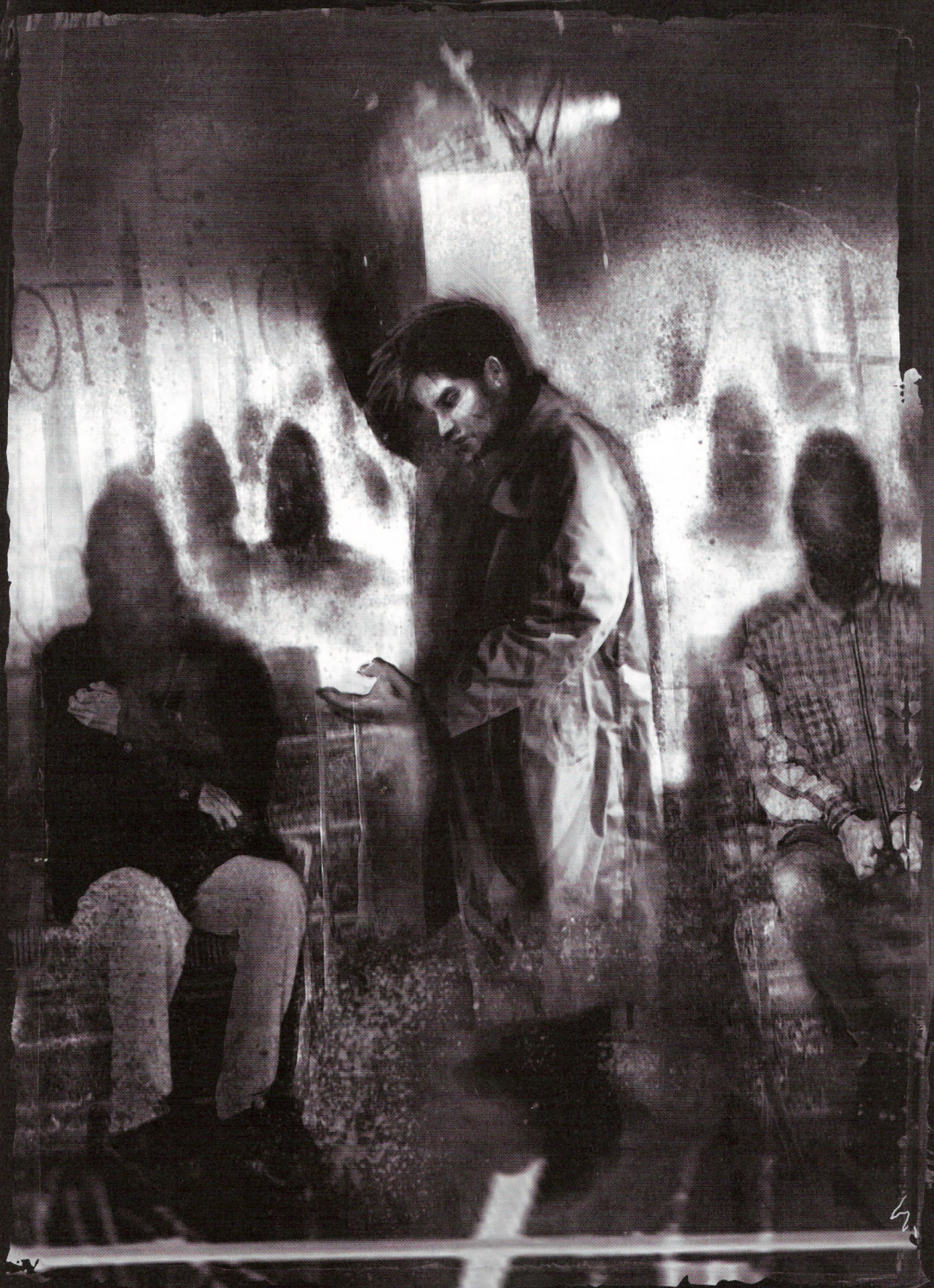
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Antagonists™

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They didn't tell me about the shakes, about the paranoia. About the constant need to look over my shoulder. I mean, yeah, doing magic is great and all, but why do I feel like I'm always being watched? Out on the streets I look at cars. I can't ever see my reflection, I only the people inside the car. And the glass always fogs if I look at it too long.

The others told me that sort of thing might happen, but I wasn't prepared for it. I sure as hell wasn't prepared for subways. Normally subways are sort of comforting. There are people, sure, but they're close enough that I can see them.

They make a point of minding their own business. No one really interacts, unless somebody gets mugged. And even that's got a kind of script, most of the time.

So tonight I decided to take the subway instead of walking.

As soon as the doors closed, I felt their eyes on me.

Everyone on the subway has been watching me. I have a book but I'm afraid to open it.

Everyone on the goddamned car is looking at me, and the look isn't one I can place. Not hate, not fear it just looks like they're thinking. Most people don't do that.

They haven't moved since I came into the car. They haven't blinked.

They just watch me.

Introduction

"The beasts belong to God/But stupidity belongs to man."

**— Victor Hugo
"La Coccinelle"**

A story is only as good as its villain. No matter how handsome or strong the hero, without an effective villain the story falls flat. The role of the antagonist in a book or film is to provide necessary conflict, either by giving the hero an opportunity to shine or by simply furthering the plot. The protagonist blooms in adversity, and the antagonist creates that adversity.

Where does the antagonist come from? What is her relationship to the protagonist? The dynamic between the two characters defines what face the conflicts between them will wear, what tone the story has, and even who the viewer or reader initially roots for. The relationship between antagonist and protagonist may be amicable rivalry or they may be arch nemeses. Perhaps the antagonist was the hero's childhood friend or first love, and the connection went sour. Maybe she and the hero first crossed swords in the political, business or legal arena, and one of them chose to take that professional relationship to a hostile, personal level. They may never have met in person. One or both of them might be masked by some conglomerate, such as a large corporation or highly secretive religious organization, using others as pawns to fight their battles. The hero might not even be aware that his actions have sparked the attention of the antagonist (or vice versa), and may be going about his daily life blind to the fact that he has a new, and potentially deadly, enemy.

While some movies and books may portray a clear line between the hero and the villain, most conflicts are not so black and white. Sometimes the hero is less than heroic, the villain less than villainous, and the traits that distinguish them from each other seem to blur. Often, the antagonist and the protagonist are two sides of the same coin. They may share similar backgrounds, personality traits, or methods of taking care of business. In all likelihood, both act in their own best interests, or those of their friends and family. Both want to see their own goals and ideals furthered, to find success in their chosen career path, and to protect the things they hold dear from outside harm. Yet, despite these similarities, only one is considered the "good guy."

Sometimes motivation provides the only differentiating factor between antagonist and protagonist. What moves her to act? The vigilante killer and mass murderer both take lives without any sort of legal right; but one is motivated by a sense of justice, while the other is moved by her own twisted, violent desires. The archetypal "above the law" vigilante hero has the audience's sympathy in movies like *Boondock Saints* and comics like *The Punisher*, while no such sympathy extends to the antagonists, even when the protagonist's body count is higher. The vigilante is seen as heroic for avenging those he feels have been wronged, even if his actions are just as violent as those of the murderer.

Not all antagonists are murderers or maniacs, of course. Some would not, by the standards of most people, even be considered villains. Those who commit violence in the name of God or country might find support from those of their own faith or nationality. The antagonist might see the hero as a threat to something she holds dear, such as a system of beliefs or morals. She opposes the protagonist, because to her *he* is the real danger. Sometimes, the antagonist is merely the one to point the protagonist's actions out to the rest of the population; and if those actions violate the socially acceptable code of behavior, the hero may suddenly find himself playing the role of the villain. Now, the hero must fight, not just against another person, but against that person's entire support group. He may find himself persecuted and vilified for opposing laws or beliefs that, though flawed or inherently harmful, are widely accepted by the rest of society. Who, then, is the villain?

Every antagonist must be crafted with the protagonist in mind. How will the hero react to this antagonist? In which areas will they find accord and in which do they clash? How can the hero overcome his opponent, is overcoming the antagonist necessary, and what will happen when and if the hero finally triumphs? Determine the nature of the conflict: Is it a simple matter of good versus evil, wrong versus right; or does the animosity between protagonist and antagonist run deeper, with many layers and nuances? Will the hero's triumph win him fame, infamy or villainy? Most importantly, when the conflict is finally resolved, and the hero walks away from the antagonist, how has his life changed? A well-crafted antagonist leaves her mark on the protagonist. What will that mark be?

But, Who's the Hero?

Sure, all that sounds well and good for a movie or novel with a single protagonist, but how does this apply to a situation where, instead of one central figure, the Storyteller is dealing with a group of players' characters? Unless the other players are willing to sit patiently while each character has a turn to confront his personal enemies and resolve any lingering conflict, the Storyteller must find a more productive and effective way to use antagonists in a story.

Storytellers and players deal with four kinds of antagonists in a chronicle. First, individual characters bring their own enemies into a story. For every player's character, the Storyteller is guaranteed at least one antagonist, however minor. These adversaries make wonderful tools for preludes and flashbacks. These glimpses into the character's past can help further character development or could foreshadow a future event that might affect the character or the entire troupe. If an enemy from a character's past suddenly shows up 10 years later, forcing his entire pack or coterie to clean up his mess, how might his relationship with his companions change?

Most enemies in a chronicle won't be skeletons from any particular character's closet, however. Over time, the players' characters will make enemies of their own. Even if only one character was responsible for initiating the conflict, it's still everybody's fight. Territorial disputes and power struggles between groups produce antagonists that the whole troupe can enjoy.

Then, of course, the characters must face enemies who simply hate them for being who and what they are. Be they humans who hunt vampires and werewolves, religious groups who target magic users, or some other entity, some antagonists don't care about the individuals' relative merits. These foes abhor everything the characters stand for. The characters themselves might spend a lot of time in one-on-one combat with such an antagonist, but they are not the sole focus of her time. If her efforts against one werewolf pack prove unsuccessful, she shifts her attentions to another. This places the players' characters in an interesting dilemma. Do they regroup and prepare for the next enemy to come their way, or join others of their kind to fight this antagonist?

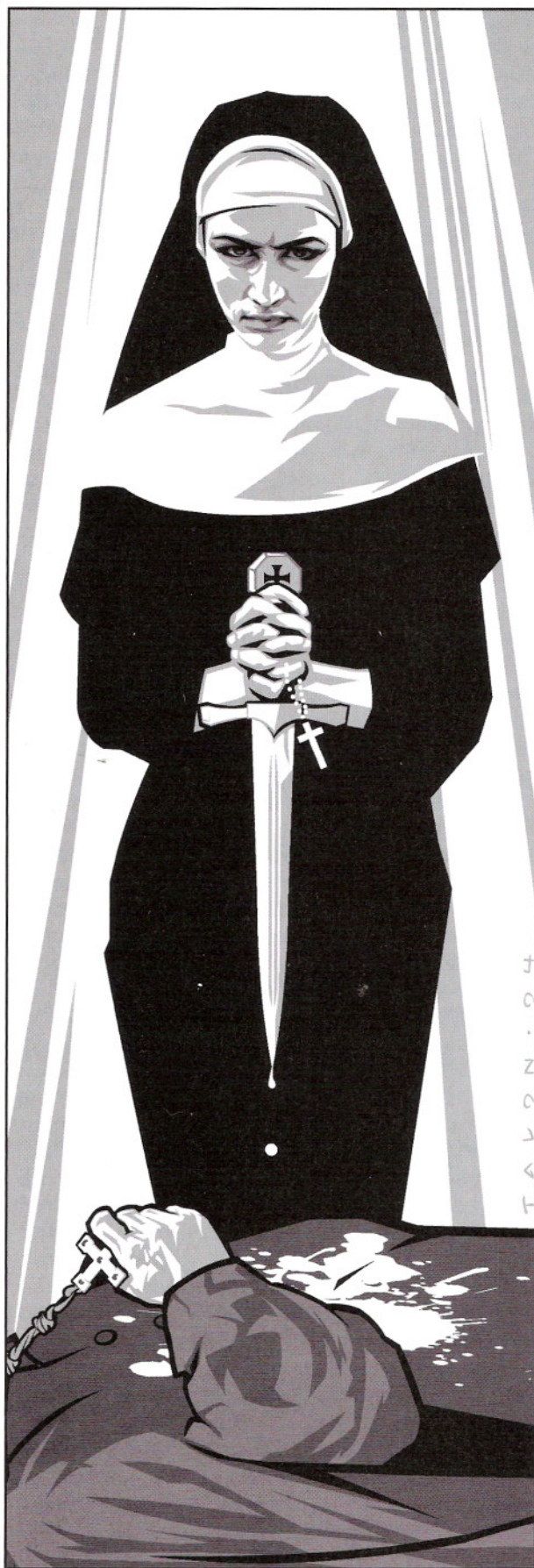
Last, but possibly the most dangerous, are those foes that do not care who their targets are. These antagonists may be mindless zombies that attack any moving thing in their way. They may be vicious monsters that defend their territories indiscriminately. Because their motives are not human, the characters may have a difficult time uncovering what moves these creatures and, more importantly, what stops them. If the monster in question is a menace to the general population, the players' characters may find themselves in a truly heroic role should they eliminate it.

How to Use This Book

Players with nothing to do get bored, and bored players won't continue to invest time and energy in a chronicle. This book offers numerous avenues to that entertainment, by providing the means to create three-dimensional, multifaceted antagonists for use in any World of Darkness game. The following chapters contain ample enemies to fight, mysteries to uncover and plots to unravel, all at the Storyteller's disposal.

The World of Darkness functions somewhat differently than the rest of the horror genre. Consider the classic horror monsters — vampires, werewolves and witches, right? Well, what happens when those antagonists step into the role of the protagonist? The players are on the other side of the mirror now; so while other vampires, werewolves and mages can certainly become antagonists, they lose the fear-factor because they are familiar. Other foes, however, become far more threatening. This book contains information on antagonists that have a special relevance to the players' characters. Humans who hunt vampires, religious nuts who target magic users, and monsters that compete with the players' characters for territory and food are just a sampling of the possible antagonists described in the following chapters. Along with these descriptions, these chapters contain tool kits to customize antagonists to any chronicle.

Antagonists offers more than a list of ready-made or easily assembled adversaries, however. When reading this book for inspiration, look beyond what is written in the chapters and find the potential for each of the antagonist types described here. Most of the people or monsters contained in this book will function well as a long- or short-term villain of a chronicle, but can also play different roles within the game. What the players first believed to be the antagonist, such as a single-minded vampire hunter or a magic-obsessed cult, may turn out to be a mere pawn of the true antagonist, sent to either do the antagonist's dirty work or to throw the players' characters off her trail. Do not be afraid to mislead the players by presenting secondary antagonists as a larger threat than they actually are. Instead of focusing only on the primary enemy of the characters, have that enemy hire or create minor adversaries to distract the players' characters from their search. Even several hours of game time spent pursuing what ultimately turns out to be a red herring can be rewarding if those hours turn up clues to the real enemy.



Some of the creatures in the following chapters are not, themselves, the antagonists, but the tools of the antagonists. A mindless zombie has little more motivation to attack the players' characters than it has to attack anyone else, but the zombie's master may have a very good reason for targeting the characters. While cult members pursuing the players' characters might hate vampires for their own reasons, they might also be manipulated by a rival group of vampires or mages that wishes to eliminate the competition. A hunter might find the characters through careful research and observation, or she may be put on their trail by a third party with vested interests in the characters' demise.

Of course, this book isn't for Storytellers alone. Players can use this book as a resource to develop their characters, find their own personal antagonists or even learn a little more about the World of Darkness as a whole. Reading through these chapters may provide input into the *types* of creatures the Storyteller may include in a chronicle, but none of the particulars of *how* she will use them. Because **Antagonists** provides tool kits for making these monsters, players cannot simply memorize a list of stats. They may know what the Storyteller knows, but not what she did with that knowledge. That little bit of information, or misinformation, may be far more frightening than having none at all.

Chapter Breakdown

Chapter One: The Living Dead depicts the many forms of the walking dead, from the mindless zombies of classic horror films to far more sinister, intelligent creatures with their own dark motives. This chapter also includes a do-it-yourself kit for creating different kinds of living dead and several sample characters.

Chapter Two: A Need for Vengeance descends into the desperate and isolated existence of mortal hunters. This chapter provides motivations, resources and the psychology of those humans who through desperation or mania fight back against the supernatural creatures of the World of Darkness, as well as several sample characters.

Chapter Three: The Righteous and the Wicked focuses on cults of both the religious and secular variety, including motivation, recruitment tactics, and methods of dealing with the other denizens of the World of Darkness. Also included in this chapter are mechanics for brainwashing, the moral ramifications of cult involvement, and sample cults and cult leaders.

Chapter Four: Fear Given Form contains a menagerie of fearsome beasts, ranging from the bizarre to the outright monstrous, for use in any World of Darkness chronicle. This chapter provides background information, storytelling hints, and descriptions of any unusual powers for each creature.

Useful Sources

The following sources proved useful to the authors while writing this book and may provide additional information and inspiration for World of Darkness chronicles.

Books

Lords of Discipline by Pat Conroy shows a secular cult in action. Young men in a military school suffer through hazing and other abuse as part of their induction into an elite group. Made into a film in 1983, the book is far better.

"Calcutta: Lord of Nerves," from the short story compilation *Wormwood* by Poppy Z. Brite, is a harrowing tale of a zombie infestation swiftly overtaking the Indian city of Calcutta. A must-read for those with a fondness for the walking dead.

Sunglasses After Dark by Nancy A. Collins, and its sequels, portrays monster hunters of both the human and demi-human variety.

The *Anita Blake: Vampire Hunter* series by Laurell K. Hamilton pits protagonist Anita Blake against supernatural creatures in a world where vampires and werewolves have become legal American citizens. Anita also possesses the ability to raise the dead for the purpose of questioning, which makes this series an interesting read from both the hunter and zombie perspective.

The Magic Island by William B. Seabrook recounts the author's travels in Haiti and experiences with vodoun.

Movies

28 Days Later puts a different spin on the zombie film, when a British man awakens from a coma to discover the entire United Kingdom infected by a disease that transforms victims into violent, mindless killers.

Night of the Living Dead, *Dawn of the Dead* and *Day of the Dead* contain all the classic elements of the zombie horror movie, including shambling, decaying corpses and flesh-eating violence. They're classic for a reason.

John Carpenter's Vampires pits vampire hunter Jack Crow and a team of Vatican mercenaries in a war against the undead. Lacking in any supernatural powers, Jack and his companions must rely on gadgets, weapons and resource-

fulness to kill their foes, making this film an excellent example of the hunters portrayed in Chapter Two.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer, both the movie and the far-superior television show, focuses on one teen girl's battle against supernatural entities. The television show often explored the complicated relationship between monster hunter and monster from both sides.

Dog Soldiers presents a superb look at ordinary folks (with military training, granted) pitted against a supernatural menace. One of the better werewolf films in recent years.

Brotherhood of the Wolf contains several elements that make it particularly relevant to this book, including frightening monsters and secret societies.

Outbreak is a suspenseful film in which the main antagonist is disease — not something that a group of characters can rip to shreds or shoot. If the disease caused some supernatural effect rather than "merely" death, the film would make a perfect *World of Darkness* story.

The Serpent and the Rainbow, while based on a true story (see also the book by Wade Davis), has enough magic and spiritualism to act as superb inspiration for a *World of Darkness* game.

Frailty is the story of a man who goes insane and begins hunting people at random under the delusion that they are demons, and even forces his two young sons to help. Of course, it could also be the story of a man touched by God and shown the truth of the monsters in our midst. When watching this film, consider what a monster hunter as described in Chapter Two might be like if possessed by a Passion Shade (p. 122).

Websites

- All Things Zombie! Your Zombie Resource Site: <http://www.allthingszombie.com/>
- Urban Legend Reference Pages: <http://www.snopes.com/>
- Ex-cult Resource Center: <http://www.ex-cult.org/>



4A

DAY
THREE: THE
NOISES STOPPED TO
DAY JUST BEFORE SUN-
DOWN. MILLER DECIDED TO
PEEK OUTSIDE. SEE IF WE
COULD RUN TO HIGHER
GROUND. HE CAME BACK WHITE
AS A SHEET. HE SAID THEY FOUND
SOME PREY NEARBY. BUT HE
WOULDN'T TELL US MORE. I THANK
GOD EVERY DAY THAT WILL AND I ARE
AN EVEN MATCH AT CHESS. OTHERWISE THE BORE-
DOM WOULD DRIVE US INSANE OR KILL US LONG BE-
FORE THEY FINALLY MANAGE TO GET INSIDE.

DAY FIVE: RADIO TRANSMISSION CAME IN TODAY. THE
ANNOUNCER SAID THAT FULTON COUNTY WAS QUARANTINED.
AND THAT A NEW SARS STRAIN MAY BE THE CULPRIT. MILLER STARTED
RANTING ABOUT THE END OF THE WORLD. I SAID, "BULLSHIT. FULTON COUNTY
IS. LIKE. THIS BLOCK AND THE NEXT ONE." MILLER JUST STARTED CRYING.
SARS MY LILY-WHITE BUTT. I SUPPOSE THE GOVERNMENT DID SOME KIND OF
EXPERIMENT. OR SOMETHING EQUALLY LUDICROUS AND CLICHÉ. PEOPLE WITH
SARS DON'T MAKE THOSE NOISES. NOTHING ALIVE SOUNDS LIKE THAT.

DAY SIX: TURNED OFF THE GENERATOR MOST OF THE DAY TO CONSERVE FUEL.
MILLER SCOUTED OUTSIDE AGAIN. CAME BACK WITH NO GOOD NEWS. APPARENTLY
THE SARS GOT WORSE.

DAY EIGHT: MILLER THINKS THERE IS NO OTHER LIFE FOR AT LEAST FIVE MILES.
THERE MUST BE A THOUSAND OF THEM OUTSIDE. JUDGING FROM THE SOUND.

I DREAMED OF THE BEACH HOUSE LAST NIGHT. I REMEMBER GOING THERE
WHEN I WAS YOUNG. MOMMA NEVER TALKED ABOUT MY DAD. EXCEPT WHEN WE
WERE AT THE BEACH HOUSE. SHE WOULD TELL ME ABOUT HOW FUNNY HE WAS.
AND HOW HE SPENT OVER A YEAR COURTING HER BEFORE SHE AGREED TO GO OUT
WITH HIM. I'M GLAD NEITHER ONE OF THEM IS ALIVE FOR THIS.

DAY 9: I AM SCARED. NONE OF US SLEPT LAST NIGHT.

AT THE BEACH HOUSE I WOULD FALL ASLEEP LISTENING TO THE WAVES. THE
CONSISTENCY AND RHYTHM GAVE ME THE BEST DREAMS.

THEY SOUND LIKE THEY ARE MOVED BY THE MOON. LIKE A DEATHLESS TIDE. THE
GROANS AND HOWLS BLENDED TOGETHER BEFORE THE SUNSET. AND THEY NEVER
STOP POUNDING AT THE WALLS AND BOARDED WINDOWS. THEY ARE ENDLESS. MILLER
WON'T SPEAK. AND WILL JUST WHISPERS TO HIMSELF. THEY BOTH WORRY ME. OUR
FOOD WILL BE GONE IN ANOTHER WEEK AND THE WATER EVEN SOONER. A SICK
LITTLE PART OF ME HOPES THEY BREAK DOWN OUR DOORS BEFORE THEN. IF IT WERE
JUST ME IN THE HOUSE. I SUPPOSE I WOULD LET THEM IN. GOD HELP ME.

Chapter One: The Living Dead

Restless Sleep

Death is forever. When a person is put into the ground, she will never come back.

No matter what you see or hear, don't be fooled. Don't buy into the hype and allure of "immortality." A catch always exists whether the salesman is a vampire, sorcerer or otherworldly being. When the spirit leaves its body the flesh becomes meat, and can never return intact to the mortal coil. Denizens of the World of Darkness can offer plenty of methods to re-animate the corpse. None of them grant life, only living death.

Death itself is not a static force. Death swims through our world provoking change. The old and weak pass with time, parents grieve for children taken too soon, and death waits in violent hands to pull the living from the world. Death is a river eroding the banks and foundation of our world. Seeking to harness the deep waters for power is pure arrogance and risks damnation.

In the World of Darkness, death twists and deforms at the will of darker masters. Vampires corrupt death with their blood. Scientists mutate death with technology and hubris. Sorcerers invoke power to deny others death's peace. Creeping out from the hidden places and the darkest corners, powerful evil extends into the world, transforming death into a defiled servant.

"Death, like virtue,
has its degrees."

— James O'Barr,
The Crow

Classification

The living dead fall into three general groups. We discuss these groups extensively in this chapter, and provide sample storylines and characters for each. Following is a brief description of the types of undead.

Zombies are mindless or near-mindless corpses that are usually raised to serve a more powerful master. Disease or spiritual contamination can also cause outbreaks of flesh-eating undead with no other impetus than to feed.

Imbued are undead beings created from once-living parts. These monsters are often childlike, but capable of extreme violence and rage.

Revenants are spirits or ghosts that possess human bodies. Human spirits normally take control of their own corpses, but powerful spirits can assume control over a body under specific circumstances.

Intruders are specific types of revenants. Intruders are inhuman spirits that possess human bodies. Their reasons for doing so vary, but are always malignant.

Vampires might be counted among the living dead. Vampires are the quintessential undead creatures of the World of Darkness. They have a robust history, and a social structure more complex and nuanced than any of the other beings discussed in this

chapter. The living dead within this section possess no need for societies or lineages.

The creatures and people presented in this chapter are intended specifically to act as antagonists or supporting characters within a chronicle. Vampires are not in the same vein as the beings discussed here. Vampires could be considered a subset of revenants, but they are discussed in depth with their own themes in **Vampire: The Requiem**.

The undead in this chapter can be used within a **Vampire** chronicle to show how far from human the players' characters really are. When a group of Kindred move to destroy a revenant that feeds on human spirits to survive, their own existence comes into sharp relief. The walking dead also make excellent antagonists against vampires, because they possess many of the same inherent advantages.

Alternatively, the living dead offer opportunities to bring out the human aspect of vampire characters. Though vampires need to feed and cannot imitate human life in even the simplest capacity (living in daylight), their spirits remain human. A demonic force that possesses and re-animates a dead human may force the body to be physically alive. The revenant could operate in the human world better than any vampire, but the spirit would still be dark and monstrous. Characters confronted with this antagonist should realize the price of succumbing to the Beast.

The walking dead range from mindless servants to unstoppable killers, but they do not grow or change. Even a human soul desperate enough to possess its former shell exists in twilight, surviving only until the light fades forever. The damned existence might be chosen or it might be forced, but rarely does the creature let its un-life go peacefully.

Wake Up Call

Returning to the world after death is like a hangover, but instead of being drunk the night before, the unrelenting corpse was dead. The alarm clock going off is the pressure of coagulated blood being pushed through collapsed veins and arteries. The morning shower is dirt cascading down onto the newly awakened creature as it claws its way to the surface.

After a morning like that, is it any wonder the living dead are generally in a bad mood? The new unlife is disorienting and excruciating. Mindless zombies awaken only to eat or to fulfill the wishes of their master. Manufactured creatures imbued with enough spirit to exist are keenly aware of their situations — never truly alive but not dead, either. Revenants, corpses possessed by

powerful spirits or disembodied human souls, normally return with a singular desire strong enough to block out all reason. Until they fulfill their passion, they know nothing but pain.

The beings discussed in this chapter can provide an excellent range of antagonists (or possibly allies) for any World of Darkness chronicle. The origin of the undead creature indicates the themes and tone that the creature brings to a story, while the type of living dead provides the motivations and capabilities of the creature. Few adversaries can crawl under the skin of the players like the living dead, and few offer the same level of versatility.

Decay

No discussion of zombies and the other living dead would be complete without attention to decay. Rather than connect rot with Health points, or attempt to define a complex system for Storytellers to reference during the game, a more qualitative approach is appropriate.

An undead being fueled by a human soul or other type of spirit usually has enough power to keep the shell from rotting. If the body persistently decays, that fact should indicate something about the animating soul. The theme of the story changes drastically when the antagonist must take steps to trade bodies, or repair her body after a certain amount of time.

Don't spend time worrying about how decay will influence Attributes. A zombie can be nearly bones and still possess incredible strength. If the creature in question is meant to exist for only a limited time, then weakening the character as her body degrades is appropriate. Unless the living dead are fueled by powerful magic or spiritual energy, their wounds do not heal. They feel no pain, however, so unless they suffer extreme structural damage they do not stop.

A simple set of rules to describe the degradation of the undead body, along with powers and abilities to halt or reverse that process, is included in the zombie creation rules (see p. 26).

The Living Impaired

The undead are a staple in modern horror storytelling. Browsing through any shelf of horror movies or books uncovers stories centered on the dead not staying in the ground. The iconic image of a dirt-encrusted hand pushing through the soil of a fresh grave adorns the box of at least a dozen horror B-movies. Why does the prospect of unlife fascinate and disturb us? What essential themes and ideas are immediately thrust into a story involving the dead returning from the grave?

Death scares us. Some cultures fear dying without honor or glory. Others fear the dead. In the Western world, the finality and eventuality of death mortifies us. Bodies are beautified with special attention paid to creating the illusion of peace. Family and friends gather around a wooden box to look at their loved one in her



new home. The dead are lowered into the ground, their bodies filled with chemicals and preservatives so that flesh will cling to bone much longer than it should. Our dead are made to look alive, but what happens when that macabre wish is granted?

The dead that walk are not at peace. They yearn and hunger more than their dead bodies, dead minds or dying souls can bear. The only peace granted to them was snatched away; and in its place a gaping maw, hollow and bottomless, demands satisfaction. They may hunger for meat, or seek to quench a passion like the possessed dead. Regardless, the same eternity calls to them, ended only by destruction.

Zombies

Charlie stood on top of the church surveying the chaos below. Next to his muddy work boot sat 10 boxes of ammunition for his hunting rifle. Charlie could shoot a squirrel at 50 yards with his Winchester. The creatures milling around beneath him challenged his sanity, not his marksmanship.

Alice Dunley remained crouched on the lawn, picking at the open stomach wound of the dead gardener. Her bloated fingertips pushed into the cadaver's stomach but dropped most of the putrescent bounty before she could push it into her mouth. Hell of a church picnic, Charlie thought.

What the hell had done it? There were rumors that the priest had come back from his vacation in England a little... off. Like he'd been sick for a week, and then recovered on the night of that god-awful storm. Charlie had expected the picnic to be cancelled; Father Fitch not only organized, but cooked most of the food for that annual picnic.

Maybe he was still sick when he cooked the food, thought Charlie. Maybe that's what did it.

Every "person" on the lawn below turned at the sound of Charlie's gun discharging. Alice fell onto her back from the force of the shot. She struggled for a moment, like a turtle unable to right itself, and eventually rolled over onto all fours. The woman who used to bake Christmas cookies for everyone on her street crawled forward until she could push her mouth directly back into her food. The gardener did not respond. For whatever reason, he remained dead.

Charlie was not a film connoisseur. He liked action movies, he liked explosions. Although he rarely ventured out to the cinema, he suddenly remembered a black and white film he saw over three decades ago.

They're zombies!

As soon as the thought entered his mind, he squeezed the trigger and the rifle fired another shot, this time penetrating the top of Alice's skull and blowing a tennis-ball-sized hole out the back of her neck. Charlie whooped in satisfaction, but the cry died in his throat. Alice was still eating.

The Mindless Dead

Few monsters are as universally disquieting as zombies. Whether the soulless dead arrive in swarms signaling an apocalypse, or act alone taking cues from some distant master, the idea that some force could animate a dead body creates a sickening discomfort. Zombies are the most recognizable type of living dead, and are defined by their lack of cognitive ability. They do not reason and they will not spare anyone. Zombies possess no consciences and exist as creatures lower than the id. They serve their master, they eat or they kill.

In modern storytelling, zombies are most often used within the horror genre to create an “ark.” Normally the zombies are highly contagious, and serve as a force of nature that keeps the main characters together in the same place. The real conflict is often among the living humans. The zombies act as a flood, storm or war raging outside, keeping the characters close together and under tremendous stress.

Using a claustrophobic ark story in the World of Darkness is difficult. While characters may not often venture to different areas or cities, a highly contagious outbreak of zombism can quickly move a story outside the purview of the World of Darkness. When designing stories using zombies, take care to ensure that the creatures do not destroy the themes already established. Of course, thrusting the characters into a post-apocalyptic world filled with the living dead might make for a superb story, but that story is no longer a part of the World of Darkness. Storytellers should be prepared for stories with a different focus if they transplant characters into a world of the living dead.

Within isolated areas, however, the “hordes of walking dead” approach can still work. If the zombies aren’t infectious, or if there is no possible way for the infection to spread (say, the story takes place in a mountain town several days’ walk from the nearest city and the zombies don’t last that long), then the story arc becomes possible. Another possibility has the government quarantining an area without knowing the full situation. In any case, some pretty heavy suspension of disbelief might be required on the players’ parts to accept a return to normalcy after such a story, so think carefully before running it.

Zombies attract attention from mortal authorities, creating problems for vampires. The living dead can be extremely strong and difficult to kill, making a group of zombies a threat even to a werewolf. Zombies created by sorcerers or mages might be given a guiding instinct to hunt and destroy anything magical. Mages, despite their awesome power, are human. They are vulnerable to the psychological trauma of dead relatives beating down the front door. They are also vulnerable to said undead relatives tearing them limb from limb.

Storytellers should determine ahead of time how the zombies can be destroyed. The method of destruction is often a clue about the source of the undead, and

sometimes indicates the theme of the story. Killing them with a bullet to the head is certainly a classic, but a zombie being controlled by a sorcerer styling himself as a puppet master might return to death only if the piece of string in its mouth is removed. No matter how the zombies are killed, make sure the players are able to determine and execute the method before frustration ruins the fun.


Disease

Most modern films portray zombism as a disease. George Romero’s famous trilogy (*Night of the Living Dead*, *Dawn of the Dead* and *Day of the Dead*) keeps the source of the outbreak a mystery. The zombies are slow and nearly mindless, existing only to consume and destroy life around them. The newer film *28 Days Later* describes the origin of the disease and plays to modern fears of biological warfare. Whether the living dead in your chronicle are fast or slow, cannibalistic or purely violent, using a biological or technological origin creates certain themes in the story.

If the players are unable to fight the source of the living dead, as is the case with a disease, the story must become centered on containing the outbreak, or simply on survival. Panic and shock are excellent tools to use in this type of story. The zombies may appear normal from a distance and then attack before a character even realizes she is in danger. Until the details come to light, the players naturally fill in missing information with the worst possible scenario. Quarantining the town or county where all the characters live and then using infrequent television or radio communication to relay important information can be extremely suspenseful.

If the living dead are used as an epidemic, allowing the characters to stop or contain the infection may be satisfying. The mortal authorities may be quick to explain away the number of deaths and the quarantine could offer the characters a chance to act without immediate repercussions from law enforcement. Presenting a cure for the infection is normally anti-climactic. Unless the characters are inclined to spend their time in a lab or doing research (and the players enjoy roleplaying that kind of thing), a biological contagion might best be stopped by destroying everyone infected. If the characters are not inclined to search out a cure, centering the game on surviving the night or escaping the area are plausible alternatives.

The World of Darkness is filled with doors that should never be opened. A scientist experimenting with the building blocks of the human genome, or even trying to cure cancer, may usher a plague of the undead into the world. A disease that renders humans incapable of rational thought but does not necessarily kill them creates difficult decisions for the players. If the slimmest possibility for a cure exists, will your character still shoot her “undead” husband in the head?



Once the dust settles and the dead are put back in their earthen beds, what are the repercussions? Chances are good that people from various official and amateur organizations will want to interview any survivors. Medical personnel arriving on the scene will quarantine and thoroughly test anyone exposed to the contagion. How will the characters avoid revealing their true natures (in the case of vampires and werewolves)? Even if the characters manage to escape with little scrutiny, what are the other possible long-term effects? Vampire characters carrying the disease in their blood may begin the hellish ordeal anew the next time they feed.

Developing a story centered on the containment or destruction of disease-created zombies might lead to an excellent opportunity to continue the story when the characters discover that a powerful vampire or mage called for the experiments resulting in the epidemic. Even worse, the mastermind could be a normal human with tremendous political or financial power who answers to a darker supernatural intelligence.

Pitner, Texas

Doctor Henry Ellis was a good man. He devoted his life to virology, and made significant contributions to research mapping out how cancerous cells grow in the human body. If he knew that the repercussions of proceeding with a premature human test of his new cell treatment would cause the destruction of his hometown, he would have burned the documentation and never given it a second thought. Two weeks ago, Sarah Asher learned about Dr. Ellis' findings, and agreed to be the first test subject in his study. Her toe contained a malignant tumor that had spread so quickly that nearly her entire right leg was scheduled for amputation in less than a week. The study provided her the only chance of keeping use of her legs.

Sarah Asher is now able to walk, but she is no longer herself.

Sometime late in the night on her fourth day of treatment, she lost all higher brain function. She bit two nurses and killed three orderlies before escaping from the hospital. Dr. Ellis flew in that night. The nurses appeared to be healthy for the first two hours, but the viral process that Dr. Ellis intended to destroy only cancerous and harmful cells spread its way through their bodies, consuming the frontal lobes of the brain. Dr. Ellis won't be remembered for curing cancer. Instead, he caused an epidemic of the living dead.

After the first few hours of infection all thin membrane walls are breached. The eyes, nose, mouth and ears begin bleeding, and do not stop until the person is killed. The treatment designed to eradicate dangerous cells consumes the infected and causes them to hunt down and rip apart anything living. Those lucky enough to survive an attack normally join the ranks of the infected within hours. The town of Pitner is quarantined. Dr. Ellis is trapped in the hospital, desperately searching for a cure. No matter the outcome, the town is lost.

Sorcery

What's more frightening than a zombie? A zombie on a leash.

Though a sea of flesh-eating lobotomites is terrifying, the knowledge that a single person can raise up the dead to hunt down her enemies is even more unsettling. Rather than the panic and shock created by an outbreak, magic lends a story mystery and suspense. The real enemy hides behind spells and undead minions, creating immediate physical conflict as well as a pervasive feeling of intrigue.

When using magic or sorcery, the Storyteller must decide who commands and controls the living dead. The actions of the undead minion inevitably leave clues as to the identity or motivation of the sorcerer. Stories can be personal and localized; a jealous boyfriend with a *voodooienne* aunt may entreat her to raise a zombie to take care of someone making time with his girl (even better if a character is vying for her attention). Games with a larger scope might include a story about a mayoral candidate who employs a witch. Any time someone gets too close to finding the skeletons in his closet, the investigator disappears suddenly and without enough forensic evidence to make a case.

Voodoo

The most robust historical source for zombies probably lies in vodoun. A religion founded in Haiti during the 17th century, vodoun mixes ancient tribal practices of Africa with Catholicism. Using the more sensational and imaginary version of this religion, voodoo, immediately instills mystery and danger into a story.

"Zombie" comes from the Creole word *zombi*, which is derived from Nzambi, a West African deity. The term came into use only after William B. Seabrook recounted his experiences in the 1929 book *The Magic Island*.

"The eyes were the worst. It was not my imagination. They were in truth like the eyes of a dead man, not blind, but staring, unfocused, unseeing. The whole face, for that matter, was bad enough. It was vacant, as if there was nothing behind it. It seemed not only expressionless, but incapable of expression."

A practitioner of voodoo who uses dark magic, called a *bokor* or *caplatas*, mixes together a potion or powder and performs rituals meant to invoke Loa (spirits) to gain control over his intended target. The concoction is blown into the target's face, or he is made to ingest it. A popular theory regarding the reality of zombification is that the target's bodily functions are suppressed, stopping respiratory and

pulmonary functions long enough for the person to be declared dead and buried. The person wakes with a diminished capacity for reason due to oxygen deprivation — or such a strong belief in the religion — that the *bokor* can control the target. However the process works, the end result is terrifying.

In the World of Darkness, no such practical explanations are needed. A sorcerer or mage familiar with voodoo is perfectly capable of creating an automaton from a dead body. A dark magician using sympathetic voodoo magic could create dolls representing the recently deceased. Gathering a bit of hair or tooth as well as some of the grave dirt would allow him to summon up the dead as personal servants. What would happen if the characters break into his sanctum while he is gone, only to find a doll that looks disturbingly like one of their own?

No matter the particulars of a chronicle, zombies acting as servants offer great opportunities for physical conflict leading to investigation. If elements of magic and religion are used, the tone provides more depth than a standard hunt and kill scenario. In keeping with the bleak tenor of the World of Darkness, reveal to the characters that a method for returning the mindless servants back to normal exists — after they have killed a few of them.

We All Need Some Body

Any time someone animates a corpse, the next logical question should be “Where did the corpse come from?” Provided that the zombies are not being used as an epidemic or to force the characters together into a confined space, every undead foe was willfully removed from its resting place by the person or thing intent on using the cadaver.

If the zombie master is connected with the coroner's office or the local morgue, investigation should yield some clues pointing the characters in the right direction. Grave robbing is illegal, and characters able to check criminal backgrounds might discover that a newcomer to the area was arrested in several other states for digging up bodies. A number of the sample story ideas in this chapter include a discussion of where the raw materials for the undead threat could come from.

Gravedigger

Emery Caldwell returned to America in 1973 after a four-year tour in Vietnam. His wife, due to have their first child nine months after the night he shipped out, found another man to father the little boy. Emery was not angry, and did not seek revenge. He got a job digging graves, and tracked his son's

growth and success over the years. Emery never made his presence or significance known to the boy. Eventually, the young man's curiosity and bright mind attracted the attention of a mystical order. Emery's son was promised a path to truth and ultimate power. The initiation ritual killed the 24-year-old, and his biological father decided normal law enforcement would be of no use.

Emery spent over six years researching the true origins and capabilities of sorcerers. Using bribes, intimidation, violence, and no small amount of luck, Emery stumbled upon a ritual effective even for those mortals unable to wield magical energies. Emery painted the symbols he discovered into the dirt of a new grave the night before the burial. The determined and sad old man watched the fresh cadaver crawl from the soil, and then sent it to destroy the men who killed his son.

In the past year, Emery has moved three times. The crafty but desperate hunter successfully destroyed all but two of the cabal responsible for his son's death. Even when they are gone, Emery knows that the darkness hides monsters wherever he might go. Every town has a graveyard, and someone has to dig the graves.

Corruption of the Flesh

Somewhere between an uncontrollable disease and the dark intent of a sorcerer stands mindless evil. Places and objects remember what goes on around them. The resonance of wrongdoing fills rooms and instills normal, man-made items with horrible power. When a place or thing is witness or accomplice to sufficient degradation of the human spirit, it creates a blight.

Finding the source of unholy zombies awakened by the taint of a place or thing is difficult. Unlike sorcerers using the undead as their servants, blight leaves fewer signs and evidence pointing back to the source. By the time the characters determine the “how” and “why” of the situation, the body count might be extremely high.

The characters can handle a tainted place or thing in a variety of ways. Blessing or purifying the area might do the trick. Destroying the building or item could stop the hordes of undead... or might send them out into the world with only their hunger to guide them.

A great way to keep a blighted object or area from becoming a one-episode story is to mention newspaper articles or mysterious events to the characters subtly, over the course of several chapters. The local graveyard could contain a crypt that awakens one of its residents each full moon during the 100-year anniversary of the crypt's construction. The number of zombies is limited to 12 or 13, and the characters could become involved in another story investigating who built the crypt and why it was given such power.

Animals

Of course all of the above discussion can apply to four-legged zombies as well. Undead animals evoke a slightly different but no less horrific reaction than human zombies. Humans are often instinctively afraid of animals. Combining that fear with undeath is great for horror storytelling.

Animal zombies do more to unsettle players when they are not used for physical confrontation. A character coming home to find her pet cat standing by its food dish, begging to be fed, is perfectly creepy — provided the cat was hit by a car and buried a month ago.

Brains à la Carte

Numerous options exist for Storytellers when designing zombies for their chronicles. Important consideration should be given to the type of threat the undead will pose. Normal humans, vampires, werewolves and mages are all vulnerable to different adversaries; and zombies are versatile enemies with countless variations and power levels.

When creating zombie antagonists, keep the characters in mind. Supernatural characters are often resourceful enough with their powers to neutralize an undead threat. Tailoring the undead menace to suit an individual game is important. Vampires are more threatened by the possibility of attracting undue attention or limiting their food supply. Werewolves can handle individual threats; but if they are not able to discern the real source of the zombies, they will eventually be overwhelmed or caught unawares. Mages are the most immediately vulnerable, but they are the most likely to determine the motivations and identity of the antagonist. Instead of the zombies attacking the characters directly, perhaps the mages find themselves in a situation where they are not physically capable of stopping the undead servants from fulfilling their mission. The players need to get creative to stop a foe that does not feel pain, will not die and has no conscience.

Attributes

Zombies are incapable of meaningful social interaction and higher brain function, so only three Attributes need to be determined: Power, Finesse and Resilience. Power describes the zombie's physical strength; Finesse indicates basic motor control and awareness; and Resilience includes the physical fortitude of the living dead as well as the strength of the disease, enchantment or blight keeping the corpse active. Each of the three traits ranges from 1 to 10, but only the most powerful zombies should be assigned traits above 5.

Skills

Zombies possess no Skills. Their capabilities are described solely by their Attributes. Zombies may retain some small piece of their former memories or intelligence, but the Storyteller should purchase the Limited Intelligence Aspect for the zombie rather than assign Skills (see Aspects below).

Merits

Zombies do not have Merits. Any special abilities available to the zombies are described by Aspects (see below).

Advantages

Some of the common traits in this section are determined differently for zombies. Additionally, zombies possess the unique trait Physical Integrity, ranging from 1 to 10. See the description below.

Defense: Zombies do not have the survival instinct necessary to dodge or block incoming attacks. As such, their Defense is 0.

Health: Zombies start with a number of Health points equal to their Size ratings. They do not add their Resilience to their Health. They receive additional Health points for every level of the Tough Aspect taken. Zombies do not suffer from wound penalties.

Initiative: A zombie's Initiative rating is equal to its Finesse.

Morality: Zombies do not have a Morality rating.

Physical Integrity: Physical Integrity is a special trait describing the state of the zombie's undead body. A zombie created from a corpse with all of its limbs and no missing parts starts with an Integrity of 10. Missing both legs or both arms would indicate a starting trait of 5. Physical Integrity limits the maximum number of dice in the zombie's dice pool. This trait also describes the overall functionality of the zombie, meaning that the reduction of integrity is not necessarily decomposition or losing limbs. Zombies created through magical means could slowly bleed off the energies needed to reanimate them; or a disease creating the living dead might consume the corpses from the inside out leaving them useless after days, weeks or months.

Every (Resilience) days, zombies lose one point of Physical Integrity. Under most circumstances, Physical Integrity cannot be replenished once it is lost. Once all of a zombie's Health points are depleted, subtract any damage done from the remaining points of Physical Integrity. Once this trait reaches zero the zombie is neutralized. A zombie with one point of Physical Integrity left usually represents the classic decapitated, but still dangerous, zombie head.

Size: Standard size values are used for zombies (5 for a human adult corpse). See the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for animal and child Size values (p. 94).

Speed: A zombie's speed is equal its Finesse or Power, whichever is lower. No species factor is added. For zombies with greater Speed see the Quick Movement Aspect.

Willpower: Zombies do not possess Willpower.

Other Systems

Damage and Healing: Zombies do not differentiate between bashing, lethal and aggravated damage. They cannot normally heal damage at all, unless the Regeneration Aspect is purchased. Zombies do not suffer wound penalties.

Attacks: Zombies can attack in any method that a human being can, but very few of them have the intelligence necessary to use a weapon, though some can manage to swing an object like a club (Finesse of 4 or more). Bite attacks inflict bashing damage unless the Vicious Bite Aspect is purchased.

Exorcisms and Abjurations: Zombies are affected in the same ways as ghosts by holy symbols (see p. 214 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*) if they possess the Unholy Weakness (see p. 28). They are not affected by exorcisms, because they are reanimated rather than possessed.

Zombie Aspects

All zombies have special powers and qualities depending on the particulars of their rise to undeath. Aspects cost one creation point unless otherwise stated, and some can be purchased multiple times. See zombie creation guidelines below. Storytellers should create their own Aspects to suit the needs of their stories.

Note: All zombies must either purchase the Indestructible Aspect or take a Vulnerability Weakness.

- **Autonomous Parts** — Even after an individual piece of the zombie is removed from the whole, it still maintains a basic will and connection to the zombie. Hands can crawl on the ground and decapitated heads can bite. Physical Integrity is split among separated parts instead of being lost. An arm worth two points of Physical Integrity would have two dice for all of its actions. This Aspect costs two creation points.

- **Contagious** — A common element of zombie stories, this Aspect describes the virulence of the zombism. Zombies created through voodoo or other magics do not normally have this Aspect. The number of times the Aspect is purchased determines how easily the undeath is passed on.

1	The zombie must kill a person for him or her to join the ranks of the undead.
2	The zombie can infect dead targets with saliva or blood.
3	Communicable through blood or saliva to living targets.
4	Airborne. Welcome to the apocalypse.

- **Death's Voice** — The zombie emits a sound capable of unnerving any living being who hears it. Anyone who can hear the zombie's moans for more than (Composure) consecutive hours must roll Resolve + Composure – the zombie's Power. Failure means the listener loses one Willpower point, while a dramatic failure means the character immediately gains a derangement. The player must make this Resolve + Com-

posure roll each day that the character is exposed to Death's Voice, but for each past failed roll, the player receives a –1 modifier. So if a character has been exposed to Death's Voice for four consecutive days and the player has failed the roll twice, on the fifth day the player receives a –2 modifier. One full day without hearing the sound negates this modifier and the player rolls the character's full Resolve + Composure if the character comes into contact with Death's Voice again. Vampires are less vulnerable to this Aspect by virtue of being dead already. They add their Blood Potency to the roll.

- **Indestructible** — The only way to destroy a zombie with this ability is to reduce its Physical Integrity to 0. The zombie is not vulnerable to a specific form of attack or hit location (such as destroying the brain). If this Aspect is not purchased, the Vulnerability Weakness must be taken. This Aspect costs two creation points.

- **Limited Intelligence** — The zombie is capable of extremely basic problem solving. Zombies with Limited Intelligence may turn doorknobs, climb ladders (if their motor control allows), and pick up basic hand-held weapons to use. Zombies created through voodoo or other magical means are most likely to possess this Aspect.

- **Magic Resistance** — The zombie's soulless form is animated by powerful magic, a primal evil or savage disease. Any attempt to use magic to put the undead back to rest is less effective. Each purchase of this Aspect adds a +1 bonus to the zombie's Resilience when resisting the effects of magic.

- **Pack Instinct** — This Aspect describes a group of zombies created by the same source, and tied into an instinctive hive mind. The number of times this Aspect is taken dictates the range of the telepathic bond. A single zombie can bring down an army of undead should it find a source of food, or the target of its master's wrath.

1	1 mile
2	10 miles
3	1,000 miles
4	10,000 miles

- **Preservation** — Normally, a zombie degrades gradually over time. This represents continued rot and decay, the re-animating disease eventually dying, the zombie starving to death, or the magical rituals maintaining undeath weakening. Purchasing this Aspect increases the time before the undead disintegrates. Normally 1 point of Physical Integrity is lost every (Resilience) days.

1	1 point every (Resilience) weeks
2	1 point every (Resilience) months
3	No degradation

- **Quick Movement** — The first dot of this Aspect gives the zombie a Speed equal to Power + Finesse (instead of the lower of the two). Each additional dot adds +5 to the zombie's Speed and Initiative. bloomer

- **Regeneration** — The zombie's Health points return at a rate dependent on how many times this

Aspect is purchased. Without this Aspect, zombies cannot heal damage. Even with this Aspect, zombies cannot heal damage inflicted through a Vulnerability Weakness.

1	1 Health per day
2	1 Health per hour
3	1 Health per minute

Note: Regeneration only allows Health recovery, not Physical Integrity.

- **Sensitivity** — Each time this Aspect is purchased the zombie is keenly aware of one type of target or phenomenon. Possibilities include: living animals, dead animals, magic, evil, virtue, holy ground, or anything else the Storyteller conceives. If someone is actively hiding, make a contested roll using the zombie's Finesse with a +3 bonus versus the character actively trying to hide. Appropriate dice pools vary depending on what type of sensitivity is being used. Composure + Stealth should be rolled to avoid detection by a zombie sensitive to living animals, where as a Wits + Occult roll may hide from magical detection. Supernatural stealth powers operate normally; the player opposes the Finesse roll with the appropriate roll for the power.

- **Special Attack** — Each purchase of Special Attack purchased grants the zombie one of the attacks listed below. Add a +2 modifier to the zombie's Power whenever making a special attack purchased as an Aspect. Zombies without a specific special attack may still perform the maneuver, but do not receive the additional dice given by the Special Attack Aspect.

Bite — The zombie takes a hunk out of the nearest piece of meat (this inflicts bashing damage unless the Vicious Bite Aspect is also purchased).

Tackle — Particularly scary when performed by an otherwise-slow walking dead, the zombie lurches forward violently, knocking the target to the ground.

Crushing Grip — The zombie can crush bone or penetrate skin with its deadly hand strength.

Entangle — The full weight of the zombie is applied to the target and the undead grapples with the victim. See grappling rules in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** (pp. 157-159).

Haymaker — The fearsome zombie punch. The creature swings its arm like a club and bludgeons the target with dead flesh and bone.

- **Tough** — Every purchase of Tough adds two Health points.

- **Undead Strength** — For each purchase of this Aspect, the zombie gains a +1 bonus on any roll involving physical strength.

- **Unholy** — The Zombie suffers damage from blessed items as described on p. 214 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. Abjurations (p. 213) force the zombie to leave the immediate area rather.

- **Vicious Bite**: The zombie inflicts lethal damage with a bite attack. Without this Aspect, zombies inflict bashing damage just as normal mortals do.

Zombie Weaknesses

Like Aspects, Weakness stem from the method by which the zombie or zombies returned to the living world. Each weakness taken adds two creation points to the zombie. As with Aspects, some can be taken multiple times. See the creation guidelines below. Storytellers should create their own Weaknesses to suit the needs of their story.

Note: All zombies must have a Vulnerability Weakness, for which they receive no extra points. The Indestructible Aspect removes this requirement.

- **Brittle** — The zombie corpse is old or the re-animation process weakened the physical shell of the undead. All attacks made against the zombie inflict double damage.

- **Decomposition** — The mobile cadaver started with serious trauma to major limbs. Every two creation points gained via this Weakness lowers the zombie's starting Physical Integrity rating by -2.

- **Hunger** — The zombie never stops feeding. Classic zombie cuisine normally consists of human brains and flesh, but some zombies might have a more restricted palate. The zombie exists only to eat; therefore, it is easily distracted and always pursues the most immediate food source.

- **Intensely Stupid** — Few zombies ever join Mensa, but zombies with this Weakness are incapable of even the most fundamental discernment. Any movement or sign of life attracts the monster. Anyone it cannot see for more than a few seconds no longer exists to the mentally deficient undead.

- **Residual Memories** — While redeeming or curing the zombie except through destruction is impossible, the creature possesses a few salient memories and feelings from life. When presented with a loved one or other appropriate stimulus, the zombie will stop attacking for (Resilience) turns. After this time, the feeling fades and even the undead's nearest and dearest are not safe.

- **Short-Lived** — The disease or enchantment granting unlife is volatile or destructive to the zombie's body. The rate at which the zombie loses Physical Integrity is equal to Resilience in hours, not days.

- **Vulnerability** — Damage to the brain, fire, and destroying the heart are all common examples of vulnerabilities for a zombie. The destruction method for a magically created zombie might be more esoteric or not reliant on physical damage (destroying the container the person's soul is trapped in for example). A zombie that suffers damage through its Vulnerability is destroyed instantly. Zombies Vulnerable to fire burn to ash in seconds, while a zombie Vulnerable to damage to the brain falls to the ground, truly dead, if shot in the head (see the Specified Targets rules on p. 165 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

Creation Guidelines

When creating a zombie for a World of Darkness story, power level is an important consideration. Vampires and werewolves need physically stronger and more durable undead to pose a threat, while magically resistant or sensitive cadavers are well suited to challenge mages.

A simple and effective system for creating balanced zombies starts with the following basic traits:

Power: 2
Finesse: 1
Resilience: 2
Health: 5
Initiative: 1
Physical Integrity: 10
Size: 5
Speed: 1

Assign a number of creation points to the zombie depending on the desired power level. The more zombies being manufactured, the less powerful each one should be. Basing the strength of the zombies on their numbers is normally appropriate. When constructing zombies this way, every zombie has the same game traits. For instance, if a mage uses a powerful spell that raises five corpses as extremely powerful zombies, the Storyteller creates one set of game statistics using 25 to 30 creation points. Each of the zombies has the same statistics.

Less than 10	25 to 30 Creation Points
Less than 50	20 to 25 Creation Points
Less than 100	15 to 20 Creation Points
Less than 1000	10 to 15 Creation Points
More than 1000	5 to 10 Creation Points

Raising any of the zombie's Attributes by one dot costs two creation points. Most Aspects cost one point each (though there are exceptions, and some can be purchased multiple times; see the individual Aspect listings). Weaknesses provide an extra two points for each Weakness assigned, with the exception of the mandatory Vulnerability. Remember to account for the power level of the characters, and design the undead minions so they can enhance the story without just feeling like fodder. Two sample zombies are provided at the end of the chapter (p. 39).

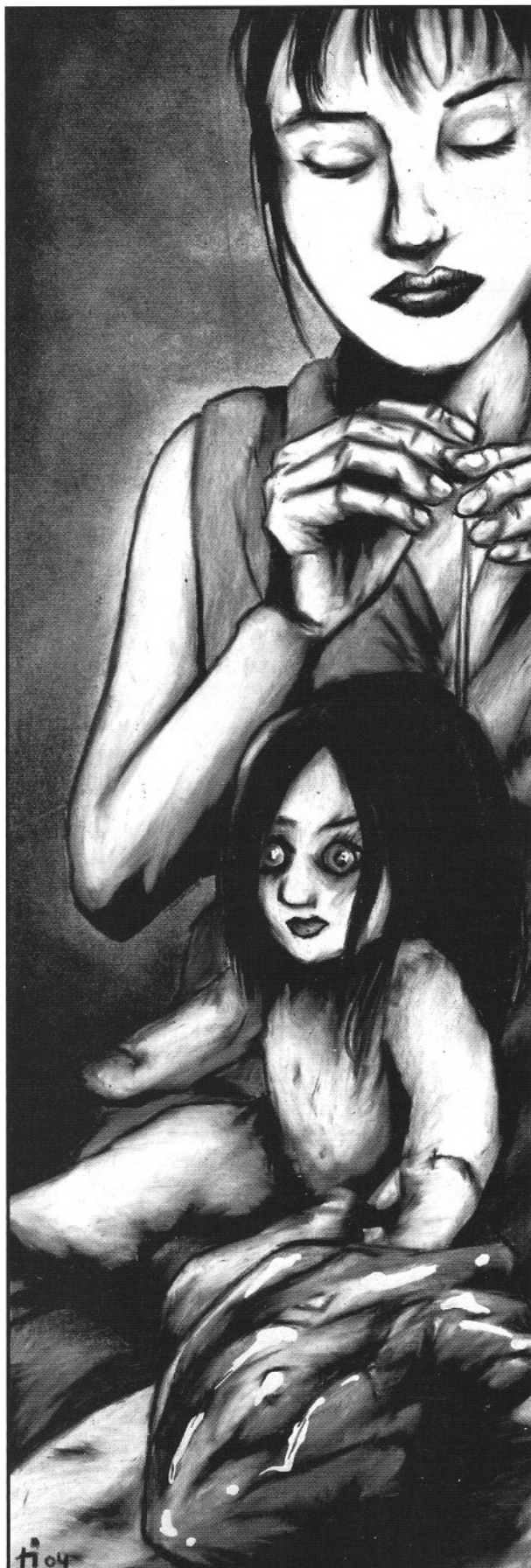
Imbued

"Stitching by hand is a lost art. Sewing machines ruined a fine craft." Theresa spoke in a quiet but assured voice to the project on her sewing table. "We don't want any of your stitches showing, do we?"

The room with her sewing table held little else in the way of furniture. Bolts of fabric hung suspended from the walls by plastic hooks, and the smell of formaldehyde and potpourri waged a never-ending war. Several large coolers sat against the back wall, mist from the dried ice creeping out the sides and winding tendrils along the hardwood floor.

"Some people have no patience. We need patience to do things right, don't we, little Doll?"

Doll looked up at her with lifeless glass eyes. Theresa's creation shifted and stretched each time she pulled the long, curved needle through Doll's skin. The motion formed a rhythm, and the hollow effigy swayed and danced along with Theresa's strong hands.



"Jack and Melissa are gone now. My babies left me, but you won't leave me. I love you so much, Doll."

Theresa settled into her work, the time passing quickly as she hummed gently to her creation. As the last stitch pulled taut in Doll's skin, Theresa sat upright.

"Oh! I have a surprise for you!"

Theresa stood and walked to a bright red cooler. Thick fog spilled out as she opened the lid. Theresa, glowing with satisfaction, displayed the plastic bag containing a human heart to Doll.

"I got this for you last night. We are going to have so much fun!"

Pieces and Parts

Another famous and persistent creature in modern horror storytelling is the imbued monster. Not all such assembled creatures gain the conscience of Frankenstein's creation. The antagonists and characters discussed here include any sentient creature that was pieced together from once-living flesh. The intelligence and psyche of the beast might be human, but no matter the process its creator uses, the child receives no soul.

Golems

Instilling sentience or basic life into dead material quickly conjures the idea of golems. While the process is basically the same, the tone achieved by using a creature made from human or once-living flesh is much different from that inspired by a servant constructed from earth, metal or any other non-living material.

Many of the themes and ideas remain consistent, but the description and discussion of imbued in this chapter includes only creations made at least partially from dead flesh.

The practice of creating earthen golems dates far back to kabalistic practices described in the Torah. Jewish holy men would write divine words onto the creation, or onto parchment, and so long as the words remained intact the man-made creature persisted.

Golems occasionally became tainted, destroying the villages they were meant to protect, or growing tired of continuous labor with no rest on the Sabbath. No golem ever received a human soul. The creatures were created in the image of Man, not God, and never received the true gift of life. The imbued are essentially golems, but with viscera. Rather than clay and dust they contain flesh and guts. The imbued's body is closer to human, making the lack of living spirit even more painful and disturbing.

Living dead constructed from flesh and instilled with basic life feel intense urges without understanding their sources or consequences. A dead child whose heart is replaced with a mystic gemstone might awaken and appear normal. When he becomes curious how the human body functions, however, his parents could return home to an autopsy on the kitchen table.

Imbued do not possess the inner compass afforded by a human soul. They lack an integral aspect of life, the spirit granted through natural creation. While some can exist without homicidal tendencies, the intensity of their emotions makes controlling their impulses is a high-impossible effort.

Even an imbued with a conscience and sense of right and wrong eventually becomes warped by people's reactions to it. The only other option is a life of solitude. The imbued not gifted with gentle demeanors are fierce and often descend into sociopathy. An intense anger and rage fuels these beings' piecemeal shells.

While the imbued are not undead in the traditional sense, many of the major themes are still applicable. These creations exist in a half-life. The ragged and cold flesh on their bodies keeps them from physical closeness with others, and their alien and innocent minds ensure their isolation. The constructed living dead are extremely tactile. They exist in a world that is only half-real to them, and most need to touch everything in order to be sure it is not a dream.

Storytellers should be careful not to make light of the imbued in their chronicles. The temptation for these monsters to become a joke is strong, but they can also touch a deep chord in players. Every human feels the need to create, whether the creation is another life, a piece of art or an unforgettable moment. Imbued exist in the World of Darkness because our creations live outside of us, and often take a dark life of their own.

A Face Only a Mother Could Love

Much like the other living dead, the appearances of imbued can vary. Some are able to pass as human in a crowd, while others look like a patchwork of leathered skin. Most imbued are either undead, or possess mechanical, electronic or magically enchanted parts. Those imbued that are able to walk among humans without fear of being immediately found out still suffer from feelings of isolation and lack of companionship. They may not hide away in abandoned buildings or remain trapped in sanctums or labs, but the presentable imbued know the real meaning of "alone in a crowd."

Another consideration for imbued that make contact with the world is the legal existence necessary for so much of everyday life. The monster may pass with a hat and baggy clothes, but how will it get a driver's license or a steady job? Most imbued do not need to eat, but living on the streets degrades the inhuman spirit of the creature until it turns depraved and violent.

Brave New World

Humanity does not restrain its curiosity. No reverence or fear sanctifies the secrets of life and death. Science in the World of Darkness can touch and attract alien and evil intelligences. Such beings might promote discovery and growth in human understanding for their own wicked ends.

Technology is a great aspect to introduce into World of Darkness chronicles. A laboratory or operating room can be alien territory for supernatural characters. Science and technology offers a venue for normal mortals to shine. While the vampire can entrance a room full of people, the werewolf stands as an invincible warrior and the mage bends reality to her will, a scientist in the World of Darkness needs no supernatural powers to open gateways to new worlds or drastically change the realm of possibility.

Do not stray too far into super-science when adding man-made technologies into the chronicle. Ray guns and colorful control panels do not inspire fear. An unmarked office building with dingy and cold labs in the sub-basement is a great environment for an imbued's birth. Magic and the supernatural are easy to dismiss as impossible. Real technology allows surgeons to operate on patients across the globe, entire limbs to be re-attached, and animals to be cloned. Players should walk away from games involving World of Darkness science worried that they will read about something similar in the newspaper the next morning.

The players' characters should become involved in the advancing discoveries of humanity when those discoveries cross over into the darkness. Make sure that the characters are personally involved before calling them in to the situation. While they could read about experiments gone awry at the local biotech lab, why not start the story with an employee of the lab getting hurt by the latest creation, and telling a family member (the player's character) the truth?

Other Side of the Tracks

A doctor, schooled in medicine and the occult, recently set up shop in the characters' city, and turned the nearby homeless and criminal communities into a stockpile of fresh parts for his experiments into the nature of life and death. He hasn't had a successful experiment yet. He ejects his failures back into the world, but they now possess bodies with missing or additional parts. The street-dwellers are stripped of their memories, and the spirit injected into each created body is not quite human. The doctor's grand design should be of some concern. What exactly is he seeking to learn, and to what end would someone so amoral put such knowledge?

Invocation

Mystical creation of an imbued is similar to the animation of the dead discussed in the previous section on zombies. Often the creations are viewed as servants or slaves, but imbued possess greater mental faculties and the potential to revolt. An old enemy might approach characters when her creation threatens to destroy her and other lives.

Rituals invoking life in dead flesh are often elaborate and costly. A sorcerer or mage interested in creating an imbued is not simply looking for a servant. Zombies and near mindless automatons can accomplish simple tasks. Gathering the power necessary to fuel empty flesh with a semblance of life only makes sense if the mage is looking for knowledge, accomplishment or companionship.

A will-worker who manages to instill a spark of life into her creation often treats the imbued as a child. Characters will not often see these creatures sent on menial errands or dangerous tasks because of the bond between creator and child. Of course, not all parent-child relationships are healthy, and it stands to reason anyone willing to create a person with dead parts and then use arcane powers to bring it to life might not be particularly stable or sane.

What happens when an imbued is more compassionate than its creator? Players' characters might be approached by a Frankenstein-esque monster after it has been instructed to kill one of them by its creator. The imbued could go to the characters for help, but what if loyalty to its parent eventually overrides the reluctance to kill? The players' characters enter ambiguous territory when fighting an imbued. Physically, they can be monstrous and powerful, but mentally they are often just children.

3121 Sycamore Lane

Theresa Zorschwinger's house sits looming at the end of Sycamore Lane. Her recent arrest for the killing of three local girls sparked rumors of Satanic rituals and hauntings. Other residents of Sycamore Lane whisper darkly about the coolers she kept full of limbs and organs, and that several pieces were never found. Neighborhood children swear they see someone moving in the windows, and often dare one another to knock on the front door. Parents cast nervous glances at the abandoned estate, but admonish their kids for being superstitious.

The children are right. The house is not empty. Doll (p. 40) waits patiently for her mother to return. She is worried and lonely, but believes the woman who gave her life would not abandon her. Doll spends her hours sewing and jumping rope. The new eyes her mother gave her before leaving cry nearly every night. When her trust gives way and she feels betrayed, the next neighborhood child brave enough to approach the house could become her new playmate.



Some Assembly Required

Of all the walking dead, the capabilities of the imbued are most dependent on their creators. The intent and energy focused into bringing the creature to life instills it with whatever abilities and powers it possesses. A short list of potential supernatural powers follows the discussion of standard traits. Storytellers should add powers and abilities to an imbued based on the method of its creation, and the capabilities of its creator.

Attributes

Imbued are described with the standard nine Attributes. Strength, Stamina, Resolve and Presence tend to be high. Dexterity, Composure, Manipulation and Wits rarely rise above two dots. Strength and Stamina can potentially be above 5. Intelligence varies greatly, but even a genius imbued does not immediately have the wisdom or experience of a human adult.

Skills

The Skills available to an imbued depend entirely on its creator. These living dead do not normally physically degrade like their mindless cousins, so long-lived imbued could master many Skills if so inclined. Unless the process of creation involved providing the monster with a set of memories, it begins its life with no more knowledge or experience than a young child.

Merits

Much like Skills, the Merits available to the imbued are dependent on the creator.

Advantages

All Advantages are determined normally, with the following exceptions.

Health: Imbued begin more than the normal number of starting Health dots. They receive (Stamina x 2) + Size rather than simply Stamina + Size.

Imbued suffer damage and wound penalties just as mortals do. They do not normally suffer aggravated damage from any special form of attack, but a creator who fears that his experiment might turn on him later might install a vulnerability to a specific substance or attack.

Morality: Imbued have a base Morality of 5, and at least one derangement.

Abjurations and Exorcisms: Imbued are not affected by abjurations, exorcisms or blessed items (see pp. 213-214 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*).

Supernatural Powers

Imbued are unique to their creators, so no two will be identical (unless the creator finds a way to mass produce). Provided below are some examples of powers available to many imbued, but nothing says these creatures need extraordinary abilities. Their physical resili-

ience and unpredictable natures can offer enough strength and danger for many stories, particularly with characters who are not supernatural beings. Use the examples below to customize an imbued for your story, and add whatever abilities seem appropriate for the creature.

- **Assimilation** — A gruesome but effective ability, the living dead may consume or attach body parts and use them immediately. The part must be fresh. Roll Stamina + Resolve. If successful, the new part is functional. When using this ability after being damaged, the number of successes determines the number of Health points restored. The imbued might have to stitch new parts to gory stumps, swallow organs, or merely press the body parts to her flesh and let her animated form absorb them. Health points gained in this manner can't exceed a creature's Health dots.

- **Bond** — Normally reserved for the creature's creator, this ability can be used with anyone the imbued loves or hates. The imbued always knows in what direction the person is, and if they are alive or dead. The Storyteller spends a point of the imbued's Willpower and rolls Presence + Resolve. The power lasts as long as the imbued feels strongly toward the target. If the imbued is no longer passionate about the target, the power fades. Imbued can only have a Bond toward one person at a time, but that Bond can change targets.

- **Enhanced Strength** — The manufactured body housing the imbued's twisted spirit is capable of tremendous power. By spending one Willpower point, the imbued's Strength increases by 3 for the remainder of the scene.

- **Heart's Truth** — The imbued views the world through the unfiltered eyes of a child. The creature is able to see the desires of others, and know when they are lying. Roll Wits + Empathy in a contested roll against the target's Composure + Subterfuge. Success indicates the imbued knows when the target is lying for the rest of the scene, and gains an understanding of what the character desires most.

- **Numb**: The imbued does not suffer wound penalties, and in fact might not even notice attacks that inflict one or two Health points of damage.

- **Regeneration** — The imbued heals wounds inflicted on its undead body at the same rate as a normal human. Additionally, as a reflexive action, you may spend one Willpower point for the imbued to heal all bashing damage or one point of lethal damage.

Creation Guidelines

The key to designing a compelling imbued for use in a World of Darkness chronicle is to understand who created the monster, and why. The apple never falls far from the tree, after all. Even if the imbued possesses a conscience and generally tries to act in a moral fashion, make sure to display the frighteningly unpredictable nature of these creatures. Just as children are capable of purely altruistic acts in one breath and shame-

fully selfish acts the next, imbued rarely behave with society's commonly accepted morals and restrictions.

If the imbued is created with magic, the creature may be resistant to or even savvy with that form of sorcery. The magic is likely to function as an instinct or intuitive understanding, but some created undead may study mystic arts intently. Living dead made with modern technology might benefit from armored plating, built-in weapons, or even cybernetics. Storytellers should use caution when adding super-science into their chronicles, but in the right doses a techno-imbued can put supernatural characters out of their elements.

Revenants

I watched the apartment for over an hour before the boyfriend left. This was reconnaissance, after all — while I could deal with the girl, I certainly didn't want to tangle with her love interest and whatever piece he might happen to be packing. My boss has heavies who can deal with gun-toting gangbangers, but I'm not one of them. My goal was to get her alone for a little chat, just me and the Voodoo Bitch, and determine whether she could offer us anything or if she needed to be neutralized.

I knocked on her door. What else would I do? I'm not some damn burglar, and B&E is not my chief talent. Voodoo Bitch answered it fast enough, peering out the door, looking around and behind me before even acknowledging me. Little bells jingled against the doorknob as she pulled the door open.

"What do you want?" she asked. Her accent was faint but noticeable, her tongue curling around her vowels just barely. She didn't look like much of a voodoo priestess, with her bare feet and long dark hair, but none of us last very long going off first appearances. I leveled my gaze on her, locking my eyes with hers.

"Let me in," I said, slowly and clearly, seeing her eyes glaze over slightly. She stepped backward, out of my way, and I walked through her doorway into a small, dingy apartment. Few lights burned around a central room largely devoid of furniture, with the exception of a single low table strewn with bowls, string, knives and various herbs I didn't recognize. Even the bundles of flowers hanging from the ceiling couldn't disguise the faint aroma of human death or the thin scent of chicken blood. With nothing else to sit on, I perched on the edge of the table. Voodoo Bitch still stood by the door, looking vaguely confused. I beckoned her over, extending a friendly hand. She sidled closer, but hesitated when I gestured for her to sit.

"Sit." I ordered, and she quickly dropped to the table next to me. I grinned at her for making things easier for me. "OK, Voodoo Bitch," I said, smiling, giving her a good look at my descending fangs. "Let's talk about these new friends you've been making. I'd ask them myself, but someone's gone and sewn up their mouths." Just then, I heard the tiny bells

jingle on the door behind me. "Who's there?" I demanded, before the door could open all the way.

"My boyfriend," the Voodoo Bitch answered, her lips curling into a wicked little smile. I felt my skin start to crawl. Something was most definitely not right here.

The door flew open and in strode the gangbanger, baseball bat in hand. I looked into his pale blue eyes, unnerving in his dark face.

"Stop!" I ordered, but he kept walking toward me. "Stop!"

"I told the bitch no company when I ain't here," he said calmly. Caught in his piercing gaze, I couldn't even move when he brought down the bat.

Inner Demons

The body was put to rest, a eulogy read. Family members shed their tears and said their prayers. The casket was lowered into the ground, but what happens when the dead are not ready to leave our world? Not acting as a mindless servant or soulless killer, and far from the horrific childishness of the imbued, revenants bring all the passion and desire of the human spirit back into their dead forms.

After death, a person's soul can remain so attached to something or someone in the world that it will not move on (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 209). When the attachment is strong enough, and additional circumstances are present, the soul can re-enter the body to fulfill a final wish. Normally, the person's spirit is given the opportunity by a sorcerer or powerful spirit. Nothing is free, of course; so once the soul leaves its body a second (and final) time, the piper must be paid.

An alternate and darker type of revenant also exists. An inhuman, intelligent spirit might find a way to possess a corpse. Dark and powerful rituals are often used to create such a being, but in some instances a person's death might be traumatic or sudden enough to leave the spiritual path to his flesh open. If the timing is perfect, the body might not die, leaving the alien spirit a living human vessel as a tool to achieve its ends.

Regardless of their natures, all revenants share two common qualities. First, they exist on borrowed time. Human spirits re-animating their former flesh often maintain the connection only long enough to accomplish a particular task. More powerful spirits or particularly potent human souls might persist longer, but need a source of energy to draw from in order to remain connected to the physical world. Second, the revenant is a creature of passion. Existence without feeling forces detachment from the world; so even revenants without a singular purpose often seek out places of great emotional resonance, and are attracted to powerful people (vampires, werewolves and mages often fit the bill).

Revenants are useful in a story as recurring antagonists, but often serve better as the center for a short story within the chronicle. Nearly any power level is possible with this type of living dead. Storytellers should

customize a revenant character to serve either as an adversary to the players' characters, or as a wild card within the setting. If the characters frequently share a goal or purpose with a revenant they will see the raw power available to the restless dead. All the better to inspire tension and fear when their aims are no longer aligned, and the passion of the walking dead turns against them.

When playing revenants as supporting characters or enemies, Storytellers should always allow emotion and passion to rise to the surface. If a revenant bottles up or cuts off the fire inside of him, his body will drop to the ground, a lifeless husk. The most powerful of the walking dead walk a tightrope, relying on intense spiritual and emotional energy to exist, while dangerously close to being consumed by their passions.

Unfinished Business

Sometimes even the powerful current of death cannot break a person's grip on this world. Someone desperately clinging to the world can become a ghost. A person consumed by her passion, her devotion to staying in this plane regardless of consequence, can become a revenant.

The human spirit is normally incapable of taking up residence in a different corpse (in the case of revenants), but exceptions might be made if the body is of particular significance. A family member, close friend or even hated enemy could possess the requisite levels of resonance needed for the restless soul to accept the new home.

Physically the person appears much like she did in life. If the corpse was preserved with formaldehyde or other chemicals, the revenant can be discovered with a cursory physical exam. The circumstances surrounding the spirit's reclamation of her body determine if any decomposition or decay is reversed. A cruel, inhuman spirit might grant a mother access to her body in order to visit her daughter one last time, but never mention that her corpse is little more than bones.

Most spirits balk when approached with the offer of taking up a human body. Though ghosts persist after they should pass on, they are creatures of stasis and fear. Most are too afraid of change and do not possess enough self-awareness to travel back to their bodies and control them once again. Ghosts possessing their bodies without the aid of a will-worker or more powerful spirit are extremely rare. The focus of the revenant's passion must be near both physically and emotionally, and the ghost must be intent on immediate action. Any powerful human feeling can serve as motivation for the possession. No matter what inspires the spirit to come back into the physical world, that desire will fuel her every thought and action while she remains. The revenant might even benefit from physical invulnerability so long as she remains focused on the sole reason she returned.

Possession vs. Return

Some ghosts are capable of possessing living human bodies via the Possession Numen (see p. 212 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). Revenants that force their way back into their own bodies might or might not have this capability as ghosts, but the metaphysics of taking control of living person and reanimating one's own corpse are very different. A living body is in motion, and all the ghost does is guide the motion with its own will. A corpse is inert, and the ghost must, in a sense, breathe new life into it. Animating a corpse without help is a monumental task, and very few ghosts are up to it.

After the desire is fulfilled, the spirit normally moves on. The ghost might pass into the next stage of existence, or become an indentured servant to whatever master made the revenant's unlife possible. A revenant sworn to protect a particular person or guard a particular place could have an extremely long life (so to speak), provided she can maintain her focus and passion over the years.

Amy Halibower

Amy didn't deserve to die. Barely 20 years old, bright and funny, her funeral attracted an impressive crowd. She excelled at academics and worked rigorously to earn her undergraduate degree before turning 21. She volunteered time tutoring children in remedial math and English. Not one of her charges was permitted to fail. Amy's parents loved her and did not let her want for anything she needed. Her boyfriend, however, was bad news. Amy's mother warned her daughter that the man was no good. Amy was convinced she could change him. Amy was tenacious. Amy is tenacious.

Rather than pass into the next world, Amy decided that Rob needed to learn his lesson. He crashed the car; he killed her and robbed her of the future. The courts declared him innocent, but Amy is beyond the law now. Three nights after her body was laid to rest, Amy made a deal with a terrible and powerful spirit. Now she will track her former lover and killer to the ends of the earth. Amy wants the chase to last as long as possible, because now that she is back in her body, she fears the consequences of the deal she made to return. Amy deeply wants to both remain in the world as she is, and destroy the man that carelessly ended her life. Should the characters stand in her way, she is not afraid to get creative. Amy's schooling, cunning and undead powers make a formidable

combination. If the characters help her to find her former boyfriend or overcome her dark master they may earn a powerful but volatile ally.

Darkest Magics

The sheer hubris and incredible mystic energies essential for creating a revenant keep their numbers to a merciful minimum. In order for a sorcerer to imbue a corpse with the same soul that inhabited it in life, the body must be fresh. A lingering connection between the flesh and spirit is necessary for the will-worker to call back the soul. Though extreme passion is not needed in this case, the spirit in question must be strong willed and resilient.


The sorcerer normally prepares intricate magical bonds to ensure the revenant's servitude. If those do not hold, intelligent mages seek out items or people important to the revenant in life to use as hostages. Using a sentient, passionate and nearly unkillable living dead as a servant is as stupid as it is arrogant. The potential payoff is incredible power. The more likely end is death.

Keeping the revenant in check is the sorcerer's primary concern once the spirit has quickened its corpse. The simplest method involves trapping the spirit in a special container, and releasing it into the body only when specific tasks are required. Doing this is the magical equivalent of handling nitro-glycerin. One mistake and the sorcerer calls down an angry spirit — or even worse, an enraged revenant.

A symbol or talisman is normally used to focus the connection between the body and soul. Common items include a container (gourd, magic box, glass sphere), a pine needle, an item important to the person in life, or a paper bearing the revenant's name and the summons used by the mage. Destroying this item normally releases the spirit and leaves only an empty shell where the revenant once stood.

Many revenants created by magic do not wish to remain in the world. Provided an opportunity to escape their unlives, they move on beyond the physical world. In some rare instances a sorcerer may call back the soul of a loved one. The child, parent, husband or wife might return to the world mostly intact, but the person is never the same. Their bodies may continue to rot, their emotions rage through them unchecked, and isolation will eventually drive them insane.

A few human revenants manage to linger and maintain their focus without a singular obsession. These undead are normally the product of powerful magic attaching the higher soul to the corpse soon after death. Provided the revenant is extremely willful, and can set constant, achievable goals, the living dead's soul will remain affixed to the body indefinitely. Passion still remains an integral part of the revenant's unlife, but rather than resolving the Passion and then moving from the



physical plane, the revenant continues forming new Passions. If a Storyteller allows a player to make a revenant as a character, this type of revenant would be most appropriate.

In the Absence of Good

Some people just don't feel right. Something in their eyes, or the way they talk, sends chills along the arms of those nearby. They seem to look beyond whatever they see, or their hollow voices carry too far. After such an encounter most people shake their heads and chide themselves for being silly, but they are quite right to be afraid.

Some revenants exist without human passion and without a will-worker calling them into their bodies. Some revenants were never human. These creatures exist as spirits yearning for the permanence and power of physical form. A celestial convergence, magical mistake, or deal with greater darkness allows the being to claim a body and use it so long as it can maintain a connection to the physical world. A human corpse possessed by an inhuman spirit is called an intruder.

The intents of these intruders vary just as much as those of human revenants. Seeking a physical home to satiate its desires, a spirit steps into a body at the moment the human soul leaves. Memories and basic personality might remain, but the core of that man or woman is gone forever. A dark revenant may result in a serial killer, a tyrannical CEO, a dictator bent on genocide, or even a religious leader shepherding the weak-willed into oblivion.

Inhuman revenants maintain their existences indefinitely provided they find a source of food. Normally their meals come in human-shaped containers; rather than deal with physical materials like blood or flesh, they siphon spiritual energy from anyone willing or defenseless. For examples of specific powers and systems please see the section following which details methods for creating revenants.

Intruders make excellent antagonists because of their intelligence and complete lack of human morality. Perhaps a particularly disastrous spell performed by a player's character results in the creation of such a creature. Every time the revenant destroys a life or a soul the character should feel responsible. The revenant may be subtler, hiding behind the life of the body's former resident. The revenant could act as spy or saboteur within the character's circle, infiltrating the characters' lives and destroying what they hold dear. Of course the intruder will offer to help characters who come running for support.

Intruders can normally be dispatched in an immediate sense by destroying the physical bodies they are using. The process of possessing a dead human host is difficult enough that the spirit will probably not return any time soon. If the characters possess

sophisticated magical or spiritual powers they might battle the spirit directly. In either case the revenant could be a match for one or all of them at the discretion of the Storyteller.

Harbinger

Someone is rocking the boat. The local newspaper ran a front-page story about a man in a waking coma wandering the streets and attacking anyone crossing his path. Three disappearances and nearly half a dozen homicides attracted federal law enforcement to the area. The spiritual resonance of the city is growing foul. Vampires are scrambling to cover up the rash of deaths, werewolves seek out the source of the disturbance, and mages are working tirelessly to track down the elusive source of the evil.

The monster who was Carl Wilton (p.42) is now a resident in the characters' hometown. Each time he feeds on the souls of the living he not only robs them of life and reason, but transforms his victims into undead killers. He will not stop, he will not repent, and he possesses alien intelligence and demonic power sufficient to evade the police forever. The characters may not feel the need to protect the innocent, but Carl searches out the strong-willed and supernaturally powerful for food. If the players' characters never seek to stop him, one of them may be his next target.

Staying the Scythe

Revenants afford Storytellers an excellent opportunity to include a multi-session arc involving a small number of key supporting characters. The revenant likely burns out in a short amount of time, meaning that a smaller arc within a larger chronicle, or a chronicle consisting of only six or seven chapters, can be centered around a revenant. Any simple human emotion or desire can become the central focus for the revenant. When the characters go to confront a young woman suspected of knowing too much about the existence of the Kindred, they won't expect to face her older brother sworn to protect her from beyond the grave.

Each human revenant needs a singular obsession driving her from beyond the grave, and a number of Passions to focus that obsession. Intruders are also defined by their Passions, but do not have a single driving force keeping them attached to their adopted physical forms. They simply need to maintain the necessary level of power to keep the body alive.

Attributes

Revenants regain all of their Attributes when they return to their bodies, and normally benefit from an increase to Strength, Stamina, Resolve and Presence. Composure and Wits are frequently diminished, the latter due to the discord between the spirit and physical planes, the former because of their overriding obsessions.

Intruders are often exceedingly intelligent and cunning, but are restricted to the physical capabilities of their new bodies (at least until they learn to wield the appropriate Numina).

Skills

Once again, the Skills known in life return with the soul. Memory gaps may exist if the spirit's time outside of the body was excessive. Skills for intruders are left entirely to the Storyteller's discretion. A dark spirit possessing a body for the first time might be unfamiliar with the mortal world, but would still glean the knowledge and Skills of the human host.

Merits

None of the Merits are standard for revenants, and are as distinct as Skills to each individual.

Advantages

Any advantage not listed below is determined in the same manner as presented in Chapter Four of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*.

Health: Revenants determine health in the same manner as mortals. They suffer bashing and lethal damage from the same sources, and do not suffer aggravated damage from any specific attacks, but may take aggravated damage from magic just as mortals do (see p. 153 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*). Revenants heal only through the use of the Regeneration Numen (see p. 38).

Essence: Essence is a measure of the fluctuating spiritual energy available to the revenant to maintain the spirit's body and fuel Numina. Essence is not rolled, and is represented with both permanent dots and temporary points. Human revenants may raise their temporary Essence points in excess of their Essence dots (to a maximum of 10) when acting in accordance with their Passions. Any day in which the Storyteller does not roll one of the revenant's Passions, the living dead loses a permanent dot of Essence. Essence dots cannot be restored once lost.

An intruder burns through Essence constantly in an effort to keep the mortal body alive. It must spend one Essence point and one Willpower point every sunrise or lose a permanent dot of Essence.

Revenants begin with 10 Essence dots and Resolve + 5 points of temporary Essence. Revenants may spend three points of Essence at any time to regain a point of Willpower. Human revenants can spend two points of Essence to simulate life for a scene (normal circulation, heart rate, breathing and warmth) provided they were not embalmed.

Morality: Revenants do not have Morality.

Passions: Revenants can have up to three Passions. Intruders need only describe their desires or base wants. Passions allow revenants to quickly regain Essence. Any time a Passion is fulfilled the Storyteller rolls a number of dice determined by the potency of the experience (see the table below). The greater the association to the undead's purpose (for human revenants) the more dice rolled. The maximum number of dice for a Passion roll is five. Every success restores one point of Essence.

Human revenants must normally have Passions very specifically oriented to their obsessions. An intruder might have a Passion for murdering women; a human revenant's Passion would be to kill a specific person. After all of the human revenant's Passions are resolved (in the same manner as a ghost resolves anchors; see p. 213 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*), its connection to its physical form disperses unless it is strong enough to form new Passions. Forming a new Passion requires an investment of 10 Willpower and a genuine desire or need associated with the Passion. Revenants capable of forming new Passions are extremely rare.

Number of dice	Potency	Example
1	Peripheral relation to Passion	A revenant bent on avenging his murder prevents a mugging
2	Noticeable relation to Passion	The above revenant convinces a cop to reopen his case
3	Strong relation to Passion	Revenant stalks the killer's accomplice, haunting and frightening him
4	Clear relation to Passion	Revenant wrings the killer's location from an associate
5	Direct relation to Passion	Revenant confronts his killer

As time passes, intruders build up a tolerance to their Passions. A particularly old intruder with a Passion for corrupting children may receive only one die for the same experience it received five dice for a decade ago. Much like their human brethren, intruders are eventually consumed by the fire in their black hearts.

Virtues and Vices: Revenants replace these Advantages with Passions.

Numina

The following Numina are presented in the *World of Darkness Rulebook*. They are applicable to revenants, but a new roll is specified. Essence expenditures are the same.

Animal Control (p. 210) — Presence + Wits

Compulsion (p. 211) — Presence + Resolve; requires touch or audible commands

Magnetic Disruption (p. 211)

Telekinesis (p. 212) — Dexterity + Presence

Terrify (p. 212) — Presence + Intimidation

The following Numina are available to both human revenants and intruders unless otherwise noted. All intruders begin with the Siphon Numen.

- **Spirit Prowess** — Up to five Essence points can be spent to increase the revenant's Strength, Dexterity and/or Stamina on a one-for-one basis. The additional dots last for the scene, and may raise an Attribute above 5. No more than five Essence points can be spent using Spirit Prowess during a scene, though the points may be reallocated during the scene by spending one point of Willpower.

- **Regeneration** — By funneling Essence into the revenant's physical shell, the character is able to heal wounds. Every Essence spent heals one point of bashing damage. By spending a Willpower, the revenant can heal lethal or aggravated damage in the same way for the duration of the scene.

- **Dead Eyes** — The character focuses perceiving the invisible, and the Storyteller spends two points of the revenant's Essence. For the remainder of the scene the revenant is able to see ghosts.

- **Dead Skin** — The revenant focuses and shatters the wall between spirit and flesh for a moment. One Willpower point and one Essence point are spent and the revenant becomes incorporeal for a number of turns equal to her Composure. The revenant is still visible, but hazy and indistinct. Normal weapons inflict no damage, but the undead might suffer damage from magical or blessed weapons at the Storyteller's discretion.

- **Inspiration** — The revenant is able to inspire the root of her Passion in others. The Storyteller spends one point of

Essence and rolls Presence + Resolve in a contested roll against the target's Composure + Resolve. Provided the revenant is successful, the target feels the same burning Passion as the revenant, gaining a +2 bonus on all rolls toward fulfilling the Passion. Every turn the target wishes to act in opposition to the desire she must spend one point of Willpower. This effect lasts for one turn per success on the revenant's roll.

- **Siphon** — All intruders begin with this Numina, but human revenants are able to develop it. The revenant must touch the victim to activate the power. Spend one of the revenant's Willpower points, and roll her Intelligence + Presence in a contested roll against the target's Resolve + Composure. If the intruder wins, every success converts one of the target's Willpower into two Essence for the revenant. If the target runs out of temporary Willpower, the revenant then siphons Health (this damage is considered lethal). Vampires and other undead creatures can lose Willpower to a revenant with Siphon, but not Health. If a revenant targets a creature with an Essence trait (such as another revenant), Siphon drains Essence directly rather than Willpower. If the target runs out of Essence, the revenant drains Willpower and finally Health.

- **Zombify** — By spending three Essence points and a Willpower point, the revenant can touch a corpse and create a zombie. The new undead have the Short-Lived Weakness (see p.28). Other traits should be assigned according to the abilities of the revenant.



Creation Guidelines

Storytellers should keep in mind how easily revenants can regain Essence when designing them as antagonists. The only time that a revenant is truly vulnerable is when it is not acting in direct alignment with its Passions. Five Numina should be appropriate for most games, though nothing prevents a revenant from learning them all.

Revenants tend to have higher than average Attributes (with the exceptions noted above), and their Numina make them adaptable antagonists with few weaknesses. The characters should need to discover the driving purpose of a human revenant in order to resolve the situation. Intruders are susceptible to holy weapons and exorcisms as per the *World of Darkness Rulebook* section on ghosts (p. 214).

But They Are So Cool!

What happens when one of the players decides that a revenant would be the perfect addition to your *World of Darkness* chronicle? The simplest answer is no. Revenants are usually short lived, and the dark version is generally more evil than the other characters will be willing to tolerate. On the other hand, allowing a player to join in the game and play a revenant until her obsession is resolved could provide a nice change of pace. Storytellers should oversee the character creation process. Revenant characters should start with no more than five Numina if the other players' characters are starting at the normal power level.

Sample Characters

Following are examples of each type of living dead. Zombies, imbued and revenants are flexible and adaptable additions to any *World of Darkness* chronicle as either supporting cast or antagonists.

Voodoo Zombie

Background: The unfortunate man or woman may have offended a *bokor* in life, or simply been in the wrong grave at the wrong time. Three days after the funeral the coffin is emptied. The corpse's mouth is sewn shut, and powerful Loa are entreated to wake the dead just enough to do the *bokor*'s will. Family might have been informed the body is missing. They might even search for the remains of their loved one. Woe to them should they ever find him.

Description: The undead servant is granted only the dimmest self-awareness, and performs simple and violent tasks for the dark sorcerer controlling it. The vacant eyes and stiff movements make the undead noticeable; but provided sufficient clothing is put on the cadaver, it can travel normally through a crowd. The zombie's spirit is usually trapped in a small earthen jar, and kept by the *bokor* in order to control the undead slave. Should the jar be broken the soul is free. A minimal knowledge of voodoo is required to control a zombie when in possession of the zombie's soul.

Storytelling Hints: A sighting by a family member or friend may create a stir, attracting enough attention to warrant character involvement. Alternatively, the *bokor* might desire an artifact or manuscript in one of the character's possession, and send the zombie to retrieve it. The zombie follows the instructions of the *bokor*, and then returns to its trapped soul. Zombies created with voodoo are more likely to retain dim scraps of intelligence and memory, allowing them to enter and exit buildings, follow the flow of pedestrian traffic, and use simple hand-held weapons.

Attributes: Power 3, Finesse 3, Resilience 4

Physical Integrity: 10

Defense: 0

Initiative: 3

Speed: 6

Size: 5

Health: 7

Aspects: Limited Intelligence, Magic Resistance 1, Preservation 2, Quick Movement 1, Special Attack 3 (Bite, Tackle, Haymaker), Undead Strength 1, Tough 1, bloomer

Weaknesses: Residual Memory, Vulnerability (Soul-Jar)

Chalice-Born

Background: The Chalice of Arista is a simple looking wooden cup with subtle carvings running along its base. Created by a power-hungry mage in the Middle Ages, the cup is rumored to hold power over death itself. The chalice has toured the globe in museums, and is considered a unique relic by curators and historians. Accounts describing the true power of the hand-carved goblet refer to armies of the walking dead, and vague references to the creator of the chalice unleashing Armageddon.

When awakened, the chalice is a terrible and destructive force. Reading the inscription at the base and filling the cup with water awakens the dark spirits bound inside. Every day thereafter, any human corpse within a certain distance of the artifact awakens as a zombie at sunset. The animated corpses collapse when the sun returns, awaiting the following night.

On first day the cup is activated, the radius of power is a quarter of a mile. Each subsequent day the distance doubles, until the sixth and final day. After six nights, the chalice must be reactivated to awaken the dead again. Arista devised the cup as a method for achieving immortality. Zombies created by the chalice seek to kill those around them, but also feel compelled to bite into any living flesh they can reach. The creatures carry mouthfuls of blood and meat back to the chalice and deposit them into the cup. Three Health points of flesh are required to fill the chalice; once it is filled to the brim the artifact absorbs the sustenance, growing darker in color. Once the cup has been filled six times (for a total of 18 Health points), Arista will be reborn — or so he intended. Whether Arista successfully created a means of rebirth is unknown as the cup has never been filled six times within six days of its awakening.

Any corpse within the appropriate radius of the Chalice of Arista becomes a servant to the long-dead mage's will. These zombies are truly horrific, and the evil energies



which give them purpose also destroy their dead flesh quickly. The creatures are not particularly durable, but the monsters must be destroyed completely to be stopped.

Description: No matter how old or degenerated the corpse, the chalice still brings it to life. As the zombies find victims and bring the gory offerings back to the cup, their flesh rots quickly and falls away from the brittle bones. Many undead raised by the cup are unable to break free of their crypts or underground prisons, but should the chalice ever be awakened near a cemetery, Arista may finally be reborn.

Storytelling Hints: Classic incarnations of the zombie, these undead minions are easy to destroy, but are really not the primary threat. Should enough of them be raised, and then have access to weak-enough victims, the Chalice may call forth one of the most powerful and evil mages in history. The characters should probably have some idea what the repercussions are in order to increase the tension, but starting a game with Arista's rebirth and then having the characters work backwards to figure out what is going on is also a possibility.

Attributes: Power 2, Finesse 1, Resilience 3

Physical Integrity: Varies

Defense: 0

Initiative: 1

Speed: 1

Size: 5

Health: 7

Aspects: Autonomous Parts, Contagious 1, Indestructible, Pack Instinct 2, Sensitivity 2 (Living Beings, Chalice of Arista), Special Attack 3 (Bite, Entangle, Haymaker), Tough 1, Undead Strength 2

Weaknesses: Brittle, Short-Lived

Doti

Background: Many parents suffer from empty nest syndrome when their children leave home, but Theresa Zorschwinger chose a most disturbing way to fill her nest again. After being raised in a household where their mother's behavior was often erratic and occasionally violent, Theresa's biological children both moved as far away from home as possible, leaving their already fragile mother alone and distraught, unable to understand why her babies abandoned her. Isolated from others, Theresa slowly went insane. She became obsessed with children, with again becoming a mother. Her attempts to adopt were thwarted when no agency would place a child with such an obviously unstable woman.

Unable to again bear a child, Theresa began researching alternate means of creating life. She toyed with the idea of kidnapping, but realized those children would leave her, too, just like her own had. Finally, lost in her obsession, Theresa decided to create her own child, one who would love her forever and never leave her. To get the raw materials necessary to craft a child from scratch, Theresa murdered three local girls, sewing their skins into an outer covering for her creation. Finally, with the aid of evil spirits attracted by her madness, Theresa finally brought her creation to a semblance of life.



She named the imbued creature Doll, and did play with her like an enormous rag doll, dressing her in pretty clothes and playing games with her. Doll, though the size of a large child, was a blank slate, which Theresa filled with a mix of crafts and children's games. Completely reliant upon her "mother," Doll adored Theresa, content to spend all day listening to the madwoman prattle, her head on Theresa's knee while the woman stroked Doll's hair. Any time Theresa left the house for errands, Doll eagerly awaited her return.

One day, Theresa didn't come home. The disappearance of the three girls was finally linked to Theresa, who was arrested in the local grocery store. Now Doll waits for her mother to come back to her. Doll does not need to eat or drink to sustain her life, but she hungers for human contact and the insane, unconditional love Theresa lavished upon her. From the window of Theresa's deteriorating home, Doll watches other children playing in the streets, and wonders why she can't be like them. She waits for her mother, feeling abandoned and betrayed, and looks for someone new to fill the aching hole in her heart.

Description: Theresa named her new "child" Doll with good reason. The imbued's features, made from the preserved skin of dead children, have a fixed and doll-like quality to them. Her mouth moves too slowly into a smile or frown to look natural, and the baby roundness of her cheeks is too perfect, enhancing Doll's appearance of artifice. In repose, her face becomes completely blank and expressionless, and her body unnaturally still. Theresa's handiwork as a seamstress shines in her creation, the tiny stitches barely visible at the edge of Doll's hairline, on her arms, and in any other location where her "mother" had to close the skin. Though a startling facsimile of life, certain key features, such as her often vacant expression or her slightly disjointed way of movement, betray Doll as little more than a flesh Pinocchio who could not quite fulfill her creator's dreams of crafting a real child.

Storytelling Hints: Doll is a true innocent, unaware of any reality beyond that taught to her by Theresa. Her brief life was one of playtime and affection, before her mother failed to return to her. Now, watching other children at play, Doll begins to suspect she may be different from the other children, little boys and girls whose mothers return to them every day. Though not inherently dangerous, Doll becomes increasingly resentful of her isolation, and wants desperately to make contact with the outside world.

Eventually, Doll will seek out either a playmate or another parent. Her size belies her actual strength, and when her new companion or guardian does not cooperate or attempts to escape Doll is likely to lose control. Alternatively, Doll may escape notice so effectively in the large house that her presence may go unfelt until after a new family moves in. Any children in the house tell their parents about a strange-looking girl watching them while they sleep. Will the parents listen in time, or will Doll decide she needs to make a playmate for herself?

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Crafts (Sewing) 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 1

Social Skills: Intimidation 1, Persuasion 1

Merits: None

Willpower: 6

Morality: 5

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Wrath

Health: 14

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 11

Size: 4

Derangements: Fixation

Powers: Enhanced Strength, Heart's Truth

Trevian "Third" Williams

Background: Trevian Williams was born into the streets of Detroit, protected and raised by his two older brothers. His brothers assured his induction into the 2-9's, a gang no longer in existence. Trevian was "beat into" the gang at age 12, but both of his brothers were killed by rival gang members a few months afterward. Trevian began to use the street name "Third" to reflect his status as the third Williams boy to join and eventually lead the 2-9's. By the age of 16, he gained a high position of honor within the gang, and a year later asserted his dominance by killing the leader of a rival faction.



Trevian could have gone on to great things, but applied his powerful mind to securing power and expanding his gang's influence throughout the city. Three years after his ascendance to leadership, Trevian found a woman he thought was different. Suzette was foreign, and mysterious, not like the ho's and boorish streetwalkers he dealt with every day. It never occurred to Trevian that she was setting him up.

After moving to Detroit, Suzette decided to infiltrate the local drug traffic by enslaving local gang members as zombies. Trevian, normally the brightest and sharpest among his peers, was inexperienced with women and did not recognize her treachery until he awoke from his brief death, angry and exhilarated. Third decided to forgive Suzette provided she showed herself capable of bowing to his will. She has raised all of the Cadavres' enemies after their deaths, and consults with Third to ensure his sustained dominance in the area.

Description: Trevian is an extremely handsome man who looks slightly younger than his actual age of 20. His features are soft and youthful, with full lips and smooth, dark skin. Trevian's eyes are a clear, pale blue, the result of his soul's reconnection to his body through the aid of Suzette and the Loa Manman Brijit.

Storytelling Hints: Trevian and Suzette are quite the pair. Suzette is resentful of Manman Brijit for defying her will, but feels compelled to bow to Third's desires. Trevian continues to expand his small empire, and has the personal strength and flexibility to adopt new Passions should the need arise. With Suzette's understanding of voodoo, and Third's physical strength and resourcefulness, they are a difficult pair to beat. Any attack against them is met with harsh violence and subsequent undead servitude.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Investigation 1, Occult (Vodoun) 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Drive 1, Firearms (Pistol) 2, Larceny 1, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Intimidation 3, Streetwise (Gangs) 3

Merits: Allies (Gang) 4, Retainer (Suzette) 5, Status (Gang) 3, Unseen Sense

Willpower: 8

Essence: 9

Passions: Control Suzette, Rule the streets, Revenge against killers

Health: 7

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Size: 5

Numina: Dead Skin, Inspire, Phantasm, Regeneration, Siphon, Spirit Prowess, Terrify

Carl Wilton

Background: Carl Wilton grew up in a small town near the Ohio–West Virginia border. He married young, cheated on his wife, and by the time he celebrated his 23rd birthday was paying child support to three different women. Carl bought a bottle of top-shelf whiskey, a .38 revolver, and a slummy motel room with stolen cable and free porn channels for his birthday. After finishing the bottle, Carl killed himself, but death wasn't the end.

An ancient and dark spirit waited for that night. It followed Carl throughout his life, recognizing the pallor of his soul. When the revolver discharged and Carl's pathetic spirit leaked out of his body, the spirit swooped in and demanded that its new heart continue beating. It became a new Carl Wilton — more assured, more capable, and entirely sociopathic. The powerful revenant keeps its physical host alive through sheer force of will, feeding off of the life energy of the weak to maintain the effort.

The monster that was Carl Wilton now exists to indulge its dark pleasures and feed off the living. Every area he enters is soon home to the hollow and ferocious walking dead left behind whenever he feeds. He reflects his dark soul into the shell of his victims, and leaves the homicidal zombies with only the vague memories of their former lives guiding them to meals of human flesh.

Description: Carl was a good-looking man in his prime, but the dark force currently residing in his flesh has not been kind to the body. The dark revenant often forgets to eat and avoids sunlight; its lack of experience with facial ex-





pressions and intonation tends to put others off. The revenant also does not care for water, and a stench surrounds Carl's body.

Storytelling Hints: Every newspaper article, horrified recounting, or call for justice spurs this dark spirit on. Carl travels fast, and seeks to claim as many lives as possible before his body is eventually destroyed. The spirit counts on his foes having no supernatural powers, or at least an inability to recognize or kill the real intelligence within the former man's flesh.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 5, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Occult (Spirits) 4

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl (Breaking Bones) 4, Drive 1, Firearms 1, Survival 2

Social Skills: Intimidation (Chilling Smile) 5

Merits: Brawling Dodge, Disarm, Fast Reflexes 1, Fresh Start

Willpower: 5

Essence: 8

Passions: Siphon Unwilling Victims, Gain Infamy, Inspire Terror

Health: 9

Initiative: 4

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Size: 5

Numina: Compulsion, Dead Eyes, Regeneration, Spirit Prowess, Terrify, Unique Siphon (Carl's Siphon Numina automatically zombifies anyone killed during the siphoning.)

The Tide

Day 10: It doesn't stop. Never ever stops. Will and Miller won't stop. They bang on the walls back at those things. Will started screaming yesterday and didn't quit until his voice gave out. Our water is nearly gone, no more updates about the SARS. I wonder if I will get SARS. I wonder if I will bang on walls and moan like the ocean.

Day 11: I saw one up close. I barely opened the door and stuck my head out. I recognized him. My mailman of over 13 years looked at me like I was food and just opened his mouth. A big glob of drool leaked out from the side of his cheek and down his lip, and the whole time he never stopped moaning.

I wish I was back at the beach house. The waves might drown out the wailing a little bit. I could talk with momma. I don't know why I wrote that, momma is dead.

I dreamed last night of those things screaming and pounding their feet, doing a tribal dance around this big fire. The fire was dark, maybe blue or black. I saw Miller and Will dancing with them.

Day 12: Last night Will started pounding on the walls again, beating against the boarded window with the same rhythm as the things outside. Miller put his hands over his ears, but I just watched Will. He started moaning, grunting like the things outside. I knew what was going to happen. I knew it as soon as he turned around. He looked just like the mailman.

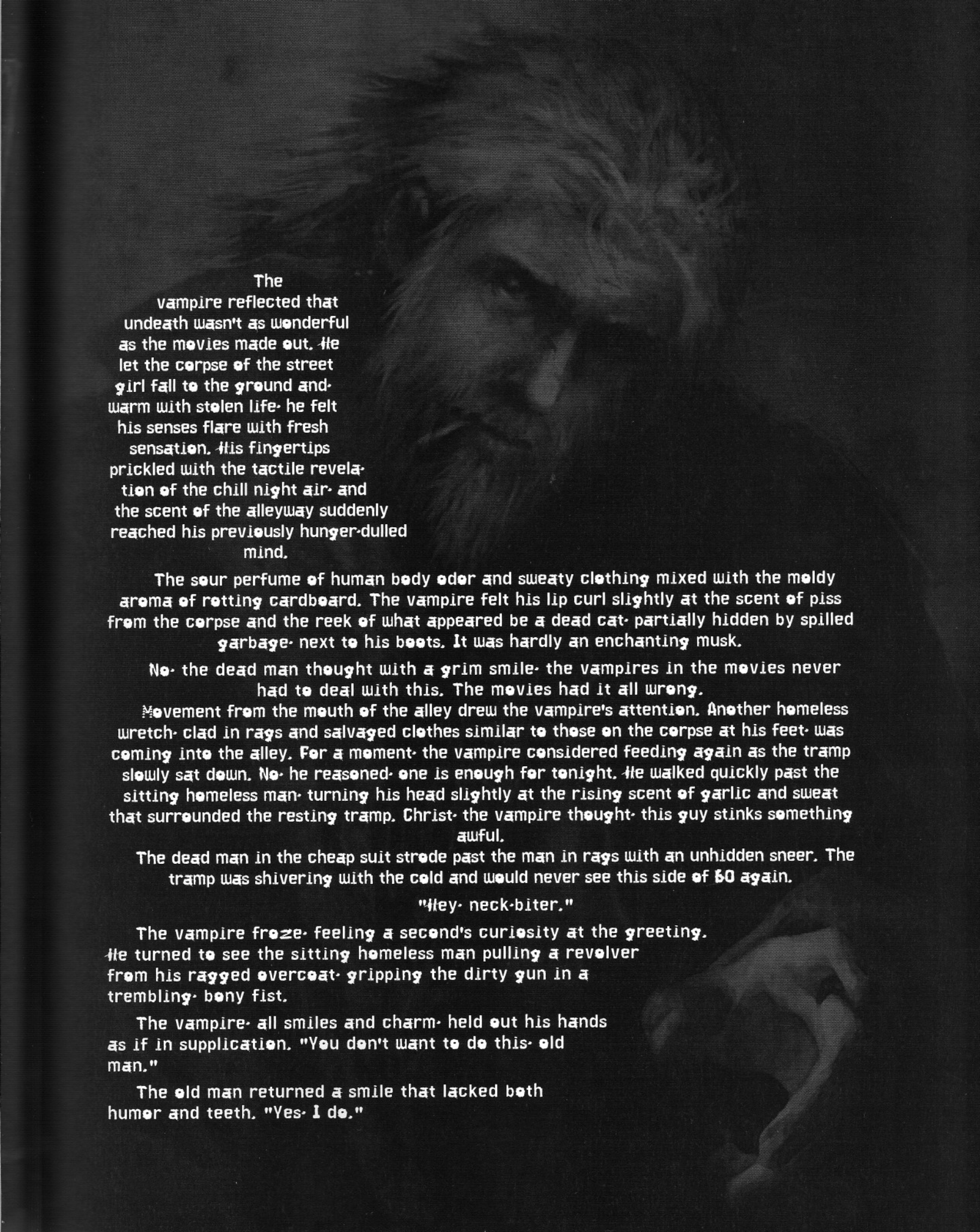
Miller didn't understand, didn't hear Will groan and wail like one of those things. I don't know if Will actually became one of them, but I shot him dead before he took a second step toward me. Miller lunged at me and I didn't know what to do.

There's food and water for at least a week now.

Day 15: I don't know where I am. Will and Miller are dead. They smell, but I am afraid to try and push them out. I think I killed them. I don't know if they are still out there. All I hear is the sound, the waves of bodies and voices and they are so hungry. I will hear them forever, no matter if they are gone.

Day 17: Maybe if I can make it to the beach the waves will drown them out. Maybe I should try. Momma could talk about dad and I could finally sleep again. The beach house isn't far from here. Right down the road, I can hear the waves. The tide is coming in.





The
vampire reflected that
undeath wasn't as wonderful
as the movies made out. He
let the corpse of the street
girl fall to the ground and
warm with stolen life. He felt
his senses flare with fresh
sensation. His fingertips
prickled with the tactile revela-
tion of the chill night air. And
the scent of the alleyway suddenly
reached his previously hunger-dulled
mind.

The sour perfume of human body odor and sweaty clothing mixed with the moldy
aroma of rotting cardboard. The vampire felt his lip curl slightly at the scent of piss
from the corpse and the reek of what appeared to be a dead cat, partially hidden by spilled
garbage, next to his boots. It was hardly an enchanting musk.

No, the dead man thought with a grim smile, the vampires in the movies never
had to deal with this. The movies had it all wrong.

Movement from the mouth of the alley drew the vampire's attention. Another homeless
wretch, clad in rags and salvaged clothes similar to those on the corpse at his feet, was
coming into the alley. For a moment, the vampire considered feeding again as the tramp
slowly sat down. No, he reasoned, one is enough for tonight. He walked quickly past the
sitting homeless man, turning his head slightly at the rising scent of garlic and sweat
that surrounded the resting tramp. Christ, the vampire thought, this guy stinks something
awful.

The dead man in the cheap suit strode past the man in rags with an unhidden sneer. The
tramp was shivering with the cold and would never see this side of 50 again.

"Hey, neck-biter."

The vampire froze, feeling a second's curiosity at the greeting.
He turned to see the sitting homeless man pulling a revolver
from his ragged overcoat, gripping the dirty gun in a
trembling, bony fist.

The vampire, all smiles and charm, held out his hands
as if in supplication. "You don't want to do this, old
man."

The old man returned a smile that lacked both
humor and teeth. "Yes, I do."

Chapter Two: A Need for Vengeance

One Truth

In the World of Darkness, a terrible truth remains hidden from most of the world. *Monsters are real.*

Think about that statement for a moment, and what it means.

It means our foolish and superstitious ancestors weren't so foolish after all. It means the creatures of myth and legend that they feared and reviled were as real as any other part of life. In centuries past, people truly believed that the dead might return in the form of vampires, or the wise man in the next village might work secret rituals where human sacrifice was made to appease old, dark gods. Someone bitten by a werewolf might become such a base and twisted creature herself, forced by an evil curse to run on all fours as a beast, howl at the moon, and slaughter those she once loved.

These truths survive in the modern world, although time, common sense and the skepticism brought on by the age of science and reason has dulled humanity's perceptions to this supernatural presence.

In this lack of awareness dwells the unknown threat that most people, despite what they might say, truly *do not wish to know*. It is one thing to say that all men and women seek the truth, but another thing entirely to believe such a statement. Knowledge of the hidden depths of the World of Darkness reveals a reality that irrevocably scars the mind of any mortal; and as such, normal humans find their own perceptions working to shield them from the dark things that hide in the shadows. Ignorance might not be bliss, but it is far safer than the truth.

Of course, nothing is perfect. Cracks eventually develop in any façade, forming from the passing of time or mere carelessness. When the covering has faded away, it reveals what was hidden, and the exposed truth is often uglier than expected.

Some rare few people have seen through the veil of lies and witnessed a shard of this truth. Once they are aware of the presence of the supernatural, innate human instinct makes sure that most reactions are uniquely focused on investigation of the deeper threat and, above all, eradicating the menace.

Humans are evolved animals, long since grown into the ethos of using attack as the best defense. Some who learn of the hidden truths may cower away from the darkness or end their lives in horror at what they have discovered. Many more grasp the truth only to fall prey to the very mysteries they have uncovered. Lastly, some men and women oppose this evil for reasons of their own, be they fair or foul. For many it is revenge for wrongs done to them; for others it is as a preventative measure, to kill before they are themselves killed. The reasons for fighting the creatures of the night are varied indeed. This chapter is about the men and women who are driven over the edge by things they barely comprehend, and who set out to bring an end to their hates and fears. For most, this end is achieved at their own funerals — but sometimes, just sometimes, a rare few get the chance to make a difference.

These are the self-styled monster hunters of the World of Darkness.

**"Friction. Fusion.
Retribution."
— Metallica, "2x4"**

Paved with Good Intentions

When some of the world's hidden truths are revealed, what is it that makes some people react to the sinister discovery with murderous intent? What makes these men and women different from those who would take their own lives from desperation?

The key difference is usually comprised of two factors.

Initial Discovery

The first key factor is the manner in which the person discovers the truth. How did these people come to see the supernatural around them? If a loving father finds his two children butchered on a sacrificial altar inside a warehouse, then his reaction upon finding the mage responsible for this act might be to beat the spell-caster to death with a crowbar. Such a man might set to locating the dead magician's friends and family, and inflicting similar

punishments upon them. This is the kind of man who becomes a successful hunter. This is the kind of man who has encountered something wrong in the world and is driven to fight it. He is not driven to understand the supernatural and reconcile its presence in life, because from the highest thoughts in his head to the pit of his still-beating heart, he believes that these creatures must be stopped.

Of course, some police officers stumble onto something in their line of work that just doesn't sit right, and they uncover more evidence of the supernatural as they go.

Some astute and dedicated doctors follow the same line of discovery. Some social workers unearth the supernatural by cataloging lists of odd behaviors in the children (or adults) they care for and work with, perhaps finally discovering a supernatural creature using some insidious mental magic on the wards in their care. These initial discoveries are far from immediately traumatic, and the slow-burning discovery can fuel a person's disgust over time and leave him aghast and committed to doing *something* about what he's finally realized. Of course, such discoveries can also lead to an alert supernatural being removing the inquisitive person from the picture long before the final realizations ever come to pass.

The more traumatic the initial discovery is, the more likely the individual witnessing it is to find a hidden well of courage to fight the evil before them. Most hunters take to the practice because of some significant, painful damage to their own lives. The horror of a savage initial discovery combined with deep reserves of emotion and willpower means that the few who do dedicate themselves to hunting the creatures in the shadows are often consumed with one emotion above all others.



That emotion is hate, and it seethes within most of these people, often forming the very underpinning of a hunter's dedication.

Resolve

The second point to consider is the strength of personal willpower. To hunt a monster (a real, flesh-and-blood thing that *should not exist*) takes more guts than your average 9 to 5 Worker Joe or Jane can muster. Consequently, the discovery that humanity is surrounded by the threat of the unknown means that they will crumble at the realization, unless they find within themselves an untapped source of determination.

It would be incorrect to assume that every kung-fu artist and army grunt would react to the presence of the supernatural with undaunted, relentless force and a cooler-than-thou one-liner. Likewise, not every Joe Office Worker necessarily cowers under his desk and never emerges again. The discovery itself affects everyone in different ways, which means that personal willpower is an aspect of monster-hunting that not all who come to the "trade" have in abundance before their eyes open to the truth.

The only unifying factor among those who hunt the unknown and unseen is that they have made the conscious choice to do so. That, above most anything else in their lives, takes a lot of guts. These are not people who fall at the first hurdle. These are people who have the urge to survive burning strong in their hearts. They might be honest and caring people or remorseless killers. They might even be both. They might never have had a successful relationship or they might have had a happy marriage for 20 years. Nationality, racial background, chosen career, level of education: All of these personality factors are insignificant. Willpower is not.

Hate

Hatred has a purity all its own. It is important to bear in mind that most of these hunters are risking their lives to fight back and make things better for themselves, their own families or even their own neighborhood. Rarely are such dangerous undertakings performed out of a sense of chivalry or sheer altruism. Take the case of a hunter who takes to the bars and nightclubs every night to squeeze the vampire population down one by one. This woman, who lost her husband to the undead, firmly believes she is killing them now so that no one else will suffer as she has suffered in the wake of her lover's death.

In truth, this passionate stance of altruism is fueled and was originally created by the hatred within her heart. She fights back because they took her husband from her. That is the key point to the balance in her struggle, for without the grave wrong done against her, even knowing the truth of the secret world would likely not have been enough to convince her to risk her life every night for the benefit of others.

Certainly some people will fight out of a sense of righteous anger, or faith that they do

the work of the Divine, or merely to aid others so that they remain "safe" in their unseeing lives. Such people are the exception to the rule. Not only are most of these people hiding their own hate from themselves and masking it with a shield of preferred morals, they are also a great deal less common than the monster hunters who are honest about their malicious attitudes and morals.

Motivation

While hatred is the underlying truth of the mindset of the dedicated monster hunter, it is rarely foremost in their thoughts. "Because I hate them," is unlikely to be the answer to the question of "Why do you hunt them?" if ever a monster hunter were questioned in such a direct manner.

"Because they took my daughter."

"Because someone has to do it."

"Because it is God's will."

These are much more likely answers to the above question, and are the core of why these people work so hard to hunt as they do. Revenge. Duty. Faith. Three very attractive masks for covering up inner hatred....

Vengeance

Most hunters act to wreak revenge upon those who have wronged them. Most supernatural creatures inflict injury upon the world merely by existing. The vampire who drinks blood to survive night to night, the werewolf who creates terror by revealing its true shape and kills innocent people in a moonlit frenzy, and the sorcerer who desecrates graves in order to raise the dead as servants. These are actions that, to the human mindset, deserve justice and revenge.

Duty

Duty implies a rigid sense of honor. This is not always the case. Loyalty to family and the desire to protect others from the horrors of the real world are very similar ethics to the duty-bound mindset of many hunters. In this instance, duty refers to those who work against the supernatural because they feel that if they don't then no one else will. These are the hunters who ardently desire to protect what they love and value. While this seems noble and altruistic at first glance, it's worth bearing in mind that those who believe this about themselves are just as likely to have initially hunted out of a need for revenge, and have no less hatred for the things that hide in the shadows. They just hide it better.

Faith

A classic of the genre is the vampire-hunting priest who fights evil in the name of the Lord. The standpoint that the faithful hunters take is that the super-

natural is pure evil, Satanic, unholy — or just plain *wrong* — in some form or another. This almost universally means that any such “evil” should be stopped and suitably banished from corrupting the mortal world.

The faithful hunter firmly believes that God truly wants His mortal servant to behold the supernatural and eliminate it. If he believed otherwise, then he would not be a monster *hunter*, and therefore has no place in this chapter. Those hunters who act out of their faith in a higher power gain no real advantages other than the short-term benefit of truly believing that they are acting as a force for righteousness. This is often balanced by the eventual degeneration and erosion of their faith as time goes on, and the horrors they witness create fractures in their once-iron beliefs.

Too Cynical

All these people are hunting because they hate the undead? Hunting monsters because they believe God wants them destroyed once and for all? Surely not everyone is so bitter or fanatical (or fanatically bitter) that they fight the monsters for these reasons?

Well, in a word, yes. Most of them, at least.

First, when would someone ever see something that utterly, without a shadow of a doubt, *categorically* proved to them that monsters were real? If he were even in a position to remember it after the event without having his memory scrambled by various supernatural powers, then the chances are that he would, like most of the residents of the World of Darkness, end that encounter in a body bag.

Say he makes it. Then what? Does he believe what he's just seen, or rationalize it away? Was the “monster” just a freak-turned-psycho-killer, or was it *really* drinking that tramp's blood with fangs to slake its undead thirst?

Why exactly would he then pick up a baseball bat and patrol the streets for the undead? Why would he spend all his savings and quit his job so he could work as an investigator in tracking down these creatures? It's not because it's fun, make no mistake. In all probability, the first vampire he tries to hit with that bat will tear him to pieces before he gets a chance at strike two.

The hunters in this chapter are people who accept the possibility of death because they hate and fear these creatures so very much. They don't understand them at all, and they rarely sympathize with them because there appears to be nothing within the monsters to sympathize with. They hate them and fear them, and just hide that hate and mix it with a wish for revenge. Perhaps they even throw in a little nobility that each of them is fighting “the good fight.” Perhaps.

Player's Note: Hunters & You

The essential point of this chapter is that these are the men and women created by the actions of

characters: *your vampire, werewolf or mage characters*. They are created by your character's degenerate acts, by your character's carelessness, and sometimes, by your character's intended cruelties.

They are pitiable at worst, dangerous at best, and desperate beyond measure and normal human comprehension. The emotional gravity of their situations is incredible. They are not endless claw, fireball or fang fodder, and your Storyteller is unlikely to use them as such. In fact, individually, all but the best of them fall quickly to even a beginning character if it comes down to a straight fight. You'll need to think on your feet when you deal with mortals in any social situation, however, because the mistakes you make could betray your character's supernatural heritage — and your characters are the evils these people hunt.

Strength in Numbers

Michelle leaned back into the white leather seat, nodding acknowledgement to the driver. The gathering had lasted longer than she'd expected it would, and the debate had ranged from the boring and long-winded to the boring and irrelevant.

“Home please, Harry.”

“At once, Miss,” came the driver's reply. The Mercedes slid effortlessly out of the parking lot and onto the night-dark roads like a snake shedding its skin. Relaxing fully now, Michelle felt her tension lessen as her thoughts of the meeting faded into memory. She let her gaze fall on the tinted windows, then through them to the neon-lit streets of nighttime New York. So many people, so many thoughts.

The car shuddered violently as it braked suddenly, sending Michelle crashing into the back of the driver's seat. The screeching wail of the skidding tires rang in her ears as she tried to regain her seat with as much dignity as she could muster.

“My apologies, Miss De Marco... I... uh...”

“What is it, Harry?” Anger and irritation dripped from every syllable.

“There is someone in the road. I had to brake to avoid hitting him.”

Michelle looked out of the windows again to see cars on either side still flowing past. “Good lord, Harry,” she snapped, “just drive around him.”

“Miss, he is—”

A crash rang out as the windshield shattered into a hundred shards. Harry screamed as he covered his face a second too late. Michelle could already smell the blood in the air, leaking from whatever face wounds lay under his

cupped hands. Michelle saw the rotund figure of an overweight man jumping off the front of the car, a metal crowbar in his fists.

"Drive, Harry! Now!" The driver trembled as he picked bits of glass from his cheeks, hearing nothing but his own panicked breathing. Another window shattered, right next to Harry's head, and he cried out in terror, kicking out at the pedals. With a judder, the car hiccupped and stalled. Michelle clambered across the back seat, her movements made awkward by the elegant evening dress she wore. The fat man appeared at her window, followed a heartbeat later by a spray of fine glass shards as he smashed his way in. He looked at her with a death's-head grin.

"Hi, bitch."

Michelle's blood heated with her anger. She could kill this pathetic man in seconds, and felt her dead heart stirring at the thought of fresh blood. Her muscles burned with sudden energy.

Twin explosions of glass sounded as the rear and side windows also shattered under the impact of crowbars. Michelle shielded her face from the flying glass then looked up to see more faces leering in at her. These newcomers held pistols, pointing directly at her head. The first man sneered as he leveled his own gun.

"This is for my sister, you bloodsucking whore."

"This is for my parents."

"This is for my friends."

"This is for my wife."

The Law of Numbers

It comes down to straight and simple common sense: strength in numbers. The hunter who runs in a pack has a significantly higher chance to bring down more powerful prey. Hunting the supernatural is certainly one of the more dangerous occupations (or callings) that a person can have. It pays to have people alongside, preferably people who understand what everyone is up against and who share the desire to put the supernatural to the sword.

This is the tricky part for many would-be hunters, however. Once a person has survived to understand a little about the things that go bump in the night, very few succeed in going it alone. Unless the neophyte hunter does his homework on the target extremely well and is lucky enough to find some weak prey, the chances are definitely stacked against the solo Van Helsing.

Violence

Killing supernatural entities is a dangerous job, and at some point, most every witch-hunter and vampire slayer is going to get down and dirty with her chosen prey. Having several friends who are similarly armed with baseball bats and crowbars (or firearms) can make a world of difference.

Even four or five normal men and women will probably meet their ends against a well-prepared mage or a werewolf, but certain factors exist to take



into consideration in a fight. First, although the actual physical damage that five people can do with everyday household objects might not intimidate a creature that can rebuild its body with a moment's concentration, the fact is that fighting back, if done in a public place, might draw a great deal of attention. The last thing any supernatural creature wants is to have its likeness splattered all across the news or to be hounded by journalists because it shrugged off a knife attack in front of a street full of witnesses.

Also, the intimidation value and tactical sense of being set upon by a group of people must be considered. A less confident mage might decide to flee the scene rather than use his powers, while a shrewd werewolf knows that five corpses left in a back alley with animal claw marks reveals a little too much to the local authorities. When faced with a group of people, it may make perfect sense to flee. This might seem detrimental to the hunters' actual goal (to kill the mage, for example), but what if they have already set up a trap in case their prey does indeed turn tail? The wizard runs to his car, only to find that when he turns the key in the ignition, the home-made explosives strapped to the engine go off.

Successful hunters are intelligent and pragmatic. They know full well they will be outfought by most of their opponents and they plan accordingly.

Understanding

A friend in need is a friend indeed. The presence of someone else who sympathizes and understands, let alone shares your experience of such incredible situations, is invaluable. Many hunters would lose their grip on reality in a short time if they weren't guided, assisted and consoled by others who shared the horrendous burden of the truth.

Some people who become hunters find their ability to relate to "normal" people dulls as they uncover more information about the supernatural. It is hard to have any kind of relationship without shared experiences and certain things in common — and hunters definitely lack that in their dealings with most of their friends and family. It makes sense that they develop close bonds with anyone else who understands the things they understand, and has seen the horrors they have seen.

Player's Note:

The Bonds Between Hunters

The close ties between the hunters in a group are almost essential for their sanity, but bad news for the prey — and therefore, bad news for your character. Take a group of people who are mostly stirred to violence because of injustices done to them and their

loved ones by supernatural forces. They are unpredictable, unstable and emotionally driven in their desire for your character's death, or the deaths of your character's allies.

Now say you meet a group of these desperate people, and because they've been making your life a living hell for so long, you take extreme measures against them. Cue prodigious unleashing of supernatural fury. Problem solved, right?

How thrilled do you think any of these men and women will be that not only did your kind (or you yourself) kill their loved ones, you have now slain one or all of the people that actually understood and sympathized with their horrifying situation?

If you work it just right, you've got a great angle for psychological warfare. If you do it wrong, you're just giving a loose cannon even more reason to fire at you.

Shared Experience

Information is power. A person who chooses to go up against forces that shouldn't exist craves any new intelligence that gives him an edge.

The very fact that the supernatural world hides itself so efficiently means that solid, factual lore on anything about it is difficult to come by, let alone anything about killing its resident creatures specifically. What can easily be found on the Internet and in libraries is almost always the kind of information that applies more to myth and legend than it does to the warlocks and vampires that walk the streets. Any hunter who rigidly sticks to the legends is going to end up dead. A hunter who goes to the city library looking for information on "vampires" isn't going to find a wealth of tips, tricks and advice in the vein of "sunlight, stakes, garlic, go to it." After even cursory research, the hunter realizes that every culture has a vampire legend and various methods of dealing with such creatures.

Consequently, most successful hunters gain knowledge of what methods are effective by firsthand experience. Trying different tactics in practice is what allows most hunters to differentiate fact from fiction, as they work initially from a mixture of medieval myth, desperation and dumb luck.

Once several hunters are together, the search for definite answers is often cut short purely by virtue of the amount of experience between them. The opportunity to team up to compare notes and share firsthand witness accounts of the things they have seen is invaluable to a successful "career" in this most dangerous of lifestyles.

Money

Some hunters have access to more money than others, and one of the biggest incentives to work with



each other is the pooling of financial resources. Things like buying guns and ammunition, bribing local cops and criminals for information and any of the thousand other things hunters need to spend the cash on all add up to one hefty bill at the end of the day.

A single hunter with her 9 to 5 office job won't be able to bring much money to bear on her problems, what with most likely having to deal with a mortgage, children and the utility bills as well. Real life doesn't leave most folks with a great deal of monetary freedom, but with four or five people gathering their spare funds together, the chances of a significant pile of accumulated wealth increase considerably.

Contacts

One person alone likely has at least one friend, relation, acquaintance or even a "friend of a friend" who would prove useful in some way to their monster-hunting activities, be it in the realm of local politics, real-estate dealings, emergency services, education, media, law enforcement, construction and so on. Almost any employment has its uses beyond the immediately obvious reward of paychecks; and when several hunters gather together, the likelihood of the group having several useful contacts becomes a certainty.

Cowardice

A final word on hunter alliances: Some of them are out there with their new "colleagues" not only because they are too scared to be on their own, but because having several other bodies around makes it less likely that a creature will seek to harm them in particular. The coward lives by the old joke: "I don't need to be faster than the bear, I just need to be faster than you." The lives of his fellow hunters mean nothing, as long as he can survive.

Cowards exist in every line of work, and even among strong-willed and dedicated hunters, some weeds grow through the cracks in the stones. Obviously not every group shelters this breed of scoundrel, but it happens enough for hunters to be on edge around each other for some time after they first meet. This is a weakness that can easily be exploited by a cunning supernatural creature by playing on the doubts that some hunters have of their comrades' bravery.

Jason: No, no, I believe you. At this stage, after all we've shared, I'd be an idiot to call you a liar.

LizaS: good cuz I was worried for a moment.

Jason: It's cool.

Jason: Relax.

Jason: So, when do we meet?

LizaS: I cant tonite or tomorrow. Is the weekend ok?

EddieCreswell: Fine by me.

Jason: Me too.

LizaS: u guys know the place where I met the bloodsucker last month. I told u about it, remember?

EddieCreswell: Yeah, I know the bar.

Jason: I think I know it. I'll just ask the cab driver.

LizaS: meet there @ around half 8, k?

Jason: I'll email you both my picture, so you can see who you're looking for!

EddieCreswell: I don't trust this online correspondence enough for that, but I'll find you both, don't worry.

Jason: What about you, Liza? How will we know it's you?

LizaS: Bcuz im still in the wheelchair from the last time i went there.

Meeting and Greeting

Most of the people who make up this breed of modern-day monster-slayer have a wise desire to establish contact with anyone else who is aware of the world's supernatural truths.

Even the possibility of forging alliances and friendships with other hunters is something fraught with difficulty, suspicion and a healthy amount of trepidation. First, the majority of hunters don't tend to advertise their presence in any kind of local media, such as a newspaper, lonely-hearts columns or a dating channel. The ever-present factor for a hunter to consider is that some of their enemies seem to have eyes everywhere. Announcing themselves in need of allies is a risky tactic, and yet an essential one if teamwork in hunting is ever going to be an option.

Subtle advertising is the key here. A carefully worded placement in a lonely-hearts page might work very well indeed, as would certain forums on Internet sites. Any online community with heavy traffic is an ideal place to drop a few hints. Again, the problem lies in how much information to reveal, so that regular folks don't automatically assume the worst, and that supernatural entities don't set their sights on taking the hunter out of action before he can stumble into a gang of likeminded friends.

Several fairly low-key websites cater to this extremely select audience, of course. Hunters encounter the undead, or wizards, or werewolves, and reach out in any way possible to contact others who have shared similar experiences. Some of these sites are dedicated to techniques and tactics for stalking the supernatural on a local scale and putting it down for good, while others focus more on an individual's personal feelings toward

the "Creatures That Should Not Be." No global standard exists for these kinds of sites or online communities, because the people who set them up are so varied in personality, experience and, to a lesser extent, computer skills.

No matter how these hunters locate each other, no system is even close to a hundred percent efficient. It is a struggle for most new monster hunters to tell the difference between the details and story of a person who firmly believes in (and manages a website dedicated to) the supernatural, and another person who has legitimately, unequivocally come into contact with a vampire. Both relate tales of otherworldly influence and mysterious goings on, but only one is legitimate in the way a hunter hopes.

Also worthy of consideration is the difficulty that the supernatural world is vastly complicated and tangled in and of itself, to say the very least. A reclusive mage might have no idea that vampires are even real, let alone have ever met one. So what odds does a hunter who learns of wizards ever have of also discovering the reality of vampires or werewolves? They (unlike you) don't get hardback rulebooks detailing the various stripes of monster that are out there. Accordingly, many potential alliances never happen because hunters either don't believe each other, or miss references because they don't fit in their personal views of the supernatural: "I saw a vampire drinking someone's blood. What? Werewolves? No, that's stupid. I'll bet some vampires can turn into wolves, though." (If you don't believe people are this tunnel-visioned or arrogant, spend an hour on an unmoderated forum anywhere on the Internet.)

The other side of the coin is that once someone learns that the Kindred are out there in the darkness, accepting the existence of werewolves might become easier. It really depends on the hunter in question.

Online Contact

Contacting someone from behind a computer screen has many advantages. It's easy to preserve anonymity if there are any doubts about personal safety, and it's slightly harder to trace someone by their IP address than it would be for their registered phone number, for example. Contacting others over the Internet is a case of smoke and mirrors, however, giving the *illusion* of security rather than actual safety. If someone really knows her way around a computer, it doesn't take her long to work out the location of the person with whom she's chatting.

The practice of establishing contacts over the Internet is a popular one for fledgling hunters, simply because of the degree of reach someone has when they're connected with a modem. A well-placed forum post or linked website goes before the eyes of a great deal more people than most personal ads, for example. The level of supernatural spying that goes on in an effort to track these so-called monster killers, however, neatly balances the level of potential for forging alliances between hunters.

Cunning vampires have been known to prey upon the people who post on certain lists and sites, using the web pages as a very convenient "menu" of sorts, allowing the undead to track down, keep tabs on or just kill the very people who are trying to do the same to them. In effect, it gives them the drop on their would-be hunters, turning the tables to the often fatal surprise of the vampire slayers in question.

Mages and werewolves are sometimes guilty of this same spying — using the very same methods the hunters themselves use to locate each other. Warning tales abound of careless newbie hunters arranging to meet a contact, only to find themselves ambushed by a vampire or wizard who sought to lure them out of hiding.

Taking Care of Business...

James screamed in fury, resisting the temptation to change shape, to surrender to rage, to tear the house down to rubble. The cry emerged from his human throat, pitiful and shrill compared to the howl he would give in another form. He never shape-shifted inside his old home, though. This space still belonged to his family.

His human parents, gray-skinned with the pallor of the recently dead, hung from the ceiling. They were strung up with electrical cable wrapped around their

bruised throats, and their eyes were swollen and bulged, staring at nothing. It was clear from the twin expressions of open-mouthed horror that they had both suffocated, rather than having their necks snapped. The werewolf tried not to picture his mother and father kicking and dangling as they tried to scream from lungs that wouldn't draw breath.

Rage flooded his mind with searing intensity, pumping through his body like acid in his blood. As he turned to run from the room, he saw the note pinned to the door.

Blinking back tears, once again in his human shape, he held the small note in trembling fingertips. Even before he read the words, he turned the note over. The message, in a neat, painstakingly precise script, was written on the back of a small photo of his parents on vacation.

Again the surge of fury threatened to steal his mind, but James glared at the delicate writing until his vision cleared.

"Welcome home, James. In addition to the redecorating job, we have also taken your mother's jewelry. We didn't find much silver among her trinkets — no surprise there — but there's good news: What little we did find will be good for at least one bullet. We'll certainly be seeing you soon, Jim. Look on the bright side... when we do catch up with you, you can join your parents in Hell."



By Means Fair or Foul

Once a fledgling hunter group has overcome the various difficulties in actually coming together, the next step is to get down to work. If a group makes it this far — that is, that they can legitimately see themselves as a group — then this is the point of no return. From this point on they are now a noteworthy threat to the local supernatural presence.

Not all hunters take to the streets with guns and kitchen knives in order to rid their town of the supernatural. Those who try that tactic more than once wind up incarcerated or dead. The hard fact is that if normal humans are going to go up against such powerful creatures as warlocks and werewolves, then they need to work indirectly whenever possible. If it comes down to a straight fight, and it often does for the most careless hunters, then the regular human is going to come off worse nine times out of 10. That doesn't mean a cool scar and a story about fighting vampires. That means a body bag.

Other methods present themselves when hunting and harming the monsters that roam the cities. These methods offer opportunities for the expert hunter to avoid all contact with his prey until he is ready to spring the final trap, or ways to make his opponents rash and careless, prone to making mistakes. Perhaps best of all, clever hunters find ways of causing injury to targets by proxy.

Intelligent, if ruthless, hunters adopt these tactics, and some become frighteningly skilled in using them against their prey. Of course, the method of hunting and the tactics deployed in the stalking of prey depends on how zealous a particular hunter (or group of hunters) is prepared to be. While one group might see no point in tracking a vampire's prey after she has been bitten and prefers to focus on the bloodsucker itself, a different group might wish to kill all of a vampire's previous vessels to reduce the risk of any "transmitted vampiric infection."

Minimal Contact

It is always a safe policy for hunters to maintain as little close contact with their targets as possible. This means that a hunter group, once they have identified a monster or supernaturally affected human, initially fall into a habit of research: gathering information about the prey's habits, regular hangouts, friends, acquaintances, residences and family.

The Internet is a modern wonder for acquiring this kind of information, as even the least computer literate member of a household or hunter group can probably manage a Google search now and then, which grants surprising access to town plans, maps and citizen information. For those more practiced in rifling through web pages and online directories, an astonishing amount of personal information can be uncovered about someone; current residences, living relations, all previous addresses, bank details, email accounts, online passwords, phone numbers, employment records, and so on.

Even a creature such as a vampire or mage, who more than likely has a few secrets up his sleeves when hiding any up-to-date personal information, can have details of his pre-supernatural life easily accessed if he was not thorough when he made himself "disappear" from the mortal world. Once accessed, such information can be used against the creature in ways limited only by the hunter's imagination.

Friends in Low Places

Another thing to consider about hunters is that they are average, everyday people with circles of average, everyday friends — and everyday people have some interesting jobs. It is not unrealistic for a hunter to know people who become extremely useful contacts, be they reliable (in the form of a close friend) or unreliable (in the form of a hated sibling). Such a connection in the local police force or fire service could work wonders for a hunter's plans: Fire trucks take an extra couple of minutes to arrive at the scene of a vampire's burning haven; or a werewolf finds himself and his packmates under surveillance for days and nights on end, purely on suspicion of drug offenses. It's a severe cross to bear for mages if they can't work their rituals for fear of being under surveillance on charges of terrorism.

Teachers and social workers are often wonderful sources of information regarding the local community, being closely bonded to many different people. They often notice anything even remotely amiss in their charges' lives, and would obviously investigate any unpleasantness or unusual behavior to its satisfactory conclusion. They are legally obligated to do so, in fact. Nurses, paramedics and doctors all provide medical attention and valuable information. Cab drivers could also double as local rumor mills and great get-away drivers; spotting one specific cab in inner-city midday traffic is unlikely at best. A good lawyer might even be able to save a hunter from serving time in prison. Probably most useful, the value of well-connected journalists in the local media simply can't be overstated. Journalists have access to experts in many different fields, to significant events that might not ever be reported, and can put pressure on city officials in ways that bring a monster's worst nightmare — public attention — to bear.

Never overlook the possibilities offered by either the hunter's own employment or the jobs of her friends and family. Friends can help out a hunter without knowing exactly what she is doing, after all. Helen might be trying to kill monsters, but her journalist cousin might offer help if she's trying to track "an old boyfriend," for example.

Storyteller's Note: Professions

Not every hunter is a trained paramedic or gun-store owner who is of great use to his friends all the time. Most have very mundane, down-to-earth professions.

Any career or field of employment has its possibilities. A good idea when designing realistic hunters is to list the jobs of perhaps 10 or 20 people that you know yourself, be they relatives, lovers, friends or even friends-of-friends. Once the list is compiled, note a few possibilities that each of the careers could offer someone who is dedicated to hunting monsters.

Myriad Approaches

No two groups of monster hunters operate in precisely the same way. Similarities exist, parallels becoming evident between those people who hunt the same breed of prey, but it's common sense for a group that seeks revenge on a deranged spellcaster to move against its target in a different way than a group that loads up on elephant guns and chases down werewolves in pickup trucks.

Tagging and Bagging

A sinister (and frankly, paranoid) method of going about this grim business is to track and "remove" anyone who has even remote contact with the supernatural entity currently targeted by a group.

Those hunters who take up this stance in their bid to fight back against the supernatural are lashing out half-armed and with more than a little overconfidence. After all, just consider the negatives of such a system against the actual merits.

Once a wizard's or a werewolf's family are killed, the satisfaction and safety of the target's allies and companions disappears from the picture. These people, while not supernaturally gifted themselves, were probably helping the "evil" out in the shadows by their mere presence, whether knowingly or not. An uninformed hunter (read: most of them) might be utterly convinced that a vampire's victims, once bitten, might themselves become one of the undead after a certain amount of time has elapsed. What if the bitten person is secretly now under the thrall of the vampire who preyed upon them, controlled by the link of supernatural predator and human prey?

Putting the victim out of her misery before she has even become aware of her "curse" is surely a gift in disguise, right? This is the classic philosophical dance of a lesser evil performed to stave off a greater one.

The main advantage of this "all or nothing" approach is the fact that once anyone who has any real contact with the supernatural is dead, the "bad guys" are out of human allies and left accordingly vulnerable. That creates emotional considerations to take into account; a dead heart might not truly feel love, but Dracula certainly pined for Mina Harker with a very real, if sinister, fervor. Likewise, once a hunter and his friends have killed a local vampire's human lover or parents, they are in the advantageous position of preying upon a crea-

ture that might very well be in emotional and mental turmoil. That might easily lead to mistakes, which is something the vampire might not survive to regret.

This approach requires no small amount of effort. Snooping on multiple people, let alone the difficulties involved in doing so without being caught in the act, requires multiple hunters working together. Ferreting out the details of a mage or vampire's human family, friends and contacts is a not inconsiderable feat, when factors such as supernatural protection and local law enforcement potentially act against such a gathering of personal information. It's careless to assume that any creature with such power would leave his loved ones or allies without any kind of protection.

Aside from the difficulty of acquiring that degree of information, a hunter must consider the moral factors to deal with. No matter how greatly someone detests the thought of werewolves existing, or how hotly someone burns with revenge for the murder of their spouse by a vampire, the fact remains that revenge is rarely glorious when it is done in cold blood. This approach is certainly damaging to the supernatural prey, but at what cost? Torturing another person, or perhaps a whole family, for information they may not even hold is a serious matter for anyone to have to deal with, especially when the eventual end of the torture is the deaths of those helpless prisoners. The weight of a death on the conscience simply can't be stressed enough. It has driven strong-willed men and women to madness over the course of history, whether their actions were justified or not. This is not a path any person can walk lightly, let alone remain unchanged by the end.

The legal factors are another quandary to be dealt with. Killing six young women because a vampire bit them does not make someone a hidden hero, hiding from the law like an avenging angel in the shadows. It makes him a serial killer. The local populace, press and police included, doesn't see a superhero; they see Fred West, Ted Bundy or Jack the Ripper.

Local law enforcement comes out in force to stop a spate of murders, no matter the level of corruption in the World of Darkness's police precincts. Burning down a local goth and metal nightclub because it's a haunt for the undead means that the hunter who fired the place is now a wanted arsonist and responsible for many deaths. These people can be caught by a dedicated law enforcement agency, especially when there's a trail of information leading from recent and sudden changes in the hunter's life, such as the breakdown of relationships, the purchase of weapons and the curious interest in the personal details and addresses of several local people.

Player's Note: Family-Killers

These hunters are seriously bad news — perhaps the worst breed out there, depending on your character's friendships and relation-

ships. The only time a character is likely to come across them is *after* they've visited some grievous harm against her, usually in the form of killing her parents, siblings, or perhaps her lover — or by methodically killing any normal humans she has (or has had) contact with.

Either way, your character is left with a trail of bodies that are all linked to her in some way; and if she's trying to remain hidden from the world at large or avoid drawing attention to herself, she must tread very carefully.

What can a character do about this kind of unwanted attention? Perhaps most obviously, she can do her sincere best to protect and watch over those with whom she is linked: friends, family and so on. If the lives of these people really mean nothing to her, then one of these hunters (or worse, a bunch of them) might turn up one day to test the strength of her convictions on that count.

Another approach to dealing with these hunters is slightly more callous, and perhaps just as obvious: the character must make sure her everyday associates know absolutely nothing about her supernatural dealings. Realistically, that's not always going to be possible, and hunters know it. In fact, as they trawl through the Internet for info on your character's parents' address, as they take photos of her sister at work, as they wait in her lover's basement with baseball bats and knives, *they're counting on it.*

These hunters are characterized by two things. First, they are rare. This is not a path that many people would walk, especially not willingly. In fact, even the ones who do walk it end up getting caught quickly. Second, while these hunters are often successful — savagely, destructively successful — it is only for a short time. The law (or supernatural forces bent on revenge) usually catch up to the psychopath(s) responsible for all the chaos before too long. Justice is probably swift and comparatively pleasant next to suffering at the hands of the enraged vampire or mage.

Someone who is willing to so fervently pursue and destroy any trace of the supernatural is definitely the exception to the hunter mindset, not the rule. Psychopaths are just that, no matter what “glorious cause” they might believe in.

Tracking and Telling Tales

A similar way of creating chaos and confusion among a supernatural creature's mortal associates and relationships from its old “human life” is a great deal less damaging to the psyche. Ethically, it can be argued that this method is the polar opposite of the previous one, for while it involves an identical dedication to

gathering information and hunting the creature's contacts, it is a tactic that delivers no overt harm to them.

Once the wizard's parents or the vampire's ignorant lover have been tracked down, then the hunters move in. They meet the normal person who has some link to the supernatural, but with a different kind of weapon than might otherwise be expected: information.

Imagine the difficulties of a werewolf who has arranged for his family to believe that he died or went missing some years ago. This is a perfectly viable solution to the problem of his new life, because it means that no one at all will be watching for him after a certain amount of time has elapsed, and they won't discover his unnatural dealings or supernatural powers. Now imagine that someone goes to this werewolf's mortal family with clear evidence that their son is not only alive and well and avoiding them, but is crazily running around fighting as some sort of terrorist. They have photos, a little videotape, maybe some CCTV or other security camera footage. Whatever it is, it might just be enough to rekindle the family's hunt for their missing son. They probably won't believe any of the supernatural stuff, but the fact remains that the guy in the photo sure looks a lot like their missing son.

These hunters might also take their information and evidence to the legitimate law enforcement in the hope that they'll do something about it — and indeed, it's likely that law enforcement will at least look into it, if the dealings were suspicious enough.

“Your Son's a Werewolf!”

Of course, some hunters get in touch with those human allies who know full well what their supernatural contact is, what he does, and are perfectly aware of many of the nuances of his supernatural life.

These “in the know” situations can play out any number of ways. Some of a vampire's mortal allies or servants might be less than loyal when the chips are down and their own lives are at stake, whereas others would fight the hunters to the death before ever dreaming of betraying their master or lover's well-placed trust. A mage's family might view their supernatural relative as “just a little new-age” or possessing odd hobbies, rather than a spell-casting magician. Even if they do know that their relative can work magic, such a talent lacks the horror factor of a sibling or spouse who is one of the walking dead. A mage's family can be iron-clad in their desire to withhold information about their “innocent” relation.

Such an incident can mean the hunters either glean a great deal of information about their intended target, or they have become snared in the target's web of influence. If they

leave the ally alive, the supernatural creature knows that he is being hunted and by whom. If they kill the loyal servant, family member or friend, then, again, the mage or vampire is likely to assume something strange is going on unless the murder was arranged carefully. Even then, when you have supernatural powers at your disposal, worse things exist to do with your time than hunt down and kill the person or persons who killed your lover, especially if they apparently did it for no reason.

The Advantageously Employed

Some people have jobs that lend themselves well to either discovering the supernatural, or to actually helping them combat its presence. Perhaps most obviously, those in and associated with the medical and caring professions — doctors, nurses, paramedics, even hospital porters and janitors, for example — have this potential. Social workers and psychiatrists are also good examples of this kind of investigative hunter.

Those with extensive training are likely to detect abnormalities in their patients and charges, potentially coming across patients with supernatural influences on their behavior, or even injuries from fangs and claws, for instance. If someone with medical training has cottoned on to something suspicious going on with a patient (let alone friend or relative) then their eyes will be open for anything related to the “illness” or the “behavior changes.” Medical professionals can also bring an intimidating level of medical and psychological knowledge to bear against the creatures that hide from humanity, making them, depending on their personalities, a potentially sinister breed of monster hunter.

Security guards and police officers could also be likely to come across a hint of the supernatural in the course of their employment, dealing as they do with such a large number of people over time. Police officers, at least those not given to taking backhanders and bribes, are also trained to investigate and solve the kind of mysteries that certain supernatural creatures might create by their very presence.

Baiters and Trap-Setters

A classic tactic for brave (or stupid) hunters is to have someone standing around as an obvious bait. This could involve the sexiest guy in the group dancing around in a club owned by a vampire who likes her men tall, dark and great at dancing, or it could be slightly more subtle, such as allowing a supernatural to “stumble” onto information that reveals the identity or location of a lone hunter.

In either case, once the creature takes the bait the other hunters break out the weaponry and hurry to the rescue. This is an incredibly dangerous tactic; if the cavalry takes too long, perhaps observing to gather in-

formation or just by lax planning, then the bait might well die first. A particularly nasty variation on this tactic is to use someone else as the bait — someone totally unaware of her position — and either observe to see what happens or rush in and save her, depending on the hunters’ intentions.

Preventing Infiltration & Locating Prey

Gregory’s eyes flicked to the window for at least the ninth time that hour. Sunrise was not far away.

“You OK, new boy? You seem a little twitchy.” He forced a disarming smile for the benefit of Marie, who returned the gesture. Her question made Gregory refrain from looking over at the window again for the next few minutes, though he couldn’t help himself when he was certain none of the others in the room were watching him.

Behind his placid expression, Gregory felt flooded with disgust at those gathered together in this run-down hostel. Zeke was a mechanic in his mid-50s who smelled of oil, grease and car metal. An overweight college kid called Mick, who had bad skin and worse body odor, sat next to Zeke rustling a packet of potato chips in his hands. Next to him was Marie, a middle-aged housewife with thin hair and frown-lines. The oh-so fearless “leader” of this motley group was Charles, a skinny man in his 40s who said he was a university lecturer from out of town.

Lastly, Gregory himself, who sat with them for the first (and what would most likely be the last) time. It had taken him months to track each of these fools down, followed by weeks of emailing and phone calls before the meeting date was finally arranged. Despite their initial paranoia, it had been almost hilariously easy to convince them that he was one of them: just another poor mortal at the mercy of the “evil” vampires.

These bastards, pathetic as they seemed, had been the ones who had destroyed Gregory’s sire. They had killed a man who had survived for over a century, and they had taken him from this world in a single instant of hatred. The endless nights of conversations over games of chess, the lessons of hunting without harming your prey, the nights spent in discourse over philosophy and religion, history and legendry — all gone, never to be reclaimed.

Now, these mortals would find themselves faced with well-deserved revenge.

Marie spoke then; “What about you, Gregory? You’ve been quiet so far. When did you say you met that... that creature? You mentioned that your meeting with him had changed your life, yes? How did you survive the encounter?”

Gregory smiled like a shark as he rose to his feet. “I met him as I lay dying of stomach cancer. He healed me and told me I would live forever. And I didn’t know him as you knew

him. I knew him as an educated, cultured man, who loved life and lamented the fact that he had sometimes killed those whose blood he took."

They were all looking at him calmly, as if none of his speech was in any way unusual. Marie smiled back at Gregory, like an indulgent mother, as he stumbled gracelessly into the last sentence he'd rehearsed so many times.

"And... I... I'm here as his revenge."

Seemingly from nowhere, a blanket was thrown over him. Under the mildew-scented darkness of the woolen sheet, he lashed out in fury, kicking and striking at whoever had come up behind him as he'd been speaking. In a few moments he was down on his knees, cradling his head as sharp impacts hammered down. They were hitting him with the chairs they'd been sitting on.

Then came another smell, overpowering, and he realized now why they'd chosen this remote, abandoned hostel as the meeting point.

Blinded and panicking, he struggled under the weight of the beatings as the smell of petrol intensified. As the gasoline soaked into the blanket, he started begging and roaring incoherently. When the world flared bright in white pain and searing yellow heat, he started screaming.

Friend or Foe

Hunters are aware that their groups and gatherings could be infiltrated by a cunning monster. To combat this ever-present threat, many hunters develop a range of cautionary tactics when meeting others in the area, and by staying abreast of local information.


Fire

A lot of hunters know or discover that vampires are extremely afraid of fire. Humans have, over the millennia, become very good at creating the untamed element — even the classic kids' trick of using a lighter and a deodorant can is suddenly a frightening weapon against one of the Kindred. Vampire hunters rarely walk around without a lighter; and if one of them ever gets wise to a person who might be a bloodsucker, it's a small matter to go over to the guy and light up a smoke. The hunter might play with his lighter a little, or offer the suspected vampire a lit-up cigarette. If it looks like the hunter is making the suspect really uncomfortable, then the vampire killer knows he is probably on to something.

Silver

Experienced werewolf hunters rarely go out without at least a small amount of silver jewelry, either on display or secreted about the hunter's person, depending on personal taste. Such jewelry is the cheapest, least obvious way to carry silver around. Walking up to a person suspected to be a werewolf and shoving a





silver watch into their face, asking "Has my watch stopped?" is hardly subtle, but it's less obvious than asking someone if they happen to be a werewolf. Hunters don't know the extent of a werewolf's allergy to silver, and anyone who looks decidedly uncomfortable when in close proximity to silver is going to be tracked and investigated (or simply killed) by most attentive hunters.

Of course, having a stranger walk up and shove a silver watch in one's face is enough to make most people uncomfortable, werewolf or no. The lycanthropic allergy to silver isn't as pronounced as some hunters believe, and experienced werewolf hunters (the very few that exist) don't rely on this method of "detection."

Local News

This is the greatest source of information for the people who fight the unknown. At least one hunter in the group, if he has the spare time and effort, cuts out anything unusual from the papers and videotapes all the local news reports. Usually, this nets the group nothing except headaches, but when the hunters compare the two sources regularly, sometimes a good story surfaces and starts the hunters on the right track. Also, the supernatural monsters can't control everything; if a suspicious story turns up in one paper but not another, or on the radio news but not in the local rags, then any hunters paying attention should pick up on the discrepancy and look into things first hand.

The Web

Local news spreads fast online; university/college websites, obituaries, news sites, community sites, and so on. Some hunters monitor as many of these kind of sites as they are reasonably able, keeping track of anything out of the ordinary. The main disadvantage is separating the useful information from the staggering volumes of junk on the Internet. Using search engines effectively, as any experienced user can relate, is a skill that takes some practice to master.

Certain Venues

Once a hunter group has pinpointed a bar or club that has seen a little supernatural activity or presence, the more dedicated members of the group make sure they go back there as often as they can. Many such places are regular haunts for vampires, and that means anyone getting up to anything unusual in the corners night after night is probably fair game to spy on.

Bereaved Relatives

Insidious but effective, few hunters are comfortable with this tactic. These hunters scan the obituaries, the memoriam pages and the local news sites. They find the bereaved relatives and pose as reporters or even government employees. Once a hunter is on the phone or across the table from the bereaved relatives, he is often

thorough and merciless, digging for anything that sounds like it could be related to his area of interest. Any discrepancies in the crime or death are noted and investigated, and many hunters make a good career out of tracking the enemy in this manner.

Hire Private Investigators

One hunter can't watch over everything, so a great way of gathering info (usually very thorough info) is to hire a professional to do the legwork for him. If he's sure someone is a bloodsucker, then he gets a PI to look into this creature's habits. If he's lucky and the target he sets the PI to follow is a supernatural creature, then he'll probably have the investigator as an immediate ally once the PI has seen the truth himself. Some cautious hunters will also hire a PI to watch over a potential ally, to see if the other person claiming to be a hunter is actually telling the truth.

Bribing Cops & Journalists

If a hunter is getting nowhere and the local law doesn't seem to be doing any better, then some consider shelling out a bribe. Usually it's for a little information like the address of a murder suspect or the real details about a murder weapon, but in some cases cops can be bribed to "do their own jobs a little better" and work a little harder to bring a "killer" to justice. Money can change a cop's mind, as long as it is offered very carefully. Obviously, this tactic can be applied equally to journalists.

This method is also a great way of getting the local law dogs and newshounds to do a background check on any potential allies a hunter meets. The downside of this is that the hunter attracts attention to himself and to a possible fellow hunter. The upside of it is that he knows all there is to know about the other hunter's past, criminal or otherwise.

Holding Vigil: The Storyteller's Section

The following section details both the lives and abilities of several people who see themselves as vampire slayers, witch-hunters and various other stripes of monster-killer, and also deals with a few extra Storyteller-specific notes about presenting hunters as antagonists in their chronicles.

Monster hunters. The very words conjure images of desperate men and women, striving grimly in a shadow crusade against sinister and inhuman entities. That is exactly the sense of presence these people should bring to your game. These hunters are not even remotely similar in theme to Anne Rice's Talamasca, or any of John Carpenter's Vampires-style church-funded sects (though

you could certainly take a cue from their tactics). They work under their own initiative, fueled by their own willpower.

Often, the only unifying factor among these people is that they hunt the supernatural in order to find out more about it so they can find these creatures and kill them. These are not the bleeding-hearts folks who turn the other cheek or endeavor to forgive and forget. These are the stalkers, the killers and the bitter underdogs. They have each discovered some of the hidden truths, and are too scared or angry to leave these creatures alone.

The five hunters presented later in this section are indicative of the kind of men and women who can plague your troupe's characters' lives (or unlives). They are the ones who dedicate their time, money and souls to putting the supernatural presence out of action — usually by any means possible.

Joe Average vs. the Wolfman

When using hunters it is worth remembering a key point in the way these people operate, especially in combat. They are regular humans in dangerous, potentially fatal situations, and it is unlikely that they approach any confrontation with a supernatural creature with a cocky attitude. They think carefully, they move fast, and they put everything they have into every single action. If they don't, they die. It is as simple as that.

Determination is one of their greatest assets, after all. What this means is that to each of these hunters, every fight they get in is a life or death struggle. Every punch, every kick, every second spent aiming a gun or swinging a fire-axe; all of it is done with the sure knowledge that unless (and sometimes, *even if*) they give it their all, they are as good as dead. That desperation and determination is something that makes great fight scenes in novels and movies, and highlights the tension and atmosphere of scenes in your own games if you introduce it in a similar way.


Yeah. But How?

Say you want the tension of a good movie or novel fight scene, but aren't certain how to go about it. We present two ways of doing this where hunters are concerned: the first is a roleplaying tactic and the second is a game mechanic.

Describe, describe, describe. There's no need to come across as James Joyce just because one of your characters happens to backhand a mugger, but the true encounters with monster hunters can and should be charged with a near-kinetic energy when you and your players are describing the action. They dodge a Weaponry attack? Tell them about the look of fear and desperation on the hunter's face as he misses his swing and hammers the fire-axe into a wall. They take a few points of bashing damage from a burly hunter who has been chasing them for months? Tell them about the savage



AVERY



gleam in his eyes as he lays a bone-crunching punch into the face of the bastard who killed his daughter. They make a great Firearms roll against a hunter? Have the poor woman take a few minutes to die, and as she writhes and bleeds to death, she spends the time crying out that she doesn't want to die and how she loves her husband.

This kind of detail is wholly appropriate to the ever-present evils inherent in the World of Darkness, and helps ram them home to your players. Additionally, it does justice to the fact that although hunters are antagonists, they are *human* antagonists.

Secondly, a hunter's grim determination or frenzied assault is easily represented in game mechanics by the expenditure of Willpower points. Take it as granted that a hunter, when he finally comes up against a creature, throws his heart and soul into beating that monster, or running for his life. It is fair to assume that for the first few actions, a Storyteller-controlled hunter burns his Willpower.

Of course, this can't last. People get tired, and the situation is a changing, kinetic scene that requires constant reevaluation. If the efforts are making no visible difference or the hunter is on the losing side from the outset, he'll either redouble his efforts for a "blaze of glory," or he'll flee.

Once a hunter's Willpower starts to run dry, if he is still in the fight, he's lost his killer edge and acts accordingly. He might switch to more careful tactics, or might simply be scared and unsure of what exactly to do. Either way, once a hunter's initial determination has been dampened, if he is on the bad end of a fight he is probably going to wind up in a coffin unless he opts for immediate flight, has a life-saving idea, or gets a sudden burst of luck.

Planning the Un-Plannable: Player Action!

As the game unfolds and the encounters with hunters occur, clever players begin to work hard at defusing the situation(s) by either removing their opposition or working to ensure that such opposition never troubles them again in the future (often both).

Several ways exist for cunning players to go about this, and it can only help matters if you've planned to account for as many of them as possible — or are at least coming to the game aware of several of the more concrete approaches that a character might take to rid herself of a hunter.

Chalk Lines & Red Puddles

What's all this about "cunning" players? What about doing away with hunters in the most direct method? Hunter + claws/fangs/fireball = 1 ex-hunter. It's not exactly cunning, but it does the job and that's what counts.

Well, yes and no. It does the job, and in some cases it's probably the best way of doing

the job if no other methods or resources present themselves. From a purely mechanical standpoint, the Morality trait, in all its different permutations for different character types, should remind players that better options than wholesale slaughter exist. Some characters won't think twice about administering lethal punishment to an inconvenient hunter, but others won't *want* to kill a person just to get rid of him. (Some players will try to use "self-defense" as an excuse for their characters killing anyone who looks at them funny. While self-defense is acceptable, try to keep it from getting out of hand.)

Killing mortals doesn't really need all that much description in this chapter. After all, it's something akin to the "default method" for getting rid of little problems like hunters, and any large section spent detailing the 50 ways to punch or claw a regular human is wasted space.

If your players' characters turn on your carefully plotted and well-thought-out hunter, splattering her across the wall instead of spending months investigating and manipulating her jury-rigged information network, try not to be too frustrated. After all, your job is to give the players problems to solve and events to interact with.

Sure, they made a mess, but all they were doing was exercising their options. Besides, every action has a reaction. If the characters realize later in the chronicle that they are *still* seeing the aftershocks from killing one group of hunters, the story can only benefit.

A key point for players and their characters to consider is the chance to catch the hunters before they can really *become* hunters. Once a person has witnessed the supernatural with curiosity, revulsion or hatred, he often decides to investigate and research things as best he can before loading up for an immediate killing spree. This means he looks into your character's business, pokes around scouting for information, and tries to make contact with other hunters.

This is the ideal time to strike at a hunter — before he can find his feet. Finding him is the problem, however, because once he makes contact with other hunters, he becomes more dangerous, better informed and equipped, and less susceptible to supernatural persuasion.

A potentially successful method would be to harness the Internet for the purpose of sniffing out neophyte and veteran hunters alike. A website or forum where hunters meet, swap tales and tactics, and discuss their grim "calling" is a literal goldmine of information

to the vampire, mage or werewolf who has access to it. The most sinister manipulation of events could even involve such a supernatural being *owning* such a site. The hunters log in and talk about their business, while the entire thing is being played out on the screen of the very creature they are all trying to kill.

Such intrusion has delicious possibilities. A character could arrange to meet "his fellow hunters" one by one, picking them off one at a time at each of the meetings and removing any potential future threats. Better still, such meetings could be engineered with the right supernatural talents, so that the hunter leaves the rendezvous with a head full of information about the character's enemies. By this method, a careful character could develop a dedicated amateur spy network or secret army to deploy against his rivals. One by one, the hunters are supernaturally coerced into seeking out the character's opponents and either keeping track of them, harassing them or simply killing them. Supernaturally coercion isn't even necessary if the character in question is charismatic, intelligent and able to provide a good reason why he knows the locations of monsters.

Perhaps, once a character has met with some hunters, she can convince them that she's a repentant example of her kind. She "confesses to her sins" and pleads for a chance to help the hunters. This "bleeding heart" tells all she knows of the locations and details of her rivals in the sure knowledge that the hunters will look into this information if she's convincing enough.

Such a misled group of hunters, supernaturally fooled or otherwise, could be used in a number of ways. They can snoop around a rival's affairs — and in the case of vampires, they can act during the daytime. They can waylay, kidnap or otherwise inconvenience a rival's allies, such as ghouls or kinfolk, using them for information, ransom, or simply to antagonize and worry an opponent who finds his allies disappearing.

The Same Tricks

A character always has the option of using the same methods that the hunters themselves use. Turning a person's own tricks against him is a dramatic way of taking revenge.

One of the dirtiest tactics that any hunter can use is very often savagely effective when used against him in return: ignoring the actual target, and going after his families and loved ones. When a hunter terrorizes a supernatural creature's family, that can be a harrowing enough situation; but when you add that most characters have a bevy of supernatural powers at their disposal, any confrontations with a hunter's loved ones take on a very serious edge.

Destroying the hunter's life around him is a potentially devastating gambit. It either emotionally and mentally wrecks the poor mortal and drives him over the edge into defeat, or renews his vicious streak tenfold. Revenge is a powerful motivation, and threaten-

ing a person's family and friends could drive it to the forefront of a desperate person's mind. Played well and in the right circumstances, however, harassing or killing some of the relatives of a hunter could be the incentive needed to scare him off the trail. Some characters may wish to make it clear to the hunter that worse things lie in store for him if he continues his little crusade, while others may wish to simply make plain the fact that they will leave the person alone if he drops the hunt. Threat or ultimatum, even the wording of such a decree is important, lest it be taken as a challenge rather than the intended merciful "get-out" clause.

Characters with economic or financial influence might work against a hunter in other ways. Striking from a distance is almost always preferable, after all. If the character has the opportunity to call in some favors, there might be a way to convince a character's contacts to freeze the hunter's bank account, get him evicted, or take his job. Any (or all) of these force someone to take stock, and leave a hunter vulnerable and distracted for some time.

Even when it comes to the final, most permanent way of removing a hunter, a character reluctant to bloody her hands with such a task could simply pay or supernaturally manipulate a thug or mugger to do the dirty work for her.

The biggest advantage possessed by a character with a dubious or "flexible" moral code is frighteningly simple. Hunters are normal humans, and normal humans die easily...

Legal Considerations

...But murder is a mess.

This can work both for and against a character with a hunter on her trail. The fact remains that should a hunter get lucky and take out the supernatural entity he's pursuing, the chances are that there'll be a corpse to show for all his hard work. Vampires crumble to dust, of course, but the werewolves and mages leave bodies. Chances are that any prepared hunter has taken this into consideration, and either has a contingency plan to get away from the scene before the police can stick the crime on him, or he has a place ready to dump the remains of those he kills. Serial killers are a hunter's closest relative, and their methods of disposing of their victims can provide inspiration for a monster killer. Bury the bodies under the patio or veranda, dissolve them in acid or lime, burn them, hide them in an alley or dumpster in the bad part of town, dump them in the woods... the list goes on and on.

A character being hunted needs to consider the same thing, however; if she eventually murders the hunter(s) following her, she could be in a lot of trouble. Hunters are often everyday folks with careers and families, and people tend to notice when those folks die or go missing. Unless the character covers her tracks efficiently, there'll be a crime scene and a potential host of evidence connecting her to the dead body.

Ways exist to get around this, of course. Perhaps careless characters are liable to be caught up in the legal mess that hunters make when they die, but a prepared or cunning vampire character might already have a place where they "hide the bodies." Even so, difficulties arise. Hiding a corpse is no easy feat.

In situations like these, a character's allies, retainers and contacts can come into play. Never underestimate the utility of good friends, reliable contacts... or a person who can be set up to take the fall.

Serial Killers

It can make for pretty grim reading, but literature detailing the lives and crimes of these people can make brilliant inspiration for fully fleshed-out hunters. How these people kill and the methods used to conceal their horrible crimes are a great insight into the lives of monster hunters and the way they operate.

Sample Hunters

The following characters have had the details of their lives, their Virtues and Vices fleshed out somewhat. This is intentionally done so you can introduce a level of depth to these characters that would otherwise be lacking in an average human character. These characters (and all interesting hunters) should be designed and used with the intention that they act as returning antagonists, because they are ill-suited for "one-shot" style scenes without hunters quickly becoming stale and uninteresting opponents. Use the additional information to entrench your players' characters in the hunters' lives, as hooks that can lure a character into deeper interaction with these people. The Virtues and Vices are especially useful in this regard, presenting you with plot hooks for the characters to discover and manipulate for their own ends. Each hunter's unique approaches to hunting and specific tactics for killing his or her opponents should also provide you with opportunities for antagonists' methods to use in your own chronicles.

Ryan Duffy.

Terminal Party Animal

Background: Ryan was born Ryan Adam Duffy, in Seattle, 1978. His father's second wife physically abused him in secret, and the troubled home life meant that as he grew up he threw himself into his studies as a form of escapism. Even in high school he was working hard to make sure he reached a good college so he could move to a new city for good. His one vice in a childhood of study and excellent report cards was cars. They needn't be fast or even in good condition, but Ryan bought them secondhand, fixed them up if need be, and would race them around the countryside roads that surrounded his town. At 18 he left home and his hated stepmother behind for England, and attended King's College in London on a Computing scholarship.

University life proved a little too heavy on the temptations. Within his first year, Ryan's friends began to notice that his heavy penchant for cocaine was getting the better of him. By the start of his second year, Ryan added two more problems to his lifestyle: He'd become addicted to amphetamines in order to keep his eyes open long enough to study, and he became HIV positive off a used needle at a house party.

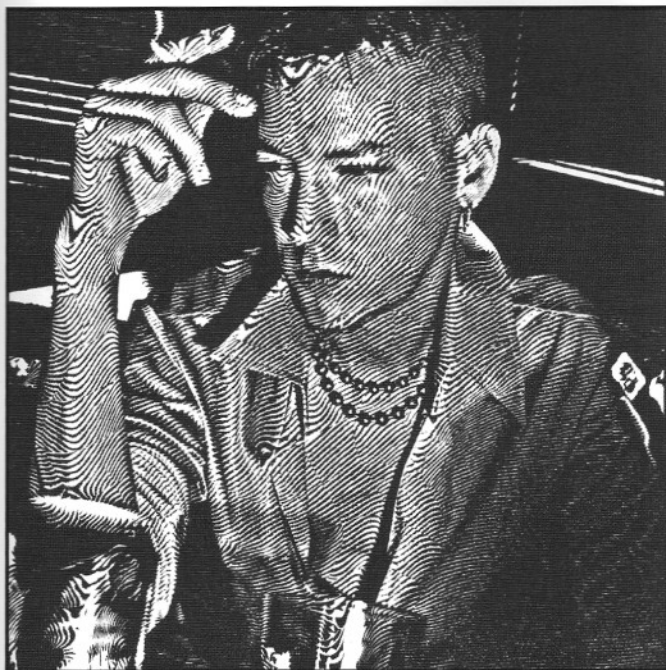
It was only a couple of weeks after he discovered his health crisis that he was getting high again at another party. As he and several others lay around buzzing from bloodstreams full of heroin, Ryan noticed that their host was actually biting and drinking blood from the wrists of her guests. He stayed where he was, faking unconsciousness while this apparent "vampire" bit the wrists or necks of each partygoer in turn. Only when the woman reached him and felt the clear pinch of fangs in his wrist did he fight her. He managed to beat her back with the kitchen knife he'd been chopping coke with earlier that night, and in a frenzy he found himself sawing the food knife *through* her neck. She crumbled to ash as her head fell clear. Ryan fled to his apartment, and remained there, missing lectures and lessons, never answering the door or his phone.

A week later, the destroyed vampire's friends tracked him to his student apartment and entered, seeking revenge. Ryan had spent the whole week in paranoid activity planning for this contingency, however, and after one of the vampires was destroyed with a gasoline-filled water pistol and a lighter, the others fled in terror.

Description: Ryan is a young man on the edge and can't hide it. His drug addictions have taken their toll on his physique, for he is severely underweight and has tremors in his hands akin to a man 60 years his senior. His eyes are almost always bloodshot from his ravaging insomnia and borderline alcoholism, though he often wears sunglasses to cover the fact. His clothes are expensive and fashionable, but they hang off him like a scarecrow's rags. If he didn't look close to death, he'd be very handsome. Despite his condition, he still forces himself to gel his hair and shave most days, and his cheeks and chin bear dozens of little scars from his regular attempts at looking clean-shaven.

Storytelling Hints: Ryan Duffy is an ideal hunter to use with urban vampires or mages who delight in the party scene. He is one of those people who seem to "know everyone" and has an acquaintance at almost every party going. He spends his days working from his apartment as a website designer (although his work isn't inspired or reliable) and he spends his nights going to parties and nightclubs, looking for vampires.

Close to death from a combination of drug abuse, insomnia and paranoia, it is only a matter of time before his HIV develops into AIDS or one of the creatures he follows proves too much for his unpredictable tactics. To date, he's racked up seven vampire kills and one dead mage in the last three years, with tactics rang-



William Kidderminster, the Graveyard Shift Worker

Background: Billy was born to a working class family in 1970. William left school at 16, as his parents were both working themselves to exhaustion at ground-level retail jobs. For a while he worked with his father in the local retail store. That lasted three years, until a friend got him a job as a subway train security guard. He grew to accept that this was what he'd be doing until he retired, and was content with the fact that at least his job kept him out of the rain.

It was while working his sixth graveyard shift of the week that he saw one of the passengers do something unusual. He was paying her backside diligent attention when she left the train. She disappeared into the tunnels behind the train, unnoticed by anyone else. He notified the station office, but nothing came of the incident until he saw her again a week later. Once more, despite being surrounded by people in a busy train station, she simply ran off into the subway tunnels behind the train. This time, Billy followed her. While Billy is an honest and moral guy, he's the first to admit he's not the sharpest knife in the drawer. His first reaction to catching up with the woman was to grab at her none-too-gently and yell at her, "Stop, you stupid bitch! You'll be hit by a damn train!" She responded by cursing, punching him with incredible force, and disappearing into thin air. Billy looked around the tunnel, stumbling a few times before getting out his flashlight. It was only then he realized that he was actually surrounded by small piles of human-looking bones, chalk lines of symbols and pentagrams, and what looked like a gibberish language all over the ground and walls.

The next meeting with the woman went much more satisfactorily. He pistol-whipped her as soon as she stepped on the train and then had her arrested, leading the police to her "Satanist shrine" as evidence to whatever murders or grave-robberies she'd committed.

The next morning he followed another woman out of the train and down the tunnel, although that incident ended when he shot and killed her. He still bears burn scars on his arms and chest almost three years later, after the woman threw fire at him from her fingertips. A lapsed Christian, the son of staunch believers, Billy was convinced this was Satan's own magic used against him.

Billy keeps a keen eye out these days, clumsily following those who tweak his suspicions. He has seen several people venture off into the tunnels, or venture out from them, and he's more than willing to risk his life to find out what the hell is going on. He is once again a religious man;

ing from running them down in his battered Chevy Caprice to setting them on fire with his favorite gasoline/water pistol trick. He sees his life in England as a string of unlucky breaks, and his mood currently borders on clinical depression. He believes he has absolutely nothing left to lose, and throws himself into every hunt without hesitation.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer 3, Crafts (Car Repair) 3, Medicine 1, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Drive (His Car) 3, Firearms 1, Stealth 2, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Intimidation 1, Persuasion 1, Socialize (Party Animal) 3, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Barfly, Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes 1, Resources 2, Unseen Sense

Willpower: 7

Morality: 5

Virtue: Fortitude. Ryan had a childhood of diligent study and lives an adult life of violent conflict, insomnia and hardship.

Vice: Wrath. Despite Ryan's patience, when things truly irritate or threaten him, his temper flares beyond his desire to rein it back.

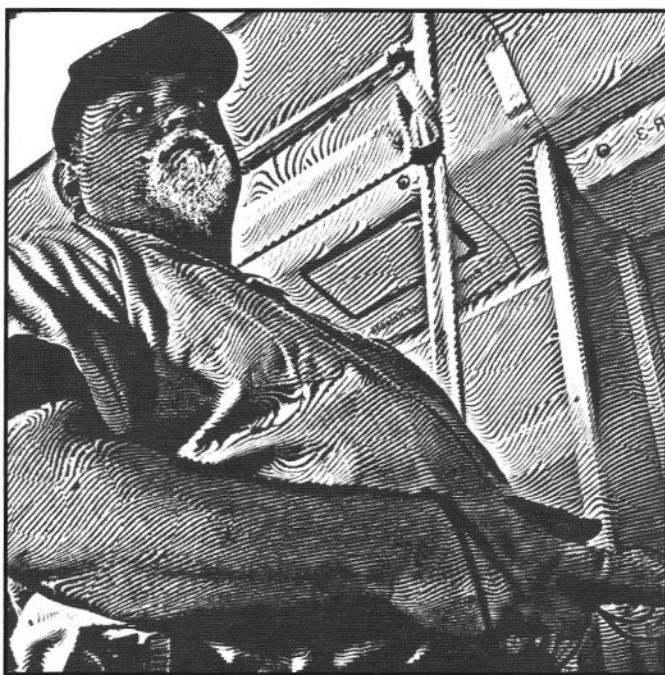
Health: 7

Initiative: 8

Defense: 3

Speed: 9

Derangements: Suspicion (mild; 6)



as such, he knows full well that “some pretty ungodly shit is happening down there,” and he often spends time walking the subway tunnels on his days off in search of any other secrets hidden in the darkness.

Description: Billy is a tall and imposing man of middle age. While most of his bulk is related to his beer belly, muscle hides under his loose clothes — the result of irregular weightlifting. His beard is short and almost entirely grey, and his hair is curly and graying at the temples, always looking as though it needs a good wash. When working, Billy wears the standard dark blue of a subway train security guard. Faded black jeans and heavy metal band t-shirts are the norm in his off-work hours, and he has a beaten, suede jacket large enough to conceal his pistol in the breast pocket without creating any suspicious lumps.

Storytelling Hints: Billy is a good hunter to use if any characters travel on the subway (or in the subway tunnels) regularly. He’s not all that smart, so he can be talked out of his convictions fairly easily given the right lines. He is deeply mistrustful of anyone who has even remotely suspicious dealings in the subway tunnels, however, and believes there is some kind of Satanist cult at work under the city. When he meets someone in the tunnels who is not obviously a maintenance technician, he is liable to shoot first. He’s seen too many eerie goings-on in those tunnels to give anyone the benefit of the doubt.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Computer 1, Crafts (Handyman Work) 2,

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Drive 2, Firearms 2, Survival 1, Weaponry (Nightstick) 2

Social Skills: Intimidation (Imposing Presence) 3, Socialize 1, Streetwise (Subways) 2, Subterfuge 1

Merits: Iron Stamina 2, Iron Stomach, Natural Immunity, Strong Back

Willpower: 7

Morality: 5

Virtue: Justice. He’s not bright and has odd ideas about women, but Billy has a strong moral sense of what is right and wrong. If there’s no one else around better qualified to deal with something, he has no qualms about throwing in to do the right thing.

Vice: Lust. Billy is incredibly sexist, and has little ability with women. He has had several formal complaints brought against him for his conduct at work. He honestly believes that many women want to be openly stared at or hit on; otherwise, why would they dress the way they do?

Health: 9

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 11

Leanne Wallis, Head of the Survivor Support Group

Background: Leanne has been a mother her whole life, from taking care of her little sisters before she was even a teenager, to working as a fosterer and social worker in her late 50s. Her own childhood was marred by her parents’ marital woes. Her mother vanished with another man and was never heard from again. A year later, when Leanne was seven, her father was killed in a car accident by a drunk driver. Leanne and her three younger sisters went to live with her resentful grandparents, and soon Leanne was acting as a stand-in mother to her siblings. She was bringing in a wage as a waitress and cleaner by the age of 13, supplementing the family’s earnings and paying rent to her grandparents.

She has always believed in working hard for a fair wage, and never complained at her treatment in any employment, no matter how difficult or boring the work may have been. When she attended her local college, she still worked some weeknights and weekends, sending the money home to her grandparents and teenage sisters. All the while she studied hard and never missed lessons, finally graduating with honors and landing a job as a social worker shortly after.

She found a great deal of satisfaction in helping troubled children, working tirelessly and diligently to assist them in any way she legally could. Such efforts won her many awards from local charity institutions and media organizations. Her face became a well-known image in the newspapers of the large town where she lived.

In her mid-30s, after a disastrous marriage with an abusive man ended in divorce, she began to take in children who needed fostering. She admitted to herself in private that she did this because she was lonely, but she

still took great joy in improving the lives of others and helping them as best she could. The years passed and a succession of children lived and stayed with her.

On the evening of her 53rd birthday, as she sat at her desk in the office just as she always did, she met a young man who would change her life. This 19-year-old came to the social welfare department asking for Leanne Wallis specifically, having seen her so many times in the paper. He needed help, and he was too scared to go to the police with his story. She listened to his tale of vampires and blood-drinking with growing disbelief and worry for the young man's sanity. She agreed to let him stay at her house that night, with the proviso that he let her take him to a doctor the next morning.

That night, she witnessed real vampires, as they broke into her house and killed the young man before her eyes. She saw the fangs, the superhuman strength and speed, she saw the blood-drinking... she saw things that simply couldn't be done naturally. The vampires threatened her with a similar fate, and she still does not know why they left after the threats, sparing her instead to live with her terror.

Knowing what she knew, she began to meticulously search through the social welfare files for anyone who could conceivably have also suffered at the hands of these creatures. She looked for records of unusual injuries, similar stories of vampires, bloodless corpses, and so on. Her contacts in the police force and local media helped after she called in a dozen favors.

Eventually, with a large, plastic binder full of newspaper cuttings, photocopied confidential crime files and telephone numbers, she contacted, one by one, everyone still living who she believed had encountered these creatures.

They met the following week, 16 people attending in all, and the Survivor Support Group was born out of one woman's fear. They are not soldiers or killers, just everyday people who have survived something they don't quite understand. They bear scars from the encounters, some emotional, some physical, that they are now determined to avenge.

Description: Leanne is a thin woman in her mid-50s. She favors long skirts and smart white blouses in day-to-day dress, usually avoiding black because it highlights her fragile, shapeless build. Her crow's feet and frown lines are prominent markings, obvious signs of her hardworking lifestyle.

She carries a handbag with her at all times, which contains (among other, more innocent things) a snub-nosed, always-loaded revolver.

Storytelling Hints: Leanne Wallis is not an immediately clever or cunning woman, and she is certainly not outwardly violent herself. She is, however, dedicated and very careful. The Survivor Support Group is a harmless-sounding organization that appears benign from the outside. Beyond the threshold it becomes clear that Ms. Wallis is in fact gathering as much informa-



tion on the supernatural as she is able, in order for her group to attack it any way possible. She is an "urban general" of sorts, coordinating her ragtag troops against the hidden horrors of the night.

Her files on the supernatural creatures that stalk the city are not reliable and certainly not comprehensive. They are collected police reports, witness testimonies, criminal records, social services files, newspaper cuttings and even the photocopied statement of a convicted madman that was sent to her anonymously.

She knows the Survivor Support Group is not perfectly informed, but believes that they have enough information to begin the hunt. She's mostly correct, and could best be used against characters that have recently done something that would have shown up on her "radar." Killing a person in foster care, or leaving a body drained of blood somewhere the police could find it are the acts that will bring a character to Leanne's attention.

When it does finally come to conflict, the members of SSG attempt to overwhelm the creatures they attack by sheer numbers. Several members of the group carry pistols and shotguns, purchased through legal means, which are accordingly easily traceable.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer 2, Medicine (Psychology) 2, Occult (Vampire Folklore) 1, Politics 2, Science 1

Physical Skills: Drive 1, Firearms 1

Social Skills: Empathy (Emotions) 4, Expression 2, Persuasion 3, Socialize 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Allies 4, Language (French, Spanish) 2, Resources 2

Willpower: 6

Morality: 8

Virtue: Charity. Leanne lives to help people. She works endlessly to make their lives easier. Although she acknowledges the fact her altruism makes her feel better, she is a sincerely selfless person. It is the way she has lived her entire life, and despite her current troubles and fears, it is the way she will always live.

Vice: Pride. There have been very few problems in Leanne's life that her direct approach and diligence could not overcome. Those few that have occurred are like wounds in her self-respect, and she reacts petulantly and childishly to any of her own perceived failings.

Health: 8

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 8

Josef Evans. the Man About Town

Background: Josef was born in an African-American family, part of an average, blue-collar community in the heartland of America. He didn't see much of his father, who was pulling long shifts at the factory day and night. His mother was a caring woman and a great cook, but her attention was divided among her six children. Josef was the fifth child and was neither a big earner like his eldest brother (businessman) or a popular under-achiever like his eldest sister (amateur glamour model).

When he left home at 18, he was working part-time in a chain bookstore to pay his rent, and occasionally writing freelance for a local newspaper. He would tell people he was writing a novel that would one day make him famous, but in truth he was slacking off and avoiding the pressures of the real world for as long as he could. This continued for several years, until everything went very wrong indeed.

He was 26 when his parents and his two sisters died in a plane crash. Later that year, his younger brother committed suicide when his wife left him. A week before Christmas, his eldest brother was killed in a mugging. A drunk driver killed his last sibling, a paramedic, four months later.

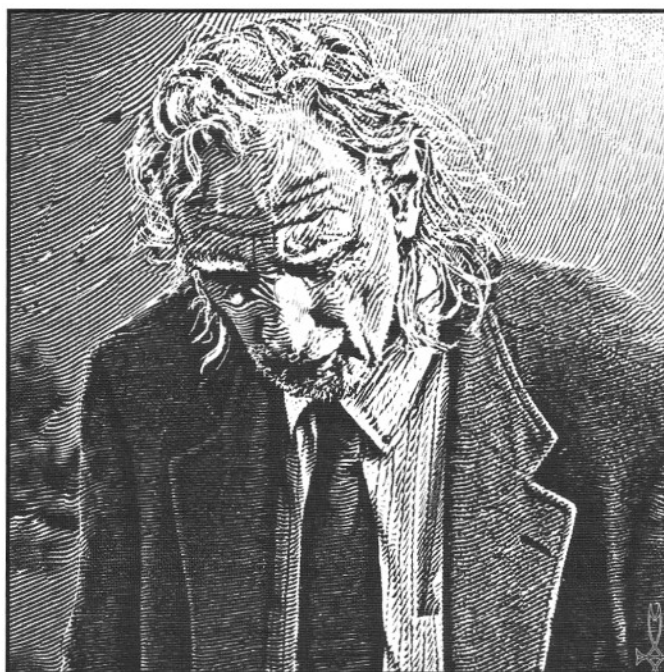
Losing both his parents and five siblings in one year changed Josef. No longer the cheery slacker, he spent his time in a haunted daze, distracted at best and depressed at worst. He was fired from his job, evicted for falling behind on his rent, and had his unemployment benefits cut off. In a single year, he had fallen a lifetime's worth. He had no family, no friends worth speaking of, and no money. He became homeless after his few friends and ex-coworkers grew tired of putting him up for free.

As he lay in an alleyway, covered with a ragged blanket and shivering with the onset of a winter night, he was approached by a lone figure. The figure turned out to be a handsome, well-dressed young man by the name of Amadeus de Silva. Amadeus calmly informed Josef that his family had not died in accidents or due to the fickle spin of fate's wheel. They had all died because Amadeus had arranged it himself. He explained that he was in love with Josef, and had been watching him for years. He wanted offer him a chance at eternal life, and had removed any obstacles binding Josef to his human existence. Josef was being offered the chance to join Amadeus as a vampire.

As Amadeus spoke, Josef felt a flood of fury and bitterness that threatened to steal his self-control. When the vampire finished laying out the terms of the "agreement," callously speaking of slaughtering Josef's entire family, the mortal's reply was not what the vampire had been expecting. From his jacket pocket, Josef pulled a switchblade, and rammed it into the vampire's right eye. As Amadeus screamed and fell back, Josef took his chance to flee.

That was 50 years ago. Since that night, Josef has lived on the streets, awaiting the vampire's return. He waits with a patience born of desperation, and a dirty handgun he stole from a crime scene. Now nearing 80 years of age, Josef has a series of vampire kills behind him. He walks the streets at night, devoutly searching each and every back alley and road he can in the city center. He catches the vampires as they feed, and kills them without hesitation by immediate, close-range gunshots to the head, sawing through their necks with a stolen hacksaw as they lay stunned. He wishes each death were one he'd inflicted on Amadeus when he had the chance all those years ago.

Josef kills the vampires to save "his people": the bums, the prostitutes, the losers and nobodies, the men and women of the streets that the world ignores. He calls himself, with an ironic smile, the "Man About Town."



Description: Josef is an old man, made older by the physical and emotional hardships of his life. His wild, greasy white hair is shoulder length and contrasts with his dark skin. As a man nearly 80 years of age, he is physically frail, yet he has the tenacity to stand up after every day's sleep and walk the streets at night. He dresses in ragged, filthy clothing, and has a gray trench coat that he acquired from a vampire's ashen corpse. In his pockets he carries several lighters and knives, and his trusty handgun. He is very careful about ammunition, for he only has a limited supply of bullets rattling around in his pockets. He often mumbles as he walks, and although the words are close to incomprehensible, the occasional word can be made out. Usually, he speaks of his family, repeating their names over and over.

Storytelling Hints: Josef is the ultimate urban stalker. Living on the streets has hardened him and provided him with a wealth of experience few hunters can ever match, which mitigates his advanced age. Werewolves, vampires, wizards: In his time, Josef is pretty sure he's seen all there is to see. He can make a character's life very difficult in several ways outside of physical combat. Firstly, Josef patrolling the streets might mean the character has difficulties going about his business without an audience. If the character has any clandestine dealings, these may prove difficult once the character realizes that Josef is out there somewhere, watching him. Josef is also not above tracking and tagging the family and friends of a supernatural creature. While he rarely resorts to committing outright harm to such a person, he does have the moral high ground when dealing with them. He will pursue them doggedly in his drive for information and an edge against the creatures he kills.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Crafts 1, Investigation (Vampires) 1, Occult 4

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Drive 1, Firearms (Head Shots) 3, Stealth 2, Survival 2

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression 2, Intimidation 2, Socialize 1, Streetwise (Back Alleys) 3, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Contacts 3, Danger Sense, Quick Draw

Willpower: 6

Morality: 7

Virtue: Charity. Despite his quest for vengeance, Josef also works to keep others safe. His deeds save the lives of other unfortunates, and he sees this as the one good facet of his unending hunt for Amadeus.

Vice: Wrath. Josef lives for revenge. It seethes within his mind like a living thing, affecting every thought and action he takes. It keeps him on his feet and walking the streets every night, and has done so for 50 long, cold years.

Health: 8

Initiative: 5

Defense: 3

Speed: 10

Julia Snow.

the Minister's Daughter

Background: Julia Elizabeth Snow was born out of wedlock and in sin, the illegitimate result of her American mother's affair with an Irish priest. Father McIlmoyle refused to acknowledge his daughter, moving back to Britain to distance himself from the possibility of his illicit relationship being discovered. He sent back, unopened, letters from Julia's mother, and adamantly denied ever knowing the woman to his superiors in the Church.

Julia grew up with a sense of sympathy for her rejected mother (and the succession of boyfriends), but she was always fascinated by talk of her real father. From an early age she began to romanticize the idea of a love that could make a priest turn his back on his vows, even temporarily. In her late teens she left her small town in Wisconsin and set to tracking her real father down. Ostensibly, she was taking a year off between high school and college; she never told her mother of the real purpose of her "travels around Europe."

Father Frank McIlmoyle proved easy to find, as he still resided at the same address where her mother sent occasional letters. She met him for the first time at his front door, introduced herself, and was reluctantly invited in for a cup of tea.

She stayed in Ireland for over five years, working in various pubs and bars and throwing her lot in with the occasional local acoustic band. Father McIlmoyle would never publicly acknowledge her as his daughter, but the two grew reasonably close over time. One night, on a visit to her father's church, she found him shaken and trembling. He said that he'd just taken confession; and though he was reluctant to talk about it, she managed to squeeze him for details later that night when he was deep in his cups.

A man had been coming to the church for months now, confessing to sins of blood-drinking and murder every week. This man believed he was a vampire, one of Satan's creatures, and sought regular confession as a means of cleansing his soul. This particular night, angered by the man's callous talk of murder and vile practices, Father McIlmoyle scoffed at his delusions of grandeur and told him to seek psychiatric help. It was then that the man came into the Father's confession booth and offered proof of his undead existence.

Faced with proof that these Satanic creatures existed, the priest and his daughter set to seeking them out. Initially the pair met with the vampire they ironically called "the Confessor," and were hoping to offer some redemption or cure for his condition. When it became clear there was no chance of the creature redeeming himself in any way other than death, they went to the next meeting with sharpened wooden stakes and thick ropes. The Confessor, grown weary and traumatized by his undying existence, allowed his human redeemers to destroy him. He acceded to their method, and was tied to a tree in the local wood to



await the dawn. In the evidence of the cleansing fire of daylight, the priest and his daughter knew they had acted correctly.

They set to tracking down more of the Confessor's kind, in order to redeem their souls and send them to the Lord's judgment. The second vampire they found was not as passive a subject as the Confessor had been. Julia and Father McIlmoyle took turns guarding their captive, each using the time to keep the creature deprived of sleep in the hope it would make the vampire more conversant.

What Julia did not count on was her father's weakness. While she spent her watch ignoring the creature's temptations of eternal life and power, her father had no such mental fortitude. His faith was weak enough to break his vow of celibacy, and now it proved weak enough to break under the temptation of damnation. When Julia awoke for her morning watch and interrogation, her father and the vampire were gone. A short letter written in her father's neat script lay on her bedside table, explaining everything: his lack of faith; his desire for a richer, more fulfilling life; and the knowledge that he had accepted the vampire's offer to become one of the undead.

After several months passed, Julia's nightly hunts for her father and his vampire maker grew tiresome as the trail grew cold. From the information given to her by the Confessor, she knew many of the vampire haunts of the city, but never were the creatures she encountered any but the weakest of their kind. These she lured closer with the promise of her body and blood, before ruthlessly killing them with stakes and knives.

Now she hunts these creatures in the sure knowledge that their deaths redeem their souls in the eyes of God. One night she hopes to catch up with her father and the vampire who corrupted him. She refuses to believe that

her father betrayed his faith twice and voluntarily allowed himself to be damned.

Description: Julia is a slender, pretty American girl. Her light blonde hair is cut short, and her eyes are the dark blue of deep waters. She favors brand name jeans and has half a wardrobe full of t-shirts with various slogans and catchphrases: "I Should Be Fired" and "Make Me Moan or Sleep Alone" are particular favorites. Athletic from regular exercise, Julia would cut a striking figure if she could get her sleep patterns and irregular diet under control. As it is, her looks are marred by her sharp weight loss, the worry lines on her face and the frown that rarely leaves her lips. No matter how fatigued she is, it is always clear that Julia has beautiful skin, pale and smooth — a fact she prides herself on every time she looks in a mirror.

Storytelling Hints: Julia excels at her style of hunting: luring in vampires at nightclubs and bars, and going for them at a suitably vulnerable moment. She would best be used as a character is potentially eyeing her up as prey, or even as an actual date.

Due to her inexperience and lack of impressive fighting skill, she relies on surprise to bag her victims. It will probably not be long before she picks a fight with the wrong vampire, lures him in too close and realizes that she is out of her league. In combat, she is best used up close and personal and with a knife in her hand. In any other method of combat, Julia will probably not survive unless she flees.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Computer 1, Investigation 2, Medicine 1, Occult (Vampires) 2, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Drive 1, Firearms 1, Stealth 1, Weaponry (Knife) 2

Social Skills: Empathy (Reading Moods) 3, Persuasion 3, Socialize 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Fast Reflexes 2, Fighting Finesse (Knife) 1, Fresh Start, Language (Latin) 1, Quick Draw, Resources 1

Willpower: 6

Morality: 7

Virtue: Justice. Julia does God's work, plain and simple. She believes she is redeeming the souls of these creatures, and does it because it is the right and fair thing to do. They exist out of God's light, and she knows that if she does not heal their souls in death, then the evils they have committed will never be atoned for. Right and wrong, good and evil — the world maybe colored in shades of gray, but Julia lives it as though it were black and white.

Vice: Envy. Julia was always a jealous girl and has grown into a jealous young woman. She is the kind of person to fake smiles when she hears of friends' successes, and

silently seethes at their good fortune. With her fatherless childhood and the stresses of her new life, she truly believes that the grass is greener on the other side, and resents it.

Health: 7

Initiative: 8

Defense: 3

Speed: 9

Full Circle

"I know you." The old man was shivering harder now, almost like a spasm. "I know you."

The vampire tilted his head slightly, amused despite himself at the homeless wretch pointing the shaky gun.

"I don't think you do, old man. I'd remember a gentlemen like yourself."

"You really don't recognize me, do you? You don't remember me." The old man was on his feet now, and his shivering had taken on a jittery, threatening aspect. "Amadeus, it's me."

The vampire stepped back, his eyes narrowed in confusion and unease. The taste of stolen blood still tingled on his tongue as he drew breath to speak, but the homeless man pressed a dirty finger to the vampire's lips. Like an incantation, the old man spoke through gritted, rotting teeth.

"Your family did not die on a spin of fate's fickle wheel. I arranged it. I arranged it all, so you would have nothing to leave behind when you joined me. I now offer you eternal life and the power of an immortal." You remember those words, fucker? You remember speaking them to me, in this alley, nearly 50 years ago?"

"I don't know you. And that, old man, is that."

The vampire sent the blood heating through his veins as it powered his supernatural reflexes. Despite his quick movements in fleeing, as the gunshot rang out he felt something like a hammer blow hit his lower back. He collapsed into the rain-wet ground, feeling a wrenching snap of vertebrae. His legs wouldn't move.

He felt the drain of blood as his injuries began to heal immediately, and was on his feet just in time to catch another metal slug, this time in the back of his head. Gunfire rang out again in a repeated staccato burst. More impacts like the pinching of flesh and stabbing of bone blossomed on his back, and he rolled over, raising his arms to shield his head. Staggered and stunned, he blinked back blood-tears as he looked up at the wrinkled man.

"Please, wait... please... I don't know you, and I don't know how you know the Prince! I don't even see Amadeus myself more than a few times a year. Look, I can give you a gift, my friend. You are an old man, one foot in the grave... I can take away the fear of death! You will live forever!"

The homeless man pulled back the hammer of his revolver.

"No, I won't. And neither will you."



The stench in the compound was awful. The remains of our small coterie moved across the empty courtyard. Behind me, Marcus swore softly, while Julianna let out a low growl, disgust twisting her face. I thanked whatever powers may be that I no longer had to worry about breathing or losing a stomach full of food, because the place was beyond ripe. A satellite dish topped the main building and wires crisscrossed everywhere. Pretty high-tech for the middle of the desert.

I gingerly pushed open the door of the first building, a squat concrete square maybe 15 feet on a side. The inside, though jammed with more cots than could really be comfortable, seemed well-ordered and clean. People, each wearing a long scarlet robe and quite obviously dead, lay on the pallets. The front of their robes bore strange symbols embroidered in yellow and green. I inched forward through a narrow space between the cots to take a closer look.

Julianna screamed my name. I backed slowly out of the room and looked across the swept-dirt courtyard, trying to locate her. "Anthony, in here!" she yelled from inside the main compound building. One hand on my gun, I headed inside. The meaty smell of death hung even more densely here — the long, even rows of cots filled the large room, each cradling a red-robed corpse. In a small back room beyond the beds, Julianna sat in front of a computer screen, gesturing excitedly.

"You've got to see this!" she called. Winding between the beds, I made my way to the back. The small, windowless cell held more than a computer. Wires and cords hung from the ceiling and protruded from the floor.

Electrical equipment and computer parts were strewn everywhere or reassembled into strange machines. Each of the three doorless, concrete walls was painted red, with yellow and green symbols. Julianna gestured for my attention again. "Here," she said, "Read this." The document pulled up on the computer screen looked like a letter. I leaned over Julianna's shoulder to read, barely noticing Marcus squeeze in beside me into the tiny room.

If you are reading this, the letter declared in bold 14 point font, the End of Days has come and we have ascended into Heaven. May God have mercy on your souls...

Chapter Three: The Righteous and the Wicked

Cults

Cults are everywhere. They vary greatly, from the ascetic to the promiscuous, from purveying esoteric knowledge to very simple teachings, from rich and elitist to poor and inviting. Generally, cults are unorthodox, enigmatic and have a devotion to a person, an object or a set of new ideas. Some are mainstream and widely accepted. Others are isolationist and hide from examination at great expense. Some cause great suffering while others appear helpful and beneficial. In the World of Darkness, these organizations grow and flourish. In this chapter you will find descriptions of different kinds of cults players' characters may encounter; examples of each cult type; sample characters; and Storytelling hints for incorporating cults into a chronicle.

Cults vs. Organized Religion

As major religions become increasingly sectarian, each faction espousing their interpretation as the only accurate one, how do they differ from the cults outlined in this chapter? Often the difference is clear, in the case of UFO or doomsday cults, or those invested in the worship of ancient gods or living human figureheads. Sometimes, however, the lines between sect and cult blur, as the fringe elements expand to encompass more members and organize themselves into orderly groups.

While no two cults are alike, most share several traits. Cults often espouse a new theology or doctrine, often considering traditional religions apostate to the "one truth" offered. Usually an individual or a small, powerful group of leaders holds control of the group's teaching and practices, which facilitates control over the members physically, intellectually, financially and emotionally. These leaders sometimes exercise control over the members through fear, threatening loss of salvation for leaving the group. Most cults possess methods to reinforce the cult's beliefs and standards, where opposing views are ridiculed and often misrepresented. These beliefs often cannot be verified, such as cults based around the leader's claims that God has visited him personally. Often, the group's philosophy makes sense only if members also adopt the full set of values and definitions that it teaches. With this kind of belief, truth becomes unverifiable, internalized, and easily manipulated through the philosophical systems of its inventor.

Many Faces

This chapter outlines various types of cults that characters may run across in the World of Darkness, though this list is by no means exhaustive. Every cult leader runs his group differently, with slightly different goals and methods. Some generalities apply across the board, however, and cults can be broken down into several clear subdivisions.

- **Mainstream Religion:** Factions and fringe groups of major religions functioning, at least on the surface, within the boundaries of their faith. Cult groups can exist within any large religious congregation.

"The acolytin' is not really what you might call laborious employment in the middle of its busy season."

**— Neil Gaiman,
"Shoggoth's Old Peculiar"**

• **Extrinsic Cults:** Religious entities existing beyond the ideologies of any mainstream religious body. These cults often espouse beliefs so wildly perverted from the original religion as to no longer retain a connection, or advocate worship of an entirely novel form.

• **Magic Cults:** Groups that use, feign or search for supernatural power to define their existences.

• **Secular Cults:** Though these organizations are not founded in religion, the structure, motivation and recruitment techniques are similar to religious cults. Secular cults include secret societies of the rich or socially elite, and pyramid schemes.

Vulnerability

Cults build their ranks through heavy recruitment, but not everyone is equally susceptible to the recruitment techniques. Some factor, or set of factors, makes certain people prone to targeting and successful conversion by cults, fringe groups and pyramid schemes, while others are able to resist brain-washing and manipulation. Why do some people become susceptible to cult recruitment while others escape with relative ease?

The Lost and Found

The most vulnerable person lacks something very important in her life. That something can be as simple as a network of supportive people like family and friends, though more traumatic events make the cult's work even easier. An untimely or unexplained death in the prospective cult member's life may leave her devastated and alone. The sense of loss causes her to seek something to fill the void. She might do anything to satisfy her need to know why this happened to her loved one or achieve validation for her suspicions that the death resulted from an unnatural cause. At such a moment, a cult can offer a different view that provides a rationale for her situation. Even if the cult offers only answers of pure fiction, at least they entertain the ideas that mainstream religion (and perhaps even friends and family) repeatedly spurn as superstitious nonsense and paranoia. Cults promise comfort, freedom from isolation, supportive friendships — and most importantly, the answers and validation that new cult member so desperately wants.

Sometimes disillusionment can make a person more susceptible to recruitment by a cult. Teenagers, especially, are prone to this vulnerability. The many dangers of the World of Darkness find easy prey in rebellious teens who indulge in drugs and alcohol or roam the streets with little regard for personal safety. Such risky behavior often has deadly results, and many urban teens have witnessed their friends fall victim to unexplained horrors. Their pleas for sympathy, or even for acknowledgement of what they have seen, typically go ignored. The teenage girl who claims vampires killed her friend finds more derision than help, and may even find herself the subject of a drug inquiry or a barrage of mental-health examinations. The teenage boy who

knows he saw something horrible crouching in the woods tells his peer group, only to be mocked. Fringe groups, especially those with supernatural ties themselves, may reassure these children and play upon their fears to earn their trust. Angry at their parents and teachers, angry at the unexplained evils that have befallen their friends and the mysteries that no one seems willing to explain, these young men and women latch desperately onto the organizations that reconfirm their sanity and safety.

Another potential target of cult recruitment is the naïve idealist. While religious cults may successfully target the idealist, secular organizations like pyramid schemes find him open to propaganda and empty catch phrases like "life betterment," "quality products that make a difference" and "lifting others up to join the social elite." This individual sincerely desires to be his best and expects others to aspire likewise so as to change the world for the better. When this individual meets the cult recruiter, he meets someone, and an organization, who seems to exemplify that same idealism. The superficiality of that image only becomes apparent much later, if ever. The warning "caveat emptor" (let the buyer beware) applies and can be taken quite literally in such secular organizations as Innovations Incorporated (p. 101).

Getting Them and Keeping Them

Each type of organization has its own techniques for recruitment and maintenance, but certain tactics are widely used by nearly every type of cult or pyramid scheme. Cult leaders may handle the recruitment process themselves, or they may entrust the task to a well-indoctrinated member. The recruiting cultist is not consciously doing wrong. A victim trained to recruit other victims, he usually believes he is doing God's will or acting for the betterment of the organization. The methodology of recruitment involves subtle techniques of mind control and undue persuasion. Most often, these techniques take advantage of the human need for affection and confirmation, or exploit inherent weaknesses. The purpose of recruitment techniques is to stress the inferiority of life outside the cult when compared with the potential for a superior life within the organization.

• **Love-Bombing:** Love-bombing is both a recruitment and maintenance technique. On the surface, love-bombing seems harmless or even positive. Current group members drown prospective members, new recruits and each other in an expansive ocean of love and caring. As long as an individual represents a prospective convert or remains a loyal member, the cult loves them to death. As members of a tight family, love surrounds each cult member who successfully promotes their cause. Should a prospective member decide not join the group, however, or if a current member voices any doubts, creates waves, or leaves the group, this abundance of love and concern ceases. The cult leader heaps immediate deri-



sion and scorn on these individuals and usually demands that other cult members no longer have any contact with the wayward individuals.

- **Shame:** Current members of the organization encourage potential members to see their lives or past actions as subjects of shame or embarrassment that can be cleansed only through inclusion in the religion or social group. Depending on the nature of the group, the focus of the shame shifts. Elitist social organizations tend to home in on material "inadequacies," like cars, houses and clothes, or on social failings like enrolling children in the wrong schools or associating with unsavory individuals. The reward for joining the organization is freedom from social stigma. Religious groups target sinful lifestyles or past mistakes, dragging every shameful sin to light and promising salvation in return for loyalty. This tactic works best on those already struggling with regrettable decisions and those experiencing difficulty in coming to terms with uncomfortable truths. For example, a young woman already wracked with guilt over aborting her illegitimate pregnancy or a young man striving to accept his friend's (or his own) homosexuality would both find themselves subject to the shame technique. Promises of absolution or even a cure for these "sins" makes this recruitment technique particularly effective. The shame never really goes away, of course, as group leaders continue to employ this technique against their followers. As

long as the need for absolution remains, so does the cult member.

- **Fear:** Few things motivate as well as fear. Cults, especially those working far on the fringe of faith, often rely heavily on this technique to swell and maintain their ranks. Cult leaders work hard to instill fear in prospective members, presenting the cult as a respite from the dangerous world. This same fear keeps current cult members committed to the organization, coupled with the additional fear of the repercussions of abandoning the cult. Cult leaders needn't fabricate dark forces in the outside world, because vampires, werewolves and other terrifying creatures do exist, and even prey upon the human population. To an extent, the players' characters mere existence actually serves to create new cult members. If monsters in the shadows aren't enough to motivate prospective members, leaders may resort to even grander messages of terror. Apocalyptic or "doomsday" cults are recruited and maintained almost solely through use of fear tactics. The recruit needs only to open a newspaper or flip on the television to see the proof of humankind's swift degeneration. Surely, these cult leaders claim, we must be in the very last days. Apocalyptic cults play on this to create a sense of fear and crisis, their message: "Don't be destroyed by God when He judges the world." Taken to an extreme, this fear tactic can even be used to convince groups to commit mass suicide. Conspiracy theories also fall into this category, when

cult members share a collective belief in government or social conspiracies, feeding off each other's paranoia.

• **Graduated Indoctrination:** Nearly all pyramid schemes, as well as many religious or elite social organizations, rely on this method of indoctrination. Leaders introduce the group's basis or belief system so slowly that the recruit usually assimilates the information without checking it against what she knows to be true. Though the process begins with fact (or innocuous ideas), the true beliefs and policies of the group are gradually intermingled. An individual may subjectively perceive the new ideas of the group as being very consistent with her own belief system, even if she would perceive the ideas as contrary if introduced all at once. Also, the member perceives this tiered exposure to new principles or rules of the organization as a mark of the leader's trust in her, and experiences an even stronger desire to prove her loyalty and commitment to the group and its goals.

Mechanics of Brainwashing

Also referred to as "thought reform," "coercive persuasion" or "mind control," brainwashing is the use of repetitive recitation, physical or emotional abuse and incentives, or extreme peer pressure to alter the subject's ideologies and beliefs or to superimpose new ones. Those performing a brainwashing may emotionally tear down the target, breaking down her individuality to replace it with the ideas and thoughts of another, usually the cult or organization leader. Brainwashing often requires complete physical control over the victim, and may involve starvation and sleep deprivation as motivational tools (where the subject of brainwashing is rewarded with food or sleep for giving the proper responses). Repetitive recitation makes these appropriate responses automatic, reducing the natural inquisitiveness of a person to a homogenous parroting of the cult leader's ideas.

Brainwashing

Dice Pool: Presence + Intimidation or Persuasion (brainwasher) versus Resolve + Stamina (target)

Action: Extended and contested (the task demands a variable number of successes based on the extent of the conditioning (see below); each roll represents three hours of active brainwashing).

The brainwasher may use either his Intimidation or Persuasion Skill for his dice pool, depending on the method of brainwashing used during the session. Use Intimidation for brainwashing involving threats or abuse, and Persuasion for sessions reliant upon coercion and repetition. The number of successes that each participant seeks varies based on the extent of the brainwashing:

Successes	Extent of Brainwashing
5	Variations on previously held beliefs: "Gays are sinful" becomes "gays are evil."
10	Target accepts a set of beliefs different than his own, but lifestyle doesn't change dramatically: "Selling these products is a sure way to riches!"
15	Target will leave his life behind and join the cult full time, but will not abandon family or commit wanton murder (though may act violently if already prone to violence).
20	Doomsday or murder cult. The target is a blind follower and will kill or die for his masters.

The target requires a number of successes equal to the brainwasher's Willpower in order to utterly resist the attempt. If this occurs, the brainwasher may make a subsequent attempt, but some significant event must first occur to convince the target that the cult's philosophies have some merit. Even then, the target receives a +1 modifier to resist brainwashing by the same cult.

New ideas that seem to have merit within the target's existing ideology may impose a -1 to -3 penalty to the character's ability to resist the brainwashing. Certain methods of physical deprivation, such as depriving the target of food or sleep may also impose a penalty, at the discretion of the Storyteller.

If successes rolled in a contested brainwashing attempt tie, the subject maintains her own will and does not fall victim to the brainwashing. Any future brainwashing attempts made against that target suffer a -2 penalty.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The target resists brainwashing completely, can feign submission or conversion, or can cultivate doubts in the person performing the brainwashing.

Failure: No successes are gained at this time.

Success: Successes are accumulated toward the total required. If the total is achieved, the brainwashing techniques apply and the target accepts the newly introduced ideas as her own, or the subject resists brainwashing.

Exceptional Success: Major progress is made with a single roll. Or, if the overall effort is completed with five or more successes than required, the opponent loses a point of Willpower.

Possible Penalties: For brainwasher: Target is atheist/nihilist (-1 to -3); For target: Brainwashing performed by friend (-1) or family member (-2), involves physical deprivation or abuse (-1 to -3)

Deprogramming

Just as brainwashing takes time, removing the implanted thoughts and behaviors requires extended effort. Characters deprogramming a cult member find the target as resistant to their attempts as to the initial brainwashing. Attempting to deprogram an individual who has spent an extended period of time as a member of the organization or been subjected to repeat brainwashing may incur additional penalties, at the Storyteller's discretion. The mechanics are identical to brainwashing, including the dice pools used.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Deprogramming fails. Target sees deprogrammer as threat and either attacks her or turns her over to cult leader.

Failure: No successes are gained at this time.

Success: Successes are accumulated toward the total required. If the total is achieved, the deprogramming is successful and the character shakes off the brainwashing effects, but gains a mild derangement from the trauma.

Exceptional Success: Major progress is made with a single roll. Or, if the overall effort is completed with five or more successes than required, the subject is deprogrammed and does not gain a derangement.

Possible Penalties: For deprogrammer: Target has extended time in cult (-1 to -3); For target: Deprogramming performed by friend (-1), family member (-2), or former member of same cult (-3)

Cult of Personality

Every cult needs a leader, someone to organize the initial meetings, recruit members and manage the internal structure once the cult is in full swing. Cult leadership may consist of one powerful individual, a small group of core leaders, or a collection of friends or lovers. These men and women are often extremely charismatic, demonstrating integrity and charm with precision and congruency. Cult leaders have an outstanding ability to win over followers. They command the utmost respect and obedience. These are individuals whose narcissism is so extreme that it takes precedence over legal, moral or personal commitments.

Cult leaders typically claim to possess special knowledge or skills, or to have been granted some divine mandate to lead. The nature of the cult determines what special traits its leaders possess. In the case of mainstream religion, the ability to reinterpret the main religious message of the faith might be enough to attract followers. The leader may claim appointment by God for a mission. In more obscure cults, a leader might profess the receipt of special revelations or visions from God, messages that confer power and privilege upon their recipient. Some even claim to be the incarnation of a deity, angel or other otherworldly messenger. Accompanying this divine stature, the leaders also claim to have special powers. Cult leaders typically demand unquestioning obedience to their excessive discipline and

expectations, requiring perfection from their followers at all times.

Cults are formed primarily to meet specific emotional needs of the leader, many of whom may suffer from one or a combination of derangements. Pre-existing derangements might create delusions of grandeur or hallucinations that could induce the cult leader to founding a religion. Inhuman acts committed by, or at the behest of, a cult leader could potentially lower the leader's Morality rating, with the possible result of adding still more derangements. With this constant downward spiral, cult leaders quickly become dangerous to themselves and their loyal followers. As paranoia or megalomania reaches a peak, a previously benign cult could suddenly transform into a doomsday or even a killer cult.

A few cult leaders actually believe their own rhetoric, convinced that God really does speak to them or that they have a divine mandate to lead. This type of leader staunchly believes in the validity of her claims — which may not as delusional as they appear. Her "visions" may be nothing but insanity, but in the World of Darkness the possibility exists that something really is speaking to her. Perhaps she really had a brush with the supernatural, which she has misinterpreted as a sign from God. Perhaps she is being manipulated directly by a vampire or spirit claiming divine status.

The cult leader may also be neither insane nor manipulated, instead taking advantage of the cult's faith in order to advance herself financially or socially. The clever prey upon the innocent and naïve, bilking them of their money and abusing their trust. From televangelists to magical sham artists, they preach, proselytize and profit, disappearing before their targets realize they've been had. Unlike the leaders who believe in the faiths they represent, these individuals believe in nothing but personal advancement. The payoff may not even be financial, taking the form of sex, drugs, social or political advancement, or simply ego-strokes.

Successful cult leaders understand the nuances of recruiting and the importance of fundraising, always with hidden objectives and never with full disclosure of the group's true goals. They may cover up the religious aspects of their cult by describing the organization as a group for spiritual growth and development, or even set up a "front" group or business to keep attention focused away from the inner workings of the cult. Many leaders use mind-controlling techniques to keep cult members from doubting their teachers or from leaving the group. While they may display behaviors reflecting integrity and honesty in regards to honor and commitment, most cult leaders are extremely convincing liars. Their promises of money or favors, which they never make in writing, seldom bear fruit; and they often change the rules when it comes time to deliver their end of the deal.

In short, the power center of a cult resides in the leader. Eliminate him and the cult scatters like ants deprived of their queen. If the characters invoke his wrath, they may find themselves with a few dozen new enemies.

Opiate of the Masses

"The Lord be with you."

"And also with you."

Even the other priest, newly arrived from seminary to assist the aging Father Connelly, looked bored.

Kneeling on the worn velvet cushion, Mario pondered his loss of faith. Where had it begun? Of course he knew the answer. Any belief Mario had in God disappeared when his brother Tony killed himself and God had not answered Mario's prayers for vengeance. For days Mario simply couldn't understand why his brother, always the handsome one, the popular one, would put a gun in his mouth. At the funeral, when the wan, pale young man placed white roses on top of the closed casket and leaned over to press his thin lips against the lacquered wood, suddenly the truth became clear. As the young man walked away, Mario grabbed his coat sleeve.

"What was that?" Mario screamed into the man's face. "Why did you do that?" The man stared at Mario with red-rimmed, bleary eyes.

"Why shouldn't I?" he said softly. "I'm the only one who ever understood him, the only one who really loved him. You never would have accepted him as he was, and he knew it. He killed himself because he couldn't stand to shame his family."

"What are you saying?" Mario shouted. "Are you saying my brother was some sort of queer? Tony was not some fag!" Mario struck the other man across the face, flailing wildly while other funeral guests tried to restrain him. The young man wiped blood away from his mouth with the back of his hand.

"I guess Tony was right about you," he muttered.

Kneeling in the church, Mario remembered the sudden shock and hatred. His brother, a queer? Mario shook his head. Impossible! Those sick perverts had done something to Tony, something horrible that made him off himself like that. If there really was a God, He would wipe out all the fags. Mario would be glad to help Him.

Mass ended and Mario crossed himself, rising to his feet. As he moved to the end of the pew, someone placed a hand on his shoulder. Mario turned to find the new priest standing behind him.

"Can I help you, Father?" Mario asked.

"No, my son," Father Franklin said. "I think I can help you."

And when Father Franklin spoke to him of God's divine plan, Mario's spark of faith rekindled. God answered his prayer after all.



Minor Factions. Mainstream Faiths

In the World of Darkness, desperate, frightened people seek solace wherever they can find it, often turning to religion to calm their fears or answer their questions. Many find the answers offered by their churches, temples or mosques to be unsatisfying, obvious collections of half-truths. When they know in their hearts that something really does lurk in the darkness, can trite assurances of a place in Heaven or of God's infinite love really put their fears to rest? Yet, these people rarely turn their backs on the ways of worship to which they are accustomed, instead searching for better answers within those practices. Sometimes these men and women find their own answers, superimposing their personal interpretations of religious texts on top of the meaningless preaching offered in their own houses of worship, banding together to form offshoots cells of the main religious body. At other times, these malcontents may stage an organized takeover of their congregation, slowly replacing the governing body of their churches and temples with like-minded people seeking the same answers. However these people find each other, their common goals simultaneously unify them with each other and isolate them from the larger body of their faith. Every bit as insular and fanatical as the more obscure cults, fringe groups functioning surreptitiously within mainstream religions have the added advantage of the social, political and financial backing of the larger religious organization.

From Whence It Came

Mainstream religious cults and fringe groups tend to reflect the structure of the original religion upon which they base their tenets. Christian subgroups retain a Biblical basis for their beliefs, Islamic fringe groups find their justification in the Qu'ran, Judaic groups cite the Torah, and so on, even if the groups' actions and beliefs find basis in a warped or skewed interpretation of their relevant religious texts. The ideology of the founding religion is too deeply ingrained in the members of the fringe group to be eliminated entirely.

While the ethnic or racial breakdown of religious splinter cells also tends to mirror that of the larger religion, age and gender can play larger roles in cult membership. Fringe groups tend to attract older members of the church, who are either more easily manipulated by the cult's leader or more likely to remember the smaller, more fundamentalist religion of their youth.

In the World of Darkness, women find themselves drawn to the lure of religious fringe groups that offer additional physical or spiritual protection for their children or, in the case of single women, for themselves. The children of these women and other cult members form another sizable percentage of cult membership.

Raised in the cults or brought in at early ages, these children accept the doctrines of the cult as their religious norm and usually grow into devout adult members.

Finally, teenagers, too, find cults attractive for several different reasons. Some are simply disgusted with the growing apathy among their peers, but some are seeking protection from the unknown *things* in the darkness. They've watched their friends disappear, sometimes returning changed and sometimes not returning at all. Parents, teachers and police lay the blame on drugs, alcohol and delinquency, turning a deaf ear to stories of monsters in the shadows; but the young men and women know what they've seen and they search for a safe place to turn.

Where There's a Will...

What serves as the impetus for those who form and lead cults within their religion? While some religious factions form on their own through a mutual accord, more commonly one individual provides the driving force that forges and maintains the group. Such men and women often care deeply about the religious issues and wish to improve the current state of their religion, but an opportunist may also play on the doubts of congregation members to push his own agenda.

Whether the leader of a mainstream religious cult or fringe group assembles his group from genuine belief or personal interests, he must be subtle and intelligent. Unlike the leader of some obscure faith, the person leading an offshoot of a major religion must navigate centuries of pre-established beliefs and customs, as well as avoid the notice of the religious hierarchy who might decry the fringe elements and eliminate both their pulpit and their funding. These leaders tend to be calculating rather than impetuous. They make changes from the inside out, working slowly to integrate cult members into the regular workings of the church, perhaps by phasing them in as new Sunday school teachers or church elders.

...There's a Way

Why join a religious fringe group at all? For cult members, the answers are varied and personal, but often come down to a few common reasons. As churches seek to increase their membership and serve wider, more diverse audiences, members may see their church becoming too large, too impersonal or too liberal. A desire to return to the origins or fundamentals of the faith can spark factionalism with a religious body. Disillusioned with the state of their religion, members begin to drift from the faith. Their attendance at worship service may drop, their volunteerism decline. Eventually, someone is bound to notice. Perhaps the church elders seek them out and offer a way to compromise their static ideals with a fluid institution. But perhaps other malcontents propose a better solution — one of action and direction.

The mainstream, monotheistic religions offer little or no explanation for the abnormal experiences of their members, brushing away claims of “werewolves” or “demons” as superstitious nonsense. People go to their pastors and clerics seeking help, a way to understand the strange and frightening things around them, only to be directed to psychiatrists. Mainstream religion, as a whole, has lost its belief in anything beyond the realm of what can be seen. The modern church, faced with Legion, recommends counseling.

Laughed at, mocked or treated as insane, where else can people turn? They look for others like themselves, they search for a listening ear and a compassionate heart. Sometimes, the answers come looking for them. Word of these “crackpots” may reach the right ears within the church, who hasten to assure these troubled souls that they are not insane and that what they have witnessed is real. Though these groups could easily turn rogue and go after the supernatural elements, more often they provide another outlet for the hate and fear that lead men and women to become hunters. The feelings are shared and diffused, and the desire for vigilantism recedes somewhat, at least for a time. From the characters’ perspective, this is an extremely good thing.

Maybe, however, nothing happened to push these people away from the flock. Perhaps they really aren’t lacking something in their faith and were simply lured into the faction by friends and loved ones, unaware of the repercussions. Some may have found themselves targets of recruitment techniques (p. 75) and found the necessary motivation within the recruiters’ promises or threats. Love-bombing certainly seems to reflect the principles of love and brotherhood espoused by most major religions, and its use arouses little suspicion. Members of the fringe group can even continue to expose the potential member to this continued bombardment of love and care in the midst of unsuspecting congregation members who are simply happy to see fellow apostates to the faith supporting each other. The new recruit doesn’t realize she has joined a cult or faction until later, when the subgroup’s true agenda comes out and the love ceases.

In most cults, joining is the easy part.

And a Way Out

However these factions acquire new members, they must hold on to them in order to exert any long-term influence over their parent religion. Secrets should be kept and dissent handled, lest attention be drawn to the faction’s existence or too many members agree that the group’s progress is unsatisfactory. While an extrinsic cult, isolated in some remote compound or bound together by shared atrocities, has the luxury of executing harsh discipline against its members, mainstream religious factions must act with more subtlety. The biggest threat is that of exposure or denouncement, the classic “if you leave us, we’ll tell on you” method of control. Guilt provides plenty of motivation as well, as

the faction leader and other members make the dissenter feel like a traitor for abandoning the only people who understand him.

If the member resists these control techniques and leaves the faction, he might find himself suddenly on the market for a new church. Current members of the fringe group make regular church attendance difficult for these “deserters.” Some may go to the extreme of approaching religious officiates to lodge claims of unsavory or inappropriate behavior against the former faction member. While this may not result in any official action on the part of the establishment, the accused may be politely urged to pursue her worship elsewhere.

Faith and the Damned

Does a place for vampires, werewolves or mages exist within mainstream religion and its factions? Some find they rely upon their faith even more to help them accept their new places outside the bounds of “normal” people. Granted, certain roadblocks may hinder this continued connection to religious life. A vampire would find attending morning services somewhat difficult. That fact might increase the appeal of smaller, evening worship groups — the sort that could very well be a mainstream religious cult. Once integrated into the cult, a vampire with the right Disciplines could easily take control, though the same faith that drew him to the church may make him refrain from such a display of power.

Werewolves and mainstream religion are another matter. After all, a werewolf *knows* that totem spirits are real, so continued adherence to a monotheistic faith proves more difficult over time. Eventually he drifts from the flock (though often this drifting expresses itself through a series of enraged theological arguments culminating in the werewolf leaving the church in disgust). The exceptions to this pattern are werewolves who try to maintain their normal human lives, sometimes by denying that they are actually different from the men and women around them. They continue with their regular religious practices, though the adamant denial of their true identities makes them a danger to anyone around them. Some seek to control their growing animal urges by throwing themselves even more fervently into their faith, sometimes to the extent of denouncing other werewolves.

Unlike vampires and werewolves, mages remain fundamentally human. They do not generally prey upon humanity and have no immediate reason to break off their membership in human organizations. That being said, a mage’s Awakening opens her to wider truths, to a universe of greater and deeper meaning than she could have imagined. As a result, Awakening may lead to a renewal of lapsed faith, or take the mage into new zealotry as he tries to make sense of his altered perceptions. Other will-workers find mainstream religion stale and insufficient after they discover magic. Their new power offers a greater spiritual high

than mere mortals understand; and for all that priests babble about divinity and miracles, they just don't get it. This sort of elitism may take the form of hostility, but just as often grows as bitterness. A formerly devoted believer may feel cheated by an Awakening. She didn't ask for this. She just wants answers that the church or synagogue or mainstream organization can no longer satisfactorily provide.

Terrorism

terrorism n. — The unlawful use or threatened use of force or violence by a person or an organized group against people or property with the intention of intimidating or coercing societies or governments, often for ideological or political reasons.

— The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Fourth Edition

Going Too Far

When a fringe group begins to take the law into its own hands through violent public action, the group ceases to be merely a religious faction and becomes a terrorist organization. Instead of exacting changes upon society through a religious platform, these groups instead choose to communicate through fear-tactics, destruction and murder. Of course, not all terrorist groups have any religious affiliation, and many use their faith for little more than weak justification for unjustifiable actions; but religious fringe groups have an unhealthy tendency to lapse into fanaticism and extremism. While not every cult or group in this chapter would, or could, devolve into a terrorist cell, the groundwork for violence is already laid for many of them. Keep in mind, however, that extremist groups are typically poor representatives of the religions to which they profess membership. The tactics used by an Islamic terrorist cell and the KKK exhibit more common traits with each other than they do with the faiths that they claim to defend.

Terrorism in the World of Darkness

Fear and fanaticism abound in the World of Darkness, and the heightened adrenaline under which many of its denizens function leads to a higher incidence of terrorist activity than in our own world. The population gathers into suspicious, circumscribed communities that are already wary of outsiders, setting a scene ripe for terrorism. People feel helpless and seek any alternate means to regain a sense of power, whether through legitimate means or vigilantism. Unfortunately, legitimate means of seizing power are often limited, causing individuals or groups to resort to calculated, violent acts in order to force their agendas upon other groups or the general public.

In keeping with the theme of isolation and seclusion, domestic terrorism represents a much larger threat than any international terrorist organization. White supremacists, xenophobes, exclusionary religion

sects and believers in the supernatural all make likely candidates for creating these organizations: The first three due to the socially ingrained fear of the outsider, and the last as a final act of desperation when no one will listen to their insistence that monsters are real. The characters described in Chapter Two could conceivably form a group that has the exterior appearance of being a terrorist organization, while in truth the group only targets vampires, werewolves or other such creatures. Consider how easily their activities could stray into actual terrorism, however, once the group ceases to focus on the creatures themselves and begins to attack the creatures' families.

Scale

Acts of terrorism are unsettling even in larger, stable, well-structured communities. In smaller communities, however, one terrorist attack can quickly escalate from a single, violent incident into full-scale chaos. When introducing a terrorist cell into a chronicle, be sure to keep in mind the natural progression of violence and lawlessness. The smaller the population, the swifter the decline of social order once a chain of events is set into motion. Insert the occasional terrorist attack into a chronicle to create an intense atmosphere of uncertainty for your players; or expand the attacks into a full-blown conflict where rival terrorist groups clash with local law enforcement, and turn the city into a war-zone that their characters must attempt to dissipate... or simply survive. Consider the role the players' characters might have in the violence as it comes to a peak.

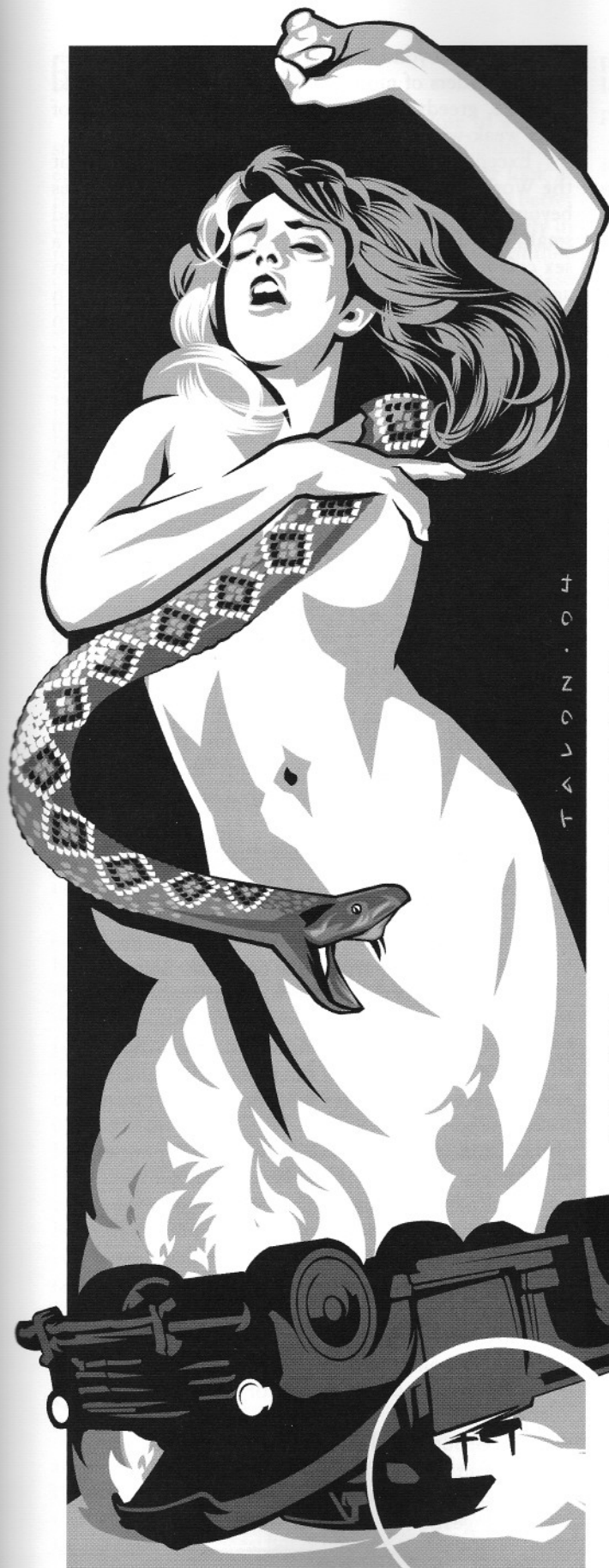
Look beyond the immediate conflict to the additional problems characters might face, such as heightened police presence, neighborhood watch programs, curfews and a general increase in vigilance on an individual and city-wide level. Also, what if the perception of an incident as an act of "terrorism" is unfounded? Just because a character isn't involved in terrorist activities doesn't mean he can't be accused of it by the most tenuous of associations. If a character starts showing weird behavior — for example, a newly changed werewolf or recently Awakened mage — his associates and perhaps even friends might jump to the wrong conclusions entirely. The destruction wrought by werewolves or the potential pyrotechnics of magic use could send the wrong message to authorities.

Player's Note:

What This Means to You

Terrorism? That's just a problem that "normal" people have to deal with, and doesn't affect supernatural creatures like your characters... right?

Wrong. Terrorism creates extreme civil unrest which can result in even greater paranoia among a population. In strange times, all strangers become



suspect. While your characters may previously have walked the streets of town unmolested, they might now be targets for questioning, harassment or outright attack. People pay more attention to unusual activities or unexplainable phenomena, making the use of obvious supernatural powers exceptionally unwise. Fewer people on the streets also increases the difficulty of finding victims upon which to feed — not to mention that one of those terrorist organizations might be gunning for your character or her family or property.

Sounds like your problem now, doesn't it?

Mysterious Ways

Mama's dancing with the snakes again, but I don't mind, for I have seen the Lord. I used to worry for her, back when I first started going to Christ of Appalachia Free Will Church, but now that Reverend Brothers got the wickedness out of me, well, I know they can't do her no harm.

Daddy didn't want Mama bringing me to church with her. He said people kept disappearing up there, but Mama says that sometimes folks just stray from the flock. Daddy called Reverend Brothers all sorts of bad things, like a dirty con and a snake oil salesman. I don't know about that, though. Reverend Brothers has plenty of snakes, but I've never seen oil on 'em. Mama said Daddy wanted to condemn my immortal soul to eternal damnation and torment, and she made me pray that God would deliver us from evil. I guess God listened, because they found Daddy's truck upside down in a ditch one morning and now I go to Free Will Church with Mama.

I miss my Daddy sometimes, even if he was a sinner.

When I turned 12, Reverend Brothers told Mama it was time for me to get saved. My friends, Helen and Mary Ann, and me all got to put on our Easter dresses and wear shoes with real heels on them for the first time! Getting saved is a real important day. The church ladies filled the church up with so many flowers, and Reverend Brothers wore his special white suit and smiled at us, and told us we were real grown up girls now. I about died from happiness. He set some incense burning up at the altar and lit candles all over the place, and I felt a tingle all the way down in my belly because I knew that today the Lord was coming to wash away all my evils and sins.

Me and Helen and Mary Ann all drank from God's holy chalice. Reverend Brothers got the spirit and started speaking what sounded like crazy talk, but what I know is really God's language, and the ladies danced with the snakes. The incense smoke filled up the whole room, smelling so sweet, and we drank from that cup. My head spun all around and then I saw the Lord! He rose up out of the smoke like some big snake. I heard Helen screaming, and Mary Ann fell down on the floor, her legs jerking all around and spit flying from her mouth, but I feared not. That big snake that was really God

wrapped its coils around me, and the smoke turned into hands and I felt the buttons on my Easter dress coming undone, the ladies all singing praises and Hallelujahs. The power of the Lord washed over me and the sky fell down on top of my head.

When I opened my eyes again, the Lord was gone and so was Mary Ann. Reverend Brothers says she just didn't believe strong enough, and that God sent her away for being a sinner. He says I can trust him because he knows what the Lord is thinking, and what He wants from us. I know it must be true, because you know what? Reverend Brothers' hands look just like God's.

Building the Mystery

While some cults begin as factions of mainstream religion, splinter groups whose beliefs veer somewhat from church doctrine, other cults start far beyond the sphere of any established religion. Rather than seeking a return to traditional values, these groups want something new and presumably better than the rituals and dogmas of mass religion. Some claim affiliation with a certain religion or denomination, but the likelihood of the churches acknowledging such a connection is slim. Some claim no affiliation or allegiance to any earthly power at all, looking beyond modern gods and morality to find their answers. They seek these answers in unusual places, from the expansive pantheons of early civilizations to the mysteries of space. Unbound by conventional religious practice, these extrinsic cults may take any form, creating new doctrines and new ideas as they go, relying on the guidance and vision of their leaders to open their eyes to the one "truth" they all hope to find.

Extrinsic cults typically focus on a central god-figure, usually embodied, channeled or represented by the cult's leader. The actions of the god-figure go largely unmoderated by pre-established religious dogma or rules of worship, even if the cult leader is claiming to be the embodiment of Allah or Jesus. Because cult members are seeking something beyond the rhetoric of large-scale religion, they more willingly suspend their disbelief, even when their "god" acts out of character. Such discrepancies in behavior are easily downplayed as misinterpretations of the original text on the part of other religions. For example, a cult leader claiming to be the second coming of Christ may justify having sex with the female members of the cult by claiming the Bible used by the Christian church is incomplete or mistranslated, or through a simple inference that modern times necessitate different actions than ancient times did.

When dealing with sects of major religions, one can expect them to follow rules similar to those of the core religion. The biggest danger of these extrinsic cults is not knowing what to expect. True, most cults devoted to sex or UFOs or the worship of some dark elder god slumbering beneath the seas are really designed for little more than feeding the ego and vices of the cult leaders. Take almost any cult leader claiming deific status or divine guidance, and anyone could likely expose him as a fraud in short order. Beneath the personality and

the rhetoric, beyond the parlor tricks and dramatic rituals, the leaders of most extrinsic cults are merely sick, perverse, greedy people taking horrible advantage of their weak-willed supplicants.

Except, of course, when they're not. Remember that the World of Darkness plays host to a number of forces beyond the reckoning of our limited experiences and small, mundane lives. Maybe that woman who started a sex cult to the worship of Aphrodite is nothing but an aging stripper trying to get in a few thrills, reveling in the touch of younger flesh in compensation for her own fading beauty... but perhaps those midnight orgies really *do* replenish her youth night-by-night, and soon she will emerge virginal and beautiful again, leaving her postulants dry and ancient, their own lush vigor stolen from them. Maybe today the dubious can dismiss the staunch believer in alien life, who urges his cult members to commit mass suicide so that extraterrestrials can carry them to a better life beyond the stars, as a raving psychotic... but perhaps tomorrow these same doubters will read in the paper about strange lights or freak weather systems and 20 unexplained disappearances from a commune in the desert. Is the blood-cult's god insane? Is he faking it? Or is he really a vampire who's found the secret to a few weeks of free meals? Nine times out of 10, maybe even 99 times out of a hundred, these cults are shams, their leaders fakes, and their followers desperately seeking truth where no truth can be found.

But how much will the players' characters risk in a bet that *this* time it isn't genuine?

Pick and Mix

Extrinsic cults may all be different, but many of them share similar ritual practices. Below is a quick and dirty list of possible ritualistic behaviors to help you create cults from the bottom up. This list is not intended to be exhaustive, but to provide a reference point and to cultivate ideas for use in developing cultic antagonists.

- Chanting, invocation, scripted or repetitive dialogue
- Robes or other uniforms or regalia
- Burning candles or incense, bonfires
- Ingestion of soporific or hallucinogenic drugs
- Extended sensory deprivation/imprisonment in claustrophobic conditions
- Tattooing/ branding/ritual scarification
- Handling of dangerous or venomous animals
- Group or exhibitionist sex, orgies, sex with cult leader(s)
- Blood, animal or human sacrifice
- Ingestion of blood or human flesh

Backwater Faith

Sometimes an extrinsic cult is so close to a mainstream religion that the two are hard to distinguish from each other — at least at first glance. A longer look at these strange deviations from major faiths yields a better understanding. These cults, set up almost exclusively in rural areas, are very different from the traditions that they claim to follow. Perhaps, on the surface, one of these backwoods “churches” has the appearance of any other small Christian church, but beneath the old-time hymns and the “praise Jesus,” something sinister lurks. Maybe an outsider couldn’t put his finger on what seems out of place, but something just feels *wrong*. When the preacher brings out the snakes or a neighbor in the pew falls to the floor screaming in tongues, then even the outsider realizes he’s far beyond anything *resembling* mainstream.

These churches often start out as Christian, often Baptist or Pentecostal branches established up in the mountains or in some other, inaccessible rural place. Just as animals evolve in isolation, however, a religious sect separated from the larger religious body tends to change and mutate over time, until the end result bears only a passing resemblance to the original. The church’s minister, who alters the course of worship to suit his needs, usually guides this evolution of faith. Often the changes result from a need to revitalize a fading congregation, or from the church leader’s indulgence in his own alternative interpretations of God’s laws. These insular communities may also fall prey to outside forces that warp the practices and goals of the religion to an end of which the congregation remains unaware.

When facing any peculiar rites, question the possible source. What need could God have for his worshippers to handle venomous snakes? More than that, what need could a church leader have for his congregation to handle the reptiles? As a show of faith, of course, but for what other purpose? How does a minister justify the inclusion of new and unusual rituals, and how will his congregation react? The members of the church may still think of themselves as belonging to the original sect, or they may gladly embrace their faith as an entirely new religion. A clever preacher could even convince his followers that the entire religion had adopted the new practices, because few of these cult members travel outside their hometowns and will never discover otherwise. Finally, consider how devout the members of the cult actually are. Perhaps they only attend the church for lack or choice or alternatives, but they may believe vehemently and take exception to anyone who disagrees.

Sacred Sex

The body is the temple at which some cults worship. In some cults, sex serves as the sacred ritual through which cult members praise their deity. Many of these cults are harmless, more like swingers’ parties than religious services; but others are more serious, pushing beyond the sacred into the obscene, or even the

profane. Understanding the motivations of the cult leader is often the key to understanding the goals and purpose of the cult itself.

Most people enjoy sex and many would like to have it on as regular a basis as possible, but few people, no matter how much they like intercourse, consider it a religious activity. They may refer to it as a holy or sacred act between married adults, but this is more an example of Christian dogma than of placing true significance upon the act itself. In a sex cult, sex is not just the symbol of worship or power, but the actual vessel of worship. Sex cultists may believe that sexual acts create or release magical energy, or that the divinity around which their cult centers demands sex as a sacrificial rite. The deities of sex cults may be familiar gods or goddesses, like the Greek love goddess Aphrodite or virile god Pan, or more obscure, like the vodoun death and fertility Loa Ghede, or the flayed Aztec god Xipe Totec.

Many early polytheistic religions had gods and goddesses of sex and fertility. Debauched and orgiastic rituals of worship ensured fertile crops, animals and people. In a modern context, fertility cults still make up the largest percentage of the sex cults, though their aspects and meanings may have changed. Goddess cults, which worship the divine female creative force, sometimes involve sexual acts intended to reaffirm the beauty of women’s bodies and build bonds of sisterhood. Some desperate couples, unable to conceive on their own, have joined fertility cults in a last effort to become pregnant. Perhaps surprisingly, women may indeed become pregnant after such rites — though whether due to any magical or spiritual force or to a change of partners is debatable.

Sex cults have a darker side. In some cults, the ritual sex is tantamount to rape, as new members are sometimes “initiated” by the whole cult in succession. Cult members who have raised their children within the cult may allow cult leaders free sexual access to their children in order to purify the children of imagined sins or to place the children (or the parents) in a favored position. Some force their daughters to marry a cult elder many decades her senior. The sex acts required of members may be strange, perverse or even violent, the goal as simple as the pleasure of the leader or as complex as a magical ritual.

Sex functions as a method of control, a means of debasing or humiliating supplicants, or as a potent tool of distraction. In the midst of an orgiastic frenzy, a vampire could easily help himself to the blood of a few cultists without anyone noticing. Someone could slip a young cult member out a back door and no one would ever see her again. A clever pickpocket could riffle through the piles of discarded clothing for wallets, watches and jewelry. Most participants in an orgy feel too embarrassed to notify police about the theft.

Ultimately, sex is a powerful tool of manipulation. Used appropriately within a cult, the leader can both control his followers and satisfy his baser lusts, all in the name of a higher power. As a recruitment technique, little is more alluring than the promise of night after night of group sex.

Circle of Min

This sex cult, established in the rural South, devotes itself to the worship of Min, an Egyptian fertility god and one-time consort of the goddess Isis. Ancient Egyptian pharaohs worshiped Min in the hope of fathering many sons. The figurehead of this cult, a man named Elijah Green, dresses in the sacred regalia of Min (including a flail and plumed crown) and claims to invoke the god. Cult members burn offerings of wheat and lettuce, which are sacred to Min, as well as carved statues of white bulls. Green, embodying the spirit of the god, then has sex with all the female members of his cult. These rituals become quite violent, as Green beats his supplicants with Min's sacred flail before forcing them to submit to degrading sexual acts. While Green offers no substantial proof of his ability to channel Min, cult members claim that, during the rituals, the shadows on the walls assume the shapes of bulls and erect phalluses. They also contend that the extremely high rate of male offspring resulting from these rituals validates their belief in their god-figure.

Death Cults

As much fun as it sounds, most extrinsic cults don't center on ritual sex. Instead of the pleasures of the flesh, some cults have a much darker method of worship. As conflicts break out around the world and people live in fear even in their own towns, some see the mounting tension as a sign of the impending end of the world.

Apocalyptic and ascension rhetoric runs rampant in these groups; and their goals often involve trying to speed up the coming of the end times, when the righteous (in this case, of course, the cult) will ascend to Heaven and the wicked will suffer and perish in an earthly hell. To assure their celestial places, these doomsday cults attempt to force God's hand through mass suicide or, in the case of some, mass murder.

No matter how bleak the world or depressing the circumstances, most people don't resort to large-scale death as the answer. What leads someone to join a cult whose path can only lead to his, or someone else's, demise? For the most part, members of suicide cults are not the most well-adjusted individuals to begin with. Like the members of so many cults, they are often merely lost souls searching for answers. Their views may not be any more fatalistic than those of anyone else — in fact, many suicide cult members enter into their own deaths enthusiastically, even hopefully, believing that soon they will join God in Heaven or ascend to some divine level of existence.

A suicide cult can develop in one of two environments. One is a frenzied rush of positive reassurance that suicide is the way toward enlightenment, or that the death is only physical and that the cultists will continue to live in a spiritual form, no longer bound by the constraints and limitations of the body. These groups are often small, with ten to fifty members, and may spring from other cults, especially UFO cults. Follow-



ers of these cults tend to be relatively well educated, often meeting each other through business connections or over the Internet. Their pre-cult beliefs may lean more toward Eastern philosophies than toward Christianity; and rather than seeking to ascend into Heaven, these men and women often believe that some spiritual force or extraterrestrial being will help them to evolve to a higher state of consciousness. Leaders of this type of suicide cult are often profoundly delusional people who buy into their own rhetoric. They follow, or even lead, their flock into death. Their suicides are neat and orderly, practically considerate, often carried out in shifts so that their bodies may be carefully arranged with identification to ease the burden on authorities. Such cults usually end their lives with an effective combination of medications, usually well researched so that the death is swift, tidy and relatively painless.

The other type of suicide cult develops in an atmosphere far from positive or enlightening. True doomsday cults form in an environment of abject fear. The members believe that humanity is fatally flawed and so full of sin that the Apocalypse is just on the horizon. Their leader, usually a charismatic male, preaches a harsh, fatalistic rhetoric, focusing on the battles between good and evil at the end times — in which the cult, an elite group, will play a pivotal role. In such groups, the leader dominates his followers totally, controlling their physical environments and dictating their emotional states, engaging in voluntary or enforced sex with them. Doomsday cults often grow quite large, with membership numbering in the hundreds as women bring their children into the cult as well, swelling the ranks. These groups isolate themselves physically from the world, which they see as a dangerous, sinful place full of outsiders. Withdrawing to private communes, often in remote, secluded locations, the cult severs its ties to normal society. Here, separated from all outside sources of information, the cult becomes totally reliant upon its leader for news. As the supposed date of the Apocalypse approaches, the leader feeds his captive audience stories of war and chaos, slowly bringing his tale of violence to a peak at which he orders them to commit suicide and ascend to heaven.

Unlike the suicides mentioned early, these deaths are far from tidy. Often, each member ingests poison, usually mixed with food or beverage, resulting in a painful, messy death as the toxins take hold and the body attempts to repel them. Caught up in the madness of the cult, mothers even feed poison to their own children, so they will travel to heaven together. Through all this, the cult leader watches over his dying flock, godlike and above reproach. His death, he claims, will come last, when he is certain all his followers are safely dispatched toward God. Those who resist the suicide orders are either forced to ingest the poison or are shot.

Ironically, leaders of doomsday cults usually lack the nerve to follow the other cult members into death. Sometimes they flee, starting over again with a new cult,

but more often they are murdered by the straggling remains of their loyal followers who realize that their leader lacks the faith he insisted they have. In the cult leader's moment of doubt, some other cult member may "help" him on his way.

Only a step beyond these doomsday suicide cults, killer cults believe that the solution to the depravity of the world is mass murder. Sometimes these killings are followed by mass suicide, but typically the murderers believe they will reap the benefits of their "righteous" actions. Killer cults tend to be led by charismatic megalomaniacs who pit themselves and their churches against the rest of the world. In some cases their beliefs stem from twisted interpretations of established doctrines, but the roots of the cult may just as likely be found in a song or poem, or in some meaningless vision of an insane leader. If the leaders of suicide cults are delusional, the leaders of killer cults are utterly, irrevocably mad. These self-proclaimed divinities devote their lives, and the lives of their followers, to bringing forth a personal day of reckoning. Leaders of killer cults often amass large arsenals of weapons, ostensibly to arms themselves against the "enemy" beyond the compound walls.

Beyond Christian apocalyptic dogma, some killer cults might base some of their beliefs in a grain of truth. Not all cults murder as a way to cleanse the world of sin or to bring on the end of days. Some are trying to wipe out a scourge that they see as beyond the realm of humanity. Like the hunters in Chapter Two, leaders or members of these killer cults may have borne witness to some act of supernatural violence that they cannot comprehend. Exposure to such unexplainable phenomena can drive a person to madness, and in the attempts to make sense of what he has witnessed, a madman with an arsenal can inflict a huge amount of damage. In rural areas especially, attempts to destroy a small group of vampires or werewolves could turn into a mass slaughter, as paranoia turns everyone into an enemy.

Los Asesinos Santos de Lobos

A recent mass slaughter in the South American jungles was set in motion when a missionary claimed to see a village woman transform from a human into a wolf. The missionary, name currently unknown, recruited a large group of followers from his mission church and led them through the village, killing nearly a hundred people. Uncertain as to whether the woman herself had been among the victims, because many were so badly mutilated as to be unidentifiable, the cult also murdered people in two more adjacent towns. Calling themselves Los Asesinos Santos de Lobos, or the Sainted Wolf-Slayers, the group has established a secret compound which they use as a base of operations for their death sprees. Hidden deep in the jungles, the killer cult has still not been found and stopped, and it continues to kill any person it suspects of consorting with the form-changing witches. Though little is known about the cult's leader, rumors suggest that he is not a local and that he is completely mad.

Something Out There

Making sense of the UFO subculture, or more appropriately subcultures, is difficult work at best. The majority of UFO cult movements rarely have more than fifty or sixty members at a given time. Most groups are quite small and function autonomously from all others. The only guaranteed common belief from one UFO cult to another is the conviction that alien beings exist. Theories regarding the nature of these UFOs and the ways in which they interact with humans differ. A common belief shared by many UFO cults is the idea that only a select few can communicate with UFOs. These individuals, called contactees, provide the only link of communication between the aliens and the UFO cult. Because of this, followers must put full faith into the messages of the contactees. Rather than a single leader, these groups tend to result from a number of individuals with shared experiences banding together, often claiming to be contactees or alien abduction victims. In this, UFO cults differ from their counterparts, having a panel of "enlightened" leaders rather than a single focus of worship.

Not all UFO cults include members with personal abduction experiences, forming instead as a result of mutually held beliefs. Some UFO cults consider alien beings to be spiritual guides, even angels. Like in some suicide cults, members believe these extraterrestrial celestials can help the cult members rise above or evolve beyond their humanity. In fact, UFO cults can easily become suicide cults if the leaders become convinced that they must shed their physical shells in order to speed the evolution process.

Most UFO cults are benign, their members often laughable, pathetic conspiracy freaks with too much free time and high-speed Internet connections. Yet, think how quickly these groups can disseminate information. Within minutes any crumb of information can race its way across cyberspace into a thousand email accounts, chat rooms and message forums. Because of this fact, players' characters must exercise extreme caution when dealing with UFO cults. Should these sci-fi loving zealots interpret the use of any supernatural powers as signs of alien contact, rest assured that such theories will be broadcast across an expansive network, calling unwanted attention to the characters. The benefit of this quick willingness to assume that all unexplained phenomena are alien in origin means that a character could easily subvert these UFO cults to her will, playing the role of a powerful extraterrestrial and using the cultists as a source of blood, money or information. Of course, this idea is so obvious that the characters are most likely not the first to think of it. The truth that's out there could very well be another vampire or mage with a vendetta against a player's character.

Sons of Earth

This UFO cult is actually an online community linking a network of believers from around the world with each other. They use their forums to report sightings of any un-

explained phenomena and to share their various conspiracy theories. While largely harmless, the group has posted information on several extraterrestrial sightings that were actually supernatural activity. Strange lights seen outside a town in Arizona, accepted as the lights of UFOs by the group, were actually the result of a spell gone awry. Intended to provide ambient lighting in an area without electricity, the magic instead resulted in an explosion of brilliant color, which hung in the sky like the aurora borealis and was visible for several miles. The "alien doppelganger" that picked up one Son of Earth at a nightclub in Seattle for "strange sexual experimentation" was actually a local vampire with some major kinks and a fetish for geeky boys. While the comical appearance of the organization keeps most people from taking their claims seriously, someone who is actively looking for monsters to hunt could easily use this group's informative website to track down their prey.

Feigned or Arcane?

"But when do we get the power?" Josh whined. God, I hate that whine. He was nothing much to look at, a suburban goth in a long leather coat over a ratty black T-shirt with some band logo I didn't recognize. Thankfully, Josh's mommy and daddy were corporate lawyers and gave their darling boy a big allowance. What a loser. By sheer self-control, I didn't wince. Instead, I leaned over a little more and smiled encouragingly. His glance predictably drifted down my blouse. Pig. I gave him another couple seconds to enjoy the view before straightening. His eyes didn't quite rise to meet mine.

"Soon, baby, soon," I crooned. He didn't look completely convinced. "You'll see tonight at the meeting." I ran my hands through my black-dyed hair and pouted. I'd perfected the look, knowing it drove boys like Josh wild. "Just be at my place before midnight." I got up to leave and then stared back at him. "Oh, and I almost forgot. I'll need to get supplies for the ritual," I explained, but he interrupted by fishing out his wallet.

"Here, take this," he said, handing me a grubby wad of bills. Jackpot, I thought. For that, I endured the touch of his greasy hand a moment longer.

"Thanks, hon," I whispered. "See you tonight." I walked away without a backward glance.

Josh was part of my third coven, if you wanted to call it that. I found the boys and girls moping in malls, rich little white kids trying so hard to be rebellious and misunderstood. I understood them well enough. To them, I was their pale and pretty goddess in black, a college girl who actually noticed them when none of their peers would. I took them for everything they had and scared them shitless, then started over.

I wasn't so different from them when Darius found me a few years ago. He was different, edgier, like he



really knew something. At our first ritual, he invoked the power and made the candles fly around the room. Some freaked and wouldn't come near again. Others worshipped him. I just wanted the power for myself, so I seduced him. I teased the secrets out of him, learned all about the bones he'd taken from a grave and the ghosts that obeyed as long as he carried them. When I realized he wouldn't share, I spiked his absinthe. Now I had the bones, tied to the necklace around my neck. I touched the reassuring weight while I stood back and admired my preparations. Sixty candles would be more than impressive enough. I checked my makeup and then the clock. Fifteen minutes to showtime.

They filed in, wary, skittish, a half-dozen total. I'd promised them a miracle, and a few were still cynical enough that they didn't believe me. At least four of them were here because they were hoping for ritual sex. Yeah, right. They all took a seat around the table, illuminated by the single candle at the center. I stood and raised my arm theatrically, rolling my eyes back so only the whites showed. I murmured unintelligibly, giving the cynical ones enough time to decide I was a fraud. Then I touched my amulet.

"Burn," I snarled, and 60 candles sparked to life with a hiss. Yeah. Eat that. When I opened my eyes, I knew I had them. Only Mel looked unconvinced, squinting to see the fuses or whatever I'd used. OK, bitch, I thought. You asked for it. I raised both arms this time and shook like I

was having a seizure. Dozens of candles ripped up out of their iron holders and raced through the air, spilling hot wax on Mel. She screamed. They all stared in awe and horror, and no one moved. I gloated and made the candles stop.

"Do you doubt my power?" I challenged the coven. No one said anything, so I pitched my voice louder. "Do you believe?" I shrieked. They all blurted out answers. Oh yeah, this was perfect. They'd pay my rent for the next three months if I played this right. I preached bullshit about power and enlightenment and the glory of strange gods I'd ripped out of Lovecraft. They just nodded like kids in church. At the end of my sermon, half-past two, I stared into each of their eyes and waited in silence.

"Who among you doubts my power?" I whispered finally. None of them dared move. Perfect. I owned them. Then I felt the sudden cold that swept the room and made everyone shiver.

"I do," something hissed in the dark. I stared toward the voice in anger, as a shape fluttered and approached. This wasn't in the fucking script. Gathering my will, I gripped my amulet of bones and whispered for the spirit to leave. It ignored me and glided into the light. My heart raced as he threw back the hood and stared at me with the eyes I'd known so well. Every candle flared, shifting from yellow to the vivid, poisonous green of absinthe. In that flash, the coven scattered in terror and he smiled with teeth like a shark.

"Hey babe," Darius purred, "Miss me?"



Unreality

In the World of Darkness, monsters exist. They are vampires, wizards and worse, gathering followers for their own ends. While any good con artist can feign the image of supernatural power, building a cult around that image, these beings do not feign. They don't have to. Their power is frighteningly real, and that power makes gods of monsters. Cults built around actual supernatural beings may share characteristics with other types of organizations, but their situations require unique considerations. Then too, cults built around an illusion of the supernatural may attract the attention of the very beings with which they seek association.

Hierarchy

The supernatural denizens of the World of Darkness agree on precious little, vying with one another for resources, power and their own survival; yet they all accept one basic truth: Don't get caught. Humanity is too numerous, too dangerous in those mobs to rule outright. Thus, supernatural beings who would set themselves up as gods must do so very carefully. Their cults must remain small or else broken into diverse enclaves and scattered cells to remain hidden. Rigid hierarchies further preserve the shield of secrecy. In most cases, the leader controls the entire group as an absolute dictator, using demonstrations of temporal and supernatural might to immediately quell any resistance.

True supernatural cults are often ruled by proxy, through a high priest who administers the cult in the absence of the otherworldly founder. When and if she appears, the true master manifests as nothing less than a god, making dramatic entrances to bolster the faith of her worshippers. Behind-the-scenes power keeps the leader out of immediate danger and risk of assassination, preserving the sense of grandeur and mystique that surrounds the supernatural. Conversely, this strategy opens the leader to a well-placed coup if the priest's ambitions grow too great. Consequently, supernatural leaders look for pliancy in their regents above all else. The best regents, of course, are those who don't even know the ruse, but actually believe. These souls may be truly righteous and charismatic, duped into promoting the agenda of a being with far fewer scruples. Where large cults divide into cells, the leader can either oversee all meetings in person through a rotating schedule or ceremonies, or else depend on a number of different priests to manage their respective pieces of the organization. This complexity increases the danger of discovery or usurpation exponentially, so few leaders are so daring or foolish as to let their organizations grow too large.

Among pseudo-magical cults, structures generally favor a less urgently authoritarian approach. Con artists pretending magical powers cannot use their "gifts" too often without risking discovery as frauds. These leaders make their displays of "power" judiciously, choosing

a time and place that maximizes the emotional impact of the special effects. Where possible, brainwashing and peer conditioning sets up an "Emperor's New Clothes" scenario, so that no one dares to speak up about any observed discrepancies. Frauds use conventional administrative and recruitment techniques to build and maintain their power, setting themselves up as the dominant figure, more guru than god.

Some cults build upon the shared practice or search for magic. These are often the most democratic of magic cults, since the cultists share a mutual vision. No one can directly dominate the rest, because the founding precepts of the organization aim toward common enlightenment and empowerment rather than placing masses under the guidance of a single figure. This is not to say that such organizations have no leaders, but rather that unofficial leaders emerge from strength of personality and factionalism rather than an innate pyramid structure. Anyone who shows too much ambition finds other members of the organization banding against her. In most cases, this preserves the semblance of egalitarianism. When secret societies go looking for real magic, however, they sometimes find the power as individuals rather than as a group. In these cases, the outcome depends largely on the person who made the fortuitous discovery. Either he benevolently shares his secrets, or he uses his new power to seize control. The latter process transforms the organization into a supernatural cult as described above.

Ambitions

For most magical cults, motivation is a matter of power. These organizations define their very existence by the exercise or search for supernatural power. In cults ruled by magical beings, that might is both proof of the leader's godhood and the instrument whereby dissenters are crushed or forcibly converted. Priests and godheads of mortal cults can preach their doctrines of salvation, enlightenment or New Age self-actualization — but all they can do is preach. That may be enough, depending on their leadership skills and charisma, but supernatural beings can do more. When these creatures speak of power, they can immediately wield that power as proof. Doing so sates the egos of these leaders, and some beings build cults simply for their own glory. Other cults exist to sate deeper or darker urges. Vampires and other predatory monsters may use their cults as a herd upon which to feed, or perhaps direct cult members to gather sacrifices for their god's hunger. Wizards may seek hapless guinea pigs upon which to test new spells. Other beings may have yet more inscrutable reasons associated with their natures, like ghosts who build organizations to protect their anchors from harm.

By definition, cults and societies seeking after the practice of power exist for the sake of that power. Many of these societies are comprised of outcasts and pariahs who live on the fringe of society. After all, they have to be fringe to believe magic is real. They view supernatu-

ral power as a means of elevating themselves above or beyond those who wield temporal authority. Most seeker cults also share an element of comparatively innocent curiosity. They want to know the hidden cosmic truths, not realizing the extraordinary danger of such studies. Supernatural beings do not appreciate mortals who probe and meddle in their affairs, and most creatures have the power to dispose of such intruders as quickly or painfully as the situation warrants.

Harvesting the Masses

While magical cults exist for the sake of supernatural power, they cannot generally deploy that power to attract new members. In the World of Darkness, as in our own world, most people do not believe in the existence of the supernatural. Monsters are just fairy tales or urban legends, and magic is just a sham. In truth, monsters and magicians alike have carefully engineered this prevailing cynicism to hide their own existence, yet the shield of anonymity (and the necessity of that shield) prevents supernatural beings from flaunting their power. Even open-minded souls have trouble accepting overt signs of the beings they abstractly accept. Many people believe in ghosts, but fewer have seen one or want to. As a result, recruitment to a magic cult follows many of the same patterns as other types of cults. Members pull in friends with promises of fellowship or spiritual wisdom, or carefully sound out the beliefs of potential converts and exploit fringe groups that already believe. Most importantly, members recruit carefully, fully aware of what happens if their god finds out they have leaked secrets to an unbeliever and exposed the organization to undue attention.

As in organizations built around actual magic, leaders of fraud cults do not show off their supposed power to outsiders. An outsider is almost certainly a skeptic, after all, and a skeptic who discerns the hoax could ruin the whole scam. These organizations prey on the weak-minded and gullible, carefully inculcating belief by means of a pyramid hierarchy. At the bottom ranks, initiates and prospective initiates have not witnessed the power directly, but hear the impassioned and charismatic testimonials of those who have. As they prove their loyalty and rise in arbitrary rank (thereby demonstrating that the conditioning process has taken hold), the leader may actually give "signs" to validate the convert's faith.

Cults seeking magic seldom recruit and almost never do so except directly by unanimous approval. These organizations are extremely small, their rituals more in line with a fraternity or secret society than a church. Generally, such organizations come about when a few like-minded eccentric individuals discover one another and pool their notes and resources. Synergy can lead to an immediate breakthrough, or a close friend might be allowed to join after complex or even grueling initiation. Because many of these organizations comprise themselves of outcasts who feel powerless, mem-


bers often overcompensate in the cruelty or difficulty of initiation rites. Only those with a strong will and keen mind may be accepted, since the search for power neither requires nor even accepts sycophants.

Reign and Ritual

Perhaps surprisingly, cults formed around supernatural leaders require constant, almost paranoid maintenance. Mortal leaders are often madmen or hypocrites, but their vices generally do not extend to devouring the blood of the innocent, offering sacrifices to unnamed spirits outside the world and other such acts of preternatural malice. Cult members may, however, be duped into viewing the perpetrators of such horror as benevolently enlightened or outright divine beings. Should these followers learn the truth, their faith invariably turns to panic or rage. More than one supposed deity has fallen prey to mobs of disillusioned acolytes, while other creatures have faced worse torments from peers after frightened ex-cultists attempted to leak information to the public at large. Consequently, most monsters take a ruthlessly pragmatic approach to their leadership, rewarding obedience and punishing dissent. For some, punishment is a matter of pain, crudely or expertly applied. Other leaders use mind-bending magic to rewrite memories or shatter wills so that the wayward disciple sees the "error" of his ways. Such methodologies may appear beneficent and merciful to other cultists, simultaneously reinforcing the leader's beatific reputation and the faith of the flock. These techniques involve nothing less than spiritual and psychic rape, however.

Supernatural leaders do not always rule directly. Whether from fear or simple prudence, some take the role of detached gods, appearing only in the context of elaborate (and often meaningless) ceremonies intended to deepen their mystique. These spiritual authorities leave matters of day-to-day administration in the hands of trusted or mind-controlled subordinates who usually play the role of high priests. More rarely and dangerously, a duped believer publicly runs the cult, presenting a face of perfect honesty and charisma for the organization. In this way, the supposed god misdirects adversaries, staying safely out of the limelight while presenting a more immediate target if anything goes wrong. A particularly canny leader might actually manage several independent cells at once, appearing before each at scheduled rituals to sate his ego or other hungers as the context of the rite permits.

While most supernatural beings rule their cults with precise applications of direct or indirect force, frauds and charlatans generally rely on their wit and guile. They have no powers to fall back on, no evil eye to shatter a mind or lay a binding curse. Unfortunately, that lack of power sits at odds with the expectations of their deluded cultists. As a result, these leaders must juggle their deceptions extremely carefully. Special effects and sleight of hand can go a long way, especially if



such displays are restricted to cultists who have already undergone a conditioning process. A smart leader only recruits the gullible and weak-willed, people who already need to believe in the promise of wonder and magic. Skeptics and well-honed minds are dangerous, not simply because they resist conditioning, but because they can pierce the ruse. Interestingly enough, many frauds focus on recruitment to the exclusion of maintenance. They set up shop in an area and rapidly gather followers with promises of occult secrets, blessings of bizarre gods or whatever else they can devise. They milk the converts of as much money and other resources as possible, then skip town and repeat the process under a new alias. Some charlatans have no idea that actual magic exists at all, while others have enough of an idea to be a little more careful. Of course, many supernatural beings are only too happy to let charlatans play. If they are caught (as most eventually are), the frauds add more "proof" that magic is just a matter of smoke and mirrors.

Among societies and cults dedicated to the pursuit of magic, maintenance is seldom an issue. No one in the organization is a cat's-paw (at least not officially), so there is no lie to uphold or obedience to compel. Membership is a matter of shared interest and talent, after all, so ambition alone provides the necessary impetus for cohesion. The only real danger is schism, which may erupt if the society grows too large or falls prey to factional rivalry. Some societies part amicably under such conditions, while others maintain quiet or even deadly feuds that can theoretically linger as long as the parties in question maintain them. Some occult orders founded in Victorian times still bicker and sabotage one another's research from habit alone, while other feuds ostensibly reach back through centuries for the oldest of these cults. Common sense, cool heads and neutral arbitration can often keep accusations of stolen notes and plagiarized formulas from degenerating into violence.

Another key issue to consider for occult societies is what happens in the event of a breakthrough. If a summoning ritual actually brings forth a spirit of the outer darkness, an archeological dig unearths an ancient vampire, or one of the occultists spontaneously Awakens as a mage during a ritual, the society stops being a quaint bunch of overeducated eccentrics. Maintenance isn't even a consideration at this point. What the group becomes next depends on what they find. They may end up enthralled to alien evil, devoured or rewarded with such mystical power as they never imagined possible, or perhaps some horrid combination of the above. Thankfully, discoveries of such magnitude are rare. Most societies make do with petty cantrips and talismans that they use without understanding why or how the bits of scavenged magic work. Overconfidence and delusions about their abilities and knowledge actually make these scholars more dangerous. A cult that would dare probe the secrets of the World of Darkness must plan for the

immediate hazards of success as much as the discouraging despair of repeated failure. Wise leaders build contingency plans for the most absurd and unlikely scenarios. Many of these plans would earn their creators such unkind labels as paranoid and obsessive-compulsive, at least viewed by outsiders. Within cults of magic, no measure of protection is ever really thorough enough, and anyone who believes otherwise is a liability to the whole group.

As a final and unpleasant note on occult societies, many such organizations often place their scholarly zeal ahead of morality. This can create discipline problems with idealistic recruits, who do not yet understand the grim necessities of mystical research. Among the most callous societies, systematic desensitization and moral degeneration takes the place of conventional brainwashing. The initiate is conditioned to believe in the lofty goals of the society rather than learning obedience to a central authority, but the process is no less thorough for the difference. Sometimes, however, newer members cannot manage to shake their "outdated" credos. They balk at sacrificing unwanted street urchins in experimental tests of summoning rites, seeking to leave the organization or even report the cult to authorities. Older cult members accept such behavior to a point, using whatever means they must to dissuade acts of defiance. Such societies are generally small, after all, and a learned occult scholar is a difficult commodity to replace. Ultimately, however, sentimentality must yield to pragmatism. If the member still insists on leaving or endangering the group despite all pleas and threats, the cult can always fall back on more permanent solutions.

Seek and Ye Shall Find

For cults built upon the exercise or hunt for magical power, involvement with the supernatural is the whole point of the organization. In contrast, charlatans may go their entire lives without uncovering the truth or the monsters behind the truth.

Cults built around a magical being tend to focus very narrowly on the creature they serve, assuming they even know what that creature is. A vampire's blood cult might realize they follow a vampire, or believe their patron is an actual god. If they do know the leader is a vampire, they probably don't understand what a vampire actually is. They might base their idea on Hollywood portrayals, novels or folklore, but they have precious little truth. This serves the interests of their undead master, who likely views the group as disposable. Should the cult ever end up discovered by mortal authorities or monster hunters, its members will appear as deluded madmen under interrogation. Anyone who actually believes a cultist's garbled accounts proceeds with dangerous misinformation, giving further advantage to the vampire. Furthermore, a cult that doesn't know the truth is far less dangerous if they should unwisely choose to rebel. Similarly, most supernatural

"gods" are jealous. Many do not teach their followers that other magical beings exist, or if they do impart this knowledge, the leaders proclaim these rivals as "devils" or perhaps lesser members of a pantheon (in the case of close allies).

Charlatans run the gamut as far as supernatural involvement goes. Some are merely greed-driven frauds who cobble together their so-called mystical teachings from the New Age sections of their local bookstores. If they ever impart a single piece of magical wisdom, they do so by pure accident. These fakes seldom find themselves beset by magical adversaries, unless they inadvertently stumble into one. For instance, a cult focused on the supposed practice of magic could attract an actual mage, or perhaps one of the cultists might spontaneously Awaken as a result of trying the focal techniques advocated by the fake guru.

Persephone Unbound

Founded in 1921 as a secret society of Harvard classics students, this grandiosely named occult order dedicates itself wholly to the search for immortality. From six friends enraptured by mythology and their overactive imaginations, the group has swelled to a dozen small chapters scattered across the United States. The order maintains the strictest secrecy regarding its membership and policies, but the organization as a detached whole has made contact and bartered lore with a number of other occult groups throughout the world. Unlike many crackpot organizations, Persephone Unbound has actually uncovered a disturbing number of arcane secrets mixed in with the usual collection of folklore and nonsense. The society knows of the existence of ghosts, wizards and vampires, though they have only the crudest understanding of how magic actually works or what vampires are. In probing death and ways to thwart death, the order has developed several alchemical regimens that retard the aging process, but these potions carry unpleasant side effects and show no promise of actual life everlasting. Of late, the society's research has grown more desperate and less scrupulous. Most members have no idea why they are pressed to urgency, only that the central chapter demands it. (For more information on Persephone Unbound and its recent changes, see p. 104.)

Secular Power

Maggie set the stack of plates on the counter as she stared at the impressive spread of white cabinets on her new kitchen wall. I never had enough space before, she thought. Now I have more than I know what to do with. Several cardboard boxes sat open and half-empty on the marble-topped island, while still more filled the breakfast nook behind her. Upstairs she heard thumps and squeals as Sarah and Holly ran back and forth, dividing their toys between separate bedrooms for the first time. In the midst of domes-

tic chaos, Maggie smiled. This is a good place for a new start.

The brisk, polite knock on the front door startled Maggie from her revelry. The cable company had asked her to be available for installation between noon and three, but the green digital numbers on the microwave only read 10:45. Maggie hurried to the door, opening it to find three women holding casserole dishes. Maggie, noticing the perfect manicures sported by all three of her visitors, adjusted the bandana holding her sweaty curls off her forehead. The blonde woman nearest to the door smiled broadly.

"You must be Maggie. I'm Karen. This is Georgette," she said pointing to the slender brunette to her right, "and Sophia," indicating the attractive black woman to her left. "Moving in can be such a chore, we thought you'd like a little company. Do you mind if we come in?"

All three women wore what looked like tennis outfits, with crisp white skirts and pastel blouses. Diamonds glinted on their wrists. So that's why they call them "tennis bracelets," Maggie glanced down at her paint-stained jeans and oversized sweatshirt, then shrugged.

"Sure, but I warn you, we've got more boxes than furniture right now." She led the women through the kitchen, where they stuck the casserole dishes in Maggie's fridge.

"I remember when we first moved in to Oak Hill," Karen said. "I barely had time to unpack everything, let alone fix dinner! Now the ladies and I try to help the new neighbors out by bringing them a few dishes. The men don't even have to know!" She added, with a conspiratorial wink. Maggie smiled in response to Karen's warmth and offered to put on some coffee. Karen accepted politely, but when Maggie made the same offer to Sophia and Georgette, she noticed that they looked to Karen before also saying yes. Miss Popularity? Maggie wondered. As Karen stirred a little low-fat milk into her coffee, she explained about the neighborhood women's group.

"The Oak Hill Ladies, as we call ourselves, really take it upon ourselves to keep the neighborhood looking tip-top. Of course, you'll have signed the covenant when you signed the contract on your house?" She waited for Maggie's nod before continuing. "Well, we try to take things a step beyond. You know, urge everyone to keep flowers planted around their mailboxes and along the sidewalks, to beautify the whole street."

"I'm not much of a gardener," Maggie laughed. "Even my potted plants die. I really don't have that much time for it, anyway, between the girls and my job." The Oak Hill Ladies shifted in their seats slightly. Karen looked politely interested.

"I work for a publishing company," Maggie continued, "though they let me do a lot of work remotely, so I can be here when the girls get home from school."

"And what does your husband do?" Karen asked. Maggie snorted.

"Makes ugly phone calls and falls behind on child support, mostly. We've been divorced for a little over two years now." As she turned around to put the milk back into the fridge, Maggie missed the furtive exchange of glances between the women. Georgette silently mouthed "Divorced?" to Sophia, who looked mildly disgusted. Karen wrinkled her nose slightly, as though smelling something foul. When Maggie returned to the kitchen table, the three were already standing.

"Well," Karen said, her voice chilly and her smile strained. "It was nice to meet you, Maggie. The ladies and I have some things to attend to. I do hope you enjoy your stay in Oak Hill." Leaving their cups on the table, they walked quickly toward the door.

"I'm sorry you have to leave so quickly. I hope you'll come over for coffee again some time," Maggie offered. Karen smiled so broadly that Maggie took a slight step back.

"Oh, we'll certainly see you again," Karen chirped. "Knowing one's neighbors, why, that's the first step to keeping the neighborhood beautiful!"

High and Mighty

Jocks. Preps. Nerds. Even as children, we segregated each other and ourselves into cliques and clubs, exclusive groups that based membership on a set of standards that outsiders might never understand. We knew which cliques were popular, which were powerful, who was rich and who could bully whom without worrying about repercussions. The idea of the social elite isn't something new. Society affords the wealthy and beautiful a measure of power and respect, while the "common" man must display an extraordinary amount of merit to have even a taste. The noble class ruled on this notion of their own inherent superiority for centuries before their "underlings" began to resent them. Now a new royalty has found its foothold: an elite class built on money, beauty and political ties.

Even within the upper class, however, elitism exists. In a group of powerful, wealthy people, some are still more powerful and more wealthy than their social peers. These individuals tend to gravitate toward each other, seeking like-minded people of the appropriate social bracket with whom to spend their time. From these pockets of society emerge some of the most powerful organizations. Religious kooks and conspiracy theorists can rant, rave and distribute pamphlets all day long, but their spheres of influence remain small. Secret societies of the social elite, however, have an enormous range of power. Their spheres of influence encompass banks and businesses, police forces and city halls, woven from cash and held together by good public names. More importantly, their money buys them ano-

nymity, a necessity when a group is involved in extortion or even murder.

However scary you find the thought of religious fundamentalists with bombs or cult leaders with brainwashing seminars, these are only subtle threats when compared to the force of a group of influential people with a huge backing of cash. Money and power, ultimately, make all the difference. Preachers can rail in the pulpits and UFO fanatics can rant on the Internet, but they pose little threat to the players' characters if they can't back up their speeches and manifestos with the right equipment and protection. Members of elite secret societies often possess everything they need to make good on any threat, and will stop at nothing to further their group's agenda.

But, what is their agenda?

Therein lies the most frightening aspect of these secret societies. These men and women already have money and power. What more could they want? What else do they need to feel fulfilled in their already rich lives?

Often, the answer is simply *control*. The more power the elite accrue, the more they wish to possess. Once they've dominated their own corner of the universe, they begin to hungrily eye someone else's. Owning a little is so rarely enough — not when owning it *all* might just be possible. Thus, secret societies begin by exerting control over their own particular circles and slowly expand to exert control over other areas.

Depending on the financial and social resources of the organization, their expansion or upward mobility might be limited. Even the elite may find, to their chagrin, that even their power has boundaries. A neighborhood ladies' group may wield significant authority within their neighborhood or even within their town through aggressive enforcement of neighborhood covenants, membership in the PTA or other youth and school organizations, and through individual social interactions such as ostracism of an unwanted element. This group, however, might find it difficult to cover up the murder of an uncooperative neighbor or teacher, because they lack the proper political ties. Their social clout is weighty, but their legal pull is no greater than that of any other person.

But add the fact that one of the women is the daughter of an influential senator, or the wife of a successful businessman with Mafia connections — or is, perhaps, the senator or businesswoman herself. Suddenly her legal and political advantages increase. If the uncooperative neighbor goes missing now, perhaps her ties can't keep the police from investigating her or the state from bringing her to trial, but all the relevant witnesses might suddenly change their testimony or a police officer might admit to tampering with evidence. The right amount of money and political sway makes all the difference.

Now imagine that this neighborhood ladies' group is a branch of a nationwide secret organization with

connections on all levels of government, from the police force to the district attorney's office. Imagine that this secret organization owns a media conglomerate that spins the story of the "disappearing neighbor" on every news channel and in every newspaper, alleging the neighbor had ties to a drug trafficking ring or was molesting his stepdaughter. In this scenario, not only would the woman never be charged, but the victim's public face would be destroyed as well, all with the result that the woman's sphere of influence remains exactly as she likes it: under her control.

The right ties to the right people make life easier for the social elite, while simultaneously presenting roadblocks to those without the money or backing to compete. In this web of interlocking political connections and social clout, players' characters may suddenly find themselves dealing with a different sort of antagonist. Unlike the other types of cults described in this chapter, secret societies are not motivated by quests for mystical power or a misguided sense of divine guidance. Their goals are often quite tangible, such as money, property or social position. Though these societies must remain secret in order to continue functioning at peak efficiency, they have access to a wealth of resources unavailable to the players' characters. Unless the characters have invested in the Allies or Contacts Merits, which might provide them more leverage when dealing with the upper crust, they may quickly find themselves outclassed in the political and business arenas.

Secret societies don't wrap themselves in veils of morality or justify their actions through claims of faith or divine guidance. Frankly, they don't have to. Their positions in society often make them above reproach, placing them on a level where the normal rules of conduct no longer apply. The only limiting factor (and keep in mind how *truly* limiting) is the fact that these organizations absolutely *must* function in secrecy. As long as the public doesn't know (or at least has no substantial proof to back up the suspicions), secret societies can continue to manipulate the system. Like a plant, however, expose the roots of a secret society and it shrivels and dies.

First Among Equals

Elite organizations are just that. They aren't open to just anyone, and the rules for inclusion are often narrow. They may be sexually or racially segregated, require that members have a certain profession or religious background, or recruit only from select universities or families. Nepotism runs rampant through this sort of organization. When considering the makeup of secret societies, remember that this generation often breeds the next generation.

Leadership in elitist clubs and organizations works very much like a popularity contest or beauty pageant. The most popular members usually hold the most sway, though the standards on which this popularity is judged may vary. Certain social groups, fraternity/sorority or country club types, tend to base popularity upon physical beauty and net fiscal

worth; others may compete through volunteerism, where the most philanthropic or "compassionate" individual gains the power. Many "men's club" groups rely on political influence to determine which member is the most powerful and therefore in charge of decision making. Whatever the standards of selection, rest assured that the leader of such a group is always the cream of the crop.

Masks

Many different groups can be lumped under the broad heading of secular cults. Some are innocuous, concerned only with mastering their small corner of the universe and making the most of petty bits of power. Others secular cults are more sinister, content with nothing less than wide-scale domination of their particular fields. The goal may be money, political clout or social advancement, but in the end it all comes down to *control*.

One main type of secular cult is the brotherhood or sisterhood organization. On a collegiate level, these cults manifest as the most exclusive fraternities or sororities, with legendary hazings and a lifelong string of benefits for those lucky enough to make the cut. With house colors and symbols; special cheers and songs; and control over what members wear, who they date, and where they go; a brotherhood or sisterhood organization can be a lot like a doomsday cult made up of pretty, rich people. Make a mistake in these clubs and you may find yourself blackballed from an entire career arena. At the most extreme level, collegiate brotherhood organizations may become the basis of adult politics and economics, as the exclusive groups produce the leaders of tomorrow. With power in all branches of the political arena and strong financial backing from the business arena, individuals joined in brotherhood could exert a huge amount of force. Players' characters who cross a member of such a brotherhood could face repercussions that include blackmail and extortion, or may even find themselves in physical danger as the brotherhood tries to eliminate the opposition by any means necessary.

Also based in brotherhood, mystic fraternal orders rely upon mysterious rituals and extreme secrecy to isolate themselves from others. Mystic fraternal orders usually refer to their groups as guilds or lodges, as many have their foundation in medieval craft guilds. Though very insular, with rituals and symbolism, mystic fraternal orders tend to be very involved in the community as a whole, performing acts of profound charity. Mystic orders do not seem overtly concerned with garnering power, though sinister individuals may use the benevolent nature of such an organization as a front for fraud and deception. Such mystical orders may also serve as fronts for magic cults or actual mage orders, providing a public face and an excuse for their occasionally eccentric behavior.

Whitcrest Social Club

This elite club started as a fraternity at an East Coast Ivy League university. It has now expanded into one of the largest fraternal organizations in North America. All the Ivy League colleges now have a branch of the Whitcrest Social Club;

WANTED

Bright, self-motivated people interested in breaking into regional sales market. Gain GREATER MEANING in your life while realizing your FULL POTENTIAL! Work with like-minded people in YOUR community. Join our team today! Experience not necessary but POSITIVE ATTITUDES a must! Call 1-800-UP-4-LIFE or visit our webpage at www.up4life.com.

several other top private universities across the country have followed suit. Membership in the club requires top grades and high levels of community involvement, as well as a certain economic and social position. Members are always well-to-do, with good families and good reputations. The surest way into Whitecrest is nepotism, because the sons of Whitecrest men are almost always invited to join. Membership is by invitation only and has innumerable perks, including legal protection and access to any substance or product, legal or illegal, a young man could want. After college, Whitecrest members usually find themselves as major players in the business or political realm as older members assist their "younger brothers" up the corporate or government ladder. In terms of secular power, Whitecrest Social Club is a major player.

The House that Jack Built

Sometimes a cult masquerades as a legitimate business, though careful attention to the structure of the business exposes it as a carefully tiered pyramid scheme. These secular, pseudo-business cults mirror their religious counterparts in recruiting and self-regulation techniques, with the added advantage of a seemingly professional front.

Usually, if someone is selling a product, the target of that sale is prepared and therefore cautious. Pyramid schemes rarely announce their intentions up front, however. Increasingly naïve or desperate people willingly attend an "information evening" at the behest of family or friends, only to find themselves maneuvered into joining very large group gatherings where they are pressured, through powerful psychological techniques, to join the new "business venture" or sell various products. Former cult marketing group members have reported shocking accounts of manipulation by these companies, including disturbing propaganda films and the forced ingestion of drugs to lower inhibitions during training seminars. Anyone could fall prey to the sales pitch, including the human servants or family of the players' characters. Even the characters themselves could be taken in by the get-rich-quick scheme, which seem so harmless at the outset.



Building Blocks

The company structure from which the "pyramid scheme" takes its name, the multi-level marketing organization relies upon heavy recruitment. In order to make the most money in the company, or to be truly "successful," salespeople must move "up line" by recruiting more and more distributors like themselves, who in turn recruit distributors and so on. In multi-level marketing organizations, members make money not just from the goods they sell but by getting a percentage of what the distributors under them sell. Just as in religious cults, recruitment of new members is stressed as a top priority. The main difference here is the monetary value assigned to each new member.

Pyramid schemes involve a broad base of low-level distributors and investors at the bottom of the pyramid, rising up to an individual or small group at the top which receives the largest share of profits. In such organizations, each tier earns more money from recruiting new distributors than it does from actual sales of products or services. New recruits are usually required to make a financial investment up front, ostensibly to cover the cost of their training and starting equipment. The actual value of such materials rarely adds up to the amount of the investment, however, and the distributor starts off his new career already in debt. To offset this initial cost, he must either quickly make several large sales (which is unlikely), or recruit more new distributors beneath him, taking his percent of their starting fees. In this way, the pyramid scheme grows and expands.

Though pyramid schemes are not designed for a high rate of upward mobility, the company's upper echelon tends to notice particularly good recruiters. A lucky individual could find himself moving out of small scale, one-on-one recruitment efforts and instead running one of the company's large seminars. Should those efforts prove fruitful, he could one day work his way to one of the upper tiers and the genuine profits the elite few share.

What of those pyramid schemes that are merely fronts for something much more sinister? The pyramid system is such an efficient one that clever minds can harness it for a darker ulterior motive than money alone. What begins as a secular organization could turn into a religious cult, where members are bound not only by secrecy, but by their large financial ties to the corporation. The brainwashed masses of distributors may even find their ultimate roles in the company to be that of a midnight snack for the CEO. After all, new tiers of salespeople are being recruited every day to replace the few that disappear unexpectedly.

The Sales Pitch

As with all cult sales and marketing jobs, recruiting for pyramid schemes requires extremely hard work and high motivation, as well as easy brainwashing for the cult leader on the go. Increasingly, pyramid scheme organizations adopt techniques similar to those of religious cults in order to attract recruits, then to keep them involved and committed to the cause. For instance, distributors are instructed

not to tell prospective recruits up front that they are selling a product. Instead they ask potential candidates to attend a meeting about an "exciting new business opportunity." The approach of the marketing organization is usually quite evangelical. It asks if there is something missing your life, and offers all sorts of emotional inducements.

In many ways, a pyramid scheme is far more like a fundamentalist religion than a direct marketing business, with money and freedom as the "God." The distributors often describe joining these organizations as a religious or spiritual life-changing experience. Distributors and covert cult leaders are encouraged to recruit first among their family and friends, an action that can very quickly put open, trusting relationships on shaky footing as friendship is exploited for the cult's financial gain.

Recruiters for pyramid schemes become aware of the emotional vulnerability of a potential recruit by asking questions about what he might be missing from his life. By feigning interest, the recruiter builds a level of trust with her target. When the sales pitch finally comes out, the recruit feels flattered that the recruiter chose him as a future business partner. Recruiting within the family or pre-existing social circle is heavily stressed in most training manuals or classes, justified by calling such practices "assisting your loved ones in bettering their own lives." The aggressive recruitment techniques put strains on relationships. Friendships and relationships are further abused when the target tries to say no. The skilled distributor may turn this into a personal rejection of herself, making the recruit feel guilty that he is turning down a friend. This is an excellent strategy for conversion.

Innovations Incorporated

ATTN: MARKETING
AND DISTRIBUTION DEPT
Good Morning, Innovators!

Just wanted to remind you that product is set for delivery on [REDACTED]. Please refer to pgs. 71-79 in your "Innovations for the Innovated" handbook for appropriate receipt and delivery procedures. As we move into Phase II, please review the appropriate protocol for handling all "Missing Persons" inquiries. Let's make this transition run as smoothly as possible!

Keep up the great work!

Jack Eaton, Jr., CEO



Exit Strategies

Unfortunately, dropping out of pyramid schemes and similar groups may not be simple or totally harmless. People who have fallen victim to downsizing turn desperately to these “easy money” groups to find some kind of income and purpose in life. Because distributors typically must pay in advance for each new shipment of product, they may feel obligated to sell all their remaining merchandise before leaving the organization in order to avoid suffering a loss. Unfortunately, as long as they continue to sell the products, they must remain in the pyramid; and many companies automatically send replacement supplies (and charge the distributor for them) when they suspect that the seller may be close to running out. These companies sometimes require employees to sign poorly worded, complicated contracts that obligate the employee to pay a “quit fee” when they exit the pyramid. While these contracts are seldom legitimate or legally binding, the average person doesn’t realize that the companies cannot, in fact, ruin their credit, foreclose on their house or fulfill any of the other threats levied against them. Frequent letters and phone calls may bully the weaker-willed into rejoining the organization. Rumor has it that some organizations have even killed ex-distributors for leaving, though of course these reports are unsubstantiated.

In the Hand of Storytellers

Now that you’ve seen the many faces that a cult can wear, here is the chance to decide which face to present to your players. While each section of this chapter provides information on the motivations and behaviors of cults, the following section is intended to help Storytellers integrate these groups into their own chronicles.

Chances are good that any major antagonist in the story will not confront the players’ characters directly — at least not initially. Instead, powerful enemies send their lackeys; and what better servants than cultists? After all, cultists present a range of moral possibilities. While they may be nameless, tattooed thugs with shaved heads, goatees and black attire, most cultists are pawns, duped into believing the divinity or enlightened grace of a monster. They aren’t innocent, in that their allegiance does not excuse their actions. Yet many believe they serve a greater good, rather than openly pledging themselves to evil. They are human beings, not extras. Killing or hurting them may be necessary, but cultists can be anyone... relatives, friends, coworkers or simply strangers caught up in something bigger and worse than themselves. By presenting the full moral complexities of misguided enemies, a Storyteller can enrich the story as a whole.

Cultist enemies need not always be complex individuals, however; the black-clad thugs with curvy knives and tattoos on their heads can also serve a role in a chronicle. Without requiring a great level of depth, these cultists provide the cannon fodder necessary to spice up combat scenes or to slow down players’ characters who are a little too hot on the trail of the main antagonist. Storytellers can use the gangbanger traits from the **World of Darkness Rulebook** (p. 205), combined with some chanting or religious rhetoric, to create minor adversaries for the characters to combat. Sprinkling these goons liberally through a chronicle can enlighten players as to the size of the cult with which they are dealing. Still, these cultists don’t take a lot of imagination, either to create as a Storyteller or combat as a character, and they lack the fear factor of the complex cult leader.

But What Do They Want?

Cultists are, for the most part, human, with human motivations and a human need for rationalization. When they knowingly do wrong, they suffer for it, both in terms of emotional response and in game mechanics, as a decline in Morality can result in derangements. Cults seldom act on a whim, which means that if they interact with players’ characters they are most likely doing so for a reason. Remember that the primary motivation for cult members is always the will of the cult leader, but leader may have any reason for interacting with the players’ characters.

The simplest reason is that the cult or its leader wants something from the players’ characters. They may possess knowledge or an item the cult desires, or the leader may mistakenly assume that the players’ characters know or have these things. The cultists may want answers to their questions, which the players’ characters may be unable or unwilling to provide. Vampires and werewolves are unlikely to share information about their origins with random humans, even if precedents didn’t exist forbidding them to do so. Mages are just as unlikely to share the secrets of their magical arts with a bunch of overeducated wannabe sorcerers. Still, even in the face of challenges, people want answers and go to great lengths to find them.

Some cults happily trade secret for secret when they can with whomever they can. In this, they make good contacts, keeping themselves as closely appraised of supernatural events and powers as possible. Depending on how well-informed the Storyteller wants to make such a group and how cordial a relationship it shares with the characters, such a society can serve as a perfect means of introducing rumors, portents and other plot hooks.

Another option is that the cult wants to eliminate evil, and the players’ characters happen to be the particular embodiment of evil they had in mind. Empowered by unwavering belief in her own moral superiority, a cult leader may think she has a divine obligation to rid the world of monsters like your players’ characters. Un-

like hunters, with a one-on-one approach to monster-hunting, a cult has the benefit of numbers. Most cultists do not have individual training in vampire hunting or fighting with werewolves. They believe they have God on their side and assume that is armor enough, when any smart monster hunter could tell them they're better off praising God and packing extra weapons. At times, secret societies have sponsored bands of monster hunters, providing resources and information to those whose vendettas serve the interests of the organization. In general, such alliances tend to come to bad ends when the violence finally prompts organized supernatural retaliation. For as long as they last, however, hunter cells with such patronage combine the strengths of both organizations into the ultimate nightmare of many monsters.

Some cults have enmity of a less personal and more professional nature. A werewolf pack may hold a piece of land that the cult is interested in, either because of its financial value or because it holds some mystical power source. The players' characters or their ilk may be interfering with business or with recruitment. A rash of disappearances might lower church attendance due to fear in the community, so cult leaders may seek the root of those disappearances and attempt to eliminate it. The cult might be led by a rival vampire who uses his human pawns to chase away the competition.

Finally, the players' characters may not even be the target of the cult's attentions. The focus may, instead, be on a character's mortal family. The cult may target a family with supernatural ties for many reasons. If the cult is aware that a couple's oldest son is a werewolf, it may attempt to convert or even kill the parents who spawned such an "evil" being — or they may want to use the family as leverage for later interaction. Perhaps the cult is entirely unaware of the supernatural world beyond its own sanctuary doors and is simply targeting the friends and family of the players' characters because they seem like likely recruits. Close family and friends not only provide a point of leverage against the characters, but they may also be privy to information that the characters don't wish to fall into the hands of a cult with a vendetta.

With Friends Like These...

Not all cultists need be enemies, of course. A vampire elder might send followers as messengers, rather than using modern technology she is not comfortable with. These followers could be obvious thralls intended to show off her strength and influence, or she could be more understated in her approach. What if the characters hail a cab, and midway through the journey the driver identifies them as vampires and relays a message? How did he know where to find them? How wide is the elder's web of followers? Are they being watched everywhere they go? Everyday cultists are considerably scarier than obvious goons, precisely because they could be anyone. Who can the characters trust? Where can they go? The same sort of system can work well with aco-

lytes of a powerful supernatural being, or even some of the enigmatic entities revealed in Chapter Four of this book. Nothing sets a mood of tension or even horror like the unknown, and a wide network of cultists who cryptically refer to their "Benefactor" or "Associate" can quickly establish that kind of uncertainty. Consider the following message: "Our Benefactor welcomes you to this city, but advises you to restrict your feeding to the following districts...." It leaves any number of unresolved matters. Who is the Benefactor? Perhaps more importantly, *what* is the Benefactor? What does he or she want? What happens if you don't follow its recommendations? How dangerous is it? As long as players feel that the shadows hold worse secrets than their own characters, the Storyteller can preserve the mood of the World of Darkness.

When They Know Too Much

Societies based on the practice of or search for real magic offer an entirely different "tool kit" for Storytellers than the other forms of magical cults described in this section. Occultists occupy a twilight place in the World of Darkness. One the one hand, they remain entirely mortal. On the other, their behavior and interests set occultists apart from mainstream society. To most "normal" people, these scholars appear frighteningly eccentric or even insane — or would, if they did not hide their studies behind veils of secrecy. In contrast, supernatural beings know that occultists aren't crazy. From their perspective, these supposed kooks are among the most frightening menaces humanity has to offer. They know too much, and knowledge is power. Consequently, occult societies make superb antagonists and foils. Creatures accustomed to mortals being ignorant should find the thought of knowledgeable savants frightening. What do they know? What are they doing with the information they hoard?

What Can Occultists Do?

Most occultists are just mortals who know of the existence of the supernatural and seek to learn more about the hidden world. Such knowledge makes them dangerous, but not unduly so. Other societies have actual magic at their disposal. They may be mages, but most are not. Mages command broad power to reshape the world, and at least an intuitive understanding of why and how that power works. Occultists lack this power or versatility, and they almost never have the slightest idea why their powers work — they just do. For instance, one group might have a book with a summoning ritual that conjures forth a specific spirit. Is the power in the book itself, in the rite, or in the spirit to appear when ritually bidden? Only the Storyteller knows (and frankly, the Storyteller doesn't even have to know). The fact that the ritual works should be enough, and its origins can remain forever a mystery.

In general, any magical powers wielded by members of an occult society incorporate lengthy and complex rituals or involve mystical talismans and artifacts of indeterminate origin. Not all of the steps in every ritual may be necessary, but removing a necessary step spoils the magic at best and invites utter catastrophe at worst. Mystical rituals produce specific effects that never change, and occultists cannot develop their own formulas from scratch. If they want more power, they have to discover it through further research. Occultists raise spirits, talk to the dead, create zombies, place hexes and perform other sorts of "folk" magic. Above all, occult powers should invoke a sense of mystery and horror, reinforcing the mood of the World of Darkness.

Liar's and Legends

While a charlatan's cultists do not have any real supernatural backing, they certainly think they do. This delusion makes them variably contemptible or dangerous. On the one hand, a group could follow its master and babble gibberish rituals in so-called Enochian every night and never pose the slightest problem for local supernatural beings. On the other hand, a cult leader who knew a little something about vampires could send her minions to kidnap one, believing she could steal

the secrets of eternal life from the creature. That fact that the plan won't work really doesn't matter to the kidnapped character if the incident still leads to his destruction. In another vein entirely, an ignorant cult may pose its own dangers. If the group is not subtle enough, their "diabolic" antics may attract official mortal investigations or monster hunters, who might widen their search to find the actual supernatural denizens of an area. Of course, properly managed, such exposure provides a perfect scapegoat.

For added fun, a fraud might look convincing from the outside, even to magical beings. Players' characters could investigate a new arrival and rumors of her magic powers, only to find a big hoax. Then the FBI shows up to look into the cult on suspicion of anything from fraud to terrorism; the characters have to decide whether to help the investigation or divert it, never quite sure which option would better ward against discovery.

For an entirely different spin on frauds, what if the characters or their loved ones are actually fooled? A group of newly Awakened mages could drift into a cult, hoping to find answers and guidance. The leader might welcome them as he would any other initiates, but then unscrupulously use their power if he discovers they have real magic. Perhaps a player's character actually Awakens as a result of participating in a fake ritual, and in one moment of cosmic clarity, he sees the truth. What does he do with that knowledge? Does he challenge the leader? Just try to get away? Turning to vampires, what if they think an infamous guru can make them



human again? They do his dirty work, but when it comes time for the leader to pay up, they face a nasty double-cross from someone who has a pretty good idea what they are capable of. For yet another scenario, a mage's friend or loved one joins a cult where she thinks she'll learn magic. After looking through the literature she brings home, the mage knows that it's a hoax. Of course, the reason he knows it's a hoax is because he knows how real magic works... and his friend doesn't know he's a mage. How does he reveal the truth and save her from the scam without revealing his own secret? Creative Storytellers can find all manner of bizarre and exciting uses for charlatans in their games, even if only to highlight how corrupt and manipulative plain old humans can be without any supernatural assistance.

Moral Ramifications

As a result of their high commitment to the laws of their faith, cult members' Morality ratings usually start at 7 (base) or higher. Their moral codes may be quite different from other people's or the players' characters, but as long as the cultists hold rigidly to the standards in which they believe, their Morality stays high. Some cult leaders, especially those of mainstream religious sects, have high Morality ratings as well, reflecting their staunch devotion to doing right. Other cult leaders, however, have extremely low Morality traits as a result of their constant lying, and abuse and maneuvering of their supplicants. Leaders of doomsday cults and some secular cults tend to have the lowest Morality ratings and therefore the highest propensity toward derangements. The most common derangements among cult leaders are narcissism, megalomania and paranoia.

Another aspect of cult involvement is the issue of Willpower. Repeated brainwashing and total indoctrination tends to leave most cult members with a low Willpower rating, while cult leader's will tends to be quite strong, manifesting in a high Willpower. Much depends upon the individual and his goals, however.

Sample Cult Leaders

Clever, manipulative and personable, cult leaders serve as excellent antagonists for use in the World of Darkness. The following characters represent a small sampling of possible leaders for the various types of cults, organizations or companies described in this chapter. More than single-use, throwaway adversaries, these characters are designed for repeat appearances or long-term inclusion in ongoing chronicles. Along with game statistics, these character descriptions also provide the personal histories, Vices and Virtues necessary for portraying well-developed foes that pique and hold the interest of players. These samples also offer potential plot hooks that can be expanded or manipulated for inclusion in new or long-running story lines. Let these characters serve as examples of the myriad ways in which individuals

can influence or exert force on the lives of players' characters.

John "Jack" Eaton, Jr. CEO of Innovations Incorporated

Background: John "Jack" Eaton, Jr. is a man without a past. No birth certificate was ever issued in his name. A search for personal records turns up no school or medical histories. He has no close relatives and no childhood friends, no one trying to make a buck or sell a story by cashing in on connections. When asked about his parents, Jack says they passed away several years ago, a statement which is patently false. Jack Eaton never had any parents.

Jack Eaton gave birth to himself nearly 15 years ago. His conception happened when a Michigan sewer worker named John Warner misread his work orders and broke open a subterranean vault that had lain dormant for over six decades. After a rush of foul, stale air vacated the vault, an impossibly long, black arm grabbed Mr. Warner by the front of his drab, government-issued coveralls and pulled him inside. Within the vault he found something that defied all logic and reasoning, something that invaded his mind and set him gibbering and screaming. The thing, whatever it was (and even Jack Eaton can't say), made a deal with John Warner. It hungered for worship and, more importantly, for sacrifice. In exchange for John's service, it would help him achieve everything he wanted, be it money, beauty, fame or power. Dumpy, blue-collar John Warner barely even took a moment to consider the thing's offer before agreeing to it.

The creature needed some insurance, however, proof of John's commitment. It needed a show of obedience. In the stinking chamber beneath a stretch of Michigan highway, the thing offered an ornate ceremonial dagger to John Warner and told him to slit his own throat. John obeyed without



hesitation — but as the blade cut open his skin, John felt a horrible, driving urge to grip the edges of the cut and *pull*. The urge was irresistible; drowning in his own blood, he tore at the gaping wound. He tore his flesh away from the cut, pulling and ripping, until it gave way like paper wrapping on a gift. He tore until all his skin pulled away and his dull, heavy body dropped on the floor like clothing.

The new man who stood over the shed skin of John Warner had all the same thoughts and memories, but he wore a different face. The man who was previously John Warner dressed himself again in his own government issued coveralls, marveling at how short they seemed in the legs and how loose in the fit, and left the sewer forever for a world of infinite possibility... and one rather large promise to fulfill.

He took the name John Eaton, Jr. because it seemed to fit the handsome face. Staring into his perfect smile in the mirror, he practiced saying “but you can call me Jack” in his rich, amiable new voice. Jack Eaton wasted no time in setting the groundwork for his fortune and repayment of his debt. He made the first three hundred sales calls himself, thumbing randomly through the phone book, beginning each call with the same question: “Do you want more from your future?” He offered no product or tangible output, offering only a concept and a structure, but people bought what he was selling. Three weeks later Jack presented his tiered-marketing concept to the fewer than 50 people who responded to his barrage of phone calls, distributing the first copies of his introductory handbook, *Innovations for the Innovated*. After Jack’s sales pitch, every single attendee signed up to join Jack’s team, each paying the not-inconsiderable cost for materials and training. Something about Jack’s speech made them feel almost *compelled* to join. Within six months, Innovations Incorporated, Jack’s company, had two dozen tiers of distributors working over a tri-state area. By the third anniversary of Jack’s deal in the sewer, Innovations Inc. was grossing in the billions, all without ever producing or distributing a single product.

Now close to 10 years in business, Innovations Incorporated has yet to roll out a product. Still, the numbers keep growing, both in (the inappropriately named) distributors and in dollars. Jack’s unnatural ability to convince others forged strong ties with the police force and the DA’s office, assuring that no legal investigation would ever be launched against the business. Everything is lined up perfectly for “product rollout day” in the near future, the day that Jack fulfills his deal with the *thing* in the sewers. On that day, all the men and women in the lower tiers of the pyramid will receive calls instructing them to go to their local distribution centers. From there, they will be transported to company headquarters for a rousing inspirational speech from their CEO. Finally, the thousands of loyal Innovators will be taken to a deserted stretch of Michigan highway, into the sewers below, where Jack will lead the upper management in performing a mass sacrifice of employees to the creature who gave Jack his second life.

Description: Jack Eaton is everything you’d expect from a man who earned his fortune almost entirely through his charisma and winning smile. With his flaw-

less tan, perfect teeth, and artfully mussed blond hair, Jack looks like he would be equally comfortable on a golf course, a magazine cover or a board room. Physically fit and impeccably groomed and dressed, Jack scarcely looks older than a man in his late 20s, despite his professed age of 37. He wears only immaculately tailored suits, favoring blues or grays over traditional black, and his ties always sport a gold tie-tack bearing the Innovations Incorporated “Double Eye” logo.

Storytelling Hints: Jack is a monster, plain and simple. He willingly traded his last ounces of compassion and humanity for a sports car and solid gold cufflinks. Without a single shred of guilt, Jack will instigate the mass murder of over 20,000 of his employees, all brainwashed by years of program training and seduced by Jack’s supernatural power to solicit consent — another part of his deal with the unknown creature in the sewer tunnel. Wealthy beyond measure and completely above reproach, Jack actually believes himself to be godlike. His rapidly dropping Morality rating has resulted in severe megalomania, which may ultimately be his downfall.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 5, Manipulation 5, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics (Finance) 3, Investigation 1, Politics 3

Physical Skills: Brawl 2, Drive 1, Firearms 1

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression (Public Speaking) 3, Intimidation (Veiled Threats) 1, Persuasion (Sales Pitch) 3, Socialize 2, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Allies (District Attorney’s Office 3, Police 3), Eidetic Memory, Mentor 5, Resources 5, Striking Looks 2

Willpower: 8

Morality: 2

Virtue: Fortitude. Jack has an iron-clad commitment to his goals, doing anything necessary to maintain the standards he sets for himself despite the odds stacked against him.

Vice: Greed. Nothing motivates Jack more strongly than the almighty dollar. His desire for extreme wealth and power overrides any lingering sense of obligation, or even connection, to his “fellow” human beings.

Health: 8

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Derangements: Megalomania (severe)

Supernatural Powers: **Voice of Reason.** Jack’s monstrous patron reshaped more than his body, imbuing him with a preternatural ability to persuade others. This power functions like a brainwashing attempt (see p. 77), save that Jack needs only a few minutes of conversation to initiate the

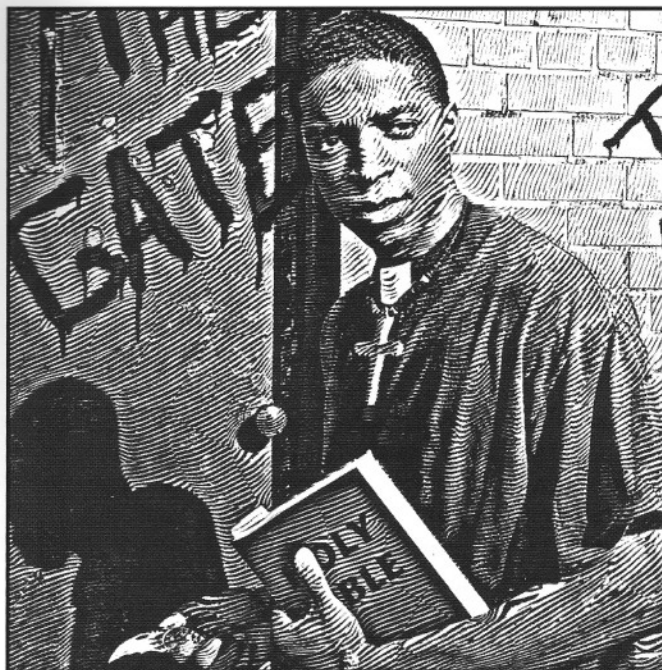
roll. In game terms, Voice of Reason is an instant, contested action rather than an extended action. Furthermore, Jack can use this power remotely, such as through a telephone or live television broadcast, but not through recordings of any type. Furthermore, any brainwashing attempt made at a distance can affect only a single target per use, preventing him from commandeering thousands with a single guest appearance on a late show. In contrast, face-to-face encounters may reach every audience member present, and his motivational seminars are the stuff of legends. Voice of Reason requires no cost to activate, but has no effect on supernatural beings of any type.

Father Ernesto Franklin, Catholic Priest

Background: Ernesto Franklin was born in New York City, the son of a Puerto Rican mother and an African-American father. His father died shortly after Ernesto's birth, leaving the child and his mother in abject poverty. Raised in a predominately Hispanic neighborhood, Ernesto spent most of the first 12 years of his life running with a Latino street gang. The boy's small stature made him an excellent lookout man, while his older, larger friends committed assaults and robberies. Ernesto might have faced a short life of jail time and violence had his mother, a devout Roman Catholic, not turned to her priest for guidance. Father Ignatius became the paternal figure Ernesto had been lacking, and through their many long talks discovered the boy's interest in science. When Ernesto entered high school, Father Ignatius urged him to take advanced science courses. With hard work and diligence, Ernesto performed exceptionally well in these classes, eventually earning a full scholarship to college, where he pursued his undergraduate degree in Biology with the intention of attending medical school and becoming a doctor.

Ernesto began medical school, but he began to suffer from increasing feelings of doubt and confusion. He lacked something necessary in his life, but what he couldn't say. While in college, Ernesto continued to attend mass regularly, though he occasionally felt uncomfortable with the new interpretations of God's law that some of the other congregation members subscribed to. Once, Ernesto was shocked to see two young men sharing his pew holding hands with each other during the service.

As Ernesto progressed with his medical degree, he began to see signs that his calling might lie elsewhere. He didn't doubt that he had a future as a healer, but began to suspect that the path of healing should be spiritual rather than physical. Just a few semesters short of finishing, Ernesto dropped out of medical school and enrolled in seminary. Even here Ernesto felt that not enough stress was being put on the kind of sins that ate away at the heart of the Catholic Church, especially promiscuity and homosexuality. Despite his medical training, Ernesto became convinced that AIDS was God's punishment for the homosexual for straying from the teachings of the Church. Realizing that the other priests did not share his views, however, Ernesto seldom spoke of them, but instead began to devise a



silent strategy to reconnect with Catholics and help them purify their religion.

When Ernesto graduated from seminary and took his vows, he made a secret promise to God that he would not rest until he saw the Catholic Church returned to its true foundations.

Ernesto's current work is to assist Father Connelly, an aging priest in a Catholic Church just a few blocks from Ernesto's old neighborhood. Now that he has a base of operations, Ernesto is slowly recruiting other young men and women angry with the current decline of the Church. Under the guise of "singles' Bible study," likeminded men and women meet to discuss their plans to retake the church. Though his faction has yet to turn violent, they have begun a hate campaign against known homosexuals in the community, sending threatening letters and encouraging others to boycott businesses owned or frequented by gays. His group is also investigating several other local businesses, including a "new age" book store that some church members claim sells books on witchcraft and devil worship, and a recently opened herbal shop that keeps unusual hours and attracts suspicious-looking clientele. One young woman who regularly attends Ernesto's "Bible study" claims she saw two men embracing in the alley beside the herb shop, implicating it as yet another meeting place for homosexuals.

Description: Even as an adult, Ernesto still retains his small stature. He wears his curly, black hair closely cropped for easy maintenance. Though his African-American heritage shows in his darker skin, Ernesto feels a much stronger connection to the Hispanic culture of his mother, speaking Spanish as well as English. A solemn man in his late 20s, he projects a trustworthy public face that leads others to feel extremely comfortable in his presence. While many priests have taken to leaving their collars at home during their day-to-day activities, Ernesto proudly wears his out into the community. Despite his clean-cut appearance, however, Ernesto always carries a knife strapped to his calf, a reminder of his early days running with the gang.

Storytelling Hints: While Ernesto's current focus is the homosexual community, he and his faction will target any group that they perceive as threatening the Catholic Church, including dissenters or anyone leading a "sinful and immoral" lifestyle. Though his actions have not yet become violent, it won't be long before the hate mail and boycotts escalate into organized attacks on businesses or individuals. While Ernesto has no express knowledge of the supernatural, his constant search for "deviant" behavior could eventually lead his attention to a nearby cabal, pack or coterie. The herb shop that Ernesto presently believes to be a gay business actually deals in the occult, selling herbs, fetishes and other arcane items to those who know how to ask. Should Ernesto ever stumble across the truth, the players' characters may find themselves faced with a new enemy... one backed by some very loyal and devout followers.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 5

Mental Skills: Academics (Religion) 3, Medicine 2, Science (Biology) 3

Physical Skills: Drive 1, Firearms 2, Stealth 1, Weaponry (Knives) 2

Social Skills: Empathy (Motives) 4, Persuasion 1, Streetwise 3

Merits: Status (Catholic Church) 1, Direction Sense 1, Fleet of Foot 3, Language (Latin, Spanish) 2

Willpower: 10

Morality: 8

Virtue: Faith. Ernesto believes he has a calling to serve God. Despite sacrificing the potential for a lucrative career, Ernesto doesn't regret his decision to devote himself to strengthening the Catholic Church. Though the world seems bleak and hopeless, he works tirelessly to weed out the sinners and help the faithful find meaning in God again.

Vice: Wrath. His early years of gang membership and his present disgust with humanity's moral decline make Ernesto's temper hard to control. Ernesto seethes at those who spurn God's love and God's laws, and he sees himself as a righteous defender of the faith. For him, little separates his Virtue and Vice, so he is most dangerous in the exercise of what he believes is right.

Health: 7

Initiative: 8

Defense: 3

Speed: 12

Christina Morrison.

Hierarch of Persephone Unbound

Background: Born in 1906 to a wealthy family of Boston socialites, Christina Keats led a fairly unremarkable childhood free of anything remotely involving the supernatural.



She was only 15 when her future husband, Donald Morrison, founded the occult society Persephone Unbound with five other college friends. She did not meet the dashing and well-educated Donald until 1927, at which time a whirlwind courtship led to their wedding less than a year later. Christina knew little of Persephone Unbound for the first five years of her marriage, except that it was a gentleman's society (and thus she was not eligible for membership). Her curiosity and extraordinary mind, however, eventually led her husband to reveal the ambitious — some would say mad — purpose of the club. He spoke of eternal life, of things impossible, and then he showed her. She saw the relics and the books gathered in Donald's archives and the experience forever changed her. Although she was not allowed to join the society formally for another two years, her insights and phenomenal intellect spurred many of the projects and lines of study that bore fruit. While Donald always retained higher rank as a founding member, Christina quickly rose to prominence as the greatest mind and most competent leader of the society. Her sex made many of the other members resistant to her ideas, but Donald was eventually able to convince them that despite the fact that Christina was a woman, she was a brilliant occultist and a valuable asset to the society.

Flash-forward to a year ago. Under the guidance of Christina and the other hierarchs, Persephone Unbound had grown and prospered. Christina had profited directly from this, treating herself with a regimen of thaumaturgical drugs that significantly slowed her aging. These drugs were unable to save Donald's life, though exactly why not is a mystery that the society hasn't uncovered yet. Donald died in 1990, passing leadership of the society fully to Christina. Despite the fact that she was actually in her 90s, Christina looked like a woman in her mid-50s. Even without further discoveries, she took some comfort knowing she could live another century and a half. Of course, that was before she discovered she had a rare and incurable form of brain cancer. The dis-

ease had progressed slowly along with her aging, spreading its tendrils of diseased cells over decades without her ever knowing. Modern medicine could avail nothing, and so Christina looked to magic as her only hope. She has directed every resource of *Persephone Unbound* to uncovering a cure, even to the expense of the society's usual caution. This redirection and intensification of focus has not come without cost. In the intervening months, one chapter has vanished outright without a trace, while a handful of individual members have similarly disappeared or come to suspiciously violent ends. She knows the society is close to *something*, because that something has retaliated against their inquiries. She only hopes she will find her miracle before her cancer spreads and kills her. If it seems no cure will arrive in time, she has conceived a less desirable backup plan. Her agents will kidnap a vampire and force the creature to transform her into one of the undead. She regards this contingency as a last resort, but even she has no idea the reprisal such an act could bring.

Description: Christina Morrison no longer appears as she did scant years ago. No one who looked at her would guess her true age, of course, variably placing her between 50 and 60. The cancer gnawing at her brain has begun to take its toll on her once vibrant physique. Her skin has drawn tight and pallid, almost translucent. Veins stand out in spite of her artful mastery of wardrobe and makeup. Her eyes have the faint squint of constant suffering, save when she numbs that agony with brandy. Only her husband and closest friends within the central chapter of *Persephone Unbound* actually know of her condition, so she takes great pains to pretend she retains her legendary vitality. To this end, she dresses in bright colors and smiles until her jaws ache, mustering every grace drilled into her by her Old Money upbringing.

Storytelling Hints: As brilliant and ambitious as ever, Christina knows she has less than a year to live. She finds this looming inevitability at once liberating and terrifying. On the one hand, she quite literally has nothing to lose. On the other hand, every passing day magnifies her pain and draws her closer to death. The headaches never go away and never let her forget what is happening. Some days she swears she can hear the tumors growing. The once vibrant and adventurous woman has turned from curiosity to ambition and finally sunk to self-ish desperation. Unsurprisingly, Christina's Morality has eroded along with her health, such that she does not give a second thought to endangering the lives of the occultists in her employ. *Persephone Unbound* was once fairly benign as such societies go, never unduly cruel or dangerous in its research. Christina's recent directives have made the order fiercer by quiet degrees, but enough that some members have begun to whisper. Although she does not see the parallel, Christina has become a cancer in *Persephone Unbound*. Whether the organization will discover and treat this disease before she destroys them remains to be seen. Storytellers should present Christina as an exquisitely polite and friendly woman, betraying nothing of her festering body or spirit.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 1

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics (Mythology) 4, Computer 1, Investigation 1, Medicine 2, Occult (Prolonging Life) 5, Politics 1, Science (Chemistry) 1

Physical Skills: Drive 1, Stealth 2, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Expression 2, Intimidation 2, Socialize (Academia) 3

Merits: Contacts (Academia, High Society, Medical, Occultists) 4, Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Language (Ancient Greek, Aramaic, Latin) 3, Status (*Persephone Unbound*) 5

Willpower: 9

Morality: 4

Virtue: Fortitude. Christina has endured the passage of years with grim determination. She believes in the lofty ambitions of *Persephone Unbound* and will do whatever it takes to make sure the society can achieve those goals.

Vice: Envy. Christina envies the young and those who have health and life before them. She thinks that most people squander their lives.

Health: 6

Initiative: 4

Defense: 2

Speed: 8

Amen

"A bunch of nutcases," Marcus snorted. I shook my head in disgust. I never could wrap my head around religion and this certainly didn't go a long way toward clearing up my doubts. Julianna stood up and pushed in the chair, walking over to one scarlet wall. She ran her fingers lightly across the symbols, committing them to her near-perfect memory.

"I wonder what they mean," she whispered, tracing the outline of a slightly bulging triangle. Marcus began to rifle through the computer equipment on the floor, scavenging for useful parts. Whatever answers we'd hoped to find here, I had a strong sense they weren't forthcoming. Two days worth of travel wasted for a compound full of dead Jesus freaks and we still weren't any closer to finding Sascha. I looked down at the screen again.

May God have mercy on your souls...I laughed, bitterly. God have mercy on your soul, partner, because it looks to me like you have more need of it than I do. I idly thumbed the delete key. Something in the back of the room began to beep and whirl. Behind me, Julianna leapt to her feet, grabbing Marcus by the shirt and pulling him toward the door, screaming my name. A new message popped up on the screen, this time in huge red letters. Julianna yelled again, yanking me up from the chair, pounding on my back, screeching, "Run! Run, bomb!" Just before the fire exploded around me, I read the words written on the screen.

Pray for your soul, sinner. This is judgment day.



"Jesus, Megs," Tiki groaned, stumbling over another root. "Are you sure you saw him drop it out here?" The stocky woman ran her fingers through her short, red hair, furrowing her brow at Tiki's complaints and clumsiness. Her eyes moved furtively over the ground, seeing clearly despite the darkness of the cloudy night. Neither she nor her packmates needed flashlights.

"Pretty sure, anyway," Megs Follows-After muttered, dropping to one knee to peer under a bush. The large field seemed unusually quiet, though Megs dismissed it as the natural result of the last weeks' fighting.

Animals must be reluctant to come back to this place, she mused. Even Megs, a seasoned tracker and warrior, felt uncomfortable here, somehow out of her element. She hadn't thought the amulet had any significance, but their totem spirit disagreed. Of course, she thought, the spirits don't risk flesh and bone in battle, now do they? Even a week removed from the terrible fight, the field still reeked of blood.

"Nothing out here," Jay called from the far end of the field. Breaker answered from up by the cabin, "Nothing here, either." Megs shook her head and kept looking. She wanted to get out of here as quickly as possible, and not just because she'd gotten stuck with Tiki-duty again. This place made her skin crawl today, which surprised her. Her last visit hadn't caused any discomfort, at least nothing that wasn't a direct result of taking a piece of pipe upside the head.

Maybe she just hadn't noticed it last week. Killing that bloodsucker and his little posse of sycophants, cleaning up the pile of bodies out back, that had kept them all pretty busy. Megs remembered seeing Tiki in the aftermath, his skinny face covered in blood and filth, hunched against the wall, talking to himself.

"Something's still not right, we're missing something, we're missing something," he kept repeating. They'd ignored him then, but Megs realized now he might have been spot-on. He looked even more ill at ease right now than she felt, and kept looking over his shoulder, squinting his eyes at the forest behind them. A leaf rustled and Tiki flinched.

"Did you hear that?" he squeaked, spinning around. Megs peered into the darkness but saw nothing. Beside her, Tiki began to tremble. As she reached out a hand to steady him, tell him it was nothing, Megs noticed slight movement low in the underbrush. It moved again. Something big, she noted. Backing slowly away from the tree line, Megs reached again for Tiki's sleeve. As she lifted her arm, something huge and black came hurtling toward them from the bushes. Immediately, Megs' body began to shift and expand, shifting her form for the impending clash of bodies.

"Megs!" Tiki screamed. "What the hell is that thing?"

Chapter Four: Fear Given Form

"Evil draws
men together."
— Aristotle

Humanity has always feared the unknown. Darkness, other cultures, the ocean, even outer space all once inspired terror, but we have explored and at least attempted to understand these. And yet, behind each discovery, each mystery solved, lurk greater mysteries still, ensuring that humanity will never truly put its fears to rest. And for those beings that wait in the dark, feeding on that primal fear in humanity (and sometimes feeding on humanity itself), our race's inability to see the full truth and conquer our fear is... reassuring.

In the past, people coped with monsters with proscriptions of faith and magic. Now, we relegate them to myth and legend, and rational-minded people normally refuse to even consider the possibility that monsters exist. Still, this primal fear of the unknown remains in the deep recesses of a person's mind — even after that person *becomes* a monster.

Introducing a monster or two into your game can bring much more than death and mass destruction. Monsters can bring a different kind of suspense, intrigue and mystery to the gaming table. Use monsters as main antagonists, companions to a central Storyteller character, or even as background material in an even bigger plot.

The sections presented below are meant to guide and inspire you. We present information on using monsters in both city and rural environments; what happens when two creatures meet and work together (or use one another); some thoughts on their motivations and possible origins; and how these monsters might best challenge your players' characters.

Finally, we present 10 new creatures, some of which appear in human legend, most of which simply stalk the World of Darkness, hunting in their own unique ways.

A word on terminology: Throughout this chapter, we use the word "monster" to refer to any supernatural creature that is not covered elsewhere in this book and is not a playable character. "Supernatural being," however, refers to vampires, werewolves, mages or anything else touched by the otherworldly.

Hunting Grounds

A monster that hunts the cities operates very differently than a creature stalking a rural area. The following two sections examine the differences between the two from a Storytelling perspective, and provide some suggestions on how you and your players can make the most of either experience.

City Limits

Large cities don't induce the same kind of fear as the woods or other "natural" settings, but certainly have a mystique and a danger all their own. Monsters that hunt cities share two important traits — traits that might well seem familiar to players of *Vampire: The Requiem* and other World of Darkness games.

First, urban creatures need to be able to either pass as human or stay hidden from humanity. Vampires, werewolves and mages, while they can all give themselves away to perceptive mortals from the "vibes" they send out, are functionally indistinguishable from normal folks; this is what allows them to dwell

in population centers without being hunted or investigated routinely. Some creatures, such as Aswang, can pass for human most of the time, but must reveal their true (and inhuman) faces when hunting. A creature that cannot pass for human and does not possess the intelligence to hide itself isn't going to be useful as a long-term antagonist, but might be a good way to introduce an element of pressure into a story; the characters must find and neutralize the creature before it reveals the existence of the supernatural to the population at large (this pressure is all the more intense if the characters somehow created, summoned or released the creature).

Second, a creature that would hunt the city needs a reason to be around people. Vampires, of course, feed on human blood. Mages *are* human, no matter how much their magic sets them apart from their fellows. Werewolves, while often more comfortable in the wilds, have found that urban territories suit their needs as well as forests and plains. More uncommon creatures do not risk the exposure the city life often brings without a good reason. Often, this reason has to do with their food source; many creatures feed on humanity in some fashion. Sometimes, though, the creatures that lurk in our back alleys do so because it is all they know. A Beast of Bethlehem summoned into a particularly violent neighborhood must be much more careful than one of its ilk dwelling in the countryside, but it cannot leave its territory, no matter the risk.


Once you know why a creature stalks the back alleys and subways of your characters' city, how

do you show the characters the threat? Simply having them stumble across the monster is possible, but if you intend to build up to a confrontation, it's best not to give the characters a chance to take the creature on right away. Even if you give the monster an escape route, players can be tenacious; you might find yourself caught between drastically altering your plotline or frustrating your players.

Introducing a monster through the media is an excellent way to pique the characters' interest and have them become involved without having it trash their living rooms. It allows you to portray the monster through eyewitnesses or murder scenes, giving the characters potential clues about motivations, abilities or weaknesses. This gives the characters time to prepare and the sense of having a choice in the confrontation. It also lets you involve Storyteller characters without forcing them into the roles of mysterious sage or occult expert; a reporter, medical examiner, homeless witness with a penchant for exaggeration (or understatement), or a beat cop who has seen a great many curious things in his life can all be good sources of information.

In choosing to use the media as a way of introduction, you also have to be prepared to involve the local authorities on the matter. A series of unexplained deaths makes the front page and also ensures attention from the police department and even federal agents. Researching both the local media of the area in which you set your game and police procedures in general allows you to give your chronicle a sense of verisimilitude.





Another possibility for introducing the characters to a monster that actually kills people as opposed to feeding on their fear or something equally insidious is to have them stumble upon an as-yet undiscovered crime scene. Brutal or occult murders receive attention in the press, which means the police of your fair city feel pressure to solve the crimes quickly. Forensic and crime scene resources are extremely impressive — and if the characters aren't careful, they might wind up leaving evidence implicating themselves. For instance, consider a vampire who stumbles across the victim of an Aswang. The character looks over the area, but doesn't touch anything, not wanting to leave fingerprints. By just leaning on the wall, however, he leaves fibers from his coat. His footprints, while faint, are still visible to a dedicated crime scene investigator. And, what's worse, during follow-up investigation, the detectives find that someone fitting the character's description has been present at other exsanguination-style killings (his own victims). Now, the character is a wanted man... all because he leaned on the wrong wall.

Once the characters know the monster is in their city, what then? No matter how dangerous the monster may be to society, characters carrying illegal arms and ammunition while hunting it are still considered criminals. Knowing the gun-enforcement laws of your story's city and sharing them with the players stops any potential arguments about such things before they even start. Carrying archaic weapons may also be a crime, but even if it isn't, a person walking down the street with a sword merits at least a series of questions from any passing cop.

In any case, a trunk full of weapons does nothing if the players can't locate the creature. Remember that cities are filled with more places to hide than any natural setting. Don't be afraid to use the abandoned warehouses, empty apartment buildings and homeless shelters that your city may feature to allow the monster to hide. Any monster that makes its home in a city has at least the intelligence to not roam about the streets in broad daylight (unless it can pass as human).

An isolated area in which characters can use their powers without restraint or fear of someone watching is the ideal place to finally confront a monster, if they intend to combat it. Forcing characters to confront a monster in a crowded mall, office building or elementary school presents a range of story opportunities. Not only do the characters have to contend with the monster, they have innocent bystanders to consider. (They might not care, of course, but every witness is a potential font of information to the characters' enemies).

Walk in the Park

"Wilderness" is relative. What one person thinks of as the wilds of nature might be suburbia to another. Yet, whether in a metropark only a few blocks from civilization or stuck in the forest miles from anything requiring electricity, the wilds can be frightening. When the wilds hide a monster, be it hungry, territorial or simply vicious, that fear is amplified considerably.

A monster hunting the wilderness might be obviously inhuman or unnatural, but still needs to have a way to hide from humanity. Very few places provide access to people and yet are untouched by them (and if the creature never needs to have any contact with people, how do the characters ever become involved?). Still, in the wilds, the monster can usually hunt down and kill any witnesses to its existence, rather than having to worry about hiding among humanity.

The question of a monster's reason for contact with people is all the more pressing in the wilds. After all, if all a monster needs is meat, it probably won't go out of its way to find and kill humans. If the creature needs to feed on human flesh, for whatever reason, but cannot hide itself from the throngs of people in a city, it might haunt a state park where large numbers of people congregate but where it has plenty of room to hide.

When placing a creature in a natural setting, consider the effect that the monster has on its environment. No ecosystem evolved to include monsters. Both predator and prey flee from the unnatural, sensing it to be a threat. Use such disruptions in the natural order to give the characters a clue as to what they face. For instance, consider someone in the late stages of the Hunger curse (p. 118). Bestial, inhumanly strong and fast, and eternally hungry, such a monster hunts an area until no animal is left, not even insects. The area isn't even strewn with the skeletons of dead animals, for the monster eats the entire carcass to the last bone. Trees that produce sap or are normally covered in mushrooms feature huge sections of them torn off in chunks, making them look more like half-eaten chicken legs than trees.

Consider also why the characters are out in the country looking for monsters. If they are all residents of a small rural town, their interest is obvious (and remember that they have the benefit of knowing the area). If the characters are visitors from the city, call for occasional Survival rolls to see how well the characters cope with being out in the sticks. If they are barely coping with starting a fire and cooking their meals, hunting a monster is going to be commensurately more difficult.

Monster Depth

As easy as it is to run a search-and-destroy story, you may find yourself wanting more depth to your chronicle. Giving the monster a reason to exist, a creature that it can serve, or even making it part of a larger plot can give you excellent storytelling opportunities.

Origins

Where does the monster come from? Was it deliberately created or did it arise in response to another phenomenon? Some monsters, such as the Passion Shades, are born from human emotions; others, like the Thief, have no explanation at all. Witchcats have been created by mages for centuries, while the groetnick is a natural creature that has simply escaped humanity's notice. A monster's origin often defines its powers, abilities and motivations.

Motivations and Goals

What does the monster want? What does it wish to accomplish? For example, the Virus, born of fear, now thrives on the emotion and treats humanity as a non-renewable food source. Monsters seek to fulfill their goals in any way possible — not being restrained by Morality allows them the freedom they need. Often their motivations bring them into conflict not only with humans but also supernatural creatures, especially when those motivations conflict (the Thief) or compete (Aswang) with other beings.

Despite the fact that monsters have no Morality to hold them back, they do value their own mortality. Surviving, which includes finding food, is the most important goal many monsters have. Monster motivation doesn't have to be any more complex than that in order for the monster to be a compelling antagonist. If the creature only wants to survive, however, its origins become much more important — the monster might just want to eat and be left alone, but what of the one who created or summoned it?

Resources

Monsters often develop, acquire or create their own resources. The Thief, through killing the supernatural creatures it needs to survive, becomes more intelligent and more human, allowing it the freedom to use the money and items of its last victims to increase its chance of surviving. Monsters with at least human intelligence know to keep their resources available and not wantonly waste them on petty situations. Even more animalistic creatures might have “resources” in the form of a favored lair or hunting ground, and are often intelligent enough not to lead pursuers back to these prime spots.

Role in the Story

This is probably the most important consideration you must make about a monster, or about an antagonist in general. What role does it serve in the chronicle? How does it enhance or underscore the themes and moods of your particular storyline? Consider: the Thief and sufferers of the Hunger curse both consume flesh and organs, meaning that their hunting methods might be somewhat similar. But the Thief targets exclusively supernatural targets, while the Hunger curse doesn't instill this degree of choosiness in its victims. That alone indicates a major thematic difference in the way these two creatures should be used in a chronicle.

Likewise, although we use the term “monster” somewhat generically in this chapter to make for smoother reading, don't make the mistake of lumping all the creatures herein into the same category or (worse) assuming that your players' characters should do so. Some of these beings are indeed nothing more than hungry animals — animals with specialized diets or supernatural powers, true, but animals nonetheless. Some, however,

are capable of human-level intelligence and problem solving; and that means they should have personalities, pasts, fears, habits and all the other quirks that make Storyteller characters special. Just because the traits we give in this chapter could apply to any Aswang (for instance), that doesn't mean that Mary Cagayan, who married an American serviceman and then killed him in a frenzy of bloodlust once she reached the United States and has remained alone and bitter ever since, has the same motives or personality as Dolores Marquez, whose mother taught her from an early age how to hunt and kill men and how to dispose of bodies properly.

A monster's role in a chronicle might be to act as a deterrent (physical or otherwise) to the characters, to menace their friends or loved ones, to threaten their secrecy or to lead them to a more powerful threat, but a monster's role should never simply be “to give the characters something to fight/kill.” The players don't get points for how many creatures they slaughter, and so the monsters in your chronicle should be more than cannon fodder.

Monster Cooperation

While monsters are often solitary, at times they may be forced or even choose to pair up with another creature of their kind. Circumstances may also dictate that a monster work with a different type of monster, putting aside differences in order to accomplish a goal. Through your own planning or your troupe's actions, these monsters may come together to fight a common enemy: the characters. This reason is often enough to hold intelligent monsters together. Constant sources of pain, embarrassment, or even a lack of prey, the characters are the monsters' worst enemies.

Monsters intelligent enough to choose to work together (rather than a more powerful and intelligent monster using another as a hound, guardian or stalking horse) should be able to communicate with new partners. Being able to plan gives a substantial edge over the characters, through the creation of tactics that compliment each other and the pooling of resources. Like the characters, the monsters should be able to work together in combat, covering each other and saving the other if circumstances become deadly (of course, also like the characters, they might have other agendas and priorities, and leave each other hanging if necessary).

This relationship isn't always equal. The stronger monster often dominates the weaker one. This gives the superior monster the ability to use the weaker monster as a decoy, bodyguard or even bait. This overlord-minion relationship is hardly ever stable enough to succeed, if only because the lowly monster should be susceptible to bribes, threats or even promises. Also, the minion monster might harbor angry, hateful feelings toward the stronger monster that the characters can use to their advantage. Of course, if the subservient monster is little more than an animal, it might be well-trained enough that the characters can't simply bribe or scare it away.

Several other different types of relationships besides overlord-minion are knowing symbiosis, unknowing symbiosis, and pack. The Virus, using some of its controlled mortals to provide cover for a Thief, is a form of knowing symbiosis. The Virus, realizing that the Thief poses no harm to the humans around it and that it actively hunts supernatural creatures to feast upon, could attempt to bargain with it. In exchange for giving the Thief a group of humans in which to hide, the Thief must protect those humans. Thus, both creatures thrive.

An example of an unknowing relationship would be with Witchcats stealing the life force of vampire victims. Dazed and near unconsciousness, the victim would not be able to defend itself against the Witchcat. The vampire, then, may be unknowingly leaving corpses, thinking that he left his victim alive and able to recover.

For a pack-oriented approach, you have to decide whether the pack will be comprised of all monsters of a single type, or several different monsters banding together for mutual protection. You have to take into account their prejudices and motivations (the Virus wouldn't work with someone laboring under the Hunger curse, nor with an Aswang). Also figure out what would drive a monster to protect another. While the Virus might work with a Beast of Bethlehem who is chasing down supernatural prey, does the Beast really need the Virus to survive? Several creatures of the same type, however, often have the same prejudices and motivations. People suffering from the Hunger curse may find each other and realize that they have only the craving for human brains and hearts, and that they are now inhuman. As such, they can work together without fear of losing themselves to the Hunger around each other.

Using the Monster

At times, subduing a monster is more productive or even safer for the characters than slaying it. Depending on the means of controlling or containing the monster, having one on the characters' side may have many advantages. Monsters often have unique powers and abilities that the characters on their own would never be able to obtain. Letting the characters use the monster for a short period of time allows many entertaining roleplaying opportunities. Some examples would be allowing the characters to lead mortals infected with the Virus to hunt down a rival, to purposely construct a ritual that would inflict the Hunger on an enemy, or even to convince the Thief to work with them with the promise of supernatural organs.

Because many monsters are alien in nature to the characters, their habits, diet (if they even eat), and way of thinking should all cause the characters to think twice about keeping such an exotic "pet." Maybe the monster feeds on fear, lust or even pain. If the characters can't supply it with these things, perhaps it becomes violent or is unable to use its powers. Perhaps the monster needs to be supervised at all times because of the way it is contained. It's unlikely that the players can convince a Storyteller character to watch such a monster while they continue to lead their lives.

Of course, the ongoing danger is that the monster might escape. No matter how well constructed the cage, the spell or the ward, it should never be able to contain the monster forever. If you allow your players to capture a monster, always allow yourself at least this small measure of plot security. Plus, what better way to bring in a new Storyteller villain than to have him free their prisoner and gain its trust, and possibly even friendship?

In any case, the theme of the game should guide any situation involving a monster. The World of Darkness is a place of mystery and horror, and using or keeping a monster should reflect this. Letting a monster live, even to use it to their own ends, should weigh heavily on the characters' minds.

They Walk In Our Shadows

The monsters below are a mixture of both unique creatures and those drawn from urban legend. Each includes a brief explanation of its origins, a description, ideas and hints for the Storyteller, and its traits. If using any of these monsters for your game, it benefits you to read the above Storytelling section. Not only will this give you additional hints on how to use the entries below, it may inspire you throughout your story or chronicle to do more than you thought possible with these monsters.

Storytellers Note: These creatures are merely examples of the sorts of things that *could* exist in the World of Darkness. They aren't "canon," that is, you won't be seeing them again in other sourcebooks. If all of these creatures existed on top of such "standard" supernatural beings as vampires and ghosts, the shadows would become overpopulated quickly.

Plus, the creatures below appeal to wide variety of themes and moods for your chronicles. The Hunger is appropriate for a bloody, brutal chronicle, but if the Storyteller is interested in working with more subtle horror, the Virus might be a better choice. If you choose to use mages in your chronicle, a Witchcat would be a good addition to the story, but the Living Web might not be. Pick, choose, cannibalize and redesign at your pleasure.

Aswang

The hideous creature glared at the Kindred invading its feeding grounds, baring its eight sharp incisors at them in disgust. In its arms it cradled the half-drained body of a young man, his neck savaged by the Aswang's hungry maw.

"Filthy dead things," it hissed in a slightly accented voice. "Find some other place to hunt tonight." With that, it let the corpse slump back against the dumpster, and turned and fled from the alleyway. The vampires chased after the woman-thing for a few blocks, but the approaching dawn soon pulled them off its trail.

Half a mile away, the sun rose as Su Johnson unlocked the front door of her spacious ranch home. Her husband greeted her at the door.

"Did you have a nice night at work, babe?" he asked the beautiful Filipina, kissing her silky cheek. She smiled at him, full lips pressed together demurely.

"Oh," she answered. "Pretty good." She slipped her shapely arms around her husband's neck, kissing him deeply. He pulled back for a moment, noticing a dark spot on her blouse.


"Aw, Suzy. You cut yourself on the press again?"

The woman winked at him. "It's nothing, sweetheart! You know how night jobs can be. People just get careless."

Background: During World War II and in the decades since, many American troops were stationed in the Philippines. There, many young men fell in love with the beautiful, exotic Filipina women. While most were exactly as they appeared, gentle and lovely girls who adored their American sweethearts, some wore this visage only during daylight hours. Due to the social conventions of both cultures, American soldiers could visit with the attractive women only during daylight hours, so many entered into their marriages with no suspicions about the true nature of their gorgeous new wives. They married the women, bringing their Filipina brides home to the United States after the war. While most of these soldiers settled happily into married life with their new wives, others received a harsh awakening on their wedding nights, when the young, lovely women became drawn, fierce hags, hungry for blood. These men were the first of the Aswang victims on the American mainland. Other wives managed to keep the truth from their husbands through various tricks, which ranged from magical mind control to explanations of mysterious medical conditions to simply insisting that all the lights in the room be left off during the night. Some convinced their husbands they held down night jobs and slept during the day, though the Aswang actually require no sleep. In truth, the women were hunting the cities, seducing men and drinking their blood.

All Aswang are female, and any female children they bear are Aswang as well. Male children do not differ at all from human males, however. Though they resemble vampires, the Aswang have no society to outline their behavior. Any rules they follow are passed matrilineally from mother to daughter. No protocol exists that demands secrecy, and some Aswang make no attempts to disguise their kills as anything but what they are — the product of savage exanginations. Though Aswang can feed on women, they target men almost exclusively, and need to feed several times a week in order to remain healthy and beautiful during the day. During daylight hours, the Aswang lead lives as normal women, surrender-





ing to their hunger only when the sun sets. Then they hunt the city, luring men into dark alleyways with suggestive calls from beautiful voices, quickly attacking before the men realize what manner of “woman” they have stumbled across.

Though they must continue to murder humans to survive, the Aswang are not totally lacking in compassion. Most love their husbands and children, just as any human woman would. Some keep perfectly normal day jobs, maintain meticulous households and raise happy, well-adjusted children. The female Aswang children typically do not learn of their heritage until puberty, when the first stirrings of their hunger begin. Natives of the Philippines, the Aswang have adopted American culture with relative ease, and can be found anywhere in the country. While nearly all of the first Aswang in the United States came into the country as military wives, the daughters and granddaughters of those women now fill virtually any role, and marry or do not marry as they please. Some have even helped Aswang relatives immigrate to the United States from the Philippines. The bond of sisterhood is very strong within an Aswang family, though the various families rarely form friendships between them, and in fact compete with each other for hunting grounds. Their largest form of competition in America, however, is the Kindred. The Aswang try to keep a low profile, disgusted and frightened by the undead creatures that share the same space in the food chain but that cannot reproduce through any means but murder. The Aswang are relatively few in number, but conflict between them and Kindred society is imminent.

Description: By day, the Aswang appears as an extremely beautiful woman, typically Filipina or Asian in origin, though after two generations of intermarrying with North American men they could conceivably have any ethnic or racial makeup. Though those raised by traditional Aswang mothers usually wear their hair long and favor long gowns, most have adopted typical American dress and hairstyles. The only noticeable trait that identifies an Aswang in its diurnal human form is an additional canine tooth on each side of the mouth on top and bottom, between the normal canine and the first premolar. Due to this, Aswang seldom smile, adopting demure demeanors that disguise their dental peculiarities and their bloodthirsty natures. The Aswang's nocturnal form, however, is far more fiendish than fair. Her hair clumps together into snarled strands; her smooth skin becomes drawn and tight, the veins standing out grotesquely in thick ropes across her face and hands; and her nails and eight sharp, canine teeth elongate. After feeding, the creature develops an unhealthy red flush and a bloated abdomen, which slowly dissipates as she digests the blood of her victims. As dawn approaches, her body slowly smoothes and softens back into that of an attractive woman. After a night of feeding, the Aswang may retain a faint blush to her cheeks during the day, as if fresh from a night of immense sexual pleasure. This blush of passion only serves to enhance her beauty during daylight hours.

Storytelling Hints: Though the Aswang is a blood-drinking, seemingly human creature like the vampire, it does not suffer from any aspect of the vampiric curse except the need for blood. It is not subject to the Traditions, and does not observe the Masquerade. Because of this, Aswang can cause a huge stir within vampire society. As Aswang and Kindred stalk the same feeding grounds, the number of deaths or disappearances spikes sharply, drawing immediate public response. Many Aswang make no effort to disguise their kills, leading to headlines about “Vampire Killers” in newspapers. Players' characters may find themselves competing with Aswang for territory or struggling to keep the blood-drinkers of the Philippines from bringing attention to them. Despite the Kindred's best efforts, the Aswang could end up revealing the existence of vampires to humanity.

Aswang are not well suited for combat. They suffer damage and death just as mortals do; and while they are, on average, stronger and faster than normal people, an Aswang is no physical match for a coterie of vampires or a pack of werewolves. Aswang make superb catalysts, however, and can be very useful in stories meant to blur the line between monster and mortal.

Story Seeds

- A covenant of vampires obsessed with studying their condition and transcending it, called the Ordo Dracul, becomes aware of the existence of the Aswang and wishes to capture one. The characters might wind up caught in the middle of this bizarre hunt, or (if they are vampires themselves) might be the hunters. Alternately, suppose the Aswang approaches them and asks for help, trying to fool them into believing she is a vampire who is being persecuted by a rival group? The undead are not immune to a woman's charms....

- The characters meet and befriend a young man named Emilio of Filipino heritage. His mother is an Aswang, though he doesn't know it. As the characters become involved in a different story arc, Emilio does as well. Emilio's mother, however, knows what horrors wait in the dark (being such a horror herself) and wants her son kept as far away from the supernatural as possible. To what lengths might she go to keep her son ignorant?

- An Aswang about to teach her young daughter of their bloody heritage falls victim to a group of monster hunters, who think they've destroyed a vampire. The girl knows nothing about her true nature, but as her hunger grows and the nightly changes begin, she runs the risk of exposing the supernatural. The characters might become involved in this story through mutual loss (if the hunters killed a friend of theirs), concern (trying to keep the girl's nature hidden from the world until they can figure out how to help her), or perhaps they *are* the hunters who robbed the girl of her mother in the first place.

Note: The traits below represent an adult Aswang. Adjust these numbers as necessary to fit the needs of your chronicle.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 5, Manipulation 5, Composure 4

Skills: The Aswang can have any Skill, especially those that normal humans might use on a daily basis in their normal lives and careers. More common Skills include Computer, Crafts, Drive, Expression, Persuasion and Socialize.

Willpower: 8

Morality: 7; the normal rules of Morality apply to Aswang for any activity except killing to feed.

Defense: 4

Initiative: 9

Speed: 12

Merits: Aswang can have any Merit common to humans except Giant. Most have Striking Looks.

Size: 5

Health: 10

Supernatural Powers: Digest Blood — Like vampires, Aswang must ingest blood in order to survive. Unlike vampires, Aswang cannot subsist on animal blood. Also, the bite of an Aswang does not cause ecstasy, nor can the Aswang close the wound by licking it. Because the Aswang require so much blood to survive, they almost always kill their victims. While they can eat human food, it serves no nutritional value for the Aswang. Aswang must consume 15 points of blood a week in order to maintain their diurnal human appearances (a human being holds a number of "blood points" equal to his Health dots). If the Aswang does not drink enough blood, it loses one Health point per day until it drinks a week's worth of blood to return itself to full Health. With every two Health points lost through failure to ingest enough blood, the Aswang loses one dot of Presence. For every five Health points lost, the Aswang loses a dot of Manipulation and a dot of Composure. All Attributes are immediately reinstated when the Aswang drinks enough blood to return herself to full Health. Aswang heal damage in a manner similar to vampires; consuming one point of blood heals two points of bashing damage or one point of lethal damage. The Aswang must consume five points of blood to heal one point of aggravated damage.

Fearsome Teeth — The fangs of an Aswang inflict lethal damage, and the attack roll receives a +1 modifier. According to p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, a character attempting to bite as a combat action first has to achieve a grapple hold on a target. On the following turn, the attacker can try to inflict damage by biting. If the victim has an action between the attacker's grab and bite, he can try to break free. The system uses Strength + Brawl – the victim's Defense to attack, but then Strength + Brawl – the victim's Strength to bite for damage. If the attack comes by sur-

prise, the victim's Defense does not apply in the initial grab.

If the Aswang wishes to feed from a foe in combat, he goes about the procedure as normal. Instead of biting to inflict damage, however, the vampire may choose to consume blood that turn. In this case, the vampire inflicts no damage (other than that caused by the blood loss).

Siren Song — The Aswang have seductive and alluring voices, even in their hideous nocturnal form. Their call attracts human men, causing them to do things they might not otherwise do, such as step into a dark alleyway with a strange woman. The Siren Song works only until the man views the Aswang's true nocturnal form, at which point the Aswang's control over the man is broken. During the day, Composure + Resolve is rolled in a contested action against the Aswang's Manipulation + Expression for targets of the Siren Song to resist the lure. Siren's Song only works on targets that can hear the Aswang's voice directly; it does not work over a telephone or through any other electronic device.

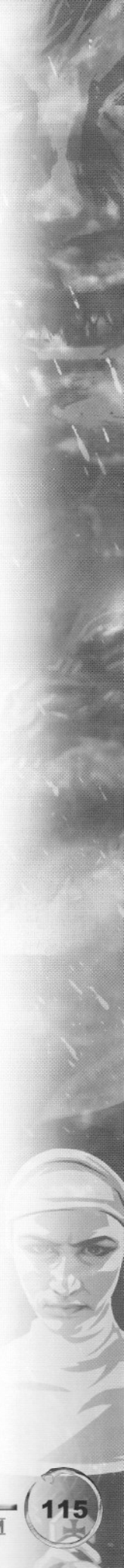
Beast of Bethlehem


Something crossed its boundary. It could feel the trespassers, four of them. They walked on its land, in its territory, coming nearer. It could smell them, feel them, the man-things, always the source of the evil. They walked closer, closer, searching for something. They moved like prey, slowly and timidly, close to the ground. They dispersed across the field, scattering like foolish little animals. It wanted to chase them and to pounce on them, but not yet. They smelled of fear, but not enough. It followed them, slowly and carefully, clinging to shadows and slinking on its belly. There! The little trespasser trembled, the scent of his fear rising rich and enticing. Soon it could chase and catch and bite. Very soon.

It crouched. It waited. Hungry. Angry. Watching.

Background: Just as some places seem to resonate with a sense of the sacred or holy, other places seem to emit a menacing or evil energy. Often these locations were once the site of some mass slaughter or some other large-scale profane or violent act. Whatever the cause, the resulting sense of pervasive evil is palpable. People passing through the area hurry quickly by, their skin prickled with goose bumps, chills running down their spines. If the site is suburban, the nearby neighborhoods slowly become uninhabited and property values plummet with the gradual upswing in crime. Like beads of mercury, other wicked forces draw together to join the larger body of evil.

These tainted places are more than a magnet for the bad element, however. The evil that lingers after horrific and brutal acts can manifest as a real, physical threat. Beasts of Bethlehem, named for the apocalyptic harbinger of Yeats' poem by an erudite survivor of the Beast's attack, embody the residual evil of an area, feeding off the foul psychic





stain left on the surroundings. These Beasts are the corporeal forms of the “bad feeling” that remains at a site after negative events. Before taking the physical form of a black, dog-like creature, a Beast of Bethlehem does not exist as a single, whole entity. They are not quite spirits, not quite demons and not quite animals, but rather are the amalgamation of bad intentions, evil deeds and lingering fear. Like a Witchcat (p. 128), a Beast is a construct, but one that occurs as a result of unnatural events rather than deliberate creation. The Irish and Scottish have stories of the barghest, the black dog that indicates an impending death, and many other cultures have their own legends of animal harbingers. Indeed, in some cities, children whisper stories of the spirits of dogs bred for basement fighting. The Beast of Bethlehem doesn’t foretell death, however. It is born from death and violence, and seeks only to cause more.

Once a Beast of Bethlehem has manifested in an area, it establishes a territory to defend. This territory includes the site of the negative energy, such as a cult’s old compound or a murderer’s shack in the woods, and the periphery, rarely stretching beyond two to three miles of the original site. Here, the Beast grows fat from the days, weeks or even years of fear and hatred that have soaked into the walls and soil. The huge canine appears in the area only at night, a physical manifestation of the locale’s malevolence. During the day it dissipates into nothingness. When a traveler crosses into its territory, the Beast senses her presence and goes after her. Like any large, intelligent predator, the Beast of Bethlehem cunningly stalks its prey; but unlike most predators, the Beast does so with the intent to terrify its victim. It allows the victim to catch glimpses of it in the bushes, to hear the rustle in the grass, to feel it brush by in the darkness. Only when its victim is terrified does the Beast spring. If the victim does not react in intense fear or passes out of the Beast’s territory too quickly, the creature returns to its lair to wait. Those who escape such a close brush with death often report feeling a chill or seeing something strange and hulking moving in the woods, crouching in wait. Stories of Bigfoot could actually be the results of near run-ins with the Beast of Bethlehem.

Because the Beast grows from violence, more death and violence will not eliminate it. Players’ characters may fight and kill the Beast of Bethlehem over and over again, only to have it return again each night to menace them. The physical form of the creature can be killed as easily as any other large animal, but the evil energy that created it will only manifest a new body for it. The only solution is to cleanse the area, which can be done with as much immediacy and pomp as a large magical or spiritual cleansing ritual, or subtly over time, by bringing positive energy to the site. As the Beast stalks only at night, characters can fill the daylight hours with acts of good that counteract the evil once done there. The symbolic positive gesture may be tearing down the compound, cleaning up the physical pollution of the area, planting fresh flowers or making love in the sunshine. Ten days to two weeks of investing the area with love and positive emotions are enough to dispel the Beast of Bethlehem.

Description: The Beast of Bethlehem appears as a huge, shaggy, black dog with slight bear- or ape-like qualities to its build and movement. Overlarge shoulders surround a heavy-jawed head, its slavering mouth filled with sharp teeth. Its eyes are slightly rectangular slits that glimmer green in the darkness. A Beast of Bethlehem moves in a crouch, low to the ground, in a manner that belies the size and speed of the creature. Though heavy, the Beast is surprisingly swift and its claws and teeth both inflict potentially fatal wounds that quickly become infected.

Storytelling Hints: Beasts of Bethlehem work best as secondary antagonists in a chronicle. After the characters have eliminated the original threat, perhaps a group of cultists performing bloody human sacrifice or a hungry subterranean creature eating the local children, the residual evil energy of the location draws together and manifests as the black dog of death. The characters may feel relieved that their work is done, only to find themselves unexpectedly facing another onslaught of missing children or “kidnappings.” Should the characters themselves become involved in some heinous act, causing their Morality ratings to drop suddenly, they might discover that their own crimes are not without repercussions. The Beast of Bethlehem is a reminder that evil begets evil. It should not be used regularly or lightly, but only in the wake of a truly horrific example of depravity, especially in areas that have had little exposure to violence. A rape and murder in a sleepy town in the Midwest may be a jarring enough event to summon up the Beast. These creatures are rare in large cities that see regular violence, such as New York City, and only the most heinous and debased of crimes causes the Beast of Bethlehem to manifest there.

Story Seeds

- A serial killer moves into the characters’ city and begins looking for more victims. He lives in an RV and commits his acts of torture and brutal murder there. Over time, his acts have created a Beast, which prowls around the vehicle. He rarely stays in one place very long, and the Beast travels with him. He does not know of the Beast’s existence, and the Beast has no interest in harming him.

- In the city’s industrial district, a factory notorious for labor abuses and on-the-job fatalities has finally been closed. As the place is emptied, however, crews find dozens of human skeletons in the subbasement. Who was responsible for this mass grave? Did the present owners of the factory know about it? As this mystery gains more attention and generates fear and revulsion, a Beast of Bethlehem starts stalking the factory at night. More intelligent than most of its ilk, this Beast has figured out how to run the machinery, the better to frighten and then murder intruders.

- A Beast of Bethlehem manifests around the characters’ turf, be it the neighborhood in which they feed, the territory they protect, or just the area where they live. It acts normally, scaring and attacking people, but leaves the characters alone and in fact obeys their commands. As the characters discover what the Beast is and what it does, they

might (quite rightly) question what about themselves is so monstrous that the Beast of Bethlehem views them as friend and master.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 4

Merits: Brawling Dodge, Fast Reflexes 2, Fleet of Foot 2, Fresh Start, Iron Stamina 2

Willpower: 6

Morality: N/A

Health: 10

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 20 (species factor 12)

Size: 6

Supernatural Powers: Sense of Encroachment — The Beast of Bethlehem has complete awareness of its territory and can sense any encroachment upon it. When the Beast first materializes, it must walk the periphery of its intended territory and define the boundaries. After this moment, the Beast immediately senses any living creature that crosses the boundary. This means, however, that the Beast does not automatically sense the presence of the undead, giving vampires and zombies a slight advantage. In order to sense an undead presence within its territory, the Beast requires success on a roll of Resolve + Wits. A vampire using Cloak of Night (Obfuscate 3) is invisible to the Beast.

Infectious Wound — Any bite or scratch inflicted by the beast begins to fester within minutes. The infection does not respond to any antibiotic and lingers until the Beast is eliminated. The victim loses one Health point per day from infection unless she has the Toxin Resistance or Natural Immunity Merit. This damage is considered lethal. Players of infected characters may roll Stamina + Resolve each day. Medical technology does not add dice to this roll, though magical healing remedies might at Storyteller's discretion. If the roll succeeds, the disease stops and the damage heals normally. This bite affects living characters only, meaning vampires are immune to the infectious effects of the Beast's bite.

Groetnich

Eldon pulled another ugly fish off his line and tossed it into the bucket. He'd fished this lake for years and hadn't seen anything like these before, with their flat faces and stubby fins, but he figured they'd fry up just fine with a little corn meal.

Another fish hit Eldon's line as soon as he cast. He reeled it in, gingerly wiggled the hook loose — these ugly fish did have big teeth, but they never bit the hook hard — and plopped it in the bucket with all the others. He was full up, Eldon judged. He stashed his rod under the seat and readied the oars.

Eldon began to row to shore. Behind him, the bucket thumped and splashed against the side of the boat. He chuckled to himself. Someone else knows it's time for breakfast, he thought. A deeper thud and a rush of water followed, as the fish turned the bucket on its side. That wasn't quite as funny. Eldon sighed, secured his oars, and turned around.

They were staring at him, the fish were, with their flat eyes in their flat faces. And they were standing, too, on those stubby fins, panting like dogs. That wasn't right. Eldon reached out and grabbed the closest fish. It bit him, taking a big chunk out of the fleshy part of his thumb. He dropped the fish and cursed, grabbing at rag to stop the bleeding. Another of the fish, hidden until now under the rag, sank needle-sharp teeth into his other hand. Eldon fell back, crashing against the side of the boat and tipping it. For a few horrifying seconds, he tried to steady himself. Then, the boat flipped over completely, dumping him and the fish into the lake.

Eldon hoped the fish would just swim away. Then he felt them begin to swim into his loose-fitting shirt, into his boots and up his pant legs.

No other fishermen were out that morning, so no one heard Eldon scream.

Background: Even in the modern world, ancient things survive. When the oceans of the Devonian seeped away, thousands of creatures perished. Others, like this fish, hunkered down in the mud to survive — and it has, unchanged, for millennia.

Science knows nothing of this creature, save what is in the fossil record; but people in the Midwest and New York's Lake Country know it too well. Aging locals can produce photographs of seven-foot monsters fished out of lakes, clubbed and then finally shot before succumbing. Local newspaper clippings dating back to the early 1900s report attacks and disappearances, often attributed to the fish-creatures known to the locals as groetnich (pronounced "GROAT-nick"). Before that, oral tradition passed legends about the lake monsters attacking settlers, and before that the local Native American tribes gave certain lakes a wide berth.

Until a few years ago, the groetnich seemed content in their smattering of small lakes and ponds, occasionally picking off local fishermen foolish enough to hunt them, but recently something has changed. Drought has kept the fish from traveling too far beyond their territories, but the population is suddenly exploding and the young fish must seek new bodies of water to avoid competition with their parents and siblings. The ugly pond-dwellers are capable of traveling short distances over land, hauling their massive bodies on stubby fin-legs. They rarely travel beyond their own string of ponds, however. The young fish are small and take several decades to reach adult size, but are already capable of doing serious damage to pets, livestock or even small children who swim in groetnich-infested lakes. Worse, some areas have reports of young groetnich swimming

in schools and attacking larger prey in horrific, piranha-like swarms. Larger groetnich hide in small underwater caves or dig burrows deep in muddy lake bottoms, wedging themselves into impossibly tight spaces to wait for their prey.

To date, the devastation wrought by spawning groetnich has been blamed instead on a foreign invader, the snakehead, with which it shares a passing resemblance. It may only be a matter of time before some biologist out for revenge for a lost finger — or limb, or relative — takes a closer look.

Description: The groetnich are giant, prehistoric fish, resembling grossly oversized snakehead fish. Their lower fins serve as stubby legs and they have lungs in addition to gills, allowing them to travel from one body of water to another. These creatures grow quite large, some measuring over 13 feet in length and weighing as much as a ton. Their blunted heads display wide mouths of sharp, spiny teeth, better for slicing than for biting. On land, they lumber slowly, but in the water they strike hard and fast, moving with grace and speed. Their muddy, gray-brown color allows them to blend into the murky water of ponds and lakes. They require very little space for fish of their size, and are able to survive in shallow pools or even muddy banks during dry seasons.

Storytelling Hints: The groetnich are literal freaks of nature, leftover and forgotten products of a bygone era. They live for centuries, spawning infrequently, going dormant when conditions are harsh and feeding voraciously when active. The reasons for the recent changes in groetnich behavior, such as cooperation among young, are still unexplained; perhaps increasing pollution levels have triggered an extinction crisis, or perhaps the groetnich, after thousands of years of unchanged existence, is evolving before humanity's unseeing eyes. Whatever the reason, the end will be messy — the groetnich are developing a taste for human flesh, actively preferring it to other prey.

Story Seeds

- An archeological dig in rural Michigan has discovered evidence of an ancient cult that performed ritual human sacrifice in a still, deep pool. Eager university interns have deduced the location of the rituals and reenacted them as best they can using small animals and, once, livestock (with dramatic results). Will they progress to human "offerings?" Visitors or outsiders (read: the characters) would be good choices. Are they students on a cruel lark, or are they forming a new cult of the groetnich?

- A rich and powerful antagonist (possibly human, possibly a vampire or mage) with a predilection for collecting rare fish stocks a tank with young groetnich. As the fish age and grow, they could make good guards or just potential surprises for interlopers... or perhaps one of them eats the owner of the property and takes up residence in the private pond. Any character investi-

gating the house on a peripheral matter might expect guard dogs, but probably not killer fish.

- If the characters are involved with the black market, they discover a strange development: fish eggs being sold for extremely high prices. What first appears to be overpriced caviar turns out to be a biological weapon that can potentially wreck an ecosystem and endanger anyone in the area.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 1, Resolve 1

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 5, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 5, Survival 5

Merits: Fast Reflexes 1, Iron Stomach, Natural Immunity, Quick Healer, Toxin Resistance

Willpower: 2

Morality: N/A

Health: 13

Initiative: 6

Defense: 5

Speed: 20 in water (species factor 10); 5 on land

Size: 8

The Hunger

Audrey stood outside the closed door of her boyfriend's dorm room, arms crossed over her chest, her face petulant. "You said we were going to go out tonight, Daniel!" she shouted loudly enough that several students came out of their rooms. The curious wanted to watch the show about to unfold.

"You... you don't understand Audrey. I have to... I need to finish this term paper." Daniel's reply was slow and quiet, as if his attention were somewhere else. Audrey could hear papers and aluminum cans being shuffled around inside the room.

"Well, could you at least open the door so I can see you?" When no reply came, Audrey knocked hard on the door. "Damn it, Daniel, open the door! This isn't funny!"

"All right, we can share my dinner," Daniel said.

Slowly the door opened. Audrey stepped inside, taking a moment to glare at several of the people watching. When the door closed, several students emerged from their respective dorms to talk.

"I don't know why she stays with him. Isn't this the second time in two weeks that he's done this to her?" asked a petite, blonde girl.

"Ever since that Chinese restaurant opened down the street, he's been holing himself up in his room, getting delivery after delivery of the stuff," offered a young man in a frayed sweater. "I mean, Neil couldn't take it anymore and went to stay with his brother while Housing's looking for another room for him."

"I actually saw him the other day in the hall. He looked like shit, like his hair was falling out," said another girl. The trio exchanged nervous glances at each other and then at the door. Not a sound. "Do you think they're making up in..."

Audrey's scream pierced through the door and echoed through the hallway. The trio scattered with just enough time to watch the door shatter off its hinges. Daniel stood in the doorway, his mouth hanging open impossibly wide, showing bloody, serrated teeth. His eyes were as black as a shark's and just as emotionless. His face, shirt and hands were completely covered with blood. Audrey's body lay behind him, her head open and hollowed out like a Halloween pumpkin.

"Anyone else for dinner?"

Background: While most of humanity has no problem with feasting on animals, to eat another human is to become a monster. Even though some cultures lack this taboo, seeing cannibalism as a form of ancestor worship or method of gaining the strength of an enemy, this fear thrives. The fear of cannibalism is an extension of the fear of being eaten, which most modern-day people never have to contend with. Human beings sit at the top of the food chain, for all practical purposes.

And yet, something of that primal fear still lingers in the minds of the people of the World of Darkness. Creatures lurk in the dark that can and do feast on human flesh, and humanity keeps that knowledge and the terror it engenders, even if no one would ever admit to it. Did the Hunger arise from that fear, a malady created from one of our oldest nightmares, or did the curse come first, doing its part to *create* that fear?

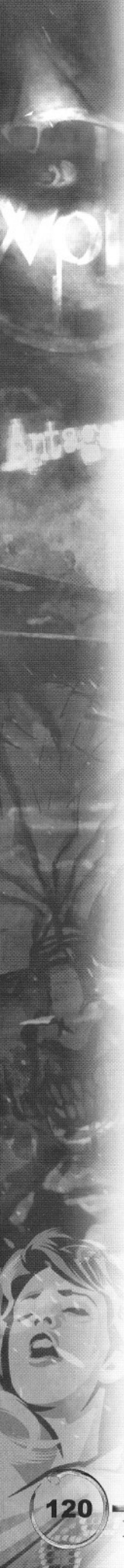
The question is academic. The Hunger exists, and even if it was born from fear its effects are horrifyingly real.

Description: The Hunger is a curse that can affect anyone who eats the heart or brain of another human being, at any time. The curse does not differentiate between those who willingly partake of human flesh and those who are tricked into it.

Not all human meat carries the Hunger, of course. The Hunger isn't a disease or bacteria in the flesh, it is a supernatural affliction. Sometimes it arises spontaneously, especially in those who eat human flesh repeatedly. Other times, a powerful mage or spirit can deliberately afflict a cannibal with the Hunger.

Those cursed by the Hunger have no way of knowing it until the physical and mental effects begin to kick in. These afflictions can start anywhere from an hour to a month after eating a human heart or brain. Throughout the curse, the afflicted person begins to take on shark-like characteristics, his mentality devolving into a hungry, instinct-driven beast. The curse goes through several distinct stages, each happening after the afflicted consumes another heart or brain, compounding each other until the afflicted becomes nothing more than the embodiment of Hunger itself.





The Hunger affects human beings, mages and werewolves. The undead cannot suffer from this curse.

Stage One: The afflicted person begins to crave the taste of human hearts or brains, and his dreams are filled with scenes of gruesome cannibal feasts. **Systems:** At this point, the victim is little more than disturbed and disgusted. As the Storyteller, you can either assume that the dreams cause no game effect, or that after nights when the dreams are especially disturbing all Mental and Social rolls suffer a -1 penalty.

Stage Two: The victim now constantly craves the taste of human organs and develops a bad habit of staring at healthy people (as they would make good meals). His pupils seem to overcome his irises, turning them black. He still retains the white of his eyes, however. Hair thins all across his body, even falling out in small patches. Fingernails grow hard and pointed. The most disturbing part of this stage is that a few of his teeth fall out every night, only to be replaced by pointed and serrated teeth resembling a shark's. **Systems:** While the afflicted person's fingernails and teeth seem to become potent weapons, unless he strikes a vital point or is able to latch on with his teeth, he inflicts normal damage (see the Specified Target rules on p. 165 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**; if the player makes the attack roll at -2, the character strikes a vital point and all damage inflicted is considered lethal). Social rolls that involve eye contact or general appearance incur a -1 penalty because of the afflicted's eyes and hair. The dreams cease at this point, however.

Stage Three: The third stage of the Hunger curse is horrifying. The victim's eyes lose all trace of humanity, all of his hair falls out, his fingernails become claws and his teeth turn into fearsome shark teeth. His skin texture turns to that of sandpaper. The victim begins to experience violent mood swings, going from lethargic to enraged at the smallest provocations. The dreams return, more intense than before, but the afflicted wakes up every morning ravenously hungry. **Systems:** All Social Attributes fall to 1, while Physical Attributes increase by one dot each (Health, Willpower and other derived traits adjust accordingly). The character now inflicts lethal damage with his claws and teeth. The character suffers a -2 penalty to all Mental rolls except for those directly relating to finding food. Finally, the character's Vice changes to Gluttony.

Stage Four: While the third stage tortures the mind and transmutes the body, the fourth stage focuses directly on the victim's physicality. The victim evolves into a powerful hunter. His body strength increases dramatically, along with his physical stamina. He is able to open his mouth past the normal human limit, wide enough to engulf a small child's head. His claws and fangs elongate, allowing him to tear open a person's chest cavity or bite open someone's skull. He also loses the fleshy part of his ears and nose, leaving only holes. **Systems:** All Social Attributes fall to zero while both Strength and Stamina increase by another two dots

each, which may take Attributes above 5 (again, derived traits adjust accordingly). The afflicted's Size also increases by one, as he gains inhuman muscle bulk. The afflicted receives a +1 bonus when attacking with claws or teeth.

The fourth stage is the last stage recommended for players' characters. At this point, the character should either have a chance to undergo a cure or the player should relinquish control to the Storyteller. If the players and the Storyteller are comfortable with one player taking on the role of a flesh-crazy maniac for a session or two (however long it takes the other characters to hunt down the Hunger sufferer), feel free.

Stage Five: The fifth stage is the last stage of devolution caused by the Hunger. The victim loses himself completely to the curse. The character is unable to think past his own hunger, which at this point never dies away, no matter how many hearts or brains he eats. Only through an extreme show of determination can the character recover his sanity for a small amount of time. **Systems:** The victim's Intelligence drops to 1, and his Wits and Resolve are reduced by one dot each (again, recalculate derived traits as necessary). With a Resolve + Composure roll, the afflicted can regain control of himself for a short time. Each success gives the victim control for one hour. During this time, the victim still suffers from intense hunger and barely controlled rage, but has enough self control to remove himself from populated areas... or to lay an ambush.

Storytelling Hints: The Hunger is a useful adversary because it is a spiritual or magical curse with direct, physical results. While sufferers of the Hunger, especially in the later stages, pose a good combat challenge for martial characters, *curing* the Hunger is a different matter entirely. How this can be accomplished is up to the Storyteller. Perhaps the sufferer simply needs a place to "detox" for a month or two, letting the curse work itself out of her system. Perhaps a certain spell or chemical can cure the victim; or perhaps the affliction is permanent, but with treatment the character can curb her desire for human flesh.

The Hunger can extend past the need for flesh, too, especially if the sufferer retreats to the wilderness. Maybe the sufferer starts taking bites out of whatever is nearby — trees, rocks, beehives, or anything else that it can catch.

The Hunger works as a "wrinkle" to complicate other adversaries, too. Imagine a killer cult (see p. 86) whose membership is comprised of Hunger victims.

Story Seeds

- A powerful mage falls victim to the Hunger and sinks into the fourth stage, but through his magic retains enough self-control to keep from running amok. He bargains with unholy spirits to remove the curse; these entities agree to cure him if he "infects" six other people with the Hunger (the number is flexible; how many players are in your troupe?). If his "dinner guests"

realize that something is wrong with their food, no matter — he can simply try again next week with different guests, using the characters as the main course.

- Fresh graves all over the city have been emptied and the bodies torn to pieces. A late-stage Hunger sufferer is desecrating graveyards and eating the organs of the deceased, but the chemicals used to preserve them are poisoning her. When the characters find her, she begs them to find a cure (if the characters need a more tangible reason than “it’s the right thing to do,” this victim might have information or an item that they need for another reason).

- One of the characters contracts the Hunger. The group has the task of not only figuring out what is going on and how to stop the progress of the curse, but figuring out when the character ate a human heart or brain to begin with. The new restaurant in town, perhaps?

The Living Web

“Jim,” his mother called to him. “You’re not looking at porn up there again, are you?”

The teenager quickly closed the browser window. “No, Ma!” he yelled back, clicking on the little x’s in the right hand corner of the pop-up ads that littered the screen. One especially bright window caught his eye, the buxom blonde girl pictured there smiling brightly back at him above a little banner advertising “Free Membership!! Join NOW!!” Something about that girl — Jim just couldn’t pass this site up. He clicked on the link. The flashing images that blossomed before his eyes, beautiful naked women surrounded by swirls and patterns, drew him in. When Jim finally looked up from the screen again, five hours later, he couldn’t remember why he liked the page so much. He just knew he had to visit it again tomorrow.

Background: Not quite an entity and not quite a ritual, the Living Web is a series of web pages that implants hypnotic commands in a viewer’s mind. As users visit the pages for their content, often pornographic, they become enthralled with the site’s subtle, subliminal series of ever-changing symbols. Like a digital mandala, the Living Web draws the viewer into a meditative state. The viewer becomes caught up in an elevated level of consciousness as she stares into the fluctuating pattern, her unconscious mind attempting to assign meaning to the progression of symbols. As her mind sorts the meaningful from the sublime, the true function of the Living Web comes into play. The Living Web plants a series of subliminal commands in the victim’s mind. These commands may be simple, such as “Buy this product,” but could also be complex orders for prayers or rituals. Trapped by the cyclical, hypnotic patterns of the Web, the victim could begin to repeat the necessary chants for summoning some horrific being or perform some other spell. If the summoning kills the victim, the original creator of the website can still

enjoy the benefits of the dead person’s participation, all without the mess of dealing with her face to face.

While the websites must be first set up by a separate entity, after this genesis the Living Web becomes a sentient being. It logs access to its sites, and as traffic increases it begins to complicate the patterns within the pages. The greater the traffic, the more complex the site becomes, building its string of digital code into an alluring maze from which viewers cannot, or simply will not, escape. As the Living Web cycles up toward the ultimate goal, which may be the implantation of a sales pitch, a ritual or some other suggestive command, it actually becomes predatory. While the “young” Living Web passively waits for viewers to seek its pages out, the advanced Living Web actively recruits new viewers with colorful pop-up ads and seductive spam. The pop-ups and unwanted email contain mini-codes of the Living Web’s message, small fragments of the larger digital prayer wheel that spin in the viewer’s mind and make him feel compelled to open the hyperlinks to the new sites. The Living Web may offer some explanation of compulsive web-surfing or repeat visits to the same, seemingly mundane, bookmarked sites.

Description: Sites within the Living Web often appear no different from any other website to the casual observer. Only when the viewer begins to search the site and becomes seduced by the fluctuating subliminal patterns does the true threat appear. The Living Web often hosts pornography or web comics, as such sites often draw repeat customers.

Storytelling Hints: The Living Web is a combined technological and magical construct, and so its creator must have knowledge of magic or the occult, and of technology, specifically computer programming. In this era, however, that means the Living Web is a tool available to a wide array of individuals. Though not a monster in the traditional sense, the predatory Living Web can stalk a large number of victims at the same time. While the Living Web’s immediate effect on victims is certainly cause for alarm, the larger threat is the motivation of the person or group behind its introduction into cyberspace. Unlike viruses designed by hackers for fun or to test the system, the Living Web is intelligent and goal-oriented, and therefore used only by those with a clear purpose. Web-savvy cults could make use of this online “creature,” as could technology-wielding wizards. The easiest way to eliminate the Living Web is through destruction of its host server, though other computer viruses could also harm it.

Story Seeds

- The Living Web merges with a website operated by a small cell of hunters, and begins sending the members email regarding the whereabouts of various monsters. If the characters are captured on film or if any of their activities receive the slightest bit of coverage in any form of media that winds up on the Internet, the hunters might just get word of it. That doesn’t mean



they'll be prepared to fight the characters, of course, but they might simply be the first wave, as the Living Web continues to "spread the word."

• A Contact of one of the characters becomes infected by the Living Web and spends days at a time visiting the sites. This particular "strain" of the Web is the machination of a mage, and is designed to "download" any interesting information from user's minds. The mage isn't malevolent, just greedy — he uses the information to drain bank accounts and commit identity theft. Blackmail isn't beneath him, though, and neither is selling information about the characters to their enemies. Because the information leak is happening second-hand and through a trusted (and possibly minor) contact, the characters might endure weeks or months of difficulties before figuring out where the problem lies.

• An anarchist group infects the city government's computers with the Living Web, slowing communications and basic services to a crawl. As terrorist threats go, it's less destructive than a bomb; but as the Web entrances more civil servants (who thereafter become useless), utilities and emergency responses begin to falter. The city certainly holds elements that will take advantage of this chaos. The characters might even be among them.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 5, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 0, Dexterity 0, Stamina 0

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 4, Computer (Self-Programming) 5, Occult 3

Social Skills: Expression (Graphics) 3

Merits: Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Language (Various, depending on language of original website)

Willpower: 6

Morality: N/A

Health: N/A

Initiative: N/A

Defense: 3

Speed: N/A

Size: N/A

Supernatural Powers: Compulsion — Upon receiving a spam email or viewing a pop-up ad for a Living Web site, viewers feel compelled to follow the link. The compulsion is mild and requires only a successful Resolve + Composure roll from the victim to resist.

Suggestive Implantation — Like brainwashing (p. 77), Suggestive Implantation involves repeated exposure of the victim to a series of alien thoughts until the victim accepts those thoughts as her own. The Living Web's Suggestive Implantation works through an escalating series of subliminal messages on its websites. In order for the victim to succumb completely, she must visit the site a specified number of times, depending

upon the requirements of the particular program. To resist the Implantation, the subject makes an extended and contested Resolve + Composure roll against the Living Web's Intelligence + Manipulation, which reflects the program's ability to continually update its subliminal message to overcome its targets' defenses. The Living Web needs a number of successes equal to the victim's Willpower to facilitate Implantation, while the victim needs a number of successes equal to the Web's Presence + Resolve (7) to resist.

Passion Shade

"What's with the new holier-than-thou attitude?" Glynnis asked.

I looked up at her, shocked. 'Holier than thou?' "I just want to make a difference," I explained. "I want others to see how important it is to believe in something. How could there be anything wrong with that?"

Glynnis just shook her head, disgusted. She didn't understand, of course. How could she? How could anyone who hasn't been touched by God understand how important it is to share the miracle? Even for me, it came so suddenly, the calling to my faith; and if I wanted to do good deeds now in God's name, what of it? I could go without food, I could go without sleep, both of which I've proven in the last two weeks, but I must keep on with my work until everyone understands how right it is to love the Lord!

Background: Mages and occultists who know of these mysterious entities remain divided on the matter of their origins. Some claim that moments of stirring heroism or debauched cruelty spawn them, gathering the psychic energy released by such events into a self-sustaining vortex. Others believe that the so-called Passion Shades simply transport themselves to these events, drawn to the spiritual sustenance like sharks to blood. Whatever their true origins or numbers, every one of these beings embodies a specific Virtue or Vice. These entities do not seem to have an active consciousness, but exist solely in the context of their overriding moral or immoral urge. They are the physical embodiments of our desires, both noble and ignoble. Lacking any form or ability to act upon the world, they attach themselves to the spiritual energy they represent wherever possible and seek hosts morally advanced or degraded enough to contain them. When they find such vessels, Passion Shades do not take over their minds. Instead, they amplify the Virtue or Vice they embody, pushing the host to extreme behavior that invariably leads to ruin or tragedy. The spirits do not act maliciously, but are instead drawn to the powerful acts of good or evil as any simple creature is drawn to the scent of its food source.

Description: Passion Shades are entirely incorporeal and normally undetectable, flying without regard for obstacles or gravity. Powerful sensory magic can occasionally catch a glimpse of one as a shapeless fog of golden light for Virtues, or a shadowed miasma in the case of Vices (those



with the Unseen Sense Merit may detect the passing energy, but at the Storyteller's discretion). Otherwise, these spirits go entirely unnoticed except by the most saintly or fiendish souls, or by those who surrender wholly to the insistence of their Virtue or Vice in a moment of rapturous determination. Such individuals perceive the entities through the lens of their own beliefs, with most interpreting the shades as luminous angels or grim specters that appear to watch impassively or flit away, but that never really *do* anything. Those who speak of their visions face mocking skepticism, as most people dismiss sightings of "angels" and "demons" as readily as tales of UFOs.

Storytelling Hints: Owing to their difficulty in interacting with the world in general and total inability to do so in any physical sense, Passion Shades make subtle adversaries. One angel sighting is a matter for the tabloids. If an assembled mob of hardened killers suddenly witnesses a smoldering devil hovering over their meeting, the situation suddenly warrants more attention. While disembodied visitations certainly have their uses, Passion Shades usually affect a story in the context of possessing someone. An individual playing host to such a creature acts with almost epic displays of excess. Faith grows into unshakeable zeal. Wrath festers into murderous rage waiting to explode at the slightest provocation. In all, the possessed become moral caricatures of themselves. For games focused on the dangers of excess and the benefit of healthy balance — even in Virtue — Passion Shades provide the perfect focal point.

Story Seeds

- A Passion Shade attuned to Gluttony possesses the vampiric "Prince" of the city (for those without access to **Vampire: The Requiem**, this being doesn't exert direct control on mortal affairs, but is the most powerful and respected of the undead in a given area). The vampire's appetites run amok, and she demands several victims every night. Her enemies, of course, wish to use this as an opportunity to depose her — where do the characters stand?

- A Passion Shade attuned to Hope visits a hospice for the dying, feeding on the Virtue of the families of the patients. Stories of angels begin to circulate, but then one of the patients makes a spectacular recovery (you decide if this recovery is a medical miracle or if something supernatural is at work). The resultant spike of hope causes the Passion Shade to manifest physically as a human adult, with full social functions (speech, cognition, self-awareness), but no memory of its life as a spirit. Is this manifestation permanent? Does this Passion Shade hold the key to understanding Virtue, or ascending to Heaven? Does it still need feelings of hope to survive?

- Run this story after the characters have already discovered and investigated Passion Shades: A zealous mage decides to hunt "sinners" by following Passion Shades attuned to the various Vices. What he does with the sinners when he finds them depends on what kind of story you want to run. He might try to magically "con-



vert" them, using his powers to forcibly alter their thoughts. He might simply kill them, making their deaths look like accidents with his arcane abilities. He might be able to force the Passion Shades to possess his victims for a short time, so that the sinners can see what it truly is to be at the mercy of Vice.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 1, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 0, Dexterity 5, Stamina 0

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 2

Skills: N/A

Merits: N/A

Willpower: 7

Morality: N/A

Virtue/Vice: As determined by the Storyteller. Lacking human intelligence and understanding, Passion Shades do not assign contexts or rationales to their Virtues or Vices, but exist as embodiments of the concepts.

Health: N/A; Passion Shades use Willpower in place of Health. If reduced to zero Willpower, they dissipate into nothingness.

Initiative: 10

Defense: 1

Speed: N/A

Size: N/A

Supernatural Powers: Passion Eating — These spirits have the ability to draw sustenance from witnessing the morally charged actions of others. Whenever a character regains Willpower by fulfilling the Virtue or Vice that the Shade embodies while in its immediate presence, the spirit automatically regains one Willpower point. If the Shade has possessed the character when she acts on the urge, the spirit regains all its Willpower. While possessing a host, a shade cannot regain Willpower from the actions of anyone except its host. Passion Shades attuned to a Virtue lose one point of Willpower every week, metabolizing this spiritual essence to sustain their existences. Those attuned to a Vice burn their energies more quickly, losing a Willpower point every three days.

Possession — If a Passion Shade of a given Virtue witnesses a noble individual (Morality 8+) with the same Virtue performing a deed that resonates with that Virtue (regaining Willpower from the trait), it can spend a Willpower point to possess her. Passion Shades attuned to Vices may do the same to characters with Morality 3 or less, under the appropriate circumstances. Individuals possessed by a Shade of Virtue gain one dot of Morality for the duration of the possession, to a maximum rating of 10 as normal. Those inhabited by a Shade of Vice lose a dot of Morality to a minimum of 1, which immediately requires a Morality roll to avoid gaining a new derangement. This change adjusts derangements and personality accordingly. Even more dramatically, an infusion of Vice suppresses the character's Virtue and

vice versa. While possessed, the character effectively lacks the opposite urge of her soul and cannot regain Willpower from it. Any time the possessed character takes an action that directly furthers her augmented Vice/Virtue, however, she adds +1 to +3 bonus dice as assigned by the Storyteller. Once a Passion Shade possesses a character, the only way to end the possession is to starve the spirit to death. This is easier said than done, given how easily the creatures replenish themselves within a host. Killing a host frees the Shade to seek a new home.

Spiritual Essence — Passion Shades can hover, glide or race away at the speed of thought. Physical forces and obstructions do not impede them. From their vantage point, corporeal reality does not exist at all; they can only perceive the glowing essence of souls. As stated previously, these beings are normally undetectable without powerful magic. Individuals with particularly strong or withered Morality ratings (i.e. those with a rating of 2 or less or 9+) can sometimes see Passion Shades within the context of their beliefs. Other characters may also do so at Storyteller discretion for a brief moment when they do something dramatic that replenishes Willpower through a Vice or Virtue.

Any attack that would normally injure a spirit can harm a Passion Shade. Most Passion Shades are vulnerable to exorcisms and abjurations (see p. 214 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**), but a Passion Shade of Faith might actually draw strength from such efforts.

The Thief

The party was winding down, and Jason looked over the remnants. Most of the attractive women had long since been seduced, dragged off to a night of shrieking at the ceiling with one of the random men. Jason smirked. What would the morning bring for those girls? Breakfast in bed, or a tiptoed retreat?

The women who were left were shy, homely, abstinent... whatever, they could still bleed. Jason approached one, a mousy girl with her stringy hair done up in pigtails in a pitiful attempt to look pert. Within a few minutes he convinced her to walk outside.

They reached his van, but Jason's hand stopped before it touched the door handle. He turned to the girl. "Fuck off," he growled. Her face crumpled, and she ran back toward the house. Jason hated to be harsh, but better she feel crushed for a while than be bled dry for seeing too much. He opened the door, expecting to see Anton, his coterie-mate, hunkered in the van with his own meal for the evening.

A pair of long, thin arms grabbed him and jerked him in. If anyone saw the van rocking, they made the natural assumption and left it alone.

Moments later, the Thief, now slightly more muscular, stepped out of the vampire's van, brushing ash from his coat. How many more still in the club?, it thought, licking its lips. How many more hearts?

Background: The Thief's origins, and indeed numbers, remain a mystery. It may well be that there is only one Thief. To date, no one has killed or captured one. The first reports of this creature stem from New York City during the Depression, when a prosaic mage attributed a rash of deaths in the mystical community to a "man dressed in black, with a black hood, creeping away from the house like a thief." Since then, the Thief is an occasional urban legend among various supernatural beings; vampires, werewolves and mages all have their stories, although of course they classify the creature according to their own worldviews.

Whatever it truly is, the Thief hunts the supernatural with a fervor that no human hunter could match. But while monster hunters stalk their quarry out of hate and fear, the Thief hunts for food. By consuming the organs of supernatural beings, the Thief grows stronger and more human-like in appearance. With information as sketchy as it is on this creature, no one is certain of the Thief's ultimate goals. It might simply continue to hunt indefinitely, it might enter a cycle of sleep, or it might be the pawn of a more powerful being. The Thief itself doesn't answer questions about its origins.

Description: The Thief looks like a sickly human whose skin has been pulled taut over its skeleton. Its skin is the color of wet concrete, with small bumps of dark colors scattered about its frame. Unnaturally tall (around seven feet in height) and gaunt, its legs, arms and fingers are thin and black like the legs of a spider. Its eyes are devoid of pupils, and the whites of its eyes swirl from black while in the light to a milky white when standing in the shadows. It moves slowly, its actions measured, deliberate and graceful.

Once the Thief has eaten several organs from supernatural creatures, however, its appearance changes. With each organ it consumes, its complexion improves, with the off-color bumps disappearing. Its muscles fill in to give it the lean build of a swimmer or gymnast. Dots of color start to appear in its eyes until a full, normal pupil has formed. Its movements quicken, but retain their measured fluidity. Once it consumes enough organs, the Thief appears completely human.

Storytelling Hints: When using the Thief as an antagonist, you might want to consider nailing down its origins and motivations. We've left the specifics up to you so that this creature can fill a niche in your chronicle. The following are some possibilities.

Suppose the Thief is a sort of "missing link" between humanity and the supernatural. By its very nature, it is representative of the mysteries of the World of Darkness. In consuming the supernatural, it becomes human, integrating the creatures that lurk in the shadows into the world of humanity.

Or, if that's too cerebral for you, perhaps the Thief is simply a creature from outside human experience. Like vampires and werewolves, it is a monster; it just doesn't have its own society. Maybe the Thief was once a vampire itself, and its hunger somehow progressed beyond

feeding solely on other vampires (which happens to Kindred as they grow older and more powerful) and mutated into its current appetites.

Simpler explanations are also possible. The Thief might be a magical experiment gone awry, a demon summoned from some outer darkness and trapped in our world, or a mage doomed by a backfired bid for immortality. In any event, once you have decided on the Thief's origins, it can make for a very rewarding antagonist.

The Thief is as resourceful and as intelligent as a normal human even before it can pass as one. It stalks and kills "easy" supernatural prey before it even considers stronger, more intelligent food. It uses its ability to resemble a human to its advantage. It takes time to study the human society around it, learning the local language and customs. Because humans can give it no sustenance, the Thief sees them as a tiger views the trees in a forest — they might be useful as cover, but it's no tragedy if they die.

Even though the Thief sees supernatural creatures as prey, it has learned that not all are the same. Mages and ghouls are often its first targets, if only because they die as easily as humans. Young vampires aren't difficult targets (they are more difficult to kill than mortals, but they have several well-known weaknesses and are almost powerless during the day), but they only have one usable organ, the heart (although a vampire's heart is dead, it still carries a spiritual connection to the body, as evidenced by the fact that putting a stake through it has an effect). Only an extremely powerful and well-equipped Thief hunts werewolves.

Other supernatural beings can serve as prey for the Thief as well. The only requirements are that the would-be prey has working internal organs (heart, liver, kidneys, stomach) and is directly touched by the supernatural. Aswang or sufferers of the Hunger are both acceptable as prey for the Thief, for instance.

The Thief is fully aware that it poses a danger to supernatural creatures, and that as soon as it's noticed, it will be investigated and eventually found. So, unless left with no other options, the Thief avoids leaving a messy kill scene. While the Thief is immune to supernatural phenomena, it has no defense against mundane threats (like bullets), and so takes great care to avoid being outnumbered or cornered.

Story Seeds

- This story seed works well for a martial group of characters: The Thief follows the characters and feeds on the organs of their fallen foes. If the characters pay close attention, they might spot the creature's long, spindly arms dragging the corpse of one of their enemies away. The Thief views the characters as a good source of easy meals, but fully intends to pick them off one at a time and eat their organs once it is powerful enough. It reasons that with all the murder they've been committing, their organs should be especially filling....



• An extremely powerful Thief enters the city and immediately destroys many of the supernatural beings there. The characters, for whatever reason, aren't immediately targets but sooner or later the Thief will sniff them out. The Storyteller can use this seed as an excuse for the characters being some of the only (or the only) supernatural beings in a given locale. The characters must find a way to dodge the creature's attention until it leaves... or perhaps they could find a way to lure it into another city, preferably on a different continent.

• The characters discover that the Thief is vulnerable to diseased or damaged prey — a victim who is terminally ill or a drug addict might poison the Thief. Do the characters know such a person? If not, could they poison or sicken an enemy, killing two birds with one stone? If they do have someone in mind, how receptive is he to the idea of giving his life in a gamble to destroy this creature?

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Occult 5

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 4, Firearms 1, Stealth 3, Survival 3, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Intimidation 3, Subterfuge 3

Note: The Thief may also have other Skills it has learned to help it blend in with humanity.

Merits: Fast Reflexes 2, Fleet of Foot 1, Language (varies), Unseen Sense (while not mortal, the Thief is able to use this Merit without penalty)

Willpower: 7

Morality: N/A

Health: 9

Initiative: 9

Defense: 3

Speed: 13

Size: 5

Supernatural Powers: Absorption — The Thief has the ability to eat the organs of a supernatural creature and take on a limited number of its traits. It cannot feed on the organs of a creature that has been dead for more than a minute, so the Thief normally kills its prey personally. For every dot of Stamina a victim possesses above 1, it has one potent organ for the Thief to consume (a creature with 2 Stamina has one organ, with 3 Stamina it has two, and so forth). Note that the number of organs doesn't actually change based on the health of the victim, only the benefit that the Thief can draw from it. For every organ that the Thief consumes, it gains a dot in the victim's highest Attribute. For multiple organs from the same creature, each organ gives the Thief an Attribute dot in the second highest rating, third highest rating and so on until all of the organs

have been Absorbed. Stolen Attribute dots are permanent. The traits above represent a weak or inexperienced Thief.

Chameleon — Once the Thief has successfully Absorbed a number of organs equal to twice its original Willpower dots (that is, before accounting for any Resolve or Composure bonuses that might stem from organ consumption), it looks fully human. As the creature nears this total, its non-human features begin to fade. That is, the transformation to human appearance doesn't happen the second the Thief eats its 14th organ. Before the Thief looks completely human, it suffers a -2 penalty on all Presence and Manipulation rolls due to its unearthly appearance. Intimidation rolls do not suffer this penalty.

Immunity — The Thief is immune to magic and other supernatural phenomena. Vampires can damage its flesh with their fangs, but cannot take sustenance from its blood. Magic designed to detect it simply identifies the Thief as a normal human (no matter how monstrous the Thief currently appears), powers intended to damage it have no effect. Powers that enhance a character (such as the Vigor Discipline or the Attribute bonuses that werewolves receive when changing shape) aren't affected. A character who punches the Thief using a supernatural power to enhance his Strength inflicts damage as usual. Powers that target the Thief specifically, however, always fail.

Toxicum Mold

Slick, black slime covered the far wall and crept slowly across the ceiling. As the door swung open, small puffs of brown smoke wafted out from the infested surfaces. The two vampires exchanged dubious glances.

"Are you sure she ran in here?" the taller one asked. His companion paused a moment, then nodded his head, not entirely convincingly.

"I think so," he stated. "Won't hurt to check. Can't let her get away now, anyway, and I'm hungry." Both men looked at the creeping black ooze hesitantly as it spread around the room, covering another wall even as they watched. Somewhere in the back of the house a door slammed, spurring the pursuers to action again. The tall man rushed quickly into the room, followed by the other. As if in response to their presence, the black film on the wall produced another huge puff of spores, which produced immediate bubbling welts on the vampires' skin.

"What the hell?" the short man shouted, backing away from the brown clouds and inadvertently bumping into another mold-covered wall. As his back touched the mold's surface, the entire wall of slime slipped quickly down over him in a black sheet. He only screamed for a moment before the viscous substance ate all the dead flesh from his bones.

Background: In the last decade, reports of a toxic black fungus invading homes, even in high-end subur-

ban areas, have made people increasingly aware of how invisible threats to health and life can be. Though most of these fungi are treated as environmental health hazards, one breed offers an additional danger. Toxicum mold is an aggressively spreading species of deadly fungus that can infest the walls, ceilings or basements of any building. It grows primarily in damp, dark areas, at least initially, but as it spreads it moves throughout the entire structure, hiding under wallpaper or wood. Breathing in the mold spores causes respiratory distress, infection and eventual death as the toxic spores slowly kill lung tissue. Any skin coming in contact with the living mold develops an itchy rash that quickly necrotizes. Though the poison of Toxicum makes the fungus threatening enough, the true threat of the mold is far more sinister.

In the right conditions, individual Toxicum molds join together to form a single, hungry entity. Much like slime molds, the single fungi cells of Toxicum normally work individually, but when they combine each cell begins to function as a part of a large Toxicum mold mass. The cells lose their mindless individuality and develop a sort of low-intelligence hive mind, working in unison to spread and consume. In this stage, the mold can move rapidly and no longer confines itself to dark places. It quickly covers any surface, spewing thick clouds of toxic spores and devouring any dead organic matter. As the Toxicum mold reaches this stage, it quickly overcomes any occupants of the building, either smothering them with thick clouds of toxic spores or strangling them as their lung tissue perishes with each gasping breath. Once the victim has succumbed to the spores, the Toxicum covers and absorbs the dead body. It does not attempt to devour a living person, but can sense dead matter, which it actively pursues.

Toxicum mold strikes in urban or suburban areas, but only a certain set of circumstances makes the Toxicum form into a mold mass. The right level of environmental contaminants triggers the mold's defense and replication instincts, which cause it to lump together to protect itself from outside poisons and to reproduce as quickly as possible. The large spores germinate more quickly than the invisible spores, making it more advantageous for the mold to reproduce in mold mass form if it feels threatened. The environmental contaminants most likely to cause Toxicum to form a mold mass are carbon monoxide and, the more common source, cigarette smoke. Even smokers who only partake outside the home or in their vehicles may bring in enough contaminant to trigger the mold's sudden deadly growth.

Description: In its early stages, Toxicum mold is indistinguishable from regular toxic, non-predatory molds. It rarely spreads beyond crawl spaces or from beneath its safe cover of paper, wood and plaster. Peeling back wallpaper or breaking into spaces between walls reveals a thin, grainy black spread of the mold, which resembles dry mildew. The spores are invisible in this

form. When Toxicum molds join together to form a Toxicum mold mass, the grainy pattern gives way to a thick, black, jelly-like coating over walls, ceilings and floors. The mold mass moves rapidly, sliding and sliming its way across the building like a slug and emitting puffs of dark brown spores, which are larger and therefore visible in this stage.

Storytelling Hints: Toxicum mold is a good reminder to the characters of the dangers of polluting the environment around them. A mutant product of urban sprawl, Toxicum mold is a danger to any living character, but is particularly dangerous to vampires. Because vampires are already dead flesh, the Toxicum mold easily focuses on them and pursues them. If the mold comes into contact with a vampire's flesh, the skin begins to blacken and rot as it touched by fire or acid. As the mold covers the vampire's body entirely, it dissolves it into a puddle of rot and ash. The mold itself is susceptible to fire, bleach or acid, and suffers aggravated damage from each of these attacks (see p. 180 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). Exposed to sunlight, Toxicum not in mold mass form ceases to spread or reproduce. The mold's Health points vary with its size.

Though Toxicum mold lacks real intelligence and has only limited mobility, it can still serve a role within a game chronicle. Use this entity to create an ominous and threatening mood. Because this mold thrives in environmentally contaminated locations, consider what would possibly drive the players' characters into such a locale. Do the owners of the building know their property is infested? Did they place the mold on purpose or did it spring up as a result of some chemical or spiritual taint? This predatory fungus could also easily work as an organic security system, especially for someone who specifically fears undead intruders. Unlike an electronic security system, mold is considerably more difficult to disarm.

Story Seeds

- A group of vampire hunters discovers the Toxicum mold and begins harvesting it for use in their crusade against the undead. This might work as an unpleasant surprise for vampire characters, or the mold could spread out of control, infesting an entire neighborhood.

- The mold seeps into the waterway and into a lake, where it mutates into an algae-like substance. Anyone swimming in the lake or drinking the water runs the risk of being consumed from the inside out.

- What if the Toxicum mold, instead of consuming a vampire, uses it as a means to transport itself? The mold infects the vampire's decayed organs and can expel spores from the hapless Kindred's mouth and nose. Perceptive characters might notice the small patches of fungus in the corners of the vampire's eyes. What is it about this vampire that makes him a host rather than a meal for the mold?

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 1, Resolve 1
Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5
Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 1
Skills: N/A
Merits: N/A
Willpower: N/A
Morality: N/A
Health: Size + 5; Size varies
Initiative: 5
Defense: 1
Speed: 11 (species factor 5)
Size: Variable

Supernatural Powers: Devour Flesh — The Toxicum mold can quickly break down and absorb dead flesh through an ultra-quick decay process. The mold can devour an amount of dead flesh equal to one point of Size rating per turn. Against vampires or other undead creatures, the mold inflicts one point of aggravated damage per turn of contact.

Necrotic Touch — Contact between living skin and Toxicum mold causes an immediate red rash that quickly begins to blister and then necrotize. If the necrotic section of the skin is not removed, the rot spreads, eventually causing sepsis, loss of limbs and death. Necrotic flesh must be cut away or burned with heat or chemicals to stop the spread, after which the damage can heal (though it almost certainly leaves scars). Victims take one point of lethal damage per hour as the necrosis spreads through their systems, turning their blood septic and opening their skin for infection. The mold has a toxicity rating of 1, but inflicts its damage once per turn. This damage can be resisted, but it requires a reflexive Stamina roll each turn. The Merit Toxin Resistance affords additional protection from contact.

Sense Death — A Toxicum mold mass can sense the presence of dead flesh within its building and is drawn to it. If a mortal character succumbs to the toxic spores or necrotic touch of the mold, the mold mass seeks out the corpse and absorbs it, but does not pursue living characters. Undead characters, however, immediately draw the attention of the toxic mold. The mold does not notice vampires with the blush of health (see p. 156 of *Vampire: The Requiem*).

Toxic Spores — The spores of Toxicum mold cause extreme lung damage that progresses into death. The spores fill the lungs, killing the tissue and suffocating the victim. The mold has varying toxicity levels for inhalation based on how large it has grown (see p. 180 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook* for more information on toxins).

Size

of Mold	Toxicity	Damage Type	Increment
Early stages (Size 1 to 3)	1	Bashing	Hourly
Entire building (Size 4 and up)	2	Bashing	Hourly
Mold mass	1	Lethal	Per turn

Characters can resist this damage with a reflexive, contested Stamina roll. The player must roll more successes than the mold's toxicity rating to ignore the damage completely. If damage is equal to or higher than successes rolled, the character suffers full damage. The Stamina roll must be made once per (increment), so in early stages the roll must be made once per hour. Characters with the Merits Strong Lungs or Toxin Resistance may use the modifiers granted by these Merits.

Witchcat

"I'll just go in and check on the baby," Mary said to her husband. She tiptoed down the hall and quietly opened the door. Inside the room, Mary heard nothing, only the soft whir of the ceiling fan. Sleeping, she thought, finally! She turned around and began to creep back toward the door when a sudden rustling sound from the crib, followed by a sharp inhalation of breath, caught her attention. Mary stopped. Suddenly, a small object flung itself at her feet and rushed out the nursery door. Mary yelped in surprise, then saw a gray tabby-striped back disappearing down the hallway.

"Damn it, Smokey!" Mary swore at her swiftly retreating cat. She walked over to the crib to make sure the sound hadn't disturbed Bobby's sleep. As she leaned over the rails to tuck the infant back in, Mary let out heartrending scream.

"Robert! Robert! Come quick! Something's wrong with the baby!"

Background: Domesticated cats have a history of poor public representation and are the subject of many superstitions. The idea that cats can suck a baby's breath and leave it lifeless can be traced as far back as the witch trials of the 16th and 17th centuries. New parents were urged to get rid of their feline companions or to not bring new kittens into the house at risk of exposing their infants to a potentially dangerous animal. The cats supposedly smothered the infants intentionally, out of jealousy, or accidentally, while trying to smell the milk on the baby's breath.

Modern medical studies eventually discovered the true cause of these infant deaths, a still-unexplained condition called Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, or SIDS. SIDS typically occurs within the first year of a child's life and results in a death with no traceable cause or symptoms, rather than the supposed smothering caused by jealous or hungry cats. Despite the new medical knowledge, however, the old wives' tale has not been entirely put aside — nor should it.

The source of this superstition, and the cause of many SIDS deaths, is actually a creature used by some powerful sorcerers as a familiar. Known as Witchcats, or sometimes as familiar vessels, these small animals pretend to be house cats in

order to steal the life force from the household's occupants and transport it to the Witchcat's master. Young babies are the most common target of the creature's attack, because they lack the physical ability to fight off the animal, which has no means of defending itself from attack beyond small, sharp claws and teeth. Witchcats may also linger around hospitals, nursing homes, mental institutions or any other places with large numbers of incapacitated or restrained people.

Like homunculi (**Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 225), these pseudo-cats are the magical constructs of powerful mages. Though instinctively able to seek out victims, Witchcats lack a human level of intelligence. Because of this, they are unable to communicate on any deep level with their masters, making Witchcats poorly suited for any tasks but stealing and storing Health points.

Description: Though Witchcats could technically take the forms of any small animals their masters craft them into, a long tradition of the feline familiar makes cats the natural and most practical choice. Due to their size and relative cleanliness, house cats are ideal pets even for apartment dwellers, giving the disguised Witchcat access to infants even in the midst of urban sprawl. Witchcats are nearly indistinguishable from normal house cats, varying in size and coloration to mimic any domestic breed. Only during the actual moment at which the Witchcat absorbs the victim's life force do its other traits display themselves. As the Witchcat sucks the breath from the victim, its jaw unhinges, allowing the creature's mouth to completely cover the victim's mouth and nose. The monster's eyes roll back and sink into their sockets to allow its face to stretch as needed. Once the Witchcat drains the victim's life force, its stomach appears extremely bloated, a feature that remains until the Witchcat transfers life force to its master. Characters with the Merit Unseen Sense attuned to magic can sense something unusual about the animal, usually represented by a feeling of animosity toward the creature, even if the character normally likes cats. True house cats have the innate ability to recognize Witchcats as imposters and react negatively, often violently, toward them.

Storytelling Hints: Witchcats are excellent support antagonists for any chronicle. A more powerful, intelligent master may have several Witchcats working for him, stealing and storing life for any number of uses. As the familiars and servants of mages, Witchcats can provide life force for powerful rituals, eliminating the need to kidnap a victim and create a public stir (not to mention the additional complications of controlling and disposing of their victim before and after a ritual). Other creatures may rely on the Witchcats as a source of food, sending the pseudo-felines to retrieve or store the human energy upon which the creatures feed. Additionally, the creature's master may invest her own life force into the Witchcat for storage before a potentially deadly encounter. If the master falls in combat, the Witchcat will return several stored Health points back to her. When including these creatures in your story, try to present them as warning signs of a much darker and powerful force. Players' characters may not immediately pursue a plot hook about a sudden rise in the number of SIDS cases until they witness a Witchcat in the act of depriving some infant of his fragile, new life.

Story Seeds

- A Witchcat attaches itself to a vampire character, following him around and feeding on the vampire's victims while they are too weak from blood loss to defend themselves. How does the character react to the discovery that his victims, whom he left alive, are suddenly turning up dead? How might the rest of the vampire community react?

- An old lady with a million cats lives in her huge, run-down house at the end of the block; her neighbors swear she's a witch and that she's lived for a hundred years. In this case, they are quite right. The old lady has survived since the end of the 19th century on the stolen life force of infants, the elderly and the weak, but she's tired of living in this fashion. She wants her youth and her health back. She reckons she'll just need to create a much bigger Witchcat, one capable of taking life from stronger prey.

- A Witchcat whose master died takes up residence with one of the characters (this only works if the character is alive; vampires are ineligible). Every morning, it returns from hunting full of stolen life, meaning that the character never takes long to heal damage. Try to avoid making the connection between the cat and the unnatural healing for as long as possible, but be sure to mention the sudden spike in SIDS deaths in the character's neighborhood. This story seed can go in a number of different directions. Maybe the character discovers the truth and wishes to find a way to atone for the deeds of his pet...or create more Witchcats himself. Maybe the people who killed the Witchcat's first master are still searching for it.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 2, Stealth 3, Survival 2

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Streetwise 2

Merits: Brawling Dodge, Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Unseen Sense

Willpower: 6

Morality: N/A

Health: 5

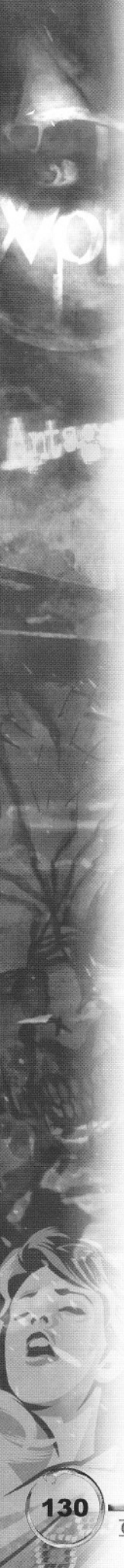
Initiative: 8

Defense: 5

Speed: 13 (species factor 7)

Size: 1

Supernatural Powers: Devour Life — A Witchcat can "drink" the life energy of a target by placing its mouth over the victim's mouth and nose and inhaling the victim's breath. The target of the attack must be asleep, unconscious or otherwise incapacitated. Newborn infants are susceptible to the Witchcat's attack no matter their state of consciousness, as they are too weak and lack the fine motor skills needed to disengage from the attack. For each turn of attack, the creature devours one Health point from the target unless the attack is interrupted, either by the



victim regaining consciousness or by a third party. The Witchcat ceases drinking the victim's breath when it has reached its maximum storage capacity of five Health points, when the victim runs out of Health, or when the attack is interrupted. The damage incurred during this process is considered lethal for healing purposes.

The stolen Health can then be conferred to the cat's master. It replaces any Health boxes from right to left that have wounds in them, regardless of what kind of wound is recorded.

Store Health — Witchcats can store up to five points of Health from another creature. The Health points may be willingly invested into the creature, usually by a mage or some other powerful individual, for safekeeping and later use, or may be forcibly stolen from the target using the Devour Life ability.

The Virus

"You're shitting me." Tony's eyes were wide, and his lips curled back in a nervous smile.

Dana shook her head. "No, I'm not. I don't know why I opened the door. It was just a weird impulse. Anyway, I saw Mr. Williams looking out the window of the classroom, and then he started pacing back and forth like a tiger in a cage."

"Bullshit," scoffed Mark. "I mean, sure he was pacing, but that doesn't make him—"

"Listen! I'm not done." Dana drummed her fingers excitedly. "He turned around and saw me, and sniffed at me. And I swear to God, he had hair on his face. You know we all saw him in class that morning. You know he didn't have a beard, right? But he was hairy, like, gross hairy. Even his hands were hairy."

Mark glanced at Tony. Both of them considered making a joke about a teacher with hairy hands, but neither of them did. They pictured their science teacher looking at their friend that way, hungrily, and both of them felt a chill.

"Then what?" asked Mark quietly.

Background: The Virus evolved alongside humanity, drawing power from cautionary tales and fables. When people talk about their fears, trying to make sense of the unnatural or coping with loss, terror or tragedy, the Virus grows strong. Like a true virus, it infects as quickly as possible, replicating itself exponentially. Unlike a virus, which kills the cells it invades, the Virus becomes sentient as it draws power from humanity, giving it the ability to reason and plan. Throughout most of human history, the Virus was restricted to small pockets of humanity; but now, with the advent of mass communication, the Virus has become a gigantic, intelligent entity. It knows of the supernatural creatures of the world through the stories it hears through those it has infected. It realizes that these creatures hunt and kill humans. While the Virus doesn't have any feelings for humanity that could legitimately be described as "compassion" or "love," it does realize that the stories that humans trade in fear are what allows it to survive. As such, it works to expose the supernatural in a rather blunt attempt to nudge people into trading stories.

The Virus can feed off of mundane stories as well, but humans are capable of understanding and even stopping such threats as terrorism or disease. The supernatural, by definition, is beyond the ken of humanity; and thus the Virus works to pull back the veil of mystery in the World of Darkness, knowing that even if humanity realizes that (for instance) vampires exist, they can never understand the truth about the creatures. Vampires themselves don't know the truth, after all.

Description: The Virus has the ability to travel rapidly from one person to the next through Storytelling; provided the person telling the story is able to inspire even a second of unease in the listener(s), the Virus can attempt infection. So long as the Virus is able to overcome the victim's Willpower, it can continue to pass from person to person. Once it encounters resistance and is unable to overcome a single person, its spread stops. This means while the Virus can theoretically leap from the mind of someone who types a disturbing story onto an online forum board into anyone who reads it, the wider the distribution of the story, the more likely that the Virus will encounter someone who either isn't bothered by the story or who is strong-willed enough to resist infection. For this reason, the Virus prefers smaller groups.

Victims of the Virus fall under two categories: carriers and drones. Most people it infects are carriers; the Virus has access to their memories and can exert a small measure of control over them, but they remain in command of themselves. Drones, however, are completely and irrevocably under the Virus' control. Drones do not feel pain, hunger or fatigue, and can barely speak or interact with others. The Virus uses these unfortunates to lead carriers to the supernatural, or to spur them to talking about it.

Like the humans that spawned it, the Virus has a fear of darkness and death. People infected with the Virus avoid darkness when possible, and the Virus often releases control over someone who is about to die if it has no other way of saving such an individual.

Storytelling Hints: The Virus has neither compassion nor mercy when it comes to supernatural creatures. It does not make the distinction between once-human creatures and inhuman aberrations. It knows, on some level, that the creatures it exposes in order to feed itself might well be placed in danger by its machinations, but it also knows that the supernatural extends so deeply into mortal society that humanity has no chance of ever eradicating it. It is intelligent enough to wait, to use resources that don't directly relate to monster killing, and to use manipulation when fighting will only lead to unnecessary death.

The Virus has no limit to the number of carriers it can have under its control, but sooner or later someone is going to resist infection (which is why the entire world isn't infected already). When that happens, the Virus must either create a drone or fall into dormancy until revitalized by storytelling (see the Virus' traits for more information). The Virus does not seek to harm humanity and in fact attempts to protect its carriers as much as is practical, but has

no qualms about sacrificing a few humans if in so doing it can spark widespread fear.

Fighting the Virus isn't as easy as killing the drones, or even the carriers (a daunting task, given how quickly the Virus can spread). Instead, defeating the Virus requires nullifying the mystery on which it feeds. Urban legends can spread the Virus, but a rational explanation for the legend (true or not) that removes the mystery and fear from it gives a carrier a chance to expel the Virus from her mind. The characters, therefore, might find themselves finding ways to explain supernatural phenomena away... including themselves.

The Virus is a tricky creature to use; disease in general makes for a difficult "antagonist" because it is hard to combat. Remember that the Virus grows more intelligent the more people it infects, and this can be reflected in the actions of its drones. With only a handful of carriers, the drones are nothing more than automatons and killers. If the Virus has infected a hundred people, however, its drones are probably more intelligent than the characters and are quite capable of complex strategies.

Story Seeds

- The Virus makes a carrier out of a pastor at a local church, waiting for the right moment during a fiery sermon to infect everyone in the congregation. If the pastor's words fail to inspire the proper amount of fear, the Virus might just have to lead the pastor to some "demons."

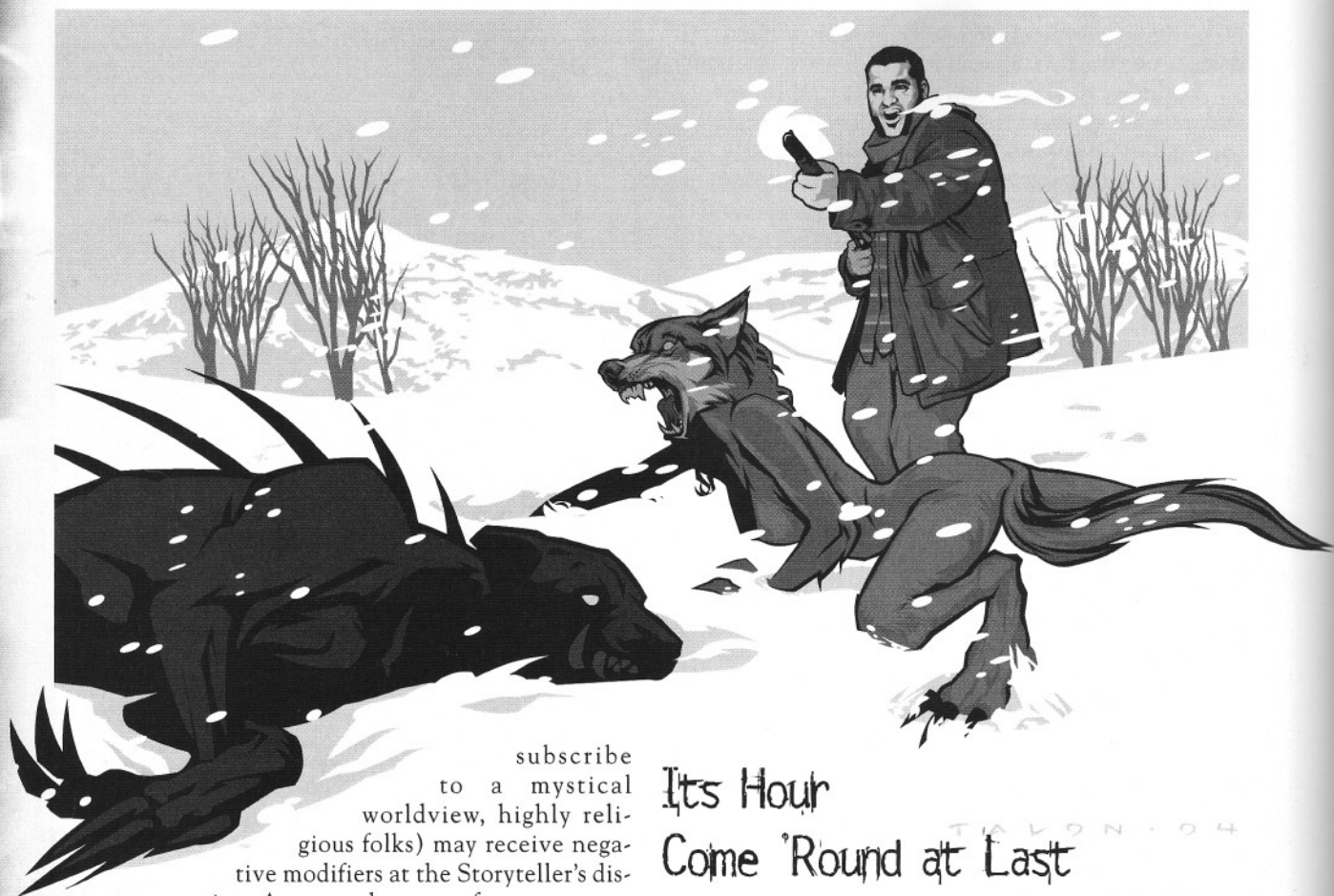
- The Virus turns a counselor at a large youth camp into a drone, and forces him to murder several random targets. The other campers then begin telling stories about why the victims were killed and the sinister nature of the killer. When the campers are sent home, the Virus begins to spread in all directions.

- The Virus merges with the Living Web (see p. 121), creating a unique strain. Anyone who falls victim to the Web's hypnotic power becomes a drone. The strain dies out quickly, since it can't create carriers, but how many drones in how many cities now wander at random, knowing only that they must engender terror?

Traits: The Virus by itself does not have traits other than its supernatural powers.

Supernatural Powers: Infection — When a carrier tells a story that engenders fear in listeners, he runs the risk of passing on the Virus. Roll the carrier's Manipulation + Expression in a contested roll against each listener's Intelligence + Resolve. Listeners who are particularly susceptible to such stories (children, people who





subscribe
to a mystical
worldview, highly reli-
gious folks) may receive nega-
tive modifiers at the Storyteller's dis-
cretion. Anyone who scores fewer successes

than the carrier becomes a carrier. If even one listener wins the contest, however, the Virus is unable to spread through this group of carriers until something happens to engender fear in at least one of them (fear makes the Virus contagious again). This trigger must be an actual event, not a story, which is why in this situation the Virus normally creates a drone to scare the carriers into virulence again.

The Virus cannot truly control carriers, but can do the following: Cause a carrier to take a simple, non-threatening action, such as walk a short distance or dial a telephone; grant the carrier the Unseen Sense Merit (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 109) for one scene; turn a carrier into a drone (see below).

Create Drone — The Virus can turn a carrier into a drone at any time. When this happens, the carrier loses her Morality entirely, becoming nothing but a vessel for the Virus. Strength and Stamina increase by two dots (to a maximum of 6), Dexterity falls by one dot (to a minimum of 1), and all Mental and Social Skills, as well as memories, fade entirely. Drones do not need to sleep or eat, and do not feel pain (and thus do not suffer wound penalties). They grow more intelligent as the Virus spreads; a good rule of thumb is one dot of Intelligence per 20 carriers.

Its Hour Come 'Round at Last

The huge, black beast came barreling out of the bushes toward Tiki. Megs Follows-After reared up on her massive hind legs, lips pulling back from her large teeth as she threw herself between her youngest packmate and the unknown monster. She locked powerful arms around the shaggy animal, trying to bury her snout into its short neck while she clawed at its broad back.

Tiki looked on helplessly as his packmate fell to the ground, locked in a battle with something that looked like an enormous black dog. The werewolf and the beast rolled in the grass, the scent of blood and the sound of snarls and panting breath filling the air. Attracted by the noise, Breaker came barreling across the field, with Jay running behind him, still in human form. Breaker lunged at the interlocked pair of Megs and beast, trying to get a hold for his claws or teeth, or at the very least to get the animal off Megs. Finally, Breaker rolled onto his back, kicking up at the black dog with all four muscular legs. Megs broke free and tumbled to the side as the monstrous canine flew up into the air from the force of Breaker's kick.

The loud thunder of Jay's shotgun burst over the dark field, knocking the beast from the air. It fell to the ground, unmoving. By the time Megs shakily regained her feet, the creature's body faded away into nothingness.

"What was it?" she panted, trying to regain her footing. Blood seeped from a cut below her eye and she carried her left arm at an odd angle. When Tiki saw her, he winced in shame.

"I don't know," Jay said, shouldering the shotgun. "But it's not going to give us anymore trouble now."

The shadows go deeper than

you can possibly imagine.

Kill me, but know this:

There is no going back now.

— Preston Callahan,
occultist and suspected
demon worshipper
(deceased)

This book includes:

- Story hooks and suggestions usable for any World of Darkness chronicle
- A look into the myriad possibilities of the supernatural
- Toolkits for building enemies, rivals or pawns for all types of characters

For use with the
World of Darkness Rulebook



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