urge

a dark superhero setting
of predatory instinct

for Ron Edwards' Sorcerer
by Clinton R. Nixon

Credits and Acknowledgements

Urge is © 2001 Clinton R. Nixon.
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Cover art is done by Raven Daegmorgan. More of his excellent work can be found at http://www.daegmorgan.net/sleipnir/gallery.htm.

The rest of the art is taken from the ArtToday clip art library (http://www.arttoday.com), which I have found to be a most valuable resource for the independent roleplaying game designer. Note that the majority of the art in this game is meant to reflect psychological imagery associated with the game, and not literal game effects. When viewing the art, the reader should get a grasp of what it feels like to be in the tormented heads of the game's characters.

in association with

Thanks go to Jared A. Sorensen (http://www.memento-mori.com) and Jenaya Dawe (http://www.nobreakfast.com).

This game is dedicated to the memory of Bill Bixby.

References

Leslie H. Whitten, *Moon of the Wolf* (novel)
Robert E. Howard, "Wolfshead" (short story)
The Incredible Hulk (mainly the television show, but also some of the comic book's storylines)
The Incredible Hulk Television Series page (http://www.incrediblehulktvseries.com/)

Musical inspiration

Nine Inch Nails, "The Fragile"
Rollins Band, *Get Some Go Again*
Juliana's Pony, *Total System Failure*

Introduction

It urged him to an intensity like madness.
D.H. Lawrence

Throughout the course of human myth, we have carried with us stories of mad animal-men, lycanthropes, that plague civilization, tearing through men, eating human flesh, violating women and animals, and infecting humanity itself.

Obviously, we've discovered enough about human biology to know men do not and cannot physically turn into wolves, bears, cats, or anything else. But, traditional myths about lycanthropes- and modern-day psychology- bear little resemblance to the Hollywood-driven "hairy-man-with-claws" image that has permeated pop culture.

The term "lycanthropy" may better be replaced with *therianthropy*: the connection of a man's spirit or mind with the spirit or mind of one or more animals. Lycanthropes, as detailed in modern psychology, are people with mental aberrations that send them into an angered, bestial state where they behave like a frightened animal, often clawing and scratching at people who approach them.

> **Is this a werewolf game?**
>
> Yes and no. Obviously, the characters do have an animal spirit inside them, an obvious homage to werewolf stories. The characters are as dangerous and can be as violent as the worst werewolf myth told. However, these characters are *not:*
>
> **Raging stupid beasts.** Not only is the Urge hosted in a human, but it's crafty enough on its own. Even in the deepest throes of bestial behavior a character inflicted with the Urge may commit, she's not stupid—just possessed of an entirely different moral system and set of priorities.
>
> **Hairy eco-terrorists.** I don't think there's anything more to say here, really.
>
> **Shapeshifters.** *Urge* characters do not ever literally become animals.

This is not entirely different from early werewolf myths: the myths that were not folklore, but fully believed by their tellers. These stories told of men bestial in nature that would roam the night, screaming and howling and attacking others with a fevered strength.

This game is about those lycanthropes, predators on the edge of humanity.

This game is about the fears of man as he progresses into civilization, leaving the instincts that lead him there behind, that those instincts may come back, and, to put it rudely, bite him square in the ass.

Urge does not concern itself with the exact spiritual details of its characters' possession. As appropriate to your game, they may be possessed by animal spirits, in touch with their primordial roots, or dangerous aberrant psychological freaks. What they definitely are, though, are people with *something* dangerous and violent inside them, a predator nature that they must continually fight against in order to maintain some semblance of humanity.

Characters in *Urge*

Characters in *Urge* will appear to be normal people for their time and setting. (I assume a modern-day setting in the text, but this does not have to be so.) Unlike traditional were-type tales (or modern mentally-ill lycanthropes) they do not have to identify with a particular type of animal. (At the GM's option, this may add depth to your game. Go for it, if you like.) Instead, they feel something bestial, old, and predatory within them. They feel it call them and urge them towards actions they'd never consider normally. But, this curse

Is this a superhero game?

Yes and no. It really depends on your definition of superheroes. One of the points of this game is to expand that definition, and so the author does consider it a superhero game: you do play characters with tremendous supernatural power that can make a huge difference in their world. However, these characters do *not*:

Have moral/legal authority. In most modern superhero comics, the heroes have few to no run-ins with the legal authorities. Even if they have no legal authority, they usually have moral authority, and the police stay out of their way. In *Urge*, if you run around breaking down walls, the police will come rather quickly.

Have an obligation to society. Actually, this is one of the main conflicts of *Urge*. The powers you have are fueled by an instinct that is antithetical to the precepts of society. The characters, on the other hand, may very well have morals and obligations. How do you balance the two, and how do you use your inflicted powers to meet those morals and obligations?

Wear four-color costumes. Actually, if they really wanted to, I doubt anyone could stop them. Characters in *Urge*, though, tend to shy away from the public, much less the media. Unlike heroes from the comics you see on newsstand shelves, the characters of *Urge* are not accepted by society, and would probably be overwhelmed by a fear-stricken mob if they were found out.

carries rather powerful gifts with it, and these gifts, with effort, can be used for good.

Urge and *Sorcerer*

Sorcerer players will note a similarity between the curse of Urge and Possessor demons from that game. This is entirely on purpose. The Urges, the bestial possessors inside *Urge* characters, are Possessor demons from *Sorcerer.* They differ from traditional Possessor demons in two ways, however:

- **They do not have full control over their hosts.** Traditional Possessor demons in *Sorcerer* control the puppet-like bodies of their hosts, suppressing the original personality. The Urges "ride" their hosts, using the host's senses, but can only attempt to exert control, pressuring their hosts to succumb to animal instinct. They can make this seem very attractive, and can go so far as to inflict images and hallucinations of committing bestial acts upon their hosts. In the end, though, the characters have control over their own bodies.
- **They cannot be Banished.** One might think this might be the ultimate conclusion to an *Urge* story: the removal of the Possessor Urge. Unfortunately, the Urge is so intertwined with its host that it maintains a very strong hold in this realm. Traditional Banishment does not work. However, there is one method of removal: Banishment at the time of the host's death.

Even though the Urge is a Possessor demon, *Urge* still does not concern itself with the exact spiritual details of its characters' possession. Just as the demons in *Sorcerer* may be conceived of as anything from unholy inhabitants of an eldritch realm to subconscious manifestations of their sorcerers' own unfulfilled wishes, so is the Urge.

Chapter I: Character

"Within each of us, ofttimes, there dwells a mighty and raging fury."
Pilot episode, *The Incredible Hulk*

Making an *Urge* character involves the following steps.

1. Create a name and background.
2. Choose scores to total 10.
3. Choose descriptions for Stamina and Will, and an aspect for Urge.
4. Set Humanity at the level of Stamina or Will, whichever is higher.
5. Choose Cover, Price and the Mark.
6. Choose a Need.
7. Choose Urge abilities.
8. Write the Kicker.
9. Give the character a once-over for likeability.

Scores

There are three basic scores in *Urge*: Stamina, Will, and Urge.

Stamina, like in *Sorcerer,* is a measure of your strength of body, as well as your general fitness, health, and ability to take damage. It is used when performing any task of physical exertion and in combat.

Will is a character's force of mind, as well as the ability to resist compulsion. While in *Sorcerer* and in many other games Will could represent nearly any state of mind, in *Urge* Will is the all-needed buffer between you and the Urge inside. The Will descriptions below not only describe what drives you mentally, but what quality resides in you that prevents you from succumbing to the Urge. Your Will descriptions defines what makes you a protagonist in this setting.

Urge, which replaces Lore in *Urge,* is a special score not afforded to normal humans: it measures the strength of the predator inside you and your connection to your instinct. It may seem like the most important score, but as your predator grows stronger, your control over it is lessened.

With Urge, 0 is normal for humans—anything above that represents someone who has been inflicted with the curse of Urge. Urge 1 is someone who may not even understand or barely perceive their animal nature, while 2 to 4 is someone who has felt Urge directly and most likely often. Urge 5 and above normally results in psychopathic reversion to instinct.

There is a fourth score, Humanity. This represents your empathy towards humans, conscience, and general psychological well-being. Set Humanity to the same score as Stamina or Will, whichever is higher.

Score descriptions

Apply descriptions to scores like in *Sorcerer.* With GM permission, you may create new descriptions that fit the below descriptions and are in the spirit of *Urge.*

Stamina
Broken. Your appearance belies your strength. You've taken enough abuse over the years to develop the ability to shrug off pain.
Hunter. You've spent a great deal of your life outside of cities and in the wilderness. You may not have been hunting to kill, but whatever you hunted-good fishing spots, nature photographs, or just a little peace-you've grown accustomed to sleeping outdoors and foraging for food.
Scavenger. You live amongst the trash and debris of human society—hell, you are the trash of human society—cast off and worn out. But you survive.
Biomechanical. You are beauty and grace in motion, a streamlined machine of flesh and blood, bone and sinew. Built to last.
Juggernaut. Equal parts mass and inertia, you are both the unstoppable force and the immovable object at the same time.

Will
Vengeance. You've lost something or someone near to you, and you'll stop at nothing to avenge that loss or burn the fuck out trying.
Fear. You're afraid of this world, you're afraid of being found out, and mainly you're afraid of this demon in your head. If you keep moving, and keep pretending it's not there, maybe it won't be.
Purpose. There's a reason you have these gifts. Maybe you don't understand it fully, but there's some sort of cosmic test you've worked out in your own belief system, and you are the subject: a holy instrument of divine will.
Zest. Having the Urge is sometimes a tremendous pain in the ass, but it's a hell of a lot more fun being able to scale walls than being stuck taking the bus every morning. Sure, there's a downside, but you're going to milk

this thing for as much excitement as you can possibly get.

Protector. There's someone or something out there that needs you. It needs your strength, and not your weakness—you may hate what's inside you, but if it's the best way to protect, then it's what you'll use.

Urge aspect

The aspect for Urge is different from score descriptions in that it determines the nature of your Urge, and combines with your Need in order to define the predator within your character. The aspect is not the only thing you're interested in, but rather *why* your predator wants things. For example, a predator with the aspect of Power still craves sex, but only to dominate someone or something else—the pleasure and procreation aspects don't really concern her.

A common mistake is for the *player* to assume the Urge is what she wants. It isn't. It's not even what the character really wants. It's what the predator inside the character wants, which provides the main struggle in *Urge.* It is something to be fought at every turn.

Dominance. This common Urge is the need to be respected, admired, and even worshipped. The Urge is the ultimate predator, and that fact should be respected and heeded by people not touched with its gifts. It wants to dominate the world.

Hunger. This Urge hoards food, and to a lesser degree, all pleasurable items—hot baths, silk shirts, fine art, and the like. It enjoys sex immensely, but from a pleasure standpoint only. It is nature's glutton, and will experience anything once.

Sex. This Urge wants to spread itself among the world. It wants its potency spread into thousands of children that will bear its name. It wants to penetrate deep inside everything that it can and fill them with its essential essences. It wants to irrevocably make things *its own.*

Solitude. At first glance, this might not seem that much different than the Urge aspect of Power. It wants to meet any challenge and put down any threat, permanently. Its purpose is not domination, though, but like the protagonist Ender in *Ender's Game*, to eliminate any obstacle to its existence. It seeks the quiet solitude of its own thought and opinions in everything. It would eliminate your own thoughts if it could, as the ultimate egoist. *(Example: Marvel Comics' Wolverine in the early issues of his comic,* **Wolverine**.*)*

Pain. This Urge is wounded in a world it can't understand: a world of plush couches, huge useless SUV's, board meetings, and action items. The sight of chubby people who couldn't last 24 hours without their television and Burger Queen infuriates this Urge to the core, enough to very literally

pain it. It doesn't quite understand why it's trapped inside this fleshy, nearly hairless body, and wants to rip its way through it and take the whole world down. This is the Urge of self-destruction. *(Example: The Incredible Hulk, mainly from the television series, and to a lesser degree, from the Marvel Comics' title.)*

Humanity

Humanity, as in *Sorcerer,* is set to the higher of Stamina or Will.

Unlike *Sorcerer*, though, Humanity is strictly defined in *Urge*. Humanity is your empathy with other persons' feelings and needs, and your ability to curb your instinctual wants in order to respect theirs.

As you lose Humanity, you will begin to care less and less about the normal boundaries set between people. You will feel much more of an urge to take what you like from others, and will care less and less about their concerns.

At 0 Humanity, you lose your last connections to the human race, with human inhibitions, and a human conscience. *This is not character death.* Your character is from then on under the control of the GM, and has succumbed completely to her basest urges. However, if restrained and kept from indulging her Urge and Need for a goodly amount of time (anywhere from a week to a lifetime), the character may revert back to humanity, left with 1 Humanity and in dire Need.

As detailed in the below rules, Humanity loss and gain can be carefully counterbalanced to ensure that you do not ever reach 0 Humanity. However, the GM tracks Humanity for you. After the initial character creation, you will not know the numerical score of your Humanity ever again. The GM may give you tips like, "You feel like you're losing your grip on things. Your Urge is thirsting like mad and all you can think about is tearing this guy's face off with your teeth." This would be an indication that your Humanity's getting a bit low and that perhaps you should back off.

Losing Humanity

There are three stated ways to lose Humanity in *Urge*, all revolving around a Humanity vs. Urge roll.

First, when you, as a character, feel angry, helpless, or afraid, the GM may call for a Humanity vs. Urge roll. If this roll is failed, you lose a point of Humanity and revert to bestial instinct, letting your Urge deal with the

problem instead of your Humanity.

Second, when you consciously decide as a player to use an advanced Urge power, the GM will call for a Urge vs. Humanity roll. If the roll is successful, you as a character have overcome your conscience and inhibitions enough to let out the Urge, but you lose a point of Humanity.

Third, whenever the GM believes your actions as a character have become reckless and catering more to your Urge than to your Humanity, she may call for a Humanity vs. Urge roll. On failure, you lose a point of Humanity.

It is noted that there are three *stated* ways to lose Humanity above because the GM may discover other situations in which Humanity loss is appropriate. The general rule is that a Humanity vs. Urge roll should always be allowed, and *any time Urge wins the roll over Humanity, Humanity is lost.* Note that the three ways above are merely examples of times Urge wins in a Humanity vs. Urge roll.

Gaining Humanity

Gaining Humanity is a much more GM-driven process than losing Humanity. Humanity gain should occur in the following types of situations:

You are confronted with a situation friendly to your Urge aspect and completely counteract the aspect. *Example: Ben's character, Paul Ricktor, has an Urge aspect of Dominance. He has just caught a man trying to hold up a liquor store, and absolutely torn him apart. The scared liquor store owner's pulled a shotgun on Paul and tells him to not move until the police come. If Ben decides Paul will not only not attack the owner, but actually stand still and let the police take him into custody (an act of submission), a Humanity point would be gained.*

You put the needs of others before your own needs or safety. This is probably the most common way to gain Humanity in *Urge* and drives the superheroic aspects of the game. When you save a baby from a burning building, stop a maniac from shooting up a schoolyard full of kids, or stop an out-of-control car from slamming into four others, you gain a point of Humanity, no matter how you go about eliminating the problem. You often may lose a point of Humanity in the process through the use of Urge abilities, but the intent balances that loss with a gain.

Cover

Cover's what you do in everyday life. This is a tremendously important part

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of *Urge*. You can't be a raging beast all the time, and you aren't a four-color superhero in the streets. You've got to pay your bills and feed your kids, or you'll have external problems to rival your internal ones in no time. Choose any Cover that fits your character, and set it equal to either Stamina or Will, whichever seems more appropriate.

Cover is also used as a resource for favors and contacts. Often, characters bridled with the Urge have to drift from place to place in order to hide the damage they leave behind, as well as to prevent themselves from forming close human relationships, and betraying those same relationships. On the road (or in a large city), Cover is used if you need to contact former acquaintances for help or favors.

Note: "Drifter" or similar Covers are not permitted. While the character may be a drifter, those contacts and acquaintances from his earlier life give him an advantage other drifters do not have.

Price

Just as you can't be a raging beast all the time, there's a difficulty in being a normal human for *Urge* characters. No matter how hard you try, you'll never quite be "right" or fit in. Something will always belie your nature. This is called the *Price.* Several examples are given in *Sorcerer*, and others are listed here, but you may choose or make up your own to fit your character concept. They should give a -1 die modifier to one type of activity, and can range from hideous to almost humorous (**Sniffs a lot.** You smell the air wherever you are: -1 to social interactions) depending on your game.

Uncomfortable with technology. You have a -1 to all rolls when using a piece of technology. This includes cars, computers, and the like.
Scarred. You have tremendous amounts of scarring from running through glass, getting in knife fights, or whatever. -1 to social interactions when scars are visible.
Avoidance. You feel uncomfortable holding normal conversations. -1 to social interactions when speaking.

The Mark

The intense loneliness of being part of a species (humanity) that you do not completely identify with and that can never understand you is counter-acted by the fact that you can see your fellow predators. Whether for good or bad, all of you have a Mark. It never is the same on two different people, and follows no guidelines, but it sticks out like a sore thumb to

those who know what to look for. It may range from traditional (index finger longer than the middle finger) to bizarre (enormous purple birthmark from ear to shoulder).

The Need

The Need continually reminds a character that the Urge is not a natural part of him: it is something very *other* riding inside him. This Urge has a Need, something that must be fulfilled often. Needs can range from rather mundane things (running through trees) to dangerous (climbing high buildings) to horrific (kill small animals, eat human flesh).

The key is to make your Need something that your character will not enjoy doing, and may be quite opposed to. If you play a vegetarian clothes merchant, his Urge's Need may be as simple as eat raw meat.

The Need will manifest in the following situations: when Stamina or Will has been reduced to 0 that day, you have failed to control the Urge in a Humanity versus Urge contest that day, or you have been in confrontational contact with another Urge-cursed person. A player may choose to ignore the Urge, in which case the GM will call for a Humanity vs. Urge roll. (This roll receives a bonus to the Urge pool for each time the Need has not been met.) If the player fails this roll, his character will frenzy, becoming bestial and hunting down his Need (and often indulging his Aspect as well). While the player is still in control of the character during this time, the GM has "over-ride" rights if the player shows restraint in sending his character head-long into a maniacal frenzy. The episode lasts as long as the GM deems appropriate, but 12 hours is an appropriate amount of time.

Example of character creation:

I want to make a character in Urge that centers on mystery and darkness. I decide his name will be Victor Hart, and he's a private detective – or at least used to be.

For his scores, I place 4 in Stamina, 3 in Will, and 3 in Urge. Victor's always been rather active, with all his skulking in dark alleys and the like, but succumbs to temptation a little too easy. I'll give Stamina the description of Hunter. He's not really an outdoorsman, but he's spent his career professionally hunting people, so it seems to fit. For Will, I choose Purpose. Zest might fit Victor, and Vengeance is easy to make a hook for, but Purpose seems to be interesting. Thinking about what that means, I decide Victor was doing some P.I. work trying to find a dead-beat dad when his powers manifested. He was watching the dead-beat from an abandoned building across the street and noticed him involved in some hard-

core drug dealing. Unfortunately, he'd been noticed, and two thugs snuck up on Victor to teach him a lesson. He ran, and suddenly he noticed how dark he'd grown, able to hide anywhere, and no one able to find him. Skulking across the street, he walked into the dead-beat's house, took the smack without even being noticed, managed to sell it for a good profit, and got his client her child support. He realized he had these powers for a purpose – he was somehow the angel of helping people out of the darkness. This story could be improved later, but it works for now.

For Victor's Urge aspect, I think for a while and consider Hunger. Victor's always had a taste for fine food, good drink, and loose women. That's too easy, though – the Urge should be antithetical to the character's morals. I end up choosing Dominance, which means Victor may have problems not using his powers to end up ruling the dark alleys instead of protecting people there.

Victor's Humanity starts at 4, equal to his Stamina.

His Cover's easy – I've already decided he's a P.I. His Price, though, takes more thought. I decide on a Price of 'Lustful'. Victor's rather obvious when he's attracted to women, and he's attracted to most of them. He receives a –1 on social interactions with women because of his abject forwardness. For his Mark, I decide he's got a uni-brow – his eyebrows grow all the way from one way to the other. (This is actually considered a classic sign of a werewolf.)

For Victor's Need, I'm going to play it simple – kill humans. This seems too easy, but he's never killed before. He's done some shady things, but that was a line he wouldn't cross until now.

Urge powers should be easy as well. Victor's Will is 3, so I pick to pick three. I mentioned Skulk in the backstory, so I get that first. To fit his P.I. background and character concept, I'm going to choose Empathy and Attraction, both for use in information gathering.

*The Kicker, mentioned in **Sorcerer**, is probably the most important part of character creation. Don't let players get away with using the advent of their powers as a Kicker. If you read the rules for **Urge** closely, someone with the Urge could spend their entire life in relative seclusion and not ever have to fulfill their Urge or Need. Each character needs a reason to get up and go. For Victor, I'm going to say that he woke up this morning to read in the newspaper that three hookers had been killed the night before. He yawned, opened the refrigerator for some orange juice, and all three hookers' heads were sitting on the shelf. That should get some action underway.*

Chapter II: Urge Abilities

The Urge inside each character is manifested as preternatural abilities that surge through the character like primordial adrenaline. The intense feeling of raging pleasure when they manifest is an amazing release to the pent-up predator inside, but a dangerous feeling to enjoy.

Almost all of these powers have a visual or otherwise-sensory manifestation, which is set by the player and GM. This manifestation should be subtle but dramatic. For example, a character using Frighten might look momentarily bigger, darker, or more bestial. However, it's important to note that the basic Urge abilities are not physical in nature (not even Burst of Strength): they're mental and spiritual abilities, pushing the physical body beyond what it thinks it can do. (But, see advanced Urge abilities below for some physical transformation madness.)

A character has abilities from the list below equal to her Will, and almost all powers use the Urge score for their dice.

In a scene or a combat, a character may use her powers a number of time equal to her Stamina before she becomes fatigued. Keep track of each time she uses a power; when she uses them more times than her Stamina, she takes 1 non-lethal damage per use.

Animal Control. You can roll Urge vs. target's Urge to control animals. You cannot speak to animals, and cannot give them specific commands, but can change their general emotions, ranging from instilling fear to challenging an animal to begging sympathy to attracting help. The number of animals controlled at one time equals your Urge score, which may be doubled for especially small animals (rats and the like).

Attraction. People find you strangely charismatic on a Urge vs. Will roll. This is not a normal charisma—it carries a feeling of excitement, thrill, and danger.

Burst of Strength. You can add your Urge score to Stamina for one action, during which all other scores are reduced to 1. Repeated uses of *Burst of Strength* for successive actions will result in 1 lethal damage per round.

Empathy. On a successful Urge vs. Will roll, you can detemine the overwhelming thought on one person or creature's mind. The "overwhelming thought" is defined as whatever is most occupying that person or creature's mind at the moment. Looking at a rookie bank robber commit-

ting his first heist, all pale and sweaty, you might get a sensation of the word "Cops" repeated over and over. Watching a bored construction worker, you might get an image of his sexual fantasy involving the boss's secretary and wife.

Fast. You may add your Urge score to your Stamina for purposes of determining your speed in combat. In addition, you may perform extra actions in each round for the cost of 1 non-lethal damage per action. You can also use this power for running, in which case your Stamina and Urge are added for rolls.

Frighten. You can cause fear in people on a Urge vs. Will roll. The reaction of the target is up to the GM: general actions for people are freeze, flee or fight. (If the player scores three or more successes, the target *will* flee.) Either way, the terror causes the target to lose its next action.

Mark. You can roll Urge vs. a target's Will score to permanently Mark the individual. Success means anyone or anything with a Urge score of 1 or higher will perceive the target as Marked, permanently. A Mark is not perceptible to individuals without a Urge score, including the target. The Mark is not a visually perceptible thing-instead, it manifests as a sort of psychic beacon. When someone who is Marked stands in a crowd with others, any one with a Urge score of 1 or higher (including animals) will automatically notice that person first.

Perception. You may add your Urge score to whatever score you are using for perception-based rolls. Exactly what you perceive must be defined when taking this power—hearing, scent, sight, or something else. When you would not normally be afforded a perception roll, you may roll only Urge.

Rage. The character can make a standard Urge vs. Humanity roll to change his hand-to-hand attacks from non-lethal to lethal damage for the rest of a combat. The character becomes enraged and manically violent, biting the victim, clawing and scratching, and generally being bestial. No non-combat actions can be taken until the enemy is dead unless a Humanity vs. Urge roll is made.

Skulk. Your Urge is subtracted from the Perception dice of any one who might perceive you (to a minimum of 1). This power can be turned on and off, but the character must have some sort of obscurement, however minimal (for example, shadows) for it to work.

Tough. You convert damage victories up to your Urge score taken from lethal weapons to the non-lethal damage table. This ability has no effect on non-lethal damage or special damage (heat, gas, fire, electricity, or what not.)

Vitality. Dice of lasting damage up to your Urge score are removed after combat, as opposed to half the damage.

Advanced Urge abilities

The predator inside each character is capable of much, much more than these basic abilities. Only the character's resistance to losing control over himself prevents physical manifestations of these abilities.

If the player chooses to, the character may let that control slip. This is represented by an Urge vs. Humanity roll, representing the moral dilemma the character must overcome in order to let loose the predator. If the roll is successful, the character loses one point of Humanity and can then exercise an advanced ability that corresponds to his Urge's basic abilities. For example, if he has the ability Frighten, he may use Shatter. The use of this ability lasts for one narrative scene or one combat.

Advanced abilities are listed by their corresponding basic abilities.

(Animal Control) Lord of Beasts. You can instinctually understand the thoughts and sounds of all
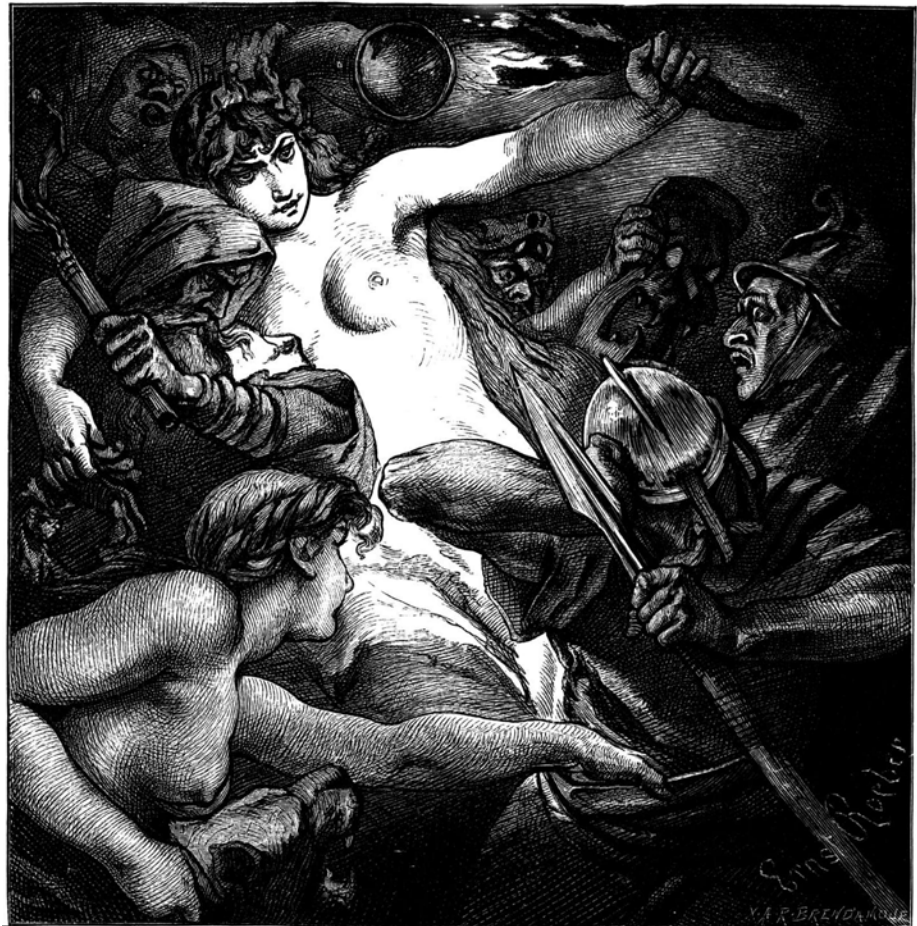
beasts. Your presence is so dominating that any and all beasts around you will follow your bidding: you can give them complete commands, although overly complex commands may not be understood. If an animal would challenge you for leadership (as may happen in alpha canines, large animals such as elephants, or the like) you may add your Urge to your Will and roll against their Will.

(Attraction) Dominate. You may command humans. You have a pool of dice equal to your Urge + Will that you use versus a target's Will in order to command them. If you wish to Dominate more than one person, you can, but your Urge + Will pool is split by the number of persons you are Dominating.

(Burst of Strength) Monster. You grow in size and stature, becoming very bestial. You may become extremely hairy, your jaw may jut out, your eyes sink in. Your Urge is added to your Stamina for the rest of the scene or until you choose to transform back.

(Empathy) Read. Choose one sentient target. For the rest of the scene or combat, you are aware of that target's actions an instant before they commit them, and can act to foil those actions. If they are going to attack you in some way, you get a complete action to avoid them (for example, they plan to shoot you, so you jump behind a crate). If there is no way to avoid them, you still get an extra die to dodge them.

(Fast) Unfettered. Your movement is not stopped by normal means. You can climb walls, cliffs, buildings, or anything vertical as fast as you can run. You cannot fly, but you can leap and dive from heights, curling into a ball to roll and cushion your landing. (As a general rule, take 1 Stamina non-lethal damage per story you fall.)

(Frighten) Shatter. This works much like Frighten, but on a Urge vs. target's Will roll, you literally shatter their idea of reality, putting sheer terror in their hearts. Their reaction is up to the GM, but common actions are self-defecation, chewing one's tongue off, falling to the ground, or vomiting. The target takes one lethal damage per success.

(Mark) Warp. You can warp and atrophy the flesh of others by touch. On a successful touch, roll your Urge vs. the target's Stamina. If you succeed, reduce the target's Stamina by the number of successes permanently. This may be used for more than damage-you may permanently alter someone's features.

(Perception) Foresight. This power is unique in that it is used after an action occurs. When a result occurs because of a direct action on the part of the character that the player wishes had not happened, the character may activate this power, and game time reverses to the point of the afore-mentioned action, the result itself merely being a premonition.

Example: Karl (the character) opens a warehouse door, only to be raked by gunfire from inside. Peter, Karl's player, isn't so keen on this, and has Karl activate Foresight. The Urge vs. Humanity roll is successful, and game time reverses to the point in which Karl was going to open the door. He places his hand on the knob and sees an image of getting raked by gunfire.

(Rage) Rend. Your hands and feet grow into razor-sharp claws, hooks, or whatever. This makes you capable of ripping through cloth, plastic, soft metals and increases your damage to X + 2 lethal damage.

(Skulk) Shadow. You very literally become a shadow, able to fade into any darkened area. You may pass through any small opening (for example, you could go through a locked door, but not a wall.)

(Tough) Ignore. You can ignore pain. While you still take damage, you do not feel it. Tally up damage victories as normal: each round roll Urge + Stamina vs. the number of victories you should be suffering. If you succeed, ignore those victories. They easily may rise higher than Stamina-this will be incredibly painful once Ignore wears off.

(Vitality) Regenerate. Any and all Stamina damage you may have taken is healed. This is often incredibly painful-all scores are reduced to 1 for one round.

Lethal and non-lethal damage

In my campaigns, I use a slightly different combat system than the one presented in Sorcerer. The specifics are not necessary, but I do refer to lethal and non-lethal damage within these rules. Put simply, lethal damage is lasting damage that can kill you. If enough lethal damage is taken, you can die. Non-lethal damage represents bruises, scrapes, and most psychic damage, and cannot kill you, but can knock you out instead.

At the end of a combat, all lethal damage stays with you. All non-lethal damage can be shrugged off, and results in only one lasting damage penalty.

Chapter III: Running Urge

"McGee ... don't make me angry. You wouldn't like me when I'm angry."
David Banner, *The Incredible Hulk*

So, after all these rules, how do you run this thing? What is *Urge* about, anyway?

First, forget the standard "adventuring party" milieu. One of the first things I had to deal with when writing *Urge* was the fact that a party of these monsters was never going to work – they'd eat each other alive in a matter of sessions. *Urge* is made to be run with one GM and one, or perhaps two, players. Two actually seems to work well, as you can play off the "united in alienation" card – two freaks of nature shunned by all society find comfort in each other. (I actually love the idea of freaks in love, but that's up to you and your players. This *does* change the theme of the game significantly, so be forewarned.)

When running *Urge*, remember that its focus is on alienation. Your character is a person with something tremendously powerful trapped inside him,

something he can control only for a short time. The fact that he does have a chance to be a hero should reinforce this alienation: while he can make the world a better place, he will be reviled for it. *Urge* is about seeing how long your character can ride that wild thing, and what he can do with it. *Urge* is about making your character try to form human relationships, and then watching them be destroyed. *Urge* is about making a difference in a world where you're not wanted or understood. *Urge* is about making those last five minutes of your life count.

How does an *Urge* adventure go, then? What propels these themes? Individual GM's may have their own styles, but I choose to go with the classic in this genre: *The Incredible Hulk.*

Step 1: Set-up

Each session should take place somewhere different, your character being run out of town at the end of the previous episode. *Urge* characters are drifters, and the beginning of an episode should begin with a huge bang introducing the character to the problems in a new town, and to the first relationship he will form. A few examples are:

- The character is eating a meal in the corner of a local diner, and a gun-man comes in to hold it up. A pretty, earthy waitress should be taken hostage, or threatened with assault, driving the character to act.
- The character is staying in a boarding house when the gas main breaks; a cabinet falls on another guest, or the owner of the house; or some other disaster happens. Whatever the disaster, it should be tailored so that the character cannot save the victim without relying on his powers.
- The character sees a small child being abducted by a stranger, and has to rescue the child.

The character will obviously not want to use his powers openly. As much as people like to be saved, they're not so fond of being saved by an aberrant demon-possessed dude. The point is to let the character *not* use his powers while putting the character in a situation where he will form a relationship, and will be looked to as a hero.

This set-up scene should be quick and impacting. Action should be kept at a maximum, immediately giving the character a 'hook' into the new location, and impressing on the character a sense of his purpose in the town. Although the initial action scene and the actual threat in the session may be unrelated, they should be somehow tied thematically. For example, if the session opens with the character saving someone from a flipped-over, burning car, the session should be about saving the defenseless trapped

and surrounded by insurmountable danger, whether that be someone trapped in a burning building, or a broke mother about to have her livelihood taken away by ruthless businessmen.

Step 2: Complacency

After the initial set-up, let the session lull a bit. Let the character deepen the relationship he's formed, and let things seem calm. During this time, you can emphasize the ambience of the small town the session's taking place in. (You *can* run *Urge* in a large city. In that case, though, instead of wondering from place to place, the character might be a wanderer within the town, drifting from neighborhood to neighborhood, or even from subway station to subway station.)

Generally, each town the character shows up in should be small enough that people start to recognize him within a few days. He probably will gain some sort of simple employment, perhaps a part-time job as a mechanic or short-order cook or something equally appropriate to the drifter-handyman image. During this stage, contrast the underlying creepiness most small towns have with the natives' friendliness towards a visitor, keeping the character looking for a hidden threat while he gets invited to dinner at widows' homes.

Step 3: Shitstorm

Finish Step 2 by letting the character get as comfortable as possible. At this point, the character should have prospects in the town. He should have hopes that 'this might be the place I could settle down.' In whatever relationship has been pushed to the fore-front, he should be in a place where trust is just beginning to emerge. To be completely blunt, if the character has a relationship with someone of the opposite sex, they should have just fucked for the first time.

At this point, bring the hidden threat out. You can start slow, maybe by having the character notice things going wrong or odd people being around, but you should soon drive the worry, pain, or fear into a frenzy, forcing the character into immediate action. As soon as the character takes action, respond with further conflict, driving the scene into a spiral of emotional and physical discord.

Then – have the hidden threat emerge as the character finally gets comfortable. He should be a stage in his relationship with whoever where they are just beginning to trust one another. To be blunt – if it's with a person of the opposite sex, they should have just fucked. If the threat can be

tied into the initial bang, all the better. The gunman who tried to hold up the diner might come back with friends to "get the idiot who stopped them, and take that little waitress piece of meat, too." Build this up into a rip-roaring ending that the character can not possibly not use his powers and still escape from. The most important thing to do here is: at the session's climax – *always have the focus of the character's relationship present.* They *must* see the character for what he is.

Step 4: Resolution

The resolution of the preceding scene is the rest of the session. Does the character's companion run for the authorities? Is their mind broken in horror? Do they keep it to themselves, but ask the character to go away? Or – worst – do they accept what the character is, but the character himself becomes too afraid of what he might do with his powers? The only resolution to any of these is leaving town permanently and finding somewhere else to live for a few weeks. This scene should be played for massive pathos, and leave the character, and quite possibly the character's companion, with mixed emotions – a feeling of longing combined with fear, guilt, anger, or any mix of the above.

Last piece of advice

Without fail, go to http://www.incrediblehulktvseries.com/ and read the episode guide. Each and every one of these episodes falls within or near the framework I've laid out above, and there's a myriad of ideas you can cull from the page. An excerpt:

David [Banner] emerges from one of his transformations, at the scene of a murder. Believing that the creature [The Hulk] might have killed a young model, David attempts to "put together" the events leading up to the murder by investigating the crime scene and the characters close to the model during her last hours.

How can this *not* be an excellent idea for a scenario? This web site may be the most valuable resource for any *Urge* game on the Internet.

Running an Urge campaign

While the standard *Urge* scenario's got all the angst and gloom you might want in role-playing, how does one keep this going? Running the same game each week in different settings reinforces the theme of *Urge*, but how does one keep it interesting?

The *Urge* campaign relies on one of the easiest tricks in the GM's toolbox: the overarching threat. In the *Hulk* comic books, the Hulk's most prevalent enemy is the United States Army, and specifically, General Ross, the father of Betty Ross. This is incredibly overwrought, as the comic Hulk is amazingly powerful, but a government organization hell-bent on capturing the Urge-inflicted character and learning about him for their own military purposes provides a consistent background threat that will drive the character onward.

In the *Hulk* television show, Jack McGee, a burnt-out reporter wanting to revive his career while saving people from a rampaging beast (actually modeled after the character of Javert in Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*), follows the Hulk all over the country, staying just a few steps behind David Banner at all times. This sort of minor threat – especially to the character's identity instead of to his health – is a perfect element to up the tension from episode to episode. Your *Urge* campaign could have a reporter, a scientist bent on discovering the origin of the Urge, or any other nosy investigative type following reports of a monster around the country. This sort of character is easily implemented later in the campaign, as well, as a family member or a lover of someone the Urge-inflicted character has killed or harmed.

As a last sort of threat – the GM should not ignore the possibility of other Urge-cursed wanderers in the world. You may decide that the protagonist of your campaign is one of a kind, but allowing the possibility of other Urge-inflicted people allows for some amazing conflicts, especially if others hunt the protagonist. The Urge-possessed do not necessarily like one another or feel camaraderie: remembering the rules for the Need, even being in contact with another person infected with the Urge drives characters into Need. The demons of Urge are not friendly towards one another, and are instead malicious, territorial, solitary beings that would prefer to destroy each other than see one of their kind live. *This* is the largest physical threat in *Urge*, and should certainly not be overused (GM's, listen: **Do not overuse. Do not overuse. Please. It will get trite as fuck. Thank you.**), but when used sparsely, can drive episodes into dramatic frenzy.

And dramatic frenzy is what *Urge* is all about.