

# MIRRORS™

the World of Darkness





# MIRRORS™



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# She Lives In Mirrors

By Wood Ingham

Let's get this absolutely straight: nobody in her right mind runs onto a pier as a means of escape. But when you're running fast enough, like Rebecca is now, you're not thinking of where you're going. You're thinking about where you're getting away from as fast as you possibly can, far away, each foot feeling like it's tangled with the other. Your arms flail around, reaching forward for a way out. You fall around corners, your shoulder colliding with one of those machines where you put in a quarter and try to grab a cuddly toy and never can. You use lamp posts as fulcrums for headlong dives down alleys.

And it's coming behind her, the clatter of shoes on the boardwalk, heels clattering impossibly, inhumanly fast. Rebecca is trying every door, every fairground ride, the gift shop, the ghost train, the Wax Museum, the Chamber

of Horrors, the Hall of Knives, the Gallery of Grotesques, the Stitching Room, the Helter Skelter, and the Fun House. She dives past windows stuffed with things she only sees out of the corner of an eye — two-headed babies in jars of formaldehyde, strings of shrunken heads, broken clown masks, death masks of Abraham Lincoln and Lee Harvey Oswald, and the Unknown of the Seine, faded skin mags, whips and chains, an Iron Maiden — and here's a door that opens. Rebecca's inside and back against the door and breathing so hard, so fast, each gasp accompanying a little yelp, a little cry of fear and pain from the stitch in her side and relief, because it hasn't got her yet.

And then it's all quiet, and she can only hear her breath, and she calms herself down as much as she can and takes stock of where she is. She's in the dark. No windows here,





the only light the dawn sunshine peeping in, a narrow knife-sharp blade of light, picking out motes of dust, illuminating the room she's in only dimly. She can't hear anything. She's next to a ticket kiosk, in a little foyer with a wide door on the other side. She thinks, maybe there's a light switch somewhere here, but the only way into the ticket booth is from the back. So she gets up and tries the door, and it's open, and she can see. The hall goes on forever, and there she is, facing herself, all running mascara and messed up filthy hair and filthy gutter-water on her jeans and a sleeve half-torn off her T-shirt and bruises on her face and arms.

And to her right, another her, only wide and distorted and wobbly in the middle, gaps appearing in her midriff as Rebecca looks up and down.

"Okay. Hall of Mirrors," she says.

She knows how places like this work. Somewhere around here, not too far from the entrance, she'll find a door that says "NO EXIT," or "STAFF ONLY," and she'll slip through that and find a cloakroom or maybe a bathroom or somewhere else or a little office with a phone in it she can use to call Jen or Ellie or one of the Rachels and get somewhere far away and safe.

The only way is in. This is how you find your way around a maze: you put your hand on one of the outer walls and follow that side, wherever it takes you, because eventually, no matter how long it takes you, you get to the middle and then you get to an exit, and in a place like this you're going to find multiple exits, because it's the law to have fire exits, right? And at least one exit for the staff? Except Rebecca can't see a sign pointing to



a fire exit. But that doesn't mean there isn't one. Because there has to be.

Left against the outside wall, which has a mirror of its own, Rebecca follows, turns a corner, and pulls her hand away suddenly as she feels fingers rather than glass. She turns and looks at the mirror.

She's there in the reflection, only it's not the same: she's in a kind of white robe, spotted with blood at the throat and shoulders. A metal collar is around her neck; the reflection stares at Rebecca with a dreamy look in her eyes. As Rebecca watches open-mouthed, someone tugs on the chain and Rebecca's reflection backs into the mirror. She leans forward and sees herself led — willingly, eyes closed, mouth open — into the middle of what looks like some sort of chapel decorated with bones and skulls and crosses and spears hanging over all the walls and she's trussed up, hands and feet, without any objection. Two figures in black monk habits with hoods attach another chain to her feet and help her up as she's hoisted above the altar. One of the monks pulls out a straight razor and slashes open her throat and the blood flows into the cup held by a celebrant who looks like some sort of deadly pale debauched nun. The blood is over the sides and onto her hands and the nun mouths words that Rebecca cannot hear, and a church full of ashy congregants bow their heads in an attitude of prayer.

Rebecca's too surprised to be afraid. She rubs her eyes and turns around, but on the facing side of the corridor the same thing's happening, except the nun is up close and she is the nun, lips so very red and skin so white and eyes like black glass beads and a mouthful of teeth like tiny white needles. Rebecca's re-





lection drinks from the chalice and the spilled gore runs over her hands and over her chin in little trickles. And she closes those horrible empty eyes and licks her lips in an ecstasy that isn't religious, and Rebecca closes her eyes too and walks in the most measured way she can around the corner to a place where she cannot see.

And again, she walks straight into herself. This time her reflection wears a bridal gown made of what looks like white butterflies, little shifting presences, stitched together and stitched to her perfect chest and shoulders, tiny dots of blood showing up the stitch marks, her hair tied up with wicked bone pins, face blank and empty and made up like a doll and her lips in a red rosebud smile. A creature like a man with the eyes of a bug comes up behind her and cups her breasts with many-fingered tendrils, and moves his bristly insectile face to kiss her neck and the reflection opens her mouth and lifts her neck to receive his kiss, and keeps those eyes open and glassy. His tongue comes out and out and it's so long and curling it goes all around her neck and constricts, and she gags slightly as he strangles her with his desire...

She watches as the Moth Prince takes her away and begins to dance with her, caressing her body all over. Touching her under and through the butterfly-dress with his sticky, curling, whiplike tongue. And she moves formally and stiffly, hands flat and held in one position always, fingers together, and her face never loses the expression of blank contentment, her eyes never closing or blinking...

And Rebecca looks over her shoulder and she's the doll in the butterfly dress again. But here her eyes are faceted and glittery-gold and she smiles and turns into the room. She con-

tinues with insect-doll precision to sew butterflies onto the abdomen of a naked woman whose hands and feet are bound to a wall in a crucifixion pose with sticky thread and strange looking nails that look like huge bee-stingers. And the woman on the wall, looking down on her and talking to her — Rebecca knows this — isn't begging her to stop. She's begging her to keep going.

Rebecca surprises herself. She isn't scared. She fascinated. She tells herself it's grotesque, knows it's grotesque, but presses her hand to the glass and stares and stares and loses focus for a moment until she notices she's only staring into her own face, holding her lips close to her own lips and her reflection is exactly who she is.

She stands up straight, screws up her eyes, and shakes her head. But behind her eyelids, she sees herself sewing butterflies onto skin. And a little bit of her wonders what that must be like. She pushes the thought as far back into her head as she can.

"I'm seeing things," she says out loud, "I've been through too much. I haven't slept. I should get out of here."

But Rebecca cannot find a door, only mirrors, and each mirror shows her a distorted reflection. In each, she stands and faces herself and moves away. Each mirror serves, Rebecca understands, as a warning or a temptation. And sometimes she is not sure which is which.

Rebecca sees what she could be, and Rebecca knows that all of these things are in some way true, that all of them exist, in the way you know things in dreams that haven't been spelled out and yet were always like this: you always had wings, or your father is a snake, or your fingers were forever made of wood.



She turns to the left: Rebecca's reflection is wearing an office suit, but as she turns away, she is not in an office, rather in some sort of fake Hindu temple in someone's apartment; she removes her clothes, one item at a time, and hangs each up carefully in a wardrobe, and then she takes off her skin completely, from under the throat, and from inside Rebecca's dead skin steps a young woman, a stranger, with a shaved head and an androgynous cast of features — except it's not a woman, or a man, but something else, because she's got breasts and a penis at the same time. And the figure who wore Rebecca like a skin folds her up and puts her in a box.

And the opposite mirror: she's got the shaved head now, and she's got magic in her hands. She floats in the perfect blue sky, and the white silk she wears flutters up around her body and reveals she is neither he nor she but both. Her hands and eyes sparkle, and she turns and swoops onto a third-world village full of men and women and children who try to shoot her with automatic rifles; the bullets dissolve before they hit her skin. She/he calls down lightning that scorches ground and makes huts that must have been full of more than just people explode as if they'd been struck by an air strike. Rebecca points at the gun-toting people, who go blind, or clutch their heads as blood streams from eyes and ears and mouths, or vomit toads and snakes that turn and bite them, and she/he laughs as people die in pain and fire.

She should be horrified. When she sees what she does to the children. When she sees what little chance those people had. And she tries to think about that. But this other thought comes up: what must it be like to be

like that, to be changed like that? To have lightning and plagues come at your whim?

Another left turn: she's made of patchwork pieces, stapled together, red welts and scars with bluish edges, watery mismatched eyes, and the field of flowers in which she stands wilts around her feet; she turns and runs, and each step kills a patch of foliage; and she runs from something many-legged and many-mouthed, that slobbers poisons on the ground, and she cannot outrun it. It bears her down on the ground and she disappears into the flowers, and they die in a growing patch of black around her and the thing looks like it's eating.

And in this one, she's still patchwork but now she's doing the eating, chasing down a man made of clay, the many-legged things working at her command. She catches the man, bears him down, kills white flowers and summer grass, poisons the ground, makes the very air around her go dark, and then the whole air goes dark. The black angel descends from above her on a dozen insect-wings, its calf's head and its lion's head and its ass's head screaming something silent and terrible, its arms holding spears wreathed in lightning, and she is not surprised; she kneels (her knees creating spreading decay on the ground, intersecting with decay already made by the chaos of running feet) and she offers it a head of clay and flesh, torn off with her bare hands, and steaming viscous fluids run from her mouth that drip to the ground and burns holes in it. And the thing blesses her, and she is pleased...

Rebecca feels nothing at all at these images; that worries her more in some respect than simply wanting it.



She watches herself stand there and the spider crawls into her mouth, and she clutches at the thing, and writhes, but more follow, and swarms of the things invade her through her mouth, nose, eyes, ears; cobwebs seep from her skin and cocoon her, make what's left of her eyes milky and empty. And then mandibles erupt from her mouth and her legs wither as new legs, four, six, eight erupt from an abdomen that distends, and she screams again, but it's a scream of hunger and rage...

Rebecca turns from this picture. She sees a spider on the floor in front of her, as if it's challenging her. She stamps on it, moves on.

Ahead and to the right: she's herself, broadly. She walks up to herself armed with a flashlight and a shotgun cocked under one arm, flashes herself in the face, and then leaps to the other side of a vaulted corridor that gives the impression of being a very long way underground but which conforms to the same shape as the Hall of Mirrors. The reflection appears ready to face... *something*. She's got her back pressed against the damp black bricks, and she's sweating as a shadow appears around the corner, ready to defend herself but terrified, and the shadow waits, and the reflection waits, and then the shadow darts out with a bloodied arm holding a bloodied butcher's knife, thrusts it up through the soft flesh of the reflection's chin into her brain and her eyes widen and she drops the shotgun and torch and twitches, and the lights go out in those still-wide eyes and the woman holding the knife frees it and lets Rebecca's reflection, suddenly drenched in blood from the face down, slump to the floor...

Rebecca puts her hand to her throat, licks her lip, and turns around.





And the opposing mirror shows her again in the same place, only now her eyes are dead and her shirt's covered in blood and she's holding the knife. Someone comes up behind her, a clean-cut young man who Rebecca recognizes as Steve, stupid unfaithful bastard Steve, and he's holding a gun. She turns around and stabs him with such force it goes straight through the bone in his forehead, and she pulls it out and stabs him again and stabs him again, even though he's dead and forever surprised. Holding him by the throat, deftly wielding the tip of the knife, she gouges out his eyeballs and pops them into her mouth one by one, each time chewing so the vitreous humor dribbles out of the corner of her mouth. The mirror-image looks up at Rebecca and smiles at her with a mouth filled with black blood and other fluids...

Rebecca retches. But at the same time, she's thought about stabbing Steve at night more than once, in her darker moments, him and Jackie who she trusted and... and Rebecca turns away. But she does not run, does not try to avoid seeing what she is seeing. And now, each time, each mirror brings with it a terrible fascination, and the dawning of something terrible.

Like this one, around a right turn, where she is naked with a big man, and he's kissing her and touching her tenderly, and she's liking it, but he gets bigger as she watches and enjoyment turns to pain as the man grows hairier and his mouth extends into a muzzle and his hands turn to massive claws, and he tears her to shreds and eats her as she cries out in fear and in something else...

And now, its twin, and this time, it's Rebecca who becomes a wolf, and pursues a

man she had been laughing with and teasing — he looks over his shoulder, it's Steve again, black-eyed, bloody, but Steve — chases him through woods and over a gray stony bluff until he falls and she pounces and eats him, piece by piece, and oh what big teeth she has as she howls at the moon.

And here Rebecca wonders what Steve's flesh would taste like.

To the left: in this mirror, Rebecca is standing paralyzed with terror at something out of view, and she breaks and runs, and now Rebecca can see it, a howling wisp of angry face and wringing hands that rub together much faster than hands should, twitch, twitch, twitch, and she trips and it's on her and it screams in her face and forces her mouth open and climbs in. And it wears her, like a coat, and she moves awkwardly, like the legs are not hers and her eyes are blank and white, and she returns to the mirror and beats against the other side of it with her fists and screams mindlessly at Rebecca.

And Rebecca stands and stares, and waits for her to go away, before she turns round and sees...

Herself again, getting up from the car wreck that propelled her through the windshield and sent her flying twenty feet, and the screaming wispy thing is all around her; without knowing what she's doing, she grasps at it and kisses it, pulls it close to her, swallows it whole. She convulses and begins to laugh, and looks at her fingers, sees the wisps of death that surround them, as she stands among the wreckage and the bodies.

Survival is everything, thinks Rebecca. Life is everything. She knows enough that death is something to be scared of, but it oc-



curs to her that in this world, if she has the will she does not have to die, or at least, not completely. At the same time, aiming for survival carries terrible risks...

Three turns later: Rebecca, black-lipped, black clad, rings in her ears and nose, a little solid-black upside-down star tattooed on her forehead, turns and raises a hand and a man — Steve again, but Steve with scars and tattoos he does not have, and a knife he does not know how to use — falls to his knees, weeping, face in hands. And then she lifts his chin and smiles into his face, and vomits fire on him. He writhes, and clutches at his face. And other men, who have just come into the room, stop and pause and she lifts her hands, and they run, each of them, rather than face what they have just seen in her eyes...

She catches her breath. She's seen so many of these things. This one does not surprise her.

Around the very next corner, the next mirror to the last one: Rebecca's hair is cut brutally short, messily, like it was done with a combat knife, and she's in fatigues, and she beats a monster who stands in front of a door to ash with a chair leg. She opens the door; Rebecca gets a glimpse of a dozen snarling faces, claws; and the reflection stands in the middle, takes off her jacket, saying something brief and pressing something in her other hand, blasting them all to nothing...

Rebecca is left looking at herself again, slumped against the mirror, shoulder and face against shoulder and face. She turns, puts her back against the mirror, and slides to the ground. In front of her is plain wall, a door

marked "EXIT" and next to it, a wooden chair. She stands up and grasps the chair by its back and swings it, and the mirror shatters; a tiny shard of glass grazes her cheeks, draws a tiny drop of blood she does not notice. The noise destroys the oppressive silence that ruled in here, and breaks something in Rebecca's head. She rounds the corner and does it again, the first time bouncing right off, the second making sharp silvery glass rain to the floor, the shattering like music to her, and again, and again, and again, each mirror she's looked into falls to pieces, creating a carpet of shards, and in each shard an eye, part of a mouth, a finger.

Still wholly possessed by the need to destroy something, she turns the chair upside down, puts her foot against it, strains like mad to free a leg that comes away with a noise like a shriek, and she hefts it in her hand and heads for the exit.

She opens the door. It's dark again outside. She was here all day. No one came, no one opened the place up. It was just her. And the mirrors. And Rebecca realizes she does not care. She hefts the chair leg in her hand and shouts out: "Come and get me. Come and get me!"

Five figures appear from nowhere, surrounding her.

"I don't have to be a victim," she says.

You don't, says the woman in the middle, a short, dark-haired, birdlike woman dressed like a secretary. This was part of the thing. You don't have to run. It's up to you, really.

She does not trust them. She goes with them. She embraces the possibilities.



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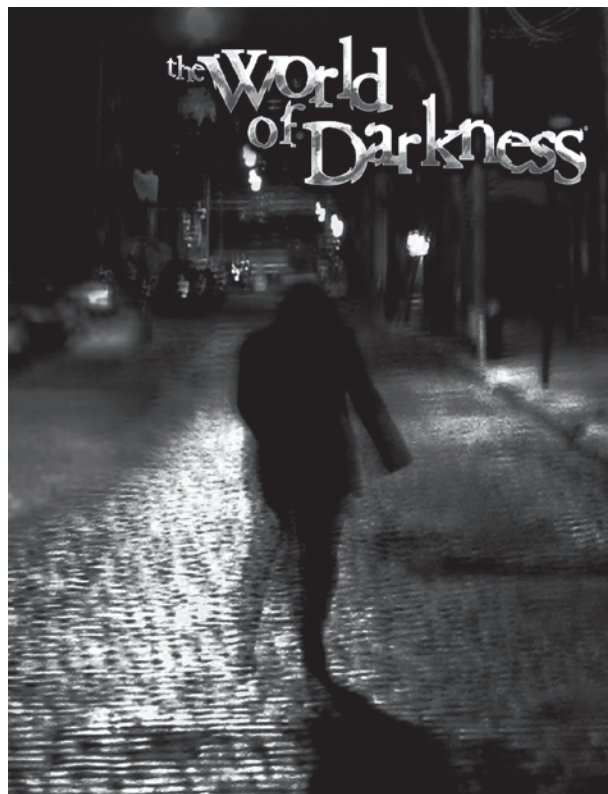
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# Introduction: Welcome to the Toolbox

Man is a tool-using animal. Nowhere do you find him without tools; without tools he is nothing, with tools he is all.

—Thomas Carlyle

A body lays on a table before you, flat on its back. Leather straps hold it to the wood. Is it alive? Does it matter? The drugs do an excellent job; let's just leave it at that.

The heart's going to be hard to extract. You need a rib-spreader, really, but you don't *have* a rib-spreader, because they don't sell those at Home Depot. So, you figure — *jigsaw*. You can adjust the height of the blade so you don't cut into the heart. Just run the saw up through the middle, and then orbit the edges until you can pop off each half of the rib cage like a sewer grate. If it's stubborn, maybe the claw-end of a hammer.

The eyes, they require a bit of finesse. Time to get culinary. A melon-baller might do the trick, but most of them are too small. But — *but!* — you ever see one of those ice cream scoopers with the sharp, wedge-like edge? The kind the pro soda jerks use? That's the guy. Dig in an edge, and use it to clip the optic nerve.

The tongue? Scissors. The hands and feet? Good old-fashioned hacksaw. Pliers for the teeth, hedge trimmers for the toes and fingers (one chop yields five toes or five fingers, and economy of movement is *always* a good thing). The rest can all get cut apart with sharp shards of mirrored glass, just because you can't stop looking at your pretty face. You're such a narcissist. Nice work!

Is the body alive? Well. It isn't anymore, look at it that way.

Are you done? Hardly. They go into the pile. Wait, what pile? The quivering, gelatinous pile of preserved limbs, brains, eyes, organs. Any time you want to build a new friend — or lover, or slave, or nemesis — you reach into the pile for the constituent parts, and find the new tools to piece him together. Duct tape? Staple gun? Pink insulation to fill the parts where organs are missing? A cattle-prod to get the heart going? An MP3 player crammed in the throat so your new pal says all the right words?

See how important it is to have the right tools for the job?

## Debug. Dissect

Options are a good thing. Cutting into a body, as described above, will make use of many tools. Take a road trip, and you'll want multiple paths to your destination — what if you want the scenic route? Or maybe mudslides have closed a main road. In a mirror, you'll preen and primp, dressing differently for different occasions — golf cleats, or kohl around the eyes, or a set of gold grills popped over the teeth.

That's what **World of Darkness: Mirrors** aims to be — a big basket teeming with options for your World of Darkness games.

We like the Storytelling System, obviously; it's meant to be simple, clean, not a lot of mess and tangle to get in the way of the narrative.

But we also recognize that it can't do everything for everyone. A hammer's a great tool. Who doesn't love a hammer? But a hammer won't cut glass; it'll only smash it. A hammer won't remove a stripped screw. A hammer won't help you extract the eyeball, or delicately pop out the fingernails.



Sometimes, you need other tools in your toolbox. Sometimes, you need options.

This book dissects the Storytelling System into its components. It spreads them out on a table, takes a good long look at them, and then attempts to replace them. Not just with one option, either — when we take a crack at the combat system, we don't give you just other approach. Oh, no. You'll get a squirming sack of possibilities, ways to dial the combat up to become more strategic, ways to dial it down so that fewer rolls translate to bigger narrative *oomph*.

Not sure that the Morality system best reflects the crazy brain that results from overexposure to the *truth* of the World of Darkness? Maybe you feel that Virtue and Vice works for some games, but not the one you're about to run? What if you're planning on running a game set in the far-flung future of the World of Darkness, or its mythic past, or are desperate to see what happens when the world is shattered in revelation and apocalypse?

Then open the book. Take a look through the many broken mirrors, each warped and distorted. Hold up the tools in each reflection. Feel the weight of the hammer as you see your pale face grinning back. Twirl the scalpel as thorn-studded vines push out of your mouth and your eyes. Rev up the blender, and see your cackling rictus reflected back.

## How to Use This Book

Preceding this intro is a piece of fiction by Howard Wood Ingham, and then, *after* this intro, you'll find...

**Chapter One: Breaking the Mirror** is about taking the core parts and systems that go into Your Character and redefining them so that you have several new approaches to creating and playing someone in the World of Darkness. Within you'll find new approaches to character creation, options to replace Virtue and Vice, how to apply a "power stat" to mortal characters, and a new look at using Merits. In addition, you'll find a new type of character: the Extraordinary Mortal (think Sherlock Holmes, Gregory House, Hannibal Lecter; a human being whose abilities are beyond the pale).

**Chapter Two: Picking Up the Pieces** is a look at the Storytelling System as a whole, and how you might hack the System at the game table to get the narrative or strategic approach the game troupe desires. Ultimately, we explode conflict resolution. Social combat? Rapport and relationships? An overflowing cornucopia of combat system changes? All contained within. In addition, you'll find a deeper look at how new or changed Morality systems might affect your story.

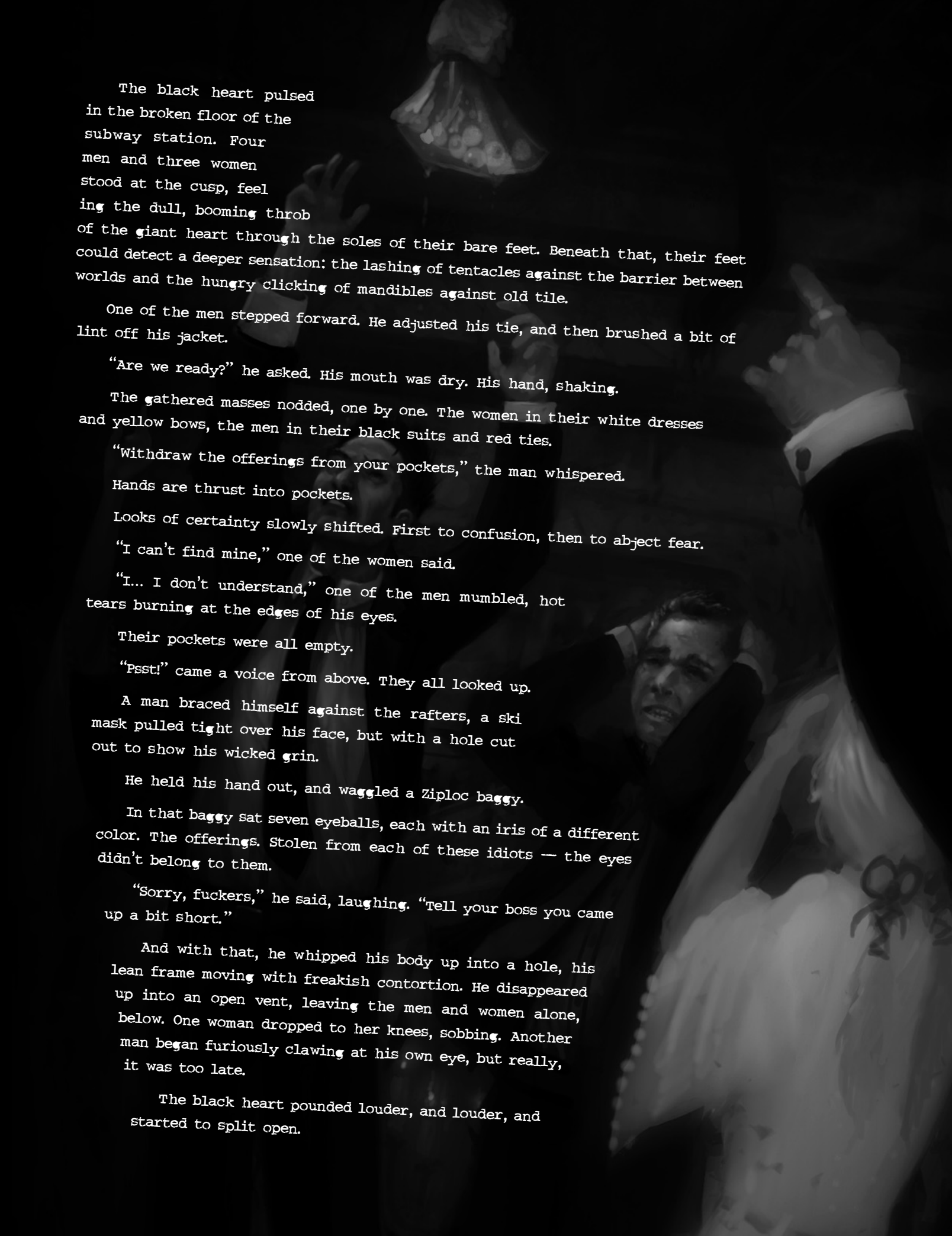
**Chapter Three: Shards** is a *setting* hack more than it is a system hack. Here you'll find four new approaches to the World of Darkness, whereupon the Storytelling System is applied in new ways. Want to witness a post-Apocalyptic future? What happens when the supernatural is revealed to the ignorant world? Want to run a World of Darkness game with the deep, rich flavor of dark fantasy with dark hero characters? This chapter has you covered.











The black heart pulsed  
in the broken floor of the  
subway station. Four  
men and three women  
stood at the cusp, feel-  
ing the dull, booming throb  
of the giant heart through the soles of their bare feet. Beneath that, their feet  
could detect a deeper sensation: the lashing of tentacles against the barrier between  
worlds and the hungry clicking of mandibles against old tile.

One of the men stepped forward. He adjusted his tie, and then brushed a bit of  
lint off his jacket.

"Are we ready?" he asked. His mouth was dry. His hand, shaking.

The gathered masses nodded, one by one. The women in their white dresses  
and yellow bows, the men in their black suits and red ties.

"Withdraw the offerings from your pockets," the man whispered.

Hands are thrust into pockets.

Looks of certainty slowly shifted. First to confusion, then to abject fear.

"I can't find mine," one of the women said.

"I... I don't understand," one of the men mumbled, hot  
tears burning at the edges of his eyes.

Their pockets were all empty.

"Psst!" came a voice from above. They all looked up.

A man braced himself against the rafters, a ski  
mask pulled tight over his face, but with a hole cut  
out to show his wicked grin.

He held his hand out, and wagged a Ziploc baggy.

In that baggy sat seven eyeballs, each with an iris of a different  
color. The offerings. Stolen from each of these idiots — the eyes  
didn't belong to them.

"Sorry, fuckers," he said, laughing. "Tell your boss you came  
up a bit short."

And with that, he whipped his body up into a hole, his  
lean frame moving with freakish contortion. He disappeared  
up into an open vent, leaving the men and women alone,  
below. One woman dropped to her knees, sobbing. Another  
man began furiously clawing at his own eye, but really,  
it was too late.

The black heart pounded louder, and louder, and  
started to split open.



# Chapter One: Breaking the Mirror

Every morning I jump out of bed and step on a landmine. The landmine is me. After the explosion, I spend the rest of the day putting the pieces together.

—Ray Bradbury,  
“Zen and the Art of Writing”

Behold, the character. On first glance, what is a character but a gathering of dots on the page with you as their shepherd? Each dot is, in its own way, a tiny mirror capturing one small part of that character’s reflection — his hands, his vanity, his fears, his dreams, his moral center. You put those elements onto the page and from them, all those little reflections add up to one larger reflection: the character as a whole, the character as he will be revealed at the game table and during the course of the story.

And yet, the array of possibilities on the page is limited. Maybe the sheet contains unseen or unrealized possibilities. Maybe the sheet — or the systems by which you will apply dots to that sheet — doesn’t quite go the distance in giving you all you need for your character, or for all the characters in the story.

This first chapter intends to take a long, hard look at all the intricacies that go into Your Character, and how you might break that mirror down further, looking at all the little requisite reflections, and reassembling them until you get the “build” you feel is apropos.

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## Seriously. It’s All Optional.

It’s easy to believe we’re putting forth “the better way,” or “the new, updated process” throughout this book. That’s not what this book is about. The old way didn’t suck. The new way isn’t necessarily better. The new way is simply *different*. A different look, a different path, a different hook. All cast in the warped bent of our own personal circus mirror. So, take what you want, discard the rest. All of this is purely, 100% non-canonical.

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## Creation Revised

Making a brand new character in the Storytelling System can be as complex or simple as players or the Storyteller choose to make it. At its core, character creation is very easy: just fill in the dots. By themselves, though, the dots don’t mean much. Oh, you can get some sense of the character by noting that it (and the character is still an “it” with just



dots) has two dots in Athletics and a Stamina of three, but it isn't until the "spark of life" step of creation in which you add background and story that you have an actual, rounded character. What we're saying here is: don't get so focused on dots and creation that you forget what those dots *mean*. Below are some options on character creation that are intended to help players and Storytellers alike create a character that fits with the story in your head. The Quick and Dirty options in particular can be used to quickly generate Storyteller controlled characters.

## Attributes

By way of review, a full explanation of exactly what Attributes stand for can be found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** on p. 42. In essence, Attributes are the building blocks of your character. They provide a framework on which you can build. Now let's shake those blocks up a bit.

### Twelve Dot Spread

Classic Attribute generation follows the standard 5/4/3 pattern. This method alters that system by combining all 12 dots into a single pool. You may place the dots in whichever Attributes you choose, but no Attribute can be raised above four. Use of this option allows for even more specialized characters than the standard method and includes the potential for playing characters that are decidedly below average in some areas, or average in all of them. This isn't entirely unrealistic. Plenty of people are highly intelligent, yet lack force of will or a developed physique. In fact, this option can aid in the creation of a character's story. Why exactly does your character have a Strength of four and a Dexterity of one? Injury, perhaps? Too much time spent on strength training and not enough on flexibility? That guy you see walking out of a gym with abs of steel and no neck, yet can't manage to scratch his own back is a good example of this.

### Three Alone

This method presents Attributes in a simpler, more generalized way by reducing the nine specific Attributes to three broad categories.

The **Mental** Attribute combines Intelligence, Wits, and Resolve.

The **Physical** Attribute combines Strength, Dexterity, and Stamina.

The **Social** Attribute combines Presence, Manipulation, and Composure.

Dot ratings for these broad Attributes are determined by nominating one Attribute as exceptional,

one as superior, and the last as average. Attributes that are nominated as exceptional and superior both have a rating of three dots, and the Attribute declared as average has a rating of two dots. Any time the exceptional Attribute is paired with a Skill from the skill-set that shares its title, that roll gains a one die bonus. The reasoning behind this (rather than just making exceptional Attributes worth four dots), is based on the framework of the Storytelling System. Three dots in an Attribute is impressive, four dots is nearing the maximum of human potential. Making an entire Attribute set equal to four dots gives that set a bit more emphasis than it, perhaps, deserves; especially for starting characters.

**Example:** *During the course of play, Howard is asked to make an Academics roll. Howard has designated his Mental Attribute as exceptional and he has an Academics score (a Mental Skill) of four. To create his pool, Howard adds four dice from his Academics rating, three dice from his Mental rating and adds a bonus die (from the exceptional Mental Attribute being used in conjunction with a Mental Skill) for a total of eight dice. If he had been asked to roll Firearms (a Physical Skill) to recall the specifics about a certain type of gun used, Howard would add his Firearms rating of two and his Mental rating of three to create a five-dice pool. The Mental + Firearms roll doesn't gain the bonus die because the skill-set title (Physical) doesn't match the Mental Attribute.*

Using this option, any time two Attributes are added together to either form a dice pool or to create a secondary trait (like Willpower), add the ratings of the two Attributes together. So, if a character with an average Physical Attribute (average rating equals two dice) was asked to make a roll to lift something heavy (normally a Strength + Stamina roll), he would roll four dice.

Storytellers that desire to use this system to represent denizens of the World of Darkness with greater than human Attributes should just increase the dot rating of any given Attribute to an appropriate amount. Powers and abilities that alter Attributes act like bonuses or penalties to specific skill-sets. A werewolf that changes form to become a towering monstrosity would gain a bonus to Physical Skill rolls and a spell that curses someone with idiocy would act as a penalty to Mental Skill rolls.

Feel free to tweak these down if you want less-powered characters. Average might be one die, superior might be two, and exceptional could be two (+1 for related Skills) or three.

### Experience Costs

The usual method of raising Attributes with experience points is obviously unsuited to this option. The



following table provides some suggested costs for increases. World class Attributes are treated as exceptional Attributes with a rating of four. Using this system, world class represents the human maximum.

Attribute to be Raised	Cost
Average Attribute to superior	30
Superior Attribute to exceptional	40
Exceptional Attribute to world class	50

## Skills

Attributes measure (for the most part) those elements of character creation dependent on raw ability or gifted to her by nature. Skills are cultured elements. They represent specific areas of interest that have seen focus during the lifetime of the character. Information on Skills can be found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, starting on p. 54. Taken as a whole, Skills are a tricky element of the Storytelling System to mess around with. Skills must be broad enough to cover a gamut of possibilities and allow for Specialization, while still being narrow enough in focus to retain the character of the real world ability being represented.

Mucking around with the Skill system is apt to have the biggest mechanical impact on your games. Troupes that decide to alter the Skill system — either with the options presented below or with their own homebrew ideas — must be flexible in dealing with the gray areas that are bound to crop up. The key to successfully dealing with problems is consistency. Once your troupe agrees to a solution to any given problem, stick with it. That doesn't mean you can't always be on the lookout for improvement, though. Dogmatic adherence to a ruling in the face of a better solution is better labeled as “stubbornness,” not “consistency.” Just make sure everyone at the table knows what to expect and how things work.

### Catch-22

Normally, characters are created with the 11/7/4 dot spread. The standard system is good at encouraging rounded characters, but does run into problems when you have trouble trying to fit the idea of adding Animal Ken or some other random Skill into your vision of a character. Just like with the Twelve Dot Spread version of Attribute creation, this Skill creation option combines all 22 dots of Skills into one pool. You may place the dots in whichever Skills you like, but no Skill may start with a dot rating higher than four. Characters still receive the standard three Specialties.

### Three Plus

This option boils all Skills down into three broad categories; Mental, Physical, and Social. Dot ratings for

these broad Skills are determined by nominating one Skill as superior, one as average and the last as unpracticed. A superior rating is equal to two dots, an average rating is equal to one dot, and an unpracticed rating is equal to zero dots (ignore the unskilled penalty for unpracticed ratings). The dot ratings might seem low, until you consider that (using this option) an average Social rating is equal to having one dot in every Social Skill by the standard rules.

Once ratings have been determined, characters can narrow the focus of the Skill-set by selecting five Specialties. Determining a Specialty with this system works exactly the same as the usual method. If the character is good with assault rifles, he writes Assault Rifles under the Physical header, if he has studied ancient Egypt, he writes Ancient Egypt under the Mental header, and so on. Just as with the standard rules, a Specialty gives a one die bonus to any roll that is pertinent to the chosen Specialty.

Any modifiers that specifically target Skills have their bonus or penalty reduced by one (meaning the maximum bonus or penalty under this system is +4 or -4), rounding up. Storytellers that wish to create characters that are more skilled than the standard should simply increase the rating of the relevant Skill.

**Example:** *Jess is creating a sultry investigator using the Three Plus option. She decides the primary focus for her character will be on Social interactions, followed by Mental challenges, with little emphasis on purely Physical pursuits. Social becomes her superior Skill, Mental her average Skill, and Physical her unpracticed Skill. She then adds five Specialties to her sheet. She puts Empathy, Persuasion, and Seduction under Social, Investigation under Mental, and Athletics under Physical. Her character sheet will look as follows:*

Mental ●○○○○  
 Investigation  
 Physical ○○○○○  
 Athletics  
 Social ●●○○○  
 Empathy, Persuasion, Seduction

### Experience Costs

The usual method of raising Skills with experience points is obviously unsuited to this option. The following table provides some suggested costs for increases. Exceptional ratings are equal to three dice and world-class ratings are equal to four dice. Using this system, world class represents the human maximum.

Skill to be Raised	Cost
Unpracticed to average	10
Average to superior	20
Superior to exceptional	30
Exceptional to world class	40
Single Specialization	5



## Skill Swapping

In some games (perhaps featuring alternate settings), certain Skills make less sense than others. During a game set in the Wild West, for example, Skills such as Computer or Drive (as applied to automobiles) don't have a place. Rather than just ignore the out-of-place Skills, what follows is an easy system for swapping them out for those more appropriate for the setting.

First, as a troupe, identify any out-of-place Skills. Maybe Firearms during a game set before the discovery of gunpowder? Or Academics in a game that revolves around the activities of unschooled medieval peasants?

Then, swap the out-of-place Skill for a Skill more in keeping with the game or setting. Skills can only be swapped on a one-to-one basis. You can't replace two different Skills with one new Skill. Continuing with the examples from above, Firearms could be replaced with Archery, and Academics could be replaced with Folklore. These changes needn't be instituted *en masse* either. They can be done on a character-by-character basis (if the Storyteller gives the thumbs-up). Maybe your unschooled peasant is travelling with a literate monk. The monk would have no reason to replace his Academics, likely having learned something useful during his studies at the monastery. Always consider whether the Skill you are proposing might be better served as a Specialty. Exchanging Crafts for Demolitions is reasonable, but swapping Firearms for Sniper Rifle is redundant.

## Got Skills?

To help fire up those creative processes, below are some sample Skill swap ideas and the genre for which the swap might be useful.

Skill	Swap	Genre
Academics	Folklore	Fantasy/Historical
Computer	Enigmas	Fantasy/Historical
Crafts	Engineering	Sci-fi
Drive	Ride	Fantasy/Historical
Drive	Pilot	Sci-fi
Firearms	Archery	Fantasy/Historical
Socialize	Etiquette	Fantasy/Historical

## Stacking Specialties (Narrow Focus)

I know what you're thinking. Specialties already represent a narrow focus! True, but let's go ahead and narrow that focus even further. Let's say you have a character that is an expert in the field of geology. You *could* represent that expertise by creating a character with three or four dots in Science and plop a Geology Specialty on top. That gets the job done, but those three or four dots in Science represent a whole lot more knowledge about science in general rather than specific knowledge about geology. Maybe you'd rather have one of those dots in Computer so your super-scientist can actually open e-mails all by himself. The solution to this is Stacking Specialties.

Simply put, this allows you to buy the same Specialty up to three times. A truly expert geologist might not know much at all about virology or quantum mechanics — frankly, he might not really know as much about biology as he'd like, because he's been so narrowly focused on his field. The character can get away with two dots in Science, but three Specialties in Geology — which you can write on the page as Geology (3) if you don't want to write the word thrice. So, when the character is called upon to make a roll in his field of expertise, he's got five dice to add to his Attribute. But if he needs to remember the taxonomy of waterfowl, he's only got two to add.

## Field Experience

A newly created character in the Storytelling System represents a person of middling ability and experience. The character might well shine in a few areas, but, overall, she isn't likely to possess the broad range of Skills that would qualify her as a veteran of any particular field. One way to overcome this limitation of the system is to pile experience points onto the character, allowing her access to a wider variety of Skills. For those that prefer that option, the standard bonus experience points listed in various World of Darkness books is as follows:

New Guy	+0 experience points
Established	+35 experience points
Old Hand	+75 experience points
Grizzled Veteran	+120 experience points

The only problem with the bonus experience point solution is that (unless the Storyteller specifically states it) the players aren't required to spend the bonus points on Skills alone. It's hard to resist the siren call of other abilities (especially supernatural powers), Merits or the various other options that make increasing Skills seem less appealing. Since this is the Skills section, we'd like to present the Veteran Merit as an alternative method that focuses on increasing the Skill base of a character without simply throwing experience points at it.



## Merit: Veteran (• to ••••)

*Character creation only*

**Effect:** A veteran character is one with at least five years of experience in a specific field. These characters haven't yet experienced enough of the oddities of the World of Darkness to truly recognize everything isn't as it seems, but they've had more real-world experience than is typical of your average starting character. For each dot spent on this Merit, the character gains one Specialty in a Skill that relates to her field. Stacking Specialties (above) is recommended in coordination with this Merit.

Examples of appropriate Skills to enhance with Specialties by way of this Merit include:

**Cop:** Computer, Investigation, any Physical Skill except Survival, any Social Skill (including Animal Ken for K-9 units) except Socialize.

**Blue Collar Laborer:** Computer, Crafts, possibly Medicine by field, Athletics, Drive, any Social Skill except Streetwise.

**Professor:** Any Mental Skill except Occult, Athletics, Drive, any Social Skill except Streetwise.

**Professional Thief:** Computer, Crafts, Investigation, any Physical Skill except Survival, any Social Skill except Animal Ken.

**White Collar Laborer:** Any Mental Skill except Crafts and Occult, Athletics, Drive, any Social Skill except Animal Ken and Streetwise.

**Soldier:** Academics, Computers, Crafts, Medicine, any Physical Skill except Larceny, any Social Skill except Animal Ken and Streetwise.

**Street Thug:** Crafts, Investigation, any Physical Skill except Survival, any Social Skill except Animal Ken and Empathy.

**Example:** *Stew decides he wants to make a beat cop with several years experience on the job. He invests three dots into the Veteran Merit, which allows him to select three Skills to enhance with a Specialty. Stew figures his character has in-depth knowledge of Drive, Firearms, and Investigation and so the character begins play with a Specialty in each of those Skills. Likely choices for Narrow Choice Specialties include Drive (Police Cruiser), Firearms (Pistol), and Investigation (Crime Scene).*

**Drawback:** Time on the job frequently comes with some disadvantages and the longer you spend on the same job; the more problems are likely to come up. Buying this Merit at three dots or above means beginning play with one Flaw. A construction worker might lose hearing after being around loud equipment day after day, a cop is likely to make some enemies during the course of his duties, or an accountant might take to slugging back the booze to drown out the numbers dancing in his head. Select Flaws that seem in-character and use

## Profession

Troupes with access to **Hunter: the Vigil** should feel free to use both the Veteran Merit and the Profession Merit to create truly rounded starting characters with solid backgrounds.

them as possible future plot points and roleplaying opportunities. Don't feel bound by the Flaws presented in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** (p. 218) either. Be creative and design Flaws that say something about the character.

**Example:** *Continuing with the example above, since Stew took three dots in the Veteran Merit, he must select one Flaw. Stew decides that his cop's time on the job has made him cynical about human behavior, which makes him hard to deal with at times and imposes a -2 penalty to Socialize rolls.*

## Variables

What is a variable? Used as a noun, Merriam-Webster says a variable is, "a quantity that may assume any one of a set of values." In terms of character creation (or character development), a variable is an option that exists outside the usual set of creation elements. This section presents age, appearance, and quirks variables that have a direct impact on a World of Darkness character, but in different ways than might be expected from the standard rules of creation.

### Age

We all get old. Life is a one-way trip no matter how many times you go to the gym or get a surgeon to stretch those wrinkles out of your face. The old cliché is that age brings wisdom, but most of us have seen just as many old fools as young ones. What age does tend to bring is a wider range of social connections. That guy you used to work nights with at the fast-food joint all through college is now an executive you can call on for a favor. That old girlfriend you still exchange Christmas cards with is a psychologist that doesn't mind answering the odd questions you throw her way. The downside to aging is, while the mind might remain as sharp as ever, the body inevitably starts to decline. Still, as they say — and this saying retains some truth — old age and treachery beats youth and skill every time.

This system allows older characters to cash in on their social connections at the cost of physical vitality. For each five years past 30, the character may choose to permanently reduce one of his Physical Attributes by one





dot. In exchange, the character gains a free Social Merit. The only exception to this rule is Striking Looks. Sadly, most people tend to lose beauty as they grow older, not gain it (unless you're George Clooney). The complete rules for Social Merits can be found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 114. Below is a breakdown by Merit of what sort of benefit is to be had by sacrificing a Physical Attribute dot. Physical Attributes may not be reduced below one dot with this system.

#### **Allies**

The character gains a new ally at two dots. This Merit may be raised to three dots for free if the character works in-game, through roleplaying, at developing the ally.

#### **Barfly**

For the older folks, this Merit takes the form of gaining entrance into private gentleman's clubs, posh country clubs, and other such high class, low access establishments, even without a membership. Gained in this manner, this particular Merit gains a prerequisite of Resources at two dots.

#### **Contacts**

The character gains access to a new Contact, free of charge. Unlike the usual Contacts Merit, this particular Contact may be changed once per chapter to a different Contact. This particular element represents the wide range of casual connections that can be built up over a lifetime, as well as gained and lost with ease — an ebb-and-flow.

#### **Fame**

The character either gains a dot of Fame or may increase his Fame by one dot. He's more recognizable, now — with age comes exposure.

#### **Inspiring**

Once per story, the character may spend a point of Willpower and draw upon his experience to figure out ways to inspire his companions. The main difference between this use of this Inspiring Merit and the one found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** is that this system ignores the prerequisite.

#### **Mentor**

The character gains the Merit at two dots. It should be noted that this particular form of mentor can just as easily be someone with whom the character is able to exchange ideas and expect useful feedback as the classical sense of a mentor. This Merit may be raised to three dots for free if the character works in-game, through roleplaying, at developing his relationship with the mentor.

#### **Resources**

If the character has a Resources of zero, this bumps it up to one dot. If the character already possesses the Resources Merit, once per chapter he may draw upon extra cash as though his Resources Merit rating were one dot higher. In either case, this represents investments finally paying off, inheritances, or other such financial boons.



### Retainer

The character gains the services of a two-dot Retainer. This is actually the reverse of the Mentor Merit, as the new retainer has come to the character for assistance and/or training, hoping to benefit from his experience.

### Status

The character may either increase his Status in one organization by one dot or gain a single dot in Status in a new organization. Assuming the character isn't a total lackwit, age can bring opportunities to join a variety of different organizations.

### Appearance

Let's not be coy. How one looks and the manner in which one presents oneself can have a lot to do with the choices available to us. Attractive, well-dressed people have a better chance at getting good jobs, finding equally attractive mates, and making social contacts than ugly slobs.

As it stands, Striking Looks is the only way to "measure" a character's appearance during the game, but you may seek alternate ways of making that individual's looks a part of the character.

We recommend using appearance as reflected in a Specialty. While this can be purchased at the time of character creation or with experience points throughout the game, Storytellers may want to allow *one* appearance-based Specialty (in addition to the initial three) at the start of the game.

Choose an adjective, noun, or phrase that highlights your character's appearance, and then assign that adjective as a Specialty to any appropriate Skill (probably a Social Skill, but not necessarily). A character might choose "Pouty" as a Specialty bound to Persuasion, or "Fists Like Cannonballs" tied to Intimidation. The goal here is that this doesn't make one's appearance "better" or "worse" in terms of attractiveness — anybody's look can be useful, as even a guy who is Non-Descript might gain bonuses to Stealth.

### Quirks

Film, television, and literature shows many examples of characters with interesting little personality quirks or hobbies that seem almost slightly out of character. The tough mercenary that likes to knit, the hacker that keeps a collection of 8-track tapes, or the death metal guitarist with a passion for Shakespeare are all examples of this sort of behavior. Sometimes a quirk might simply seem amusing, but more often when a character displays an unexpected interest it makes him seem more real by adding another dimension to his personality. As part of character creation or development in the Storytelling System, this element can do the same thing for World of Darkness characters as it does for characters in popular fiction.

During creation, a character may swap one of the three Specialties he receives for a Quirk. If a Quirk is selected during character development, the cost for buying a Quirk is the same as buying a Specialty (three experience points). Characters may only have one Quirk and this element is further limited to secondary and tertiary Skill sets (see below). A Quirk is essentially a modified, character-driven Specialty. It is attached to a Skill in the same way as normal Specialties and indicates a specific area of interest in that Skill that the character either has more knowledge about or is more facile with. To differentiate a Quirk from a Specialty on the character sheet, Quirks can be marked with an asterisk, written in all caps, or any other method that will help you to remember. Quirks differ from Specialties in the following ways:

- A Quirk is worth a +2 dice bonus to the relevant Skill. This bonus is gained in the same way as the bonus die from having a Specialty is: the roll must directly relate to the Quirk.

- At the end of a chapter, if the Storyteller feels the manner in which a Quirk has been roleplayed somehow acted to the character's detriment, the character gains an additional experience point. As an example of this: if the knitting mercenary discussed earlier lost his shit during a firefight because his latest project was set on fire by a spark from a ricochet, the character is eligible for bonus experience.

Quirks should never be tied to a Skill in your primary Skill set. The area of specialized knowledge represented by a Quirk should always be character enhancing rather than character reliant. As an example, choosing a Spot Clues Quirk for Investigation is an abuse of the element, while choosing a Reggae Quirk for Expression is more appropriate, particularly for a character that would surprise people with a love of Bob Marley. Storytellers are the final arbiters of what is and what isn't an appropriate Quirk.

### Quick and Dirty

Roleplaying is a social activity that frequently grows out of other social engagements. Anytime a group of roleplayers gets together, even with some other intention in mind, like watching a movie, playing a video game or even just to drink a few beers, the odds are at least even that when the movie ends or people lose interest in the video game that the conversation will turn to playing a quick game (often called a "one-shot" game). The problem with a "quick game" usually begins when character sheets are handed out and people begin digging through books. Often, the very act of character creation eats up most of the time that could have been spent on playing. This section presents a number of options to help speed up the process of character creation to help get everyone playing the actual game instead of the mini-game of creating a



character. These guidelines can also be used by Storytellers that are pressed for time or need to make up a character with at least a minor level of detail, mid-game.

## Without Merit

The process of character creation can be sped up considerably simply by dropping Merits from the creation process. Flipping through heaps of gaming material in search of that one specific Merit is fine for a character that will see extended play, but is kinda overkill for a one-shot story. Try replacing Merits with three extra Skill dots and three additional Specialties. This still gives a character some of the depth provided by Merits without slowing down the process. During the course of play, if a character needs the specific benefits provided by a Merit (such as money from Resources or a specific Contact of some sort), the Storyteller should give each character two freebies to keep the game moving along.

**Example:** *In the midst of a one-shot, Malcolm decides his character needs enough cash to rent a speed boat. The Storyteller allows that the character can come up with the money from savings or a payday loan and the game continues. Later, Malcolm's character is arrested by the police. Since he already used a freebie for quick cash, he can't do so a second time to pay for bail. Instead, Malcolm asks for an Ally that might be willing to bail him out, using up his second, and last, freebie to get out of jail.*

## The Threes

Characters with a reasonable amount of detail can be generated quickly by using the creation options Three Alone and Three Plus as described on p. 17 and 18, respectively. This option can also be used to expedite the creation of Storyteller-controlled characters either before or during a game.

## The Spirit of the Game

Another method for quick creation is to adapt the rule for ghosts and spirits to apply to all World of Darkness characters. Characters receive seven dots to place however they like in Finesse, Power, and Resistance. Other relevant traits can be extrapolated from those three primary traits following the rules presented for creating ghosts in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 208. Skill rolls are handled by determining whether the character is the aggressor or the defender in any given situation. As the aggressor, the character rolls Power + Finesse. As the defender, the character rolls Power + Resistance for feats of resolve or physical endurance; or Finesse + Resistance for feats of agility or mental alacrity.

## Bit Players

Similar to the above, this really works for creating Storyteller characters, but can be adapted for quick player-controlled characters, too.

Bit players have three stats: Mental, Physical, and Social. This number represents the max dice pool the bit player can have in its given category (though equipment and other modifiers can apply, unless the Storyteller says no). If the character's Mental is 4, no Mental-based roll (Wits + Composure, Intelligence + Academics, etc.) can exceed four dice, and the Storyteller may rule that the dice pool is actually less due to penalties.

Their attack pool is equal to their Physical trait, regardless of how terrible or fantastic their baseball bat or hunting rifle happens to be.

All bit players have a Defense of 2, an Initiative of 4, a Speed equal to the Physical Trait, a Willpower equal to the Mental Trait, and a Health score of 5.

This isn't encouraged for long-term characters, but can be a great way to inject a scene where the players need to control, say, flashback characters, or characters present only in dreams or visions.

## The Virtue/Vice Element

Virtue and Vice contribute to both the narrative and mechanical aspects of a character. The task of assigning Virtue and Vice begins to mold the basic outlook of a new character, perhaps giving you greater insight into further elements of the creation process. Many basic questions about a character can be answered by looking to Virtue and Vice. What does the character prize? What drives him? Pairs of opposing Virtue and Vice (Temperance and Gluttony for example) help define internal strife and provide good fodder for roleplaying. This section provides some alternate possibilities for Virtue and Vice that go beyond the Seven Deadlies and their counterparts. Though you can find a number of mechanical benefits involved with the new systems, the primary function of the Virtue/Vice element and the systems that follow is to provide an impetus for character and roleplaying.

## Absent Morality

Some people object to the idea that the basic elements of character can be summed up by a couple words. They will argue that humans are too complex for such simplistic evaluations or that what drives any particular person changes on a daily (or even hourly) basis. Buddhists would agree with both arguments. As a philosophy, Buddhism notes that the world and everything in it is in a constant state of change. We aren't the same people we were even 10 seconds ago, let alone one year ago. If our characters are to be as real as possible, given the backdrop of the World of Darkness, it seems as though assigning

hard rules of behavior prohibits character development, rather than encouraging it. One way of overcoming this perception of artifice is to allow characters to switch Virtue and Vice between stories. The problem with this approach is that it makes more work for the Storyteller as she tries to remember who has exactly what Virtue/Vice at any given time. Since a Storyteller already has plenty to keep her busy, this can lead to immersion-breaking questions like, “Err. What’s your Vice again?” It can also lead to Grumpy Storyteller Syndrome, a condition no wise player wants to cause.

## Optional Rewards

For troupes whose members find that they don’t care for the constraints of Virtue and Vice, we suggest dropping the elements completely, rather than changing those elements every other chapter. In place of gaining Willpower by fulfilling a Virtue or Vice, characters can be rewarded with Willpower for overcoming challenges. By way of example, a character might regain Willpower by:

- Tracking a monster back to its lair (1 Willpower)
- Finding a useful bit of information while researching a problem (1 Willpower)
- Escaping from a dangerous situation (1 Willpower)
- Defeating a minor enemy (1 Willpower)
- Trapping a monster in its lair (2 Willpower)
- Finding a vital piece of information through research (2 Willpower)
- Rescuing a friend or loved one from a dangerous situation (2 Willpower)
- Defeating a major enemy (2 Willpower)

Alternately (or in addition to the above), the Storyteller could award a point of Willpower to each character at the end of each scene in which the characters learned or did something important, or simply roleplayed in an interesting way.

Willpower could also be regained through Meditation, or by spending time in some sort of relaxing diversion (off-screen, as it were). The easiest way to refresh Willpower is to allow the characters to “fill-up” between sessions, restoring Willpower to full each time the troupe meets. In the end, you have no reason to let Virtue and Vice get in the way of your play-type, if you don’t want it too.

## Motivations

By breaking down Virtue and Vice to the most basic elements, you come up with compulsions that explain how and why your character behaves the way he does. A character with Hope and Greed is driven by opposing internal ideas of promise and the future. A character with





Fortitude and Lust is likely driven by physical motivators. As a game element, Motivations breaks down Virtue and Vice to the drives of a character, without reference to morality. Who can say Wrath is always misplaced? Why is Pride necessarily a Vice or Faith a Virtue? Is it really a sin to be proud of an accomplishment? Any number of terrorists claim to be men of faith, yet their actions are certainly without virtue from the perspective of their victims.

During character creation, instead of choosing a single Virtue and a single Vice, each character can instead choose three Motivations. The nature of a Motivation should be intensely personal to the character, rather than a catchall. Quality Motivations should be building blocks of characters that serve as insight to his story. Be prepared to defend your Motivations to the Storyteller! Possible Motivations and the questions posed by them include:

- **Avarice:** What is the focus of your greed? What are the reasons behind it? How far are you willing to go to get what you want? Are you a hoarder or a waster?
- **Chivalry:** So it ain't dead after all! What aspect of chivalry defines your character? Is it more than just a devotion to your preferred sex? What sort of actions do you consider to be chivalrous?
- **Duty:** Who is the duty to? Your job? Your family? An organization like the police or the mafia? Are there limits to what you'll do for duty?
- **Faith:** Who or what do you believe in? What are you willing to sacrifice for your beliefs? How strong is your belief? Has it been tested? Has your belief ever failed?
- **Glory:** How do you define your achievements? Are you willing to trod on others to claim your due? How much are you willing to risk for adulation?
- **Honor:** Is it personal honor? Family honor? Do you have a "code?" What sorts of acts are dishonorable to you? Do others perceive you as honorable?
- **Love:** Who is it that you love? Is your love returned or unrequited? Is it independent or codependent? How would you respond to a betrayal of your love?
- **Patriotism:** Are you a mindless fanatic or an intelligent participant? Is your patriotism dependent upon those that lead you? Does your zeal come before your family? Yourself?
- **Revenge:** Who has wronged you? How? What will it take to satisfy your sense of justice? Are you willing and able to kill for it? Is death too good for your enemies?
- **Survival:** Do you place your personal safety above the needs of others? Are you willing to fight to survive? Lie? Cheat? Steal? What sacrifices are you willing to make in order to survive?

The above list is in no way meant to be comprehensive. You should (and will) come up with your own Motivations, basing the questions posed by them on the examples provided.

## Regaining Willpower

Once per scene, a character that acts in accordance with a Motivation gains a point of Willpower. Characters may benefit from acting on multiple Motivations within a single scene to gain more than one point of Willpower, but any single Motivation may only be tapped once per scene.

*Example:* Matt's Motivations are Avarice, Glory, and Love. If Matt was single and he managed to get a girl he fancied to go on a date with him (Love), he would gain one point of Willpower. If, during the course of a different scene, Matt managed to steal something valuable (Avarice) that he then used to impress his new girlfriend (Glory, Love), he would regain three Willpower. If, later on in the same scene, Matt was congratulated on his success by a friend (Glory) he couldn't gain another point of Willpower, having already profited from Glory once in the scene.


## Culmination

Some Motivations carry with them the promise of being fulfilled. This is true for things like Revenge (the bad guy is vanquished), Love (romantic promise is fulfilled), or Avarice (you have more than you could ever spend). When you and your Storyteller both agree a Motivation has been realized, your character gains a permanent point of Willpower and the Motivation is erased from the character sheet. Consider your character's new place in life and replace the old Motivation with a new one. A character may gain a maximum of three dots of Willpower through fulfilling Motivations.

It's also possible for a Motivation to be changed by a traumatic experience or personal revelation. The zeal of Patriotism might be crushed under the heel of a despot or you might find you are unwilling to Survive if it means a child will die. In this situation, erase the offending Motivation and replace it with one relevant to the character's new outlook. Patriotism might become Revenge, as your character seeks to eliminate the person (or persons) responsible for smothering your zeal. Survival might change to Duty, as your character takes on the obligation to protect the child he refused to sacrifice to save himself.

## Nature and Demeanor

A different way of replacing the Virtue/Vice element in your games is to look to the past, with a bit of a twist. In the Storyteller System, Nature and Demeanor filled the roles of the Storytelling System's Virtue and Vice. In short, Nature is how your character *really* is and Demeanor is how he presents himself to others. Nature is the core of the character's drives, desires, vices, and virtues. Demeanor is the mask of civility he wears in polite company.



Characters that are created using this element should choose one Vice from the standard list (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, starting on p. 103) then add one of the Archetypes listed below to it, forming a sort of composite of how and why that describes the Nature of the character. For Demeanor, select one Virtue (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, starting on p. 100) and add one of the Archetypes. Just like every other variation in the Virtue/Vice section, these are meant to be an exercise in character building. As you mix and match Archetypes with Virtues and Vices, think on how the end result will affect your character. Troupes with access to older World of Darkness books should feel free to use any Archetypes not listed here and, as always, we encourage you to come up with your own, unique, Archetypes.

## Archetypes

- **Architect:** You are driven to create something of lasting value, whether it be a company, art, a new vision for society, or some other type of lasting legacy. At times you may become so fixated on your goal, you may force your dream on others.

- **Bon Vivant:** Life is short, so you should enjoy your time to the utmost. You're willing to work toward a goal if the reward is a good time. Indeed, pleasure is often its own reward. You feel sorry for those that take life too seriously, but your pursuit of pleasure can sometimes get out of hand.

- **Bravo:** It's a dog eat dog world, and you are the type of dog that ends up with the biggest meals. You reinforce your self-worth by taking the dominant role in conflicts, no matter whether the conflict is physical or social in nature. You don't know the meaning of fear, but you have a tenuous grip on the idea of discretion or the possibility of compromise.

- **Conniver:** The old saying goes, "If you have a tough job, give it to a lazy man. He'll always find an easier way to do it." In your case, the easiest way to do things is to convince others to do them for you. You advance your cause by "coordinating" the efforts of your friends and sowing dissent among your enemies. Your biggest fear is that someone might be using *you* in the same way you use others, which makes it difficult to completely trust anyone but yourself.

- **Follower:** Too many chiefs not enough Indians. Too many cooks spoil the broth. You are the type of person that wholeheartedly believes in these sorts of idioms. Taking charge isn't your style, nor is rebelling. You're the sort of follower to jump off a cliff if ordered to, lacking the self-esteem to question even the most foolhardy or suicidal of commands.

- **Guardian:** In this hostile world, the strong must protect the weak. You might act out of love and duty, or

simply a strong sense of responsibility. The weapons you chose to fulfill your obligations may be physical, mental, or even spiritual. All around, the just are besieged by horrors and calamities; you can't just stand by and do nothing. You must be cautious lest your anger at the injustices of the world spill over to rage and, in a moment of violence, become what you despise.

- **Jester:** Sorrow and pain are your enemies, and humor is your weapon. All the world loves a clown and if your antics can relieve the tension of gloom and doom, you're willing to take a pie in the face. Occasionally, you may cross a line with your efforts to amuse, distracting and irritating those you meant to entertain.

- **Martyr:** You are ready to put yourself at risk so that others (or a cause) may succeed, even when sacrifice isn't necessary. You drive yourself twice as hard as anyone else does and, despite this suffering, you endure, clinging to the belief that you can make a difference. The danger to this kind of self-induced blindness is that you could end up sacrificing yourself for nothing.

- **Rebel:** Authority exists to be challenged. Whether you champion a specific cause or are simply contrary, you always blaze your own path. Others are welcome to try and match the beat of your drummer, but only if they can stay in step. You defy authority on principal, even if you share the same views and goals as "The Man."

- **Survivor:** You don't have to outrun the bear, you only have to outrun the other people the bear is chasing. No matter what, you never give up, never surrender. You have no sympathy for those that bend under pressure. In fact, you resist forming close ties with others just in case you need to sacrifice them in order to survive.

## Mashups

At this point you may find yourself saying, "Well, that's great, but what does it all *mean*?" Below are a few examples of Archetype and Virtue/Vice mixes to get you started.

**Nature:** Rebel/Glutton

This combination produces a character that is intrinsically selfish and greedy. He rebels against authority because he wants more for himself, but he keeps his methods and motivations a closely guarded secret. A lobbyist that theoretically promotes a majority view, but actually twists laws to serve himself or an elite few, is an example of this mix.

**Demeanor:** Jester/Hope

This combination produces a character that gives others the impression that her jokes and quips act to encourage others when the chips are down. The on-stage persona of a comedian entertaining the troops is an example of this mix.

**Nature:** Martyr/Envy

This combination produces a character that might



be described as “emo” in current parlance. His angst-driven envy of others pushes him to self-destructive acts. He may even entertain thoughts of suicide as a means of one-upping those he perceives as luckier than himself. (“They’ll be sorry when I’m gone!”). The man that cuts himself (high on the thigh, where no one will see) as he watches his neighbor washing a new car is an example of this mix.

**Demeanor:** Bravo/Faith

This combination produces a character that takes her beliefs to the streets, parading them in front of others as the One True Way. She has no interest in listening to other points of view and will even contradict herself to win arguments against non-believers. The moral majority leader who preaches that sinners choose to be homosexual and actively works to deny homosexuals equal rights is an example of this mix.

**Nature:** Architect/Wrath

This combination produces a character that works to create a legacy of hatred. Not satisfied with venting his anger on a specific target, instead, he works to bring his rage to the masses. The general that carefully plans out a campaign that is meant to annihilate, rather than just defeat the enemy is an example of this mix. It won’t be obvious, but the devil is in the details.

**Demeanor:** Hedonist/Charity

This combination produces a character that is a party on two legs. She not only wants to have a good time herself, she *insists* that everyone share the good times with her. Especially that guy in the corner cubicle that hasn’t said a word to anyone in months. He sure looks like he could use some cheering up! The perpetually cheerful boss that keeps a bottle of whiskey in the top drawer and plans parties to which everyone is invited (and is obliged to show up for) is an example of this mix.

## Regaining Willpower

Just as with the standard Virtue/Vice element, when a character acts in accordance with his Nature or Demeanor, he regains Willpower as a result. Specifically, if a character acts in accord with his Demeanor, he regains a single point of Willpower. If a character acts in accord with his Nature — and *no one* is the wiser to the real reason for his behavior — he regains all spent Willpower. A character may only regain Willpower from either his Nature or Demeanor once per scene.

**Example:** Ben’s Nature is Survivor/Pride and his Demeanor is Follower/Fortitude. If Ben were tasked with a difficult mission and succeeded, he could regain a point of Willpower from his Demeanor. If, during the course of that mission, Ben took on more than he could handle out of arrogance and someone else suffered as a result, but Ben still came out of it smelling of roses, he could regain all spent Willpower.

## The Mask Slips

As was explained earlier, Demeanor is the mask we present to others. So what happens when that mask slips and the true Nature of a character shines out? If it comes to pass that the way a character behaves or is perceived by others is more in tune with his Nature than his Demeanor, the mask has failed. Erase the Demeanor mix from the character sheet. The character now has two choices. He can either continue to behave in accordance with his Nature or he can attempt to construct a new Demeanor. If he chooses the former, the character can regain Willpower twice per scene from acting in accord with his Nature, but he has no option to refill his pool completely. If he chooses to construct a new Demeanor, he should select a new Archetype/Virtue combo and begin acting in accordance with his new Demeanor. People won’t be fooled right at first, of course. It takes time to convince those around you that you’ve actually changed. For the duration of a story (or at least four chapters), the character may only regain Willpower from his new Demeanor. If he regains any Willpower from his Nature, the jig is up and he’s back to square one.

## Personal Touches

This method of altering the Virtue/Vice element modifies the specifics of Virtue and Vice, rather than replacing them altogether. Instead of selecting a specific Virtue or Vice, characters chose a descriptive that sums up the shortcomings (for Vice) and inherent nobility (for Virtue) of the character. As an example, let’s say Rob is a family man with a troubled past. Before he met his wife, Rob got in too deep with a cult and saw things he still has nightmares about and, just maybe, he still harbors a dark longing for the mad debaucheries of his old life. Fortunately for Rob, his wife is willing to accommodate some of his cruel desires in the bedroom, which satiates him enough to remain a devoted husband and father.

Using the standard Storytelling System, we might give Rob the Fortitude Virtue (for overcoming his past and maintaining his hold on his new life, despite his desires) and Lust as his Vice (for obvious reasons). Those are fine descriptions of Rob’s basic personality, but they don’t really delve very deeply into the heart of the character. If instead we describe Rob’s Virtue as Devoted Family Man and his Vice as Sadomasochist, we get a much clearer picture of what drives him. This is the essence of adding personal touches to Virtue and Vice. As this modification removes handy lists of Virtues and Vices to choose from, it’s worth devoting some time to examining exactly what sorts of drives and behaviors constitute a Virtue or a Vice.

## What is Virtue?

The defining virtuous characteristic of a character should be one that represents moral fiber, or willful bravery, or saint-like patience. The descriptive used to define the Virtue of a character should be short and to the point. A teacher that truly cares for her students and lives for the chance to make a difference in the lives of young people might be described as Virtue: Dedicated Teacher. A teacher that just happens to be good at her job and is well-liked by the students doesn't necessarily qualify for that Virtue. It's the element of choice that separates the two. More often than not, humans have to *choose* to be virtuous, because being a good guy is hard work. Make sure the descriptive that defines the Virtue of your characters represents some sort of choice, rather than an imperative.

## What is Vice?

Everyone has bad habits. Maybe you squeeze the toothpaste from top or drink directly from a communal milk bottle. These kinds of behaviors are petty sins at best and minor annoyances to others at worst. A true Vice goes beyond poor manners, negligent hygiene, or a tendency to pick your nose in public. A Vice is something you know you shouldn't do, but do anyway because *you like doing it*. A Vice represents the possibility of harming (emotionally or physically) others with your actions and being selfish enough not to care. The guy at a bar that picks fights with strangers "sitting in his seat" is just looking for an excuse to commit a little casual violence. He might be described as Vice: Brawler. This is different from someone who likes to cause serious damage to others. He might punch you in the face, but he isn't looking to shoot or stab you. When choosing the descriptive that defines the Vice of your character, make sure it is specific. The guy who gets high every hour of every day and the guy who eats two pizzas for dinner are both gluttons, but the form of their gluttony is very different (unless the pothead has the munchies).

## Regaining Willpower

Using the personal touches option doesn't change the usual mechanics for regaining Willpower via Virtue and Vice. Storytellers may find that it's actually easier for characters to regain Willpower by using this option, which is a good thing. This option might also make it easier for players to figure out when they should be eligible for Willpower gains. Virtues like Hope and Faith are sometimes a bit fuzzy when it comes to determining whether a character has acted within her Virtue. This option makes the picture clearer.

## Mind Over Matter

This section focuses on new ways for characters to overcome adversity and provides opportunities to give in to temptation. Forbidden Lore is a new system that offers guidelines for giving a supernatural boost to human characters at the cost of mental health. Conviction showcases the strength of the human spirit and the expanded Willpower section gives players and Storytellers alike new options on how to use Willpower in their chronicles.

## Forbidden Lore

Characters that stare too long into the shadows in the World of Darkness find the shadows are staring back. This staring contest between humans and the denizens of the darkness usually results in knowledge of some kind, though it may be unwelcome. Most commonly, the contest ends with the shattering of the illusion most humans hold: illusions of safety and sanity. Monsters exist and even the least predatory of them is bound to manipulate the affairs of humans for some purpose. Occasionally, the knowledge gained takes a different form. A postman finds a leather-bound book in a mailbox. He opens it up to see if he can figure out who it was meant to be delivered too and discovers an arcane formula that hints at realities beyond our own. Old Aunt Margaret dies and the nephew assigned the chore of clearing out her house finds a room in the basement filled with canned fruit, the likes of which he's never seen. Curious, he tries some and finds he can talk to the birds in the trees on his next trip outside with the garbage. The World of Darkness is filled with all manner of Forbidden Lore, just waiting for someone to use it.

## A Mind is a Terrible Thing

Unless you are the type that P.T. Barnum would've delighted in meeting (i.e. a sucker), you know by now that everything in the World of Darkness comes with a price tag. The postman that experiments with the contents of the grimoire he found is likely to seem slightly eccentric the next time friends drop by when they discover his walls are covered with occult geometry. Questioned about his odd new choice in interior decoration, the postman will seem confused as to what the problem is. Dabbling in the occult has skewed his perceptions on what counts as normal. Similarly, the boy that can now talk to birds is apt to garner some strange looks if he's seen questioning pigeons in the park while feeding them breadcrumbs. The benchmarks of a healthy mind can be calculated as reason and sanity, both of which suffer when humans delve into knowledge the human mind was never meant to fathom. In return for the postman's new ability to tweak possibility by altering the mathematics



of fate, what seems reasonable to him has changed. By forcing his mind to solve equations that shouldn't make any sense, his sanity has suffered.

## Reason: How Lore Shatters Sanity

In game terms, Reason is described as an element that is rated from 10 to 1. Every character starts with a default 10 dots of Reason. In fact, most average, everyday people that characters bump up against have Reason 10, meaning they have accepted the common perception of reality espoused by the masses. A character that has discovered a way to make a deal with the spirits of fire so that flames won't hurt him drops to Reason 9, because he accepts a new reality of thinking that goes against reasonable thought or

modes of action. If that same character later figured out how to make mechanical objects stop working just by touching them, he'd fall to Reason 8. In essence, he has sacrificed his Reason to gain access to abilities outside the norm.

So how does this work in your chronicles? **Mirrors** is all about breaking rules and here we're gonna break a big one. Any time a human character (and we do suggest limiting this to normal humans) uncovers a legitimate piece of Forbidden Lore, he can spend a dot of Reason to learn how to use that lore. What exactly is Forbidden Lore? *Anything you can think of.* Contracts from **Changeling**, Disciplines from **Vampire**, Gifts from **Werewolf**, spells from **Mage**, etc., etc. If you (and your Storyteller) think it'd be cool if your character could use

## Effects of Reason

Reason	Penalties	Bonuses
10	None	None
9	-1 to all Social Skill rolls*	
8	-1 to resist the effects of a derangement	
7	-1 to avoid gaining a derangement	+1 to all Occult Skill rolls
6	Increase the above penalties to -2, reduce any bonus gained by spending a point of Willpower by one (+3 dice to a roll becomes +2, the +2 bonus to Resistance becomes +1, etc.)	
5	Reduce one Social or Mental Merit to the lowest possible rating or lose access to a single Social or Mental Merit**, the character may not eliminate derangements by increasing Morality	Gain a free Occult Specialty
4	The penalties for Social Skill rolls* and to resist gaining a derangement are increased to -3, derangements may only be suppressed by spending a point of Willpower.	+2 to all Occult Skill rolls
3	Reduce the bonuses gained by spending a point of Willpower by two (minimum of one), the character automatically gains a derangement after degeneration	A single Attribute selected by the player may now exceed human maximums (no upper limit)
2	Reduce a second Social or Mental Merit to the lowest possible rating or lose access to a second Social or Mental Merit**, rolls to avoid degeneration automatically fail	A second Attribute selected by the player may now exceed human maximums, +3 to all Occult Skill rolls
1	The penalty to Social Skill rolls is increased to -5*, eliminate all remaining Social and Mental Merits	A third Attribute selected by the player may now exceed human maximums
0	The character is so detached from reality he becomes unplayable and is removed from player control	

\*Excluding Intimidate and Streetwise.

\*\*This only applies to Merits currently possessed by the character and excludes Language and Resources. Characters without either Social or Mental Merits may not purchase new ones without Storyteller approval (and a *really* good justification).

a specific Endowment from Hunter; spend that point of Reason and add it to the character. The only limits on what is acceptable are those imposed by the Storyteller or the troupe. Each point of Reason spent buys use of one ability, regardless of the dot rating that ability has in its parent book (note that buying the power doesn't incorporate the entire suite of abilities that comes with it — just that single instance, that single rating).

Before you go crazy (literally, in fact) adding a bunch of cool powers to your character, keep in mind that once it's spent, Reason can never be bought back. Unlocking secrets best left undiscovered forever alters that character's perception of reality. Below you will find a table that lists the effects of reduced Reason on a character. Listed penalties are cumulative, that is, a character with Reason 5 suffers the effects of all the penalties listed above Reason 5.

*Example:* In the aftermath of battling a vampire in the sewers, Chuck decides to use some of the vampire's blood in conjunction with a ritual he uncovered earlier in the story that will give him the ability to alter his appearance. Chuck currently has Reason 7. Spending a point of Reason to gain access to the vampiric Obfuscate power, "Familiar Stranger" drops his Reason to 6. At Reason 6, Chuck takes a -2 penalty to all Social Skill rolls, a -2 penalty to resist the effects of a derangement, a -2 penalty to avoid gaining new derangements, and any bonuses provided by spending a point of Willpower are reduced by one.

## A Few Explanations

Not all of the effects of reduced Reason might make sense at first glance. Explanations are as follows:

- The more out of touch a character becomes by sacrificing Reason for power, the less able he is to relate to normal people. The Social Skill modifiers represent this disconnect. Storytellers should feel free to ignore this penalty when the character is dealing with other nutters that have ditched Reason for unnatural abilities or when dealing with supernatural forces that understand how things really work. In general, the Social penalty should be enforced whenever the character interacts with someone with a higher Reason rating.

- Meddling with Forbidden Lore increases the chances that a character will either actually go insane or have difficulty suppressing the personality defects that afflict him. This accounts for the penalties on gaining or resisting the effects of derangement.

- The greater access an otherwise normal human character has to unusual abilities, the less stock he places on solving problems or overcoming obstacles by will alone. The reduction in bonuses gained by spending Willpower represents this.

- At Reason 5 and lower, the character begins to lose touch with some of the elements of his old life or

the mental discipline he began the chronicle with begins to lapse. This makes maintaining relationships (or creating new ones) more difficult. This accounts for the reduction — or loss — of Social or Mental Merits. As with the Social Skill penalties, Storytellers may waive this effect of reduced Reason if the Merits in question are solely related to other people (or things pretending to be people) with serious occult knowledge or ability.

- Learning Forbidden Lore *does* increase the general occult knowledge of a character, which results in the Occult Skill bonuses and the free Occult Specialty.

- At Reason 3 and lower, the mindset of the character, combined with the abilities he's able to produce, basically make him more than human. This is represented by the removal of human limits on specific Attributes.

## Insanity: The High Cost of Crazy Power

If you want to think of Reason as a power stat, then Insanity is the "juice stat" that powers it. Insanity is a measure of how much a mind is able to stand working with the Forbidden Lore learned by spending Reason. As a game element, Insanity is rated from zero to ten. A character begins with zero Insanity and each time she uses a power she gains a point (not dot; this is not a permanent score like Reason) of Insanity as a result. The original cost of the power is completely replaced by gaining a single point of Insanity. If, for example, a **Mage** rote is listed as costing 2 Mana and one point of Willpower, the cost for the character that learned that spell as Forbidden Lore is still one point of Insanity (gained, not lost).

When a character reaches 10 points of Insanity, her mind snaps from the strain imposed on it by Forbidden Lore and she automatically loses a point of Reason. This does have the benefit of completely resetting Insanity back to zero, however, as what is sane and what isn't is now being judged by lower standards. Insanity naturally decays at the rate of one point each time the character manages to get a full night's sleep. Characters may also buy off Insanity by spending Willpower. Each point of Willpower spent reduces Insanity by three points (this can be reduced by Willpower penalties accrued from low Reason). Regular, weekly visits to a psychologist can also reduce Insanity. Once each chapter, a character may reduce Insanity by five after visiting a qualified mental health professional. Characters that lose a point of Reason from Insanity build-up don't gain any new abilities, meaning it's completely possible for a character's Reason to drop just from overusing Forbidden Lore.

## Learning and Using Forbidden Lore

The dice pool for a power remains the same when bought with Reason as it does in the original form, minus the "power stat" (Wyrd, Primal Urge, etc.) bonus



dice, if any. Simply replace the power stat dice with a flat three dice bonus. Alternately, for troupes that would like a bit more oomph for their crazy, you could replace the power stat dice with 10 minus Reason in dice. Any potential unhappy side effect that comes from using a power (like Paradox) holds no sway over a character that purchases it with Reason. The powers gained by spending Reason work exactly as described in their parent book. Without gaining a true template, otherwise normal characters that sacrifice Reason for power don't have the ability to mix and match powers like may be allowed by systems such as mage spells.

If troupes decide to include Forbidden Lore in their chronicles, they will also need to decide how to present the accumulation of such in-depth occult lore. Werewolf Gifts, for example, are learned directly from other werewolves or from spirits. Humans aren't likely to find a werewolf willing to teach her how to use a Gift, but a spirit might be tricked, compelled, or bargained with to act as a teacher. Below is a list of the various World of Darkness lines (up to the writing of this book, at least) and some ideas on how human characters might learn to use the powers normally reserved for the entities from those lines.

#### **Changeling: the Lost**

Likely the best way for characters to pick up Contracts is to have a True Fae teach them or having another fae creature enchant the character. The example

used earlier of the boy learning how to speak with birds could be construed as an unusual side effect of eating a goblin fruit and gaining the ability acquired from the first dot of Contracts of Fang and Talon, "Tongues of Birds and Words of Wolves." A new power could also be the result of a Pledge, though a changeling is apt to ask for a Greater Task in return for learning the secrets of the Wyrld without submitting to the touch of the Gentry.

#### **Geist: the Sin-Eaters**

A trip to the Underworld might be a good way for characters to pick up Manifestations. A character that was possessed by a ghost might retain enough Plasm to work Sin-Eater powers. Many Manifestations could easily be written off as enhanced psychic techniques.

#### **Hunter: the Vigil**

Gaining access to Endowments is actually a much simpler prospect for characters than the powers of the other lines. Troupes can basically follow the information presented in **Hunter**, simply ignoring as much of the prerequisites required for an Endowment as they like.

#### **Mage: the Awakening**

The old standby of learning Forbidden Lore from moldy old tomes is a good one when it comes to mage spells. Alternately, the character could find the leftovers of a ritual casting and try to piece together the spell. Don't overlook the Faustian possibility of gaining power from a demonic bargain, either.



### Promethean: the Created

Transmutations could be thematically learned through alchemy. Mix up a brew and learn a new trick. Another possibility would be to require the character to partake of the Vitriol collected by a Promethean. Perhaps the notes of a demiurge hold clues on the workings of Transmutations.

### Vampire: the Requiem

Blood should definitely feature in gaining the Disciplines of vampires. The character might be a recovered ghoul that retains some of the powers he once had while serving his master. It's possible that a vampiric bite results in a blood infection that gives the character access to a power. The earlier example of using vampiric blood as part of a ritual is also a viable means of gaining some portion of vampiric powers.

### Werewolf: the Forsaken

As mentioned earlier, spirits could teach characters how to use Gifts or possibly wearing the hide of a werewolf could impart certain abilities. Like vampires, werewolves are known to bite people and the infection theory works here as well.

### Miscellaneous

Keep in mind, too, that just because something is a "vampire Discipline" doesn't mean that's what it is when the human uses its forbidden power. The supernatural abilities can be framed however they need to be. The Obfuscate Discipline is about hiding in shadow, but that can be something taught by a demon, a Native American spirit, or an ancient grimoire. Flexibility can be your friend, here.

## Conviction

At their best or during times of extreme duress, humans are capable of some astonishing acts. A mother lifts the wrecked car off her child, soldiers carry on fighting for their brothers even when wounded to near death, and a prisoner refuses to give his torturers the answers they seek. These are all examples of Conviction, of the will of the human spirit to overcome adversity. Some people learn to tap into the well of potential that exists within every human and can access Conviction even without facing a life-or-death situation. These people have learned to still their minds and steel their wills to accomplish the task at hand, no matter the odds.

As a game element, Conviction is a power stat rated from 1–10 dots, similar to Wyrd for changelings or Blood Potency for vampires. The "juice" that drives Conviction is Willpower. For troupes that decide to include this element in their chronicles, normal humans (no ghouls, no hedge witches, no psychics, etc.) begin with one dot of Conviction. Raising Conviction with experience points costs five times the current rating.

## Active Effects of Conviction

By putting all of their concentration and will to the challenge confronting them, the characters are able to rise above normal human limitations for a short time. Active effects of Conviction are activated by spending a point of Willpower to produce one of the effects listed below. The total bonus gained for any roll generated or altered by an effect is equal to dots of Conviction (maximum of +5). So, if a character with Conviction ●●● spent a point of Willpower to activate it in order to increase her Strength Attribute, her Strength would temporarily be increased by three. Bonuses gained through Conviction ignore the usual human maximums.

A character can only use Conviction once during a chapter (game session).

- **Concentration:** Distractions and circumstantial impediments can be the bane of actions that would ordinarily be easily accomplished. Any thief worth his salt should be able to pop open an average lock with little difficulty. Opening a lock in the rain before that ravaging monstrosity can rip out your spine is a whole different matter. In cases like these, the ability to concentrate solely on a goal can make the difference between life and death. By activating Conviction, the character may negate environmental penalties equal to his Conviction rating on any single Skill roll. Further, the odds of success are improved by this sort of tunnel vision, allowing the character to achieve an exceptional success with four successes rather than the usual five. As an example, let's say the thief mentioned above has a –4 penalty on his roll to pick the lock due to environmental penalties (rain, darkness, wind), but has a Conviction rating of three. If he activates his Conviction, the penalty would be reduced to a –1. This lasts for a scene, and cannot negate penalties that aren't environmental (it won't help push past wound penalties, for instance).

- **Drive:** A narrow focus and a motive to succeed are all that are sometimes required to push humans beyond their normal capabilities. The drive to overcome adversity can be channeled by the will to produce seemingly super-human feats. By activating Conviction, the character gains a bonus equal to her Conviction to a single Attribute for one roll. As a secondary effect of such drive, any other rolls in the same scene that include the Attribute that was enhanced gain a +1 bonus.

- **Endurance:** War stories often feature tales of soldiers that continued to fight even with horrific injuries, refusing to give up until the battle was won. Outside of battle, people still manage to find the strength to stagger onwards, with broken or missing limbs, until they or



their loved ones are safe. By activating Conviction, the character is able to ignore wound penalties for a number of turns equal to her Conviction rating. Even after the initial surge of endurance has faded, the character continues to struggle on and will not lose consciousness from injuries until the end of the scene.

- **Perception:** The player may spend a point of Willpower to allow the human the ability to “see” monsters for what they are. It doesn’t identify the monster’s specific identity (vampire, changeling, demon, what-have-you), but it does cause them to stand out in a way that intuitively tells the character something is “off” or “wrong” with the target. When the player spends the Willpower point to turn on this “perception,” it doesn’t target any one creature — any creature that the character sees during the scene will stand out as being unnatural. This can be tailored to the character. One might see human-seeming monsters as if a dark shadow is cast over their faces; another might see them as full-blown color inversions, like a negative print.

## Passive Effects of Conviction

Even without tapping into Willpower for active effects, Conviction provides passive effects based on rating.

- **Willpower/Turn:** One of humanity’s greatest strengths is our adaptability. Humans can become accustomed to, and even thrive, in the worst possible situations. This is the essence of the human spirit. As the Conviction rating of a character increases, she learns how to tap into the human spirit more efficiently. Starting at a Conviction rating of four, the character gains the ability to spend multiple points of Willpower each turn. This ability comes with some restrictions. A character may only spend one point of Willpower each turn to produce any specific effect. So, if a character spends a point of Willpower to gain a +3 to a roll, she may not spend two Willpower to gain a +6.

- **Resistance:** On the whole, humans are easy prey for the supernatural abilities of the strange creatures that inhabit the World of Darkness. Lacking the innate magical resistance of a mage, spells that target humans will likely succeed. Without the touch of the Wyrd, humans have little chance against the enchantments woven by the fae. Conviction gives humans a boost, an edge against the unnatural, by dint of zeal. The Resistance number listed by Conviction rating is added as bonus dice to contested rolls to resist supernatural effects or acts as a penalty to abilities that are passively resisted. This aspect of Conviction can also be used to combat more mundane methods of coercion, by granting bonus dice against attempts at intimidation, seduction, torture, and so on.

## Effects of Conviction

Conviction	Willpower/Turn	Resistance
1	1	0
2	1	1
3	1	2
4	2	3
5	2	3
6	2	4
7	3	4
8	3	5
9	3	5
10	4	6

## Expanded Willpower

Willpower as a form of player control over the randomness of dice rolls is a pretty essential part of World of Darkness games. It provides that little extra edge that all characters need, now and then, especially when the chips are down. Willpower is useful for more than just adding three dice to a roll. This section expands upon the rules presented in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, giving troupes new ways to spend those precious Willpower points. The troupe as a whole should discuss which options appeal to everyone before adding any of them to regular play. Remember, these are *options*, not commandments. Use one, use none, use ‘em all if you like, keeping the mood and theme of your chronicle in mind.

## Permutations

- **Achilles’ Heel:** Maybe you’re just having one of *those* nights with the dice or maybe it seems to you like the Storyteller overestimated the fighting prowess of your character. Either way, you just can’t seem to land a solid blow on the bad guy. This option allows your character to spot a chink in the armor or a window of opportunity to get past the opposition’s defenses. By spending a point of Willpower you can reduce either the Defense or the Armor of your target to zero for the duration of one attack. Sadly, the same trick seldom works twice, so this option is limited to once per scene *per side of the conflict*. Specifically, you can’t go around the table, with player after player spending a point of Willpower to get in free shots.

- **All or Nothing:** Sometimes a single success just doesn’t get it done. Sure, you’ve still succeeded at the roll, but the result is probably nothing spectacular. This option allows you to dump all your remaining Willpower to gamble with probability. When you choose to go All or Nothing, if your next roll is a success it counts as an exceptional one. If, however, the roll fails, it’s considered a dramatic failure. This option may not be used in combat.

• **Automatic Success:** Statistically, three dice is equal to one success in the Storytelling System. This option cuts out the middleman and grants an automatic success for spending a point of Willpower. The only caveat to this option is that it may not be used for rolls that have been reduced to a chance die. Spending a single point of Willpower to automatically succeed on a roll that has been reduced to a chance die might be a bit excessive and it would almost certainly put an end to those exciting dramatic failures! This option has no effect during combat.

• **Distractions:** Combat in the Storytelling System is a “you-go, I-go” kind of affair, based on the initiative of characters involved in the scene. Normally, unless it’s your turn to act, you can’t really interfere with the actions of other characters. In terms of story, though, characters don’t stand around picking their noses, waiting for their turn at bat. They talk, they move around, they duck and weave and they get *involved*. This option allows you to spend a point of Willpower to harass and annoy an opponent just enough so he might make a mistake. The harassment could be verbal, or include minor non-action physical attempts to intimidate, hinder, and irritate. In play, each point of Willpower spent by the group as a whole acts as a –1 modifier to a single roll of an opponent. Players should describe the manner in which they are distracting the bad guy, without describing actions that would require an actual dice roll. Distractions might include insults, loud noises, bodily fluids, whatever.

• **Even Footing:** That keen-eyed security guard can foil the cleverest of plans just by noticing the one member of the group that couldn’t manage to avoid stepping on every dry leaf in sight. This option allows you to even the odds on a contested roll by forcing both sides of the contest to use the lowest dice pool available to either character. In the event that multiple characters are involved in the contest, use the lowest dice pool present for all rolls.

• **Get a Clue:** When that Wits-based roll you’re sure was meant to help you notice something fails you can usually accept the –1 penalty and try again, or you can chose to use this option. By spending a point of Willpower, the character automatically uncovers a clue or other vital piece of information that is hidden in the scene. The downside is that sometimes you didn’t find a clue because it doesn’t exist and the Willpower point is wasted. Kind Storytellers might make up something interesting on the fly, or “refund” the spent Willpower (though, with the refund, any hope of this being a “gamble” ceases to exist). This option has no effect during combat.

• **Hurry:** This option helps cut the time devoted to extended rolls in the hopes that speed is the character’s friend. The character can spend a Willpower point dur-

ing one roll of an extended action, and in doing so, cuts the time of that “per roll” period in half. Example: John is foraging (p. 77, the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) for food. Normally, each roll equals one hour’s worth of searching, but by spending a Willpower point during the roll, that single roll is now equal to half that, which in this case is 30 minutes worth of searching. The character may continue to spend Willpower roll after roll, but one must be spent *per roll* to hurry the process.

• **Moral Victory:** Once you pull the pin on Mr. Grenade, he’s no longer your friend, *especially* if you fumble the throw with a dramatic failure. This option allows you to turn a dramatic failure into a simple failure. True, the roll still fails, but at least Mr. Grenade lands further away from you.

• **Narrative Elements:** Generally, the composition of the environment around your characters is completely up to the Storyteller. No matter how badly you need a handy pond or swimming pool to hide from the baying

## Cooperative World-Building

The idea of using Willpower to fuel narrative elements goes outside the usual structure for spending Willpower, but it can add a new dimension to gameplay. It allows a cooperative sort of world building between Storyteller and player, based on a finite resource. True, this option represents a more “metagame” type approach to play, but not to the extent that it breaks immersion. Here’s a small chart to give Storytellers an idea of how much Willpower a given narrative element should cost, based on rarity.

Willpower Cost	Rarity
1	Common, easy-to-find elements, such as a gas station or fast-food restaurant, a specific type of topography in keeping with the area, makeshift weaponry.
2	Specific services, like a church or wedding planner (you never know), an unusual topographical feature for the area (oasis in the desert), some manner of escape from unpleasant situations (a secret door, loose bar in the jailhouse window).
3	Dear God, how did <i>that</i> get there? Finding a gun under the sofa, a doctor that picks up bloody hitchhikers, or various other <i>deus ex machina</i> .



hell-hounds chasing you, if the Storyteller doesn't allow such occurrences, then it's lights-out. This option gives players a measure of control over the environment, in a purely narrative fashion. The system works as follows: a player describes to the Storyteller what sort of narrative element he would like to find. Maybe he needs a gas station around the next corner to replace a busted tire or it would be nice if the small town you're trapped in happened to have a silversmith. As long as the proposed narrative element doesn't have a direct mechanical benefit (that is, it doesn't give bonuses to dice rolls), almost anything is fair game. (Oh, and it helps if it's within the realms of possibility. A character in the desert whose player spends a Willpower point and asks to find a spacecraft or a glacier is asking too much.) Once the player has described the narrative element, the Storyteller tells him if it's possible, and how many Willpower points it will cost.

- **Specialty:** Some Skills require a specific Specialty to avoid the unskilled penalty, even with basic competence in that Skill. Shooting a rocket-propelled grenade without the Heavy Weapons Firearms Specialty is an example of this, as is piloting an airplane without the Pilot Aircraft Specialty for the Drive Skill. This option gives your character "beginner's luck" for the rest of the scene, negating the unskilled penalty. We suggest limiting the use of this option to once per game session.

- **Supreme Effort:** Every story has a turning point at which you simply can't afford to fail. Maybe you have one shot to stake the vampire that's been feeding off your kids or failing a Drive roll along a cliff would result in very bad things. At times like these, the usual +3 bonus gained from spending a point of Willpower just doesn't cut the mustard. With this option, once per story you may spend a point of Willpower to give a single roll the Advanced Action quality (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 135). This represents the protagonist (that's you) putting all he has into a life-or-death situation.

- **Survival:** The Storyteller just rolled a shit-load of 10s and now you're flipping through the books, making a new character to replace the one that just got dead. This option guarantees survival, at least in the short term. Any time your character takes enough damage to kill her; you may spend a *dot* of Willpower to reduce damage taken to the minimum to ensure survival. As an example, say Stephen had two open Health boxes left and takes enough damage to fill both of them with aggravated damage. Normally, Stephen is dead. If your troupe decides to use this option, however, instead of filling his track with aggravated damage, Stephen burns a dot of Willpower and fills the last box with bashing damage. Likely he'll pass out, but he remains alive. Death can only be thwarted in this manner once per story.

## Reimagining Merits

Merits serve as traits that enhance your character in ways that Skills and Attributes can't. They give them little tricks, tips, and abilities that aren't covered by the basics. Merits help tie your character to the world around her, and to the path you ideally envision for her. A character can be the world's greatest martial artist, but without any levels of a Fighting Style, he's not as good at applying his knowledge when other people want to kill him. A character can be the world's greatest hacker, but he exists in a vacuum without any dots of Fame or Contacts or Allies.

Below, you'll find a new look at Merits, and how you might choose to enact the idea for the characters in your game.

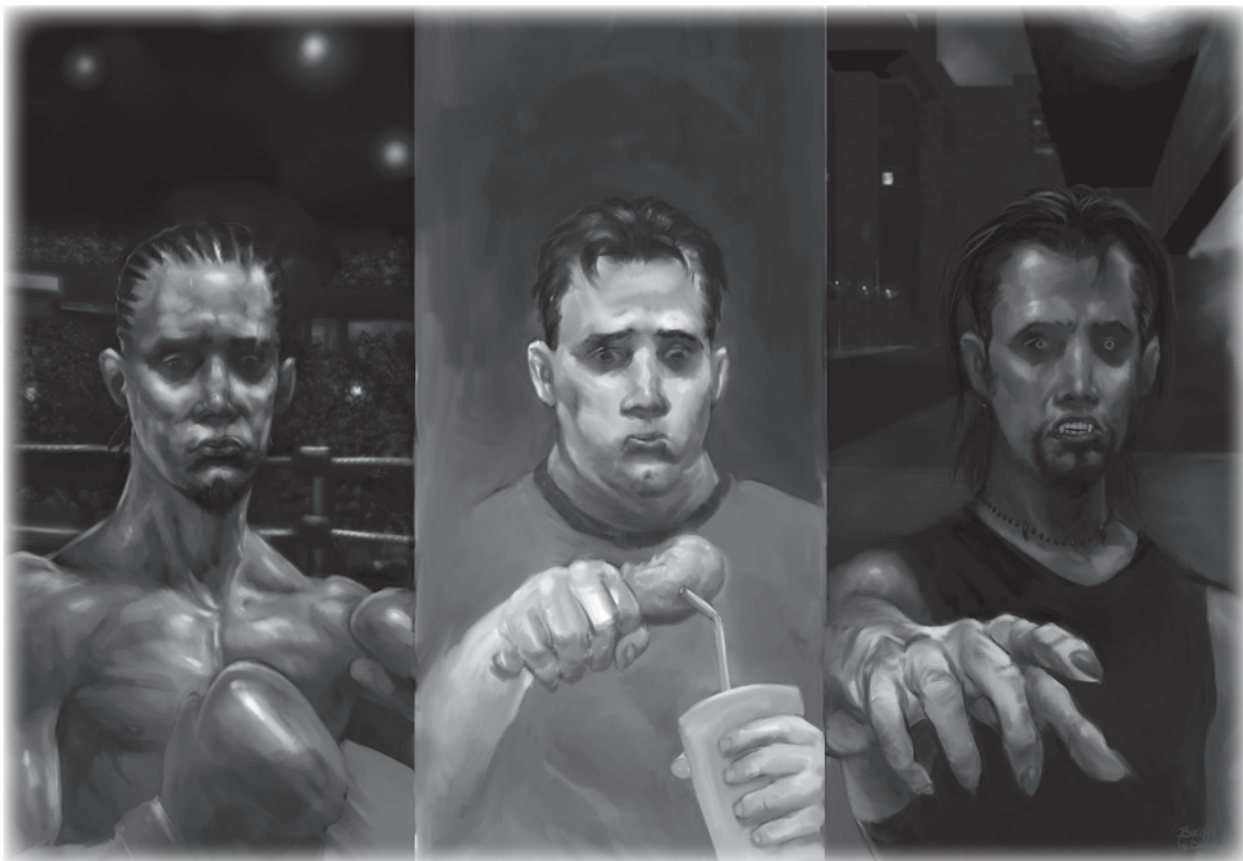
### Player-Described Merits

Rather than picking from a defined list, why not simply describe the character? When you create your character, you make five statements about him rather than spending dots and picking Merits from a list. It's that simple. No lists, no odd effects, no wondering whether your points would best be spent on four dots of Resources or Striking Looks. Just five direct, simple statements.

The trick to using this system is to really make each statement — under this system, each Merit — paint your character as an individual. If, after coming up with all your Merits, you look at them and realize they could describe a whole bunch of different people, go back and make them more specific. Generic Merits lead to generic characters. Don't worry if you can't come up with anything to start with, you're playing the game with a whole bunch of other people. Use that to your advantage: talk to the other players and talk to the Storyteller. Come up with interesting and unique Merits that really play to who you feel your character should be.

"Barry Is Strong" is an awful statement to serve as a Merit; it covers the same ground as putting dots in Strength and doesn't offer anything to tie the character into the world. "Barry's an Ex-Boxer" is better — it not only indicates that the character's tasty in a fight, but it carries with it a relationship with other people on the circuit and maybe even the mob boss who wanted him to throw his last fight. "One Time Bare-Knuckle Champion" is even better than that; the character doesn't just have a profession in his past but he did something, became a champion, but then something happened to drive him out. Even though it's more specific, such a Merit can actually apply in *more* situations, because every bit of detail opens up opportunities.

Likewise, "Charming" is worthless. Presence and Manipulation are right there on the sheet. Merits should



tie the character into the world. “Striking Looks” is a better Merit because it describes something concrete about the character that others can see and with which they can interact. “Winning Smile” or “Could Sell Ice to an Eskimo” are both evocative.

## Fast and Loose

This system for Merits relies on the creativity of every player. Some troupes will take to that naturally, while others might find it interesting but might not be ready to take the plunge — especially from fears of a player creating Merits that apply to almost every action.

In addition to the group discussion and the Storyteller’s veto, look to the sample Merits throughout this section. They’re not just there for flavor, each one is ready to be cherry-picked and written on a character sheet. Use them as examples, as inspiration, and as yardsticks for the Merits your group comes up with.

And if it turns out that you prefer Merits with hard and fast limitations, that’s cool as well.

“Brainy” is another Merit that’s already covered by traits on the character sheet; between Intelligence and Mental Attributes a character has every opportunity to be brainy. Instead, think about ways in which the character can express himself. Is she an “Ivory Tower Academic” or an “Eccentric Medical Genius?” Maybe she was a “Nobel Prize Candidate” or just a “Quirky MIT Graduate?” It’s always better to be specific.

As a player, you’re using your Merits to tell the Storyteller: *I want to see this stuff have meaning in the game.* If you don’t want something to come up, don’t make it a Merit — even if it’s a part of your character’s background. The things you select as Merits will have a tangible presence in the game.

## Using This System

The first very important rule when using this system is that everyone should be on the same page regarding Merits. Because they’re entirely freeform, it’s harder to judge what other people will find appropriate for the game. If everyone’s on the same page with using this system and discarding the old, great. Do it up. Storyteller gets veto on every described Merit, and some troupes might want to consider sharing all Merits with one another for the purposes of example (and veto power should someone come up with a ludicrously imbalanced one: “Barry’s Hits Are Lethal,” for example).



Merits don't have to be unambiguously beneficial. A girl who's a "Sucker for a Pretty Face" may run into problems because she wears her heart on her sleeve, but it's also more likely that someone she's attracted to will talk to her. Whoever she talks to will have an angle, but she's been around enough to recognize that — and she can work an angle of her own as well. Merits should be beneficial for player and for story — *not* necessarily for a character.

Storyteller characters can have Merits, though the precise details should wait until the troupe has discussed where the boundaries lurk. Only characters with a major presence in the story should possess these Merits — cops, thugs, clubbers, and everyone who isn't otherwise important to the story shouldn't have player-described Merits (but can certainly use the ones in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

## Evocation

Using a Merit is a simple system. The player says, "I want to evoke my Merit," and then calls out the player-described Merit applicable to this situation. A player-defined Merit can have a number of possible effects — the player chooses whatever one he feels is best (or most interesting) for the situation.

Again, note that the effect needn't necessarily be the one that's best for the *character* — the evocation of a Merit could instead be one that's best for the story, or for the player and troupe's enjoyment.

A single player-described Merit can be evoked only once per game session. (For ease of memory, put a check mark next to a Merit as it's used, and erase all check marks at the beginning of each session.)

The following game effects are possible. The player must choose one. If the effect requires or modifies a roll, the Merit must be evoked before the roll is made.

- **Access Equipment.** The character can gain access to any one piece of equipment relevant to the Merit (normally restricted to Cost ●●● items or below; items higher than that in cost mean the character has to take a Conflict, as described below). (Example: Marlene is a "Big Game Hunter," so gaining access to a Remington 700 rifle is really no problem at all. If she wanted something bigger — a piece of military equipment, say — she'd have to call in some favors and take a Conflict to her character.)

- **Access Location.** Some locations in the game might be restricted for most characters — a military base, the back room of a club, an underground fighting ring, a corporate boardroom. The player can evoke a Merit to access an appropriate location. (Example: With either the "Corporate Fixer" or "Could Sell Ice to an Eskimo" Merits, Derek could have his character access a secret company meeting either by knowing people inside, or simply by using his golden tongue to convince them he deserves access.)

- **Awesome Effort.** On one applicable roll, the player gains the ability to achieve an exceptional success on three successes instead of five. (Example: John uses the Merit "Obsessive Over Details" on a Perception roll at a crime scene to hopefully notice truly unseen elements.)

- **Call On Relationship.** The player-described Merits can infer connections to a whole host of as-yet-unmentioned (or mentioned) individuals, and this effect allows a player to evoke a Merit for the purposes of creating an ally or contact. The character can be called upon for information or to help on matters related to the Merit, but only comes for one scene. The player may conjure a Conflict to have the relationship aid his character for the remainder of the game session. (Example: Stew's character has the Merit, "Known at All the Clubs." He's able to evoke this Merit to call upon the bartender at a club called Moon Bounce, and the bartender will supply him with information, free drinks, or maybe even a key to get into the place after-hours.)

- **Narrative Advantage.** The player literally gets to play Storyteller for a moment, actively changing the story to connect to her character (through the chosen evoked Merit). The Storyteller gets some veto power here, and evocation of this effect should not allow for *established* facts to be over-written. (Example: Rob's character has the "Bare-Knuckle Boxing Champion" Merit. He's in a fight with an unnamed, but clearly well-trained assailant. Rob can evoke this Merit and declare that his enemy realizes who he is, and backs down from the fight either out of fear or respect. This wouldn't work, however, if the Storyteller has already given the assailant an identity that doesn't make sense in this context, such as if the foe is a corporate assassin or an ancient vampire who just woke up from a long slumber.)

- **Narrative Disadvantage.** As above, except the player can actually twist the story to work against his own character. Why do so? Well, for one, it's interesting. Conflict is why these games work. Two, by doing this, the character gains an experience point. The player may *suggest* how the narrative works against him, but the Storyteller is the ultimate arbiter of how it bites the character, through use of conjuring a Conflict (see below). (Example: Rob's character still has that "Bare-Knuckle Boxing Champion" Merit, and he's in that fight with the unnamed assailant. He decides to evoke a narrative disadvantage, and the Storyteller conjures a Conflict that says the assailant recognizes Rob's character for the champion that he is, and wants more than anything to take him down as a notch in his belt. That means the assailant will pull out all the stops to win, which might mean All-Out Attacks or other low-down fighting tricks.)

- **Second Nature.** The character automatically succeeds on one applicable roll. If the roll is an instant roll, it succeeds that turn. If the action is extended, assume the character gains three automatic successes per roll (without actually rolling). (Example: "Rock Climber"

is the Merit, and Justin uses it to have his character automatically succeed on climbing a 100-foot tall cliff face. It's normally an extended roll that would necessitate 10 total successes, with each roll equaling one turn of climbing. So, with the automatics, Justin's character would make it in four rolls, or four minutes.)

- **Skill Bonus.** A player-defined Merit can modify a single Skill when evoked. The character gains +2 to that Skill if applicable, and the bonus lasts till the end of the scene, though is only applied on appropriate, Merit-related rolls. Conjuring a Conflict can extend its use for the remainder of the game session. (Example: Dan's written down the Merit "Reformed Gang Member" on his character's sheet. During one scene, Dan's going to need to make Streetwise rolls to identify gang tags and colors, and he evokes his Merit to gain +2 to those Streetwise rolls. Since he's in another city from the one he grew up in, Dan's character *won't* get that bonus on rolls during the scene where he's just trying to figure out the lay-out of the city — his old gang memories don't help him, there.)

- **Trait Bonus.** A number of traits sit outside of Attributes and Skills: Defense, Health, Initiative modifier, and Speed. In certain situations, a player-defined Merit might modify one of these traits for a scene. The character gains +2 to that trait if applicable. Conjuring a Conflict can extend its use for the remainder of the game session. (Example: Desi gives her character the "Always Flight, Never Fight" Merit she made up. During an intense fire-fight, she decides that her character — as usual — bolts for the hills, and her driving heartbeat and subsequent adrenaline rush equate to a nice +2 to her Speed.)

## The Umbrella

Player-described Merits on one hand, don't cover the specifics very well. If you're looking for a Merit that always applies a bonus to, say, your Initiative, then this system doesn't cover that.

That being said, player-described Merits cover a wider array of options, and supply a player with a whole host of potential benefits to her character. With a single Merit, it's possible to call upon a system like Allies or Contacts, or to gain Social dice, or to access equipment. And it's all done with a system that customizes Merits to each character — every instance a beautiful and unique snowflake.

Problem is, if you demand a system that, say, tracks money or bodyguards (Resources and Retainer), then what? This system doesn't handle that perfectly (for money, the character can evoke a Merit to gain equipment, which cuts out the middleman; for, say, a Retainer, the system could allow the character to call on relationships related to a specific Merit). So, what to do?

One, you could just not use this system. That's okay. It won't hurt our feelings. The original Merit mechanics are great.

Two, you could use a mix. Give a character the standard seven dots in Merits, but then give them one to three player-described Merits at the time of creation. Thus, all systems are covered — just be careful to watch for power creep. Nothing wrong with min-maxing when appropriate (see Matt McFarland's essay on p. 216 of the Appendix), but it shouldn't get out of control.

## Why Bad Merits Are Still Awesome

It seems a little odd, sure. Why would you want to give your character "negative" Merits, things that ultimately amount to a new type of Flaw?

A Merit may not seem great for the character, but it can still be great for the story and for the player's entertainment — moreover, sometimes even negative Merits have their benefits.

Consider: "Heroin Addict."

Addiction? Not so fun.

But, membership has its bonuses. First, the Heroin Addict can call upon his buddies — people with whom he shoots up, dealers with whom he does business, or even people out of his many failed rehab stints. Second, he knows all kinds of shit — how to hide his stash from police, how to move hell and earth to score some horse, how to get into back rooms and basements and opium dens, how to get hold of illegal shipments of drugs or guns, and so forth. Plus, any Merit allows the player to evoke narrative shifts for benefit or disadvantage (and a Conflict can lead to experience points as well as great story opportunities).

The thing to remember is, Merits are just elements to your character. They're not really *good* or *bad* for the story — they might not be great for the character's life, but are you really hoping that a character wandering the aptly-named World of Darkness is going to have a blessed existence? Probably not.

## Conjuring Conflicts

Some of the above evocations call for the conjuration of a Conflict.

What is a Conflict?

A Conflict is something that stands in the way of the character's needs and wants. Generally, the Storyteller is the final arbiter of the nature of a Conflict, but players are encouraged to suggest what kind of Conflict might be appropriate (some players aren't very good at giving their own characters punishments, which is understandable; others are *all too good* at giving themselves crushing penalties).

A Conflict should never be so severe it cannot be overcome.

A Conflict should be one largely held to the current game session (or the next if the session is near to wrapping up).

A Conflict is best when it can lead to more story, and not be a stumbling block to the current story.



A Conflict doesn't require negotiation between player and Storyteller unless the troupe demands it. A player needn't even know (and probably shouldn't, for the purposes of suspense) just what Conflict is on the horizon.

#### Examples:

- Dan wants to use his character's "Reformed Gang Member" Merit and extend the +2 Streetwise bonus through the entire session. The Storyteller determines that the Conflict here is that it means by immersing himself once more in the seedy underbelly, Dan's character will once more run afoul of the law. He isn't doing anything wrong, but they don't care. They know he's ex-gang. They know they can fuck him up with impunity. For the rest of the session, the cops cause trouble, and are constantly closing in on the character.

- Missy's character has the Merit, "Paranoid." She suspects that this game session is going to be combat-intensive, so she wants to use a Trait Bonus to gain +2 to her character's Defense, a bonus that she hopes will last for the rest of the session. Missy suggests that a good conflict would be for the character to suffer from the "Paranoia" derangement, but the Storyteller thinks that's too long-term. Instead, the Storyteller determines that anytime Missy needs her character to make a Social roll, the roll will be penalized by -2 dice, reflecting her discomfited, suspicious nature creeping through.

- Jim just wants the experience points for his character. His character possesses the Merit, "Neat Freak," and so he decides to evoke that Merit to take a narrative disadvantage for the experience point it will net him (he's hoping to buy

some new Skill dots). He has no idea what the Storyteller will spring on him as a Conflict. His Neat Freak status comes into play when his small house is besieged by a flock of bile-hungry bat-creatures — Jim wants his character to flee to the car and out-run the bats, but when he gets to the car, the Storyteller rules that Jim doesn't have his keys. He's so much a Neat Freak, he forgets where he puts things sometimes, and that includes the keys. Oops.

## Those Wonderful Toys: Creating Merits

What happens when you want to give your character a Merit that doesn't exist? Maybe the Merit you're after does exist, but if it's in a supplement your troupe doesn't have access to, the only way you can know is by asking around. Maybe you've come up with an idea that hasn't yet worked its way into a book. Whatever the case, you can always build your own Merit.

The first and most important part of creating a new Merit is talking with your Storyteller. Discuss what you're thinking of, why it works — and why it's justified as a Merit rather than a note in your character's background. Talk the idea through, bounce ideas around until you have a good idea of what you want to happen.

## Buying New Player-Described Merits

We recommend acquiring new player-described Merits be done in one of two ways.

The first: a character never has more than five. If a character wants to get a new one, he must swap it out for an existing one, but that isn't done by simply declaring it so. The old Merit must be "resolved" in a proper, story-driven fashion. "Heroin Addict" could be resolved if the player gets clean. "Bare-Knuckle Boxing Champion" might go away if the character does something that earns him greater reputation, or does something that sullies his old reputation.

The second is that a player can add new ones above five, but must pay experience points to do so. Since they're pretty versatile, we recommend that the player pay a total of 15 experience points per new Merit.

## I Know Kung Fu

The guidelines in this section apply to Merits in general. They're a broad-strokes system that should work well enough without focusing too much on one area. Some players may want to focus on one area: Fighting Styles. While you can use the rules in this section to create new Fighting Styles — look to the "Sequential Maneuvers" section below — **Armory: Reloaded** looks at combat in-detail, including an expanded look at creating Fighting Styles for all manner of martial arts.

One thing to bear in mind when creating Merits, especially as a player: you're not just creating them for one character. Once a Merit's accepted in a game, it's available to anyone who meets the pre-requisites. Whatever benefits a character has in a game can also apply to a Storyteller character — especially one who acts as a rival, rather than an enemy.

You might rethink the current organization of Merits by arranging them in three broad categories: background traits, expanded traits, and specialized traits. All three tie your character into the world, but in different ways.

**Background traits** are the sort of thing that can't show up elsewhere on the character sheet. It could reflect relationships with other people (a whole lot of Social Merits are background traits), a natural quirk of birth that can't otherwise be represented (Ambidextrous, Giant), or a learned element that isn't covered by existing Skills (Common Sense, Language).

**Expanded traits** make your character better at using various traits when the right situation applies, much like Skill Specialties. Such a Merit might give your character a bonus to an Attribute for a specific task (Iron Stamina, Strong Lungs), or increase a dice pool — sometimes just to negate penalties — in a specific situation (Meditative Mind, Striking Looks).

**Specialized traits** let you use Attributes and Skills in new and exciting ways. Any ranked Merit that gives access to maneuvers is a Specialized Merit, including all Fighting Styles. Any Merit that allows you to perform specific actions that you can't otherwise rely on is a Specialized Trait (Encyclopedic Knowledge, Holistic Healing). Other examples include those that allow you to use different traits for otherwise standard purposes (Brawling Dodge, Fighting Finesse).

That brief list makes Merits a lot easier to handle. As one element, they're a bit of an organizational nightmare. Is spending your life becoming a kung fu master really worth as much as being very high up in the FBI or a major company? How about being a billionaire? That, of course, depends how much your characters are going to be dealing with the world. Ideally, all three categories will have their own chance to shine.

## Background Traits

Most background traits have an effect that grows broader as the Merit dots increase, rather than a distinct increase in power. More dots of Allies give your character more influence in a specific field, or less influence in a number of fields. Another dot of Contacts only gives you another area from which to get information. When creating a background trait, make sure it's plain to all parties what each dot represents — look at existing Merits like Mentor, Resources, or Status for existing examples. If the specific nature of the Background Merit would include dice bonuses, make sure to spell out when and where it applies.

Other background traits affect otherwise static values that can't otherwise change. Fleet of Foot, for example, alters the species factor when working out Speed. Because it only has a direct impact on dramatic actions when it's used to modify Athletics rolls or to judge how quickly someone can move while people shoot at her, Fleet of Foot is one dot per point of Speed, something that can be replicated by decent equipment. Giant, on the other hand, modifies a character's Size.

No equipment does that, and a character with Stamina 5 and Giant is at a significant advantage over one with Stamina 5 alone. Health is a very valuable trait (as is Size, to a lesser extent), so Giant costs 4 dots. That way it's a serious investment, rather than something that everyone takes.

Generally, something that's replicated by equipment or a fairly simple deed — getting known on a citywide level, learning a language, joining a rotary club, or running a bit quicker than someone — costs one dot. At three dots, a Merit represents becoming a police detective or FBI special agent, having friends in City Hall who can quash building permits without asking questions, or getting a weird feeling from walking too close to a vampire — something that requires specialized equipment, or a significant investment of time and effort. Five dots can represent a CEO, a powerful (or supernatural) Storyteller character who helps out, or access to millions of dollars of disposable income — the product of a charmed life.

## Drawbacks and Prerequisites

Most Background elements have a simple drawback related to the Merit's nature. A Giant is bigger than everyone else, thus sticks in the mind. Allies aren't a one-way street, they require help. Contacts need bribes or other incentives to feed the character information. In general, background traits don't have prerequisites.

## What's What?

As a starting point, here are the Merits from the **World of Darkness Rulebook** broken down into the categories used in this section.

**Background Traits:** Common Sense, Language, Unseen Sense, Ambidextrous, Direction Sense, Fleet of Foot, Giant, Allies, Barfly, Contacts, Fame, Mentor, Resources, Retainer, Status

**Expanded Traits:** Danger Sense, Eidetic Memory, Meditative Mind, Fast Reflexes, Iron Stamina, Iron Stomach, Natural Immunity, Quick Healer, Strong Back, Strong Lungs, Toxin Resistance, Striking Looks

**Specialized Traits:** Encyclopedic Knowledge, Holistic Healing, Brawling Dodge, Disarm, Fighting Finesse, Fighting Style: Boxing, Fighting Style: Kung Fu, Fighting Style: Two Weapon Fighting, Fresh Start, Gunslinger, Quick Draw, Stunt Driver, Weaponry Dodge, Inspiring



## Expanded Traits

An expanded trait takes one set of Skills or Attributes and makes them easier to use in certain circumstances. An expanded trait should apply roughly half the time: Striking Looks only applies in non-threatening situations when the character can use her looks to help, and generally that comes into play roughly half the time. The condition of an expanded trait should be fairly explicit about when it comes into play. Eidetic Memory explicitly covers any roll to remember information. Danger Sense only fires when a threat is present. Natural Immunity affects all rolls for staving off disease and infection. Make sure when you're creating the Merit that you're equally specific.

An expanded trait adds to a specific Attribute, at +2 dice for a two-dot Merit. If it applies to more than one Attribute, up that to three dots for a +2 bonus. Bonuses and penalties from Merits should never go above +3 or below -3. Beyond that is the realm of extreme circumstances and supernatural talent.

Alternately, the Merit can apply one of the effects in the following table, for one dot each. Apart from gaining the 8-again quality, all of them can be taken more than once — either making the Merit broader (including a second source, or a second Attribute) or more focused (reducing the penalty by two, adding two to the Attribute).

### Suggested Merit Effects

- Gain the 8-again quality on any rolls involving up to three Skills when the condition is met
- Add one to a specific Attribute for the purposes of a specific task that meets the condition
  - +1 Initiative in a specific circumstance
  - Reduce the penalty from a source specific to the condition by one

For two dots, the character can either halve or double the time between specific effects — healing a specific type of damage, exposure to a specific temperature or environmental extreme. For an additional point, add another specific effect, on up to a maximum of four specific effects for a five-dot Merit. Quick Healer uses this system, halving the time to heal bashing, lethal, and aggravated damage — three categories.

### Drawbacks and Prerequisites

A Merit that enhances a specific Trait should require two dots in that Trait, unless it's very specialized, when it should require three dots. A Drawback has to be something that impacts the character, affecting her behavior or ability to participate in the story as a result of the Merit. The higher the Merit's rating, the more a Drawback should impact the character.

## Specialized Traits

Specialized Merits break the rules. With the right Merit, you can swap out one Attribute for another when building one specific dice pool. You can take actions that others can't, like bringing useful trivia to mind or drawing on your training to disarm a foe. Some specialized traits allow you to take more than one action, or give a variety of benefits depending on the rank purchased. Specialized traits often reflect esoteric training or a quirk in how the character thinks that's special, but that can't be reflected in common traits.

Representing that snippet of specialization in terms of dots can pose a problem. One Merit could have a half-dozen mechanical implementations, none of which really seem to click. So boil it down. A good driver is anyone with plenty of dots in Drive and a specialty, but a Stunt Driver is someone who can keep control of a car while firing a gun out of the window or performing first-aid on a wounded colleague in the passenger seat. Driving no longer consumes his action for the turn. It's as simple as that.

**Extra Actions:** A Merit that gives a character one extra action should cost three dots. At least one of the actions must be relevant to the Merit, and it requires three dots in the related Finesse Attribute. In combat, the character must make two of the same type of attack, though he doesn't have to attack the same person with both actions. The second attack suffers a -1 penalty, and attacking twice negates the character's Defense for the turn. The Merit also requires the combat skill in question at three dots.

**Swapping Attributes:** Changing the Attribute used in a specific dice pool costs two dots, and can only swap the Power and Finesse Attribute in the same category. These Merits require the new Attribute at three dots and two dots in the Skill as pre-requisites.

**Recalculating Traits:** A Merit can change how a secondary Trait is calculated: adding Brawl or Weaponry to Defense instead of doubling it when dodging, for example. These must only be affected when the character takes a specific action. The Merit costs one point and requires the appropriate Attribute at two dots and the Skill at one dot.

**New Actions:** This is the "none of the above" category. Anyone without Encyclopedic Knowledge can perhaps remember scads of trivia, but without taking that action, they're probably never going to remember anything directly useful. If the action's useful in most situations, it's worth four dots. If it's only generally useful in a specific type of scene then it's worth three dots. The Storyteller and player should work together to determine precisely what a success entails, but remember to keep it simple. Work with any existing system rather than making two different actions for the same thing.

## Paying the Setting Toll

Purchasing Merits during character creation can get confusing. The points all go into rounding your character off, either by hooking him into the setting directly or by representing things that you can't otherwise. Some Storytellers may want to hand out differing amounts of points for each type of Merits. Say, five points for background traits and five to split between expanded and specialized, or ten points for everything; but a character must have at least one from each category.

Whatever system you decide on, talk it out among your group first. If someone's got a good concept ready to go, it's not a good idea to cripple her character by restricting where she can spend Merit dots. Don't make it harder for players to create the characters they want, *especially* not in the name of "balance". The idea is to give a little more freedom, and maybe a little more structure. If that ain't happening, take a good look at what you need to change.

**Sequential Maneuvers:** A sequential maneuver is a ranked Merit where every level gives a specific benefit, like a Fighting Style. Each element should be built as a single Merit, but worth one dot more than it would otherwise. The one-dot element is the exception to this; build it as a one-dot Merit as normal. If most of the subsidiary elements rely on one specific Attribute and Skill, require both at three dots. If two Attributes come into play, require the most common at three dots, and the other at two, along with two dots in the Skill. If three Attributes come into play, require all three and the Skill at two dots.

## Morality

Morality is a thorny topic, even outside of the relative safety of the context of a role-playing game. Questions about whether a given action is right or wrong, whether an action is *always* wrong or is sometimes correct, under what circumstances someone might legitimately act counter to his professed morality, and whether any value can be found in a moral system can and have filled volumes. Add to those concepts the questions of whether a higher power exists and, therefore, whether acting in accordance with that power's wishes — assuming one can *know* those wishes — is "moral" and it's clear

that simulating "morality" realistically in a chronicle is far outside the scope of any game engine.

And yet, simulating anything realistically is outside the scope of the game engine. The goal shouldn't be — and isn't — to emulate every possible facet of a given topic within the game, but to give players the tools to make the topic part of the game in an enjoyable and thematic manner.

For this section, then, we'll be talking about Morality and what it means in a World of Darkness game. We'll discuss how to make it more of a focus, less of a focus, and give you different ways to approach the concept mechanically.

Before we start, though, we need to clarify something: at no point are we (where "we" means both the author of this section in particular and White Wolf in general) trying to make a statement about the way morality "really is." Everyone has an opinion on the subject, but those opinions make pretty lousy bases for game systems, because they tend to clash with other people's opinions. The idea here is to make Morality an interesting and evocative part of your chronicles, not to convert you to any particular ideology.

## Morality as Written

The Morality system as presented in the World of Darkness does not necessarily measure morality. In a sense, it measures conscience or social functioning, but it is no indicator of whether a person is "good" or not. And lest the reader complain that the trait is therefore misnamed, consider this: what is "good?"

This isn't meant to open a philosophical discussion (feel free, if you'd like, of course) but just to underline one of the problems with having a morality system in the first place. By what yardstick is goodness measured? We measure by actions, in the case of the World of Darkness' system, but even then, the *result* of "evil" actions is only the potential for loss of functionality in certain circumstances (derangements).

One of the other challenges with the system is that the chart on p. 91 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** isn't to everyone's liking. Again, it isn't meant to represent the way morality "really works" (that's pretty subjective anyway), but even so, placing "injury to another" as a less serious crime than "shoplifting" might seem strange to some, or natural to others. Part of the difficulty is that the "sins" listed leave much up to Storyteller interpretation.

## Theory — What is Morality?

What purpose does having a Morality trait serve in a World of Darkness game? We'll consider the question both from the standpoint of theme and of game design.



Thematically, the World of Darkness is supposed to be a morally gray place. The various World of Darkness games have explicit or implicit ethical or moral themes. **Vampire: The Requiem** and **Promethean: The Created** both ask, in different ways, what it means to be human. **Werewolf: The Forsaken** showcases themes of faith, duty, and the warrior ethic. **Mage: The Awakening** grants people godlike power and then asks them to use it with Wisdom. **Changeling: The Lost** pits the characters against beings that have no moral understanding (as human beings understand it). The characters of **Hunter: The Vigil** are faced with overwhelming moral choices — what is a monster? What is the appropriate response to something inhuman? When does that responsibility end? **Geist: The Sin-Eaters** explores the notions of death and free will and all of the moral choices that come with those topics.

Having a trait representing Morality, then, puts a spotlight on those themes (and many others besides). It provides a convenient yardstick for where a character's lines exist. It does *not* indicate what a character would never do, it simply indicates what actions would have an effect on the character's psyche.

Morality, by itself, does not indicate deficits in social functioning (not for mortals, anyway). It's possible for a character to lose a great deal of Morality and never gain a derangement. This means that a character might wind up at Morality 2 and be capable of committing premeditated murder without risking degeneration, but not show it in the slightest. That fact alone should inform the portrayal of the character — even if the character isn't willing to murder people, it's not because her moral outlook says that she shouldn't. It's because she's afraid of the consequences, legal or otherwise.

But although it is *possible* for a character to fall to a lower Morality rating without gaining a derangement, it isn't very likely. What the Morality system seems to state, then, is that “immoral” acts cause mental illness. This isn't really the intent, but it's an easy assumption to make, given that the derangements have names like “phobia,” “depression,” and “schizophrenia.” The intent of the system, however, is to highlight the effects that self-serving and socially irresponsible acts have on the character's perceptions of the world. A character who gains derangements in response to losing Morality isn't handling the stress of that loss well. A character who doesn't gain derangements copes better.

Morality is a building block. By providing a system for “baseline” human morality, we can more clearly see the change when a person becomes a vampire (or a werewolf, or a changeling, and so on). The differences

between Morality and Humanity, Harmony, Clarity, Wisdom and Synergy provide additional thematic support for their respective game lines — human beings can break their sworn oaths all they like without worrying about their Morality (unless the Storyteller wants to classify such lies as “selfish acts,” and those only become violations at Morality 9) but changelings risk Clarity for doing so.

## Keeping the “Bad Players” in Check?

Players occasionally identify the Morality system as a check on character behavior. That is, the system is reputedly in place to prevent characters from doing things like engaging in mass murder, property destruction, and (in the case of supernatural beings) revealing arcane secrets to mortals. This is true only insofar as an in-game, systemic consequence must exist in order for a thematic element to be important within a chronicle.

As longtime players will notice, though, the fact that a particular action risks degeneration does not *prevent* players from having their characters take those actions. Werewolves risk Harmony from eating human flesh, and yet during a **Werewolf: The Forsaken** chronicle that this author ran, one of the characters (played by another author of this book, as it happens) deliberately hunted down and ate a random person to gain some quick Essence. He recognized the risk (and indeed, the character lost Harmony), he just felt that in that instance, the character accepted that risk.

Morality as a system doesn't “stop” players from doing anything. It simply demands that their characters are, in some small way, held accountable for what they choose to do. Implementing a system that out-and-out prevented certain kinds of actions as being “immoral” would be utterly counter to the World of Darkness' themes. A system that allows for a short-term gain, but a long term (and less tangible) loss, however, is very much in-theme, and that is part of that thinking behind the system in place.

## Storytelling Morality

Now that we've identified some of the issues that players have with the Morality system, and some of the theory behind why the system exists in the first place, we'll discuss some alternatives for the system. The first thing we (rather, you) need to establish, though, is what role Morality is going to play in the chronicle. The three options we present here aren't the only ones, of course, but they fit with the World of Darkness and hopefully represent facets of the game that players would want to see represented.

### Morality as Sanity

Because loss of morality results in mental instability, why not just call the trait "Sanity" and be done with it? The Morality system, used in this way, plays into the World of Darkness' established theme of dark symbolism. Everything *means* something, and learning those meanings leads to madness.

If you're going to use a Sanity system instead of a Morality system, consider what you want the outcome to be. The Storytelling System assumes that characters will lose Morality over time, but not that they will all become Morality 0 psychopaths. The drama is in the conflict — does the character commit acts contrary to Morality because that's what's necessary to survive, or take the moral high road and let that be a comfort, possibly the *only* comfort, when the shadows come to life? With a Sanity system, the question is different: does the character seek out (or at least, not avoid) situations in which he sees the maddening truth of the world, or does he avoid the supernatural to hold onto his mind?

The problem with that question is that if the character avoids the supernatural, he's probably not a big part of the chronicle anymore. As such, degeneration checks with a Sanity system are probably more frequent than with Morality. The characters should risk their Sanity several times during a story, and the results of that risk should linger *even if* no Sanity loss is indicated. (For an alternate peek at this, take a look at the Forbidden Lore system earlier in this chapter, on p. 28.)

### Morality as Spiritual Purity

Here we drift into some risky territory. If Morality is a measure of how spiritually pure a character is, that means that the Storyteller has to determine what "spiritual purity" entails. It doesn't have to conform with any particular religion's view of purity, of course, but if it does, consider what that means for the chronicle. If following the minutiae of a particular religion is actually rewarding — Spiritual Purity increases — then does that imply that religion is correct? And if a given religion is correct, what does that imply about

the World of Darkness? If the minutiae isn't important, but the tenets that coincide with societal laws (not harming or killing people, for instance) are, is the purity in question really spiritual, or are we just back at Morality again?

In the established World of Darkness, human beings have souls. That is, a non-physical component to every human being exists. That, in itself, implies that a measure of Spiritual Purity not connected to a specific religion is possible, and the system for this trait given below doesn't presuppose any spiritual truths about the World of Darkness other than what's discernable from the **World of Darkness Rulebook** (that is, people have souls, they can become ghosts, rituals like exorcisms work but are not specific to one religion, etc.). If you wish to specify the matter further, feel free. It might be interesting to play Lancea Sanctum vampires in a world where Roman Catholicism is the objectively correct spiritual truth of the universe, but then, players of other faiths might find this approach dismissive and even offensive. As always, the players need to be clear about their comfort zones.

### Morality as Conscience

Conscience is fundamentally about perception of other people. It includes "theory of mind," the notion of being able to recognize that other people are thinking, feeling beings and that they have their own perspectives on the world — in short, that one's own viewpoint isn't the only one that exists (much less the only one that matters). As such, as Conscience drops, the ability to relate to other people *can* also become impaired, but it doesn't necessarily have to. A serial killer might have Conscience 0, but he appears outwardly normal.

## Alternate Systems

Below are a few ways to change the mechanics of Morality. The first two are different ways to approach the game system itself. The next three flesh out the notions above (Sanity, Spiritual Purity, and Conscience) and create full systems for them. Pick whichever one you like, mix them to your taste, ignore them all if they don't work.

Note, too, that these rules are written with mortal characters in mind. Supernatural characters have different moral concerns, and in general, the Morality traits presented with the various game lines work quite well in highlighting the themes of those games. That said, if you think that your **Mage: The Awakening** game would benefit by changing Wisdom to Sanity, or if your coterie of Sanctified vampires should be tracking Spiritual Purity instead of Humanity, go ahead and make those changes. Just be prepared to do a little mechanics-tweaking on





the fly, as we don't have the space here to pick through every existing sourcebook and tell you how to handle every Merit or supernatural trait that deals with a given character type's Morality trait.

### Scrap It

Not everyone likes or feels the need for a Morality system. That doesn't mean that moral or ethical considerations have no place in the chronicle, just that a game mechanic isn't necessary. That's perfectly acceptable. If your chronicle works better without tracking Morality, ditch it. The only immediate consequences to a character's behavior are the temporal ones, such as police involvement.

For a chronicle involving mortals (including a **Hunter: The Vigil**), little more needs to be said. But what if the Storyteller is running one of the other supernatural games, or plans to have the mortals become such characters? Do the characters suddenly gain Morality traits upon their descent into the supernatural?

They *can*, if the Storyteller feels that the Morality system has more merit for those game lines. Admittedly, a vampire's Humanity says more about the character, both in terms of game systems and role-playing considerations, than a mortal's Morality score. As such, while it perhaps is not worth tracking Morality, the Humanity system is important enough that the Storyteller decides to keep it in. On the other hand, if the Storyteller prefers to keep

things consistent, or if the troupe has the same feelings about Humanity (and Harmony, and so on) as it does about Morality, again, scrap it.

Be aware, though, that those alternate forms of Morality tend to figure more heavily into their respective games than Morality does. Humanity, for instance, acts as a cap on certain dice pools for vampires. Prometheans, who also track Humanity (though they view it differently than vampires), might one day become human — and the dice pool for that attempt is Humanity. Harmony measures how much a werewolf is in tune with her spiritual nature (and thus high Harmony gives bonuses to dealing with spirits), while a changeling's Clarity impacts how (and how well) he perceives the world around him. A Sin-Eater's Synergy rating measures how in-tune with his geist he is, and therefore high Synergy makes passage between the living world and the Underworld easier. In fact, of all of the *World of Darkness* lines released as of this writing, only **Mage: The Awakening** uses a Morality trait that merely adds to the existing Morality trait, rather than rewriting bits of it.

If the Storyteller chooses to do away with the Morality trait entirely, even for supernatural characters, he needs to decide how systems that rely on that trait are handled. Some suggestions follow. Refer to the appropriate sections of the games in question for the full systems, of course.

Game	Morality Trait	Effect/Dice Pool	Alternate Suggestions
Vampire: The Requiem	Humanity	Base time spent in torpor	Stamina + Resolve
		Remaining awake during the day	Stamina + Resolve – Blood Potency
		Interacting with mortals	Blood Potency acts as negative modifier to appropriate rolls
Werewolf: The Forsaken	Harmony	Death Rage Stimuli	Storyteller's judgment
		Dealing with spirits	Bonuses/penalties are based on sum of Primal Urge + Occult
Mage: The Awakening	Wisdom	Dealing with spirits	Bonuses/penalties are based on sum of Gnosis + Occult
		Contesting Abyssal beings	Bonuses/penalties are based on sum of Gnosis + Stamina
		Determining Paradox effects/duration	Intelligence + Wits
Promethean: The Created	Humanity	Avoiding Torment	Resolve + Composure
		Creating a new Promethean	Intelligence + Occult
		Reaching the New Dawn	Azoth (the Storyteller should consider being lenient with modifiers if using this method)
Changeling: The Lost	Clarity	Perception	Bonuses/penalties are based on sum of Wyrd + Wits
		Kenning	Wits + Wyrd
Hunter: The Vigil	Morality	N/A	N/A
Geist: The Sin-Eaters	Synergy	Opening Avernian Gates	Bonuses/penalties are based on sum of Psyche + Manipulation
		Dealing with geists/Kerberoi	Bonuses/penalties are based on sum of Psyche + Presence
		Conducting Ceremonies	Bonuses/penalties are based on sum of Psyche + Manipulation
		Navigating the Underworld	Bonuses/penalties are based on sum of Psyche + Wits

## Customized Morality

It takes a little more work, but it's possible for every character to have a Morality track custom-made for the chronicle. The main point against such an approach is that the hierarchy of sins might wind up becoming a list of "Things The Character Would Never Have Done Anyway," and as such the Morality system loses its bite entirely. This assumes, however, that the player is attempting to use the system as some kind of cheat and ignoring the *point* of the Morality system, and we don't want to make that assumption. As such, we'll discuss customized Morality with

the understanding that it's meant to underscore the themes of the World of Darkness games, not dodge them.

In order to create a customized Morality track, the Storyteller should first decide what he wants Morality to represent in his chronicle. The suggestions should provide a good road map. Once he knows that, he should tell the players if *all* Morality tracks have to include any particular sins. Premeditated murder, for instance, might be represented on all tracks, though it's possible that it shows up higher on the scale for some characters than others. The point of the exercise, here, isn't to preemptively punish



the players or try to restrict their characters' actions. Remember, the sins on a Morality chart should come up at some point during the story, because that forces the characters into a choice — commit the sin and gain whatever advantage that allows but risk degeneration, or take the high road and deal with the results. Also, we don't advise Storytellers to place acts on the chart that they personally find reprehensible. A Storyteller who is also a parent might find child abuse morally unforgivable, but that doesn't mean it needs to be on the chart. Indeed, if it's a hot button for the Storyteller, he's probably better served telling his players that it makes him uncomfortable and for them to simply avoid the situation entirely.

Once the Storyteller has decided which sins, if any, must be on the chart, the players populate the rest of it with actions that their characters would risk degeneration for performing. The players can get a sense of how to figure these out by using the questions listed under Sanity, below, but let's delve into the process a little deeper here (with the understanding that the Storyteller needs to clearly define what Morality is really measuring).

The player needs to consider the character's life up to the point that the chronicle begins. The default is Morality 7, which makes a character socially functional, with no particular drawbacks or benefits as a result of his ethical outlook. What does that translate to for this particular character? The character still has a long way to fall before becoming an unplayable monster (if that is indeed what happens to him at Morality 0 — see below), so what is the baseline? How does the character look at other people? How does he view himself and his place in the world? What kinds of actions would he find immoral or unethical?

Note that this is different from being unwilling to take certain actions because of the temporal consequences. Some people claim to be “above morality,” but they don't rob, steal, and commit violence because they know they would be held accountable for those actions. Whether those claims are legitimate or just adolescent puffery isn't at issue; you can make that decision for your character. But Morality is an inherently internal process, quite separate from considerations of outside consequence, so if you feel that your character simply *has* no moral outlook, talk to your Storyteller about how you can create a Morality chart that takes into consideration your desires for your character *and* the story's needs.

Some guidelines for creating sins:

- **Remember the levels on the chart.** At Morality 8–10, the sins are minor and very difficult to avoid committing. Most people have “selfish thoughts” many times a day, since “I wish I'd gotten the last donut, not Hardigan” and the like are such thoughts. By the same token, though, remember that such actions grant the player five dice to avoid degeneration, and five dice

grants a better than 80% chance of success. It's hard to maintain that level of Morality, but that's only because the sins are so hard to avoid committing.


Likewise, the sins in the middle of the chart grant three or four dice — still good odds of success, but not nearly *as* good. The sins are also much harder to commit casually. Indeed, they should be acts of will. In order to risk degeneration, the character has to take an action, not just have a thought or react to a stimulus. A rule of thumb: if the character has the level of Morality necessary to risk degeneration from committing them, he should feel compelled to stop them or report them if he becomes aware of them.

Finally, at the bottom of the chart, the sins should be serious infractions of the character's moral code. A character that does these things knows quite well that he is doing something wrong, though once he actually does it, he might realize it's not really a big deal (that would be the result of a failed here degeneration roll).

- **Choose things that you might *have* to do.** Consider the Morality chart on p. 91 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. At Morality 4, we find “impassioned crime.” Loosely put, that means if the character gets into a fight defending a loved one and kills someone, he risks degeneration. That's not great, but the result of *not* defending the loved one would be far worse to the character. Moral decisions aren't supposed to be easy. They're supposed to cause *dramatic conflict* for the character. That's the whole point.

Taking an even more extreme example, characters in **Changeling: The Lost** can lose Clarity (their Morality trait) as a result of unexpected life changes. A changeling leaves town, and returns to find his home has burned down. He might lose Clarity, through no fault of his own (mind, while the world might act capriciously, the Storyteller shouldn't, but we digress). That's because one of the themes of **Changeling** is the tenuous grasp on reality and sanity. When the illusion of control slips from the Lost, it might break them just a bit. When designing your character's chart, consider what would shake him up to the point that it might drive him mad, with the understanding that it's probably going to happen (or at least threaten to happen).

- **What does Morality 0 mean?** The **World of Darkness Rulebook** says: “If a character descends so far that her Morality drops to zero, she can no longer be played in any meaningful way. She becomes a true monster, inflicting pain and suffering on everyone around her without the slightest hint of remorse and no hope of redemption. At that point control of the character passes to the Storyteller.” But as this section (indeed, this book) should show, nothing is set in stone. Depending on what your Storyteller wants Morality to *mean*, losing it might mean something other than utter depravity.



One option is loss of functionality expressed in a different way. The character might go catatonic, unable to cope with the outside world in any way. He might descend so deeply into drug abuse that he isn't playable, or (if the Storyteller really wants to set the World of Darkness on its ear) he might spontaneously become a supernatural creature such as a vampire or a werewolf.

## Sanity

Sanity falls when the character experiences something that shakes up his worldview too much. This includes viewing the supernatural, seeing things that “should not be,” but can also include taking human life or even committing “softer” crimes such as theft. When such an event happens, the player makes a degeneration roll and, if appropriate, the attendant roll to avoid a derangement. Sanity, then, is a threshold — as the trait falls, derangements become more likely, but are not certain.

Of course, not everyone has (or should have) the same triggers for degeneration. Some people are better able to cope with committing violence — does that make them less sane? Instead of looking up degeneration points on a chart, the player and the Storyteller should work together at character creation to determine some *probable* degeneration points for the character. Players should expect for Storytellers to use those degeneration points in play. As such, no Sanity “hierarchy of sins” is necessary. A character's Sanity level changes, but the threshold at which the player should check for degeneration changes based not only on the character's Sanity rating, but also on that character's experiences. Figuring out a given character's starting threshold becomes an important part of character creation. Each player should answer the following questions for his character (and the Storyteller should, of course, feel free to add to or modify these questions as necessary):

- **What is the character's most deeply held belief?** Note that a belief is something that the character accepts as true without rational proof. “People do awful things” is not a belief, it's a readily apparent fact (yes, we could debate the definition of “awful”). “People are basically good,” however, is a belief. “Everything happens for a reason” is a belief. “God loves us” — actually, any statement regarding a higher power — is a belief.

When answering this question, though, consider that this is a belief that the character holds dear. It's one thing to flippantly say that everything happens for a reason, and most people say it in order to lessen the blow of a traumatic event or provide some justification for a coincidence, but if the character fervently *believes* that everything happens for a reason, it's worth delving a little deeper. Who decides on that reason? Does the character have faith that a god is the motivating force here? If so, which god? Does he believe in Fate, or that everything is predestined?

- **How does that belief make itself known in the character's life?** A character with a deep-seated and fervent belief in Christianity might hand out tracts at work, or try to minister to people. Then again, she might just go to church every day, read her Bible on her off time, and be quite willing to talk about her faith if asked, but otherwise worship silently. In both cases, her beliefs are informing her actions. How do the character's beliefs show themselves in daily life? How might another character be able to discern those beliefs without it coming up in conversation? The more specific you can be, here, the better. It's one thing to say, “My character goes to church every day.” That's helpful, to a point; it tells the Storyteller that your character makes time to worship and that she has a schedule, and those are useful tidbits. But it's even better to say, “My character attends the New Bible Church every evening on her way home from work. The minister lets her put her groceries in his fridge, so that she doesn't have to make two trips out.” These statements not only give the Storyteller all of the information from the other answer, but they establish that the character has a relationship with the minister (who might then be represented by a Merit) and hint at more details of her daily life.

- **What past events in the character's life would have demanded a degeneration roll?** Something has happened in the character's life that challenged his Sanity. It doesn't have to be earth-shattering, in the scheme of things. Maybe the character got drunk and had a fling with some floozy he met in a bar. It doesn't seem like much, but creeping home afterwards, hung over and ashamed, the character realizes that he's been drinking too much and needs to take better care of himself (successful degeneration check). Maybe the character got into a fight while at college, punched a guy in the face, and was charged with assault. He had a few months of probation, and to this day secretly wishes he'd hit the guy hard enough to knock him out so he wouldn't have been identified (failed degeneration check).

These past events should inform, but not dictate, what kind of events will call for degeneration checks in the chronicle. The Storyteller needs to build up a picture of the character's psychological makeup with enough detail that he can include events in the chronicle that can cause degeneration. Figuring out some history for the character will hopefully help the Storyteller avoid arguments as to whether a given event would or would not cause a degeneration roll.

Either the player or the Storyteller can ask for a degeneration check during play. The Storyteller and the player must agree on roll; if the player feels that the circumstance is truly inapplicable to the character, she can refuse. If the player agrees to the roll, however, the character gains an extra point of experience for the chap-



ter, regardless of the result. The Storyteller must agree to the roll as well, though, and can refuse it if he feels that the character is just trying to rack up experience points (do note, though, that some sessions *will* include multiple degeneration rolls, and the players will wind up with more experience points because of it). The player rolls a base of three dice, subject to the following modifiers:

- If the character's Virtue or Vice resonates with the degeneration check, add one die. For example, a character with the Vice of Wrath might snap at a coworker during a meeting, using personal insults to shout the offending person down. A character with the Virtue of Hope might witness a werewolf change forms and attack someone, but focus on the people around her, shielding them from the monster.

- If the character has made degeneration rolls during this chapter, *subtract* one die for every such roll. Whether the character has staved off madness or succumbed to it, she doesn't come out of the experience stronger (not in the short term, anyway).

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character loses a dot of Sanity, and the player immediately rolls the new Sanity rating. If this roll fails, the character gains a derangement. In addition, the derangement is immediately triggered. If the character gains a phobia, for example, she flees the area at once — the player gets no roll to resist the effects.

**Failure:** The character loses a dot of Sanity and the player rolls the new Sanity rating. If this roll fails, the character develops a derangement, and the player must immediately roll to see if that derangement is triggered (usually Resolve + Composure; the systems for derangements are listed on pp. 97–100 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

**Success:** The character does *not* lose Sanity. This is not an empowering experience, though. The character might feel remorse, terror, revulsion, or incredulity because of what she has done or witnessed. The character can hold herself together and does not risk a derangement, but she immediately loses a point of Willpower. If the degeneration roll resonated with the character's Virtue or Vice, the character may choose to gain Willpower through the appropriate trait, subject to the usual rules. That is, if the character has already gained Willpower through Vice during the scene, or Virtue during the chapter, the character still loses the Willpower.

**Exceptional Success:** The character does not lose Sanity. In addition, although the character is certainly shaken by what has occurred, she finds a place in her worldview for her new experiences. She does not lose Willpower, and may regain spent Willpower if the degeneration roll resonated with her Virtue or Vice (again, subject to the usual rules on the matter).


## Spiritual Purity

As mentioned above, the system presented here for Spiritual Purity as Morality doesn't specify any particular religion as being correct. Instead, the assumption is that Spiritual Purity is a measure of the soul's health, and that taking certain actions can be detrimental to that health. One thing to note about this system is that characters do *not* gain derangements as Spiritual Purity falls, though other detrimental effects do present themselves.

The degeneration system doesn't change, here. The hierarchy of sins has been rewritten to reflect the differences in intent. As always, players should take into consideration that this chart might contain "sins" that they disagree with, either about their placement or about their very inclusion on the chart. A Storyteller wishing to use this system should run the chart by the players first, and make any changes the troupe feels necessary.

Morality	Sin
10	Overeating, spreading hurtful rumors, breaking promises. (Roll five dice.)
9	Deliberately engaging in conversation or contact with a supernatural being. Unhealthy habits (smoking, chewing tobacco). (Roll five dice.)
8	Stealing from a business or establishment; fraud. Witnessing evidence of violent abuse or murder (such as crime scene photo graphs). Unknowing/unwilling supernatural enhancement. (Roll four dice.)
7	Willingly accepting supernatural alteration, abusing mind-altering substances. Being a direct witness to a murder or a brutal assault. (Roll four dice.)
6	Stealing directly from a person or a home. (Roll three dice.)
5	Intentional mass property damage (arson, etc.). (Roll three dice.)
4	Causing deliberate injury to another person. (Roll three dice.)
3	Impassioned or accidental murder (killing someone in the heat of passion, <i>or</i> in self-defense). (Roll two dice.)
2	Torture of another human being (including rape). (Roll two dice.)
1	Premeditated murder. (Roll two dice.)

Some explanations of the above chart are probably in order. Spiritual Purity makes the assumption that human beings have souls, and that those souls can be damaged by activities that are harmful to the individual in question (such as using drugs or other unhealthy habits), or that harm other people. The more direct the harm caused to others, the greater the risk of degeneration. Unlike the chart for Morality on p. 91 of the **World of**



**Darkness Rulebook**, Spiritual Purity presents premeditated murder as the worst possible crime, the one that does the most harm to a person's soul. A character can even lose Spiritual Purity (albeit at higher levels) for witnessing violent crimes or evidence thereof. Astute readers might recognize that such evidence is easily found on the Internet, and yes, that means that looking at such things can cause a drop in Spiritual Purity (though only at higher ratings than most people have).

Note, too, that dealing with the supernatural can harm the soul. This isn't to suggest that the supernatural is, by default, evil (by the same token, nowhere do we suggest that having a healthy soul is morally "good," it just carries some rewards). But learning about the supernatural opens a person's soul to a wide variety of spiritual contagion. It forces the person to confront greater truths than the soul wants to understand, and that can be dangerous to the soul's health and integrity. At Spiritual Purity 7 or higher, a character risks degeneration for supernatural alteration (at eight dots or more, the character doesn't even have to be aware it is happening to risk degeneration). Supernatural alteration includes any power that causes a change in the person. That includes obvious, extreme examples (imbibing vampire blood, demonic or spiritual possession), but also includes powers that compel behavior (Majesty Discipline, Dominance Gifts, many changeling Contracts, Mesmerism Transmutations, etc.) and powers that enhance the target (any kind of healing magic, spells or powers to improve or alter perception, ensorcellment). This means, of course, that supernatural characters that don't take pains to keep their nature secret risk harming the souls of those around them. Whether that is ever cause for degeneration for the supernatural character's Morality is up to the Storyteller.

Does that mean, then, that someone with Spiritual Purity 10 is cloistered, unable to function in society because he is unable to lie or conjecture about people (that would be spreading rumors), unable to enjoy a beer with his coworkers? No. That person is not *unable* to do those things, but they do threaten the integrity of his soul. Note, though, that this hypothetical saint's player gets five dice to avoid degeneration from such infractions, which means that he has a good chance of succeeding on degeneration rolls.

Players roll for degeneration as described for Morality.

**Failed Degeneration:** A little bit of the character's soul is stripped away. Usually, the character doesn't even notice. The sin in question was easy, it might have even felt good or prompted curiosity. Spiritual Purity falls by one dot. Consult the section below for whether this changes anything for the character.

**Successful Degeneration:** The character feels that her soul is in jeopardy. Whether the character realizes the

specifics of it or not, she realizes that something is terribly wrong. The character *must* undertake some act of reconciliation within the next 24 hours. The act doesn't have to be time-consuming and it doesn't necessarily have to be an act of contrition. The character just needs to find a way to come to terms with what happened. If she fails to do this, she sublimates the damage to her soul at the expense of her sanity — she gains a mild derangement or upgrades an existing mild one to severe.

**Example:** *Dane is accosted on the way to his car. A mugger pulls a knife on him and demands his money. Dane happens to be trained in defensive combat, but has never been in a real fight before. He resists, and his arm is cut badly, but he manages to turn his assailant's knife on him and the man dies.*

*At this point, the player rolls two dice (yes, Dane killed the man in self-defense, but for his soul's purpose that doesn't matter — he still took human life). If the player fails the roll, Dane goes numb. It's not that he doesn't realize the gravity of the situation, he just can't bring himself to feel empathy for the man. Once the shock wears off, he'll probably have to come to terms with what happened (and if he's smart, he'll get some therapy), but a small piece of his soul has been worn away.*

*If the roll succeeds, Dane has an immediate and passionate reaction. This isn't necessarily overwhelming guilt. It might even be euphoria (after all, he's alive!), but Dane needs to find a way to cope with what happened on a spiritual level. He might go home and meditate. He might visit his girlfriend and spend the night making love. He might seek out the mugger's wife and apologize. He might go to church and make confession. He might talk it over with a police officer, someone with a similar experience. In any event, although he has taken a life, he reaffirms his own connection to the human race and therefore mends the rift in his soul. If he can't or won't do that, the only way is to patch it by altering his own perceptions — gaining a derangement.*

### Benefits and Drawbacks of Spiritual Purity

At extreme levels of Spiritual Purity, characters enjoy certain benefits and suffer certain drawbacks.

**Spiritual Purity 10–8:** At this level, the character's soul is largely unblemished. Children, naïfs, and people who have, for whatever reason, kept themselves sheltered from the outside world might have this level of Spiritual Purity. Again, this doesn't make them *good*, it just means that their souls are untarnished, which says nothing about behavior or outlook. In game terms, though, they have great spiritual defenses against supernatural incursion. Any time an Attribute is used as a resistance trait against a supernatural power, add one for every dot in Spiritual Purity over seven. For example, a character with Spiritual Purity 9 runs afoul of a vampire who tries



to use Dominate on him. The vampire's player subtracts the victim's Resolve + 2 from the relevant dice pool.

On the other hand, Spiritual Purity at this level is hard to maintain. Not only are the sins harder to avoid, but the character's own base impulses work against her. The character can only regain Willpower through her Vice once per *chapter* without risking degeneration. The second (and subsequent) time that the character attempts to regain Willpower through Vice, the player must check for degeneration (roll five dice).

**Spiritual Purity 7 – 6:** At this level of Spiritual Purity, the average character's soul probably reaches a kind of equilibrium with the World of Darkness. He doesn't go looking for trouble of the supernatural sort, he doesn't inflict any serious harm to those around him, and while he might indulge in a drink or a pill periodically, he doesn't abuse such things. This level confers no special bonuses or drawbacks.

(Note, by the way, that this is the level of Spiritual Purity at which the *average* denizen of the World of Darkness arrives. The players' characters aren't average; they're assumed to be the sorts of folks who would go poking into the supernatural's doings.)

**Spiritual Purity 5 and below:** At this point, the character's soul is a little worse for wear. This doesn't make him evil, but it might make him jaded, cynical, and misanthropic. His soul is stretched thin, and not only offers no protection from the supernatural, but it can also offer otherworldly creatures a way in. This can work to the character's benefit in some cases, though.

If the character's Spiritual Purity falls below six, he can regain Willpower once per scene when he has direct contact with the supernatural, as if he were acting in accordance with his Vice. Direct contact requires that he is, in fact, seeing the supernatural. Being present at a fake séance or participating in a religious ritual without any actual otherworldly forces behind it doesn't count; while the character might not know the difference, his soul does.

Unfortunately, the character's weathered soul allows supernatural creatures easier access. For every point the character's Spiritual Purity falls below six, supernatural creatures attempting to control, manipulate, or alter the character's perceptions, thoughts, or emotions gain a +1 modifier. This has no effect on attempts to alter the character's body, including healing and combat.

## Conscience

A Conscience trait shares some thematic and mechanical features with Spiritual Purity, but the intent is very different. Spiritual Purity measures something internal and intrinsic to a person. Conscience measures attitude toward other people. It is notable more in its absence than its presence.

The hierarchy of sins against Conscience is as follows:

Morality	Sin
10	Violating precepts of ingrained belief, without harming others.* (Roll five dice.)
9	Telling lies, spreading hurtful rumors, breaking promises. (Roll five dice.)
8	Stealing from a business or a home (burglary) with no confrontation or threat. (Roll four dice.)
7	Causing injury to another person in self-defense, or in defense of another person. Intentional mass property damage (arson, etc.). Stealing under threat of force (mugging). (Roll four dice.)
6	Causing injury to another person on moral, religious, or nationalistic grounds. (Roll three dice.)
5	Causing deliberate injury to another person out of hatred or anger. Killing in self-defense (whether impassioned or premeditated). (Roll three dice.)
4	Causing deliberate injury for pleasure. (Roll three dice.)
3	Killing for ideals or out of moral belief ("honor" killings). (Roll two dice.)
2	Torture of another human being (including rape). Impassioned killing out of anger or hatred. Premeditated murder for greed or other opportunism. (Roll two dice.)
1	Premeditated murder for pleasure. (Roll two dice.)

\* The character takes an action that his belief system considers wrong, but that doesn't actually harm anyone. Orthodox Jews and Muslims don't eat pork, for instance, and a character of either of these faiths who places a great deal of credence in his dogma (hence the high level of Conscience) would risk degeneration for doing so. Note, though, that the character has to be aware that he is violating his beliefs, since the underlying conflict is one of conscience. A devout Muslim who ate a hot dog he was convinced was beef, rather than pork, wouldn't risk degeneration. By the same token, even if the hot dog *was* beef, but the Muslim was later told by a credible source it was pork, the player should probably roll for Conscience loss.

The Conscience chart, you'll notice, splits a number of hairs along the blade of intent. If the character kills a man because that man is threatening his child, that's higher on the chart (and thus grants the player more dice) than if the character killed the guy for his shoes. This system of Morality has more to do with the character's subjective outlook and less to do with some objective standard of Morality (and as such, the Storyteller should feel free to alter it as necessary for the chronicle).

Degeneration works the same way for Conscience as it does for Morality.

**Failed Degeneration:** The character loses a dot of Conscience, barely noticing what he did or why it might be considered wrong. The player can choose to roll to see if the character gains a derangement, or can spend a point of Willpower to negate that roll. In that case, the character simply doesn't care about what he did, and probably doesn't worry about getting caught (either because he has a plan in place, or because he's apathetic about that, too).

**Successful Degeneration:** The character realizes that he has just done something in serious violation to his usual code of ethics, but decides either that it was acceptable because of extenuating circumstances *or* that it was not acceptable and he must make amends. If the character takes the latter route, he must make amends sometime during the story (note that the offended party doesn't have to offer forgiveness or accept an apology, the offender just has to make the attempt). If the character does this, the player gains an extra point of experience at the end of the story. If not, the character is assumed to have come to terms with the act (or at least grown numb to it).

## Extraordinary Mortals

Some people are exceptional. We're told from an early age that everyone is special, and that makes us feel better when we see someone with a degree of skill that far outstrips our own. But it's not really true. Some people are just amazing, be it through natural talent, years of hard work, or both.

It's tempting, in the World of Darkness, to assume that everyone who demonstrates a truly jaw-dropping level of skill is in some way touched by the supernatural. Consider Nikola Tesla. Do a quick Internet search and note not only how brilliant the man was, but how *weird*. In the later years of his life, he believed he was visited by a white pigeon that he loved "as a man loves a woman." This is the same man who was making unfathomable strides in electrical engineering.

Reading a biography of Tesla, it would be tempting to place some supernatural influence in his life. Maybe he was Awakened as an Obrimos mage. Maybe he was abducted as a young man by the Fae and returned as some sort of changeling (this might explain his aversions to light and sound as he grew older — changelings gain such weaknesses as they grow more powerful). Maybe he was a demiurge, a mortal able to create Prometheans.

But maybe he was just a man. He was brilliant, eccentric, and probably mentally ill, and that's all. The extraordinary mortals system presented here helps you to include characters in your chronicles who are exceptional, and yet not at all under supernatural influence (not necessarily, anyway).

Why include such characters? For one thing, it can help set the characters apart. The players' characters might be extraordinary, but the supporting cast members around them are not. The characters are the stars of the show, and having access to Skill Tricks (see below) helps accentuate that.

If you use extraordinary mortals *as* supporting cast, however (perhaps in a chronicle in which the players portray supernatural characters) it allows you to create mortal opponents who are still somewhat formidable. A character with the Incisive Mind Skill Trick might be no match for a mage using the Time Arcanum or a vampire with the Auspex Discipline when it comes to figuring out what happened in a given area, but if she is investigating the characters, she might drive them crazy trying to figure out what kind of magic she's using to track them. Likewise, werewolves can recognize each other on sight, and thus might assume that the wiry-looking guy in the corner is no threat. That's because they don't know he's got the Butcher Skill Trick and a razor blade against his palm.

## Character Creation

Extraordinary mortals follow the standard character creation rules, for the most part (though we'll plug the opening of this chapter, which posits alternate creation rules). The only difference is that Step Five of the process is Select Skill Tricks. Choose three Skills for the character that define how that character is exceptional, and then choose one Skill Trick for each of these Skills. You may choose the same Skill multiple times and wind up with two or even three Tricks in the same Skill, if you wish, or you can spread them out and make a more well-rounded character.

## Skill Tricks

Extraordinary mortals can perform feats of talent, training, or know-how that seem nothing less than amazing to the people around them. These are Skill Tricks, abilities that are *just* a bit less powerful than the powers of the supernatural denizens of the World of Darkness. This section provides five examples of Skill Tricks for each Skill, so you should have a good yardstick for how to create new ones. Some discussion of the theory, however, will also be useful.

Skill Tricks are meant to be extensions of a Skill. That means that a character with a Skill Trick in Firearms can potentially perform feats of marksmanship that seem incredible, almost superhuman, but are still possible within the limits of the laws of physics. For instance, such a character might shoot at an oncoming car and disable it, bringing it to a halt or (more likely) causing it to veer away before it hits him. This isn't *easy* by any stretch of the imagination, but it's also not *impossible*. Firing a gun so that the bullet curves around one target to strike



another, however, is impossible, and so a Skill Trick that allows this is not in keeping with the system.

Skill Tricks are meant to be impressive. They aren't always obvious — the Master of Red Tape Skill Trick under Politics is useful, but it's not flashy, and of course no one should ever notice that your character is using a Stealth Trick. But viewed in full context (which is normally only possible for the players, not the characters), it becomes quite clear how deftly the Master of Red Tape dodges bureaucratic entanglement.

Finally, Skill Tricks have two important functions within the game. One is to provide the bonuses and effects described; they're character benefits just like Merits and any of the innumerable supernatural powers that other characters have available. Such "powers," regardless of what form they take, are *fun* for the players, and it's a thrill to live vicariously through a character that can take on a room full of drunk bikers and walk out the winner, or who can walk right past the desk sergeant at the local precinct because he's just *that good* at looking like he belongs.

But the other use for Skill Tricks is to highlight the important plot points of a story. Consider: A character uses the Diagnostic Eye Trick regularly in her practice as a doctor. She uses a savant-like knowledge of symptoms combined with long years of experience in her field to separate out the flesh-eating flu from the common cold, as it were. So when, during the course of a story, the character runs up against a weird-looking disease, and

the player says "I'll use my Diagnostic Eye Trick," and the Storyteller says "*You don't know what this is,*" that should tell everyone at the table something. The expert, the person for whom diagnosis is not a question of skill but a reflex, doesn't know. Yes, she can find out with some effort, but if *she's* putting effort into it, it's significant.

Skill Tricks, therefore, are a great big neon sign that the Storyteller can flick on to tell the players, "This way to the story's plot."

## Systems

Skill Tricks have one of five general game effects:

- **Combat:** These Tricks increase a character's efficacy in a fight. Usually this means inflicting more or more severe damage than is usually allowed for an attack. Unlike other Skill Tricks, Combat Skill Tricks *always* require a roll.

- **Extra Talent:** Under certain circumstances, the player can add two Attributes to a given Skill roll, or add the character's dots in the relevant Skill to another roll (this is a variation on the Extra Talent rule, found on p. 135 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

- **Penalty:** The character's Skill dots act as a penalty on certain types of rolls that others make against him.

- **Story Advancement:** Use of the Skill Trick grants the character access to information or an advantage that he didn't have before. This is the most common and probably most interesting use of Skill Tricks, but it also relies more on narrative than on game systems. Often, the



effect of these Skill Tricks just *happens*, which means the Storyteller must provide a way for this effect to become useful in the story. This might require the Storyteller to deviate from his plan of events just a bit, which is what usually happens when players get involved anyway.

- **Time Saver:** The Trick allows a character to bypass an obstacle, be it a literal barrier (All Doors Open), a troubling situation (Fight Dissection), or a period of waiting (Master of Red Tape). Sometimes such Tricks reduce the amount of time needed for rolls in extended action.

Skill Tricks do not cost Willpower, and are not usually subject to dice rolls by themselves (Combat Tricks are the most common exception). They simply work. Put simply, the Skill Trick is just what that character *does*. Characters can use Skill Tricks as often as they wish, with one exception. The Storyteller can rule that a Skill Trick doesn't work, or doesn't work automatically. As stated above, this should only happen when the Storyteller is using a Skill Trick to highlight a plot point.

The list of Skill Tricks, below, labels each Trick by one of the five above-named descriptors and presents a situation in which the Trick might *not* work (signifying a plot hook).

## Developing New Skill Tricks

We don't recommend that characters be allowed to develop new Skill Tricks after character creation. This recommendation is based on the fact that a Skill Trick should be intrinsic to a character's concept. As an example, Sherlock Holmes is, at a conceptual level, the world's greatest detective. It makes sense that he would have Skill Tricks in Investigation, Science, and other such Skills (honestly, Holmes seems to have a Trick in just about every Skill, but we digress). But for him to suddenly be a horse whisperer as well just doesn't make a lot of sense.

Of course, role-playing games aren't novels or films, even if we emulate these media in our chronicles. Characters *do* develop, and they change on a conceptual level, and your troupe might find it fun for the characters to pick up new Tricks. If that's more your speed, a new Skill Trick costs 15 experience points and requires, obviously, that the character have at least one dot in the relevant Skill.

## Mental Skill Tricks

### Academics

- **Befuddling Double-Talk (Extra Talent):** Having the gift of the gab is nothing if one can't choose the right words to impress. The character can lay down a layer of obfuscatory language, literary allusions, critical theory, and historical tidbits so thick that no matter what he is actually trying to say, he's unassailable. Add the character's Academ-

ics ratings to Social rolls, provided that the character has at least one uninterrupted turn in which to pontificate.

**Plot Hook:** No matter what you say, no matter how many groundbreaking sociological studies you quote or avant garde magazines you cite, she always undercuts you. It's like she knows what you're going to say before you say it!

- **Legal Authority (Story Advancement or Extra Talent):** While the character might not actually be a lawyer, she can certainly *sound* like one when she needs to. In a society terrified of litigation (and for good reason), speaking from a position of legal authority can be a real time-saver. In a situation where the character might run afoul of the law *outside* an actual courtroom, the player can either cite an official sounding legal precedent to put off questioners or security forces, or add Academics to any Social roll to do so. Note, though, that in some instances, a quick legal argument just won't cut it. If the character is engaged in clearly illegal activities and the police show up, she is going to get arrested, though this Trick might help when the arraignment rolls around. **Plot Hook:** Upon hearing the argument, a security guard says, "Sorry, ma'am. The law is a human institution," and pulls out a set of handcuffs.

- **Linguist (Story Advancement):** Given a few words to work from (understanding the translation for "love" or "water," for instance), the character can translate any written work in a basic way. Without a deeper understanding of the language, she'll recognize surface meaning and the general tone of the piece, but not nuance or humor. She can also make an educated guess as to what language or dialect she is dealing with, if she doesn't already know. **Plot Hook:** The carvings seem to be in a form of Sumerian, but if you're translating them correctly, they include concepts of spiritual animism that this culture simply didn't possess. And the phonology — as best you can tell — looks off, as though these phrases are *older* than the language would indicate....

- **Quick Cram (Time Saver):** The character can spend (5 — Academics) hours studying, and gain a free, but temporary, Specialty in a given field. This Specialty lasts until the end of the story. Obviously, using this Trick requires that the character has ready access to good sources on the subject. **Plot Hook:** After spending most of a day in study, you should be able to hold a conversation on this author's works, life, and perspective. And yet, the people at this party talk as if they knew him personally. But that can't be — he died in 1875.

- **Quote Master (Story Advancement):** The character recognizes quotes and allusions within his field of study automatically (the Storyteller may grant the player an Intelligence + Academics roll to recognize references in related fields). While the character might not grasp the immediate significance of the quote, just knowing that the killer quoted *Titus Andronicus* before striking the death-blow can give the investigation a direction. **Story Hook:**



The quote has the cadence and language of Shakespearean dialog, but it's not from any of his plays. And yet, when you recite it to yourself, you can see people applauding in the Globe Theater, almost as if you were there...

## Computer

- **Graphics Expert (Story Advancement):** It's possible to make a photo look markedly, but realistically, different through the use of imaging software. This has led to some paranoia about photographs on the Internet; anything that looks remarkable is automatically labeled as "shopped." The character knows the difference, though. She can immediately recognize a photo as being digitally altered, no matter how subtle the work is. **Plot Hook:** The photo is real. The photo is real. *The photo is real.* But it can't be. People don't look like that.

- **No Internet Footprint (Penalty):** The character is extremely difficult to hack or trace online. Subtract the character's Computer rating from any attempt to research her on the Internet, hack into her systems, or otherwise find her using a computer. Obviously, this Trick is only an advantage for characters who would otherwise have an Internet presence. **Plot Hook:** No matter what you do, he keeps getting in. He just wants you to know he's there — he makes purchases with your accounts worth only pennies, leaves messages for you (with your own accounts!) on message boards. Do they form some kind of pattern? And more importantly, how is he doing it? He'd have to be literally looking over your shoulder.

- **Scammer (Extra Talent):** The Net-savvy folks might joke about Nigerian conmen who can't spell "Nigeria," but this character can make a tidy sum fooling folks with a computer. It's not just good for money, either — she can coax sensitive information out of people, including passwords, access codes, and schedules. Add the character's Computer rating to any Social roll involving online communication. **Plot Hook:** Your scam seems to have worked too well. Whoever this "johnstevenson" person really is, he's ready to meet with you and hand over some money in exchange for information and *objets d'arte* that you just don't have. And he's getting persistent. And why does he keep claiming that he knows where you live?

- **Super Surfer (Story Advancement):** The character spends a few moments online, and learns a relevant fact about whatever the characters are presently looking into. This "fact" might not be true in the strictest sense, but it definitely takes the characters in a direction that will pay off. **Plot Hook:** The web page the character finds shuts down. When it reloads a few minutes later, only the relevant information is missing, and it doesn't seem to be cached anywhere.

- **Web Presence (Time Saver or Story Advancement):** The character can create a composite of a person based on data found online, whether or not that person

has a web presence per se. The character needs a little bit of data going in (a name and a birth date or birthplace work), and from there can extrapolate other facts — high school, graduation year, college, and career — based on what other people have said about the person in their blogs or other places online. This can take some time, but if the character is willing to put the effort in, he can come up with a few *probable* assertions about the target. **Plot Hook:** The character finds three separate obituaries for the target. They all read exactly the same, but they appear in different publications and are each three years apart.

## Crafts

- **Car Facts (Story Advancement):** The character is a walking automotive encyclopedia. He knows the stats about any given vehicle, how to repair it (whether or not he is physically capable of doing so), and how much it should cost. He also knows how to modify cars and identify where they have smuggling space, meaning he can search a car and immediately know if anything is hidden in it or if it has been modified in any way. **Plot Hook:** No way could this gas guzzler have that number of miles on it, with the original parts, with the condition that it's in. It's not possible. The undercarriage, at least, should show more wear and tear, and yet it's both off-the-line mint and has over 100,000 miles on it.

- **Improvised Tools (Story Advancement):** While the character can't exactly make a computer out of a cereal box and a car battery, it's close. She can make tools out of whatever is handy, allowing a one-time equipment bonus equal to her Crafts rating. This assumes that she has *something* to work with, but even the buttons on her shirt and a spare piece of wire can make the difference. **Plot Hook:** Every time you try to assemble something, it just falls apart in your hands. Your vision blurs when you search for better components, and you see blood under your nails when you go to work. What's happening here?

- **Junk Picker (Extra Talent):** The character takes a trip to a pawn shop or a quick flip through online auction sites and finds junk that *someone* would pay big money for. The character can make a purchase equal in cost (see Equipment on p. 139 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) to his Crafts rating once per week, regardless of whether or not he possesses the Resources Merit. **Plot Hook:** You find an object that you estimate is worth a small fortune, but the owner lets it go for nearly nothing. Try as you might, you can't find a buyer. And then things start going *wrong* in your life — is the item cursed?

- **Stress Points (Combat):** Provided the character has an appropriate tool (a sledgehammer, for instance), he can break any object in short order. The character ignores an object's Durability when attempting to break it (see p. 135 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). The character does not gain this benefit against magical items. **Plot**

**Hook:** You tear a book in half at the spine, only to watch the tears knit back together in seconds. The old couple paid you a hundred bucks to rip a book up. Now you're starting to understand why they looked so freaked out.

• **Weaponsmith (Combat):** The character is adept at turning everyday objects into weapons, or at upgrading existing weapons. If he spends one full day working on a weapon, he can increase the weapon's damage by his Crafts rating. This includes any penalty for being an improvised weapon. For example, if the character wishes to strengthen and sharpen a broomstick into a formidable implement of death, and he has Crafts 3, the death-broom's damage modifier is +2 after a day of work. This kind of work isn't free, of course. The character must have access to a workshop with a Resources level at least equal to (Crafts - 1), minimum one. This acts as a cap on how high he can put the damage. In the example of the death-broom, a character with access to a Resources 1 workshop could only increase the damage modifier by two (for a total of +1). **Plot Hook:** It's a simple cudgel, an ugly thing, made of wood and decked with metal. It shouldn't be hard to make it lighter, add a better handle, that sort of thing. But every change you make is undone as soon as you take a break, and the cudgel goes back to looking like it did when you found it out by that rosebush.

## Investigation

• **Always Investigating (Extra Talent):** The character never turns his instincts off. He is always analyzing everything around him for patterns, evidence, even just simple data. Add the character's Investigation rating to all Perception rolls (see p. 45 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*). **Plot Hook:** There is just too much to see in this room. The wallpaper, the grain of the hardwood floors, the orientation of books on the shelves. *Everything* has meaning. And now you can't get it out of your head.

• **Incisive Mind (Time Saver or Story Advancement):** The character glances around a scene and immediately knows everything that it has to offer. At a crime scene, the character can flawlessly recreate the crime based on the evidence at hand. **Plot Hook:** According to your read of the crime scene, the killer vanished into thin air just after committing the crime. There's odd condensation on the windowsill, as though the room got suddenly colder or a fog arose... indoors. You can't figure it out.

• **Just a Red Herring (Time Saver):** The character can recognize a false lead when she sees one. It might be an enticing fact about a subject, or it might look as though a broken window is going to lead to some interesting data, but the character knows that it's the upside-down painting on the wall that's going to break the case. The Storyteller must provide the player with a lead to follow that will bear fruit (though he is under no obligation to explain *how* to follow it). **Plot Hook:** All of your instincts tell you that

the footprints are of no consequence. But how could they not be? Still, they *feel* like a red herring. Everything in the case *feels* like a red herring, even the corpse.

• **Pattern Expert (Story Advancement):** If there's a pattern, the character can see it. Provided he has enough data (dates and locations of murders, names of victims, etc.), he'll figure out what ties a series of events together. Note, of course, that just because all of the victims had 16 letters in their names doesn't mean that the killer was choosing them based on that fact, but recognizing absurd patterns at least allows the character to weed them out. **Plot Hook:** These people don't have any common ground, other than the way they were killed — heads bashed in with a wooden club. Most (but not all) of them also went missing for a short time at some point during their lives, but not at a consistent age or for a consistent length of time. What does it mean?

• **Riddle Master (Story Advancement):** The character is adept at lateral thinking and symbolic understanding, making her able to recognize the meaning of riddles and word puzzles almost immediately. The Storyteller is required to provide a number of hints to the player equal to the character's Investigation rating when the character is faced with such a problem. **Plot Hook:** This riddle is about death, you're sure of it. But there's something you're missing — it almost seems like to understand the riddle, you'll need a frame of reference. That would mean that whoever wrote the riddle has died, but obviously that's impossible.

## Medicine

• **Anatomical Intimidation (Extra Talent):** The character knows exactly where to shoot or stab someone so that he spends the rest of his life eating through a tube. Now, whether he could actually *do* that is another matter, but he can describe it with blood-curdling detail. Add the character's Medicine roll to any Social roll in which a medical description or analysis would be helpful. **Plot Hook:** You hold up the knife and explain how a nick to the carotid artery can make a person bleed out in eight seconds... and she just laughs and stretches out her throat.

• **Diagnostic Eye (Time Saver or Story Advancement):** The character can diagnose non-supernatural illnesses and injuries with a glance and a cursory examination. She draws on years of experience in medicine, as well as her extensive work in staying current in her field, to become a master diagnostician. **Plot Hook:** The patient suffers from an illness that you've never seen. It looks like a parasitic infection, but all your tests come back negative. It gets worse every month on the new moon. And he's having weird auditory hallucinations — something about howls.

• **Lifesaver (Time Saver):** "Instant death" is rare. Certainly, it happens, but ordinarily one has a window of at least a moment before the Reaper's scythe falls. And



that's all the time this character needs. This character can clear the last (rightmost) box in another character's Health track in a fraction of the time usually required. Bashing damage takes a single turn, while lethal damage takes an hour. More incredibly, the character can clear a character's last box of *aggravated* damage, provided she reaches the injured party within a number of turns equal to her Medicine rating. The character cannot heal boxes farther left on the Health track with this Trick; Lifesaver is strictly an immediate response to a potentially crippling or fatal problem. In addition, the injured person's body must be intact. A character who has been decapitated might technically have a track full of aggravated damage, but clearing that last box isn't going to reattach the head. Likewise, while this Trick can be used to prevent death by disease or poison, it is not a cure — all it will do is buy time. **Plot Hook:** This guy is *dead*. He's been dead for hours. His body is cold, and the gunshot wound in his chest isn't bleeding. So why are all the bystanders saying he was just shot seconds before you arrived on the scene?

- **Medical Advantage (Combat):** If the character has access to a target's medical history, even in part, he can use that information to his advantage in a fight. Knowing a target suffered a knee injury means that the character can aim a kick at that knee for maximum effect, for instance. The player adds the character's Medicine rating to attacks against the target. **Plot Hook:** The target's medical history leads you to believe this guy is in his 60s. He looks even older than that. So why is he fighting with the energy of a 30-year-old prize fighter?

- **Medical Bureaucrat (Story Advancement):** The character might not actually be a doctor, but he has a deep understanding of the business side of the medical profession. He knows where the cracks are, who the local drug reps are (and what they drink), which hospitals have lax security, and which doctors' secretaries hate their arrogant employers. The character can obtain medical goods — equipment, drugs, even ID badges — in a number of days equal to the Resource cost of the item — the character's Medicine rating. Use common sense, here; an MRI machine isn't exactly portable, though the character could probably arrange *access* to such a machine after hours. **Plot Hook:** You and your compatriots sneak into the hospital after hours, wave nonchalantly to the security guards, and make your way to cold storage — where you find three people already there. Who are they? How did they get in? And why are they stealing all the blood bags?

## Occult

- **Harmless versus Dangerous (Story Advancement):** Long years of exposure to the occult has given the character the ability to recognize the difference between someone whose beliefs are strange, but harmless (ghosts exist, and cannot pass on unless their bodies are given a

proper burial) and someone whose beliefs are dangerous to those around them (ghosts exist, certain people act as beacons for them, and those people must die). After having a discussion with a character on spiritual or occult matters, the character comes away knowing the subject's Morality rating, whether or not she has any derangements (though not what they are), and whether she poses a threat to herself or anyone else. **Plot Hook:** You meet a woman in the parking lot of a state park, and after talking to her, you're terrified. You can't tell if she's dangerous, but you do know that she's not human. She has no understanding of what it means to be human. And she keeps looking at that treeline, like she is waiting for someone to meet her.

- **Mental Healing (Extra Talent):** Some things, people just aren't meant to see. The character can look those things in the face, and while she might scream, her sanity remains intact. The character never risks derangements from witnessing supernatural occurrences, and if she is present when other people run this risk, she can help talk them down. In game terms, other players add this character's Occult rating to any relevant dice pools to resist gaining spontaneous derangements (see p. 96 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). **Plot Hook:** You've seen strangeness before, but it was never *personal*. This time, it touches you. It reaches into your past, and it *changes* things. And now you can't decipher which of your memories are from before that horrible caress, and which are the real ones, the ones that came after — no, that's backwards. Isn't it?

- **Myth Expert (Story Advancement or Extra Talent):** No matter how strange or random the supernatural event the character witnesses, she can relate it to some culture's beliefs, and thus come up with a way to fight back. Whether this method actually works or not depends on whether the problem really is supernatural, but in the event that the Storyteller rules that the remedy might have an effect, the character can add her Occult rating to any necessary rolls (using abjurations, for instance — see p. 213 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). **Plot Hook:** The character recognizes the ritual markings on the walls. Written in human blood, resembling an inverted prayer, complete with the sacrifice of a serpent. The problem is that this ritual is designed to open a gateway into the darkest, most profane parts of Hell — and there is no known way to close it.

- **Occult In-Jokes (Story Advancement):** Supernatural beings often think they are above the “mundanes.” Vampires love making jokes using plays on the words “dead,” “alive,” and “blood.” Werewolves do the same sorts of things, but work dog references into their humor. Most people just blink and shrug, but the character has learned to pick up on this sort of banter. This makes her an effective, if not foolproof, detector of groups of supernatural beings. **Plot Hook:** You don't detect a group of vampires. You find people who think



they are, or are pretending they were. And now one of them is dead, because you and your friends put a stake through his heart. What are you going to do with the body? And why is his body still warm?

• **Symbolic Intent (Story Advancement):** Folks who write (or draw, or sing, or blog) about the occult frequently encode their messages, whether out of a paranoid belief that others might take exception to their revelation, or out of the certain knowledge that they would. The problem is that anything shrouded in symbolism can be misinterpreted, a fact that so-called prognosticators have taken advantage of for centuries. The character, however, is able to look past the symbolism and see the intent. The Storyteller should tell the player if his interpretation of what the character sees or reads is correct or incorrect, provided that the material is occult-related. **Plot Hook:** The painting itself is about hubris and the Fall from Grace, you're sure of that. What you don't understand is the odd symbols worked into the smoke from the fallen tower, and why your eyes just seem to slide off of them.

## Politics

• **Butterfly Wings (Story Advancement):** The character has an intuitive understanding of cause and effect in the political world, and can exploit that for his own gain. The character does an innocuous favor for someone, which doesn't require more than a day of attention. In a subsequent chapter, the character can reap the benefit. For every chapter that the character waits to cash in the favor, the effective Status he can wield increases by one. For example, the character, a teacher, pulls some strings and gets the senator's son a lead role in the school play. The senator promises to attend the play on opening night (one session; if the player cashes in the favor now, it is worth Status 1). The character sells this information to someone who wishes to break into the senator's office (two sessions; Status 2). The senator upgrades his security system (Status 3). Getting the senator to agree to take possession of a strange mahogany box without opening it is a tall order, but with Status 3, it's appropriate — and besides, now the senator has tightened the security. **Plot Hook:** You horribly misjudge how things are going to progress. The senator isn't burglarized while at his son's play — he's murdered.

• **Follow the Money (Story Advancement):** Everyone has a price, even the supposedly incorruptible. The character can figure this price out with a few minutes of conversation. The character knows what the target would need to be bribed with — or threatened with — in order to acquiesce to some favor. In addition, if doing this favor would cause the target to risk degeneration, the character realizes that, as well. **Plot Hook:** You know this guy is rich and well-respected in the art world. But when you try to figure out what it would take to get him to low-ball the price of a painting at an auction, you don't much like the

feelings you're getting. He wants to... meet people. And he smiles all shark-like when he says that.

• **Hot Buttons (Extra Talent):** Wise people know not to discuss religion or politics in polite society. The character can creatively ignore that piece of advice, pushing people's beliefs until they snap, or agreeing with them enough to make them pliant. Add the character's Politics rating to any Social roll, provided that the character spends time talking about the political scene (local, national, personal, whatever) for a few minutes first. **Plot Hook:** You keep looking for a way to push this woman's political buttons, but nothing seems to work. It's not that she's apolitical, it's just that her views seem... alien. Almost as if she's working on the assumption that before you know it, the current system will be obsolete.

• **Friends in High Places (Time Saver):** The character might not really have gone to school with the local Congressman, but she knows his name, his family's names, what position he played in football, and how he takes his coffee. That's enough to convince a cop to, say, overlook what she's doing here so late. The character can name-drop to get out of immediate trouble with the law or gain access to someplace from which she'd normally be barred. Extreme situations, obviously, counteract this Trick. You might actually *be* the Congressman's best friend, but that's not going to stop the police from arresting you if you're found over a corpse, holding a hammer. **Plot Hook:** You use the mayor's name occasionally to grease the wheels, but you never expected it to come back on you. Now, though, the mayor's office is on the phone, and they say you owe the city a favor.

• **Master of Red Tape (Time Saver):** The character, perhaps through direct experience, perhaps through friends in the system, knows where the cracks in the bureaucracy are. Wait times associated with permits, licenses, bail, processing, and other government-based nightmares are reduced to one-fourth their usual periods or one working day, whichever is less. **Plot Hook:** The minor functionary who should be handling your case has been ordered to sit on his hands. You know that by talking to him and listening to his excuses — but you also know that if his boss was responsible, he'd have just passed the buck. Who is he really reporting to?

## Science

• **Applied Sciences (Penalty):** With a good knowledge of physics, chemistry, engineering, or any of a dozen other disciplines, the character can manipulate the world around him to his benefit. Given a number of hours equal to (6 – Science), the character can set up security measures or other environmental hazards to intruders and enemies. In game terms, the character's Science rating can be applied to rolls to break into the area, combat rolls to attack the character in his own space, or rolls



to search the area. **Plot Hooks:** You've set up a rather elegant little trap involving soda and candy — it's not fatal, but it'll certainly be a distraction. When it goes off, though, the "victim" just gestures — and the reaction doesn't happen. That isn't possible. Soda doesn't go flat that fast. Surely the *gesture* had nothing to do with it?

- **Network of Knowledge (Time Saver):** The character might not be the foremost expert in a given field, but with an hour on the phone, he can find that expert. The player starts any extended action involving scientific research with a number of successes equal to the character's Science rating. For simple tasks, this might obviate the need to roll at all. **Plot Hook:** You've been looking for someone to help you analyze the chemicals in this dirt sample for a week, and everyone you've talked to has made excuses. It's almost like there's a conspiracy afoot *not* to talk about this stuff, whatever it is.

- **Occam's Razor (Story Advancement):** Occam's Razor is a scientific precept that states that the theory that requires the smallest number of unfounded assumptions is usually the correct one. The character with this Trick is adept at applying the Razor in all situations. The Storyteller should tell the player when his character makes (or hears) a hypothesis to a problem that makes an assumption that isn't borne out by the available data. This Trick does require that the Storyteller pay careful attention, and that she works with the players to keep in mind what the characters *know* versus what they *think*. **Plot Hook:** In discussion about a kidnapping, the details don't add up. Some of the witnesses think they saw the victim the morning of the kidnapping, others remember seeing her that night — which was after the ransom note arrived. And now, even you and your compatriots are disagreeing over the facts. How can you solve this problem if you can't keep your own statements straight?

- **Stats Don't Lie (Extra Talent):** Statistics, as anyone familiar with modern media or academia knows, can mean whatever you want them to mean if you cite them the right way. By reciting the right statistical information, the character becomes that much more persuasive. Add the character's Science rating to any Social roll, provided the character can work in some convincing (sounding) data. **Plot Hook:** Your compelling argument for lowering the speed limit near your house generates a weird response. You mention the number of fatalities in the area and relate it to the 1998 increase of the speed limit. The (unsigned) letter you get says, "Just as many people died before cars. They just didn't find the bodies."

- **Sound Theory (Extra Talent):** Science is based upon developing a hypothesis and then testing it until it falls apart. That model can be applied to *anything*. The character can apply her knowledge of the scientific process to almost any endeavor, and thus the player adds the character's Science rating to any roll to build, improve, or

destroy something. This increases the time required for the endeavor to one full scene (for a normally instant action) or doubles the time increment (for extended actions). **Plot Hook:** The data keeps coming back different every time. Different materials don't work the same way twice. And it's getting worse — and more random — each day. This seemed to start the night that crusty old guy moved in next door, but he couldn't be changing the physical properties of things just by his presence, could he?

## Physical Skill Tricks

### Athletics

- **Deadly Accuracy (Combat or Story Advancement):** The character can throw objects that are normally too light to do any real damage (playing cards, pencils, pebbles) with enough force and with such pinpoint accuracy that they can cause injury. Any such object has a damage rating of either 1B or 0L, at the Storyteller's discretion. In addition, the character can hurl such objects accurately enough to push buttons on a keypad from a number of yards equal to (Strength + Athletics) away. **Plot Hook:** You keep missing. You're not really trying to hurt this guy, of course, you just made a bet that you could hit the apple on his head. And everything you throw just veers off at the last second, like he's standing six inches away from where you're seeing him. Were you drugged?

- **Fastest of them All (Time Saver):** The character automatically wins Foot Races (p. 65 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) provided that his Speed is equal to or greater than that of his opponent. The race is over in a single turn, unless the character wishes to let the quarry outrun him (or let a pursuer close in a bit). **Plot Hook:** How is she keeping pace with you? She's been sucking on cigarettes all night, she's pale and anemic-looking, she's skinny and unhealthy — but *damn*, she's right on you!

- **Free Run (Time Saver):** The character might be a practitioner of *parkour* or free-running, or she might just be nimble and dexterous. In any case, once she gets going (at least one turn of running at her normal Speed), she can clear any obstacle up to five feet in height per dot of Athletics (so a character with Athletics 3 can clear a 15-foot wall without a roll). **Plot Hook:** When your foot touches the wall, it sinks in just like you'd stepped in water. It looks solid enough now, now that you're lying flat on your back trying to catch your breath, but that's what you felt.

- **Perfect Physique (Extra Talent):** It's one thing to be pretty or handsome, but those kinds of standards change. What people appreciate on an almost unconscious level, though, is someone who looks healthy, vigorous, and hale. Add the character's dots in Athletics to any Social roll, provided the target can see the character and appreciate how toned he is. **Plot Hook:** The four people who just



walked into the club are... perfect. You're sleek, beautiful and shapely, you work out twice a day, and so on. But these people... they should be hunting mammoths or something. Especially with those weird tattoos on their shoulders.

• **Size Up (Combat):** Given one turn to check out an opponent before (or during) a fight, the character makes an educated guess about that character's capabilities. This doesn't necessarily mean that the character can recognize whether someone is trained in combat (which is more the province of Brawl). Instead, the character can tell if the target is a smoker (labored breathing), has a trick knee (slight limp), or has vision problems (squints, looks at objects sideways). The character immediately knows the target's Health rating and whether he is currently injured (and to what degree). Also, once during the fight, the player can make an attack roll into an advanced action (see p. 135 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). **Plot Hook:** The guy has a knife wound in his side. He should have been easy pickings. But he's not slowing down, not acting hurt, and not... bleeding anymore.

## Brawl

• **Fight Dissection (Time Saver or Extra Talent):** The character explains, calmly and rationally, why her opponent cannot possibly win a fight between them. If the player wishes, this can be accompanied by a few deflected punches, just to make the point. Note, too, that this Trick

works just as well with Weaponry ("You've got a knife, huh? Funny, so do I. Feel like getting cut?") or Firearms ("You already fired three shots. That gun's going to overheat — I see the smoke from here."). The character's opponent chooses discretion rather than glory and backs down. If the Storyteller wants to use dice to resolve this, the player might add her Brawl dots to an Intimidation roll (Extra Talent). **Plot Hook:** You give your best explanation of why this dude wouldn't win the fight. He laughs, and then he hits you, and you realize, spitting out a tooth, that you are wrong. Can you still talk your way out of it?

• **Killer Instinct (Combat):** The character goes for the kill, every time. Going for the kill, though, doesn't mean you leave yourself vulnerable. The character has learned to watch his back in a fight, even when bringing the pain. The character does not lose Defense when performing an All-Out Attack (see p. 157 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). **Plot Hook:** This guy is tough, you knew that going in, so you try to put him down fast and hard. And he dodges every shot, smacks you in the face, and urges you to try harder. You should run... but you can't. You can't quit until this guy is face down.

• **Knockout Punch (Combat):** The character can knock someone out with a single punch. Despite what decades of cinema have taught us, this is next to impossible. Any blow that knocks a person out probably also deals lasting injury — but never mind that.



This character knows just how to sock someone to stun them for a short while (the rest of the scene). It requires a successful hit, and in addition to the target's Defense, the player subtracts the target's Stamina from the roll. If the player manages even one success, however, the target falls unconscious. Supernatural creatures are unaffected. Mages *might* be affected normally, provided they don't have some kind of Mage Armor up at the time of the punch. **Plot Hook:** You give the security guard your best punch. He drops, sure, but then he gets up with this weird light in his eyes, and says "Please go. We're closed." Why does it sound like three people talking at once?

- **Mechanical Compliance (Combat):** Knocking an opponent to the ground doesn't have to be about physical strength or causing pain. The human body behaves in certain ways when pressed in certain places; this is mechanical compliance. The character knows how to push or knock an opponent down with a minimum of force. One success on a standard attack roll knocks an opponent prone, in addition to *or* instead of inflicting damage (player's choice). **Plot Hook:** You knock the guy down, all right — so why is he on top of you? And why are your hands cold, like you just touched a flagpole in winter?

- **Multiple Strike (Combat):** Whether it's a roundhouse punch or a series of quick jabs, the character can hit everyone in his immediate range with one attack. The player makes one attack roll, subtracting the highest Defense represented by the intended targets. The character must be able to physically reach all of the targets without taking more than one step. Damage is applied equally to all of the targets (the damage is bashing, unless the character has some way to inflict lethal damage with a punch or kick). **Plot Hook:** You draw back, and all of them took a step back at once, like it is a cue. In fact, they've been moving pretty much in unison from the get-go. They must all train together.

## Drive

- **Demolition Derby (Extra Talent):** The character is adept at using cars as weapons, but minimizing the damage (to his own ride, anyway). Add the character's Drive rating to the car's Durability for the purposes of determining whether a crash results in damage to the car (see Crashes, pp. 144–146 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). **Plot Hook:** You are just planning to clip that fool's big SUV, not to knock him off the road. But when he pulls back on, he chases you down, and every time he rams your bumper, another indicator light goes on in your dashboard. Engine, oil... gas?

- **Expert Driver (Extra Talent):** No matter what sort of vehicle the character is operating, he's a natural at maneuvering it. Instead of adding (or subtracting) the vehicle's Handling rating from Drive rolls to keep the car under control, steer it or aim it, or navigate treacher-

ous roads, the player uses the character's Drive rating. As such, the roll becomes Dexterity + (Drive x 2). **Plot Hook:** The car hates you. There's no other explanation for it. You know they'll think you're crazy back at the station (if you get there alive), but every time you try to make a turn, the car *fights* you. And then there's that weird laughter from the radio....

- **Lose 'Em (Time Saver):** Following the character is difficult — as soon as he spots his tail, he can shake it. The number of successes required for the character to lose a tail in a vehicle pursuit is halved (see p. 69 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). **Plot Hook:** No matter what you do, you can't lose this guy. And just when you think you have, he pulls out from around another corner. Last time, he pulled out *in front* of you.

- **Nooks and Crannies (Extra Talent):** The character knows which cars have the best trunk space, which ones have enough compartment space in the dash to hold a small person, and which ones have little hidey-holes, perfect for drugs and other contraband. Add the character's Drive to any Investigation roll involving a car (or, if the character has the requisite Specialties, a boat or a plane). **Plot Hook:** Yes, this model has a big trunk. But there is no *way* a guy that big can fit in there with all of the other junk that you see when you open it. He'd have to shrink himself somehow, and of course that's impossible.

- **Shortcuts (Time Saver):** Drive time is always halved. The character knows a shortcut, or isn't shy about driving around cars on the shoulder of the road. This allows the character to arrive at a destination earlier than usual, which can result in greater preparedness or the opportunity to catch enemies red-handed. **Plot Hook:** You try taking a shortcut and wind up getting lost. Did someone switch a street sign, or is your GPS being fed false information?

## Firearms

- **Ammunition Count (Extra Talent):** The character has a savant-like ability to keep track of how many rounds have been fired in a firefight. As such, he can time his actions to the reloading. After the first round of combat in which the opponents have used guns, the player adds the character's Firearms rating to his Initiative. **Plot Hook:** The guns aren't making any noise. Even with a silencer, you can count shots, but they just aren't making a *sound*. Bullets just hit the walls around where you're hiding, and you're trapped here.

- **Cover Fire (Combat):** By laying down some suppressing fire, the character can keep enemies from advancing. This requires the character to use at least two shots per turn (meaning reloading might be an issue), but as long as she keeps it up, anyone who tries to approach suffers lethal damage equal to the character's Firearms

rating + the damage rating of the fun. **Plot Hook:** He stands up and runs straight toward you. You keep firing. Your teammates pull you back, but as he gets closer, you see he is holding the bullets you fired at him in his hand. He is trying to give them back.

• **Dismantle (Combat):** The character can take a gun apart with one deft move. He can't completely disassemble a gun in the heat of combat, but removing the slide is enough to render it inoperable. The player rolls Dexterity + Firearms and must be within arm's reach of the gun in question. If the roll succeeds, the gun is useless until reassembled. **Plot Hook:** You grab the gun, and it electrocutes you. Did that weirdo wire up a battery to it? Does gunmetal even conduct electricity? No time to worry about that, now — you're in pain, your hand is numb, and he's still armed.

• **Trick Shot (Extra Talent, Story Advancement):** The character can place a bullet in exactly the right place to accomplish a simple goal — unlock a door, shut down a transformer, disable a car, and so on. If this action would provide information or advance the character's goals (unlocking a door to gain access to a building), Trick Shot is a Story Advancement Trick and no roll is necessary. If the Trick Shot would inconvenience or damage another character (shooting out the tires of a moving car), the player rolls Dexterity + Firearms as usual, but adds the higher of Intelligence or Wits to the roll. **Plot Hook:** You place these shots perfectly, but the car swerves at exactly the right second. You aim at the tires. There's no way the driver can see you, not from this angle.

• **Walking Gun Catalog (Story Advancement or Extra Talent):** The character knows the specs and stats for any firearm one could name, as well as knowing as much data as is available on next-generation weapons. He also knows the local and national gun laws backwards and forwards, which means he can tell if a gun is legal, if a concealed carry permit is valid, and probably even where a given gun was purchased. This allows the player to add the character's dots in Firearms to Investigation rolls in which guns figure heavily. **Plot Hook:** This gun shouldn't exist. It looks like someone took three or four different types of weapons and made a hybrid. It's a revolver, but it can fire *shotgun shells*, for crying out loud. And what's that weird symbol on the barrel?

## Larceny

• **All Doors Open (Time Saver):** Locks are no problem. The character is so familiar with locking mechanisms that she can open them without a roll or without proper tools at no penalty (but not both). This Trick applies both to electronic and mechanical locks. **Plot Hook:** You go to work on this electrical lock, and the circuitry *changes*. And to make matters worse, it looks like the silent alarm just trips itself. It's like the

electronics are aware of your presence...

• **Hidden Stash (Story Advancement):** The character can find hidden hoards anywhere. It's partly good guesswork, and partly a matter of asking "where would I hide this?" In any case, given a short time to search (roughly 10 minutes per room), the character finds secret doors, compartments, and any hidden goods. **Plot Hook:** That staircase leads to a solid ceiling. You're sure of it. But after going up another flight of stairs, you find the trap door that leads down through that "solid" ceiling onto the staircase.

• **Light Fingers (Story Advancement):** The character can pick someone's pocket without a roll. She's just deft enough to pull wallets, phones, and other sundries from a target without him noticing. For truly incredible feats (like pulling someone's belt from the loops) the Storyteller might require a roll, however. **Plot Hook:** You approach the mark. He turns around, points at you, and says, "Don't even think about it. I saw you coming a mile away."

• **Security Assessment (Penalty):** The character knows the best way to secure an area, with just a few moments of consideration. Given an hour to secure the area (less if she has help), the character's Larceny rating acts as a negative modifier to anyone attempting to break in or otherwise skirt the security the character sets up. **Plot Hook:** You spend all afternoon setting up traps, tripwires, bells, and so on... and then open the door to the office, and there she is, sitting in your chair like she owns the place.

• **Spot Concealed Weapons (Story Advancement or Extra Talent):** As the name suggests, this Trick allows the character to spot concealed weapons of any type, no matter how cunningly a person disguises or hides them. In addition to seeing weapons hidden in the small of a subject's back or in an ankle holster, the character spots throwing knives hidden in belt buckles and the like. **Plot Hook:** That guy isn't armed. He can't be, and certainly not with a hand cannon like that. Did he pull it out of the air?

## Stealth

• **Backstab (Penalty):** It is impossible to block or dodge an attack that one doesn't see coming. The character can make such an attack with practiced ease. Subtract the character's Stealth rating from the Wits + Composure roll to avoid surprise (see p. 46 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). If the target is surprised (she fails the roll), the player adds the character's Stealth rating to the attack dice pool. If the target rolls a dramatic failure, the character may strike a killing blow instead (see p. 168 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). **Plot Hook:** You sneak up on the guy, figuring to whack him over the head while his back is turned. And then he



moves, but it doesn't look like he jumped. It look like something pushed him — but there's no one here but the two of you!

• **Find Cover (Extra Talent or Combat):** The character can always find something to hide behind, under or atop. This has obvious applications for stealth, but it can also be used to find cover during a fight. The character can automatically find cover corresponding to her Stealth rating (see p. 162 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**), so at Stealth 3, the character can always become “substantially covered” when a fight breaks out. At Stealth 4 or higher, the character can find complete cover, though whether it's enough to withstand protracted gunfire is up to the Storyteller. If the character uses this Trick to hide, her Stealth rating is doubled for the purposes of contested rolls to stay hidden, provided she stays in the hiding place. **Plot Hook:** You dive behind a huge stone. You don't think they saw you, but now one of them is looking down at you from on top of the rock. Never mind how he saw you, how'd he get up there?

• **Know the Shadows (Extra Talent):** It's much easier for the character to find people, because he understands how to hide. By applying his own skills in skulking, he can comb the dark corners for trespassers much more effectively. Add the character's Stealth rating to opposed rolls to find or notice people hiding from or shadowing him. **Plot Hook:** You feel a cold breeze, but there's no one here. No footprints, no disrupted earth, no cracking twigs. No one is here but you. You're safe.

• **Nondescript (Time Saver):** Witnesses don't place the character at the scene. They agree that *someone* was there (maybe), but they can't agree on hair color, build, height, skin color, mannerisms, or sometimes even gender. The character might or might not make an effort to disguise herself; it's not really necessary. She just has a forgettable face. **Plot Hook:** You're leaving the scene, and someone calls after you. By name. You've never seen him before, you're sure of it, but he knows you. And when you run, he calls out, “It's okay! I'll just call you at home later!”

• **Still as a Statue (Extra Talent or Penalty):** The character can remain perfectly motionless — useful for when he hides in a ventilation shaft or in plain sight. The player adds the higher of the character's Composure or Stamina to oppose rolls to remain hidden, in addition to whatever Attribute would normally be used. Alternately, anyone searching for the character *subtracts* the higher of these traits from attempts to find him (in addition to the usual opposed roll; see p. 75 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). **Plot Hook:** She walks into the room and nearly walks right by you, and you figure you can just wait until she leaves, and then get onto her computer. But then she starts sniffing the air... and she's getting closer. What the hell? She can't possibly *smell* you!

## Survival

• **Concrete Jungle (Extra Talent):** The city has its own nature, its own harmony, and its own ecosystem — and the character understands them perfectly. Add the character's Survival to Investigation rolls made outdoors in a city environment, as well as to Streetwise rolls meant to gather information about an urban locale. **Plot Hook:** These prints don't make any sense. You get stray dogs in the cities. Coyotes, sure. But there are *wolf* tracks, and from the size of them, there's no way this animal is wandering around and no one's seen it.

• **Homemade Tools (Time Saver):** Similar to Improvised Tools (p. 55), the character can fashion crude tools out of wood, stone, and other natural and found objects. While they aren't as impressive as the jury-rigged contraptions that Improvised Tools creates, they're a lot more durable. The equipment bonus for such tools is equal to half of the character's Survival rating (round up), but they remain functional for one week per dot of Survival. **Plot Hook:** No matter what technique you use, your tools keep falling apart. Birds and squirrels watch you from the trees, and they seem to be shaking their heads in disapproval. What are you missing?

• **Master Tracker (Story Advancement):** Tracking is impossible without a trail, but not for this character. Through instinct or near-superhuman perception, he can follow a trail on dry rocks (or in a city) for miles. It might be slow going, but he can track with the determination of a bloodhound. **Plot Hook:** This doesn't make sense. The trail picks up every few hundred feet or so, almost like the guy is *jumping*. But no one can jump that far.

• **Nature Boy (Time Saver or Story Advancement):** The character can always find food and shelter, and so need not risk damage from exposure or hunger in the wilderness. This differs from the Iron Stomach Merit in that the character isn't necessarily able to eat spoiled or otherwise tainted food, he always just seems to find edible (if not especially tasty) fare, no matter where he is. **Plot Hook:** Pickings have been pretty scarce out here. Not a lot of game, the plants taste awful, and the water is going stagnant far too quickly — even the water in the bottles that you brought. It seems to be getting worse as you get close to that old shack, but someone must live there. You can see smoke coming from the chimney. But who would live out here in the wastes?

• **Will-o'-the-Wisp (Penalty):** The character is skilled at leading enemies into hazardous situations. Bogs, cliffs, and briars are traditional, but in the city, this Trick might lead opponents down blind alleys, off bridges, or into rats' nests. Apply the character's Survival as a penalty in combat as long as the opponents remain in the area (assuming they follow the character). **Plot Hook:** You lead the bikers down the embankment. Their bikes should sink

into the soft mud down here, and you've never known a biker to leave his ride. But when their tires hit the earth, the leader looks down and snarls, and the dirt just gets solid, leaving their bikes intact... and you stand there defenseless. You hope they can take a joke.

## Weaponry

- **Always Armed (Combat):** You can always find something to hit people with. It might be a particularly impressive weapon, but even a beer bottle or a piece of loose wood is better than nothing. You can find a weapon worth 1L with a reflexive action, though in especially barren environments it might take an instant action (Storyteller's discretion). You also ignore the -1 penalty for using an improvised weapon. **Plot Hook:** You pick up a length of discarded cable and brandish it, trying to keep the snaggletoothed woman away. She gestures at it, and it hisses and squirms in your hand. How did you accidentally pick up a *snake*?

- **Butcher (Combat):** The character aims for veins and arteries with an edged weapon. One solid hit can kill, and so the character inflicts aggravated damage with her strikes. Note that vampires, Prometheans, and even some changelings don't bleed, and suffer lethal damage as usual. The Storyteller might even rule that a character that doesn't bleed suffers *no* damage from this kind of attack, as the character just doesn't do enough tissue damage to harm the target. **Plot Hook:** You've cut on this guy six ways to Sunday, and he just keeps bleeding. His throat and both wrists are wide open, and the blood keeps flowing, but he's not slowing down. And he's talking as best he can with a cut throat. "Cut me again," he says. "I *like* to bleed."

- **Cripple (Combat):** The character can make a targeted strike to the leg, severing a tendon, or breaking a bone. The target is then forced to hobble until he can get medical attention. This reduces the target's Speed to 1/10 its normal value (round down). This Trick requires a successful attack roll, but if even one level of damage is inflicted, the target is crippled. **Plot Hook:** You hit the guy in the leg, figuring he'll mellow out if he can't walk right. But he grabs his shattered leg and shoves, and you *hear* the bone pop back into place. He stands up straight, looks at your leg, and whispers, "Okay, your turn."

- **Flashing Blades (Combat):** While this Trick doesn't necessarily involve bladed weapons, they do tend to make a good deterrent. The character twirls and spins his weapon(s), creating a zone of injury around him. Add the character's Weaponry to his Defense during this time (but note that the character can't walk more than three yards per turn and maintain this Trick). If an opponent enters the zone, the character makes one free attack against him, and the opponent's Defense is not applied. **Plot Hook:** You spin your chain, pushing the

guy back, but he locks eyes with you, and suddenly your own chain smacks you in the head.

- **Wearing Weapons (Story Advancement):** When the character conceals a weapon, it stays concealed. Through a combination of body language and sleight of hand, the character can go through searches and even metal detectors and retain whatever weapons she had on her. **Plot Hook:** That man is staring at your gun. *You* forgot you had it on you, but he's looking right at it. And when you make eye contact, he just winks, and mimes shooting at you. Is that a threat? Or is he just being playful?

## Social Skill Tricks

### Animal Ken

- **Behaviorist (Extra Talent):** One can learn a great deal from the behavior of animals, whether or not one believes that they behave differently in the presence of the supernatural. The character can observe animal behavior and draw conclusions about what might have happened in the area. This ranges from the kinds of insects feasting on leaves (which were recently drenched in blood) to the hungry looks of the crows peering down from nearby trees, hoping for more tasty eyeballs. Add the character's Animal Ken rating to any Investigation rolls made for the area, provided that the Storyteller feels that enough fauna are present to bring this Trick into play. **Plot Hook:** The animals are all dead. They're here, they're just dead. Birds dead at the feet of trees, handfuls of bugs struck dead around a pond, fish and frogs floating. What could have killed all of the animals so quickly? And is it going to happen again?

- **Expert Trainer (Time Saver):** The character can train animals in record time. She just seems to have a kinship with them, and can sense the best methods to use. The player can choose to forego the animal training roll (see p. 79 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) and instead apply automatic successes equal to the character's Animal Ken rating, *or* can make two rolls per day rather than just one. **Plot Hook:** No matter what you do with this dog, it doesn't seem to work. He doesn't remember tricks from one day to the next. And every time you take him out on a leash past "Dead Man's Curve," he starts whimpering and you've got to teach him "heel" all over again.

- **Fight or Flight (Combat):** Not everyone with a high rating in Animal Ken is an animal lover. The character knows how to use animals as weapons, striking just the right nerve with a blow, a special whistle or a chemical to send the creatures into a blind rage or mindless panic. This requires a Manipulation + Animal Ken roll, but if the roll is successful, the animal either attacks the nearest person or runs away at top speed, and does not respond to commands from its trainer for the rest of



the scene. **Plot hook:** The horse should have thrown its rider. But it just looked at you with eyes that you can only describe as sorrowful — or *human* — and shook its head, carrying the woman in blue away.

- **One of the Pack (Story Advancement):** Dogs and potentially wolves love the character, and won't hurt him even if trained to do so. The character can calm an attacking animal with a soothing noise and gesture, rendering it sleepy and docile. **Plot Hook:** The wolves are laughing at you. They should be romping, playing with you. You might get a nip — it's happened before — but there shouldn't be this undercurrent of aggression. And something else, you realize, as the beasts glance at each other. It's like a joke you're just not getting.

- **Whisperer (Story Advancement):** The character might be a horse whisperer, a dog whisperer, or even a bee-singer. Whatever the specific species, she never worries that the animal will harm her. Animals of the given type approach her deferentially. Actions made to tame, heal, or diagnose the given type of animals always succeed, and the character can make a strong guess as to any traumatic events that might have befallen the beast (this is less appropriate for animals like bees, of course, though it might be possible to gauge what happened to a hive). **Plot Hook:** The cat isn't a cat. It looks like one, yes, but you've never in your life met a cat that looked at you that way. And why is it staring at the cut on your hand like that? Has someone been feeding it blood?

## Empathy

- **Body Language (Story Advancement):** The character can tell when someone is hurting, needs help, or is spoiling for a fight. This makes her a natural in such professions as police officer, social worker, con artist, or vigilante. In addition to knowing if a person has an immediate need or desire, the character is also hard to surprise. Add the character's Empathy to her Initiative modifier, as long as she has one turn to observe her aggressor before hostilities break out. **Plot Hook:** He just pulled a knife! He was calm one minute. No hint of violence — it was like someone flipped a switch.

- **Emotional Attack (Combat or Extra Talent):** The character knows how to attack a target on an emotional level. This doesn't inflict physical damage, but it certainly dampens a target's resolve. This Trick can have one of two effects. As a Combat Trick, it allows the player to roll Presence + Empathy — the target's Composure. If the roll succeeds, the target loses a point of Willpower as the character strikes a nerve. As an Extra Talent Trick, it allows the player to add the character's Empathy to any other Social roll (this can help with seduction, interrogation, fast-talk, etc.). **Plot Hook:** You expect her to burst into tears. You expect her to fold up like the shrinking violet she always acted. And

now you're bleeding from the shoulder and she's beating through the door with a hatchet — how the Hell did you screw this up so badly?

- **Hot Button (Extra Talent or Combat):** Insults don't actually hurt worse than physical blows, but one can certainly complement the other. The character knows how to deliver a barbed insult at exactly the right time to suck the wind out of someone's sails. Add the character's Empathy rating to an offensive roll, whether an attack in combat, a roll meant to intimidate, or a roll meant to make a fool of the target. **Plot Hook:** Your best insults aren't making any difference. This guy should be rising to the bait. You know you've hit him where it hurts. But every time you catch his eye, there's no hint of anger now, just a promise of anger later. Perhaps you should hush up.

- **Microexpression Reader (Story Advancement):** The character can read a target's emotional state flawlessly by watching his facial expressions and gestures. Of course, simply knowing that a target feels sad when the topic of dogs is raised doesn't give the character any context for *why* this is the case, but it can certainly inform a line of questioning. **Plot Hook:** You know that Mr. Gold is a hard case — most agents are (though has he ever said which agency he's with?). But the guy doesn't *have* facial expressions, even the little unconscious ones. And it's creeping you right out.

- **Sympatico (Penalty):** The character is hard to hit, not because he's necessarily dexterous or quick, but because he's sympathetic. All else being equal, aggressors with some kind of Morality trait attack the character *last*, and until the character acts aggressively, the player can apply the character's Empathy rating to Defense. Again, this only works against enemies who might feel some remorse about attacking; wild dogs really don't care. **Plot Hook:** He came out of the building with a length of rebar, covered in blood, and started swinging. You tried to talk him down, but now you're running. Limping, anyway. And he's gaining, and he still hasn't made a sound.

## Expression

- **Attack Reputation (Penalty):** Satire is a powerful force. The character lampoons a target (an individual or a group), and for a number of weeks equal to the character's Expression rating afterwards, the target suffers a penalty to all Social rolls equal to the character's Expression rating. This assumes that enough people see the roast, of course, but "enough" is relative. A character might skewer the town blowhard at the local bar — only about 20 people see it, but that's enough for word to get around in the right circles. In order for the Trick to affect a large corporation, the character might have to get a viral video going on the Internet. **Plot Hook:** Last night, you gave the greatest roast of your life. They'll be calling the mayor out for what he is — a racist and a fool — for

the rest of his life. But this morning, you wake up to find the angry messages on *your* machine. Who was on the receiving end last night?

- **Encoded Message (Story Advancement):** Through symbolism, cleverly disguised lettering, and knowledge of his audience, the character can embed a message within a written or artistic work. Whether it's a hidden message in a song or an apparently boring essay that comes to life when one reads between the lines, the character can communicate a very specific set of instructions or facts without giving away his true intent. Interpreting the message correctly, of course, is up to the viewer (and this should involve an Intelligence + Wits roll). **Plot Hook:** Your songs are giving people nightmares. It's not the lyrics — while they contain messages, they're very positive and uplifting spiritual ones. So what message does the music contain?

- **Fire Up the Crowd (Story Advancement):** Given a few moments to speak, sing, or perform to a crowd, the character can saturate an audience with whatever emotion he wishes. He can make people march with him straight to City Hall, or he can put them into deep, near-suicidal depression. Whatever the emotion, it dissipates a few minutes after the crowd disperses, but while the group is together, they're capable of impressive (and potentially lethal) feats. **Plot Hook:** You lead your angry mob to the home of the corporate pig that's been sucking this town dry. And he walks out to meet them, sniffs the air, inhales deep like he's taking a bong hit, and then shudders like he just got off. And looking around, you realize that your mob just doesn't give a shit anymore.

- **Instruction (Story Advancement):** Those who can't do, teach? What a load of horseshit. You can do *and* teach, and your students benefit. You can grant another character the benefit of one of your Specialties for one story, if you spend one hour of game time teaching her. If the player of that character wishes to purchase the Specialty, she spends two experience points, rather than the usual three. If the student does not have any dots of the Skill in question, the Trick has its usual effect, but the unskilled penalty still applies. For instance, a character teaches the Medicine Specialty: First Aid to a character with no dots in Medicine. The -3 penalty for unskilled use of Medicine still applies, but if the First Aid Specialty comes into play, the character adds a die (for a net of -2). **Plot Hook:** You've become quite knowledgeable about fairy tales over the years. The old tales, about changeling children and so on. But today, when you try to give your standard lesson on the subject, you find you can't make a sound. You can talk about other things normally, but when you try to teach, nothing comes out.

- **Mood Music (Extra Talent):** The right choice of music can make all the difference when setting up a situation. Provided the character can choose (or play)

his musical selections, the player can add the character's Expression ratings to all Social rolls made during that scene. **Plot Hook:** You time all of your best pickup lines to the music. You lead her out onto the dance floor, and if you dance to *that* song, you know you'll be able to take her to bed. But then that big guy just stares at you, and shakes his finger, and suddenly the music sounds all distorted. No one else seems to notice, but you can't dance if you can't hear the rhythm, right.

## Intimidation

- **Crazy Rant (Story Advancement):** The character launches into a rant against the government, his ex-wife, the bastards on the Internet, the aliens that control his thoughts, or whatever strikes his fancy. People back away — they recognize a powderkeg when they see one. The character also appreciates the fine line between “threatening posture” and “actual threat,” which means he's unlikely to be arrested for ranting in public. This Trick is useful as a distraction, or for clearing people out of a store or subway platform quickly. **Plot Hook:** Everyone's gone except for those two. They look kind of alike — you'd say mother and son, but they look the same age. They aren't scared in the least, and they keep watching, hanging on every word. And you're running out of material.

- **Don't Mess With Me (Penalty):** The character looks dangerous enough that attackers think twice. Add the character's Intimidation to the character's Defense. This bonus is lost for the scene if the character fails an attack roll or suffers more than three points of damage. **Plot Hook:** You glare at the kid and his buddies, thinking to send them scampering away into the city. But they just look at each other and whisper something. Must be in Spanish, though, because you swear it sounds like, “Let's eat him.”

- **Fast Break (Time Saver):** Maybe it's because the character is brutal, or maybe he can get under people's skin (literally or figuratively) so easily, but either way, interrogations tend to end quickly when he's involved. The player can roll once every 15 minutes, rather than once an hour (see p. 81 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). **Plot Hook:** You're hurting this guy. He's bleeding, bruising, in pain. But he's also *forgetting* what you're doing as soon as you do it! Every few minutes he looks up and asks what he's doing here and why you're hurting him.

- **Induce Derangement (Combat):** Hold a guy down and shove a spider in his mouth, and it's a sure bet he'll be a little arachnophobic afterwards. The character can bring on phobias and fixations, with the usual effects (see p. 97 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). This requires an extended Presence + Intimidation roll, with a target number equal to the subject's Resolve + Composure (one



roll per turn). The derangement lasts for the rest of the story. Use of this Trick risks degeneration if the character has Morality 3 or more. **Plot Hook:** You slam the snitch up against the wall and pull out the beetle. You're planning to put it in his ear — that usually makes them quiver every time they see a bug for months to come. But this guy grabs the bug out of your hand and *eats* it.

- **Scared Straight (Extra Talent):** When the character tells someone to keep his mouth shut, it sticks. The subject knows that no matter what the consequences of staying quiet, having the character find out that he blabbed will be worse. The subject adds the character's Intimidation rating to any dice pool involving resisting coercion or persuasion (including supernatural attempts) to betray or inform on the character. **Plot Hook:** He swears up and down he never opened his trap, and that he never even *met* the crazy redhead at the door with the snaggle teeth and the weird yellow eyes. But no one else knows you are here. What'd she do, read his mind?

## Persuasion

- **Commanding Presence (Story Advancement):** The character walks in and takes charge, and everyone immediately and instinctively defers to him. If the character doesn't wield any actual authority, this isn't going to last long, but if the character has even a single dot of applicable Status, other characters present respond as if his Status rating was equal to his Persuasion. **Plot Hook:** Apparently, some social hierarchy to which you aren't privy is at work here, because about five of the people in this room keep looking at each other whenever you give an order. Do they know you're faking and that you don't really work for the governor?

- **Con Job (Penalty):** A real mark always convinces himself, and the character is happy to help. She is adept at making the subject of a snow job think that the whole deal was his idea to begin with, and she is reluctantly agreeing. When making a Fast-Talk action (p. 83 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**), the subject suffers a penalty on the contested roll equal to the character's Persuasion rating. **Plot Hook:** Right in the middle of your best con, he stops you. "Sorry, son," he says, "I invented this gift. There's a sucker born every minute, but I ain't one of them." You read about this con in a book from the 1800s, though....

- **Everyone Wins (Time Saver):** Compromise, popular wit has it, means no one goes home happy. The character can make everyone happy, or at least satisfied, with the outcome of a disagreement. As long as the character can start talking before someone actually takes a swing, she can defuse a fight before it starts and send both sides on their way without losing face. This can apply to gang fights, standoffs between police and protestors, or even corporate boardrooms. The underlying disagree-

ment isn't necessarily resolved, but immediate hostilities can wait. **Plot Hook:** These guys look ready to kill each other, but it's the middle of the day and there are kids on the playground nearby. But they aren't listening to you. One of them looks at you and says, "Better run, man. This goes deep." And you get a chill up your spine as he says that — this *isn't* just a brawl.

- **Master Negotiator (Time Saver):** When Cutting a Deal (p. 82 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**), the character always seems to know the right words to use, the right buttons to push, and the right figures to cite (correct or not) to ensure she gets the better end of the agreement. Subtract the character's Persuasion rating from the target number of successes for the deal. If this result in a negative number, the character automatically wins the action with any rolls being required. **Plot Hook:** You're negotiating a run-of-the-mill real estate deal, urban renovation, nothing special. But the slumlord refuses to bend on a certain building, and he gets all glassy-eyed whenever you try to talk about it.

- **On the Prowl (Story Advancement):** The character never hurts for companionship. No matter what the situation, he can always find someone receptive to his seductive blandishments. Given 10 minutes or so to work the room, he can find someone willing to submit to his attentions, independent of age or gender (whether the target is someone that the character is interested in is another matter entirely). **Plot Hook:** She's not your usual type — a little out of your league, maybe — but she is making eyes at you, so you figure, why not branch out? But she's been biting at your wrist and arm for a while now...and suddenly you're feeling cold. Feels too good to stop, though.

## Socialize

- **Connoisseur (Story Advancement):** People very often try to appear more educated or sophisticated than they really are, and the character never falls for it. Based on a target's choice of dress, words, and even food, the character immediately knows the target's socioeconomic status (both now and when growing up), country and region of origin, and education level. What's more, the character knows if the target is actively trying to hide any of these things. **Plot Hook:** This man's bearing is completely at odds with his age. He's acting as though he was raised during the Great Depression — his slang, his careful attention to conservation, even his politics all remind you of your mother. But he's only in his 20s.

- **Professional Drinker (Extra Talent):** The character can hold her liquor on a level that seems impossible. Normally, the roll to resist the effects of drugs and alcohol is Stamina + Resolve (see p. 49 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). The player can add the character's Socialize rating to this roll as well. **Plot Hook:** The wine

isn't especially strong, but it's got you reeling. Not drunk, exactly, but certainly intoxicated. And it's got an oddly salty sort of flavor....

• **Mover and Shaker (Story Advancement):** The character can immediately detect who the most important and sought-after person in the room is, just by observing for a few moments. This doesn't necessarily have to be the most powerful person in the room in terms of influence or title, of course. A politician's advisor might be more important than the politician himself. **Plot Hook:** All of your instincts tell you that the most important person in the room keeps *changing* every few minutes, almost as though the people here decide, as one, to respect and pursue someone new.

• **Opening Line (Extra Talent):** People remember a good first impression (and a bad one, for that matter). The character can begin a conversation with a memorable statement or action, and the player can then add the character's Socialize rating to later Social rolls. He can do this a number of times equal to his Socialize (so a character with Socialize 4 can add four dice to Social rolls involving people who heard the Opening Line, on four separate occasions), but he has no time limit on applying this bonus. Years later, people still remember the funny thing he said at that party. **Plot Hook:** In the moment, it was funny, but now people are telling the story of what you said and tsk-tsking about it. It's a social disaster for you — and then you realize that people are retelling the story but getting the wording wrong. Who misled them?

• **Whispers (Story Advancement or Combat):** Groups of people don't stay quiet, even when they should. The character can listen to the whispers of the crowd and keep tabs on a chosen target. Once a character notes his target's location, the target can't hide in the crowd. Also, the character automatically succeeds on Reaction to Surprise actions (see p. 46 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**) while in a crowd. **Plot Hook:** You're standing near the balcony, watching the room, and you realize you've lost her. How? People are buzzing every time she walks away from them. And then she puts her hand on your shoulder, from behind you. There's no way she could have gotten to the balcony without you noticing!

## Streetwise

• **Dark Underbelly of the City (Time Saver):** The character can work the black market with the best of them (see p. 86 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). The time required for each roll to do so is reduced to one *hour*, not one day, as the character can always think of exactly who to call or where to go. Note that this Trick does *not* grant access to magical or overtly occult items. **Plot Hook:** Your message gets crossed with someone else's. Instead of taking possession of a carload of hot elec-

tronics, you take possession of a car with an unconscious girl in the trunk. Seems a little anemic, but otherwise healthy — only why is she so opposed to going to the police or to a hospital?

• **Gang Ambassador (Story Advancement):** The character knows the code words, gang signs, graffiti tags, and all of the other methods for dealing with the gangs of his city. That might not necessarily protect him or his friends from said gangsters, but it allows him to know within seconds who he's dealing with and whether running, talking tough, or begging for mercy would be most appropriate. **Plot Hook:** The graffiti on this wall doesn't resemble anything the gangs in this area use. But it appears here every night, even though they always paint over it. You haven't met anybody willing to talk about it, though.

• **Lifelong Resident (Story Advancement):** The character has lived in this area all his life, and knows every bit of dirty history and trivia about it. He also knows all of the local movers and shakers (regardless of who's actually been elected this time around) and where a lot of the bodies are buried, literally and figuratively. For any given question about the city's history, the character will either know the answer or know someone who does. **Plot Hook:** Seems to you that the house on the corner burned down 30 years ago. So how come it still looks the same? Why does no one else remember the fire?

• **Network of Eyes (Penalty):** The character has eyes and ears everywhere. Folks know him and trust him (or maybe he scares them), and so if he's following someone, they tell him where his quarry went. When the character is following someone through his neighborhood, the quarry applies a penalty to his rolls equal to the character's Streetwise rating (this applies in Shadowing or in a Foot Race). **Plot Hook:** They're all lying to you. They all say she just flew away. Grew wings and flew away. But that's stupid — so why do they *all* say it? Must be a prank, and it ain't funny.

• **Rumor Mill (Extra Talent):** People talk, and mostly it's bullshit. But every now and again, people learn or reveal something that's true and useful. The character can sort out the wheat from the chaff in the rumor mill, and apply that knowledge later. For every hour of game time (not downtime) that the character spends hunting down and listening to rumors about a given subject, the player can add the character's Streetwise rating to a roll related to it. This roll might be based on Investigation (the character heard where the target hid the stolen goods), Occult ("Big Mike ain't dead, he's just gone crazy") or even combat ("You know Montgomery's boy has a trick knee, right?"). **Plot Hook:** You spend a full day chasing rumors about someone, someone that no one wants to name. Finally, just as the sun sets, the old blind fella that sells the papers describes him — and "he" looks just like you.



## Subterfuge

- **Cognitive Dissonance (Story Advancement):**

The character believes what he's saying, even if he knows it to be false. He can put the falsehood of it out of his mind, at least long enough to get his point across. This allows the character to beat polygraphs without a roll, or to forego the need to engage in a contested action against someone trying to test the veracity of his story (of course, the interrogator might be left with the impression that "he believes it," rather than "it's the gospel truth," depending on the situation). **Plot Hook:** You meet a man who knows the truth. Not whether someone is lying (which implies an act of deliberation), but whether a statement is *actually true*. And he's right about it 100% of the time.

- **Doubt (Combat):** Sometimes a comment gets under the skin, and won't let a person rest. The character can produce those kinds of doubts. If the character spends a scene talking to a target, he can leave the target so unsure of himself that he can't regain Willpower through his Virtue for the rest of the story. If the target's player happens to roll an exceptional success on a Resolve + Composure roll before this, however, the effect is lifted. **Plot Hook:** You go to work on this guy, this corporate executive, softening him up so that your lover, the DA, can demolish him in court. Next day, he's dead, hanged in his office. Did you do that? Could you do it again?

- **Everyone Lies (Penalty):** The character assumes that everyone is lying. Not necessarily out of a conscious desire to deceive, mind, but just because everyone alters the truth in his own mind, just to make it more palatable. While this viewpoint is rather cynical, it does make the character especially difficult to hoodwink, since he's already looking for the untruth. Subtract the character's Subterfuge rating from any attempt to deceive the character, even on a contested roll. **Plot Hook:** Everything she says *must* be true. She's too beautiful to lie. This irrational feeling fades once she leaves, but you remember it.

- **Perfect Disguise (Penalty):** Disguise isn't just about donning a mask and some makeup. It's about walking and talking like the intended person, even if that's someone the character made up. The character can so fully inhabit his "mask" that he almost believes it himself. Anyone attempting to pierce the disguise subtracts the character's Subterfuge rating from the attempt, even in a contested action. **Plot Hook:** She leans over and whispers, "I can smell the hair dye. You'd better get out of here before someone else does." It takes you a minute

to remember that you *did* dye your hair, but now you notice a bunch of the other people here sniffing in your general direction, too.

- **Reverse Con (Story Advancement):** If someone tries to con this character, they wind up buying her dinner. The character is adept at reversing a con artist's doubletalk, all the while letting him think he's in control. If the character is the target of a con job or Fast-Talk attempt, he automatically wins the contest and the would-be con artist must do him a favor that can't take more than one scene to resolve. **Plot Hook:** Every time you try to turn this around, he brings up some new topic that fascinates you. And every time you try to use *that* to your advantage, he changes the subject. And what's with that coin he's rolling between his fingers? Why can't you stop staring at it?



## Extraordinary Supernatural Characters

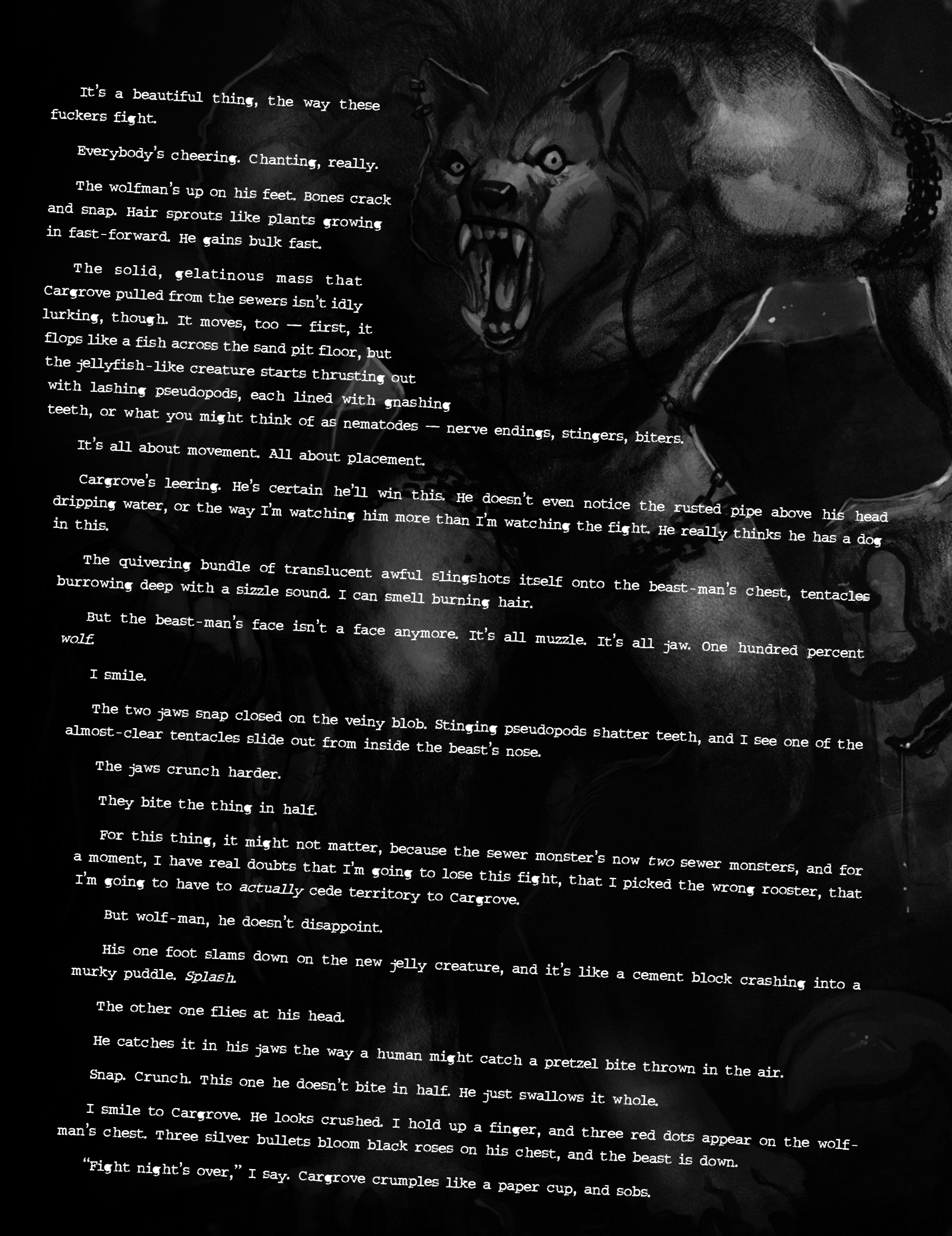
What happens when an extraordinary mortal becomes a supernatural creature? You have two choices: either the character keeps the Skill Tricks, or he doesn't.

If he keeps the Tricks, this emphasizes that one's talents are one's own, and even the trauma and strangeness of the Embrace, First Change, or Awakening doesn't change that. If Sherlock Holmes had been stolen by the Fae and returned as a changeling, he would still be the world's greatest detective. If Annie Oakley had undergone the Bargain and become a Sin-Eater after the car accident in 1922 (which merely wounded her, in the real world), she would still have been a crack shot.

If the character loses Skill Tricks upon gaining a template, it draws a sharp contrast between the mortal — or rather "known" world — and that of the supernatural. Any talent that the character may have had before is gone, or rather, it now exists only through the lens of that supernatural template. If you go this route, we recommend granting the character a free dot in the applicable Skills. If this would take the rating above five dots, add a free Specialty instead.







It's a beautiful thing, the way these fuckers fight.

Everybody's cheering. Chanting, really.

The wolfman's up on his feet. Bones crack and snap. Hair sprouts like plants growing in fast-forward. He gains bulk fast.

The solid, gelatinous mass that Cargrove pulled from the sewers isn't idly lurking, though. It moves, too — first, it flops like a fish across the sand pit floor, but the jellyfish-like creature starts thrusting out with lashing pseudopods, each lined with gnashing teeth, or what you might think of as nematodes — nerve endings, stingers, biters.

It's all about movement. All about placement.

Cargrove's leering. He's certain he'll win this. He doesn't even notice the rusted pipe above his head dripping water, or the way I'm watching him more than I'm watching the fight. He really thinks he has a dog in this.

The quivering bundle of translucent awful slingshots itself onto the beast-man's chest, tentacles burrowing deep with a sizzle sound. I can smell burning hair.

But the beast-man's face isn't a face anymore. It's all muzzle. It's all jaw. One hundred percent wolf.

I smile.

The two jaws snap closed on the veiny blob. Stinging pseudopods shatter teeth, and I see one of the almost-clear tentacles slide out from inside the beast's nose.

The jaws crunch harder.

They bite the thing in half.

For this thing, it might not matter, because the sewer monster's now two sewer monsters, and for a moment, I have real doubts that I'm going to lose this fight, that I picked the wrong rooster, that I'm going to have to actually cede territory to Cargrove.

But wolf-man, he doesn't disappoint.

His one foot slams down on the new jelly creature, and it's like a cement block crashing into a murky puddle. *Splash*.

The other one flies at his head.

He catches it in his jaws the way a human might catch a pretzel bite thrown in the air.

Snap. Crunch. This one he doesn't bite in half. He just swallows it whole.

I smile to Cargrove. He looks crushed. I hold up a finger, and three red dots appear on the wolfman's chest. Three silver bullets bloom black roses on his chest, and the beast is down.

"Fight night's over," I say. Cargrove crumples like a paper cup, and sobs.

# Chapter Two: Picking Up The Pieces

**“No doubt there are other important things in life besides conflict, but there are not many other things so inevitably interesting. The very saints interest us most when we think of them as engaged in a conflict with the Devil.”**

**—Robert Lynd,  
“The Blue Lion”**

The point of the game is conflict.

Maybe you don't think so. Maybe you think that it's about story. About character growth. And it is about those things, yes, but those elements do not exist without conflict.

*Hands around throat. Knife between ribs. Convincing words. Whispered threats.*

A story is nothing without conflict. A character meets adversity, and in overcoming that adversity — or falling prey to it — is where the story is told.

A guy goes to the store. He buys milk. He comes home.

Is that a story? Maybe in the barest threads, in that he probably encounters the very meager conflicts of having to exert the earthly will to, *I dunno*, open a doorknob or heft the jug of milk. But, is it really a story? It's damn sure not a good one.

A guy goes to the store. Along the way he finds a coin, and on this coin is a faceless president from a year that has not yet happened. He picks it up and pockets it, then makes his way to the store, where he tries to buy milk — but now, with the coin in his pocket, he finds that no one will speak to him. He can't get their attention. He is invisible to them. Is it a curse, or a blessing? His ailing mother needs the milk. They can't see him. He has a choice, a moral choice. He steals the milk, and feels the addicting rush of impenetrable anonymity.

Is that a story? It's a better one. It features conflict (strange coin means man now cannot be seen, has a moral dilemma). It features choice on how to defeat that conflict. How he moves past the conflict tells us something about him. It's what makes the story interesting.

With the Storytelling System, you're trying to take your characters through a story. Conflict is king, then, because it's the cornerstone of both a good character and a good story. Hence, you need robust tools to mediate such conflicts, right?

That's what this chapter is all about: *conflict resolution*. Whether it's hacking off some monster's hand with a camping hatchet or besting him at a game of chess, this section will give you new ways to explore conflict resolution at your gaming table.

## Combat Options

Let's talk about combat. The *World of Darkness Rulebook* describes a fast acting, easy to follow system. Its simplicity and broad appeal makes it easy to start shooting, stabbing, and beating people right away — a bad



thing in the real world, but a definite asset for a violent horror game. Nevertheless, the combat rules aren't designed to be all about speed, ease of use or "realistic" results. It's designed to work for a large number of different play groups, so that means to a certain extent it's built on compromises between rigorous rules and out-of-the-box playability, speedy resolution, and detailed narrative consequences; and tactical options versus the desires of people who want to yell, "I shoot him in the gut!" and be done with it.

Fortunately, the rules are also eminently *hackable*. In other words, it's easy to break them and rearrange the elements for your own use. This is intentional. They're an elaboration of the basic Storytelling System, an extension of core principles like dice pools, resisted Traits, and equipment bonuses. Players have fiddled with these rules ever since early, prerelease playtesting. As the line grows, we add new options, and fans talk to each other online and at their tables about how to customize combat. Game supplements and inventive play groups have produced enough material to threaten you with information overload. Let's go over three suggestions for processing this chapter's ideas, along with the sources you've seen before:

**The Player Rules:** Storytellers usually bring in new rules. It's your job, Storyteller, but do it for *players'* benefit first. If players don't want gory details in their fight scenes, don't force it on them. If they latch on to an option they've read about, give it a shot. As the Storyteller, you have the unique pleasure of bringing the world and characters together, but you also have a responsibility to engage the players. When your preferences conflict with the group, it's *your* job to accommodate them — or step down and let someone else run the show.

**Tiny Bites:** Implement new rules gradually, in manageable stages. For instance, it's a good idea to add the miniatures rules in pieces so that everyone learns them, instead of using the whole section right away and running to the book for reference every five minutes. On a related note, don't try to apply too many *different* options at once. If you want new Health and timekeeping options, add them in separate sessions, or separate scenes of the same session. Respect your players' learning curve.

**Screw Realism — Sort Of:** Some players yearn for "realistic" combat, but the reality of violence is tragic, upsetting, confused, and bizarre. Real people have died from light taps to the chest, and survived being shot dozens of times in a single engagement. Take arguments from martial arts experts, shooting enthusiasts, and military historians as inspirations, not restrictions. What you really want is *verisimilitude*: something that *feels* real and truthful, but isn't a simulation.

## More Dangerous Tricks

This book isn't the only one with new combat ideas. Notable sections exist in **World of Darkness: Dogs of War** and **Armory Reloaded**. The book you're reading digs deeply into its options, while the others provide quick "hacks" and brief rules changes. Take a look at them if you want to import more new rules into your chronicle.

## Building the Fight

To make combat your own, work with a vision. Set it for yourself ahead of time or read through the options to grab inspiration, but either way you should end up with an agenda that defines what you want out of combat. This isn't just the Storyteller's call, either. Poll your players, brainstorm, and come to a compromise. While you're building the agenda, consider these factors:

**Narrative:** What do you want fighting to look like? Is it a brutal, desperate contest rife with elbows, body slams, and broken glass? Can martial arts experts beat down half a dozen people without breaking a sweat?

Figure out what kind of action fits comfortably within your group's ability to suspend disbelief. Remember, this is not the same as *realism*. It's what you'll allow within the chronicle's narrative rules. If your stories feature stuntmen vampires who lay about the characters with spinning hook kicks every week — and *everybody is okay with that* — go for it. In this case, everybody's suspending disbelief to cover that as well.

**Rules:** What do you want fighting to *play* like? Do you want the rules to provide tactical challenges? Do you want to just figure out who lives and dies? Do you want special cases, or general conditions you can tweak to fit the situation?

Some people like games where the rules correspond to real elements of the story. For instance, they want a roll to shoot something that *only* encompasses the act of drawing and pulling the trigger, and doesn't cover the weapon's overall lethality. Other people don't care, and see it all as abstract math they can justify post hoc. Neither point of view is superior.

## What is Storytelling System Combat Designed to Do?

Let's look at the default combat system to give you a baseline, and from there you may stray or add your own ideas. Here's where it fits into each category:

**Narrative:** The game's designed to run fights that aren't terribly stylized, but still provide an outlet for

people who want low level action film exploits. Special moves aren't for everyone; Fighting Styles provide those for anyone who wants to invest in them.

World of Darkness action is about slipping on concrete and desperately getting out a fist or shot, not coolly dispatching nameless extras. Nevertheless, even out-of-shape, timid protagonists can take a licking without going down right away. A gang can hurt you, but a crowbar won't knock you out if you see it coming. (During the original playtests, we debated character toughness at length, and eventually struck a balance between the image of brutal, back alley violence and the practical needs of an ongoing chronicle, where instant death and incapacitation aren't much fun.)

**Rules:** The combat rules are designed for speed, sometimes at the expense of tactical depth. One roll does all the work. It lets Storytellers create antagonists at a moment's notice because it's very easy to calculate core combat traits. Early playtests experimented with

alternative rules, including detailed tactics and complex equipment rules, but the consensus was that they were more annoying than interesting.

## Combat Aspects

Think of combat as a template that fits on top of the core Storytelling System. Like supernatural templates that add special Traits to characters, combat adds a particular set of modifications to the core system. The Combat Aspects option extends that principle with additional sets of add-ons. These are smaller and easier to spontaneously use, but can be combined into one cohesive system that fits on top of the basic rules. Each aspect is a "mini-rule" that applies in a specific situation.

Combat aspects are ideal for groups who want rules to add some kick when they spontaneously narrate special actions. It also works as a toolkit that helps you build specialized combat actions. Build maneuvers by combining Aspects. Apply them to adjudicate particular threats and injuries, or develop special, trained actions, as an alternative to the Fighting Styles in the core book.

### From the Cutting Room Floor

Here are two rules that existed during various playtests of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. Every group is different, so you may find them worth reviving.

**Grazing and Significant Shots:** Originally, two successes were required to completely succeed at any task, including striking someone in combat. A single successes inflicted one point of damage, just like it does now but it was considered a "grazing hit" because at that stage in the playtest we rolled damage separately.

You can adapt this rule by rolling Strength (for close combat) and a ranged weapon's Damage rating (for ranged combat) as additional damage any time you score two or more successes. Characters will inflict more damage whenever they score more than a token hit, making combat more dangerous. In playtest, this extra damage was not allowed whenever characters used the Fighting Finesse Merit. You might want to let all characters use Fighting Finesse in exchange for this penalty.

**Pushing It:** Spend one point of Willpower and mark a point of bashing damage to give your character the ability to perform an extra instant action: an option that anyone could use in early playtests. This might slow down combat or interact strangely with nonhuman characters (how does a vampire get tired?) but it reflects a certain desperate ferocity.

## Action Aspects

Action Aspects add special rules to a specific attack or other combat maneuver. Each Action Aspect has a positive or negative rating in parentheses, representing the maneuver's relative value compared to a basic action. To construct an action, just add the aspects you want until you end up with a total of 0 or less.

**Contingent (-2):** This action requires a previous action to set it up. This first action can use the Setup aspect (see below) to make it more powerful, or it can transfer no benefit to the subsequent action. If the setup fails, the character can't perform the special action, though she may take another action instead. *Examples:* Feinting, grabbing someone, and pulling him into a knee.

**Defensive (+2):** This action is actually a form of Defense. If the attacker fails to hit, roll your character's Defense to attack. *Examples:* Blocking an attacking limb with a sharp knife or shooting a charging swordsman.

**Difficult (-1 to -3):** This action is inherently difficult. It levies a penalty of -1 to -3 to the applicable dice pool above and beyond any external conditions. Give it a value equal to the difficulty penalty. *Examples:* A cartwheel kick or shooting somebody in the hand. In fact, you can use this aspect to help adjudicate specified targets in combat.

**Explosive (+1 or +2):** When this action succeeds it has a chance to succeed exceptionally well. At a rating of +1, add the 9-again quality, or increase an existing 9-again quality to 8-again. At a rating of +2, add the 8-again quality. *Examples:* A wide swing with an ax or a body slam.



**Limited (-1 or -2):** This action rarely leads to exceptional performance. At a -1 rating, this action removes the 10-again quality from dice rolls, or drops an 8-again or 9-again quality to 10-again. At a -2 rating, rolling a 1 subtracts one success from the roll. Cannot be used in conjunction with Explosive, above. *Examples:* A short strike from the clinch or hitting with an improvised weapon.

**Penalizing (+3):** This action levies a penalty to one type of action the target might attempt, such as shooting, punching, or grappling. The penalty is -1 per two of your successes on the action/attack. This action still inflicts damage unless you add the Undamaging aspect—a common way to use this rule. *Examples:* Suppressive fire, trapping the enemy's sword with your own.

**Predictable (-1):** The maneuver can't be used more than once in a scene without drawing a penalty. It's too predictable, or strains credulity to allow over and over again. This Aspect discourages players from "spamming" combat with one particular maneuver. Every attempt to perform the maneuver past the first suffers a cumulative -1 penalty. *Examples:* Spearheading an eye with your fingers, or shooting somebody in the hand. Storytellers and players, use common sense. It doesn't apply to "bread and butter" actions like a center of mass gunshot or a right cross to the head.

**Rapid (+2 or +3):** This action (or combination) is fast enough to perform more than once, at a cumulative -1 penalty for each additional action, up to either one additional action (for a +2 rating) or a maximum number of actions equal to your character's Dexterity dots (for a +3 rating). *Examples:* A double tap with a handgun or a jab/cross/hook combination.

**Rewarding (+3):** If this action succeeds at all it will usually succeed well. Roll the action's governing Attribute as additional dice if your character scores at least one success using her normal dice pool. *Examples:* A body slam or a point blank shot.

**Risky (-2):** Failing this action ensures that your character will suffer. If your roll scores no successes, she experiences a dramatic failure. Note that this is a consequence of the action, not other special circumstances. For example, you don't get to invoke this one just because you're fighting on a tightrope, but because you're doing something that's even *more* likely to get you hurt than just shooting or punching someone from a tightrope. *Examples:* A jumping spinning back kick, or somersaulting over cover while firing.

**Setup (+2):** This action benefits your character's next action. Every two successes give you an additional die on your next action. *Examples:* Using a jab to set up a big right hand or making one rifle shot to test for wind effects.

**Severe (Special):** If the attack succeeds, it imposes a Condition Aspect (see p. 76) such as Blinded or Lame. *Examples:* A spear hand to the eyes or taking out the

knee with a length of pipe. The rating is equal to the Condition Aspect's rating.

**Undamaging (-3):** This action inflicts no damage. This aspect is designed to stack with aspects like Setup for actions that have effects other than damage. *Examples:* Taunting the target or slipping behind him.

**Vulnerable (-2):** This action leaves your character especially open to attack. She can't use Defense on the turn in which she executes it or against the first attack in the next turn, and ranged attacks enjoy a +2 dice bonus to strike her during that same period. *Examples:* Standing up and calmly aiming in the center of a firefight, charging straight at an opponent.

**Weak (-2):** This action isn't very effective. Halve all successes (rounding up). *Examples:* A backhand slap, shooting without aiming.

## Using Action Aspects

Players use Action Aspects to design combat maneuvers on the fly by combining Aspects with positive and negative values. If the combined value is 0 or less, the player can spontaneously attempt that action.

**Examples:** *Steve decides to swing his knife in front of him and cut the arms of anyone that tries to grab him. He's acting out of desperation, not training. This is Defensive (+2) but Weak (-2). He can damage anyone who misses him while his Defense holds up, but only half of his successes apply.*

*Tara wards off her enemies with suppressive fire: a hail of bullets designed to prevent other people from shooting back. This is a Penalizing attack (+3) that's actually Undamaging (-3) since it isn't really aimed at anyone.*

## Aspect-Based Merits

Storytellers can also use Action Aspects to design custom Merits for player and Storyteller-controlled combatants. In this case, the net rating can be a positive number, but no character can use it without buying a Merit with a dot cost equal to the maneuver's positive rating +1.

Aspect-based Merits actions never apply to every conceivable attack. You need a qualifier: a specific weapon or other circumstance. The Merit can't be exercised without that condition. Use these rules to replace Fighting Styles or as an add-on to them, but if you use both, Fighting Style benefits never stack with these Merits unless noted in a Combat Aspect (such as the Explosive aspect).

**Examples:** *Steve decides to train with a Filipino Kali expert to understand how to cut defensively, without incurring penalties to a Defensive (+2) technique. This is a three dot Merit (2 + 1 base dot) that only works when Steve uses his Weaponry Skill with a blade.*

*Tara wants to improve her suppressive fire so that it might actually hit someone. It becomes Weak (-2) instead of Undamaging, and applies whenever she uses a fully automatic firearm. The result is a two dot Merit (1 net rating + 1 base dot).*

## Standardized Action Aspects

Storytellers can use Action Aspects to create standardized moves for their games, both as off the cuff maneuvers and Merits. Untrained moves have balanced ratings. Trained Merits don't. Here are some examples drawn from unarmed combat.

**Eye Gouge:** The character claws or spears the opponent's eyes. *Untrained:* Difficult (-3), Limited (-1), Severe — Blinded (+4). *Trained:* Limited (-1), Severe — Blinded (+4); 4-dot Brawl Merit.

**Face Bite:** A desperate or sadistic assault employed by street brawlers, a small number of martial artists trained in Filipino *kino mutai*, and fanged supernatural horrors. *Untrained:* Contingent — Must Grapple (-2), Difficult (-3), Severe — Disfigured (+2) and Severe — Pained (+3). *Trained:* Must Grapple (-2), Severe — Disfigured (+2) and Severe — Pained (+3); 4-dot Brawl Merit.

**Jab:** The character uses a quick, half-committed strike to gage her opponent's distance. *Untrained:* Limited (-2), Setup (+2). *Trained:* Setup (+2); 3-dot Brawl Merit.

**Kick:** A basic round kick, push kick or side kick. *Untrained:* Difficult (-1), Rewarding (+3) and Vulnerable (-2). *Trained:* Difficult (-1) Rewarding (+3); 3-dot Brawl Merit.

**Complex Kick:** A spinning kick, double kick, cartwheel kick or other difficult martial arts kicking maneuver. *Untrained:* Difficult (-1), Explosive (+2), Rewarding (+3), Risky (-2), Vulnerable (-2). *Trained:* Difficult (-1), Explosive (+2), Rewarding (+3); 5-dot Brawl Merit.

**Leg Kick:** A kick attack to an opponent's leg, designed to hamper his movement and maybe even knock him down. *Untrained:* Difficult (-2), Severe — Lame (+2). *Trained:* Severe — Lame (+2); 3-dot Brawl Merit.

## Condition Aspects

Condition Aspects govern particular injuries, hindrances, special attacks, and other distinctive threats. Most Condition Aspects determine their duration and severity based on the strength (represented by successes) of an attack or other harmful situation.

Like Action Aspects, Condition Aspects have an attached rating. Add these to combat maneuvers by using the Severe aspect to create actions with special effects.

You can also use Condition Aspects without using Action Aspects. If you do, apply the positive rating as a penalty to attack rolls aimed at inflicting the special effect. The attack inflicts normal damage.

**Blinded (+4):** The target is blinded. See "Fighting Blind" on pp. 166–167 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook* for details. Blindness lasts for one turn per success scored on the attack. *Examples:* Gouging the opponent's eyes, tossing a flash grenade.

**Deafened (+1):** The victim cannot hear. She suffers a -1 penalty to Defense and fails all checks to notice sounds. Deafness lasts for one turn per attack success. *Examples:* Slapping both ears, discharging your gun right in your enemy's face.

**Disfigured (+2):** The target suffers an injury that mars her face, speech, or another important physical element of her social life. Until the injury heals and the Storyteller rules she's made a full recovery, each attack success reduces Social dice pools by one whenever the disfigurement would interfere in social relations. This Condition always accompanies a form of damage (bashing, lethal, or aggravated), so attacks incorporating it cannot use the Undamaging Action Aspect. *Examples:* Raking your enemy's face with a broken bottle or dunking him in acid.

**Disarmed (+2):** The target drops a weapon or other handheld object. Subtract the item's Size from the attack's total successes. The result is how many yards the weapon or object flies away. A result of 0 or less indicates the object drops at the target's feet. *Examples:* Cutting a weapon hand so your target drops his knife, smacking the gun right out of his hand.

**Lame (+2):** The attack interferes with its target's ability to move. Divide the attack's successes between duration (two turns per success) and a penalty to the character's Speed (-2 per success). *Examples:* Kicking out a knee or shooting someone in the foot.

**Hindered (+2):** The attack injures or binds an arm. This interferes with the target's ability to move. Divide the attack's successes between duration (two turns per success) and a penalty to actions using that arm (-2 per success). The character also suffers a -2 penalty to Defense — successes don't modify this up or down. *Examples:* Pulling the target's shirt over his head and on his arms ("jerseying," if you're a hockey fan) or shooting him in the shoulder.

**Pained (+3):** The attack is intensely painful, interfering with concentration. The character suffers a penalty to all actions equal to half of the successes scored by the attack, rounded down, for a single turn. The Storyteller can commit additional successes to duration (one turn





per success) reducing the effect accordingly. (This is effectively the Penalizing aspect with the option of extra duration.) *Examples:* Fishhooking the mouth or a club to the liver or kidneys.

**Stunned (+1):** The attack forces the character to lose his next action. *Examples:* Knocking the wind out of the target with body hook or shoving him off balance.

**Unconscious (+3):** The attack causes the character to lose consciousness. This lasts for one turn per success scored on the attack. *Examples:* A hard strike to the head is the usual cause of a knockout.

## Indefinite-Duration Conditions

At the Storyteller's discretion, conditions (besides Disabled) with at least five successes devoted to duration may last indefinitely. They heal when the associated damage does, or after some specific medical treatment (such as cosmetic surgery for Disfiguring). This is a harsh thing to do to players' characters, so use this option with discretion. Break an arm, but don't hack it off unless there's a really good reason. Of course, in the horror genre, there often is a good reason.

## Bad Karma: Diceless Combat

Getting rid of the dice is a good idea when you want to either streamline the steps to resolve combat or run a game with a more deterministic atmosphere, where the better fighter almost always wins. You don't really need any system to run combat this way; there are enough game traits to guide pure narration. Your only obstacle is consistency. Over multiple dice rolls, the Storytelling System usually cleaves to a certain distribution of results — and when it doesn't, you can always point to the dice as the culprit, not the Storyteller (or another player in a more collaborative approach).

If the group decides who hits and misses, or lives and dies, they might stray from the average. This isn't in itself a bad thing, but when you use pure narrative, you know exactly who's responsible for that, and sometimes that puts their motives under a microscope. Decisions might sway toward too much challenge, or little. Again, wild dice rolls cause this too, but most people don't take this as personally as anything moderated by pure human fiat.

Let's add some systematic elements to diceless combat — entirely optional, but food for thought, at least. We'll move from pure group fiat to some rules based on resource allocation. In some roleplaying theory, this idea is called

*Karma*, contrasted with *Drama*, (players decide based on whatever would make the story interesting) and *Fortune* (random elements like dice resolve the outcome).

The main thing to remember for *all* diceless combat that uses game traits is this: **three dice produces an average of one success**. It will not only help you moderate diceless combat, but diceless interactions of all kinds.

## Averages Aren't Instances

Although we use averages in this section as an alternative to dice, don't get it in your head that averages are *equivalent* to dice. It's tempting to treat it that way, but while probability distributions average out in the long run, individual instances may not resemble averages at all — if they did, it wouldn't be fun to roll the dice. Examples of this are 10-again, 9-again and 8-again, which don't seem so great when you look at the global average of dice rolls, but can dramatically influence a certain subset of successful dice rolls. In combat, anything that increases successes (and damage) is nothing to be sneezed at.

## Traits, Force, and Frequency

Numbered Storytelling System game traits have three core functions. The first and easiest to understand is to determine the *likelihood* of success — that's whether a sword's going to hit, or an insult will sting.

The second is the *intensity* of success. In most forms of task resolution, one success (or the minimum target for an extended roll) is enough to completely accomplish your character's objective. An exceptional success (five successes, or five successes past the target on an extended roll) occasionally provides an added bonus. Combat is a little different. In basic combat, where one character attempts to damage another, every success counts for a point of damage.

The third function is to determine *resistance* to an action, either through a contested roll or a resisted trait such as *Defense*.

To squeeze these functions out of combat traits in diceless play, go through these steps:

1. Apply dice pool modifiers normally, particularly *Defense* and other resistance traits.
2. Divide any dice left over by three. Note leftover fractions, but set them aside for now. The whole number result is the action's base *Force*. The base force for a negative dice pool is always 0.

If the action has the rote benefit (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, page 134) double the dice pool after applying modifiers, but before calculating *Force*.

3. Remember those fractions? Consider them as decimals, and ignore the second and subsequent digits after the decimal place (but do *not* round off). When you divide your dice by three, you'll usually end up with a .3 or a .6 after the whole number. Now, remove the decimals. This is the action's *Frequency*. If you ended up with no fractions or a *Force* of 0, record a *Force* of 1. Add 1 to *Frequency* for the 9-again trait or 2 for the 8-again trait.

Here's a table for reference:

Modified Dice Pool	Force	Frequency
0 or less	0	1
1	0	3
2	0	6
3	1	1
4	1	3
5	1	6
6	2	1
7	2	3
8	2	6
9	3	1
10	3	3
11	3	6
12	4	1

**Example:** *Farouk's* base *Strength + Weaponry* dice pool is 6. His steel-shod riot club increases it to 8, but his target's *Defense* of 3 drops it down to 5. *Farouk's* player divides the result by 3 and ignores second and subsequent decimal places for a total of 1.6. This gives the action a *Force* 1 and *Frequency* 6.

## Diceless Combat Procedure

After determining *Initiative* (see p. 84 for variant *Initiative* systems), actions automatically succeed as if you rolled a number of successes equal to the action's *Force*. In addition, your character's *Frequency* accumulates each turn. You may spend 10 *Frequency* per additional level of *Force* — usually another point of damage.

You can accumulate a whole lot of *Force* to spend on one large wallop, but there are two restrictions:

- Whenever two characters have at least 10 *Frequency* built up, one of their players *must* spend his character's *Frequency* on additional *Force*.
- If there are more than two characters with at least 10 accumulated *Frequency*, no player can spend *Frequency* twice in a row.

These rules prevent players from just hanging back, building *Frequency*, and converting into a huge single blow. The following rules create an incentive to underperform or fail.



- You can also drop your Force to add extra Frequency, trading success now for increased success later. You earn 6 Frequency for every point of Force you lose for the turn. If this drops the action to 0 Force and failure, add a bonus 3 Frequency on top of that.

- Characters acting with a base (not voluntarily modified) Force of 0 have one other option. If the player chooses for his character to act, fail and incur a Dramatic Failure, he earns 3 Frequency.

Optionally, to increase the prevalence of failure, you may also rule that in any group of two or more player-controlled characters, at least one player per turn must trade Force for Frequency or incur a Dramatic Failure in exchange for Frequency.

## Miniatures Play

The Storytelling System is designed to be used without the need for miniatures, but some groups like setting up a map and markers to figure out where each character is, get a better sense of range, and inspire tactical ideas. Using miniatures can open up new tactical possibilities, but it subtly changes game balance. Without miniatures, movement is a dramatic detail and a way to tell if someone is roughly in hand-to-hand or firearms range. On a map, exact positions matter. The rules in this section are designed to exploit the particular properties of miniatures play.

## Scale

These rules use a grid to determine movement and distance. One inch = one yard is the default scale, and one square inch is one square yard, more or less. Don't worry about absolute scale as much as relative distance. It's really only important to have squares that are big enough for your markers.

Characters have a base movement per turn equal to their Speed traits in squares, but as you'll see further along, various conditions can modify this rule. Instead of referring to Speed in yards, we'll talk about it in terms of squares. Special forms of movement cost additional squares, reducing the total distance your character can move.

## Actions per Turn

In the miniatures rules, characters perform three types of actions in a turn: reflexive actions, movement actions, and instant actions. Here they are in order of speed:

**Reflexive actions** take almost no time to perform. Characters can perform an unlimited number of reflexive actions in a turn (within reason), though the type of action (spending Willpower points, for example) may specify limits. *Examples:* Resisting a supernatural power or spending Willpower points. See the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p 131 for the basic system.

## Maps and Tools

Here are some handy accessories that make miniatures play easy to run.

**Grid Map:** A laminated or other wet-erase grid map is one of the most popular ways to determine character locations. The surface lets you draw in buildings and other terrain features. The author's group also enjoys using a chessboard for small areas and masking tape to mark terrain features. Even though it isn't strictly to scale, the author thinks it would be really stylish to use a Go board for miniatures, but has yet to talk his group's resident Go player into the scheme.

**Miniatures or Playing Pieces:** Modern miniatures are hard to come by but if you do some digging you can find them. Several companies also produce printable paper figures.

You probably won't be able to collect miniatures for every figure in a fight, so don't be squeamish about using substitutes. Playing pieces from multiplayer board games is a practical option. To keep these from interfering with the players' imaginations, use color coded abstract pieces, not pewter top hats, race cars, and Scottish terriers. Plastic soldiers work too. Game designer Robin Laws sticks artwork to coins. If you have a scanner and an eye for appropriate images, this is a great idea. Chuck Wendig (the developer of this book) uses spare 10-sided dice. He tracks Health by turning the top number on each die.

**Small Index Cards:** To speed play along, write down expendable traits (such as Health and Willpower points), combat dice pools, and other salient information (weapon ranges, ammunition, etc.) for quick reference. This is a bit less cumbersome when you're already moving figures around. Use small cards (or bits of cards) to write down special conditions to append to your figure on the board, so that you'll remember blindness, supernatural compulsions, and so forth.

**Movement actions** are implied in the core rules. The miniatures rules break them out into a separate category. This is the action type your character uses to move and defend. In these rules, using Defense is a movement action too. It represents the character taking time to protect herself from assault. Characters in the miniatures rules can perform two movement actions per turn, but one of them is usually raising Defense. Otherwise, if you

would let a character perform this action in addition to everything else, but never more than once or twice, it probably falls into this category. *Examples:* Moving or activating Defense.

**Instant actions** are as described in the standard **World of Darkness** combat rules, with one difference: the *instant shift*. When your character performs an instant action he can move one square for free. This represents the unpredictable movements that take place in the thick of a fight. Use instant actions to attack, or perform any other action that requires a moment of concentration. You may also convert an instant action to a movement action — a prerequisite for many special maneuvers. *Examples:* Attacking or activating many supernatural powers.

## Supernatural Speed

Some characters have abilities that let them run at supernatural speed, or penalize incoming attacks due to their users' extreme quickness. They don't add additional movement or instant actions, but do allow the supernaturally quick to cover more ground with a single movement action or enhance an existing Defense.

On the rare occasion that a power allows an additional instant action, check the conditions of the power. In most cases, characters can never use instant action supernatural powers more than once per turn.

Feel free to experiment with exceptions to any of the above, but take a close look at the results. The Storytelling System doesn't hand out extra actions lightly because they're potent, and can slow the game down.

## Back to the Wall

Optionally, you can allow characters to trade in two movement actions for an instant action, allowing characters to perform two instant actions per turn. Your character can't move except to shift two squares (one for each instant action) and can't raise Defense. This option is a very powerful one for supernatural characters, who often have an innate defensive power and can combine normal and supernatural actions, so if (for example) you don't want a powerful mage boosting his Strength over the top and using it to crush somebody's skull in the same turn, think twice before implementing it.

Do *not* double the multiple actions provided by Merits and other character traits, unless you want to go for a martial arts movie feel and let desperate characters fend off dozens of people at a time.

## Standard and Variant Actions

A standard turn's worth of actions consists of the following:

- As many reflexive actions as necessary
- One movement action to move the character's Speed in squares (yards)
- One movement action to raise Defense. Note that unlike many other actions, this can be declared before your character acts in the turn.
- One instant action to attack or perform another maneuver

Taken together, these constitute the Storytelling System's basic combat procedure: move, attack, and defend.

In the miniatures rules, you can deviate from this standard array. You might use two movement actions to move double Speed or enhance your character's Defense, for example. In addition, you may convert your character's instant action into a movement action, for a total of *three* movement actions in a turn.

## Combat Routines

These action rules absorb certain special actions from the standard rules. For example, there's no need for the charge maneuver (see "Charging," p. 164, **World of Darkness Rulebook**) — this is just two movement actions devoted to running, followed by an attack. Special rules apply to certain action combinations, however. The miniatures rules also include special actions that don't exist in the standard system.

We call these special maneuvers *routines*. Each routine lists the required number and type of actions, to be expended when the character uses that particular routine.

**All-Out Attack (1 Movement + 1 Instant):** Using the All-Out Attack routine in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** uses up one movement action and one instant action, but the character's remaining movement action *cannot* be used to raise Defense. To benefit from attacking without moving, choose the Steadfast Attack routine. To get an advantage out of attacking without moving or defending, choose the Desperate Attack routine.

**Close (1 Instant):** If your character enters an enemy's threat zone, (see p. 83) she must make a Close roll to move toward him or risk the possibility of a Quick Attack (see below).

**Desperate Attack (2 Movement + 1 Instant):** Your character throws all caution to the wind and attacks without moving or raising Defense. She gains +2 to her dice roll and if she succeeds, one bonus success (usually an extra point of damage).

**Dodge (2 Movement):** If you use two movement actions on Defense and do not perform an instant action, your character can use the Dodge maneuver or reap the benefits of the Weaponry Dodge or Brawling Dodge Merits.



**Drop (1 or Movement):** In the miniatures rules, dropping prone is a movement action. Your character can hurl herself to the ground and fire (or perform another attack, though this suffers a -2 penalty for dropping prone) in the same turn.

**Jump (1 Movement):** In these rules, any character may perform a standard jump (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 66–67) for one movement action instead of one instant action. All of the other listed conditions for this action apply. In the case of a running jump, characters need to devote an extra movement action to running three squares.

**Quick Attack (1 Movement):** If an opponent enters or leaves your character's threat zone (see pp. 83) without using The Close or Withdraw routines, respectively, she can attempt one close combat attack as a movement action instead of an instant action. See "Quick Attacks," pp. 84 for specific rules.

**Notice (1 Movement):** Your character takes a moment to notice a hidden element on the battlefield, using a movement action. Note that noticing something that *isn't* hard to see is a reflexive action, not a movement action.

**Rise (1 Instant):** Even though dropping prone is a movement action, rising from the prone position is an instant action.

**Sprint (3 Movement):** If you use three movement actions to run as far as possible, your character doesn't move triple Speed. Instead, roll Dexterity + Athletics and add the result to (2 x Speed) + Species Factor (usually 5). Unlike standard movement, running all-out requires athletic ability.

**Stand Firm (2 Movement):** If you use two movement actions on Defense *and* use an instant action to attack or perform some other action, your character adds +1 to Defense but cannot use Dodge, Weaponry Dodge, or Brawling Dodge.

**Steadfast Attack (1 Movement + 1 Instant):** Your character refuses to back down and uses sure footing to strike harder and more accurately. If her attack succeeds, one bonus success — usually one extra point of damage.

**Total Defense (3 Movement):** If you use three movement actions on Defense alone, your character can use the Dodge maneuver or the benefits of the Weaponry Dodge or Brawling Dodge Merits, *and* she earns a further +1 to Defense.

**Withdraw (1 Movement):** To move out of a close combat threat zone (see "Threat Zones," p. 83) you must use this routine or face possible Quick Attacks.

## Movement

When one yard equals one square (usually, one square inch on a grid), characters may move a number of squares equal to their Speed in one movement action — double that with two movement actions. (The Sprint

routine works slightly differently, as described above.) Additionally, mind the following rules:

- Remember that all characters can move one square for free when they take an instant action (this is called the *instant shift*).

- On a grid, characters moving diagonally will travel farther in terms of absolute distance. If this concerns you, charge for one additional square of movement (three total) for every two squares of diagonal movement. In actual play, this often doesn't make much of a difference, so feel free to ignore it.

## Terrain Features

Once you have the area mapped out, it's time to consider different types of terrain. The miniatures rules apply game effects to the following conditions:

**Barriers:** The **World of Darkness Rulebook** describes rules for breaking through or climbing walls and similar barriers. They apply to the miniatures rules. Climbing 10 feet constitutes an instant action or *two* movement actions. Dropping up to 10 feet voluntarily is a reflexive action. Thus, it's possible to spend an entire turn running to a 10 foot tall (movement action) wall, climbing it (instant action), dropping down, and running onward (another movement action, so no Defense is possible).

**Obstacles:** An obstacle is a railing, the hood of a car, or another feature that characters capable of walking or running can traverse in a split second. Hopping or sliding past one reduces your character's total movement by one square per obstacle, as long as the obstacle is no more than three squares wide. If it's any wider, he has to spend one square to enter the obstacle space and another to leave it.

The character must still count the squares an obstacle occupies as part of his movement. An agile character can still move quickly, as each success at a reflexive Dexterity + Athletics roll removes the movement penalty for one obstacle in his path.

**Rough Ground:** Rough ground has no single impediment, but is generally harder to traverse. Examples include swamp, dense forest, rocky ground, or steep inclines. If any of these apply, it takes two dots of Speed to move one square. Different types of rough ground don't stack (that makes it easy to just define rough ground and move play along), but if the terrain is particularly hard to traverse it may require a Dexterity + Strength or Dexterity + Athletics roll to move across without falling.

**Stairs:** To make mapping simple, assume that every two squares of stairs looking from the top down equals three squares of actual distance. They're also treated as obstacles, reducing movement by one square per set of stairs unless the player succeeds at a Dexterity + Athletics roll. Finally, characters can move a bit faster down stairs by jumping, using the standard rules for doing so. In this case, they only need to clear the top-down length of the stairs and not the extra, "hidden" squares.

## Concealment

Page 162 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** defines concealment as how difficult it is to see your target. The miniatures system modifies concealment rules according to two factors.

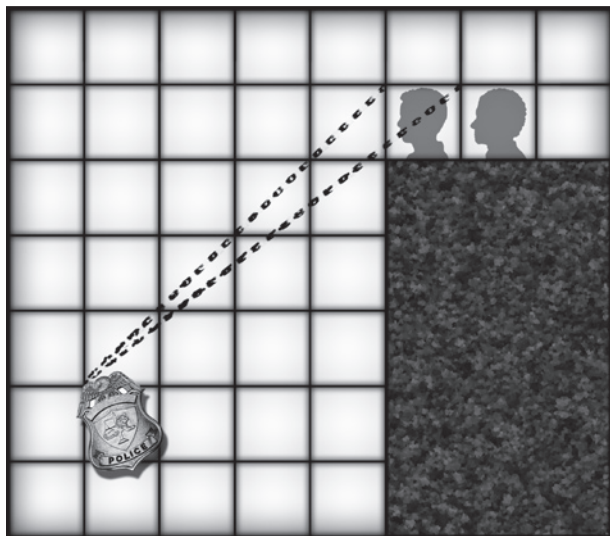
**Reduced Profile:** A reduced profile exposes less of the target to an attacker, due to either positioning or an intervening object. It uses the following four degrees, each of which imposes a listed penalty to ranged attacks. See the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for descriptions, along with the following notes:

**Barely Concealed:** -1. This includes falling prone. Note that falling prone does not stack with other forms of profile reduction.

**Partially Concealed:** -2. A character is partially concealed when about 50% of his body is hidden. If you can draw an unimpeded straight line from any point on the attacker's square to *two* corners of the target's square, the target is partially concealed. If any line must pass through a corner that's also occupied by a barrier (such as the corner of a wall) to touch the target, that counts as an impediment.

**Substantially Concealed:** -3. A character is substantially concealed when about 75% of his body is hidden. If you can draw an unimpeded straight line to just *one* corner of the target's square from any point on the attacker's square, the target is substantially concealed. Once again, a line that passes through a corner also occupied by a barrier (such as the corner of a wall) counts as an impediment.

**Completely Covered:** -4. No part of the character is visible, so all attacks must bypass cover.



**Example Sight Lines:** *This cop's taking aim at two revenants. They may look like zombies, but they're smart enough to take cover. The cop's player can draw a line to two corners on the closest revenant's square, so that target is only partially concealed. One of those corners also belongs to the farther revenant, but the cop's player can't draw a second straight line to it without crossing a building corner. The farther revenant is substantially concealed.*

**Visibility Conditions:** Visibility conditions track how easy it is to see in the area between the attacker and target due to darkness, smoke, or other vision-obscuring factors. Ambient city light is considered to be the minimum default lighting condition — the worst lighting for which no penalty applies. For simplicity's sake, give most battlefields uniform lighting conditions, but if necessary use construction paper or tape to mark the borders of various light sources. If you want a real “fog of war” setup you can even use two maps: one that censors what characters can't see, and one the Storyteller uses for true positioning.

Visibility penalties apply to ranged attacks and any roll to pick out visual details. They also stack with reduced target profiles.

**Slightly Obscured:** -1. It's difficult to make out minute details, and silhouettes start to get hazy. Examples include dark alleys and back country woods when the moon is out.

**Substantially Obscured:** -2. Smoke and moonless nights in the woods create substantially obscured terrain.

**Blind or Invisible:** Characters are in a mine without a light, blinded, or hunting for an invisible monster. They must use the rules for fighting blind on pp. 166–167 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

## The Eyes of Monsters

Some supernatural creatures are adapted to night time activity — and in fiction, vampires rarely blunder around in the dark. Some **Vampire: The Requiem** Disciplines account for this, but you might want to reduce darkness penalties for vampires and other nocturnal monsters. We suggest you treat slightly obscured conditions as default lighting and substantially obscured conditions as slightly obscured. Take blindness on a case by case basis. Many monsters might not be able to see the invisible, but can make out something even in the almost lightless conditions of a cave.

## Stealth, Concealment, and Visibility

The miniatures rules don't track which way your characters face, so you can't use them to decide when someone can sneak up behind them. Apply these rules instead:

- To sneak up on someone your character must begin in an area where her position is completely covered or substantially obscured, relative to those whose attention she wishes to avoid.
- To move into hiding from a position of visibility, your character needs to avoid direct observation and end her movement in locations with those characteristics.



- To sneak right past an area unseen, she must both begin *and* end her movement in completely covered or substantially obscured squares.

Even though the character might pass through a visible area, we assume that she uses techniques to stay in the shadows or make herself less noticeable — actions governed by the Stealth Skill. This kind of battlefield stealth is a movement action. The Storyteller is free to impose further penalties and restrictions based on the character's path (it's tough to sneak *between* two enemies) or local conditions — but some situations make sneaking around easier, too.

## Threat Zones

In close combat, every character has a *threat zone*. This is her close combat reach, measured in squares. There are four threat zones.

**Long Weapon (3 Squares):** This threat zone applies to characters with spears, staves, pole arms, and long lengths of chain — in general, any weapon that's at least six feet long.

**Short Weapon (2 Squares):** This zone encompasses swords, crowbars, riot police batons and other weapons with reach — usually a minimum of two feet in length.



## Bringing a Knife to a Gun Fight

Police and military forces note that much of the time, hand-to-hand attackers get the drop on a shooter. Early experiments established a minimum distance of 21 feet (or seven yards) to allow a shooter to draw, aim, and fire upon an onrushing hand-to-hand attacker.

To represent this in the miniatures rules you may want to employ an additional shooting range of seven squares. As a further option, you can depict the benefits of training by letting trained characters take a single Quick Attack anywhere from seven squares to that number reduced by their Firearms Skill dots. For example, a character with five dots in Firearms can unload a Quick Attack at a target anywhere from seven squares to two squares away. She can only do this once within those ranges and must have the weapon in hand.

Shooting range has one additional advantage: onrushing attackers can't use the Close or Withdraw routines to avoid Quick Attacks. No amount of parrying and dodging will affect that bullet.



**Striking (1 Squares):** This zone includes fists, feet, knives, and a few small weapons such as stun guns and brass knuckles. The character can only strike opponents in the adjacent square.

**Grappling (0 Squares):** The grappling threat zone is the character's own square. When an enemy tries to occupy the same square, he enters grappling range. In these rules, the roll to get an initial hold (see **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 157) is no longer necessary. The combatants just need to occupy the same square. After that, they get straight to overpowering maneuvers — provided the attacker can avoid a Quick Attack counter.

## Closing and Withdrawing

Getting inside an enemy's threat zone without being struck is tricky — your character might get hit with a Quick Attack. This represents the fact that rushing someone or just turning and running away are both dangerous actions.

If your character enters an enemy's threat zone he has two options:

- He can devote an instant action to the Close routine. This requires a normal attack roll, but if it succeeds it has no effect on the opponent. It just lets him move in. If the roll fails, he can choose to enter anyway at the risk of a Quick Attack (though this costs the enemy one movement action), or stay at his current distance.

- He can wade right in without using the Close routine. His opponent can strike with a Quick Attack if she has a movement action to spare.

Leaving a threat zone is also dangerous. Your character has two choices here as well:

- He can perform the Withdraw routine. This costs one movement action, but it automatically shields him from Quick Attacks.

- He can move away without using Withdraw, leaving himself vulnerable to Quick Attacks.

The following additional rules apply to moving through threat zones:

- If your character enters or leaves multiple enemy threat zones in a turn, you must select the ones he will or won't expend his limited supply of actions on countering with Close/Withdraw.

- Your character might just pass through a threat zone without intending to stick around. If she leaves the threat zone during the same turn she entered it, she is only threatened with Quick Attacks when she closes in — she can leave without that danger coming up again.

- The character only needs to deal with a maximum of two threat zones from any single opponent: her weapon and grappling zones. In other words, if she moves inside her staff-wielding enemy's threat zone to within one square, she doesn't have to worry about entering her unarmed striking zone. (Theoretically, the staff fighter





could kick, but practically speaking she doesn't have time to exercise another Quick Attack.) If she drops her staff to punch him, she doesn't have to consider Closing again unless she wants to grapple with her. Keeping away someone who's trying to grab you is instinctive and immediate enough that characters armed with anything can still inflict Quick Attacks on would-be grapplers.

## Quick Attacks

If a combatant enters a threat zone without using Close, he's recklessly charging in. If he leaves without using Withdraw, he's probably turning tail to run. The Quick Attack routine lets your character strike an opponent (or vice versa) as a movement action instead of an instant action. This has the potential to allow two attacks in a turn: one standard instant action attack and the Quick Attack.

Each character can only perform one Quick Attack per turn, even if he possesses a Merit or supernatural power that allows multiple actions. On the other hand, characters can perform Quick Attacks out of Initiative order as long as they are aware of the target.

Quick Attacks are always triggered by the *target's* movement. Your character can't use one just because she moved to put someone in her threat zone, or shift someone out of it.

Quick Attack opportunities also apply only to targets initially entering or leaving threat zones. If an enemy moves into your character's threat zone but still can't attack by the next turn (if for example your character has a long weapon and the opponent doesn't) you don't get another Quick Attack — just a standard close combat attack.

Finally, you can't stack multiple attack abilities inside a Quick Attack by, for example, employing the Kung Fu Fighting Style's "Whirlwind Strike" for your Quick Attack.



## Flank and Rear Attacks

Character facing is irritating to deal with so these rules assume that each combatant is constantly turning to face the most pressing threat they can sense. Therefore, characters don't have a "back" or "sides" as far as the rules are concerned.

It is still possible to deprive a character of Defense by sneaking up on her, as detailed in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, page 165. Remember that in the miniatures rules combatants must take advantage of a concealed position or poor visibility (see pp. 82) to sneak around effectively.



# Action Sequences

Who goes when? The Storytelling System has a straightforward answer to that. Start with the highest Initiative roll and go in order. Keep that order for each turn until the fight ends. It's easy to track, but it's not even a tiny bit realistic. Combat is chaotic. In hand-to-hand fighting, the faster person sometimes goes *last* to interrupt her opponent's attack. Sometimes combatants act simultaneously. They both miss — or kill each other.

Realism aside, a combat system's sequence of events transmits a powerful signal about how players should imagine the fight. Is it a morass of confused, traumatic collisions or the output of a cold-blooded tactical plan? Is it a series of duels or a rough, multi-person scrum? The core rules takes a middle-of-the-road approach, where actions are neatly laid out but the story behind their effects — encapsulated by a single roll to strike and injure — lends itself to looser interpretations. Here are some ideas to help you play with action sequences in your game, and find the feel that works for you.

## Alternate Initiative

Initiative is an artificial construction designed to throw combat into a playable order of events. The standard rules have some verisimilitude but they're still arbitrary. If you want to change it to get across a particular theme or just make it easier to track, take a look at these ideas. If you're interested in simultaneous actions and other deep changes to the order of operations, take a look at "Fog of War: Simultaneous Actions" and "Order of Battle: Phased Actions," further down in this section.

**Dice Pools:** To emphasize character competence, go in order from the highest dice pool that applies to the phase to the lowest. For example, in an Instant Action Phase with two unarmed combatants, the character with the highest Strength + Brawl goes first.

**Seating or Listing:** Seen by some as lazy and others as convenient, just going in order of seating is a time-honored house rule. In online games, you can always go in order of listing on your chat or IM client. Consider adding a Resolution Phase to balance out the advantages of the guy who always sits next to you, or any online player who happens to be named Aaron Aardvark.

**Player Command:** Hand over total control to the players. The Storyteller decides when everyone else acts. Easy! Plenty of options exist. For example, you can add a rotating "Initiative leader" each turn or scene. This person decides when each member acts. This is a good option when your group includes introverted personalities who might get talked over in the excitement of the



moment. This also adds a nice strategic element to the group's efforts.

**Static Initiative:** Instead of rolling, just use Initiative ratings without the die. For ties, pick an order and stick to it for as long as the characters have those ratings. This speeds play along because your players always know what order they go in.

**Traits:** For an exotic variant, consider using other character traits. In a socially focused game, act in order of Composure + Status. If raw supernatural power is the heart of your chronicle, try the relevant power trait (Blood Potency, Gnosis, etc.) plus the highest ranking supernatural power.

## Blow by Blow: One Second Turns and Detailed Fighting

The Storytelling System works at a level of abstraction that speeds play along, but might require an extra imaginative leap to describe. For instance, real people can hit each other far more frequently than once every three seconds. A "hit" in the core rules represents how damaging the sum total of a character's efforts are, whether they come from a single haymaker or a flurry of blows. (Unfortunately, this doesn't translate well to firearms combat, but it would be annoying to say that every single "shot" actually uses up a handful of bullets, most of which miss. Instead, we assume that characters only have one decent opportunity per turn to carefully aim and fire.)

The following rules exist to remove that level of abstraction. Here, every attack is a single punch, stab, or shot. Each turn is just a second long, and everyone can attempt multiple attacks.

### Alternate Second by Second Options

White Wolf's **Exalted** and **Scion** game lines feature another system that tracks actions by the second. Characters "join the battle" and move through a second by second cycle of actions. It's an interesting rules set and easily adapted to **World of Darkness** games, since **Exalted** and **Scion** also use pools of ten-sided dice. We haven't included it here for the simple reason that it would do the reader disservice to repeat several thousand words that have appeared elsewhere.

## Movement

A one-second turn means you need to use a different Speed Trait. Your character's base Speed is now the lower of her Strength or Dexterity. Consequently, the Fleet of Foot Merit (**World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 112) costs twice as many dots per extra level of Speed, and can only be purchased to a maximum of four dots (+2 Speed).

## Actions

Each turn, your character performs one of the following three types of instant actions. Ignore any Merit or other Trait descriptions that would let her perform multiple instant actions. These rules supersede them. The action categories are:

**Concentrated Action:** Activating a supernatural power that uses up your action for the turn counts as a concentrated action. So is any other activity that your character can't perform more than once per second, (like reloading a weapon or lifting a heavy object) or while splitting her attention between it and another task. Using your instant action to move double Speed also qualifies. The Storyteller is the ultimate arbiter of what constitutes a concentrated task.

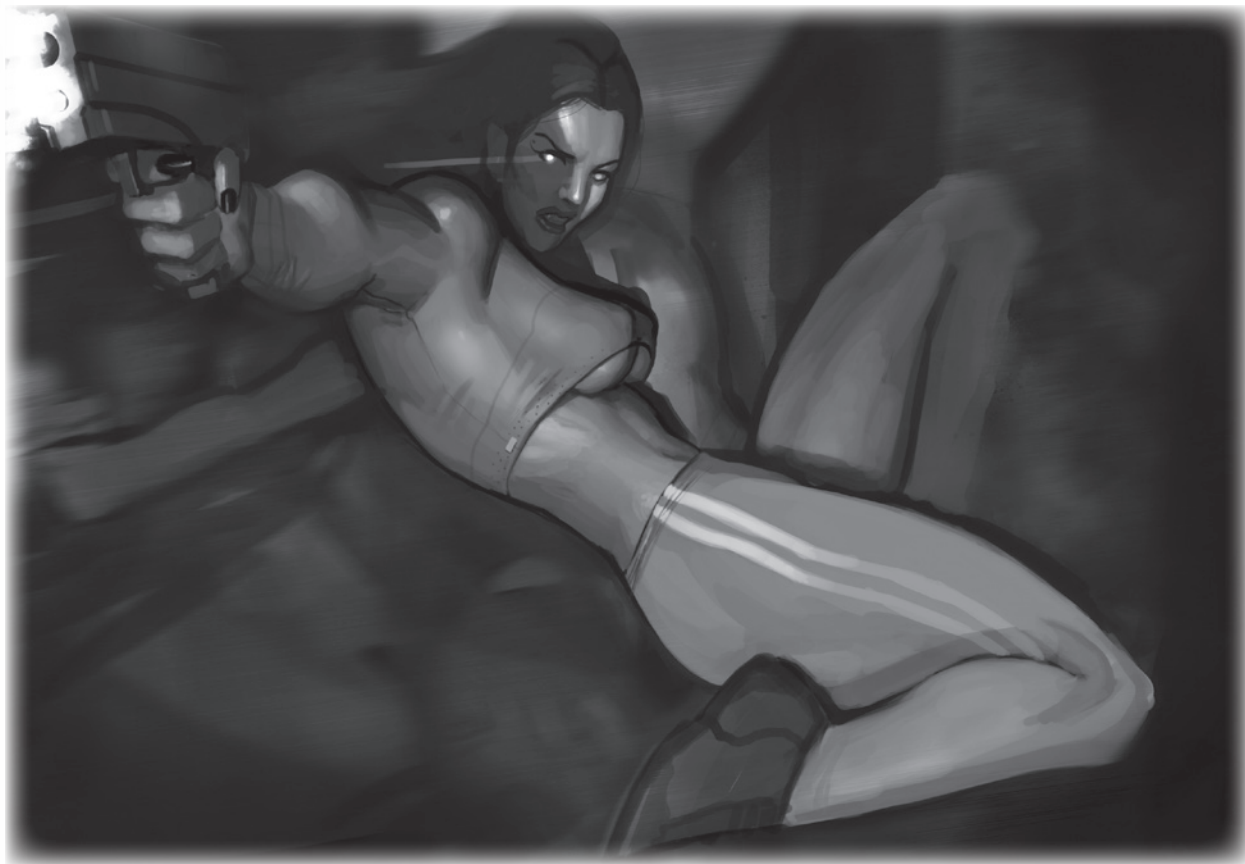
Use standard dice pools and rules for concentrated actions.

**Dedicated Action:** A dedicated action is something that your character *can* perform more than once per second or in conjunction with another task. Examples include Brawl, Weaponry, and Firearms rolls, as well as Athletics rolls to perform quick throws, jumps, and other speedy maneuvers.

Like concentrated actions, dedicated actions use standard dice pools. The difference is that you can perform any dedicated action as a fast action instead.

**Fast Action:** Fast actions cover the same types of tasks as dedicated actions, but they're executed differently. Dedicated versions of these actions utilize a moment of focus; your character plants her feet, pulls back her fist, or raises her gun to line it up just right. Fast versions are quick instincts, tossed out in rapid combinations. They're double taps and jab/cross/hook combinations and the "knitting needle" stabbing used in real-world knife attacks.

Your character can perform as many fast actions per turn as she can manage. The first action suffers a -2 dice penalty. Each additional action has a further, cumulative one-die penalty, so that the second action is -3, the third is -4, and so on. Your character can keep acting until penalties reduce her dice pool to 0 *before* applying other penalties for Defense, cover or environmental factors, or adding bonuses for weapons and equipment. Only her competence matters. Add these bonuses and penalties when it's time to actually roll the dice. You might be left with one or more chance die attacks, but you're entitled to them.



If you switch dice pools in the middle of the turn, apply your running penalty to the new action. So, if you punch someone with one hand and stab them with the other, the punch (assuming it's your first action) suffers a  $-2$  penalty, while the knife strikes at  $-3$ .

Aside from this penalty, fast actions have one other drawback: You can't add three dice to them by spending a Willpower point.

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## Fast Actions in the Combat Sequence

When do fast actions happen? That's up to you. It's easy to resolve all of a character's fast actions when it's time for her to act in Initiative. This gives high-Initiative characters a big advantage, because they can beat slower opponents senseless before they have a chance to respond.

Instead, you might resolve one action per combatant in Initiative order until none of them have the dice to act. Once that happens, events roll over into a new turn. The disadvantage is that even though just a second passes in game, going back and forth will take considerably more time.

## Block, Parry, and Dodge

Basic Defense works normally, so in these rules it isn't as useful against multiple opponents. The Dodge, Brawling Dodge, and Weaponry Dodge maneuvers work a little differently, however. Your character may either perform these as dedicated or fast actions. If you opt for a dedicated action, these maneuvers work normally and your character can't attack.

If you use Dodge, Brawling Dodge, or Weaponry Dodge as fast actions they represent specific blocks and slips instead of a general defensive attitude. These are called *active defenses*. You can mix these up with attacks and other fast actions. However, instead of using the standard rules, you must roll your character's score in each maneuver as a dice pool. This dice pool suffers the standard, cumulative penalty for fast actions, and increases that running penalty just as if it were an attack. Roll the dice to counter a single close combat attack. Each success on the Dodge, Brawling Dodge, or Weaponry Dodge roll reduces the incoming attack's successes on a one-for-one basis.

Your character benefits from his normal Defense, as far as it applies to the attack in question. This roll adds an additional benefit.

**Example:** Steve used fast actions to attack twice this turn. He opts to Dodge a third attack as a fast action. His opponent hits with three successes. His base Defense is 3,



so his player has a base of six dice to roll. Steve has attacked twice (at -2 and -3), so his penalty is -4, leaving Steve's player with two dice to roll. Steve scores one success, dropping attack successes (and total damage) to two.

## Special Circumstances

If you use this system, apply the following additional rules:

**All-Out Attack:** The bonus for an All-Out Attack counts as part of your character's base dice pool for fast actions.

**Fighting Style Merits:** Fighting Style maneuvers that provide multiple attacks are less valuable because almost anyone can attack two or more times per turn. Therefore, reduce any penalties for multiple attacks attached to those Merits by one, so that (for example), the "Focused Attack" maneuver from Fighting Style: Two Weapons provides two attacks at no penalty, instead of 0/-1. Using a Fighting Style multiple attack maneuver counts as a concentrated action. The Storyteller should decide whether other maneuvers can be used as fast actions on a case by case basis.

## Watch Out For a Flurry of Blows

These rules give skilled characters significant advantages. This represents the fact that a professional boxer really *can* smash someone with half a dozen punches in a second, and a trained combat shooter can pull the trigger with alarming speed and accuracy. Nevertheless, characters with high Brawl, Firearms, and Weaponry dice pools will make short work of less competent enemies.

One way to limit this is (that is, if you *want* to limit it) to introduce *control Attributes*. This reduces skilled characters' dice pools by using a method similar to calculating Defense. When it's time to make a fast (not a standard, dedicated action) attack, calculate the character's dice pool using the lower of the control and standard Attributes, as follows:

**Brawl:** Dexterity — calculate using the lowest of Strength or Dexterity.

**Firearms:** Wits — calculate using the lowest of Dexterity or Wits.

**Weaponry:** Dexterity — calculate using the lowest of Strength or Dexterity.

Even then, trained characters still operate at a serious advantage. Your chronicle will change, so be prepared for the results.

## Fog of War:

### Simultaneous Actions

If you want to visualize combat as a confused event where participants only understand events after the fact, consider simultaneous actions. Don't use standard Initiative; follow this procedure instead:

1. Declare all actions, including their targets and applicable dice pools. If this includes any modifications to Defense, now is the time to note them.

2. The Storyteller decides whether any declared actions are impossible. For example, if a target flees, a close-range attack isn't possible.

3. Roll the dice for all actions and note successes.

4. Apply all results (damage, supernatural effects, etc.). These are all considered to occur at the same time, so at this stage, no action can interrupt any other.

### Nullified Actions

One of the troublesome effects of simultaneous actions is that some maneuvers won't work, because the conditions that make them practical vanish when combatants move around in the preamble to dice rolls. It's up to the Storyteller whether characters with nullified actions get an alternate choice. In this system's pure form they don't; the character made a gamble and lost. This reflects stressful "fog of war" conditions.

If you want to be merciful, offer affected players a second choice: an alternative target or action that they can accomplish. The danger here is that players can game the system by choosing impractical actions, letting

## Metagaming Simultaneous Actions

One practical barrier to using simultaneous actions is that even though each player is supposed to act as if she doesn't know what anyone else is doing, they'll still react to each other's choices based on the order in which they're declared.

Even though you can exhort players not to pay attention to each other's declarations, the temptation may be impossible to resist. It may even unconsciously influence their choices.

To get rid of the problem at a physical game table, quietly write declarations down on slips of paper. Pass these along to the Storyteller and once all submissions are in, she'll moderate the results. In online games, use private messaging functions for the same effect.

them fail to work, and using their second choice to make a more informed decision. If you use private messages as suggested in the sidebar “Metagaming Simultaneous Actions,” the Storyteller can just state that the requested action is impossible without providing further details, continuing with these vague responses until the player hits on a practical action.

You can also decide that *no action* gets nullified, and always use the conditions (location, etc.) established on the previous turn.

## Movement

Simultaneous actions can make it tough to organize chase scenes and tactical movement. How do you know if an opponent is close enough to stab or has taken cover against enemy gunfire? Consider these options:

**Initiative-Based Movement:** In this variation, instant actions are simultaneous but movement isn’t. Roll Initiative and go in order for movement only. After that, declare instant actions and roll them out.

If you use this option, relative positioning becomes far more important because it’s the tactical tool over which the players have the most control. Consequently, abilities that enhance movement become more potent. You can plug this into miniatures play to better understand where combatants are. If you use the miniatures rules, participants can game the system a bit by using routines like Quick Attacks along with terrain and obstacles.

**Simultaneous Movement Phase:** A simultaneous movement phase takes place before settling instant actions. All participants declare their characters’ destinations and arrive before picking and rolling for instant actions. Again, mapping the battlefield can be useful here, but unlike Initiative-based movement it’s hard to make informed tactical choices. Combatants will tend to seek cover and take defensive positions as a way to minimize risk.

## Order of Results

If you use basic simultaneous actions, no action interrupts any other. If doesn’t matter if your character kills or knocks out an enemy because the opponent’s action will still occur. This might be unsatisfying because it’s harder to describe scenarios where a combatant gets the drop on her opponent. Fortunately, you can tweak the sequence of results a number of ways.

**Top Down Results:** In this variant, actions resolve themselves in order of success. The more you score, the earlier you act. For instance, if one combatant scores four successes versus her enemy’s single success, apply the results of the four-success attack first. If that’s enough damage to take her opponent out, then the single-success result doesn’t apply. She shot him down before he was able to respond.

This rule obviously stacks things in favor of characters with bigger dice pools. They not only tend to succeed better and more often, but can nullify enemy actions. The better fighter is always faster.

**Bottom Up Results:** The bottom up variant adjudicates results using the *fewest* successes first. Glancing blows inflicting one or two points of damage hit first, followed by major blows.

This rule maintains the effect of pure simultaneous results when it comes to making it more likely that superior combatants won’t drop enemies before they can act. It also makes certain decisive supernatural powers more potent. When your character’s mind control ability scores a single success, she heads off that six success wallop coming her way.

**Initiative-Based Results:** Lastly, you can use Initiative rolls to place results in order even if you don’t use them for any other step. In this case, you’re using simultaneous actions to limit what players can know about the situation, but the outcome proceeds in the same sequence as a standard combat scene.

## Narrating Simultaneous Actions

Standard Storytelling System combat tends to promote narrating events while the combat turn is being resolved. The players and Storyteller describe bullets hitting right after applying damage, or someone jumping behind a car as soon as Dexterity + Athletics successes show up on the table. Anyone acting later in the turn reacts to these events as they happen.

Simultaneous actions give you a chance to narrate combat differently because you don’t have access to this back and forth play. Instead, the results appear as one large block, and it’s up to the group to figure out what it all means afterwards. Here are two ways to go about it.

**Collective Story:** It’ll take a bit of time, but your group can reach a summary of events by consensus. The Storyteller just intervenes as much as she needs to in order to make the description conform to established facts, or move players past arguments and other sticking points.

**Personal Vignettes:** The results are set before you describe them, so there’s no harm in each player describing the outcome from a purely personal, in-character perspective — even if that contradicts what other players say about *their* characters. The Storyteller moderates personal vignettes when they would differ about an obvious fact or important chunks of information, but otherwise lets the players get as subjective as they’d like. The result is combat from the point of view of a *Rashomon*-style team of unreliable narrators, which underscores the idea that fighting is traumatic and confusing.



## Order of Battle: Phased Actions

A *phase* is a limited subcategory of everything a single character can do in a turn. Participants act according to the rules of each phase, and every combatant acts in an applicable phase before moving on to the next one. When it's time to move, everybody who wants to move does so, and *then* everybody attacks — in one implementation of the rules. Phases can be heavily customized for particular chronicles.

Phased actions have two advantages. First, they help players organize their thoughts by breaking combat down into discrete chunks. Participants who don't know what their characters are going to do have some "breathing room" because they don't have to declare a particular action until its phase comes up. Second, you can hack the phase concept to change combat's characteristics by adding, splitting, and reordering phases.

### Core Action Phases

Moving and performing instant actions are the two basic elements of a combat turn. If you split these up you'll end up with two fundamental phases:

- In the **Movement Phase**, characters move their base Speed to close with enemies, seek cover, and so forth.
- In the **Instant Action Phase**, characters perform attacks, activate supernatural powers, and perform other instant actions. This includes moving again if the character gives up an instant action to do so.

Resolve the Movement Phase for every character first. Once they're in position, head to the Instant Action Phase.

### Variant Phases

The two core phases can be modified to add a number of interesting twists. Most of these create subcategories for the Instant Action Phase. Note that if a character acts during a variant phase he can't act during the ordinary Instant Action Phase, too. Multiple phases don't normally give you multiple chances to act — unless you hack the rules to make that true, of course.

Consider the following:

- If you add a **Supernatural Phase** consisting solely of paranormal instant actions like spells and certain vampire Disciplines, setting its order lets you fine tune the balance between normal and supernatural combatants. If the Supernatural Phase occurs before the standard Instant Action Phase, mere mortals are in trouble; they can be mind-warped, burned, or fed to otherworldly beings before they have the chance to get

a shot off. If you set it after mundane actions, ordinary people have a chance to get their licks in first.

If a character with supernatural powers just shoots or punches someone, that's not a Supernatural Phase action, even if it's helped by a supernatural power.

- **Character-Based Phases** enhance theme at the expense of strict verisimilitude. If your chronicle's normal humans are natural victims, perhaps everything with a supernatural template goes first — even if they're just throwing punches. If you want to emphasize character Skills, set up Skilled and Unskilled Phases (or if you're playing **Hunter: The Vigil**, devote a phase to characters with Professional Training).

- A **Firearms Phase** settles all the shooting (and other ranged attacks if you like, though this dilutes the distinctiveness of guns in the fight) in a separate section from close combat. If you think too many people charge toward gun-wielding combatants, set this phase to occur before other instant actions so that people with guns always get a crack at onrushing brawlers. If you think shooters are blowing people away at range too often, set the phase after other instant actions.

Unless you decide otherwise, the Firearms Phase doesn't apply when targets can apply their Defense in close combat or grapple for the gun.

- Simplify combat by splitting events up into **Player** and **Storyteller Phases**. Every player-controlled character acts, and then every Storyteller character acts. This may feel less realistic, but it also creates an unambiguous sense of who goes when. If you go this route, you might recombine Movement and Instant Action Phases so that each side takes care of all of its procedures in one go.

Which side goes first? That's a tricky question. The side that goes first might spoil enemy actions, and even take them down before they can respond, but the side that goes last reacts according to their opponents' current position and situation — things that won't change until the next turn. Consider adding the Resolution Phase to even out the differences a bit, so that no matter what happens, both sides get to act.

- If you split the effects of combat away from the Instant Action Phase, you end up with a **Resolution Phase**. This is handy for bookkeeping purposes (everyone records damage, Willpower fluctuations, and other game effects at the same time) and it also delays the consequences of actions until the next turn. Even though your character kills his enemy, she can still act if there's time left in the turn. Then again, your character can get a final blow too, and once you see that last aggravated damage box go you can try something really risky — after all, he's dead anyway!

Unlike other phases, you don't have to worry about the order of action in this phase. It's strictly bookkeeping.



## Order in the Phase

Phases tell you *when* it's time to do something but they don't tell you *who* goes first within each phase. Standard Initiative (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 151) works, but see "Alternate Initiative" on p. 84 for other options that might suit your game better.

## An Example of Phased Combat Design

Kearsley wants to organize combat turns by phase to fit an action-packed chronicle that puts a heavy emphasis on supernatural abilities. He wants character actions to unfold in a predictable order, and wants to make it easy to track, too. Here are his phases.

- 1. Movement Phase:** Everybody moves their combatants.
- 2. Supernatural/Firearms Phase:** Kearsley puts supernatural instant actions and firearms combat in the same phase. Powers are important, but so is hot lead.
- 3. Instant Action Phase:** Characters perform all other instant actions.
- 4. Resolution Phase:** Kearsley decides to leave damage and other effects until the end of the turn.

## Streamlining Combat

Maybe you don't want a blow-by-blow breakdown of combat. You want the dice to provide suggestions, not descriptions. You want to resolve combat by scene, not turn. Why? It might be all about procedure. The standard rules run too slowly for your group, or put you in a narrative rut when you have to repeatedly describe similar game effects in the story's fiction. (Ask yourself: how often does someone get "shot in the shoulder" or "grazed" in your game?) It can even open the door to new themes and moods — either ones you've agreed upon together, or just the freedom to let players define such things as they go along.

These weaken the link between the rules and what they represent in the chronicle's narrative. For example, a Dexterity + Firearms roll doesn't always decide whether

that shot hits, but could describe the general "pressure" accurate bullets put on your enemy. Let this concept guide you when you apply the following rules.

## Collective Combat

The basic idea is simple: all allies roll their dice together in one big pool, and split up successes to affect their opponents. This has far-reaching effects on the combat procedure.

**Step One — Declare Dice Caps:** In these rules, you don't decide what your character is going to do until you already know the results. You do, however, declare a *dice cap*. Inspect your character sheet for dice pools that cover actions your character *might* want to execute during the turn. Set your character's dice cap to the lowest dice pool for one of these actions. For example, if your character wants to use a supernatural power with nine dice, or strike with a fist using six dice, pick six dice — your character might strike *or* use that power, depending on how the dice fall. Include equipment bonuses.

If your character opts for the Dodge maneuver her dice cap is automatically 0, but her Dodge adds to her side's collective Defense.

**Step Two — Total Dice:** Create a dice pool equal to the total of all allied characters' dice caps. Add one additional die per character to reflect strength in numbers. You'll end up with an enormous dice pool, but don't worry. That's the way it's supposed to be.

**Step Three — Total Defenses:** Defense works a little differently because it's now your character's general resistance to danger. It even applies against ranged attacks. Calculate it using the lowest of her Wits, Dexterity, *or* Composure, to cover mental, social, and physical threats. Add her supernatural power trait (Blood Potency, Primal Urge, Gnosis, Wyrd, etc.) to represent general protective abilities.

Your character may opt not to act offensively and double her base Defense (increasing the group's collective Defense) as for the Dodge maneuver, but Brawl and Weaponry Dodge don't function in these rules, so if you use them, don't use those Merits.

Once you know everyone's Defenses, add them together, and add one additional point for each ally (again, strength in numbers). This is the group's collective Defense rating.

**Step Four — Roll the Dice:** Subtract the enemy side's total Defenses from the combined dice pool, just as for individual combat, with two differences:

- No group is ever left with less than one die per member. If the modified dice pool would reduce the dice pool below that, convert the difference to chance dice (dice that only succeed on a roll of 10, but do benefit from the 10-again roll — see the *World of Darkness*



Rulebook, page 124). The worst a pool can get is one chance die per ally. Each failed chance die brings a dramatic failure down on *one* member of the group. The players choose who suffers a dramatic failure.

- If the allies face more than one group of defenders, subtract the higher of these groups' totaled Defenses.

Once you figure these pools, roll and then note each side's successes.

## Collective Magic

If you play **Mage: The Awakening**, note instant spell penalties when you calculate your side's dice pool (and of course, drop the pool by the appropriate number of dice). Don't pick a specific spell. Instead, figure out the biggest penalty for all the spells you'd like your character to have the *possibility* of casting. If you want your character to cast a spell with extra factors, include that penalty, even if she ends up casting a weaker spell, or doesn't cast a spell at all.

## Resolution

After following the steps in the last section, each side will be left with a pool of successes. This is the currency they use to achieve their objectives in the fight. The successes don't belong to any particular character or action until the players devote them to specific results. Until that point, they're an abstract measure of the entire side's successes. Here's how you break them down:

**Step Five — Set the Resolution Order:** It's easiest to resolve events for one group at a time. Use a variant of the phase rules (p. 89) to administer this, so that the actual *results* of the turn don't take effect until every side has had a chance to allocate successes.

The order of actions *within* a group is of critical importance. Each side has a finite number of successes to spend, so players who go first can use them up before allies can act. You can't have ties, because this creates confusion over priority access to group successes.

The easiest way to settle this is to use standard Initiative, but consider variations such as those found in this chapter. Initiative-boosting abilities should *not* affect this order, because it represents not just speed, but the general ability to seize control of the group's advantages. We recommend that you vary the order every turn or scene.

**Step Six — Spend Successes and Narrate the Results:** Each player spends group successes on combat

results, depleting the amount available to anyone who goes after her.

You can spend successes on any actions with dice pools no lower than your dice cap. For example, if you picked a dice cap of six, you can spend successes on actions covered by a Strength + Brawl pool of six or a Dexterity + Firearms pool of nine, but not a Strength + Weaponry pool of four.

These successes act just like successes from the appropriate dice pool. A weapon usually inflicts damage equal to its successes. A supernatural power has the effect it would impose at that number of successes, too. You can spend as many of the group's successes as your dice cap, but you'll probably want to spend less to leave some successes for allies' players. You can even choose to fail by spending 0 successes, passing the opportunity along to another player.

## Armor, Special Defenses, and Fighting Styles

These rules don't cover armor well. Multiple attacks don't work the same way and stacking armor with a collective Defense would make it effective against threats that have nothing to do with being shot, stabbed, or beaten. If you want to use armor with these rules we suggest that you roll the armor's rating as a dice pool to nullify (or in the case of bulletproof armor, convert) damage on a one success per point basis after you know your character's been hit. Apply the same guideline to supernatural powers and other special effects that wouldn't work against a substantial number of threats.

The rules are also difficult to reconcile with Fighting Style Merits. The easiest solution is just to not use them in any game where you employ collective combat. Otherwise, you might want to simplify them as follows: whenever a result matches the area of expertise your character's Fighting Style is supposed to cover, roll her Merit dots in the style as additional dice, to earn successes on top of any she applied to affect opponents. You must devote one success per opponent before rolling these bonus dice.

## Bringing Down the Hammer and Stealing the Show

Nobody has to pick a target until the dice fall, so it's easy to concentrate successes on one opponent, taking him down in a turn or two. The Storyteller should intervene if this strains credulity when, for example, everybody ignores the thugs who smacked them to concentrate on the boss who's gloating 10 yards behind the skirmish line. Nevertheless, this is *not* necessarily a bad thing unless you were relying on a separate, dramatic conflict with that leader.

On a more problematic note, Storyteller-controlled characters can bring the hammer down too, by throwing a huge number of successes at a single protagonist. Players won't like this because it means that one of them can get knocked out or killed during *any* fight. The Storyteller chooses where successes go, so he can hardly wash his hands of responsibility after, say, deciding to smack your character with 10 of the 12 enemy successes as lethal damage.

Players might hog the spotlight by constantly using most of the group's successes. This can either be the result of getting first crack at them in your chosen Initiative order, because they can set higher dice caps to grab more successes, or because they have a unique ability that's better at taking opponents out of the fight.

Here are a few options to help you deal with these issues.

**Volunteer Shields:** Let players put their characters in the way of attacks. Volunteers can absorb some or all of the successes intended for the original target (in the form of damage or other effects) unless the nature of the attack (such as a mind control spell) makes it difficult to justify.

Storytellers can also throw antagonists in harm's way. This ensures that a few zombies will fall before their necromancer master, but don't overuse this option, or players will feel like they never get to choose their own targets.

**The Courtesy Success:** Each player is entitled to one success from the group total, up to as many as can be divided in priority of Initiative. Players who act earlier in the turn may not use these successes without permission from their "owners."

Remember that you can always help fairly spread out successes by using alternate Initiative methods. For instance, you can get a different player to go first in each turn. In collective combat, this makes that player's character the turn's "star," with her choice of successes to spend.

## Collective Combat Example

Steve, Mara, and Farouk square off against four dead soldiers who've been hideously reanimated by a forgotten desert ruin.

Steve chooses a dice cap of five, covering his Strength + Brawl pool of five and his Dexterity + Firearms + small handgun pool of seven. He adds two to group Defense.

Mara chooses a dice cap of 10, limiting her to using her rifle, as her Dexterity + Firearms + the rifle compose her biggest dice pool. She adds a Defense of two as well.

Farouk picks a low dice cap of four. He's as good with his fists as Steve, but his Wits + Occult pool of four lets him read a banishing ritual from a moldering piece of vellum. Farouk's Defense is three.

After adding three to dice pools and Defense, the group has a collective dice pool of 21 and a Defense of seven.

The zombie soldiers are a bit simpler. Two shoot with dice pools of nine. Two attack with knives, using dice pools of six (they could shoot as well, since that's a bigger dice pool, but it would only make a difference if their enemies ran for cover). Each has a Defense of two.

After adding four to dice pools and Defense for this side, the zombies have a collective dice pool of 34 and a combined Defense of eight.

The living characters score three successes after rolling 13 dice (21 minus the zombies' Defense of eight). The zombies score 10 successes after rolling 27 dice (34, less the characters' Defense of seven). Ouch. The Storyteller decides to run the fight in simultaneous phases, so that no action interrupts any other.

The living characters' players know things have turned out badly and place their hope in Farouk's scroll. Steve and Mara decide that they've failed. Zombies batter aside their fists and rifle barrels. Farouk gets to use all three successes against the zombies — and the scroll turns one to dust per success. Unfortunately, this doesn't take effect until after the zombies act, so with eerie, wheezing screams, two of them take shaky but accurate shots at Mara, and another stabs Steve with a rusted knife in rotted hand. The Storyteller assigns five points of lethal damage to each of them (using all 10 successes), but none to Farouk after Steve and Mara's players explain that they would guard him while he uttered the incantation. They scream at their fresh wounds. Farouk sings in Akkadian; the zombies rot to nothing and his scroll burns under a strange blue flame, leaving nothing but ash and tatters.

By the next turn, two of the three protagonists are seriously wounded, but three of the zombies are gone, and the last one is almost sure to be dispatched quickly — though much more messily, now that the scroll is gone.

## The Magic Scroll

Farouk's scroll was designed by the Storyteller for this chapter of the chronicle. It's a single-use artifact that de-animates one of the walking dead per success on a Wits + Occult roll before it disintegrates. In this example, it represents how supernatural powers can decisively contribute to collective combat. A single success that completely neutralizes an opponent is worth more than a success that inflicts a single point of damage.



## Scene-Based Combat

Some groups are less interested in the blow-by-blow process of combat than its fallout, and even the biggest action fans might want to skip a minor fight or two. These are situations where you might want to use rules that resolve the entire scene. Let's ignore turn-based exchanges in favor of your characters' objectives.

It's based on the rules for extended actions on pp. 127–129 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*. The basic procedure is:

1) **Determine Initiative:** Using the normal rules or a variant depending on your group's preferences.

2) **Select an Objective:** The goal you want your character to accomplish, such as capturing or knocking the enemy out of the fight, or defensive maneuvers to avoid danger. This determines the dice pool you'll use for an extended action roll.

3) **Set Action Thresholds:** The first threshold is a number of extended-action rolls equal to the lowest dice pool among all participants. The second is equal to the next lowest, up to the highest dice pool among all participants.

4) **Roll Extended Action to the First Action Threshold:** Each participant rolls their dice pools a number of times equal to the first action threshold. Each failed roll imposes a cumulative –1 dice penalty to the next roll.

5) **Check Objectives:** Check to see if any participants have accumulated enough successes to reach their objectives by the first action threshold. If they have, resolve these objectives in Initiative order.

6) **Roll to the Next Action Thresholds and Recheck Objectives:** Keep rolling to the next action threshold and check for objectives as per steps 4 and 5 until the combat has been fully resolved or you reach the last action threshold.

7) **If Required, Refresh Thresholds and Roll Limits, then Keep Going:** If the scene isn't fully resolved by the last action threshold, start again — but add successes to previous totals.

### Objectives

After setting Initiative, you'll pick your character's *objective*: her final goal for the scene. If she wants to knock somebody out of the fight,



pick the Incapacitate objective. If she wants to trap an opponent, choose the Capture objective. If she wants to guard herself or someone else from harm, that's the Defend objective.

Objectives don't refer to particular methods. Your character could Incapacitate someone with a mix of bullets and blunt force trauma, for example. The important thing is the end result. Your character's objective will determine your dice pool for an extended action roll.

## Rolling the Dice

Except for Defend, each objective sets the minimum successes and results for success, failure, and dramatic failure on your extended action. These are usually based on the opponent's Traits. As per p. 128 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, you can only roll a number of times equal to your character's dice pool. Action thresholds (see "Action Thresholds," pp. 95) may require you to check for results before you make all of the rolls to which you're entitled.

If you fail a single roll in the series, you incur a -1 penalty to future rolls. This is cumulative across multiple failures until you score at least one success, at which point it vanishes.

Note that if your character opts to protect herself or somebody else, she instead applies successes to increase her opponent's success thresholds, as detailed under the Defend objective, below.

Sometimes, combatants won't completely succeed but they'll injure, scare, or otherwise partially meet their goals. These situations are called *partial successes*. They're listed in the entries for each objective, and occur whenever you score half of the required successes, rounded up.

## Core Objectives

Examine the basic objectives below. Where typical combat maneuvers represent immediate goals, an objective refers to the final situation your character wants to bring about. She wants to handcuff her target and haul him in the car or knock him out.

Characters can usually only target one opponent per combat. They *can* team up on a single opponent, using the rules for teamwork on p. 134 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. Optionally, you can split your dice pool to pursue objectives against multiple opponents (see p. 96).

### Objective: Capture

Your character wrestles, shoves, pins, and submits an enemy to put him in her custody.

**Dice Pool:** Usually Strength + Brawl, but other pools may qualify at the Storyteller's discretion.

**Difficulty:** You must score as many successes as the opponent's Strength + Dexterity + Brawl, Firearms, or Weaponry, depending on how your opponent is armed.

#### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Your character's opponent turns the tables and either escapes combat completely or inflicts the partial results of an Incapacitate or Capture roll.

**Failure:** Your character fails to get a hold of her opponent.

**Partial Success:** Your character can't capture the opponent, but does place him in the area of her choice, as long as that wouldn't effectively equal capture anyway. (She can put him in a circle of allies, but not in the trunk of her car, for example.)

**Success:** Your character captures her enemy, putting her in a situation where she cannot escape for at least a full scene.

**Exceptional Success:** The target is strongly secured, and can't try to escape for at least two scenes or hours.

**Suggested Equipment:** Any weapon (+1), rope (+2), handcuffs (+3), a nearby confined space (a room that can be locked, a car, etc; +2)

**Possible Modifiers:** Opponent is injured (+2), character is injured (-2), confined combat space (+1), open combat space (-1)

**Special:** A captured character cannot capture another character. In any contest where two characters are attempting to capture each other, the highest number of successes wins.

### Objective: Incapacitate

Your character brings the pain to her enemy with fists, weapons, and other destructive tactics. She wants to knock him out or kill him.

**Dice Pool:** Dexterity + Firearms, Strength + Brawl or Strength + Melee, depending on the method.

**Difficulty:** You must score as many successes as the opponent's Defense + Stamina + 5.

#### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Your character suffers a counter-attack or gets cornered, suffering the partial results of an Incapacitate or Capture roll.

**Failure:** Your character doesn't injure her enemy.

**Partial Success:** You inflict damage equal to your weapon's Damage rating.

**Success:** If you succeed with a bashing weapon or standard unarmed attack, your target has been knocked out — all of his Health boxes are filled with bashing damage. If you succeed with a lethal weapon your opponent's boxes are filled with lethal damage, and he's incapacitated. He will die without treatment like any other character who has suffered that degree of injury.



If you succeed with an attack that inflicts aggravated damage, your opponent is dead.

To move things along we ignore Stamina rolls to stay conscious, but you may wish to allow them for players' characters.

**Exceptional Success:** If you score more successes than required you inflict them as additional points of damage.

**Suggested Equipment:** Add your character's weapon Damage rating and other modifiers (such as 9-again) as per the standard combat rules.

**Possible Modifiers:** Opponent is injured (+2), character is injured (-2)

## Objective: Defend

Your character moves to defend herself or someone else instead of taking an offensive action. Note that you may declare this action out of Initiative order in response to actions targeting you.

**Dice Pool:** Wits + Dexterity. You may substitute Brawl or Weaponry for the *higher* of your Wits or Dexterity if the character has the Brawl or Weaponry Dodge Merits, respectively.

**Difficulty:** Not applicable. Your character's successes add to the threshold to attack or capture her or one other character of her choice.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Attackers gain a +5 bonus on one roll to pursue an objective against the character.

**Failure:** Your character doesn't make opponents attacks any more difficult.

**Partial Success:** Not applicable.

**Success:** Attackers must score additional successes equal to your own successes to meet objectives targeting your character or one other.

**Exceptional Success:** Not applicable.

**Suggested Equipment:** None

**Possible Modifiers:** Character is injured (-2)

## Other Objectives

Many unusual actions can still be folded under the three primary objectives. The goal remains the same, even if the methods include mind control or conjured fire. Follow these guidelines to create new objectives when they require special treatment.

**Dice Pool:** This is the standard dice pool used for the action.

**Difficulty:** This is usually the total of three character Traits such as:

- Attribute + Attribute + Skill
- Attribute + Skill + Skill
- Attribute + Attribute + Size or Species Factor

(these normally apply to actions that involve Health or Speed, respectively)

If the action would incur supernatural resistance, add the target's supernatural power trait (Blood Potency, Primal Urge, Gnosis, Wyrd, etc.) to the objective's difficulty.

**Dramatic Failure:** If the character suffers a dramatic failure, the standard penalty is for an opponent to inflict a partial success for some other objective (such as Incapacitate) on the unlucky character.

**Exceptional Success:** If the player scores five successes above the difficulty, you can add an additional special benefit. If each success represents an ever-increasing effect, apply that effect instead.

## Action Thresholds

Action thresholds ensure that characters with low dice pools have a better chance of interrupting enemy actions. Otherwise, characters with large dice pools would probably always succeed because they have more dice *and* their players are entitled to more extended action rolls. An action threshold sets a point where players check for results early, before more players rolling higher dice pools have a chance to make all of their rolls.

Once everyone has picked their objectives and dice pools, note the lowest unmodified dice pool among all combatants. This number is the first action threshold. For example, if Steve, Farouk, and Kearsley have eight dice, six dice, and five dice, respectively, the first action threshold is 5.

Everyone rolls their dice a number of times equal to the first action threshold. If anyone achieved objectives, apply the results in Initiative order.

The next action thresholds go in order of dice pool size from next lowest to highest. At each point, repeat the procedure of making additional rolls until the total number of dice rolls per player equals the new threshold. Check for objectives at the new threshold and once again, apply them in Initiative order.

Players can only roll their characters' dice pools as many times as they have dice in the pool, one or more of them will have to drop out after the action threshold equals their pools. For instance, using the example above with Steve, Farouk, and Kearsley, Kearsley drops out after action threshold 5, Farouk drops out at action threshold 6, and Steve drops out at 8.

## Resolve and Restart

The last action threshold (the highest dice pool) marks the end of the scene. At this point, your combatants may have been captured or taken down, or may be relatively fresh. If the scene hasn't resolved itself, go through the following procedure:

- Roll dice pools once per die in the pool, as if you have not made any previous rolls. However, your suc-



cesses add to previous successes that have accumulated toward the same objective.

- If players are rolling with penalties for previous failures, reset the penalty to zero.
- Reset action thresholds, so that combatants go through their first, second, and subsequent thresholds again.

Do this until the scene's been resolved to everyone's satisfaction — or if the players' characters meet a bad end, their resignation, at least.

## Permutations

Use the following options to add new dimensions to scene-based combat.

**Changing Objectives:** You can always change objectives in the middle of the fight. If you do, you lose any accumulated successes and running failure penalties and can change your dice pool, but you must subtract the number of rolls you've already made from the number of rolls you're allowed to make toward the new objective.

**Combat Advantage:** To quicken resolution and portray building momentum, add a cumulative +1 die bonus to the pools of each combatant whenever the player scores at least one success. This bonus vanishes when the player fails a roll.

**No Action Thresholds:** If you drop action thresholds completely, characters with higher dice pools

are far more likely to defeat characters with lower dice pools. This does streamline the system further, however.

**Post-Hoc Objectives:** If you use this option you don't have to define objectives ahead of time. Instead, set a dice pool cap as you would for collective combat; roll this instead of a specific dice pool. Once you feel you have enough successes to pull a specific objective off, declare it, but you may only pursue objectives where your character has a pool equal to or greater than the dice cap you set.

**Split Objectives:** Characters can perform multiple actions from turn to turn, and might be able to pursue multiple objectives in the scene, against the same opponent or multiple targets. In this case, players take the *lowest* of each applicable dice pools (before equipment and modifiers) and split their dice before rolling. If equipment bonuses only apply to one pool, add them for rolls related to the applicable objective.

Consider a character who wants to protect her ally and fight back in the same scene. The character's Wits + Dexterity pool is seven, but her Dexterity + Firearms pool is eight. Her player splits the smaller pool, devoting four dice to Defend and three to Incapacitate. Fortunately, she has a 2(L) pistol, so she actually rolls five dice for the Incapacitate objective.





**Sudden Death:** To convert this system into a one-roll mechanic, roll dice pools once in Initiative order. One success is a partial success, three successes is a standard success, and five successes is an exceptional success. Instead of using the listed success thresholds, apply the opponent's Defense or another appropriate Resistance Attribute. This option is less complicated and lacks the rising tension that comes with extended dice rolls, but it's quicker.

**Supernatural Objectives:** In many cases, supernatural actions are covered by the three basic objectives, but they provide alternate (and in some cases, higher) dice pools to work with. But many Gifts, Disciplines, spells, and other powers can inflict a number of potent instant effects, but in scene-based rules we care about final outcomes, not turn by turn events. One way to deal with this is to use a limited version of the Post-Hoc Objectives option, below, limited to supernatural powers.

Once your character exceeds the task's difficulty, you can inflict any supernatural effect your dice cap allows, intensified to represent fight-ending results. A vampire's Majesty reduces a victim to cowering awe, for example. This isn't strictly the way the power works, but it's good enough for the simplified rules and besides, we assume that the vampire in question has performed other actions to further that end — he didn't just activate Majesty over and over again. To simplify supernatural bonuses for the Defense objective, add your character's dots in a defensive power to her dice pool.

## Health and Injuries

When the fight's over, the story continues — for some. Not for the dead. Not for the mad, or men and women who've been turned into empty-eyed puppets, forced to obey supernatural commands. In traditional horror, an unfortunate end is the culmination of the story, when fear's source finally steps from the shadows, but let's face it: you're not always going to run a traditional horror story.

The World of Darkness may push the feel of subtle dread, but a little splatterpunk still lurks in its narrative genome. And even though the game suggests certain kinds of stories, it doesn't push for them *too* hard. Gory survival horror, straight-up action, and in all likelihood, some undiscovered genre that you invented especially for your table all have a place. Let's look at a few rules to tune combat's visceral consequences for your chronicle. (When it comes to mental fallout, it might be worth a peek at the Morality variants on p. 44 of the first chapter.)

## Critical Hits

The following rules drive home the horrific elements of violence — or at the very least, satisfy the occasional deviant urge for gore. They originally appeared in the **Mage Chronicler's Guide**, but are repeated here because they're relevant to this chapter.

Real people don't take generalized scratches and bruises from a knife or gun. They lose eyes and hands. Organs spill out. It's not pretty.

In these rules, a critical hit is a special effect that occurs alongside aggravated damage — but serious damage like aggravated wounds are easier to mete out. Whenever a strike in combat scores more damage than the opponent's Size, any damage in excess of Size is upgraded to the next most severe damage type. Bashing becomes lethal; lethal turns aggravated.

**Example:** Steve shoots a security guard, inflicting a base seven points of lethal damage. five points stay lethal, but on the Size 5 guard, two points are aggravated.

When a character suffers aggravated damage, roll for its location on the following table. Alternately, a character can specify a target before attacking, but this imposes a penalty to the player's roll based on the location. Penalties are included in parentheses.

Die Roll	Hit Location*
1-3	One leg (victim chooses; -1)
4-6	Torso (-1)
7-8	Dominant arm (-2)
9	Non-Dominant arm (-2)
10	Head (-3)

\* Generalized injuries such as explosive effects are always considered to be torso hits.

Once you've determined location it's time to figure out the Severity of a critical hit. Base Severity is equal to the aggravated damage the attacker inflicted with that single shot. The target may reduce it by making a Stamina roll. Mundane conditions (wounds, etc.) never penalize this roll, but each critical hit already sustained imposes a -1 penalty to the roll. On a dramatic failure, increase Severity by 1.

You *never* add the Severity of two critical hits, but their effects are cumulative. For example, two Severity 1 hits to the arm subtract 2 from applicable actions.

**Option:** If you don't think the players' characters should get maimed so easily, make their Severity reduction roll Stamina + Composure. (Yes, it's cinematic, so it's about attitude.)

Severity	Effect
0-1	The character suffers a -1 penalty to all actions involving the affected body part. This is cumulative and lasts for the scene.

- 2 Body part is useless for the next turn. If the location is the head, the character cannot act at all — she's stunned by a shower of blood or near-knockout blow. If it's a leg or torso hit, the character falls prone.
- 3 Body part is useless for the scene. Other effects are as for the Severity 2 injury.
- 4 Indefinite crippling injury in the body part as it is severed, crushed, or burned. If the head is the target, this causes permanent (to normal medicine at least) deafness, blindness, or the loss of one Mental or Social Attribute dot. If the target is the torso, this causes the loss of one Physical Attribute dot. These losses can be recovered with experience points, but the character's ceiling on increasing the Attribute drops by the amount lost (one per applicable critical hit). Once this cripples an arm or a leg, the character is immune to further damage in that hit location.
- 5+ Death. This is instant if the attacker is willing to risk a Morality/Wisdom check (see below). Otherwise, the victim is completely incapacitated, and will die at the end of the scene unless someone renders immediate, skilled aid (usually 5 successes on an extended Wits + Medicine roll — one roll per turn). If the character survives, she suffers a Severity 4 effect.

Without supernatural aid, the Severity of any non-lethal critical hits drops by one per week, but Severity 4 effects never go away. They leave scars, limps, and stumps. Fortunately, mages can heal critical hits magically, removing their effects. Each affected body part must be healed separately in this fashion as if it were an aggravated wound equal to its Severity. Other supernatural creatures heal critical hits in the same way, using their own methods for healing aggravated wounds. Supernatural healing methods remove even persistent Severity 4 effects.

**Moral and Psychological Effects:** Inflicting a critical hit is traumatic for the attacker as well. Maiming a living (or lifelike, like a vampire) being only pleases desperate people and psychopaths. Any critical hit is at least a Morality 8 sin. Maiming someone in a fight *the character* started is at least an Impassioned Crime (Morality 4), even if the ultimate aim is some greater good. (That's what *everyone* thinks they're doing.) As mentioned in the Severity table, the player can choose to instantly dispatch the recipient of a Severity 5+ hit by voluntarily making Morality check, typically against murder (Morality 3). In cases of multiple critical hits, wait until the scene's end and tally the worst hits per victim.

Using magic to inflict critical hits on living, feeling beings is worse than mundane methods. The mage is

directing his innermost being toward mutilating or killing a victim. Rate this as a Morality sin one rank worse than its mundane counterpart.

## Heroic Toughness

Screw all this retching and bleeding. You want characters to shrug off bullets. You want most damage to represent close calls — near misses and slight scrapes — right up until characters are down to their last Health points. Perhaps you like the idea that no matter how much someone suffers, she can't go down until her will to fight is gone. The following suggestions exist to help you encode these concepts in the combat system.

### Tough People, Tough Shots

You can tone down any Heroic Toughness rule by increasing damage across the board. This is a good option if you want to change how character resilience works without boosting them to superhuman levels of damage resistance.

You might rule that all weapons inflict automatic damage equal to their Damage ratings but give everyone access to extra Health. You can give everyone automatic attack bonuses based on Skill dots, experience point totals, or even supernatural power traits. For example, if you want to make ordinary humans weaker, supernatural power traits add dice to attacks *and* Health, so that mere mortals are chaff, but werewolves and vampires can still go toe to toe.

### Experience is Health

It's simple and familiar to many gamers: the more experienced your character is, the tougher he is, straight up. For every 10 experience points the character earns, up his Health dots by one. It seems slow at first, but imagine your character walking around with 10 extra Health dots at 100 experience!

As an alternative (or addition, if you want truly heroic characters) you can also allow characters to purchase more Health dots. The rate depends on the effect you want:

**Flat Fee:** Charge eight experience points per Health dot. This is a significant cost measured from session to session, but becomes increasingly more attractive for experienced characters when the cost multipliers for other Traits leave players routinely shelling out double digits per dot.

**Multiplier:** Let players buy Health at a base cost equal to the new amount, multiplied by a fixed number — but only after subtracting the character's standard Health dots from the base. Otherwise, you'll penalize characters with high de-



rived Traits. A multiplier of five experience points (the same as Attributes) isn't unreasonable and lets most players buy a new point of Health or two after a few sessions, but levies a high price for the outer limits of cinematic fortitude.

**Differential Increases:** You don't necessarily want someone who can shake off a dozen punches to laugh off a stab wound. Maybe nobody should take a "flesh wound" from being critically set on fire. Or maybe you'd like to let it happen, but only for players willing to pay the price. In that case, let them purchase additional bashing, lethal, and aggravated Health separately. Increasing one track has no effect on the others.

As Storyteller, you can forbid the purchase of aggravated Health dots, of both lethal and aggravated Health dots. (You could theoretically choose a different scheme, where bashing was forbidden, or lethal was but aggravated wasn't, but this would give you characters with glass jaws who don't mind being set on fire. It's your chronicle and might make sense to you, but the author wouldn't do it. Still, go nuts.)

Consider these permutations:

- If you let players increase two or three types of Health you'll want to charge the most for aggravated points, less for lethal, and the least for bashing. If you use a flat fee, a rate of nine per aggravated dot, six per lethal dot, and three per bashing dot work. This may look inexpensive, but remember that the standard flat fee structure actually provides *all three* Health dot types for eight experience points.

- If you use experience multipliers consider x6 for bashing, x4 for lethal, and x2 for bashing.

- If you add a Health dot for every 10 experience points, use these rules to tone down the advantages by alternating increases by *type*, cycling through bashing, lethal and aggravated, limiting increases to just bashing, or bashing and lethal; or by using a pyramid structure, where every 10 experience grants a bashing dot, every 20 grants a lethal dot, and every 30, an aggravated dot. Play with these numbers to taste, based on how rapidly you expect characters to advance.

## Power is Health

To give supernatural characters an even bigger edge than they already enjoy, add one to each character's Health for every dot they possess in a supernatural power Trait, such as Blood Potency, Primal Urge, Gnosis, Wyrd, Pyros, or Psyche. Stack this option with Experience as in Health above for gamers where everybody's tough, but supernatural characters are just a *bit* tougher.

## Will is Health

If you use this simple option a conscious character's player can always substitute Willpower points for Health dots on a one-for-one basis. She refuses to fall to the wound and as long as she survives she'll find out that her injuries weren't as severe as they looked at first glance. Players

can spend more than one point of Willpower per turn as substitute Health dots.

## Second Wind

In some movies, main characters get shot, stabbed, and beaten, but once they take a moment to catch their breath they're ready to leap back into action. The Second Wind rules emulate this.

As long as your character is conscious, she can take a full turn to regain her wits, grit her teeth and shrug off damage. Your character can't move, attack, or employ Defense, but she can employ reflexive actions as usual. This means she'll often devote two turns to Second Wind; one to move to safety (during which she might also attack or perform another instant action) and another to recover.

Roll Resolve + Stamina; every success recovers one point of bashing damage and every two successes recovers one point of lethal damage. Optionally, three successes can remove a point of aggravated damage, but this might be too extreme for even highly cinematic chronicles. You may spend a point of Willpower on this roll, and you don't have to pick the type of damage you want to heal until you know the results.

You may succeed at a number of Second Wind instances during a scene equal to the lowest of your character's Stamina or Resolve, for a maximum number of scenes equal to the same number. If you fail the roll, it doesn't use up one of these instances.

After that, your character needs eight hours of rest (at least four of which must be uninterrupted) to regenerate her Second Wind opportunities. Furthermore, after resting you can't use Second Wind rolls to rapidly heal any damage the character suffered *before* the rest period. Any remaining damage is serious enough to warrant the normal rules for healing damage.

## Soaking

If you want really tough characters, let them *soak* damage. This takes characters' basic toughness into account. The core Storytelling System already does this by adding Stamina to base Health dots, but when you allow soaking, Stamina becomes even more important. Everyone will be a bit more resistant to damage, but it will increase the gulf between tough and fragile characters because everyone will rely on character Traits to ward off damage *twice* — for basic Health and soaking.

Here are three ways to apply it:

**Soak as Armor:** Your character has a Soak Rating: a new trait equal to the lowest of her Resolve or Stamina. She always possesses armor equal to her Soak Rating against bashing damage. If you want even tougher characters, let them have armor equal to half their Soak Ratings (rounded up) against lethal damage.

This rule drops even skilled characters down to a chance die when they attack tough enemies, so there's one important limit: each time a character suffers damage, her Soak Rating drops by 1 until she's had a chance to spend at least eight hours resting. The practical effect of this is that even though a tough character can take shots for a long time, a bump or scratch quickly whittles that power away.

**Soak Rolls:** After a character suffers bashing damage, roll a Soak Pool of Resolve + Stamina; each success removes a point of bashing damage. For even tougher characters, roll the lower of Resolve or Stamina against lethal damage for the same effect.

This option adds an extra die roll to combat and slows things down a bit. It will also create situations where combatants trade shots that don't inflict damage. To compensate, rule that every successful hit inflicts at least one point of damage. Every substantial shot always leaves a mark, even if it's not as bad as it could have been.

Alternately, you can let characters soak up every point, but the moment they suffer any damage at all, drop their Soak Pools by two dice until they get a chance to rest up.

This also works when you want to better differentiate Defense and armor. Just add the armor's protection as an equipment bonus to the soak roll instead of reducing dice from the incoming attack roll.

**Soak as Damage Conversion:** Using this variant, your character uses her innate toughness and determination to make the damage type less serious. Choose one of the following rules:

- If you've opted not to roll your Soak Rating each level converts one point of incoming lethal damage to bashing damage, or removes one level of existing bashing damage (and of course, it doesn't convert lethal to bashing and *that* bashing to nothing). This makes soaking tougher against bashing damage (it removes damage after the fact, instead of dice that may or may not succeed as damage).

- If you want to roll to soak, each Resolve + Stamina success converts a point of damage as if you're using the Soak Rating to do it.

## You'll Do What I Tell You: Social and Mental Combat

Things had been too smooth, he realized. Too easy. He'd started to forget how bad it had gone before calming down. His father always said, "Your Momma ain't retarded. We had her seen to when she was talking about leaving the family. Got her brain cut at the state hospital, and she's been doing real nice since. Quiet and appy. Had your sisters for us."

Jamie stood in the kitchen door in his boxers, morning chub softening into a defensive shrivel and trying to follow his balls up into his abdomen.

"Well, you don't look surprised to see me."

What do you say to a woman you'd killed six months ago? Jamie found he couldn't answer that question, so he walked to the fridge and got down the half-gallon of milk, and drank from it slowly with his back to the woman, her half-eaten bowl of corn flakes, and her mean little Bulldog .44 curled up sleeping an inch from her right hand. Yeah bitch, he thought, I drink from the carton, and you ate your cereal with my backwash.

Emboldened by his petty payback, he stayed there until his back itched, then he wiped his mouth with his hand, and turned.

The gun was where it had been. She wanted to talk, at least for awhile. She looked good. Real good. Jamie thought about how a woman's cheekbone or the orbit of her eye feel when it breaks under a fist, and how long it takes to heal from facial reconstructive surgery.

He grabbed a bowl from the cabinet, a spoon, and sat down across from her. He didn't bother being careful to keep his hands in sight. The only place he could have hid a gun was down his boxers between the crack of his ass. He poured cornflakes. Milk. The bowl was the color of a LA sunset. A happy shiny Fiestaware knockoff the girl still sleeping upstairs bought because of the color. Jamie caught hold of his runaway thoughts, dragged them back from the safety of trivialities, and made them focus on the present situation.

A woman he thought he'd killed was sitting at the kitchen table waiting for him, and an inch from her hand was a stub-nosed Magnum revolver, and he was unarmed, undressed, and wholly unprepared. Focus. For all his casual brutality, vice, and old-school white-trash evil, his father had taught Jamie how to read a situation. He took a bite of cornflakes, and while his hard-trained facade carried the moment, he considered the women before him...

... head cocked slightly to the left... something new... damage from the beating? Yeah, she's in pain but hiding it well. Got some nerve damage in her left side because she's left-handed, but the gun is by her right hand. That jives with what I did to her... left eye looks fine, but doesn't track right... and her tits are bigger, and given healing time, she must have had the surgeon who worked her face give her a boost up-top while he was doing it... new rings on her finger, a fat rock and a diamond-chip engagement ring, both so flashy they almost look fake... she always took getting married seriously, can't see her wearing them for a fancy, so she's married and he's loaded... intuition... her surgeon? Feels right. She was always good at being rescued... I did. Her nails are longer than before... how fast can she pick up the revolver? Chew chew... too fast. But the manicure is fresh, no nicks or chips at all she might pick up getting in here, jimmying the deadbolt, popping the window, and the alarm code — behind her, next to the garage door the Armed light on the panel is off, the Ready light green. An inside job? Skip it for now, just throw the cereal in her face and lunge to her left so her body's between me and the gun, circle low and hit her from the



left side, no time for art, just plow into her and hope she really is slow on the left, and I really did fuck her eye up badly enough to give me an edge, take a breath, and let a thumb curl casually over the lip of the bowl, and...

Click-click, behind him.

He froze.

It sounded like the hammer on a Colt .45 Peacemaker being thumbed back. It sounded like the hammer on a John Wayne Memorial Colt .45 Peacemaker being thumbed back.

He recovered slightly, finished chewing and swallowed, then put his hands flat on the table.

"You brought help?"

She smiled, and it was lopsided enough, the left lip drooping slightly, to make him think he might have done more than break her face, and given her a little brain damage too. He fought a losing battle against the adrenalized fear stalking his gut, as he considered for the first time the depths of hatred a woman like her might harbor for a man like him after being beaten near to death, cheated out of a share from six and a quarter million, shot in the back, and tossed down a gully outside Birmingham, Alabama.

From behind him, the too-familiar voice of the girl who was supposed to be sleeping upstairs.

"No baby, I brought help. Jamie, let me introduce you to my little sister. I'd hoped to spare her some of the business's uglier realities, but it looks like we've got to take this to a bad place much sooner than I'd intended."

Sister.

The girl he'd been living with for the last three months... met her on the beach... drinks... a second chance meeting... chance... the 'innocent' questions about where his money came from.

"You see that right there, little sister? That's a moment of realization. Jamie just figured out how long we've been playing him. He's so smart, isn't he? So clever. But he's got that one blind spot."

Jamie spoke finally, curling the word into a curse.

"Women."

## What Is This, How Do I Use It, and Why Should I Care?

All fair questions, and very topical. The World of Darkness core rules offer some fairly detailed mechanics for handling physical conflict, and perhaps justifiably so. It's humanity at its rawest. You with a length of rebar, me backing away, eyes cutting left and right looking for a weapon to even things out, to give me a chance to shatter your bones and make you bleed before you do that to me. But social and intellectual ways of brutalizing other human beings is given thinner treatment, and again perhaps justifiably so, because using mechanics to resolve social actions seems off to many who prefer to roleplay these elements. Using mechanics to adjudicate intellectual action might seem to



rob players of the ability to make clever plans and decisions for their characters (even if on paper, those characters are dumber than a road-killed armadillo).

So here's what's going to happen in *You'll Do What I Tell You* — we're going to make social and mental conflict more mechanically crunchy, so the amount of "table-time" dedicated to resolving these sorts of conflicts will balance out with the punching, kicking, and eye-gouging. Further, we're going to make it exciting, intense, and palatable to those who're iffy about this kind of system. As an added bonus, it's going to be modular — pick the parts you want and plug them into your chronicle. If you like the social-fu, but don't want players of genius characters boning your plots with the ability to ret-con, then just take the social modules, and leave the brainwork as it is.

## Inspirado

What are the inspirations for these mechanics? Doyle's *Sherlock Holmes* and his opposite in LeBlanc's *Lupin*, Rian Johnson's *Brick* and *The Brothers Bloom*, a little Machiavelli, Tsugumi Ohba's *Death Note*, Singer's *The Usual Suspects*, *House* because *House* is a magnificent bastard, Hannibal Lecter, the pioneers of social psychology Hewin and Festinger, and the disturbing experiments (which show the power of others to make people behave abominably to one another) of Zimbardo, Sherif, Milgram, Bandura, and Asch, the whole body of Chandler and Hemmet's work, and every goddamn thing Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall said to each other on screen.

From these sources we get the pointed exchange of dialog in a hardboiled detective novel or a noir film version of same-words delivered like knife cuts, smoldering looks hot enough to burn your face. Or, a psychotic genius locked in his cell, reaching beyond it to toy with the lives of those who seek his advice, or turning his poisoned words on a neighboring prisoner, until the man chews off his own tongue. A detective and an occult murderer play a complicated game of deceit and discovery, with each revelation itself revealed to be part of a larger plot, like playing chess on all six checkered sides of a Rubic's Cube as it is reconfigured between moves. A criminal spins a tale that merges truth and lies so perfectly, the police are taken in completely... as is the audience until the moment of revelation. College students conform to their assigned guard roles and abuse other students playing prisoners, or ordinary volunteers deliver what they believe is lethal electrical shocks to an unseen but weeping person because a man in a lab coat told them to.

Fighting can be powerful — guns, bombs, tanks, planes, subs, nukes — but wars are won and lost by politicians who play complicated social and intellectual games to maintain their power. Beyond the deployment of actual boots in the mud, wars are all-brain-all-the-time. Strategy, tactics, logistics. And training? The conditioning of a bunch of sappy kids into trained and controlled killers? That's social. Social and mental conflicts frame, drive, and justify physical ones. Even the decision to throw a punch is a social one — and overcoming base human resistance to inflicting damage on something recognizably human gnaws at the core sociability of the human condition. The brain and the heart meet in morality: decide to murder the man who screwed you out of your fair share, plan it, make it happen, and then put the gun to his head. Can you pull the trigger? Can you pull the trigger *while he begs for his life*? He's throwing his persuasion against your planning and resolve, and the stakes are his brains on the floor.

Of course, if you do pull the trigger, where does that leave you?

Morality aside, you've got a whole mess of new mental and social problems — getting away, cleaning up after it, and lying about it convincingly to the cops.

So, what it is: a crunchier system for handling social and mental conflicts. How it works: modular mechanics to be added to a chronicle to introduce some or all of these new systems. Why should you care: because it's completely awesome. Don't believe me? Then I'd better convince you.

## The Hottness

Here are the four basic modules — Sway, Anticipation, Setup, and Declaration to be used together or individually. New Merits taking advantage of these mechanics to follow, along with some plug-ins for other systems in this book.

## Sway, ("I Am the Boss of You")

Sway is the core mechanic underpinning social conflict, and lets us quantify influence — how profoundly you elicit the desired thoughts, feelings, or behavior from another person. Subtle persuasion, intimidation, brow-beating, charm — it all boils down to how you sway your target. The flip side is of course getting swayed yourself, but characters run by players have certain privileges as it relates to sway, and a lovely advantage called Willpower, which acts not entirely unlike Health does for physical attacks. Unlike Health though, Willpower doesn't just sit there doing nothing when it isn't being carved off of you with monster claws or butcher knives. Willpower is a dynamic score, fluctuating up and down with use and how often you indulge your Vice and act on your Virtue. Sway adds another potential drain on this resource, which makes



finding ways to get it back even more significant. Pushing players to work those things hard and often is another advantage of using Sway.

## Creating Sway

Sway is generated with a successful Social Skill roll modified normally by circumstances and the target's resistance. There are some similarities to a physical attack roll, as three successes on this roll generate a more powerful Sway effect than one success. The damage analogy isn't wholly inaccurate either, as there are three categories of Sway similar to the three kinds of damage. The amount of Sway you generate determines how long your influence will persist, how useful it is (specific instances of altered behavior, divulged information, changed feelings that are useful to you), how resistant that persuasion is to another character attempting to reverse it, and how much Willpower it would take to overcome it partially or completely.

**Example:** *Jamie is in trouble of the worst sort — betrayed, and at the mercy of women who want to do really horrible things to him. But Jamie is a charmer. He considers his chances of persuading the sisters that it was all a big misunderstanding, and they should make up and have a threesome, but abandons this idea (after a subtle shake of the Storyteller's head informs the player that sort of nonsense would stretch things too far). All right, how about playing on the feelings of the younger sister so when the older one suggests slowly peeling the skin off his hands with a pair of pliers, she'll object to the torture? That seems more reasonable to everyone concerned (and fits with Jamie's intent to play the sisters against each other). But given the relationship the sisters share, it'll require something more than casual influence to create a dividing line between the...*

## The System

Once you nail down the general nature of the Sway being sought, and the relevant modifiers (from situation, the target's resistance, and such), it's time to roll it out.

This is usually an instant roll based on Presence or Manipulation and a Social Skill, though in some situations other Skills might be added instead — for example, creating Sway with the audience of a lecture, persuading them to accept your theories, might be rolled with Manipulation + Academics. If the intent of the Sway and the Attribute and Skill the player wishes to use don't quite jive, the Storyteller can suggest an alternative combination, and if the player insists, impose an appropriate penalty.

**Example:** *Jamie needs to do really well on this one, or he's going to get peeled like a tangerine. His player proposes Manipulation + Socialize, and the Storyteller agrees. She decides that the younger sister's Composure makes the most sense for her to resist with. Jamie's player asks about her*

*Morality: would she be comfortable with torture? Ah, says the Storyteller with a knowing wink, let's save that for a bit further into the scene. Jamie's player will then have a total dice pool of Manipulation 4 + Socialize 4 — the sister's 2 Composure. That's six dice. An exceptional success on only six dice? Not impossible, but... well, it looks like this will take an extended action to achieve. The older sister tightens the cuffs holding him to his chair, which cut into his wrists, and then selects the sharpest fillet knife from the drawer. Her smile makes him think he'd better hurry the fuck up.*

## Types of Sway

As we said, Sway comes in three flavors roughly parallel to the three damage types. Unlike damage, the elements that separate the kinds of Sway are as often situational and relational as they are based on how the Sway is generated. Persuading a loved-one has a significantly different dynamic than persuading a stranger, with deeper risks, rewards, and longer lasting results. The ability to generate Intimate Sway with a total stranger is an exceptional talent (one requiring a Merit), and can be seen as vital to legendary seducers or madmen who talk people into suicide. Likewise, a susceptibility to persuasion or an ache to feel connected to others could predispose a character to this sort of Sway, causing feelings of intimacy from even casual contact. This flaw plagues hopeless romantics, gormless optimists, and creepy window-peeping stalkers alike. Finally, you have wholly unnatural modes of Sway. Occult powers, spells, psychic dominance, and supernatural talent. Unless these powers generate an effect noted for its subtlety, the Sway they produce supplants and overrides the victim's own thoughts and feelings. Rather than shift them along natural paths of decision making, Unnatural Sway imposes new order.

### Casual Sway

This type of Sway, most commonly generated quickly between strangers or acquaintances, lacks a strong emotional component, and rarely relates to actions, events, or belief beyond the immediate scene. Uses of Casual Sway range from panhandling to cold-calling to charming your way past an administrative assistant. Characters must usually be able to fulfill the desired actions immediately (within the current scene), and Casual Sway rapidly fades without further exposure. With time and some additional effort, Casual Sway could be turned into Intimate Sway if you pursue the requisite intimacy with the target, forming a relationship with them.

**What Casual Sway Can Do** — Get the target to perform an action they might be inclined to do anyway, or at least have no concrete objection to (moral or common sense). Get them to reveal a piece of information that could get them in some trouble, but not risk their livelihood or life. Make the target receptive for more intensive Sway





(the formation of the relationship needed for Intimate Sway). Leave the target positively inclined towards you, or negatively inclined towards another. Make the target fear you and react accordingly. Persist for the remainder of the scene, fading almost completely after this.

**What Casual Sway Can't Do** — Make a target experience powerful or long-lasting emotions or form a connection to you (you could inspire lust or create feelings of attraction, but not make the target love you). Make the target take action that's overtly against their interests or puts their life or livelihood at risk (you could bum five bucks off a stranger, but not five-hundred). Make the target take any action that would cause them to make a Morality check. Last much longer than the immediate scene.

(Casual Sway is roughly analogous to bashing damage.)

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** You sour the social situation rather than shift things in your favor. Further attempts to create Sway with the same target suffer a -3 penalty for the remainder of the scene, and -1 for the rest of the story unless you successfully generate some Sway with them (which removes this second penalty).

**Failure:** You don't make things worse, but don't really improve things either. Attempts to generate Sway using the same Skill within the current scene causes a -3 die penalty, but other Skills can be used with only a -1 die penalty. No persistent penalty carries beyond the current scene.

**Success:** You generate Sway equal to the successes rolled. See below (p. 106) for what this gets you.

**Exceptional Success:** You generate Sway that is both powerful and persistent. This also opens the possibility of forming an emotional bond with the target, which would allow you to generate Intimate Sway if you chose to do so.

### Intimate Sway

When an emotional bond exists between you and a target — a relationship or some shared bonding experience — you can attempt to create Intimate Sway with your social Skills. This level of influence relies strongly on the intimacy and vulnerability people who open up to one another share. The connection required to create Intimate Sway arises from play in a chronicle, and is possible when it makes sense in that context. Some talents let a character leapfrog past the tedious stages of forming relationships, and stab right at the heart of people stripped bare by their cunning social insights, wit, charm, or personal magnetism. But for most characters, Intimate Sway requires a degree of familiarity that's best revealed through play. Players are given a certain amount of freedom when deciding when they can attempt to impose Intimate Sway based on how the roleplaying seems to justify it, but they should be cautious in doing so wily-nilly, because it means they're also exposed to the same potential for influence. Declare your character has bonded with another character



powerfully enough to try Intimate Sway, and you're saying they could try the same on you.

If you want to just be able to shamelessly manipulate other people's deep feelings for you, see Upgunning below for how to set them up to understand that the opposite of "you always hurt the ones you love" is also true.

**What Intimate Sway Can Do** — Convince the target to take an action or reveal information that could get them in serious trouble, threaten their livelihood, or even endanger their health. Persuade a target to take action that causes a Morality check. Change the target's opinions on an important issue. Convince the target to abandon an action or belief they're strongly motivated towards. Cause changes in the target's thoughts and feelings that last for a long time (beyond the current scene). Temporarily change the target's Virtue or Vice to one of your choosing.

**What Intimate Sway Can't Do** — Make permanent changes to the target's beliefs without exceptional success, cause the target to directly harm themselves (unless they're predisposed towards self-harm), change a target's Virtue, Vice, or Nature permanently.

(Intimate Sway is similar to lethal damage.)

## Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Sour the relationship for a time. You can't attempt to create Intimate Sway with the target until you make some effort in-game to patch up the relationship. You're also at a -3 die penalty for attempts at Sway with this target during the current story, and suffer a -1 penalty permanently when trying to use the same Skill to Sway as the one used to suffer the dramatic failure. This is permanent damage to the intimacy you shared with the target, a nagging reminder that your efforts at manipulation did harm.

**Failure:** You simply fail to influence your target, but you don't spoil the relationship. Attempts to generate Sway using the same Skill within the current scene is impossible, but other Skills can be used with only a -1 penalty. There is a -1 persistent penalty with the Skill you failed at for the remainder of the story, as the efforts at manipulation become a sore spot in the relationship. (This penalty is applicable only on Sway attempts.)

**Success:** You generate Sway equal to the successes rolled. See below for what this gets you.

**Exceptional Success:** You generate Sway that is both powerful and persistent. The influence you impose on the target becomes permanent, and from now on reflects their normal state of mind.

## Unnatural Sway

And finally we have Unnatural Sway: influence over another person's thoughts and feelings gained through occult power or supernatural ability. This completely side-steps the ordinary modes of human influence and expression, and obligates the usual mores and expecta-

tions. In the World of Darkness there are dozens of unnatural ways to create this kind of Sway, though not every supernatural power does so. Some powers bridge the gulfs between Casual and Intimate Sway, allowing a pale stranger to persuade you like he was your best friend your whole life, or the small unassuming woman to terrifying you like a rampaging parent terrifies their child. Using the Sway module with mind-influencing powers requires a little forethought and discussion among players and Storyteller, as most work in their own special ways, have unique limits or potencies, and others enhance ordinary human social actions while others provide direct access behind the velvet ropes of the conscious mind to the VIP lounge of a victim's soul.

(And yes, that's "victim" rather than "subject" because no matter how you slice it, using hideous powers from beyond the sane reckoning of man to hijack the free will and identity of another person and make them dance about for your amusement equals victimization.)

Unnatural influence often happens very fast when compared to ordinary human ways of creating Sway, and can often completely overcome a victim's free will, self preservation, morality, and essential nature. But there's a wide field where these things grow, and some grow weird. The effects of these powers are usually spelled out well enough in their descriptions to infer the sort of Sway they'd generate (based on the criteria outlined in the two previous types), and that happens in the event of dramatic failure and exceptional success.

**What Unnatural Sway Can Do** — What can't it do? With great power comes great irresponsibility. Unnatural Sway is limited by the criteria of the power used to create it, but if the Storyteller rules it creates Unnatural Sway rather than giving a quick and dirty route to Intimate Sway, then there's very little this kind of thing can't make a person do or say.

**What Unnatural Sway Can't Do** — Leave a victim wholly unharmed by the experience — Unnatural Sway involves having your mind split open and someone else's thoughts squirted in like eggs down the ovipositor of a parasitic wasp. Sometimes, this is literally the case. This is mostly a story level consideration, but in the case of Exceptional successes (or dramatic failures) Unnatural Sway might leave the victim suffering a thematically appropriate derangement. Morality loss is certainly a possibility too. Unnatural Sway hurts people, and there's no way to pretty that up. Even the most genial imposition of will is going to leave greasy fingerprints across a victim's cerebellum. The signs of Unnatural Sway is often something people with the right skills and the right insights can notice in a victim. The tells of psychic dominance, magical enslavement, demonic influence, and undead seduction are plain to those who know what to look for.

## Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** See the specifics of the power used.

**Failure:** See the specifics of the power used.

**Success:** You generate Sway equal to the successes rolled. See below for what this gets you, and also refer to any specifics of the power used.

**Exceptional Success:** As above, and also refer to specifics of the power used.

## From Casual to Intimate

Taking casual influence to an intimate level involves an extended action, and you need to accumulate successes equal to twice your target's Willpower to begin using Intimate Sway. This can take some time too, given your access and other factors (see How Long Does This Take below).

Each roll in the extended action takes one day's worth of time (moving from Casual Sway to Intimate Sway takes time, after all).

**Problem:** What if a character just doesn't have that kind of time?

Trying to convince a guy to go back to your place for a nightcap isn't going to be easy if you've only got 30 seconds to work the mojo before the quartet of broken-nosed hardcases who're looking for you find you and make it much harder to be seductive by sticking their big unwashed fists into your face. So ideally, you've got the luxury to do it right, and there's some roleplaying to be enjoyed. But when the hell are things ever ideal? Rushing Sway makes this process harder. If you've no time restriction, you've no penalty, and if you can take all the time you need and then some, you get a bonus die. That's the reason people spring for dinner and a movie, and suggest long walks on the beach. It gives them time to think up really subtle and romantic ways to say, "Hey, you want to screw?" (Cynical, yes, we know.)

But if you don't have time for dinner and a movie, and you have to get past the assistant and in to see the boss before security arrives to toss you on your ass, you have to take a hit. You can reduce the time each roll takes, but in doing so, you take a penalty. The shorter the time frame becomes, the greater the penalty becomes. (See below.)

Roll Equals	Modifier
One day	+1
One hour	-1
Half-hour	-2
Ten minutes	-3
Five minutes	-4
One minute	-5

**Example:** *Jamie doesn't have a lot of time. Soon as the sisters get him to the basement and start cutting — well, his*

*focus will be gone and so will his chance to keep his skin. He doesn't really know how much time he's got, so he has to gamble. Jamie's player opts to allow for each roll in the extended action to be equal to five minutes, which grants him a not-too-lovely -4 penalty. But, fuck it. He's gotta keep his hands, and the player will spend Willpower to help mitigate the lost dice. He has to move this relationship from Casual to Intimate, and fast.*

## Resisting Sway

The target's Composure is usually subtracted from efforts to Sway them, though if they've been burned by you before, the higher of Resolve or Composure is used (Resolve enters the picture because their intelligence comes into question if they let you take advantage of them again; the Storyteller may thus rule that Resolve becomes the appropriate resistance Attribute). Sometimes, if the Sway demands the target violate his Morality, he can make an opposed roll of Morality + Composure to resist, with net successes for the persuader acting as reduced Sway.

## Using Sway

When you make your roll with a Social Skill (or hideous inhuman power) to generate some Sway, how do you describe it? You basically say what you're going for, what actions you want your target to take. Keep in mind the limitations of Casual, Intimate, and Unnatural Sway when doing this. Of course, a stranger won't do everything; some actions are too extreme for a target to consider without having some Rapport built up, first. But if you have the time (or know the techniques) you can attempt a deeper form of influence even with a stranger. Hostage negotiators and con-men practice this stuff: approaching targets, earning trust, forming a bond, and then hitting those targets with Intimate Sway that can elicit some dramatic changes in behavior. With Casual Sway, you couldn't make an attacker stop shooting and give you his gun, but you could convince him to stop shooting for a minute and listen to you.

So you first describe what you want the target to do, and then the Storyteller slices this up into distinctive separate sequential or parallel things. "I want to make him quit shooting for a goddamn minute, and listen to me while I explain things." That's two things — stop



shooting and listen. Each one of these things requires one point of Sway, which translates to one success on your roll. If you don't manage enough successes either you or the Storyteller chooses which get through. If the target of Sway chooses to resist the influence with Willpower, each point of Sway must be individually countered with one point of Willpower.

The effects of Sway usually don't last beyond the immediate exchange of action (unless you roll an exceptional success), but you can use points of Sway to extend the duration of the effects. One additional point makes it persist for the whole scene. Two for a whole session. Five for the remainder of the story. Points spent to extend the duration don't have to be countered with Willpower if the target actively resists.

Given the guidelines on the different kinds of Sway, the Storyteller can suggest an alternative if she thinks your stated intentions are too much of a stretch given the particulars of the chronicle and the situation at hand.

**Example:** *It's do-or-die time for Jamie, but with his extended Casual Sway action he managed to rekindle the one sister's softer feelings for him. Now, he's in a position to try something really heavy on her with Intimate Sway. His player thinks, and decides a simple appeal is best — "Babe, are you really going to let her slice me up? This whole thing is fucked up! It's not as simple as she's saying it is. I need time to explain it so it makes sense. Just give me a little time, and I can make it make sense!"*

The Storyteller, after a couple of questions for Jamie's player, arrives at these specific elements Jamie needs to achieve in his Sway attempt:

- Prevent her from leaving
- Make her listen to him
- Make her intercede and let Jamie go

To get all this, Jamie would need three points of Sway, or three successes.

This time, he's throwing Manipulation + Persuasion, and he's giving her his best terrified innocent face. He's got seven dice for this, and knocking her Composure out gives him five. He spends Willpower for another three dice, and throws his eight, and carries it with three successes.

Going down the sequential list, this could get her to do everything through making her try and let Jamie go, but that would mean the influence would be spent once she made the attempt. Narratively speaking, she'd work the cuffs and then pause to wonder what the hell she was doing.

Instead, Jamie's player elects to blow one success on extending the duration of the Sway up to the whole scene, and only getting the first two things he wanted from her. She'll stay, and she'll keep her sister from slicing his fingers off, but she's not prepared to actually let him go. Not yet.

## Saving Up Sway

If it was just a case where points translated into successes immediately, you wouldn't even need the points. But, what happens when you accumulate more points than are necessary?

First, you could spend them immediately on increasing the duration.

Second, you could bank them — note, of course, that points of Sway are specific to a character. You can't bank points after Swaying Tom and then later use them to Sway John, for instance.

It's also possible that you attempt to generate Sway without yet having any effects in mind. Just chatting up a mark at the bar might allow you to generate some Casual Sway, and you can take those successes and bank them for a later attempt.

You can't bank more than 10 points at a time.

Further, points of Casual Sway fade at a rate of one per day.

Points of Intimate Sway fade at a rate of one per week.

Points of Unnatural Sway do not fade at all.

Further, you can only attempt to generate Sway in this way (without ascribing actions to them) on one character per day.

Storytellers might also want to invoke a one-time "Sway per day" on any character, regardless of whether actions are queued up. This would help counter abuses of the system, should any come into play (as those referenced immediately below).

## Don't Tell Me How to Play My Character!

All right, here's where we admit that the mechanics for Sway are going to rub some players the wrong way. The complaint is valid, and many players have had bad experiences having their characters essentially yanked by mind-controlling bastards and the inconsiderate Storytellers who use them as antagonists. Sway attempts to quantify influence but what it does not do is dictate how a character must be played. Instead, it provides a template for action and puts the decision on what to do with it in the hands of the player. Say you get nailed with some Sway, and you flat don't like what the dice say you're being persuaded to do?

This is what Willpower is for. Spend a point of Willpower and neutralize a point of Sway. This can get pretty rough sometimes, and you might be making a decision about acquiescing partially to an enemy's demands or going all-in and shaking it off completely. But between your Virtue and Vice, recovering Willpower is easier than healing damage, and having to suck it up and go with Sway sometimes isn't going to kill your character like getting shot will. (Though, on the other side of the coin,

Willpower is harder to get back than Sway is to build, and this is why the recommendation above of limiting a Sway attempt on one character to once per day should be on the table for consideration.)

Okay, fine, we'll sweeten the deal. (As Billy Mays might say, "But wait, there's more!")

If you go with it — don't resist the Sway at all, but accept that your character has been convinced, and play it out in a way that's dramatic and cool and contributes to the chronicle — then you get a shiny gold experience point for it.

So the dynamic for Sway is this: pay Willpower to shrug it off, or own the Sway and earn experience for making things more interesting.

Now, I can imagine the crafty looks being exchanged around the table as these rules are explained to a group of clever players. "Hey, you Sway me, I'll Sway Russell, he'll Sway Chuck, and he'll Sway you. We all do it, and get experience! Woo! We've broken the game!"

Sorry, you can't do this. It's a rule, and ultimately the Storyteller has the veto on whether caving to Sway makes the chronicle better. She's officially here and now instructed to be generous in her judgments, and to always suggest alternatives before declaring a definitive "NO!" but if you try some kind of circle-jerk infinite experience shenanigans, she'll squash it. Or throw dice at your head.

Now this is not to say that players can never cash in this way by going with the Sway generated by another player's character, but it has to be cool, and it has to be worth it, and it has to make the chronicle better.

## Swaying Storyteller Characters

The main way to actively resist Sway is by spending Willpower, and Storyteller characters have as much of this as the Storyteller sees fit to give them. They also don't have to worry about recovering spent Willpower or making decisions on resisting now versus having some Willpower to use later on in the scene.

*Example: Well, two can play this game, the Storyteller thinks. The little sister turns her charms on the helpless Jamie after Big Sister stomps off in a huff over the interference. She's asking for assurances, asking for Jamie to say he really does love her. Asking for him to help her, just give her a little something about the stolen six million... a little something to give to Big Sister to keep her from coming back. She's rolling her Presence + Persuasion minus Jamie's three Composure, but that still gives her five dice. Perhaps, she says, if they had the money they could go away, and start over... Big Sister isn't the boss like she's always trying to be...*

The Storyteller is limited to Casual Sway (as Jamie is still in manipulative bastard mode), but could use it to get some hints from Jamie. She outlines these things:

- Admit he has the loot hidden.
- Hint at whether it's close or far away.

The Storyteller rolls for her, and gets two successes.

Jamie's player has the Willpower, and could shrug off the Sway if he wanted, but... instead, he elects to take the experience point, and go with it. They play out the scene. Jamie gets persuaded, admits he's got it, and it's close. (He can't and won't lie, not unless he spends Willpower to counter.)

## Confession

Sway can be used to elicit confession or gain information from a target (within the limits of the kind of Sway being imposed) at the general exchange rate of 1 point of Sway for each useful but reasonably specific information revealed or question answered. Since this will most often be the Storyteller's character getting it this way, she's the one deciding how to phrase the character's answers, but if the Sway mechanics are to mean anything, then she must provide useful information to the players as a result of their efforts.

A confession can be done with leading questions, or can be done just in the hopes of prying loose-but-useful information without knowing what to ask for.

## Dogpiling

Again, clever readers, I imagine at this point you're smiling at the obvious exploit — get everyone in the group to hit the target with Sway-generating social actions to deplete their Willpower, and force them to capitulate to the real demands. And, to a limited extent, this is entirely permissible, indeed, encouraged. Ganging up on the weak is a timeless and treasured pastime of schoolyard bullies and homicide detectives on TV.

That demands limits. First off, if the Storyteller thinks the Sway being generated is boring, and it's degenerated into strictly a mechanical exercise in Willpower pinging, then he can call bullshit on the actions, and call them for what they are. Secondly, there's a certain amount of diminishing return when doing this, and further attempts to generate Sway against a single target within the scene suffer a cumulative -1 die penalty if they're based on different skills, and a cumulative -3 die penalty if they're based on the same skills. Past a certain point, all the set-up work done to break down the target's resistance could leave her totally numb to social influence when the real questions finally get asked.

Also, consider once more the optional rule of limiting a Sway attempt against one character to one time per day — that means that, while everyone here gets their shot in, they cannot continue to hammer away roll after roll. For each, it's one and done.





## Good Cop Bad Cop

What's the recipe for this classic cocktail? It falls under the heading of Dogpiling, but it's traditionally done with only two dogs. This is pretty simple, really. The cops scope out the target, and try and get a sense of the best approach. They try and figure how close they'll have to get to the skull, what kind of Rapport they'll need to create to get the information they want. A reluctant witness might only need some Casual Sway, and a quick one-two punch of Bad (Intimidate) and Good (Socialize) to get them to spill.

A fashionable member of the criminal set sporting a lovely collection of shiv scars and jail house tats might need significantly longer, and a totally different approach. Bad tries the buddy-buddy (Socialize), and Good follows up with a sensible offer (Persuasion). Regardless of the situation and the skills, Bad Cop works to wrong-foot the target, and mechanically speaking, chew into his Willpower reserves. Good Cop uses a different approach, with appropriate theater, and takes advantage of the target's depleted ability to resist, and does it with a different skill to minimize the penalties for dogpiling.

## Respect My Authority

Fighters have their guns and knives... what do social heavies hit with? They have social position, authority, badges, white doctor's coats, police cars, uniforms. Most Social Merits can be used this way, providing a bonus equal to their value if they're appropriate to the situation and the conflict. Some forms of authority won't impress certain characters — the honest citizen is much more likely to be impressed by the authority society invests in a police officer than a third-strike gangbanger who's spent most of his adult life behind bars.

In the famously disturbing Milgram experiments, the subject was told by a stern actor dressed as a lab technician that they were participating in a test of memory and learning, and they were to shock an unseen "student" when they answered questions incorrectly. A genuinely frightening majority of ordinary people pushed the electric shocks up to lethal levels when told by the authority figure that they must do so. Perhaps even more damning, even among those who refused to administer the final "lethal" shock, none demanded the experiment end, and none sought to check on the welfare of the person they believed they'd been electrocuting. The experiment was repeated across a wide cultural and geographic spectrum, with consistent results.

The human animal is hardwired to obey those perceived to have authority.

Exploiting this can be as easy as throwing on a white coat and draping a stethoscope around your neck when tying to bluster a look at a patient's medical records. Assume the mantle of physician in the context of a hospital, and you can use that authority the way a shootist uses a revolver.

## Swaying the Crazies

When Morality craters, relating to sane non-damaged people gets harder. An ethical zombie might counterfeit the signs of Morality, but on some level she's lost the ability to relate to other people. Some are born this way. Some get their empathy traumatized out of them. Regardless, how do you Sway a person who lacks the ability to relate to other human beings? All efforts at such persuasion must be couched in terms of self-interest, or backed up with the promise of really unpleasant consequences should obedience not come quickly. One possibility too, is this — someone trying to Sway another person unlike them has a difficult time doing so. A sane person with high Morality trying to Sway an insane person (with or without low Morality) is likely to suffer a -3 penalty. But, birds of a feather, and all that... if the crazy guy is trying to convince another crazy guy, you might suggest that the attempt is on the same playing field. No penalty is necessary (and, in fact, a +1 to +3 bonus might be in play if de-rangements are properly exploited).

## Evil Yoga and Aggressive Face Washing

So there you sit in your mother's living room, and bound to one of her dining room chairs with zip ties that are making his hands turn purple is a man you're going to brutalize, maim, dehumanize, and degrade. He can't talk yet because you haven't taken the tape off his mouth, and his heavy panicked breathing is blowing threads of bloody snot out of his nose. On the Dukes of Hazzard TV tray you ate off of as a kid you've spread out a collection of your mother's good knives, a corkscrew, a tube of long fireplace matches, and a cordless drill from the garage. Next to the drill, there's a random clutter of bits, routers, and one nasty looking thing used to cut holes in doors for the knobs to go through. You're going to use that on the big muscle in his thighs because you read online that it's excruciatingly painful, but won't kill. They say you make the victim watch the damage hap-

pen so it bores into their mind as it bores into their leg meat. All the while, you keep up a banter. You talk about trivial things — especially about your family. You never let the victim dehumanize you even as you dehumanize him; you never let him demonize you, form a mythology around the person destroying him. As a last touch, you put a picture of your daughter down on the tray so the man can see it.

But ask yourself: how the fuck did it come to this?

Torture is as much about the perpetrator as the victim. Inflicting suffering on another human is a great way to get them to say anything you want them to say, anything to stop the pain. They try and figure out what you want to hear — truth, lies, fantasy, or confession. Their whole agenda gets hijacked by animal survival and fear. They're trying to tell you what you want to hear to make you stop hurting them, and that's not going to be reliably accurate. The issue is basically one of mixed messages. When framing the goal or torture, it might be "make him tell me where my daughter is" but the way most people are wired, as soon as the pain and horror pass a certain threshold that intent gets warped to something like, "make him tell me something to stop me cutting on him" which might (or might not) actually answer my stated questions. It's a really messy business, and has a long history of being better at eliciting false confessions than accurate information.

Torture done right (or very wrong) means doing it slowly and forming a twisted relationship between torturer and victim, and in game terms, creating a situation where the torturer can start imposing Intimate Sway, because until then all the Casual Sway in the world won't make a hardened or driven individual divulge their most valuable secrets.

In the right circumstances, physical damage can act as Sway, if it's inflicted with the right deliberate cruelty. If the intent is to inflict agony and fear, then damage inflicted with physical torture is treated as Casual Sway. It still takes Intimate Sway to start breaking down the victim's psyche on a fundamental level, but the physical abuse chews up their ability to resist.

Now, what about the bloody-handed man with the scalpel and jumper cables?

His Morality is going to take a mauling, assuming he's not already a psycho with his soul worn down to a nub. Psychological defense mechanisms and comforting lies are elements bound into our wiring. Dehumanization is a classic number. Convince yourself that the person you're destroying isn't really human, or at least, isn't human the way you and your people are. There's also the comforting power of somebody else's authority — obey orders, offload responsibility. More intellectual torturers might try and think that ends justifying means. The upshot is, the success or failure of these gambits is a function



of the Morality rolls: succeed, and you manage to justify the horror enough not to degenerate. Fail, and welcome to the exciting new world of diminished capacity to tell right from wrong.

The Storyteller has another weapon in her arsenal when handling torture in a chronicle — how it is described.

Sometimes, she may want to draw a veil over such a scene, and deal with the moral and emotional fallout after the fact, successful or not. Other times, she doesn't feel like sparing the players wholly from their choices, and provides some details. Not all groups will be comfortable with in-character actions making the players uncomfortable, but others will appreciate the intensity this can bring to the situation.

## Anticipation (“I’ve Got a Bad Feeling About This”)

One of the classic twists is the revelation that a character has anticipated a misfortune, and already planned for it — indeed, perhaps even made the disaster part of their larger plan. The audience smiles or gasps. Playing smart characters is tricky because typically, you've got to be out ahead of things, and anticipating complicated circumstances in the chronicle actually requires the player be as smart as his character, and as invested in long-term planning in the game. So, to provide a way to keep character intelligence separate from player intelligence, and to establish a pattern of play that maps fairly well to the revelation-of-genius thing, we've got Anticipation.

This element gives players mechanics that allow them to *retcon* (the mashup of “retroactive continuity”) events that have already happened in the chronicle, casting them in a new light and revealing actions or preparations taken in a brief descriptive flashback. Within the story, this happens as if by dramatic reveal. The player makes the required rolls at the moment when the effects become relevant, and then explains how their smart character, at some point in the past, foresaw this situation or one like it, and planned ahead.

Given the perspective of having seen events unfold in the story, players can then counterfeit genius fairly easily without having to do any mental heavy lifting along the way, and it partially removes player intelligence as a hard cap on effective character intelligence. Added bonus, the “revelation” moment in the game mirrors that in the source media that inspired this module.

**Example:** *Let's invert the story. Rather than Jamie being the player character, the Big Sister is. So we'll need to give them names. Big Sister is Ruth-Anne (Ruthie) and Little*

*Sister is Jane. Ruthie was working with her then-boyfriend on a successful heist that netted them six and a quarter mill. Then, her boyfriend betrayed her, beat her so badly she needed reconstructive surgery, shot her, and tossed her down a gully. Ruthie is not happy about this situation. She's engaged to her plastic surgeon who's the real deal, but wholly ignorant of her past — and how ruthless Ruthie can be. She wants to keep him in the dark, and still extract some pain (and green) from her murderous ex. She and her sister formulate a plan to con him into revealing the location of the loot, but it just didn't work out that way. Which brings everyone together in the kitchen.*

## What a Twist

How do you actually do this? Anticipation is something a player can call for once per session for free. Additional instances of being this super awesome clever in a session cost a point of Willpower, and even then are limited to once per scene.

The Anticipation roll is based typically on a Mental Attribute and Skill, modified as circumstances dictate. You say roughly what you want the results of your Anticipation to be in the immediate context. The Storyteller can impose additional penalties if you're really stretching credibility. Once you have your dice pool, you roll it. Success means you indeed anticipated the present situation or one like it, and took some appropriate action. The total number of successes generated impacts how profoundly and accurately you anticipated things and how closely they matched your projections, and consequently, how well you were able to prepare yourself.

**Example:** *Ruthie wants to ambush Jamie in the kitchen, and catch the bastard at his most vulnerable — in his boxers, before he's had a cup of coffee. She arranges with her sister to be waiting for him, and then just like she remembers from their time together, he gets up early to wander down to the kitchen in his boxers for some alone time before the day begins. Now, how did Ruthie's player establish that this was Jamie's familiar pattern, and how did she establish that's how it was going to go down this time? With an Anticipation roll.*

## No. Sorry. Not Buying It

One issue with Anticipation is that a player may wish to have some kind of advantage in the current scene, but can't think of a plausible (for your group's typical value of “plausible”) way to have anticipated it. Who could've foreseen the attack by the assault-rifle wielding Nosferatu jumping out of the fast food drive-thru window at three o'clock in the morning? The Storyteller can impose penalties for Anticipations that seem too far gone, ranging from -1 for small stretched to -5 for ridiculous and highly improbable ones, or can veto

it entirely if need be. However, rather than completely veto the player's desire to have foreseen something, the Storyteller and indeed the whole group can offer more reasonable alternatives. The purpose of the Anticipation module is to give smart characters a way to make being smart matter in dramatic ways and some mechanics to make it fun to resolve, and a half-dozen canine addled brains can come up with more ideas on the spot than a single caffeine addled brain.

### Creating Dramatic Shifts

Anticipation can make some fairly dramatic shifts to things on the level of the story, and sometimes this is enough — especially if it means having thought to bring a gun to the knife fight in which you currently find yourself. But if you need to know how much your Anticipation puts you at an advantage, treat the successes generated to anticipate action as a pool of bonus dice that can be spent to add to a tangentially related roll. If you drop the gun out of your sleeve with a magician's flourish, then spending the anticipatory bonus dice on your first attack roll would be acceptable. It's also quite kosher to use these dice to assist in the generation of Sway. That gun would make a very effective aid to intimidation if you want to use it to cow your attackers instead of opening up holes from which all their blood will fall out.

### Rolling It

**Dice Pool:** Mental Attribute + a Mental Skill.

**Action:** Instant

**Cost:** First is free during the game session; each one after costs an cumulative +1 point of Willpower (so, using this three times in a game session means the first is free, the second costs one point of Willpower, and the third costs two)

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** You anticipate trouble... but not the trouble you're actually in. You're actually less prepared because you've been so badly wrong-footed, and suffer a -1 die penalty to all actions for the remainder of the scene.

**Failure:** You simply fail to have foreseen this current situation. Situation Normal, All Fucked Up.

**Success:** As described above, your ability to predict events earns you extra dice and an impact on the story. "Impact on the story" means working with the Storyteller to retcon ("rewrite") events to your character's advantage, gaining bonus dice where appropriate (bonus dice equal to successes gained). Examples can be found below.

**Exceptional Success:** You anticipated the situation so completely that you get an additional bonus die that you can use for any relevant roll during the remainder of the scene.





**Example:** *Ruthie player rolls Intelligence + Empathy (six dice) which is the pool the Storyteller and she agreed made sense to predict someone's actions based on their previous actions. Given the past relationship, the Storyteller also decides this isn't much of a stretch, and imposes no penalty. Ruthie's player rolls, and gets two successes. She's waiting for Jamie when, just as she knew he would, he stumbles into the kitchen to find her waiting for him.*

## Earning Your Preparedness Badge

One way to use Anticipation is to declare that you foresaw the possibility of being gunned down, and so wore a bullet resistant vest. It's a scene that pops up again and again — a main character is gunned down, seemingly killed, only to have them rip open their shirt to show the bullets flattened against their previously-hidden (and unguessed at) body armor. Popular alternatives include thick silver serving trays, a pocket Bible, and the doors from wood-burning stoves.

This sort of revelation can get out of hand, and so it's not always easy to manage.

Essentially, any anticipatory retcon will quickly lose its spark if overused, so each should be permitted sparingly — if a player, upon success, attempts to use a previously declared retcon (declared by this player or another one in the troupe), you have a few options.

## Magic 8-Ball Says “Reply Hazy Ask Again Later”

The Anticipation module can do double-duty for you. You can use these mechanics to represent the effects of prophetic powers rather than super-smarts. Everything works the same, except you'd be using it with some kind of magic or other supernatural ability rather than mundane Mental skills. About the only difference here is that rather than look smug and say, “Ha ha ha, just as I expected!” you say, “Ha ha ha! Just as the Ancestor Spirits told me it must happen!” This beats the awful tendency for players to completely goof a good prophecy or bit of precognition by refusing to ride the train despite you generously buying them a ticket. Some players just don't like railroads.

As another optional portion of this module, the Storyteller can decide to allow access to forms of divination and fortunetelling without a specific advantage via the Occult Skill. If this is done, then those with the Occult Skill can use it to make Anticipation rolls normally.

One, as Storyteller you can demand a different retcon, or say that it fails.

Two, you can say, “It works,” but take an additional Willpower point as a “toll” for replaying old, worn-out ideas. (An alternate toll is experience points — take one or two of those hard-earned suckers, instead.)

Three, you can make sure that all players declare the retcon result of an Anticipation roll *before* making the roll — if a player rehashes an old retcon, incur an appropriate penalty (cumulative -2 for each time it's used, maximum -5!).

## Anticipating Anticipation

*“I knew you would double-cross me, and that's why I notified the police before coming here, and look, here they are now.”*

*“Oh bravo, very good. Yes, it was very inconvenient hiring someone who could convincingly portray for you a senior narcotics officer as well as ‘Officer’ Murray did, but*

## The Battle of Wits

Whether played out within the immediate action of scene itself, or across a broader plane of the whole chronicle (see Unreliable Narrators on pg 115), Anticipation makes a good set of mechanics for handling battles of wits. *I knew you'd put the poison in my glass, so I'll pick your glass. Well, I knew you'd think this, which is why I used a poison I'm immune to, and put it in both glasses.*

This can be played out as an extended resisted action, with each participant trying to accumulate enough successes to beat their opponent before running out of the Willpower they need to keep rolling. Since this is considered an extended roll, it just barely slides under “one Anticipation roll per scene max” rule, but to keep it from getting out of hand, each roll of the dice beyond the first in the session costs 1 Willpower. As the battle grinds on, the participants deplete their Willpower reserves, and the battle ends when one or both choose to stop or can't continue.

Take this to a grander scale, and you have masterminds controlling people, organizations, public opinions, and laying down plans within plans within plans to defeat their unseen opponent. On this level, the anticipatory battle of wits can provide the structure for a whole session of play, with each scene spawned by the results of the battle of wits (er, not necessarily Wits) rolls, with the players finding themselves dealing with the fallout from the battle “on the ground.”

*the other fellows don't share his acting ability, though they are quite excellent shots with those automatics of theirs."*

No reason a character, suffering because an opponent's anticipatory action hosed them, can't respond with their own Anticipation — but remember that each character can only attempt this once in a scene.

## The Setup

### ("This Is How It Really Is")

The Setup is like Anticipation, but involves a deeper level of detail, and usually includes the help of other characters. This module works fairly simply — one character initiates the Setup exactly like Anticipation (relevant Mental Attribute + relevant Mental Skill, unless another Skill is more appropriate), and then instead of them simply explaining how they took precautions or saw this coming, the story instead moves to a flashback scene, and the preparations are actually played out. When this nested scene is completed, the focus of the chronicle snaps back to the “present” and the interrupted scene is resolved, with the flashback now reframing what's going on. (For added fun, begin a game session with the after-effects, and then use this Setup element to flashback on how it got here.)

The Setup roll is not used to determine the advantage earned like in Anticipation, rather this is generated by what the characters do during the flashback scene. If you initiate one, you get to frame the scene — say where it is, when it is, who's there, what's going on. Then the Storyteller picks up and provides the usual opposition and challenges. The character doing the Setup has to pay one Willpower dot to initiate the Setup. (Why one dot? Because this is a potentially huge retcon, and a game-breaking moment. Remember that a dot can be repurchased by spending eight experience points. Alternately, if the Storyteller feels this is too severe, we recommend an expenditure of Willpower points equal to player characters who will participate in the Setup.)

Setup scenes should run fairly quickly, and include only what's relevant to the part of the story being changed (read: “hosed”) by them.

It's recommended that the Setup element only be allowed to enter play once per story. That said, this technique is used frequently in heist and con films — cutting to a flashback at a dramatic moment to show how the hero-thieves already escaped the seeming disaster they're facing. In just such a game, it might be worth using this once per session, instead.

Setups can break the flow of a game pretty dramatically, putting an intense scene on hold to play out a humdrum one. Storytellers and players should come together to create a dynamic scene of suspense and tension, rather

than some yawn-worthy extrapolation of events. Ideally, players should get to feel clever and excited by the possibility of turning tables on an already existent scene.

**Example:** Taking the inverted example of *Ruthie versus Jamie*, this whole situation with the kitchen could have happened first — rather than play out the con she and her sister run on Jamie, her player could instead declare at the moment in the kitchen that the whole thing was a Setup from the beginning, roll Wits + Persuasion, and then run a flashback three months previous to the beach, and luring Jamie with Jane.

As an option, the Storyteller can limit the power of the Setup by limiting the number of dice rolls the characters can make during the nested Setup flashback scene.

So, when the initiator rolls Mental Attribute + Skill, however many successes she gets is the total number of rolls that can be made by all players whose characters are involved in the scene.

If the initiator got only two successes, then the troupe can only afford two total dice rolls during the scene, so they better make them count. The initiator (with or without the troupe's help) still gets to set up the scene, but if any action would require a roll, then that roll takes away from the count.

An example would be, the characters are pinned down by gunfire from across the street, and they're stuck hiding behind a dumpster, and are totally out of bullets. It would seem that they're fucked, but one player initiates a Setup by spending a Willpower dot — the Storyteller allows for a Wits + Streetwise roll to go back and allow a change of conditions on this city street. The player gets two successes, and thus, two rolls.

They decide that they showed up at a sanitation company earlier in the day. They spend one roll for one character to sneak them into the building, and they spend the second and final roll to “convince” (read: bribe) one of the truck drivers to do a little freelance for them that night.

Fast-forward back to the main scene, and just as they run out of bullets, along comes Joe the Trash Truck Driver, who not only blocks the bullets with his giant monster of a truck, but also backs up, allowing the characters to hop in the back, thus making their escape.

## Your Sudden But Inevitable Betrayal

Combine the Setup with Sway, and you can pull such marvelous bastardry as having your enemy's henchmen suddenly turn their guns on him. You try and use the Setup flashback to suborn an enemy, winning enough Sway over them to turn their loyalties (at least temporarily) in your favor. Bribery (using your Resources as a “weapon” on the roll) or other forms of influence can work to generate Sway and change up the scenario.

An even more devious way to do this is to run the Setup when you're carrying enough experience points to



add some Allies, and then spend them to make the guy you're trying to win over an actual on-your-character-sheet ally who'll help you beyond your immediate desire to have him screw somebody over for you.

**Example:** *Who's to say that the barely-sketched Storyteller character Jane was even Ruthie's sister when the scene began? Perhaps this represents a devastating use of the Setup to turn an enemy's allies into your allies. In this case, the flashback could carry Ruthie back to a reconciliation with her long-estranged sister after Ruthie sprung her from a secure mental institution, and their subsequent plan to get revenge on Ruthie's would-be murderer... Ruthie's player could then spend experience points to make the newly turned character her ally.*



## Training Montage

If you've got the experience points banked, how about a dramatic revelation of unguessed-at powers and Skills? This you see fairly often too — the hero suddenly whips out an ability there was no inkling he'd previously possessed... even when logic would suggest he should have done so. Use Setup to give yourself a training montage — a series of scenes in which you practice just the right sort of abilities to deal with the “present” menace, then spend the experience points, and bam — you got the power.



## The Long Con

This one involves some major retconning — here the Setup carries you and the other characters back to the planning stages of a con you are going to run on a target even though this has never been mentioned up until this point before. This recasts all the action in the chronicle between the time the Setup flashback takes place and the “present” moment in a different light. It makes it all a choreographed operation designed to bring you all to this point, in these circumstances, which despite first appearances are actually precisely as you planned them. It makes you and your accomplices the prime movers in your story, even if it seemed like you've been doing nothing but reacting the whole time.

Need we drop another “use with caution” note here?

This use of the Setup will fuck the shit out of Storyteller plots and plans, and possibly hose the plans of other players. It can transform almost anything in the chronicle's past, not so much by altering events, but

radically changing what they mean and meant, and how they relate to the present. Then again, the Storyteller might be happy if the story ends up cool, and every player at the table comes away with a great feeling of success and memory.

## Unreliable Narrators (And Other Dirty Tricks)

The Cadillac of Retcons is the revelation of the unreliable narrator — the story as it is played out is revealed to be a false narrative, told to confuse a listener or reading an account, and could be revealed to be an artifact like the character's actual in-game journal or something similar.

Then, at the moment the Setup mechanics are employed by the player, the imaginary reader sees the line, “And now my friend, have you enjoyed this tale I've fabricated for your amusement? Has it distracted you long enough?”

If the Long Con can fuck continuity, then the Unreliable Narrator stages a drunken orgy with it. This is a major hose-job for chronicle continuity, and can make a whole chunk of play “not real”... it's akin to waking up to find that the past story arc was only a dream or hallucination, but if the chronicle is approached more like episodic TV than an actual chronicle of events that happened to the characters, then more narrative structures become available, and there's more room to screw around with things via the Anticipation and Setup modules.

Anytime one player rewrites the history of the chronicle or declares a portion of it to be outside the continuity of the rest then there's got to be some Storyteller oversight, and the other players have to be cool with it. It can suck, if you've had a really awesome dramatic moment in play, and then later it turns out to have all been (in the context of the story) a lie spun by another character to hose a particular Storyteller character. This is why by default Anticipations and Setups must nest within established chronicle continuity, and generally only involve the initiating character and those of players who explicitly agree to go along with it.

But, if the players are willing to step outside these limitations, and embrace the potential mind-fuck, then expanding the potential for the Setup mechanics to wholly rewrite or reinterpret past events can make for powerful (if rarely completely comfortable) play. For chronicles with themes of memory, identity, the weight of history, and the consequences of hubris, the mechanics can really serve to emphasize them.

If these options are going to be used, everyone should know up front, understand how they work, and sign off on it because it will affect all the characters and the Storyteller's ability to control the narrative.



## Going into Drama Debt

Your character is brilliant but you were up all night and by game-time haven't had any coffee yet. Even with Setup and Anticipation available, sometimes cooking up the justifications for your character to gain unexpected advantage is just more than you can hack. If the Storyteller is willing, you can simply roll it out, figure your advantage, explain how it manifests (without explaining why at all) and leave it to the Storyteller to later present you with the flashback in which you'll pay back the advantage you'd previously borrowed.

Of course, she's going to totally murder you with interest. It is the Storyteller's job to make things interesting — and, making things interesting often means “conflict,” as noted at the fore of this chapter.

## Declaration

### (“Because I Said So!”)

Where Anticipation relies on insight and forethought, Declaration relies on awareness and knowledge. If the Declaration module is used, then players can make a special kind of roll with their mental traits in order to have their characters dramatically become aware of something or recall something relevant, and in game-play terms, allow the player to declare certain details to be true and retroactively to have always been true in the chronology of the game.

Declaration simulates both the keen observer and the broadly knowledgeable, and lets players fill in undefined elements of the chronicle's setting. The exchange rate is one fairly specific fact per success rolled. As with Anticipation, the first use of Declaration in a session is free, but subsequent uses costs a cumulative point of Willpower (so once for the second instance, two for the third, three for the fourth, and so on), and only one Declaration roll can be made per scene.

**What Declaration Can Do** — Add details that become fact within the chronicle's setting. Make statements about Storyteller characters or small groups or organizations

**What Declaration Can't Do** — Redefine a player's character without her permission. Contradict previously established facts. Make sweeping statements about whole populations rather than small groups or individuals.

**Example:** Let's revert Jamie's story, and make the bastard the protagonist (and player character) once again. He employs Declaration when he studies Ruthie, and notices the details reflecting the beating she'd suffered at his hands. The weakness in her left side, the badly tracking left eye, that she's holding herself as if in pain. His player is defining

things that he'll be able to use to his advantage if he makes a play for the gun she's got on the table. If the Storyteller has nothing planned that hinges on these facts, they stand and become true in the story from this point forward.

## What Do I Roll?

For observation, you'd use Wits as your base, for remembering something relevant, Intelligence. But which Skill to use? With Declaration, you can use any Skill that relates to the situation or the facts you intended to introduce. Recognizing (and Declaring) a Storyteller character as an acquaintance (and notorious drunk) you knew in High School could be rolled with Intelligence + Socialize, for example. Noting a gun with a particular modification is prone to jamming could be Intelligence + Firearms. Spotting that a mark is religious, and would respond well to a con fronted by a fake preacher would be Wits + Academics (or Occult).

Sometimes, the facts you want to insert might cross-over between different skills... the man's holding an unreliable firearm in a hand shaky from Oxycodone withdrawal and he's sweating and sniffing enough to make you think he's running a fever. In these cases, add the lowest of the skills you wish to use. If the Storyteller or other players think you're getting way too many facts into the game about a character's abusive childhood with your Crafts skill, they can nix the details and suggest alternatives. In a sense, what this means is that if you roll nothing but your raw Intelligence or Wits attribute, you don't have any restrictions on the things you could notice or remember. Skills give you more dice, but limit the scope of your Declarations.

**Example:** Jamie is doing a very simple set of observations and inductions, and using Wits + Medicine to do it. He's using Medicine because it's the lowest of those details his player is creating are most thematically similar to. Note that he's not inventing details wholesale — he's taking details provided by the Storyteller, and building smaller stories around pre-existing details. This is an organic way of creating Declarations.

## What Do I Win?

The introduction of new facts into the chronicle has story-level effects that can become dramatic, and these Declarations can be marvelous hooks onto which to hang future plots. A casual use of Declaration and Wits + Intelligence to recognize the signs of someone who's suffered in abusive relationships might spin off into a whole subplot dealing with that character's fucked up family life. Every time a player adds additional details to the chronicle's setting, it gives the Storyteller, cruel mad genius that she is, more parts with which to build the narrative equivalent of a biting cyborg Doberman.



Declarations also generate a pool of dice equal to twice the successes rolled, and the player can add these successes as bonus dice to any rolls made during the scene used to exploit or build off the new Declarations.

These get used up, however — if the player has three successes, she can add three dice across one or a handful of dice rolls, but once a success is applied as a bonus die, it's gone.

### Roll Results

#### Dramatic Failure:

You remember something or notice something and... it's completely irrelevant. Worse, it's dangerously misleading. You suffer a -1 penalty for the rest of the scene as your assumptions are proved disastrously wrong and the confidence you gained from them kick over and over in the testicles until it vomits on itself.

**Failure:** You simply fail to notice or recall anything useful. So much for the value of a classical education

**Success:** As described above, your ability to notice details or recall useful information earns you extra dice (double the successes rolled) and an impact on the story.

**Exceptional Success:** In addition to the bonus dice (as per success), you also get a +1 bonus to all rolls relevant to the new Declarations; this bonus lasts for the remainder of the scene.

**Example:** Jamie's pool for this Declaration is five dice, and he manages a lucky two successes. The other things he observes may or may not be accurate, but Ruthie really is weak on her left side, and her left eye really is messed up. That would be four dice he could add to his action when he takes advantage of this at some point. Plus, those Declarations are now "true" for the game setting, and the Storyteller can use these elements if need be.



## The Storyteller's Prerogative

Sometimes, Declarations might contradict things the Storyteller has already plotted out, planned, or built into the backstory or personality of a significant one of her characters (note we didn't say, "things the Storyteller has already established" — if he hasn't put them into play yet, they don't "exist"). A Storyteller can always decline a Declaration by saying it is contradictory. This itself gives the player some useful information — there's something there to be uncovered! Some secret to be wheedled out! But further, the player gets to make another Declaration instead of the declined one, so it all remains equitable.

## Investigation: Swiss-Army Skill?

So, can Investigation be used to make any kind of Declaration? Well, sort of. Investigation is a skill focused on uncovering things. That's all it does. So is it the only skill you'll ever need to make Declarations? Nah. Investigation has some limitations on how it's used in this context. You've got to say in some general terms at least how you're looking and what you're looking for, and this serves to focus the details you can declare with success. If you're searching through the morgue at the local paper, looking back over their archive of dead papers for references to a suspect's criminality in the 70s, you can't make Declarations about their current activity online. You just don't have the access within the scope of the roll.

Investigation is also most frequently used to uncover true things the Storyteller has already pre-plotted rather than giving you, the player, the power to define those things on the fly in play. Both forms are exciting and provide a different experience. In fact, with the Storyteller prerogative to decline Declarations if they contradict as-yet unrevealed but significant facts, both modes of representing the smart and observant character are really important.

## New Merits

The following Merits are bound up with the above section, relating to the new mechanics given to Mental and Social manipulations. Players, before purchasing these Merits, check with your Storyteller to make sure what systems she'll be implementing — if this story won't ever make use of Sway mechanics, then don't buy Sway Merits (unless you feel like just throwing your Merit points into a dark, bottomless hole).

## Sway: Trustworthy Face (●)

**Effect:** You just have one of those faces people tend to trust, without any particular rational reason for them doing so. If they stopped to think about it they might reconsider, so don't give them the chance. Gain +2 bonus on all Casual Sway attempts.

## Sway: Once Burned (●●)

**Effect:** You used to trust people, until betrayal (or your base suspicious nature) got in the way. Now, it is extremely difficult to Sway you. You double your Composure or Resolve when resisting Sway.

**Drawback:** Trust is impossible, even when it might serve your character in the long term. If you have Willpower, you must spend it to resist Sway, and can never willingly go along with it in order to gain the bonus experience.

## Sway: Magnificent Bastard (●●●)

**Effect:** Even people whose trust you've abused, who've been warned against you, or who catch you in the most compromising situations just can't, for some reason, bring themselves to condemn you for it. You suffer no circumstantial penalties for your Swaying actions. Even if your target knows you're a no-good lying sack of shit, the knowledge won't help them at all.

## Sway: It's Like I've Known You My Whole Life (●●●●)

**Effect:** You form rapport with strangers and acquaintances with astonishing speed, rapidly striking up warm and sometimes intimate conversations with people you've only just met. The time it takes to move a relationship from Casual Sway to Intimate Sway is halved (see table on p. 106).

## Sway: Cut to the Heart (●●●●●)

**Effect:** You have an insight into human nature (either studies or intuitive) that is so profound you can use Intimate Sway with anyone — strangers, cellmates, taxi drivers. Nobody is safe from your uncanny manipulation of mind.

## Anticipation: Unpredictable (●●●)

**Effect:** You are almost impossible to Anticipate, and still worse for your very clever enemies, very good at using their best-guesses against them. If anyone tries to use Anticipation on you, you may counter it with an opposed roll (the dice pool would be the most appropriate based on their roll), and if you're successful, you claim your successes on this roll as a bonus of your own and neutralize any they would have earned.



### Setup: Faceman ,(●)

**Effect:** You are adept at using Social Skills during Setup scenes, fixing future advantage by being charming and persuasive. Add three dice to a Social roll made during a Setup scene.

### Setup: Coordinator ,(●●● or ●●●●)

**Effect:** You are extremely good at organizing others during Setups — you can include as many characters or allied Storyteller characters as you wish in a Setup with only a basic success on the check required. The four-dot version allows that, *and* lets you have an additional roll per Setup flashback.

### Setup: Mastermind ,(●●●●●)

**Effect:** You are always three steps ahead of everyone else, and are a master of organizing perfect Setups. You can include as many of your allies as you wish in a Setup, and they all gain a bonus to their dice rolls during that scene equal to your successes on the Setup roll.

### Declaration: Ear for Gossip ,(●)

**Effect:** You have a catalog of secrets and scandals in your head, and are always hearing more. If someone is well-known or famous, chances are you'll know something about them. You can add a target's Status or Fame Merits to your rolls to make Declarations about them, so long as the facts you declare are those you could reasonably know by word of mouth.

### Declaration: Holmesian Deduction ,(●●●)

**Effect:** “When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.” You have a knack for uncovering (via the Declaration mechanics) the bizarre, macabre, and unlikely. You do not suffer penalties when your Declarations stretch probability so long as they come with sufficiently strange details the Storyteller can use to complicate and embellish future drama.

### Declaration: Shocking Revelation ,(●●●●●)

**Effect:** You can make Declarations to devastating effect that can make those of a nervous disposition collapse, the deranged suffer a psychotic episode, and the honorable commit suicide in shame. In effect, your Revelation has the effect of Intimate Sway in addition to its effects as a Declaration. You get to say the first thing the Declaration will make the target do, the Storyteller the second, you the third, and so on until you are both satisfied. When the roll is made, the successes are referenced against this ladder of extremis, and the victim's reactions determined.

## Plug-Ins

Here's where the magic happens — the books you hold are filled with optional and new systems, the one you've just read included. So how to get these things to synergize and work together? Here's a few plug-ins for other Mirrors systems that tie strongly to this one.

## Rapport & Relationships

Sway and Rapport work very well together. The map can tell you who can use Intimate Sway on whom. Rapport can also serve as a bonus to Sway attempts. Sway can be used to mess with existing Rapport, increasing it or reducing it by the Successes of a Swaying roll. Casual Sway could be used to do this temporarily — say, cause an argument between friends, which briefly alienates them. Intimate Sway can permanently damage Rapport, or increase it.

Rapport can also be used with Anticipation, Setup, and Declaration — familiarity can serve to enhance all of these things.


## Skill Tricks

Rather than use the Merits described above, Skill Tricks can provide a much finer-grained access to Sway, Anticipation, Setup, and Declaration. Each of these can be treated as a new category of skill trick that opens use of these mechanics with that skill alone.

## Rapport and Relationships

No two things can interact without changing each other forever. This is as true in impossibly small particles as it is with people. Magicians and physicists both understand and respect the power of resonance and the invisible web of connections that make up the reality of the world. Every person stands at the center of this vast web that connects them to everyone they've ever touched, and each of those people stand in the center of their own web. The interplay between these webs is what makes the world a dynamic, fascinating and sometimes frightening place.

The occasional mage or madman catches a glimpse of this network, but in doing so he overlooks that its limits are as important as the extent of its reach. For all the vast potential for connection humans (or those who were once human) have, they rarely have the ability to realize it all. If they encounter someone they knew in grade school and rekindle a connection, it's a pleasant surprise, but if they were to try to track down and connect with everyone from grade school it would likely end in an awkward mess (though, sites like Facebook make this easier).



Stop and think for a moment of the number of people in your life. Friends, family, co-workers, neighbors, classmates and all the people who have filled those roles in the past. Do you stay in touch with them all? More likely there is a circle of people with whom you stay close, and another circle with whom you stay loosely in contact. Perhaps you have a distant circle beyond that which you follow remotely (or are recipients of Christmas cards and little else), and beyond that it probably gets hazy. No surprise — that's how most relationships run. More connections exist than any sane person could be expected to maintain or track.

The irony is that for all these connections and the impossibility of maintaining all the ones we already have, we are always on the lookout for more. One of the most human actions possible is to make a connection. Even those who might not call themselves human any longer still face this pull. Some steel themselves against it, seeking to keep one another at or out of arm's reach. Some lurk in dark places wishing for a way to form bonds stronger than the fear they create. Wherever they stand, they are still defined by the connections they forge or avoid.

## Supporting Cast

Characters in the World of Darkness go out and interact with everyone from ancient monstrosities to the cute barista down at the corner. That interaction is the foundation of a lot of interesting play. This cast of supporting characters has the same contradictory mix of countless connections and practical limitations that everyone possesses. But Storytellers and players have an issue there, which is the simple logistics of making these connections work mechanically within the confines of a game. Certainly it's easy to let it fall to roleplaying. But what if you don't play every week? Relationships can be misremembered. Moreover, real relationships can track up and down in ways that players — or their characters — may not perceive without it being made overly obvious.

The simple reality is that a Storyteller has limits to what he can track. As nice as it is to imagine having a complete dossier of every character with which players might interact, it's simply not practical. Unless the chronicle is confined, the number of characters that could show up will grow with each session, and sooner or later things will reach a breaking point.

A Storyteller has a number of tricks to help him with this “relationship wrangling,” ranging from keeping a stable of stock characters to improving improvisation skills. Perhaps the most useful trick is to look to how the issue is handled in fiction. Books, film, television, and theatre all encounter a similar problem to games. More stories means more characters, more characters means more complexity. This complexity can translate

to confusion for the audience — they need to spend time thinking about each new character rather than paying attention to what's going on, and if relationships are not clearly defined, then they might feel cast adrift.

Because of this, most fiction exercises a certain amount of conservation of characters. The rule of thumb is to use as few characters as the story requires, and no more than that. As an example, think about the role the police play in most non-police stories. Notice that the same police officer tends to keep showing up? For the writers and the audience, it is easier to just re-use that same character as is most convenient for the story.

That's all well and good, but Storytellers don't have casts of characters the same way that writers or directors do. Their audience is smaller and much more immediate. How well can this model translate to the gaming table?

Surprisingly well, with nothing more than a small shift of perspective. The Storyteller is probably used to being able to have a cast of thousands at his fingertips. If he needs a character for a scene, he can just make one up and go. Many Storytellers enjoy exactly the sort of creative challenge offered by that sort of ad hoc character creation. Unfortunately, this approach can create problems over time. Not only does it create a steadily expanding list of characters for everyone to track, it also leads to a certain amount of laziness on the Storyteller's part. If he simply creates characters as he needs them, then nothing is challenging him to use those characters to engage the game.

That last part may not seem entirely intuitive, but imagine for a moment how a game would play out if it was not easy to create a new supporting character. If it would take several minutes of effort to craft someone new for players to meet, what should a Storyteller do? Should they stop play to make up the new character? Or should they look a little more closely at the characters that are already on hand and think about which one might work well in this situation?

When a Storyteller chooses the latter, they make the same choice that writers and directors make, and also realize a more subtle benefit. By stopping and thinking about these characters and finding unexpected ways to use them, the Storyteller discovers things about these characters that would not otherwise have been considered. The act of using them in play will make them richer and more complex, which will in turn make them more useful down the line.

*Example: The characters are looking into a series of murders that have happened around a nearby youth center. Some kids playing basketball may have seen something, but their coach is quite protective of them. When the Storyteller first writes this up he whips up the coach from whole cloth. Maybe he's ex-military, from the neighborhood, volunteer-*



ing at the youth center, skeptical of why these murders merit attention when so many others don't.

*It's a good setup, and it will probably play well, but it sets the coach up as a throwaway, so the Storyteller takes a step back and looks at the cast of his game. The players have already met Reggie, a street hustler and sometimes-pickpocket. He's not the most natural fit for this, but the Storyteller thinks about that mismatch some, considering reasons why Reggie might be doing something like this. Maybe he's doing community service. Maybe he's hustling the kid's games, running side bets. Maybe this is something he does for himself, and he doesn't like to talk about it. Maybe it's a mix of these. Whatever it is, by hooking it to an existing character to whom the players are already tied, the net result is that this investigation feels like it's part of their ongoing story, not just a disconnected snippet.*

*The trick to capture this kind of mojo is to think of the game as having a supporting cast, like a TV show or novel, and to try to use that cast to best advantage. It's not an ironclad limitation — sometimes characters still need to be created out of whole cloth — but the simple act of pausing and considering the pre-existing cast can improve matters significantly. Not only does it increase resonance with already extant characters, but it also makes it easier on the Storyteller — and that's a win for everybody.*

## Creating a Cast

The rule for creating the cast is surprisingly simple. It should be a cast composed only of characters that the Storyteller or players find interesting. This may seem a very narrow view at first, but if everyone at the table is indifferent to a character, what reason is there for him to keep showing up? Mundane encounters with uninteresting people are something we can get in spades away from the gaming table.

Before a game begins, the Storyteller may have a lot of ideas about the cast of the game. If the game takes place in a certain city, he may choose characters from one of the World of Darkness books for that city. He may also have characters he's created that serve whatever plot he has in mind. Whatever the origin, the Storyteller probably has a fair-sized list of characters when things start, but that's only the starting point.

As each player creates a character, they should be adding to this list. Some might come out of player backgrounds, others might stem from the game itself. Vampires have sires, Prometheans have demiurges, and most occupants of the World of Darkness have some connections that are implicit in their nature. Social Merits suggest new characters and (Allies, Mentor, Retainer, etc.). As the players introduce each new character, the Storyteller should make a note of them, appending them to his list. It's also worth noting the parts that the player doesn't flesh out — if the player's background suggests his character has an extended family then there's no need for

him to fill in all the details right now. It's merely something to make note of for future reference. (TV shows do this all the time — they fill in backstories as episodes and seasons progress, not in the first episode.)

At the end of this, the Storyteller may have a fairly long list, and this is where his first challenge emerges. He should look at this list and see where he can compress it, looking at the characters he's introduced and the characters the players have brought to the table, and figure out if he can combine them. This may seem daunting at first, but there's a simple trick. Characters the Storyteller has created are usually defined by their role in the game: prince of the city, sinister killer, wise mentor, and so on. Characters that players introduce tend to be defined by their relationship with the character: father, brother, lover, enemy, and so on. The trick is finding a good match between the role and the relationship. (And, word to the wise: the characters brought up that are bound to the players' own characters in the game are the more important ones. Remember that it's your players that are making this game.)

*Example: Jenny has worked up the characters she hopes to use in the chronicle she's running, including an older Gangrel she intends to use as a mentor figure. Dave's created a Gangrel and established that he has a close but intensely rough relationship with his sire. Jenny looks at this situation and decides to combine the characters. She runs this by Dave, who's fine with it, and the list compresses by one.*

## Character Ownership

When combining characters, it's important to discuss it with the player who created the character. Usually, players want to see their ideas actually show up in play, but sometimes a player has such a strong idea of how a particular supporting character should behave that they're uncomfortable with it entering play and possibly behaving differently than their vision.

Compromise is key for both sides. Ideally, a solution can be reached that doesn't muddy anybody's vision for the game. We recommend defaulting to the player's wishes, provided the player isn't being belligerent, as it's probably not worth risking a bad player experience (especially this early). The Storyteller is encouraged to come up with creative solutions — but it may mean setting aside his own character idea for now, or biting the bullet and creating the extra character that serves the needs of the game.

## Bringing it All Together

If the Storyteller stopped after condensing the list, he'd have a pretty useful list of characters to bring to bear in the game, but it would be fairly static. The next step is to start building a better understanding of how these characters interact with the player's characters and with each other. This transformation creates opportunities for the unanticipated to emerge and develop.

To do this, the Storyteller creates a diagram of a social network for all the characters. If the group has access to lots of little Post-Its or diagramming software, great. The easiest analog approach is to simply take a big piece of paper and write the names of the characters in the middle of it and draw a circle around them. From there, just start writing the names of the characters the players have introduced, and draw a line connecting the new character to the originating character. Finish doing this for all the characters the players introduced, then add all the Storyteller's characters. For the moment, the Storyteller's characters will have no lines connecting them to anything. Lastly, draw lines connecting all the player's characters.

Now that the basics of the social network have been established, each player may now add lines to the diagram. A line may connect any two characters on the diagram so long as they're not already connected. The only exception to this is that a player should not create a connection to another player's character without first

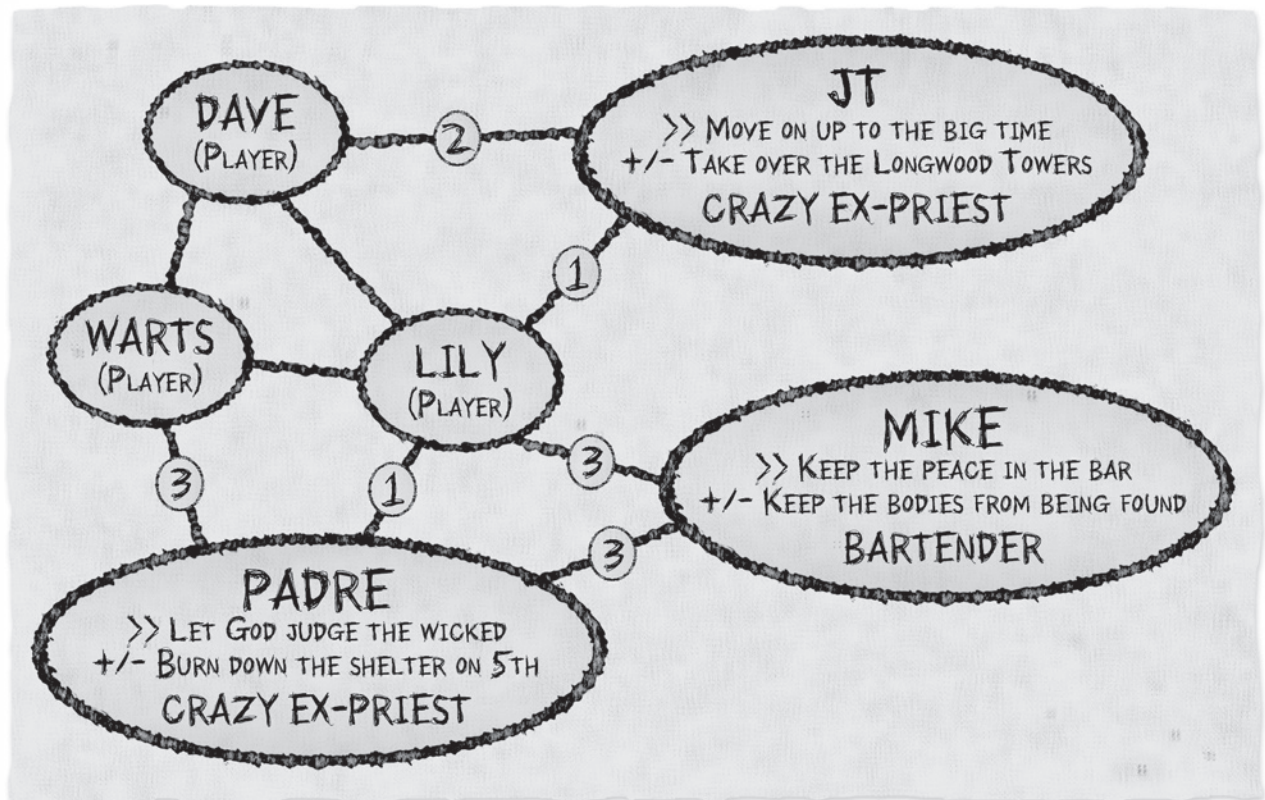
getting that player's thumbs-up. When a player adds a line, he can suggest what sort of relationship it might be, or he can simply leave it up to the Storyteller to figure out. If a character should have a relationship with the whole player group, the line can be drawn to the circle around the player's characters rather than to any individual character (though the character may also be connected to an individual character by another line).

Each player (and the Storyteller) can add a number of lines equal to the number of players (including the Storyteller). Provided the players are being good sports about this, Storytellers are encouraged to offer a reward for this, such as one point of experience per extra line the player adds.

If, by the time this is done, characters remain on the map that have not been connected to anyone, then the Storyteller may want to think a little bit about the role he has in mind for those characters. If his expectation is that the character would not really be entering play until later, or would have a slow build, then all is well, but if it's just that no one was that interested (including the Storyteller), then maybe that indicates the character may be better off put out to pasture.

## Filling in the Details

Now that the basic framework is in place, it's time to flesh out those connections a little bit. Each player gets a pool of points called their "Rapport." The total





value of this pool is equal to their Willpower score plus their highest Social Skill plus any dots they have in the Allies or Contacts Merit (whichever is higher). For each connection from his character to another, he may invest some number of points from this pool, assigning the connection a numerical value from 0 to 5. The value of the connection represents its importance to the character, for good or ill.

A 0 indicates minimal and practically non-existent importance — in the movie of the character's life, this person is a little more than a color character, a distant acquaintance. A five indicates that this person may be the most important one in his life, whether it's his true love or his arch-nemesis. The value of the connection doesn't speak to the positive or negative nature of the relationship, only its importance.

Rapport Number	Relationship
0	Distant acquaintance, a fringe character
1	Close acquaintance, one-night-stand, an occasional thorn in the side
2	Co-worker, employee, friend, foe, casual lover
3	Business partner, close friend, grudge-bearing foe, steady lover
4	Best friend, cherished lover, long-suffering foe
5	Most important person (true love, arch-nemesis)

Players are free to write the number next to the line to reflect the value, but it does feel a little more in keeping with the Storytelling System just to draw that number of dots on the line itself. (However it's written, remember to use pencil.)

At this point the whole chart is handed off to the Storyteller, who now has a relationship roadmap for his game.

## The Allies Merit

Allies aren't really individual characters, of course — they're a breed or category of character, like, "Cops," or "Jewel Thieves" or "Monster Hunters."

That being said, if one of the characters on the chart fits this description, feel free to throw in one Rapport dot toward them for free in connecting to your character. You can still use the Allies Merit with this character as normal, but if you want specific interactions with this character, that free dot can go a long way.

## Storyteller Details

While it may be messy and different than originally envisioned, the Storyteller is now holding an incredibly valuable document. Not only does it give an overview of the important characters in the game, the players have effectively come out and said, "This is how often I want to see this character show up." Clear pointers to where the player's interests lie can be hard to find, and it's difficult to overstate the utility of having them marked out in black and white.

The Storyteller should now take the map and put his fingerprint on it, taking all of the player input and meshing it with his own ideas to create the game that will excite him and engage the players. First, he needs to fill in some of the details.

For every connection between two characters who are not the players' characters, the Storyteller should assign a value from 1–5, much like the players did previously. Unlike the players, he should also denote whether the number is positive or negative. The number denotes the intensity of the relationship between the two characters, and the positive or negative value indicates whether or not the relationship is, well, good or bad, like or disgust, love or hate. Because the Storyteller is going to be putting most of his effort into the connections that directly impact a player, this shorthand serves as a convenience, both to give the Storyteller a broader sense of the big picture, and also to give a sense of how the players' actions might affect the network as a whole.

Once those have been filled in, it's time to concentrate on the important characters, those who are connected directly to the players. The players have conveniently labeled which ones are the most important to them, so if the Storyteller has a question regarding where he wants to include a specific element, he has a good sense of where player interest will be directed. The main tools for this can be found in two additional elements the Storyteller should note under each important character. These elements include the character's Desire and the character's Conflict.

### Desire

The character's Desire (noted easily with a >> or an →) is the thing that character wants that most shapes his behavior. The character will take reasonable action towards that end, and that Desire sets the tone for his relationship with a player's character. If his Desire is at odds with a player's character then the relationship likely has elements of tension (which can be good). If these Desires are in alignment, then the relationship may be a smooth, positive one. The Desire may be something the Storyteller character wants, but it may just as well be something that character wants to avoid,

or something else that elicits a strong response. What's important is that the Desire must inspire action — if a character's Desire is a love of the local sports team, then it must be a Desire that individual is willing to act upon. Just going to games is not enough — that character needs to collect memorabilia, hunt autographs, leave town to watch training, and otherwise take active action in the pursuit of it. Desire is *strong stuff*.

Because it will shape interaction, it is important that the Desire touch upon the player's character. It does not need to directly relate to him, but it should relate to something important to him. A police officer's Desire to clean up the streets is only relevant if the character he's connected to has an interest in law and crime as well.

The Desire should also be fairly specific. A police officer who wants to uphold the law is pretty cookie-cutter, but a police officer who wants to make sure the street his mother lives on is safe offers a lot more personalized, tailor-made inspiration. Choosing a detailed, nuanced Desire saves the Storyteller a lot of bookkeeping; inventing elements like the police officer's mother and his connection to the neighborhood creates a fuller picture of him.

### Conflict

The character's Conflict (noted with a +/-) is an issue that confronts the character and, generally speaking, stands in the way of that character's Desire (and it's for this reason an alternate name for this system might be Wants and Fears). It needn't always be something that blocks the Desire, but doing so helps to create an "organic feel" to the character, a sense of unity of purpose in the context of your game.

A Conflict could be an addiction or a bad relationship. It could be a roadblock character who prevents them from achieving a Desire (a bastard boss standing in the way of a promotion). An enemy is a Conflict. A loved one in danger is a Conflict. A single negative adjective — "Broke," or "Rage-filled" or "Sinful" — might work as a Conflict.

Note that a Conflict *could* also be a repetition of that character's Desire. A character whose Desire is "Get my boss, Becky, into bed," might have that same thing as a Conflict. Why? Because Becky's not his wife, and his wife wouldn't be too happy with that. Fulfilling the Desire is its own danger, hence it becomes a Conflict.

A character's Conflict reveals things about him to give some sense of what he does when he's "off-screen." Like a Desire, the more nuanced and specific it is, the more it reveals without excess bookkeeping. But more importantly, it gives a clear signpost for where the character's story is going. Like a gun introduced in the first act of a play, it's the promise of an event waiting to happen over the course of a game.

## Sample Character: Mike Gorsky

### Mikhail "Mike" Gorsky: Bartender at the Hammer & Cycle

>> *Keep the peace in the bar (Desire)*

+/- *Keep the bodies out back secret (Conflict)*

Mike is a character who shows up in a lot of games; the tough, taciturn bartender who maintains a reasonably well-respected neutral zone where a lot of tough customers hang out. His Desire is pretty straightforward and clearly impacts the way his relationship with the players' characters will unfold. If they take advantage of the Hammer & Cycle as a haven (maybe literally so, if the characters are vampires), then he's a potent ally within his domain, but if they come into the bar looking for someone to rough up, then it's going to end badly for someone.

The bodies in the back are a little more... problematic. By putting that Conflict on the table, it's almost certain that the issue will come up over the course of play in a way that draws in the players. Whether that means that they might be the ones to find the bodies, or if maybe Mike asks for their help when the police come sniffing around is something that can unfold in play.

What's important here is that these issues are what make Mike tick, whether he's a normal human, a vampire, or something else. Those things might impact what dice he gets to roll in a fight or powers he can use in a scene, but they are less important to what he might do, and why.

What's almost as important is that the Storyteller has put a face on a potential issue in the game. The bodies are (hopefully) important to the plot. They could just be in an abandoned warehouse or a ditch, but by putting them in play through a character, it guarantees that there will be play that surrounds the issue. It will have more bite to it than just throwing some shovels in a pickup truck.

If, after filling in all these Desires and Conflicts, the diagram does not suggest several plot ideas to the Storyteller, then he should go back and look at the Conflicts and try to figure out what might make them more immediate. One simple trick for doing so is to take an interesting Conflict and add a time element to it, perhaps by simply appending the word "tonight" to it.



Take a look at the sidebar on this page — Mike Gorsky. “Keep the bodies out back secret” might be an interesting story hook, but “Keep the bodies out back hidden tonight” feels like the starting point for a game. Why does it matter that it’s tonight? What’s going on to bring this matter to a head? These are the sorts of questions that the game will answer.

The Storyteller makes an important decision when he decides on the immediacy of a Conflict. It might be a different unit of time (this week, this month, before the full moon) or it might key off some other event (before the cops get a confession from Tiny, before that message reaches the Prince) but whatever form it takes, it will have a much greater impact on play than it might seem at first blush. Conflicts will generally be urgent, relaxed, or uncertain.

Urgent Conflicts allow little time for planning or preparation. They are things that are going on right now, and players need to act without time to plan or prepare. These Conflicts tend to be stressful but exciting. When players enjoy them, it’s because they allow for the thrill of flying by the seat of one’s (potentially shit-filled) pants. When players don’t enjoy them, it’s usually because they feel overwhelmed, or that they’re powerless to impact events.

Relaxed Conflicts take more time to unfold, giving players time to plan, prepare and take care of the problem before it gets out of hand. Conflicts like this often give players a chance to flex their muscles and show off elements of their character that they feel don’t get enough spotlight. Since there’s time to plan, players can usually come up with a way to bring their strengths to bear, and there can be a great deal of satisfaction in that. Unfortunately, these also tend to be the most lacking of Conflicts, as the non-urgency allows for easy sidetracking or spending time dwelling infinitely on minutiae like shopping lists.

Uncertain Conflicts introduce a question by hinging their resolution on something external to the Conflict into which the players may have no visibility. In practice, this means there’s no telling when the Conflict will come to a head. The operative emotion for uncertain Conflicts is tension — players have more time to think than in an urgent Conflict, but not as much time as in a relaxed one. Every decision they make is a tradeoff between the benefits of more time and the risk that things will come to a head before they’re ready. Uncertain Conflicts have the strengths and weaknesses of other Conflicts, but they have some added benefit in that the Storyteller has a little bit more control over the throttle of them. If things look bad, he can delay matters, but if things start slowing down, he can speed things up.

Uncertain Conflicts can introduce an implicit second plotline as players seek to remove the uncertainty. That is not always a viable option, but it can make for richer Conflicts when it happens.

**Example:** Let’s go back to Mike Gorsky from the sidebar, and look at how much of a difference it makes to change the urgency of his “hidden bodies” Conflict.

*If Mike needs to keep the bodies from being discovered tonight, that suggests a hectic effort to try to sneak them out before it’s too late. It invites specific scenes and problems that stem from trying to do things fast and sneakily.*

*If he needs to keep the bodies from being discovered before next week then it’s much more calculated. The characters have time to scout out a new location (or arrange for disposal in the intervening time). They’d have time to call in favors and also probably have more of an opportunity to look into why the bodies are there in the first place.*

*If he needs to keep the bodies from being discovered before the vampire Prince’s investigator comes around, then things are a bit more up in the air. They have some time to get things prepared, but there’s every chance that as soon as they think they have everything together, the inspector will show up at the bar, getting a quick drink before she looks around, forcing the characters to put plans into action immediately.*

## Resolving Conflicts

Do the Conflicts resolve? They may. That’s the hope; you put it into the game so it will see some conclusion (though characters with persistent, seemingly eternal Conflicts can also be interesting for the albatross that hangs around the neck).

Whenever a Conflict is resolved, the character changes, and that change should introduce a new Conflict. It may also change the character’s situation or Desire, depending on how drastic the change may be. It is always possible that resolving a character’s Conflict will remove them from play — they might die, leave town, or simply have a finished story arc — but the Storyteller should be careful about doing this if there is still interest in the character. (Plus, depending on the game, a little thing like death may be no reason to take the character off the map!)

So long as the character is still in play, their change should always introduce a new Conflict. The Storyteller should use the same guidelines to create this new Conflict as he used on the first one, with one important addition. The Storyteller should try to make the new Conflict a logical extension of the resolution of the original Conflict (or barring that, a logical consequence of the actions taken by the players’ characters). It’s a simple thing, and easy to overlook, but this is one of the important ways for a Storyteller to help the game really engage the players. This difference ends up being obvious to players — when problems arise in play as a result of their actions and activities, they feel engaged with an organic, responsive world. When new Conflicts emerge to which they have no connection, they can end up feeling like they’re the audience to someone else’s story, and that’s just not that fun.

An example — they help Mike hide the bodies, permanently. The Prince or whoever is looking for them is none the wiser. New Conflict, though, is that *someone* was watching, someone who took some revealing pictures that include Mike and the characters “handling” the situation. Now, blackmail is on the table.

When a character’s Conflict is resolved, this also is an opportunity to change the values of the scores on the lines connected to him. For the connections to other Storyteller characters, the Storyteller can change connections up or down by one point if he considers it appropriate. Similarly, players can change their level of connection to the character by one step, either reducing their investment by one point, or increasing it if they have Rapport to spend. If the player has no free points, he can diminish another relationship to increase this one (and in doing so, might find a whole new story to explain the shift).

## Changing the Map

Over time, events in play will change the map. Not only will Conflicts and relationships change and evolve, characters will be added or removed.

The removal of characters ultimately happens when events in play make any further interaction with the character unfeasible or outright impossible. Exactly what removes a character depends a lot on the game — if the character leaves town or dies, that might end their story in some games, but it might be a small inconvenience in others.

More importantly, a character’s departure is more likely to correspond to a lack of player interest. While the Storyteller should not keep a well-liked character from dying if it makes sense within the game, he should only seek to actively shuffle the guy off when players have lost interest in him. The easiest measure of this is in their investment. Any character that has no player investment in his connection should be considered at risk, even if he’s one of the Storyteller’s favorites. If players do not care about this character, there’s rarely much of a reason to keep him around.

Adding characters is a little bit simpler: it just requires a player showing an interest in a character. Any time a player sees a character that’s not currently on the diagram he can commit a point of Rapport to that character, adding him to the diagram.

Alternately, the Storyteller can introduce new characters by connecting them to an existing Storyteller character. When the Storyteller does this, he should set the value of the connection for the new character. Characters introduced in this fashion are only tenuously connected to the game until players show an interest and are willing to invest some Rapport in them, but even as very minor supporting

## Assertions of Fact and World-Building

At the Storyteller’s discretion, the player may make minor assertions about his character’s backstory when he invests a point of Rapport. This should usually be limited to a reason the characters might know each other in a passing fashion. It’s appropriate to say, “I talked to him at the last big party;” it’s not appropriate to say, “Oh, yeah, he works for my company.” The Storyteller always has the final say over whether a connection is appropriate or not, but reasonable suggestions should be respected. A good guideline is that the connection should be such that the characters would be comfortable initiating conversation in a social setting. If it’s a borderline case, the Storyteller can always offer suggestions.

**Example:** *The Storyteller has just introduced Lars, bodyguard and general muscle for hire, currently in the employ of one of their rivals. Dave’s player thinks Lars looks interesting, and he has a free point of Rapport, so he invests it in Lars, announcing, “We’ve seen each other around the dojo and sparred a few times.” The Storyteller kind of wants Lars’ abilities to be a bit of an unknown, so he suggests that perhaps their paths have crossed, but they haven’t actually sparred. Dave’s player is okay with this, so that is now an established fact. And, bonus points, it adds mystery.*

Players and the Storyteller may collaborate to create further details out of play. If the Storyteller is going to bring in an important character and the player wants to invest a lot of Rapport right out the gate, then it’s entirely reasonable for the player to have a hand in helping craft the background.

**Example:** *Dave’s player looks at the pile of Rapport that Dave isn’t using and decides he’d really like to bring in an important character for Dave. He talks with the Storyteller and they settle on Dave’s ex-wife moving to town. The Storyteller has Dave’s player write up her background, the reasons she’s an ex, and so on, offering comment when he thinks it’s appropriate. He also asks Dave’s player what kind of role he expects her to play, so that he has a sense of what Dave’s player expects. Once Dave is done, the Storyteller may add his own details (some secrets and an agenda) and a Conflict and Desire before adding her to the grid, attached to Dave with an initial value on the connection of four points. This is going to be really important to Dave as play unfolds.*



characters they can be very useful for the game. If the players show no interest in the character, then bear in mind that he might drift off the map as easily as any other character. If this is a character in which the Storyteller is particularly invested, then that's just that much more incentive to help the players share that investment.

## Ditching Characters

When a player drops the amount of Rapport he has invested in one character to invest in another one, that has an effect. The player's character has less time for the first character and is paying more attention to this new person. Depending on the relationship between the characters involved, this may change the dynamic of the old relationship or it may be cause for creating a relationship between the two Storyteller characters.

This will not necessarily happen every time. If the player cuts down his connection to his bookie to invest a bit more in the assassin who's trying to kill him, it's unlikely any feathers will be ruffled. But if he changes from one romantic entanglement to another, there's a high likelihood that there will be consequences. The Storyteller should make liberal use of these changes as inspiration, since they help make the characters feel alive. Plus, sometimes combinations just suggest themselves: if a character drops his connection to his girlfriend in order to invest in the assassin who's chasing him, is it hard to guess who the assassin's next victim will be?

## Desires and Conflicts for Player Characters

Up until this point, Desires and Conflicts have been discussed as tools for the Storyteller to figure out the relationship roadmap for the game.

But don't hesitate to use this for player characters, too. Desires and Conflicts don't necessarily have a mechanical aspect to them, but they *do* help to define a character in concrete ways. A character on a television show is very often defined by an overarching Desire and Conflict working in tandem. Michael Westen, on *Burn Notice*, has the Desire to uncover the people who "burned" him (spy lingo for those who ruined his career and put him out to pasture), and the Conflict grows out of that Desire (for the people who burned him present an ever-present enigma and threat). Since your player characters are the story's protagonists, it doesn't hurt to think about these definitions.

What's that, you say? You *want* mechanical aspects for this when applied to player characters? Okay, put the gun down. We'll comply.

In fact, we'll give you a few options that you can use alone, or mix and match (collect them, trade them with your friends!).

**Option #1:** You have five points to spend between them. If at some point during a game session, your character successfully pursues his Desire or confronts (and succeeds) some small part of his Conflict, you gain a number of bonus dice equal to the points assigned to the Desire or the Conflict. These bonus dice can be used on anything — they represent your character's rush of sensation, his adrenalin, his pride, whatever.

**Option #2:** Anytime your character successfully pursues his Desire, he gains back a point of Willpower. On the other hand, any time you *as a player* put your character's Conflict into play so that it creates an interesting story, you gain one experience point. (In this way, you might want to add these to Virtue/Vice, or replace them entirely. More systems on Virtue/Vice can be found in the first chapter, p. 23.) Another add-on to this: if your character successfully confronts and ends a Conflict, he gains a Willpower dot for free. (And, he also gains a new Conflict.)

**Option #3:** See option #1, except now you can take multiple Desires and Conflicts — the only limit is, you have 10 total points to spend between them all.

## The Rapport Mechanic

While all these values for rapport and relationships are useful in a purely abstract fashion, they also can have a concrete mechanical impact on play.

As noted earlier, each character has a pool of Rapport equal to his Willpower plus his highest Social Skill plus the number of dots he has in the Allies or Contacts Merit (whichever is higher).

This represents the amount of "social bandwidth" he has available to invest in other people (for better and for worse). It's no limiter on the number of people he knows or interacts with, rather, it's a limit on the number of people that jump to mind as important in his life. If this were his movie, they would be his supporting cast.

Players invest Rapport into relationships, from one to five points, representing the importance of the relationship. It's important to remember that importance does not correspond with the *type* of relationship. Even in normal relationships, those people who are closest can also be most dangerous. In the World of Darkness, this tendency is even more pronounced, where today's lover may be tomorrow's blood enemy, and next week's ally of necessity.

This has the interesting effect of allowing players as strong a hand in selecting their enemies as their allies. This may seem counterintuitive at first, and players may

feel that Rapport spent on a connection to an enemy is “wasted” in some fashion, but that overlooks one important truth:

**The Storyteller is going to do bad things anyway.**

Don't hold it against him — it's his job after all. No game stays interesting if everything comes up puppies and rainbows every session. Conflict is king. Players will encounter opposition in one form or another and the advantage Rapport allows is to help say what kind of opposition it's going to be. If a player wants to pursue a blood feud with some ancient family of ill-bred monsters, then he can invest some Rapport in his connection to the head of that awful family. When the Storyteller is working on a new storyline and finds he needs some bad guy foot soldiers, he knows just where to look.

## Using Rapport

A player's character receives a number of benefits from interacting with the character in which he has invested Rapport. First, his character knows how the individual thinks and what makes him tick. The number of points of Rapport invested translate into an equal number of bonus dice whenever using Empathy to get a read on the associate.

Second, the character is attuned to the target's signature — his way of doing things. Whenever a character successfully finds clues or information about something that the target was responsible for, he will likely be able to identify the signature surrounding that target, translating to bonus dice for any relevant Investigation rolls. This will rarely be based on any concrete evidence, and is usually a hunch or some sign that could be interpreted a number of ways, but the character will be certain of it.

Last, whenever the target resolves his Conflict as a result of the character's action, the character gains experience equal to the amount of Rapport invested in the associate.

## Storyteller Rapport

Storyteller characters handle Rapport a little bit differently. When dealing with player's characters, they get the same ability to spot signatures, but do not get the bonus to Empathy or the experience.

Instead, Storyteller characters use Rapport as a yardstick for how well they interact among themselves. The positive or negative value of the Rapport between two Storyteller characters is added or subtracted as dice to any Expression, Persuasion, or Socialize attempt. Storyteller characters should almost never actually be making these rolls, but these bonuses should give a sense of how well interactions between these characters go.

## Positive and Negative Values Involving Player Characters

Up until this point, we've put forth the idea that the +/- value assigned to a Storyteller character is largely to help the Storyteller gauge the nature of that relationship.

Except, if you're game for it, feel free to try it out between player characters and Storyteller characters, too, thus allowing a player to identify concretely whether the Rapport indicates friend or foe.

You've two primary ways of having characters purchase Rapport, then. The first is that, they still buy the points of Rapport, and that applies to positive and negative relationships. The second way is, for every positive they buy, they can also take a negative (if they choose).

The number, +/-, becomes a modifier when making Social rolls against that character — so, a +3 means a three-dice bonus, while a -2 means a two-dice penalty. You also have the option of reversing this for, say, Intimidation — a negative becomes a positive, a positive becomes a negative.

## Changing Rapport

Over time, players will want to move their Rapport investments around to reflect the ways the game and their characters have changed. It's a cruel truth that the people who were most helpful on the way up may grow a lot less useful at the top.

Players have a lot of freedom to change their Rapport values, but the main limiter is that it takes time or extreme circumstances to actually make the change.

## Changes over Time

This is the most common way for Rapport to change. Once a week, the player may remove a point of Rapport from an associate or add a point of Rapport to an associate. Note that these points are not moved from one associate to another. They must be removed first.

## Changing Circumstances

Occasionally circumstances will emerge that allow a character to re-examine his connections. When an associate resolves his conflict, the player has the option of investing another point of Rapport in that associate, or of removing one of his points.





Similarly, when a new character is introduced to the game, players may choose to immediately invest a point of Rapport in the new character.

## Dramatic Changes

Sometimes events will drastically change relationships. Characters may die. Someone might do something so horrible to a character that he moves right to the top of his hit list. A character might discover the son he never knew he had. All of these things can call for more immediate investment or withdrawal of Rapport than normal, and the Storyteller should be willing to allow for such changes if he feels the event is suitably dramatic or appropriate. If the Storyteller is hesitant, the player will still be able to make the changes in a few game weeks, so this really should only be blocked if it seems strongly inappropriate or if the player is clearly attempting to abuse the system.

## Rapport in an Existing Chronicle

If the group decides to introduce Rapport into an existing game, they will have a few advantages that should make the whole process a little bit easier. Specifically, they should already have an established cast of characters, so there's less need for the players and the Storyteller to come up with new characters and connections. For an existing chronicle, the map should represent the current game (the "conditions on the ground," as it were). If it turns out the map looks a little sparse, then players and the Storyteller can add characters to it as if they were creating a new diagram. Once the map is complete, the players invest their Rapport as normal, and the Storyteller takes it home and fleshes it out.

## Trust

Players may invest Rapport in one another's characters to represent how much they trust the other character. It's good and valuable for them to be able to trust the people that they live and work with, but that trust also makes them vulnerable. (That character is referred to as "trusting.")

When a player invests some of his character's Rapport in another player's character, his character gains a bonus in any teamwork efforts with that trusting target. When the trusted character rolls to help the trusting character, he rolls a number of extra dice equal to the number of points of Rapport invested.

Additionally, the trusted character gets a similar bonus to any Social or related rolls to try to reach to the trusting character when something is affecting him, such as depression or a magical compulsion.

The downside is simple. When the trusted character betrays the trust, he gains a number of *successes* on the



betraying action equal to the number of points of Rapport invested. While this betrayal may be as direct as shooting the other character in the back, the real danger comes when a character is offered a chance to do something else at the cost of their friend.

The bonus from a betrayal may be taken after the dice have been rolled, but whenever it is taken, the nature (and the result) of the betrayal must be clear. A betrayal with no consequences is no betrayal at all — the character who has been betrayed should face very dire consequences indeed, even if they were not betrayed directly. As a corollary to this, the opportunity to betray the character must exist to get the bonus. The Storyteller is the ultimate arbiter of this, but it should be fairly obvious.

**Example:** *Warts and Lily have been working together for a while. Warts has invested three Rapport in Lily, and Lily has invested two points in Warts.*

*One night, Warts and Lily are breaking into an “abandoned” warehouse. Getting over the barbed wire fence is not exactly something at which Warts excels, so Lily gives him a hand. She gathers up the dice to roll Dexterity + Athletics. Because Warts trusts her, she can help him more effectively, and gains three extra dice on the roll since Warts has invested three points of Rapport in her.*

*After they’ve gotten into the warehouse, Lily ends up fighting her bitch of a sister on the catwalk. Over the course of the fight, Warts gets knocked over the side and is hanging on for dear life. Warts is going to fall, but Lily really doesn’t want her sister to get away. She turns her back on her friend to drive a boot into the side of her sister’s face (getting three automatic successes on the roll, thanks to betraying Warts) and Warts takes the fall.*

Rapport invested in other characters is subject to the same limitations as other Rapport, and can usually only be changed at a rate of one point per week. The exception is, of course, when trust is betrayed. After a betrayal, both characters immediately get back all Rapport invested in each other.

## Rapport for the Storyteller

While Rapport is a small pool and a set of connections for each player, for the Storyteller it’s a tool for taking a 10,000-foot view of the whole chronicle. It serves as a tool for keeping a lot of dynamic information well organized while providing inspiration for events that can drive play.

Just using the Rapport system as it’s been outlined so far puts a lot of utility in the Storyteller’s hands. The human brain loves to see connections between things, and laying out the characters in such a way as to make those connections explicit can be absolutely enlightening. Even if the details of the game are well known, changing perspective can make old things look new and suggest

patterns that might have otherwise eluded notice.

For all that, there are still a few more tricks the Storyteller can use to try to squeeze the maximum value out of the diagram he’s created.

## Why We Have Storyteller Characters

When the Storyteller creates a Conflict for a character, he is taking a look under the hood of the single most important difference between the Storytellers characters and the players characters. Put simply, with very few exceptions the Storyteller’s characters *do not drastically change their situations*. (With some caveats, and we’ll note them, below.)

This seems fallacious on the face of it. Many of the Storyteller’s characters are powerful, intelligent figures: princes, arch-mages, and eldritch monstrosities. They have all the power and knowledge necessary to do anything they want, don’t they?

Well, yes and no. While they might have all the tools necessary to change their situation, they would never use them. There’s no force that is keeping them from doing it, and there’s no need for the Storyteller to cheat to keep them down. There are always enough reasons not to change, no matter how good an idea change might be.

Whatever reason the individual may have, it all feeds into the most basic necessities of fiction: protagonists (heroes and anti-heroes alike) act. The audience can tell who a story is about because they are the person who is changing (either themselves, their world, or both). The other characters in the story might be interesting and capable, but they do not change themselves, the protagonist changes them (or the antagonist does, but more on that in a minute).

This may sound all well and good for literary theory, but it’s got a concrete and critically important impact on game, and that is an answer to the apparently simple question: who is the game about? The answer is, “The people who are doing things” and one hopes that those people are the players. But it is sometimes easy to accidentally relegate the players to the role of audience as other characters resolve struggles between themselves.

Storytellers almost never set out to do this, but often find themselves forced into it by necessity. If the events of the game are going to drive the Prince into a conflict with his rival, what can the Storyteller do? He doesn’t want to resolve matters off-screen, so he give his players a front row seat in hopes that they will feel this is a reward for their involvements in this. Unfortunately, it rarely is, and everyone walks away feeling frustrated.

And this is why it matters. If the Storyteller had gone in from the outset with the understanding that the Storyteller characters could not influence their own destinies, it would have required the presence (and ac-



tions) of the players at every step of the way, from the first to the very last. At no point would the players have been relegated to audience, or forced to merely follow a breadcrumb trail to stay involved. They would be the catalyst of change, the center of the storm, and isn't that where they should be?

Practically speaking, when the Storyteller picks conflicts for a character he can bear this in mind by remembering that if the player's characters do not step in, the conflict will either not resolve, or the worse outcome will come to pass.

The first caveat, though? A Storyteller character's situation changes if the protagonists (read: the player characters) cause it to change. A Prince is dethroned not because of the actions of other antagonists, but because the protagonists set events in motion that cause it to become true.

## Antagonists

Antagonists, which is really to say the good, interesting villains of the sort people love to hate, are a little bit of an exception to this rule. The antagonist can change his situation, at least to a limited extent. Specifically, the antagonist's Conflict will resolve in his favor if the player's do not take action. This is what makes them so compelling and so important to play.

This may seem to make them more potent than other characters, but the reality is that their situation and role is just as limited. A ghost that is killing people in a neighborhood is going to keep killing them until someone (which is to say, the players) stops it, but it is still stuck in that particular rut. Mechanically, when its Conflict is resolved, it does not change to a new Conflict. It just restarts the same one all over again.

An antagonist who can change his conflict when he resolves it is going to be a powerful, dynamic force in any chronicle. He can effectively stack his victories, accumulating power, resources, followers, or anything else he needs for so long as he goes unchecked. This ability pretty much marks such a character as the main villain of a game.

**Example:** *JT is a gang leader serving as an antagonist in this chronicle. His Conflict revolves around whether or not he will keep the populace of the tenement his gang runs cowed. If the players never intervene, he will succeed, but he still needs to keep the building under control, so his Conflict simply "restarts."*

*Now, if JT were one of the main villains of the game, then he would have many more options. If he resolves his first Conflict because the players haven't intervened, his Conflict changes and now becomes something like "Expand to take over another building." If he continues unchecked, he might eventually take over larger territory, take over other gangs or do almost anything else, building on his previous successes.*

## Using Dynamic Antagonists

Exactly how many of these dynamic antagonists a chronicle should include is an important decision. The Storyteller should include at least one, if only to keep the players on their toes, but there is a potential for diminishing returns as more get added. The best yardstick for this is the capabilities of the players. If the players are able to respond effectively to a lot of problems (which is to say, if they're capable movers and shakers) then they can probably handle more dynamic antagonists. If they're having a rough time of things, then one might be more than enough.

If the Storyteller is not sure what to do in a specific game, try this solution. Assume that none of the antagonists are dynamic until such time as it seems like it would be a lot cooler if one of them was, then make that one dynamic. This seems simple, but it holds up thanks to the way play ends up working. The Storyteller should constantly be introducing new conflicts, but that can often mean introducing new characters. That's fine for a while, but eventually the bookkeeping gets inconvenient, and the convenience of being able to attach a conflict to an existing antagonist will become apparent. It's an extension of the idea of conservation of characters, applied specifically to how the Storyteller wants to handle the bad guys in his game.

## Antagonists and Experience

It should go without saying, but if an antagonist resolves his own Conflict without the players taking a hand, no experience payout occurs, even if Rapport has been invested in the connection. Less obviously, characters who participate in resolving the Conflict that is resolved in the antagonist's favor still get experience. Losing can be very, very valuable.

## Drawing in Characters

The most obvious use of the Rapport map is to suggest where to introduce plots. If a monster is on the loose, then having it attack one of the characters connected to a player's character is the best way to bring the player into the plot, right?

Well, yes, but only to a point. Hitting the connected characters works great the first few times, but the player will eventually start feeling like he's just connecting himself to a collection of punching bags, and that the whole point of this Rapport system is to give the Storyteller more places to kick him. Obviously it shouldn't come to that, so a little bit of subtlety is in order.

The best place to start is two steps away. The Storyteller picks a character with a connection to the player that could draw him in, then pick (or create) a character connected to that character. The Storyteller then does

the bad thing to that new character. That character's situation will draw in the intermediary character, which will in turn draw in the players.

This approach has some secondary benefits as well. It does a great job of expanding the players' circle of interaction — even if the connections don't merit a Rapport investment, drawing the characters out into the broader world helps keep the game feeling alive. Of equal importance, there is a bit of a social reward when someone asks for help with someone else's problem. Even setting aside the cynical notion of favor trading, it is a sign of acknowledgment and respect that can feel good. When a friend asks you for a favor, it's a reflection of your friendship, not their view of your capabilities, but if they ask you to help someone else then they are doing it because they think you can do it. This sort of interaction offers the players a similar reward. It's a subtle thing, but such avenues for allowing the player's characters to earn respect are incredibly powerful and important.

### Short-handing Characters

As the Storyteller builds the cast of characters for the game, he needs to strike a balance between keeping enough characters in play and keeping each character distinct and interesting. It can be hard, but there are ways to create a mental “shorthand” for these characters that can make life easier.

### Tap Your Inner Nerd

The Storyteller picks a television show he likes. Books and movies work for this too, but for some reason people really respond to TV shows for this sort of thinking. Think about the cast and all the characters, and then think about this character. If the character were cast in the show, which of these characters would he play?

This answer also answers a lot of incidental questions about the character. In uncertain situations, the Storyteller can think about what the character from the show would do and take guidance from that.

There are a lot of fancy terms for this sort of thinking, using words like archetype and such, but it always seems a little off to talk so seriously about deciding if some guy is more the Gilligan or The Skipper.

What's great about this method is that it can be used with any area of knowledge. A Storyteller who has never watched TV but is a Shakespeare nut can just as easily decide which character from Shakespeare this character would play.

### Everyone Has a Secret

What's the one thing about the character the players don't and won't know? It need not be dramatic and world shaking, just something small and important to the

character. He visits his mother in the retirement home once a week. He kicks cats when no one is looking. He cheats on his taxes.

Resist the temptation to “scale up” the secret for more powerful characters. The purpose of this is not to reveal the black heart of the High Priest of the Yellow Stag, but rather to reveal the small petty things that make him human.



## System of Secrets: The Whispered Gamble

If you're looking for an interesting mechanic to potentially surround secrets in your game, here's one:

Every character has a secret.

Every character wants to keep that secret, well, secret. Hush-hush. Shhh.

The character must assign this secret a rating from one to five dots.

Her entire goal is a gamble to keep that secret from spilling.

Of course, the really cool secrets have a way of getting out. This is also a good way for a Storyteller to find a nice “pressure point” on which to hit — a conflict area.


If the character's secret spills, that character suffers for the exposure.

The suffering is a number of penalty dice equal to the secret exposed, and it usually translates to a Social penalty (though the Storyteller could rule otherwise if other penalties are appropriate). Reasons for this penalty? The severity of the secret might be worrisome (“I'm a cannibal”), and it also might be troublesome that the character felt the need to keep a secret at all.

Determine at the start of using this element whether or not it counts if other members of the group (coterie, pack, whatever) are in on each other's secrets (and thus are complicit in potentially airing one another's dirty laundry, on accident or purposefully).

The Social penalty fades, over time, at a rate of one penalty die per week.

That's it. Ta-da. A system of secrets. Use or discard.





Whatever the secret is, what's important is that it says something about the character, and it raises interesting questions. Does he cheat on his taxes because he's got a really smart accountant? Does he just do it because "everyone else does it" and he's willing to run the odds of getting caught? Is he just so convinced of his brilliance that he can't conceive of being caught? Whatever the answer, it will either raise more questions or inform on how the character responds in other situations.

Now, this is not to say that all this needs to be written down now. It can be, of course, but the real trick is that the secret itself becomes the mnemonic for these things. It's a mental pushpin used to keep the rest of the image of the character in place with a minimum of bookkeeping.

## The Power of Trust

Using Rapport for trust is something that a lot of players may zero in on as an easy "cheat." They may feel that their group would never backstab each other, so it's an unalloyed bonus for free, snatched from the sucker of a Storyteller. Feel free to let them keep thinking that. It makes the look on their faces all the better when they realize it's not that simple.

The reality is that it's unlikely that the players are going to abuse trust to start shooting at one another (or if they are, that is perhaps reflective of another issue entirely). But what's most important is that the bonus from the betrayal need not be applied against the character being betrayed. With that in mind, every time the players come short on a roll that's very important to them, some part of their minds will be asking, "who could I betray to pull this off?" Even if they never do so, it will slowly dawn on them that they're not the only ones doing that math.

The Storyteller's job is never to *make* the characters betray one another, but rather to make certain they have opportunities to do so (or, at least it is in a certain type of game — this is more appropriate to **Vampire** than it is to **Werewolf**, for instance). A betrayal requires that things go very badly for the betrayed character, possibly even lethally so. A betrayed character should end up terribly injured at best. When dangers arise that could do this kind of harm to characters, they'll take steps to avoid them (for obvious reasons). Usually, they'll be successful, and that's all well and good, but their presence

introduces a vector that might not otherwise be present. For example, a fight on the edge of a long drop introduces opportunities for betrayal that might not be present in an open field. Even if these dangers don't play a larger part in the scene, by introducing them the Storyteller creates the possibility that they might be used, which is all that is required to generate a satisfying level of tension.

## The Ripple Effect

Whenever a conflict is resolved or a dramatic event occurs on one part of the map, it can have an impact on the connected parts. After a Conflict is resolved, take a look at the characters connected to the character that just resolved his Conflict. How would this affect them? Would it make their lives better or worse? Now look at the people connected to them. Are they going to have strong opinions about this? Did this help their enemy enough to draw their attention to a place or person it had previously overlooked?

The ability to track this cascade effect is one of the great uses of the diagram, and when things really start going badly, it can be one of the few ways to keep everything making sense.

## Reduce, Reuse, Recycle

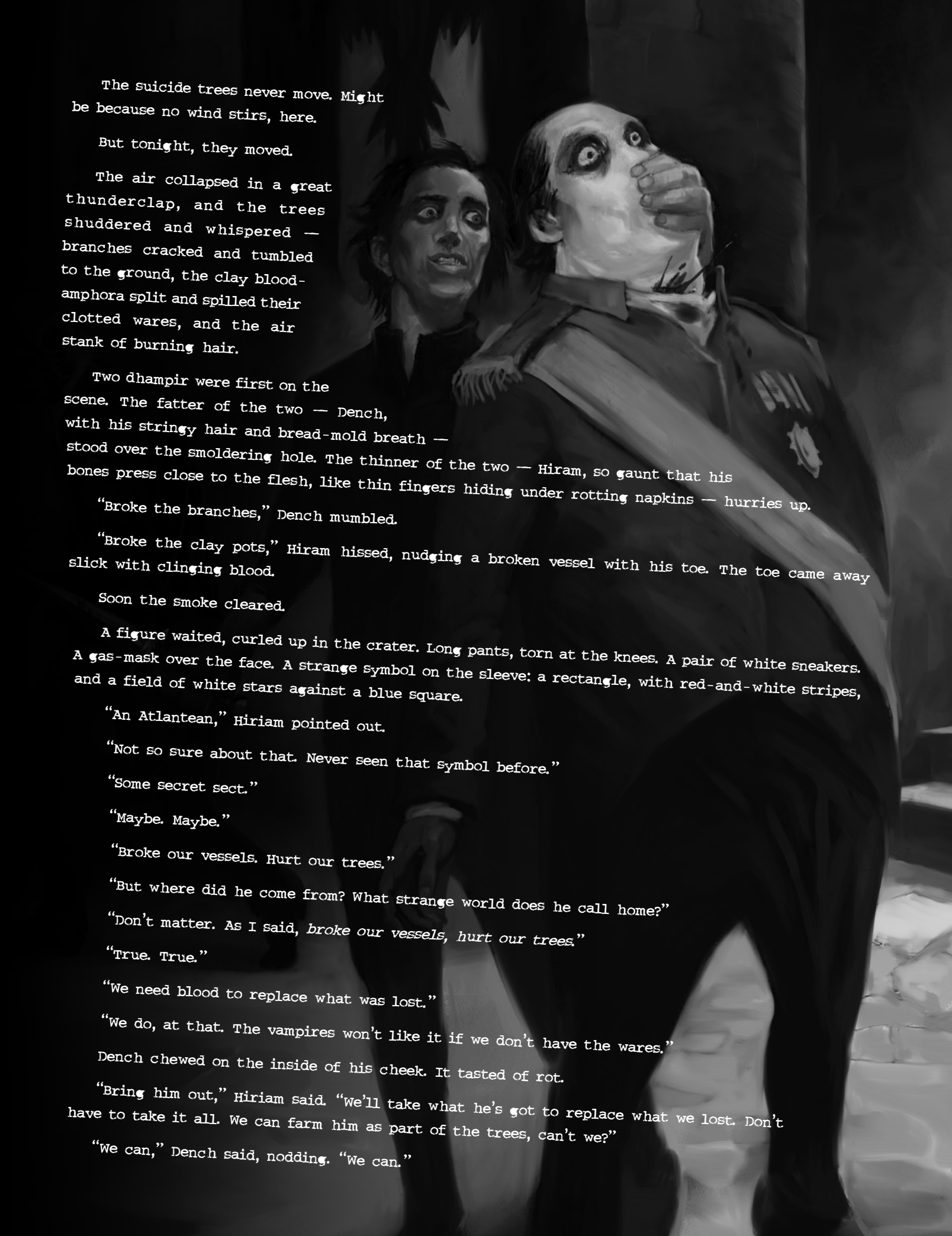
This got touched on in the section on conservation of characters, but it bears repeating. The whole point of building this cast of characters is to re-use them. When there's a need for a new character, *always* look at the existing stable of characters first, and see if there's a character to re-use instead.

## Transparency

How much of the information on the map is available to the entire group? The default assumption is that the Storyteller has complete visibility into the whole diagram, while players can only see their individual constellations. While this can work, Storyteller's should consider the possibility of making the entirety of the diagram an open secret, visible to all players. This approach depends on the players being mature enough to not abuse this information, and to instead look at it as a way to find new opportunities for play. If a group is not uniformly comfortable with this approach, then the diagram can remain secret, but the question should at least be discussed by the group.







The suicide trees never move. Might be because no wind stirs, here.

But tonight, they moved.

The air collapsed in a great thunderclap, and the trees shuddered and whispered — branches cracked and tumbled to the ground, the clay blood-amphora split and spilled their clotted wares, and the air stank of burning hair.

Two dhampir were first on the scene. The fatter of the two — Dench, with his stringy hair and bread-mold breath — stood over the smoldering hole. The thinner of the two — Hiram, so gaunt that his bones press close to the flesh, like thin fingers hiding under rotting napkins — hurries up.

“Broke the branches,” Dench mumbled.

“Broke the clay pots,” Hiram hissed, nudging a broken vessel with his toe. The toe came away slick with clinging blood.

Soon the smoke cleared.

A figure waited, curled up in the crater. Long pants, torn at the knees. A pair of white sneakers. A gas-mask over the face. A strange symbol on the sleeve: a rectangle, with red-and-white stripes, and a field of white stars against a blue square.

“An Atlantean,” Hiram pointed out.

“Not so sure about that. Never seen that symbol before.”

“Some secret sect.”

“Maybe. Maybe.”

“Broke our vessels. Hurt our trees.”

“But where did he come from? What strange world does he call home?”

“Don’t matter. As I said, *broke our vessels, hurt our trees.*”

“True. True.”

“We need blood to replace what was lost.”

“We do, at that. The vampires won’t like it if we don’t have the wares.”

Dench chewed on the inside of his cheek. It tasted of rot.

“Bring him out,” Hiram said. “We’ll take what he’s got to replace what we lost. Don’t have to take it all. We can farm him as part of the trees, can’t we?”

“We can,” Dench said, nodding. “We can.”

# Chapter Three: Shards

...it leads to the conclusion that the world of our experience – the universe that we actually perceive – is not the only universe. Co-existing alongside it are countless billions of others, some almost identical to ours, others wildly different, inhabited my myriads of near carbon-copies of ourselves in a gigantic, multifoliate reality of parallel worlds.

–Paul Davis,  
“Other Worlds”

The World of Darkness is the setting.

The Storytelling System provides the mechanics by which we create characters for this setting and for which we use to navigate that setting *with* these characters.

Up until now, we’ve been hacking apart the Storytelling System, chopping it into its component elements, and rearranging the pieces while inventing whole new ones.

Now it’s time to hack the *setting*, to kick the mirror dead-center, and see what shards break free.

In this section you’ll find three shards. Each shard is a new look at the World of Darkness, a way to play with the knobs and buttons that govern the setting so that it creates a modified setting in which to tell stories.

The first is **The World of Darkness Revealed**. In this shard, we take a look at an alternate World of Darkness where the monsters have been exposed, where mankind can no longer exist in ignorance. We shine a big, garish light on the darkest corners of the setting, and take a look at what comes scuttling up out of the shadows.

The second shard is **The World of Darkness Destroyed**. Here, we throw every possible apocalyptic scenario at the wall, and give you a myriad of options with which to run a story set during the End of Days in the World of Darkness. Outbreak of plague? Zombie hordes? Chemical weapons? It’s all here. Welcome to a monstrous Armageddon.

The third and final shard is **The World of Dark Fantasy**, where the setting gets put through several fantastical spins, allowing you to conservatively — or liberally — apply a fantastical brush to your World of Darkness story

## The World of Darkness Revealed

What if the Masquerade was no longer necessary, because it no longer applied? What if Lunacy stopped working? What if humanity snapped out of the fog they so willingly wrap themselves in? What if the World of Darkness woke up, took a long hard look at itself, and *believed*? The scales fall from their collective eyes and they become aware of the supernatural element so thick it seems choking when put side by side. Neighbors, colleagues, and public figures discover a scant few degrees separate them from the supernatural denizens that lurk in every alleyway and under every stone. What becomes of the World of



Darkness when the lights are turned on? Do the cockroaches scurry feverishly for the underside of the refrigerator or do they turn and fight like trapped rats? How have the monsters remained hidden for so long? How is it they are revealed? Are the monsters aggressor or victim?

Welcome to the World of Darkness Revealed. The elements herein are designed to put a few new tools in your toolbox to address what happens when one Masquerade breach too many makes it past the Prince, or when the FBI agent makes his roll to resist Lunacy or when the gauzy filter of the Abyss isn't enough to keep the club kids from seeing the magic performed in front of them. Even the smallest slip-ups like these can start the dominoes falling and before you can say "you didn't see anything" it's all over the evening news, on the AP wire, and on the Internet. But what if it isn't an accident? What if the center simply doesn't hold or some group gets it in their head to ruin it for everybody else? We've all wondered at times what it would be like if the vampires got their shit together and ruled the world, or if the werewolves simply voiced their noble mission and got to it unhindered by interference from local sheriffs, or what mages could do when out in the open and spitting right in the Abyssal eye.

This is usually where we pull back. After all, the struggles, uphill climbs, and obfuscations inherent throughout the World of Darkness are major themes. They're not so easily left aside without becoming something entirely different. A **Vampire: The Requiem** game without the Masquerade can easily devolve into a bunch of assholes doing whatever they want. Maybe fun for an afternoon, but long-form stories aren't likely to take root. Besides, the Masquerade adds a protective element among the Damned; as much as it's designed to not "spook the herd" it also keeps them from getting crushed underfoot when they inevitably stampede.

But what if? What if it was a controlled fall into chaos? New rules would rush into the vacuum. New themes would present themselves. How does the rest of the World of Darkness respond? Would the loss of the Masquerade (as our reigning example) get the dominoes started, diminishing the effects of Lunacy and raising public belief in the supernatural in general? Or would it make it all the harder for the monsters to survive now that government-supported hunter cells patrol the streets and a national curfew is put in place? All manner of new elements begin to burble to the surface as we let our minds explore the possibilities inherent in this shard. What we lose in personal horror we gain in speculative societies and social experiments. It will essentially be a different game with the same rules but if you've played enough World of Darkness games maybe you're ready for a change for a session, a story, or a whole chronicle. Maybe twisting a few knobs and adding and subtracting a few key elements will do the trick. After all, what else is this book about?

## Scenarios

"*Vampires are real, news at 11.*" As a Storyteller, your job is to ask two very prescient questions: *how the hell did that happen?* and *now what?* We'll explore these tentpole questions in further detail below with setting-specific examples while keeping the information general enough to be applied to one, several, or all games as needed.

## Revelatory Language

We'll be using a few catchall terms throughout this shard in order to cover as broad a base as possible. "Gameline," for instance, is rather self-explanatory but refers to the publishing lines such as **Vampire: The Requiem**, **Werewolf: The Forsaken** on through to **Geist: The Sin-Eaters**. That includes the "Blue-Book" line, those books that add dimension to the World of Darkness that target no specific gameline and only need the **World of Darkness Rulebook** to play and are identified by the blue color of the covers (ex: **WOD: Tales of the 13<sup>th</sup> Precinct**, **WOD: Slasher**, **WOD: Inferno**).

We'll sometimes refer to "limited" gamelines, which refers to the runs of **Promethean: The Created**, **Changeling: The Lost**, **Hunter: The Vigil** and **Geist: The Sin-Eaters**, specifically. This isn't to pass judgment on anybody's favorite game so much as looking for some canned language to use to discuss these wide reaching topics — these games are not limited in scope, only in the number of books devoted to them.

## Media Blitz

Every day our society ventures a little deeper into the information age. The modern news media is no longer limited to boiling down information into hour-sized chunks. With 24-hour news channels and the Internet made more readily available the world over, the hunger for bigger leads and scoops grows exponentially by the hour. This need is driving reporters, paparazzi, and even amateur bloggers to crawl into every shadowy corner left on Earth to pull whatever they find there screaming into the light. Vampires find fewer shadows in which to lurk, werewolves find less territory unclaimed by man, and mages find it harder to uncover mysteries beyond human eyes. Even the dedicated people who take up the Vigil find it more difficult to stay off the grid. All it takes is for one credible — or semi-credible — story to hit the AP wire or

YouTube and the deepest secrets of the supernatural could become a viral video or household gossip within a week. The Masquerade shreds, the effects of Lunacy shatters, and the miens that hide changelings slip away and magic is no longer solely the purview of the fringe.

How do vampires respond to being followed by rabid paparazzi (we can't help but recommend the HBO series *True Blood* for a glimpse of vampires "out of the closet")? How do werewolves go about their business when a herd of unwashed reporters camp out at their locus wanting to score an exclusive interview about their noble mission? How do the Awakened keep their heads when teenage groupies wear arcane and genuinely-powerful occult sym-

bols on their T-shirts or tattooed above their ass-cracks? Can reality TV and similar stunts and infotainment be far behind? How long before a network offers a college scholarship to a Promethean or hands Network Zero cells a blank check to compete against other cells in a game show format or a survivor's expose? Sound ridiculous? Turn on a television during primetime and think again. Is it horror? Maybe, maybe not, that depends on you as Storyteller. Horror has certainly taken on our increasingly entertainment hungry culture before: *Running Man*, *Death Race 2000* (or the 2008 remake), *Series 7: the Contenders*, *Man Bites Dog*, and dozens more readily turn entertainment into horror and vice versa.

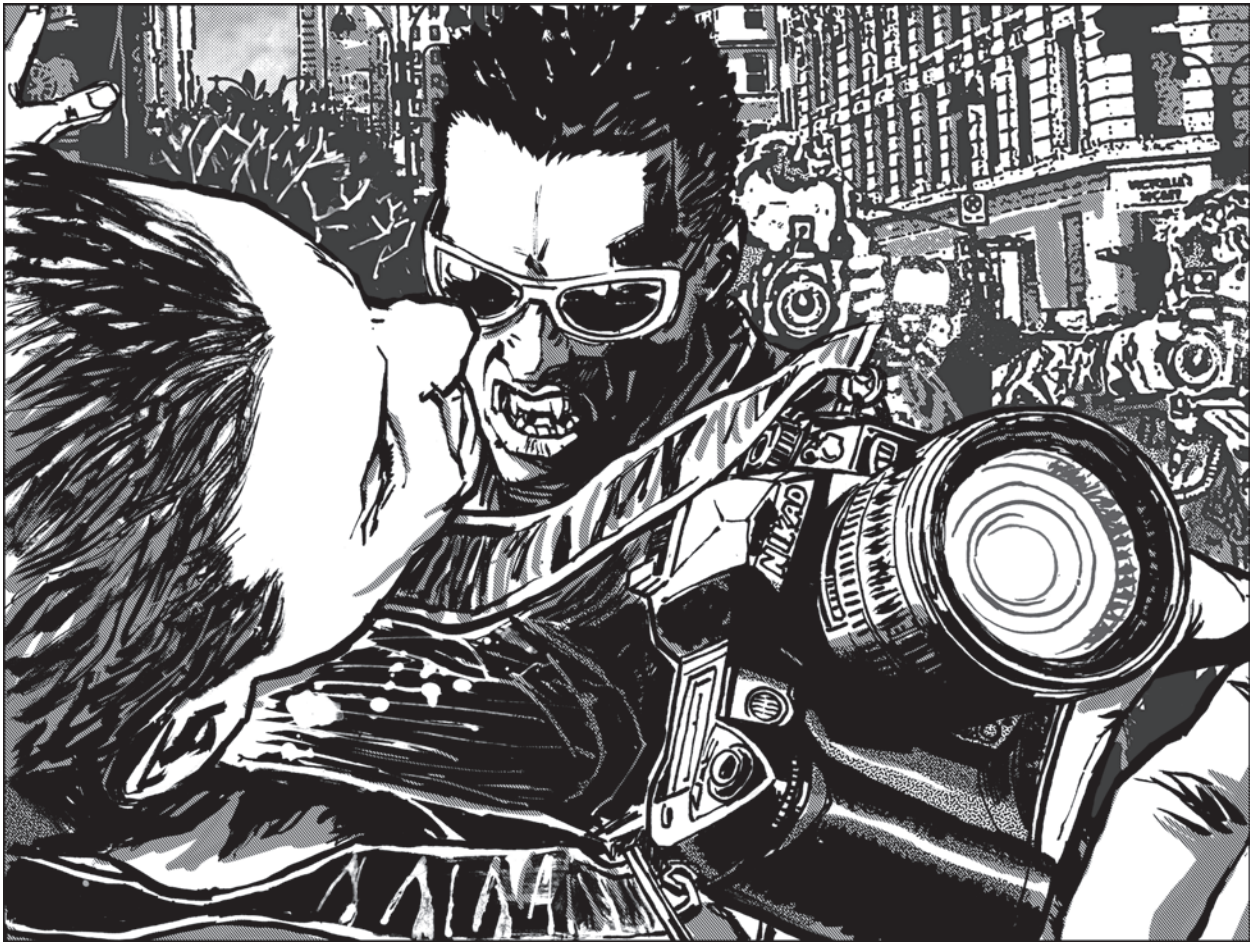
## Story Seeds

**The Poet's Soul of Leonard Macklin:** How did he get so big? How did anyone not see this coming? How did the Prince of his home city not step up and stop this? Where'd he come from, anyway? Leonard Macklin went from zero to mega-celebrity overnight. His music isn't particularly groundbreaking but something in his pouting lyrics, droning chords, and steel blue eyes seemed to capture an entire generation at once. That he was a vampire singing about his condition openly was written off as metaphor — at first. By the time of his *Rolling Stone* interview and his notable failure to develop on a single photograph it was too late to control the sensation. He was too young, too new to the condition to understand why the rules are in place, why the Masquerade exists, why Princes rule, why accounting is so important to his kind. Another famous vampire musician — who shall remain nameless — tried to pull him aside and get him to back off a little, to play it cool, to little avail. Contrary to his elders' long held fears, the world didn't sharpen their pitchforks, no, they embraced him (little "e") and wanted 10 more just like him. Before long the youth of America and Europe (soon touring in Japan) accept this young man for exactly what he claims to be. Other younger vampires grow bolder and by the time everyone understands the implications it's a full bore cultural revolution. The elders hang in the shadows — for now. But soon, humanity will drag them into the light. Will it be flashbulbs and screaming groupies, or torches and pitchforks?

**Conspiracy Fact:** Hunter life is composed of various tiers ranging from street level cells to globe-spanning conspiracies. Those aptly-named conspiracies have a lot to lose in the face of revelation. A pharmaceutical company that harvests monster parts and makes anti-inflammatory drugs out of ghoulish lice will have a lot to answer for once outed. A portion of the American government that hides knowledge of monsters from the general public since the violent end of the Lincoln presidency will be seen as only the tip of the iceberg. Conspiracy theorists the world over aren't looking to reveal Supernal magicians or border-marching wolfmen as much as they're looking for governments, corporations, and secret societies to be up to something sinister. That they are correct overshadows the further revelation that monsters are real, lost in the din of self-congratulations and demand for trials against humanity's own protectors.

**The Fallen Sun:** A new religion has taken root in trendy Hollywood and spread throughout the American Southwest. Before long it becomes the talk of other trendy settings frequented by the rich, effete, and bored: London, Monaco, Milan, and Prague. They have all the trappings of a self-important social network, talking about "tending the living soul" and "paying it forward to the departed" and other obtuse platitudes that only seem to serve those with less earthly concerns. Before long this group comprises the people you need to know to get anything done at the upper echelons of society (ahem, cough cough, Scientology). That's when this "cult" becomes prohibitive and transcendent enough to bear scrutiny. A young journalist goes undercover to find out what all of the hubbub is about only to discover the sinister machinations of a death cult with connections to the very real Underworld. The celebrities and criminally rich who make up this cult have an initiation ceremony involving a handful of pills and being led through a villa of literal dead souls. The experience is as terrifying as it is transformative. The journalist never returns, whether he's discovered as a mole or doesn't survive his own journey to the Underworld.





This sort of “pop-cultural revolution” is in many ways the most realistic of our scenarios — or most accessible — to the world as it stands today. Deep in the throes of the information age, where and how are the supernatural expected to hide? The days of Internet journalism, blogging, and YouTube make it so that every man, woman, and child plugged into the web add to an increasingly global vantage. With the quick-burn, viral celebrity available on the net and the lack of discretion of youth, it isn’t hard to believe that a pack of young werewolves lets themselves get caught on a camera phone (or the mage who thinks no one is looking when he performs a rote, or a changeling entering the Hedge through an unused doorway). Horror in general has a lot more hurdles to jump these days now that a babysitter locked in a suburban house or group of young filmmakers venturing into the woods of Maryland have cell phones, iPhones, and wireless Internet at every turn.

The Media Blitz can be the least antagonistic of our scenarios, though not necessarily any less disturbing. No shots need to be fired, no one needs to die, just one day a famous singer gets a little too confessional or some changelings stumble out of a door rimmed with creeping tendrils of living Hedge and next thing we know it’s all over the Internet and cable news. However, even in the most peaceable scenarios people will bring old prejudices

or develop new ones. In our real world people still can’t see past skin color or sexual preference, they certainly aren’t going to be okay with blood-suckers and moon-worshipping half-wolves. Even as science is busy labeling them *Homo Sanguine*, *Homo Lupus*, or *Homo Magus*, a few kids on the block (or some Union hunters) are going to be donning ski masks with a plan to put them sonsofbitches in their rightful place. They aren’t going to want them moving in their neighborhoods, dancing to their music, drinking at their bars, or touching their daughters. The younger generations will — as always — find themselves generally more tolerant while the older generation will fight tooth and nail to hang on to their old ways.

Now onto the other side of the coin: the inevitable blowback of fame. Our most popular entertainers are worshipped and reviled in equal measure. The media and we as the audience love to build people up only to tear them down. The paparazzi hound them to the ends of the earth until we can’t stand to hear their names anymore or learn of their every indiscretion as it’s made. Sure vampires and changelings are tragically hip enough to surf that initial wave of attention but how long before the “poor dears” reveal themselves to be blood-draining monsters and emotionally-leeching freaks? Scoring an interview with a werewolf pack is a great scoop; that they’re Fire Touched



zealots doesn't mean anything to the terrified crewman as they film some hideous branding ceremony. How long will mages maintain our sympathies once humanity recognizes the sheer power to which they have access? That doesn't even get into government and military meddling where weaponized Prometheans, psychic intelligence gathering, and ghost spies all jump up on the R&D to-do lists — all in the name of national security, of course.

The Media Blitz is a good scenario to ease into the World of Darkness Revealed or to explore themes of the fickle and mercurial nature of the media and our increasingly modernized culture. It has a nice realistic pace but doesn't necessarily drag humanity screaming and kicking into an occulted world that's been hiding under their noses the whole time.

## Protectors of Humanity

Positioned between the shuddering masses and some new threat, the supernatural forces step forward to keep us safe, exposing themselves in the process. Each gameline has enemies that seek to threaten humanity to which only the protagonists are privy. Most notably, werewolves, mages, changelings, and Sin-Eaters recognize whole layers of reality that they can access but the average human being has no concept of. Threats loom just outside of our tangible world and they are the thin red line between *us* and *them*. Even the conceits of vampire culture and its Masquerade protect the human herd (in the same way that humans protect, say, a herd of cattle). At some point the hidden threat looms too great or the mission weighs

## Story Seeds

**Humanity Ascendant:** Unprecedented numbers of souls begin Awakening all at once. It isn't the revelation of magic that causes this influx of new blood, but rather how the revelation comes to dawn on humanity. This makes the ascension of humanity itself the enemy as too many cooks crowd into the kitchen. Each faction and Legacy sees this as a glorious dream to start but when the Awakenings don't slow down, the scope of the problem sharpens into focus. The Guardians lose their minds first, but the Banishers damn sure aren't happy about it, either. As the Awakenings show no sign of stopping, it becomes apparent that humanity must be told what's happening to them. But who? And how? Will a single spokesman be chosen or might the various factions race to approach this situation in their own way? Could a complete schism be far behind? Is this the rise of a new Atlantis, or the confirmation that one will never rise again?

**The Champion of Dogleg Creek:** Prometheans can easily be painted as the sympathetic outcast, each a noble soul with a nobler purpose; a willing Pariah. As a small village or town is plagued by the supernatural unchecked — due to the included scenarios or because our proverbial “Dogleg Creek” is too far off the grid for anyone to notice a vampire overlord or Pure pack holding sway. Until the wanderer came, that is: a Promethean or perhaps a whole throng intends only to pass through but the pull of Milestones tells her she has more work to do here. Excising whatever demon cancer has taken root makes this misbegotten miscreant a hero despite herself. The people are glad enough to be free to fight back their rejection of her. Already desolate and barren, the population invites her to stay awhile. This works well in smaller settings obviously, but having a throng act as the guardian of the West End or Seattle are the same concept exploded. Eventually, the Wasteland will take hold. Disquiet, too.

**The Candle Lights Another, Lights Another...:** Boiled down to its essence, the Vigil comes from a desire to protect the rest of mankind. Not every hunter is an altruistic force for good and justice but for the *most* part hunters are people who gazed into the darkness and could not suffer it. The conspiracies and compacts that comprise the Vigil are more organized on a street and global level than most supernaturals. It would only take the will and the desire for any one group or combination of groups to say to hell with hiding *in* the darkness *from* the darkness, let's send up a flare and light this motherfucker. The conspiracies certainly have the funds and clout to make the move but they arguably don't need to. More likely a confederation of compacts will do the job instead. The millennial fear and desperation of the Long Night may cause them to damn the torpedoes and put out a call to all God-fearing folks. Network Zero may finally succeed in putting enough evidence together to demand attention. Or maybe it was the brass of Task Force:VALKYRIE who had one budget cut too many and sent out the appeal to the citizens they've kept safe. Regardless of where it originates, the call is put out and the response isn't swift but it does come. Other potential hunters, witnesses who can finally explain what happened to them that one night, etc. begin to come forward. The World of Darkness is a scary place to live and finally someone has given voice to the urge to fight back.



too heavily and the protectors are forced to step out from behind the curtain. Do they represent Chicken Little, desperately clamoring for an audience before the thunder rolls and the sky falls, or are they battle crows stepping in after first blood has been drawn to supply crucial answers to the confused (and potentially dying) survivors?

To assert that one or more groups are revealed in the name of protecting humanity necessarily predicts that who or what they're protecting us from is on the move (see the Masters of Mankind scenario presented below). It could be that the status quo has simply gotten out of hand all on its own certainly, but if our once-hidden protectors are going to step out of the shadows it's probably because something big is coming or already here. Whether the Keepers are sharpening their blades to stage a mass abduction or some elder spectral horror is rearing its head with only a handful of psychics and Sin-Eaters aware of its emergence, something has changed the game.

Once a group has come forward to save us from their dark-hearted kin (or ourselves) they are expected to make good on that promise. If a cabal of mages storms into the United Nations while they're in session with overtures of impending doom and the need for all trust to be put in their ability to keep us safe... well, then there had better be some impending doom. Unless said group can paint a convincing scenario wherein we all averted the crisis thanks to them, people are going to anticipate fireworks, even war, or the very real end of the world, depending on the threat.

Are our benefactors arming us to deal with the problem or saying that only they are equipped to handle the danger? At what point do our protectors become the oppressors and what splinter factions might crop up among the herd? Is the enemy sapient or salient enough to make a counteroffer? If the Uratha claim that staying within approved zones and maintaining strict curfews is the only way to keep us safe, it's going to breed resentment; the kind of resentment that the Pure can fan into a revolt against their protectors. Are they switching one conqueror for another or might the world truly turn upside down and who we've suspected of being the good guys all along reveal themselves as the true enemy of mankind? Hell, what if the Banishers or the Pure are the ones who brought this message of mutual protection against the evil mages and horrible Forsaken? Several themes beg to be explored in this scenario: "What price for our security?" and "Who has our best interest at heart?" to name a couple. (Then there's that old chestnut: "Who watches the watchmen?")

How does each of these groups purport to keep us safe anyway? Vampires are only effective at night, so do they train ghoulish squads to keep themselves and the rest of us safe from their brothers' dark servitors? Empowering humanity while at the same time subverting their will to resist their masters? This brings up another pertinent question: what is life like under the protection of predators? Putting your

safety in the hands of something that considers you on the menu? How does the antelope see the lion? The herd is allowed to move about, frolic, and play as much as they like but once the lionesses get hungry, the nightly drama begins again. As they drag your mother, child, or friend away you're expected to go back to the watering hole or return to your grazing as if nothing happened.

Granted, vampires (and some other consumptive monsters) don't need to be lethal in their hunger. Mandatory blood drives or donation by lottery should keep them sufficiently fed. We hope. Vampires are the most extreme example, but many of the gamelines possess some way to feed off humanity, even if it's just eating inspiration or humans serving as a desperate source for Essence or Plasm. These are the very urges they're presumably offering to keep us safe from and at that point, people can only trust them to keep that word. Accidents happen even under the best intentions and it's worth exploring what happens when the shield becomes the spear.

Werewolves are in-part ruled by instinct and likely will fall into a kind of herd-and-patrol pattern of protection. Mages are specifically equipped to deal with Abyssal creatures or other mages and will need to directly take charge of our supernatural protection. However, with artifact creation and the ability to weave rites directly into the patterns of people and items around the city, we might be able to go about our lives with less bother.

Expect hunters to create a society of entrenchment and battle readiness, while changelings may have contracts designed to hide, early warning systems and drills put in place to keep people safe from the keening of their Keepers.

What of still other groups, hitherto unseen contributors to the World of Darkness, such as psychics attempting to keep us safe from astral invaders or angelic super-forms descending from the moon to warn us of encroaching infernal forces? Ordinary people might suddenly find themselves empowered by unseen forces to stand between the rest of the World of Darkness and their unenlightened brothers and sisters. Do you have outlines for a whole new creature or gameline to add into the mix? Now might be the time to have your pet creations come to the rescue (with your troupe's implicit approval, of course; even more enticing is when the players get to play these new protagonists or adversaries).

Lastly, what if the threat never manifests itself? Those mages are still out there, in the public eye on record as having extraordinary powers and some crazy ideas about how the world works. Does it cast doubt on their very existence? Can the genie be put back in the bottle? Or do people move forward as in any of these scenarios only slightly more suspicious of mages crying wolf? So when the Scelesti or Seers of the Throne rear their heads, will mankind be too slow to rally?

## Masters of Mankind

The equal and opposite number of the scenario directly above: what happens when one or more factions within the World of Darkness decide they're not going to bend their knees and appease humanity anymore? They're tired of hiding and begging for scraps just to protect the fragile psyches of the ignorant herd. *They* have to deal with their supernatural condition, so why shouldn't *you*?

Many of the supernatural denizens of the World of Darkness offer some variation on being humanity's master. Whether it's for the clear evolutionary advantage of the vampires, or the ancient task of protecting and culling the herds of the Uratha, or the superior understanding of the universe of the mages, they all have a claim. Any and all of these considerations might eventually boil over with a resounding "fuck humanity." Yeah, humanity might have superior numbers, but so do ants and no one's really concerned about being conquered by ants, are they?

These groups will have to be smart about it if they want to be successful, but they've remained hidden from them since before time so they obviously have a few tricks up their collective sleeves. Maybe it's just

attempts by some radical splinter group or antagonist force to assert their primacy over mankind. But don't rule out the consideration that the mainstream culture of a given gameline gets fed up or desperate enough to make a grab for the brass ring.

This scenario is the most strictly antagonistic of the lot and in many ways the one that comes to mind when pondering the World of Darkness Revealed. While the other scenarios present a lot of interesting roleplaying opportunities, theme exploration and alternative society design, this goes right for the jugular. The monsters rise up and seek to overtake us — or were already successful by the time you wake up tomorrow (and if you want to start with them seeming benevolent and then move toward malevolence, you could do worse by using the old — or new — *V* TV series as a model).

How do they expect to enslave and control the masses? Will they control mankind's resources? Will it be through intimidation and shows of strength? Will they rule by the stick and carrot? Might they delude humanity with honeyed words and promises of future prosperity? Vampires can sway entire crowds, werewolves are physically power-

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## Story Seeds

**New Year's Revolution:** The world watches as the clock climbs to the inevitable descent of a gaudily decorated ball and for the crowd of thousands to erupt in revelry. A half-drunken chorus of Auld Lang Syne echoes forth, young and old kiss their loved ones and for just one second all seems good in the world. Then the screaming starts. It starts on the far edges of the crowd but the chaos quickly spreads inward. The mass of drunken flesh churns in confusion like a stampede with nowhere to go. Hundreds are crushed under foot as people don't know what's happening or where to turn. The vampires have closed off the streets; they're killing and shooting their way toward the middle. Cameras roll but only catch glimpses of Vaseline-like smears and eruptions of blood and violence. The revolution has begun. Happy New Year.

**The March of the Pure:** The Pure have always fancied themselves as humanity's masters. Finally they believe themselves capable of reinstating the pogroms of yesteryear and without warning or provocation they begin to cull the great herd once more. It is a deliberate call to arms, a proclamation of war that begins with a dozen or so packs spread out over several countries but before long it is a movement. Word of mouth and barking chains echo through the night and the March of the Pure makes its inevitable trek toward the bastions of mankind. Spirit worshipping armies of werewolves invade villages, towns, and cities. The Uratha put up as much as they're able but they're outnumbered and overwhelmed. Now, as conquered people you serve them or you die.

**The Fifth Season:** A radical faction takes hold among the disenfranchised Lost, which is probably a bigger number than anybody suspects. They are tired of shuddering under their covers afraid, afraid of the Keepers, afraid of their fetches, afraid of fate, and afraid of people. Their words and contracts have the ability to rewrite reality, so why are they hiding in plain sight when they could be masters of this world? It begins less violently than the other scenarios: after all, a changeling's strength lies more in guile than raw power. With great organization and skill they begin to wheel and deal throughout a given area (a township, a city, a country?). Deals of wealth, power, fame, and ignominy; and what they give, they also get, thanks to Byzantine pacts and oaths. Before long none are in power that weren't put there by one of their number. By the time anyone realizes anything is amiss, the changelings already rule the world from backrooms and boltholes.

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ful enough to take on large numbers, and mages can bend and break the rules that govern the world around us. Is it enough? Is it total? Does it have to be? A single man with a gun can rob a crowded bank despite not having enough bullets to go around; no one individual in the crowd wants to get shot, so the crowd remains docile.

Is humanity just fodder and/or cattle to our new overlords? To be ruled over and obeyed? Do they have some other mission in mind for us? Vampires keeping charnel houses full of people strapped to machines drinking them dry, werewolves keeping strict curfews and clearly demarcating where people can and can't go, mages lording over us like a ruling class. While the title of this shard is the World of Darkness Revealed, these groups might not rule entirely out in the open (though their existence would become known eventually). They might deal through proxies — human servitors, those who selfishly choose what is perceived to be “the winning side.”

What kind of resistance is formed in response, or is our will so completely subverted that the idea of rebellion is banished entirely? Consider a gameline based on the World of Darkness cast in negative. Playing the select few humans with enough will to overcome the monstrous pogrom of this World of Darkness Revealed, people are the hidden monster attempting to free the herds of captive humanity and overthrow their shadowy masters. Are people kept in camps, segregated by utility, or put to work on some larger project like rebuilding Atlantis or constructing subterranean monuments to the dead?

Do other creatures pitch in to help control the masses or do rival factions compete for control or to once again free the people. Do hunters lead the charge to resistance or are they the perpetrators (or collaborators) of this new rule? Combine with the Protectors of Humanity scenario above or use these elements in building the Open War scenario detailed below.

## The Ancient Enemy Returns

Something older than recorded history slumbers in the few uncharted corners of the world. From beneath the Saharan sand or below the verdant carpets of the Congo or Amazon, it awakens with an insatiable hunger, alien desires, ungodly power and returns to “life” dangerously confused.

The World of Darkness is thick with unknown and unconfirmed histories. Countless questions linger for the denizens in the modern nights, questions similar to those that haunt humanity: where did we come from? Who created the vampires? What force animates the unliving bodies of the Created? When did the Sundering separate the world of man from the Shadow? Where do mages get their reality-bending powers? Why do the Keepers abduct humans, and how have they all gone this long without learning their own — let alone one another's — secrets? Now what if one or more figures from before time stumble back into the big picture? Does it know the answers or is it just another — albeit powerful — pawn in the grand scheme of things? Does it herald a coming darkness or speak to an age of renewed hope? It certainly has little

reason to hide, perhaps having walked among the teeming human herds from thousands of years ago — and it believes it can and should do so again.

Vampires can presumably survive for millennia barring incident. Powerful spirits from before the Sundering, beasts from the Atlantean age, or a fabled king and queen of the Fae may lie in wait on whole other layers of reality. How long can the Created live, and might some mythical forbearer still roam the earth? Deathlords — literal Gods among the dead — may lurk deep in the Underworld preparing themselves for some arcane sign (perhaps the final days of the Aztec calendar in 2012). Independent of the various game lines, what of demons or alien creatures from outside our four dimensions? What of mythos-inspired titans whose footsteps created mountains and valleys and the stirring of them cause earthquakes and tidal waves? Or a hitherto unknown ancestor of humanity that has been biding its time underground returns to war with and

enslaves its descendants? Or for a tie-in to *World of Future Darkness* or *World of Darkness Apocalypse* consider the alien race that inspired the Egyptians and Aztec pyramids or the sand paintings at Nazca returning to earth — are they coming to usher in the next evolutionary leap, or do they just want their stuff back?

When any (or all) of these antediluvian entities returns, the question immediately becomes: do they want peace or war or some combination of the two? A vampire from prehistory may be used to being worshipped as a God-king atop a throne made of the bones of his enemies. The changeling's Keepers may remember when they dreamed up humanity and desire to drag us back to the age of fealty. Our alien guides may expect the masses to return to work on the Siberian pyramids they were never able to finish thanks to the resistance borne from Atlantis. They establish work zones and set to renewing their dark works. They create communities of slaves

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## Story Seeds

**The God-King Rises:** Archaeologists and anthropologists the world over are constantly poking and prodding the forgotten recesses looking for the next Tutankhamen's tomb or lost civilization. Finding a lost burial chamber and uncovering a centuries-old torpid vampire would certainly stir up the possibility: if such an immortal creature survived this long, isn't it likely that more of these creatures exist? When the ancient monster wakes up, speaking long dead languages and hungry, will it have the world's sympathy or be seen as a threat? What, if anything, might it tell us of the ancient world? Does this creature even have a concept of the Masquerade? Does it predate the Covenants and what kind of position does it put exemplars of these institutions? What if it is mysteriously free of the Fog of Eternity, perhaps even predating such a condition? Does it herald from a time before clan or covenant or is it indeed the forefather of such conventions? Do the Mekhet the world over suddenly feel a distinct unnamable pull to suddenly travel to the shadowless sands of the Sahara? Is this creature just the tip of the iceberg?

**The Moon-Banished Escape:** The idigam are ancient horrors, formless spirits banished to the moon by Father Wolf before the Sundering. They awoke and returned to earth in 1969 (after the moon landing) and have been slowly reintegrating themselves to the world ever since. Taking on forms and aspects until finally they begin to affect the world around them (for more information on who the idigam are and how they work, check out both **Werewolf: The Forsaken** and **Night Horrors: Wolfsbane**). Now after decades of observation and rest, they are ready. Whether one at a time or organized all at once, the idigam make themselves known. Many spirits and some members of the Pure will view them as totems and gods returned, i.e. entities deserving of worship. Still others will come to the Uratha with tails tucked between their legs begging for aid and alliance. Father Wolf is long gone and it is now their time to play. They are not afraid of you, little wolves; they fought your great-great-great-great grandfather's grandfather when the earth and the moon hadn't yet cooled.

**The Island:** The eastern coastline of the Americas are ravaged by massive storms, Europe and Africa's western coasts are hit by tidal waves and earthquakes. In the middle of the Atlantic Ocean a mysterious island surfaces fully formed. Whether drawing inspiration from Shakespeare's *Tempest* or its spiritual successors, such as *Forbidden Planet* or *Lost*, an island makes an excellent setting for a game. It creates an environment somewhere between sandbox and locked room. Is it Atlantis returning? If not the literal ruins of the long-lost civilization, could it be a new Atlantis; a refuge where magicians can live and learn in relative solitude? Who else expresses interest in this prime new real estate in international waters? Racing against opposition (church, clergy, pirates, whomever) to explore and claim this potential haven provides a nice backdrop to kick off a chronicle.



building cities, locking down neo-feudal societies amid the modern world. Despite this, what if they mean no harm? They're simply doing what is expected of them. What if their "slaves" are more or less willing? Fringe dwellers, supernatural descendants, futurists, or Luddites all may take the pilgrimage to observe and participate in this new old culture.

Of course, the government of whatever modern country in which they rise and claim will most likely resent the territory they just lost (although some may seek to hash out a peace accord to benefit from their supernatural protection). International organizations, occultists, and scientists will want to goad, poke, and prod this rising phenomenon. Imagine if this happened in occupied Iraq where the eyes of the world are already watching. The burgeoning Iraqi government wants to take charge of the situation, the international forces see a surge in numbers as they're suddenly unwilling to scale back, antiwar protestors the world over preach prudence in the face of this new event and the military (already stretched thin) is put on the front lines to wait as the world argues over what to do. Meanwhile citizens — human and supernatural alike — are disappearing into the hot zone every day, more are making their way on some dark pilgrimage out of fascination or some deeper compulsion.

Why now? What long slumbering impulse has forced these creatures to awaken or return? Are they the beginning of the end? Answering the call of some internal clock? Or have the dominoes been falling in plain sight and only psychic and other sensitive citizens had any forewarning — of course we ignored their warnings as the rambling of the insane. Are more of these ancient creatures coming? Will the ancient founders of the vampiric bloodlines awaken in a set order or will powerful Exarchs return to the Fallen World to do battle with the Oracles? Or will the idigam fight the Gentry or the Deathlords or the eldest vampires? Entire continents could be the stakes as all modern borders are replaced with long defunct culture markers or brand new ones. Humanity and monsters are swept up in equal measure and to fight or to serve will be the question on the lips of everyone the World of Darkness over.

## The Curtain Falls

The World of Darkness is composed of a labyrinthine cosmology, a multi-faceted jewel separated into distinct layers. The Supernal, the Abyss, the Shadow, the Astral Plane, the Hedge, and the Underworld just to name a few. These places are removed from our waking world by various thresholds. Somehow, someway the various veils, gauntlets, and mystic barriers separating these layers weaken and fall. One or all of them erode and collapse, laying bare a second (or third, fourth, and fifth) world to the unready masses of humanity. Spirits readily invade

the tangible world, hobgoblins and other Hedge creatures walk unhindered among us, and ancient Abyssal or Underworld horrors forge boldly onto our shores.

How did this happen? Did some powerful monster or group full of hubris tear the curtains down on purpose or are they as gob-struck and stammering as humanity? Did the powerful and alien forces beyond these veils find a way to tear them away or do they find out when everyone else does? Does it happen on some infernal timetable; did Father Wolf only have the strength to push the *Hisil* and the world apart for a scant few millennia? Did some experiment performed by Atlantean kings or prehistoric will-workers only fracture the supernal realms and not break them completely? Is there a time when the Underworld will simply fill up and overflow back into the living world? Are the eschatological musings of a particular religion dead on and might their "end of the world" simply be the merging (or remerging) of the planes of existence?

Has only one realm been torn open or will all of them shortly follow? Does the Gauntlet inadvertently keep the Hedge from prying eyes or the Underworld for that matter? Are these other realms connected to the Supernal landscapes that house the mages' Watchtowers? Arcadia and Stygia have easy enough analogs but then what horrors lie in wait from the less-charted realms such as Pandemonium or Aether? Do even more of these nightmare-scapes exist than are currently recorded? Have the mages glimpsed but a few tiny shards of the whole and built their entire world lie around that glimpse? Untold numbers of heavens and hells that they may be unprepared to face could come crashing down all at once. Unimaginable horrors from different vibrational planes find themselves turned out onto our streets or giant antibody-like organisms that have been kept behind an invisible membrane but now spill into our perception and view us as the invasive organism.

In this scenario, the world itself becomes the antagonist. Werewolves aren't much more prepared for the *Hisil* to wash over the earthly plane than the rest of us. Their guidance and ability will become a dire necessity. Vampires will find themselves in desperate want for allies when the spirit of the sun refuses to move in the sky fixing half the earth in permanent daylight (and the other half in permanent night!). Similarly, mages might find their ability to use and store magic heightened as their Watchtowers draw nearer, but the rest of the world will very much need their guidance. Will they be too consumed with this new dawn of discovery or warring over the wealth of territory and resources that just flooded this plane to consider anyone else? Changelings will wake up to find their nightmares made real but they will be integral to showing humanity the way to survive within the ever-spreading Hedge and how to hide and protect themselves from the creatures who make this place their awful home.



## Story Seeds

**A Victory of Rats:** The Azlu spiderkin were birthed from a set number of eggs left behind by the Spinner Queen while the Plague King's children breed out of control. The Gauntlet weakens every day as the Beshilu ratkind destroy faster than the spiders can possibly repair. Spirits in increasing number find their way through these holes. It's subtle and unseen at first, the same trickling invasion that has typified the past few centuries. The Uratha do their job as they've always done and the public remains none the wiser. Spread too thin and losing the buffering presence of the Azlu, the dam will break and they will be overwhelmed. More incursions, more possessions, more strange attacks and mysterious creatures are seen the world over. The door swings both ways, however, and before long people go missing just by stepping out of their front door. Whole subway trains enter tunnels and never come out the other side. Before long, the spiritual reality of a re-emergent Pangaea must be contended with by an unready population of wolf and man as the rats screech and keen in victorious song.

**The Spell Heard Round the World:** Someone, somewhere casts a legendary rote so enormous, so mind-bogglingly vulgar that the world can't help but notice. We're talking "visible from space" kind of magic. The original caster is almost certainly long since dead or deranged from the ensuing Paradox — unless she happens to be a legendary Oracle or from a similarly mythical level of power — but the damage is done. Whether the various governments of the world attempt to cover it up or not, the truth is out there to be found. The Guardians seek to stop the water from rising, while reality terrorists look to blow the hole open wider. What of the Sleepers who witnessed the event more or less directly, having their collective minds blown right before the black helicopters come in full of gentlemen who want to tell them they saw the planet Venus.

**The Door Stands Open:** While it takes the Lost to open the doorways, the Hedge is fully visible to any transient unfortunate enough to pass by. Hell, they could walk right in if they were brave or oblivious enough (this is true of the Underworld as well). What if the doors stop closing, period? Changelings have long been fond of the ability to duck into the Hedge to escape mortal pursuit or duck out for the same reason. It becomes a significantly less convenient escape route if you can't close the door behind you. The poor bastard who owns the apartment you ducked through comes back to find his studio apartment has been replaced with a doorway to an alien and terrible landscape. The skinless Keeper who is trying to put you back in your gilded cage finds it quite easy to walk boldly into the real world without even slowing down. (The developer of this book would like to mention that this was the idea behind a recent **Changeling** game: what if a Keeper decided to exploit an ancient Contract that allowed her to kick open all the Hedge doors at once, and keep them open for a set time?)

Mortal authorities can deal with a wide range of revelatory scenarios. However, this is one where even the most battle-hardened hunters and topmost levels of government will find themselves equally lost. Humans are remarkably resourceful animals — after all, most of the monsters we play are/were human — and it won't take them long to start reacting and adapting to their new situation. Fast forward a generation or two to really turn this scenario on its ear, potentially combining this scenario with any of the other shards found in this chapter. The Hedge, Primal Wild, or even the Shadow could marry well into the **World of Dark Fantasy** (p. 179) shard. The walls between realities crashing down will probably have more than a few things in common with the **World of Darkness Destroyed** (p. 154) and can benefit from any number of systems and suggestions provided therein.

### Monster War

The multiple factions of the World of Darkness are either largely ignorant of one another or extremely tolerant, depending on the Storyteller's desires. When focusing your story in a particular gameline you probably don't worry overmuch about what the other supernatural creatures are doing unless you need a unique ally or unexpected antagonist. However, if you presume that each of these groups exist side-by-side in every city and every town the world over, then things are bound to get crowded, tensions will run high, and eventually someone is going to throw the stone that starts the avalanche. This scenario can be isolated to a given gameline as needed, eventually the fragile peace keeping the vampire covenants from murdering each other over ideology or the changelings Courts from declaring civil war can



erode without the other monsters contributing or even knowing it's happening.

However, let's take a long look: put all the toys in the toybox and shake it up. Who fires the first shot? What's the opening shot of the war to end all wars? Is it a simple misunderstanding that starts a tempest in a teacup or is it an intentional and malicious stepping over the line? Perhaps the mages' hubris gets the best of them and they believe they can take all comers, or the territorial beast within all Uratha finally snaps when their domains are encroached upon one time too many,

or maybe changelings and hunters feel they've gathered enough numbers together to make a play for the respect they deserve. Once first blood is drawn it won't be long before the remaining factions shore up, run for the nearest stronghold, or choose a side and come in swinging. Whatever starts the fire, one thing is certain: humanity is stuck in the middle. They're either a resource to be fought over or an ally to be courted.

Humanity is left to choose sides or hold its own. The global networks mankind has spent the last several centuries building soon fall to city-state mentali-

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## Story Seeds

**The Other Fang Drops:** Vampires often hate and fear one another. A few exceptions occur as they do with every rule, but the lurking beast inside each of these monsters cries constantly to unleash all their undead puissance on their so-called Kindred. They've gotten pretty good at pretending this isn't true; they put on their dress clothes and present themselves to their mockery of court and it's all very practiced and principled. It's a house of cards is what it is, fit to topple at the simplest breeze. All it takes is for an irreconcilable difference or a rakish tongue getting away from its owner and the beast breaks loose of the cage. Once the line has been crossed — the historical Rubicon — going back fails to be an option. Even if the mainstay of Damned society can be trusted, any number of fringe elements lie within their shadows waiting to screw things up for the rest of them. Belial's Brood, VII, rebellious unaligned, or radical Carthians can all be dangerous x-factors within their nocturnal society. All it takes is for one of those groups to take a step too far to drag the rest of the culture screaming into the light.

**The Not-So Civil War of the Brothers Wolf:** Even Uratha packs can become antagonistic with each other when it comes to who owns a particular square foot of land so it is no wonder that the struggle between the Uratha and the Pure most regularly dares the public eye. Often enough it gets written off as gang violence or a particularly grisly mass murder. Think about escalating gang violence and how often bystanders or other innocents are caught in a crossfire they don't understand. Two rivals find themselves at the same movie theater or public school and they just can't let it go. It's small wonder and fiat that have kept their perpetual war hidden in plain sight. Eventually, the luck of the People is bound to run out and someone won't forget what they saw or a confrontation will happen in too public a place. The minute one or both sides hear that they're secret war is less secret, expect the fur to really fly. Protected by the effects of Lunacy and more than a match for mortal authorities, the werewolves will have lost the only excuse they had left to remain hidden. Of course, that is until humanity catches up and fords into the river of blood without prejudice.

**Ballroom Blitz:** A mage cabal stumbles across a powerful font of magic energy only to find out too late that the werewolves claim that part of town. The subsequent violence alerts the vampire sheriff who whistles up a goon squad to try and get things under control before they're all on the evening news. Each group steps on the others' toes and a week later the survivors only remember someone needs to pay. Before long, an allied pack makes a run on a member of the vampire's Primogen, while another elder makes a move to expel a mage from the university area he's tolerated for far too long. In two weeks time, the World of Darkness in this city becomes a much smaller place. Outside contacts are called and in a few months this struggle branches out into neighboring counties until it sparks a fire in the next closest city. Like an unchecked cancer the war spreads, inevitably gaining the notice of the other citizens and creatures of the World of Darkness. A brutal case of mistaken identity for instance, such as a beast changeling being taken for a werewolf or a Sin-Eater believed to be a vampire takes the war to a new level. The landscape of the world changes quickly throughout the country and from there the world. What does such a conflagration do to a city where the mages and vampires have had a tradition of mutual respect and tolerance? What does it do to the relationship between a powerful, torpid vampire and the werewolf pack that protects her sleeping form? Or any of the myriad of other alliances, exceptions, and friendships formed the world over?



ties. Mages take hold in some areas while werewolves successfully purge them from another and vampires declare a third a safe haven and changelings help enact special contracts that declare them neutral territory in a fourth.

What of the games' in-built antagonists? Do the Banishers come up on the side of mages as the devil they know or do they throw their weight behind whatever is giving their old enemies a black eye? Do Pure werewolves figure they have the strength and numbers to survive them or do they see past their family feud and attempt to keep their kinslayer brothers off the endangered species list?

Ultimately, this scenario brings up questions of who can beat who in a straight fight and does X gameline have an inherent advantage over Y gameline. By and large, the World of Darkness has been designed to be fairly well-balanced. No one group should realistically run roughshod over any other. Yes, mages are insanely powerful when taken to their extreme but by then all of your time is spent honing yourself to spiritual perfection and you're likely compelled to leave the Fallen world to move on to the next step of your journey or your utter lack of physical concentration makes you vulnerable to other forms of attack (remember, a bullet in a mage's head stops his incantations dead). Or perhaps your overwhelming pride (i.e. loss of Wisdom) might cause you

to lower your guard at a costly moment. Each game has pluses and minuses, checks and balances. Unless you as Storyteller have a clear favorite to win the war for story purposes, then it hardly matters. Each monster should be considered by and large to be a match for every other monster; all bets are off. (Changelings, for example, may not be a physical match for Prometheans but their guile and finesse make them a match in other ways). Focus on the grim realities of war and the character roles therein. Worry about the desperate struggles the characters undergo in a world gone mad where Elysium and other safety zones have long since lost meaning.

## Shards of Shards

When building your World of Darkness Revealed, will you only bring a small selection of elements or will you empty the bag out on the table? Many of you will only be interested in how this affects your ongoing chronicle or your favorite gameline, if instituted. Well, let's take a quick look at some of the quandaries, questions, and unique elements each gameline brings to the table.

## World of Darkness Revealed

What about humanity? You and I and everyone we know? We certainly don't need any special story hook as to how or why we stand revealed. We're every-



where. But how do these scenarios affect the man on the street? Not hunters, not mages in waiting, not the enchanted: people, Joe and Jane Everybody. If revealing the supernatural strains any of the gamelines beyond recognition, think about returning to the skin of the normal guy or girl. Living in a world where vampires are a known commodity or that otherworldly alien figures can come for you any time they please is a terrifying existence indeed.

While some of the mystery is removed from the average “blue book” game, the out-of-your-depth atmosphere remains. Playing from the perspective of the everyday citizens of the *World of Darkness Revealed* can make an interesting story or chronicle if your troupe is so inclined. Hunter groups openly recruit on a platform of human purity, vampires run blood drives from which you hear a friend’s sister never came back, mages are on the TV demanding their piece of the pie while your werewolf “protectors” watch you like a cat watches a mouse as you cross the street, and you just want to make it to work with your limbs, blood, and soul intact.

But let’s take another look at what the *World of Darkness Revealed* can mean. We’ve spent a lot of our time discussing what the various gamelines add to this shard but what of the other menaces to the *World of Darkness*? What of the truly weird and unexplained phenomena that make playing the uninitiated so much fun in the first place? What of zombies, demons, psychics, and other Fortean terrors? What does the unknown made real mean to humanity? Vampires and werewolves might be welcome relief or even allies when confronted with skinless demons from one of any Thousand Hells who force sapient creatures into work camps. Cryptids, immortals, body-thieves, ghosts, psychics, other skinchangers, and slashers all dwell on the outskirts of the *World of Darkness* “proper” and await exploration just as much as any, and may bring new surprises for the players. Few of them have the numbers to mount global pogroms or to have as significant an impact, but any glimpse into the supernatural can get the ball rolling and the dominoes falling.

What of expeditions that dig too deep and unearth a race of eyeless, troglodytes who eat Willpower? What of ravenous titans who arise from the world’s oceans and whose coming is heralded only by the nightmares of the world’s psychics? While the *World of Darkness* is an intricate enough tapestry as it stands, never feel so limited by what is that you overlook what isn’t.

## The Requiem Revealed

**Vampire:** The Requiem stands the most to lose by removing the central conceit of the Masquerade. Werewolves and mages hide thanks in part to the


universe doing the heavy lifting for them. Vampires on the other hand hide on purpose; it’s as much instinct as mandate. Flash your fangs in a crowded coffee house and its torches and pitchforks all over the place. Or is it? Let’s face it, we’re a culture increasingly drawn to the myth of vampires. Books, TV shows, and movies come out every year trying to capitalize on this fascination. Here we are playing a game that lets us become the vampires, not fight them, not flee from them. Sure, they’re monsters, but they’re *cool* monsters; blood, sex, life and death all wrapped into one sexy package. Is it enough to keep the unruly mob at bay? That will depend largely on answering the first question: how did this happen?

If the Masquerade is shattered with widespread violence and brutal murder, the “Twilight” crowd isn’t likely to deify them for very long — not most of them at least. You can always count on a select few walking around with Charles Manson or Che Guevara on their T-shirt, whether ironically or in misguided celebration of mass murderers and pseudo-revolutionaries. If the Masquerade crumbles and erodes through national reporting or uncovering a centuries-old corpse who awakens confused and speaking lost tongues, it’s more likely that the fascination with these creatures would continue to grow among the marginalized, young, and forgotten.

Either scenario — whether by bloody murder or growing acceptance — presents unique problems to the Kindred at large. If the cultish psychopaths of Belial’s Brood go apeshit during a live shoot on the evening news, that just became your problem whether you’re a Carthian Daeva narcissist or a Ventrue spiritualist empowering your herd with lessons of the Crone while taking relatively little in return (except, y’know, blood). That’s your problem if you’re a Mekhet Dragon who wiles away your eternity exploring the peculiar sciences of your condition. The herd will want a reckoning against the monsters you now represent no matter your involvement or condemnation. Think of the increased racial tensions and violence immediately following 9/11. It didn’t matter that you were an Indian Sikh who had nothing in common ideologically with the terrorists; you talked funny and looked different. If vampires become real to the world in the worst way possible then it will take unprecedented amounts of spokespersonship and diplomacy to control this animal. It starts as everything does in the *World of Darkness*: on the city level. How your city responds and attempts to control the immediate backlash adds to the greater tapestry of the future.

Similarly, if people learn of vampires through a dreamy crooner who reveals his undead state live on stage, then the Kindred need to prepare themselves





for a different influx of attention: fandom. You can be the most boring Lancea Bishop on record but teenage girls and disaffected boys will suddenly think you're the Coolest Thing Ever. This might not be much more than an annoyance to the more urbane members of Kindred society but when they start prodding the Nosferatu recluse or poking around a Gangrel Ordo's laboratory, people are going to get hurt or go missing, which becomes everyone's problem same as the above.

## The Forsaken Revealed

*This story is true.*

*It was shortly after the Reunion, after the Hisil crashed into the world of Man. Luna's maddening hand was lifted from their senses and spirits again roamed the physical world freely.*

*At the crux of three rivers within Penn's Territory, man and half-man met to discuss what course lay before us both against Udu Luhal, the Oathbreaker, the Moon-Banished. Her armies of unihar and lust-ridden Pure already claimed much of the County of Butler and it would not be long before they beset the City of Bridges.*

*It was a man not of the blood who called for peace between human and Uratha in the name of war. It was a man who commanded iron birds to breathe fire and lay waste to the northern hills. It was a man who rattled his saber and issued the call that the Alphas would follow.*

*Before the Reunion War such was unprecedented, but it was for all people: Uratha, wolf-blooded and spiritless that the wolves found wisdom enough to listen.*

*It is the will of the People.*

*All the people.*

The supernatural effects of the Lunacy protect the People and their occulted mission. Now take that away and watch what the big bad wolf does. Revealing the Forsaken to the populace at large might change how the game is played but it doesn't change the game itself. Whether or not humans know werewolves exist doesn't alleviate their mission to act as the spirit world's border patrol. In fact, it potentially endangers that mission even further. At a glance, the world waking up to the revelation that wolfmen walk among us serves the Pure more than the Forsaken. The Pure already play at this game, herding humanity together, catering to spirits, and weakening the veil between worlds. The Forsaken on the other hand still have a job to do and unless people start pitching in, their lot doesn't change. If the Uratha are smart they'll work that angle, try to organize themselves with environmental groups and preservation societies to attempt to control the local Shadow, and keep the right sort of loci away from random transients. Granted, a pain locus or one of loss isn't going to benefit from having the lawn pruned and the trash picked up. Other arrangements will have to be made to keep

them in working order and that's where the relationship with humanity might be strained. Which brings up the question, how much do people know?

Knowing werewolves are real, knowing what they do and believing in the very real spirit world are pretty large distinctions on the road to revelation. Becoming aware that the Forsaken (and/or Pure) exist without knowing anything about their culture may not be enough to distinguish them from movie villains. That they're people on any level is a secondary consideration to the giant, hairy, many-toothed monster towering over you. The big guns will be called in and no matter how badass it sounds to say, a werewolf pack without Lunacy won't cut through SWAT teams like they're confetti. This level of revelation benefits the Pure more than anyone because they can cause a blatant ruckus and leave the blame and cleanup on the steps of the local Uratha pack.

If humanity learns of the People and their greater mission (within a local community or making the AP wire and broadcast internationally) things get trickier. While the Forsaken consider themselves as fighting the good fight, they're still monsters with a very gray view things like murder and property rights. For every group of people they might win over to their side, others will come up with a dozen solid reasons why these creatures remain an enemy to mankind.

With proof or enough earnest belief that they are the thin shaggy line protecting the material world from an invisible one, however, the face of the game undergoes its final change. Corporations will want in, human agencies will want to prod and explore, and disturbed, wayward humans might knowingly invite spirits into their bodies, becoming a certain enemy. The Pure seek to bolster their resources, the Uratha try to educate and protect in equal measure, and territory becomes all the more important as new kids seek to move in on every block.

To lose Lunacy completely or just give humans an across-the-board bonus (such as +2 to resist Lunacy) is a question only you can answer. As a stand in for panic and post traumatic stress syndrome it's a good system, but it's also very prohibitive in dealing with humanity on any sort of equal terms. Look at what you want to accomplish in a Forsaken Revealed game. Is it open war, is it the Gauntlet shattered, or is it the long road to peace? Also, who will your players be playing? If you want a game where a scrappy band of survivalist humans are trying to hold the line against the invading werewolf menace, then a little Lunacy adds a whole other level of tension; it also might stack the deck too much in favor of the marauders and your chronicle might only last an afternoon. Though, maybe that's intentional.



## The Awakening Revealed

At first blush **Mage: the Awakening** stands the most to gain by having the scales fall from the eyes of humanity. Finally the masses can communicate with them on their terms and as one they can aspire to the next stage in evolution. Hand in hand they will introduce a new age of wonders and reclaim the spirit of Atlantis. Right? Unless you're speaking of a different humanity than the one that populates Earth and hates everything different than it, probably not. Mankind has a habit of reviling things it sees as "better" and mages would be no different. A group of people who can control the very fabric of fate and death aren't going to be greeted with open arms by a superstitious and phobic society. Even if they were more or less willing to meet mages on their own terms and discuss humankind's ascendance, the schisms and politicking of various mage factions would quickly squander this opportunity. World religions aren't going to be keen on working toward a universal truth if it means losing their flocks and individual members are sure to believe the masses are being misled at the cost of their souls. Not to mention the Guardians of the Veil, who won't take all this lying down and will do their best to lead a counter conspiracy hoping to discredit the whole lot so mages will have to return to the shadows. Still sound easy?

The upshot of humans learning the truth about magic is the greater potential for more Awakenings. The more open we are to the reality of the Supernal realms the more ready as a people we are to move to the next level. The downside, of course, comes when more people Awaken than the local Consilium can realistically deal with. It takes a village to keep a mage from merrily tap-dancing off into the Abyss. The more Awakenings that go untended the greater the chance for dangerously uninformed willworkers running around. Orphaned mages take the world by storm, and each is left to interpret the strange, alien worlds visited during their Awakening all on their own. The Awakening is a terrifying journey for even the most enlightened and open-minded soul, so when Joe and Jane Anybody travel to the monolithic Watchtowers the greater the chance of dangerous interpretations. A girl from Utah believes herself claimed by the devil after an all too real glimpse of hell she saw in her dreams; a corporate cog glimpses a primeval wonderland and upon his return accepts himself chosen to return earth to its natural state, so he wages a one-man war on cities; a girl traumatized by images of a society of corpses beside boiling rivers of fat becomes convinced that she has become an angel of death and must usher this vision into a wailing, burning reality.

These guideless souls may become serial killers and terrorists at supervillain levels of power and madness.

Also consider how Banishers, left-handed practitioners, and the Scelesti could be recruiting in full force. Unprepared and untrained, these newfound mages may not take on the Wisdom trait, instead having their souls emptied and replaced by the palpable darkness of the Abyss.

## The Created Revealed

The Created are a difficult row to hoe in these scenarios. In many ways they can't really hide in the first place. Stand still too long and the milk curdles, the sky darkens, and the landscape rots around them. No one stands to gain from Prometheans. They're not really romantic or charged with an enduring mission to protect all of humanity from forces they can't see. They're tragic abominations who instill hate, fear, and wrath in all those who look upon them. They are walking, talking revulsion. They corrode everything they touch and destroy beauty everywhere they go. Being revealed isn't likely to lift or lessen the effects of Disquiet in the same way it might with Lunacy or coincidental magic. Lunacy is a willful curse (or boon) granted by a very real moon-spirit, once the werewolves are out in the open it seems natural that they could erode through familiarity and exposure. Not so with Disquiet. Disquiet is reality itself rejecting these aberrations to the natural order. Whether Prometheans count as undead or unliving, God seems to spit on them at every turn. Furthermore, this struggle against revulsion and exclusion is a significant part of their Pinocchio-like quest for realness. To earn their place in the order of things they must fight, claw, and scrape their way out of the muck of their own awful origins. They must know what it is to be hated, feared, pissed on, reviled, and rejected. It is their lot in life and a major — if not *the* major — theme in the game.

All those points made, perhaps it is the milestone of a messianic Promethean to rid the Created of the curse of Disquiet. Maybe instead of questing to become real and accepted, the journey becomes about feeling at home in their manikin-like bodies and shedding their taint on their surroundings. Other themes can and should arise to replace the cumulative curse of Disquiet if you decide to do away with it. Otherwise, why struggle at all? The Created risk the comfort and ennui that leads to becoming Pandorans.

However, the revealed might stand some chance of finding allies in their quest for (literal) humanity. Promethean underground railroads and selfless people looking for a mission or *mitzvah* might find their own retribution in helping these lonely wanderers get to where they're going. As a group with far less numbers, it is much easier to tell the story of a throng revealed in a local area. Maybe through saving the lives of a busload of children or similar act of altruism they can beat back the creeping hatred within the community enough to stay.



## Story Seed

**The Final Milestone:** What if a Promethean's final milestone was to reveal the Created to the world? Perhaps it is the titular Frankenstein himself or a silver-tongued Galatean. The figure begins a crusade to bring the Created to light with public heroics. He seeks out the media, putting his name and face out there. Other Prometheans hear the voice, Pyros calls to Pyros, and they clamber out of their hidey-holes and into the public square. The first few intrepid Created are met with the same misunderstanding and violence that have forever haunted their existence. They become martyrs to an unknown cause. As mobs crowd around the broken forms, the message of the One reverberates in their ears and pulls at their conscience. They have destroyed something ugly but beautiful; a grotesque mockery of life who only ever wanted something better for itself. Before long the message trickles out, public awareness is cultivated and Prometheans find their effect on the world around them lessens. What might their future hold now?

## The Lost Revealed

Changelings are another group supernaturally occulted from pedestrian eyes. So, the first challenge is determining how they're revealed in the first place. If you implement a fully revealed World of Darkness, then it's easy enough to posit that widespread belief has simply eroded the effects of the mien and other Hedgespun enchantments. When vampires form a minority of your city council, werewolves patrol the borders of the city and Shadow, the mages have opened an embassy down the street, and the local church has a Golem on staff, half-faeries aren't that hard to take on board.

However, if you want the Lost to be the only players in your new society, what does it look like? On the surface it makes their lives a whole lot easier: ratting out one's fetch, reconnecting with loved ones, and gaining support from society at large is a lot easier if a precedent is set. That takes a lot of dramatic meat away from the game if the Lost no longer have to contend with... being lost. It doesn't obliterate all dimensions from the game but it does seem worse off for the journey, at least when it comes to the human side of things. The otherworldly Keepers and their dark hungers are still at play, and the weirdness of the Hedge and its denizens are still around. Metaphysi-

cally, it's still the same game, but without that feeling of returning to a world that's moved on without you, where are your themes? That leaves it to you as the Storyteller to find new and interesting ways to turn the knobs of personal horror and struggle. What if your family isn't so quick to push out the fetch they've loved as a daughter in your absence? Can you accept this odd doppelganger competing for their attention or will you force them to make a decision between the You they put through college and the You they don't recognize anymore? In that way, the tragedy of the Lost can be dialed up to 11.

Certainly, some themes may be exploded and reexamined for the Revelation, but by and large the title says it all. It's not Changeling: the Found. Being lost is what hides them from their Keepers and keeps their families safe. Falling between the cracks is their power in more ways than one and being revealed should almost be an antagonistic force. A few scenarios are suggested above that let changelings take control of their revelation but consider a shard that has them revealed and they're trying desperately to get hidden again. Whether searching for a new contract or eluding government agents in and out of the Hedge, the motley frantically tries to pull the curtain shut again before the Keepers arrive.

## The Vigil Revealed

Those dedicated enough to take up the Vigil have their own reasons to fear being revealed to the world at large. Not the least of which is because they look like sociopaths and deranged lunatics. However, if any of the *other* denizens of the World of Darkness stand revealed and the monsters they hunt are made real for all to see, then they very much stand to gain from their own revelation. Finally, appreciation, dispensation from the law, and other gratuities are coming their way. Or maybe not. After all, they're still vigilantes.

Revealing hunters isn't necessarily as interesting as how the hunters interact with the World of Darkness once revealed. They make better supporting players than stars that way. Still, revealing hunters could be a good way to start the dominoes falling. A Vigil goes bust, which leads to a high-profile trial that drags a conspiracy into the light, which drags everything they're holding onto with them. The Malleus Maleficarum gets put on the stand and the vampires and witches they hunt come with them. With clandestine ties to each other, the revelation of the Shadow Congregation uncovers a Lucifuge bloodline that leads to generations of demons and their offshoot kin, etc. If your troupe is already playing a hunter-centric chronicle, this makes an attractive jumping on point for the World of Darkness Revealed.

Really, at its core, the Vigil is an excellent study for this shard for how individuals and societies react to the presence of monsters; the compacts and conspiracies are exactly



that. While largely antagonistic (even if that antagonism comes in the form of poking, prodding, or trying to catch them on film) that isn't unexpected. At a glance, hunters are humanity's fears, anger, and curiosity writ large.

Left to their own devices, escalation will be their watchword. While the rest of the world wants to embrace their "spiritual defenders," the Aegis Kai Doru will be sharpening their spears. While the herd embraces their new vampire cousins, the Malleus will hold their crosses tight and pray the losses are acceptable in the eyes of God. When the monsters are invited to all the best parties, the Ashwood Abbey will have to find a way to get their kicks under the noses of all those in attendance. And as governments embrace demons in human flesh, the Long Night will see it as another sign of the End Times they failed to avert. In many cases, these stalwart guardians and earnest warriors will only see their missions as all the more urgent.

Lastly, don't expect life under the governance of hunters to be any better than living in service (or under the protection) of vampires or werewolves. The Vigil demands a heavy toll. No hunter is quite right in the head anymore. They may be just as despotic and militaristic when it comes time to set new policies and forge a new society. Breaking curfew might get you shot as a suspected vampire or arrested for collusion. Or imagine playing as a monster on the streets of hunter society where they're allowed to pursue you openly and act as judge, jury, and executioner as they deem fit.

## The Sin-Eaters Revealed

Being revealed adds some fascinating dimensions to the Sin-Eater's plight. Stuck between life and death, they act as conduits, mediums, and dark saviors to the dead. Much like the Forsaken, the Sin-Eaters' mission isn't affected by the revelation although their methods will see some cosmetic changes. The largest impact to the post-revelation Bound might be their elevation to superhero status. Known Sin-Eaters will have their doors broken down by bereaved family members, police, detectives, loved-ones, etc. to deliver messages, do favors, and run other such errands on both sides of the great divide.

Theirs is already a restless existence ferrying back and forth between the Underworld and the world above. If they thought the ghosts were bad, the living are worse. It might become unbearable as any peace they might find is dashed by well-intentioned but misguided grievers, debtors, and others left behind. A few benefits lie in wait behind that sort of celebrity, such as getting paid or recognized for your work and getting full cooperation from the law. Whether the pros outweigh the cons will be a major theme left to explore. Most of the Sin-Eaters' best work happens out of the public eye and in that way being publicized won't interfere with their greater mission. Or will it? They might find themselves called upon to patrol

the twilight border between the Autochthonous Depths and the living world as shades attempt to cross over.


Lastly, consider the role of krewes in the World of Darkness Revealed. Krewes are forged around ideology and meditations on the nature of life and death. They become the new religions in this bold new world, informing the landscape of conflict and resolution moving forward. Death cults celebrating their morbid energies fight with platitudes and words against a krewes of bon vivants who embrace life. Do these conflicts come to open war and how do the established religions deal with these upstarts? Interacting with individuals who claim (and can produce) proof of an afterlife was trouble enough, now they're competition in the business of souls.

## Story Seed

**And The Dead Shall Rise:** As with many apocalyptic scenarios (and current horror trends), the dead scratching their way from their graves to walk the earth is a pervasive concept. It's also an undeniable way to confirm the grim realities of life after death. This phenomenon affects every denizen of the World of Darkness but falls within the Sin-Eaters' rather specific wheelhouse. None are better suited to suss out the hows and whys with the all-access pass to the Underworld they possess, and that includes any advice or wisdom the geists riding shotgun in their heads might provide. What do they know? Does it signify an overpopulation of the Autochthonic Depths? Pushing desperate shades back out the in-door? Does it herald the return of a Deathlord (or several), the so-called Gods of the Underworld? Or is something even nastier stirring within the Lower Mysteries causing the smaller fish to flee any way they can?

## Metrics and Closing Words

How does mankind come to cope with these various revelatory scenarios? The same way man deals with most everything else: he waits to see how everyone else reacts. He looks to his institutions (church, government, community) and neighbors. When playing with these elements and determining how this new shard is going to take shape, keep the following tentpoles in mind: religion, government, and counterculture. This is especially true for people but you can find the faithful among vampires, werewolves, mages, and changelings just as much as you'll find patriots among all the same. Personal opinion knows



no bounds and hundreds of other possibilities will come hot on the heels of the above. It's a good place to start, though, as these are three major factors in how modern society breaks down and informs itself. Religion will either have to allow for or condemn any gestalt-changing revelations. The government will need to gather intelligence, forge official policy, and dictate how much information to disseminate to the masses. Counterculture will respond and react to the massive societal upheaval of learning monsters are real, often in unpredictable ways. How will music, artists, television, and fashion react to vampires made manifest? Werewolves? Mages? These are only the finishing touches but the devil, as they say, is in the details and the more little touches you as Storyteller can bring to the reimagined World of Darkness, the more complete it will feel.

Just try and keep it all grounded. Remember the old adage/question "What's that got to do with the price of tea in China?" You can rearrange the entire World of Darkness from top to bottom but at the end of the day, what matters to players is how it affects their characters. That our dimension of existence has been invaded by body-thieving mandala-spirits only becomes real if it affects their characters in a meaningful way.

## World of Darkness Destroyed

*It's the end of the world. What do you do?*

That's not a facetious question. Movies, books, and roleplaying games alike try to answer the simple question: what happens after the end of the world? In some cases, it's a harsh struggle for survival against inhuman foes. In others, it's a fight for scarce resources amid the rubble of society. Importantly, it's not easy. A lot of the time, whatever killed off the majority of humanity still lurks — either hiding out of sight in the form of radiation or disease, or a horde of the unquiet dead roaming the streets.

Remember that: most of humanity is dead. The characters in a post-apocalyptic story might have a network of contacts or even allies among other survivors, but that network might not make it to the end of the night. Resources aren't stored in stocks and bonds, they're tangible trade goods — food, tools, medicine, or simple expertise. In the short-term, the characters can probably rely on each other, but they should *never* be comfortable. One single mistake — as little as smoking a cigarette or not lacing up a boot — can condemn the whole group to death.

Playing a game of humans set after the apocalypse with only humans involved can be a whole lot of fun, but this is a World of Darkness setting. Vampires, were-

wolves, and stranger creatures suffer at the end of the world — unless some insane monster is actually responsible for the end. Nobody benefits. A vampire needs the blood of human beings to sustain it, but when a large settlement might contain a dozen people, where does she get that blood from? Any apocalypse would wreak havoc in the Shadow and destroy the hunting grounds of most werewolves. A mage's search for mystical knowledge comes a distant second to the simple need to find another meal.

Beyond the monsters and the simple horrors of living in a thoroughly changed world, the end of the World of Darkness doesn't make the people in the world any better. The stories you tell in the destroyed world are still in part Victorian morality plays, where the protagonists desperately try to hold themselves to an unattainable standard. Normally, they deviate from that standard to highlight their own weaknesses — avarice, envy, and wrath are all common motivators. In theory, a virtuous person can hold to the code of Morality. In a post-apocalyptic game, that's not possible. Even a virtuous person needs to kill, both to eat and to protect himself. In the end, whatever destroyed the world has also left the survivors pretty fucked up.

This section doesn't supply a single take on the end of the world. Instead, it presents a range of new rules and options to represent all manner of potential ends from alien invasion to nuclear war, from asteroid impact to the Biblical Armageddon. However you decide to end the world, you should find a doomsday device (or three!) to help you plan.

## This Is the Way the World Ends

No two means of ending the world are the same. Take *28 Days Later*: despite a whole country being reduced to shambling zombies (well, viral carriers) the presence of an airliner at one crucial moment suggests that the rest of the world is just fine. That's made explicit in the film's sequel, as the rest of the world tries to repopulate the United Kingdom. Compare and contrast that with the global ecological disaster of *The Day After Tomorrow*, where the whole world suffers equally.

Away from film, consider the impact of a sudden climactic shift, whether as a result of human activity or a near miss by a large orbital mass. Changing the average temperature by just five degrees in either direction is enough to fundamentally alter the world. Move the planet away from the sun just enough to reduce average surface temperatures by five degrees, and you have the start of a new ice age. A five-degree increase is enough to melt the polar ice caps, raising



sea level by over 100 meters. Everyone on Earth has to learn to live with the new situation. A viral outbreak, asteroid impact, and even a nuclear detonation might be more devastating, but they are contained to a local area. People outside the area still have to recover from a painful blow, but for most, life continues much the same as normal.

An eschatological taxonomy (a term coined by writer and futurist Jamais Cascio) is a way of easily categorizing the impact of different end-of-the-world scenarios. His taxonomy ranges from category 0 for a regional catastrophe all the way to category X: the destruction of the planet. Naturally, high-category events aren't going to provide much fodder for role-playing. When most of the planet's biosphere has been annihilated, nobody's left to be the protagonists. For our purposes, useful catastrophes fall into categories 0 to 2; anything higher is an extinction level event that leaves no survivors, human or monstrous.

### Category 0: Regional Catastrophe

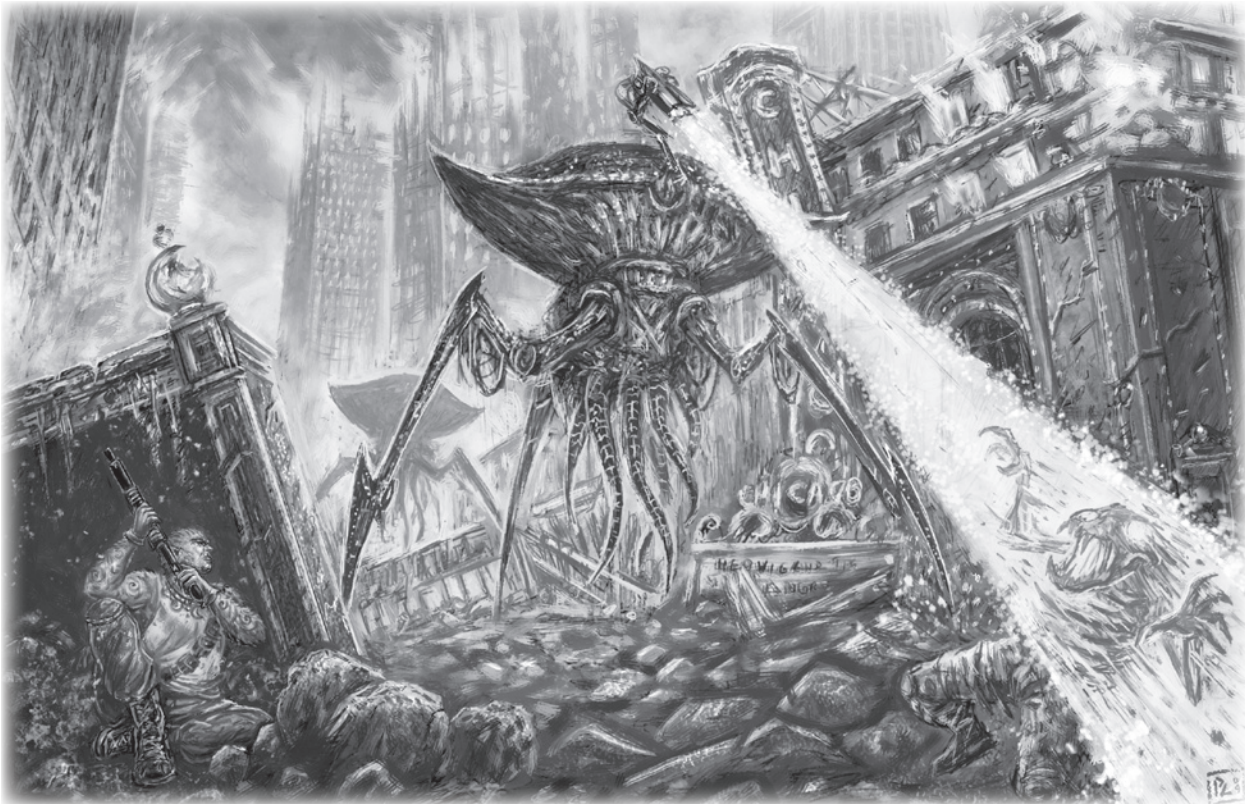
Enough people are killed in a localized area to totally destabilize civilization, but elsewhere life continues much as normal. Note that a "localized area" can be any containable space from a small island to the North American continent, and the death toll ranges from millions to hundreds of millions. Some examples include a small asteroid impact, local thermonuclear war, localized super-viral outbreak, or the Black Death.

### Category 1: Human Dieback

Enough people die to return global civilization to pre-industrial (or low industrial, for populous areas) conditions, and the effects are felt worldwide. Several billion human beings die. After a while, the biosphere recovers and due to lessened human impact, wild spaces eventually reclaim most man-made structures. Some examples include global thermonuclear war, extreme-case climate change, global alien invasion, or zombie uprising. Sources in popular media include *The Day of the Triffids*, *Mad Max*, *The Stand*, *A Canticle for Leibowitz*, and the *Fallout* series of computer games.

### Category 2: Civilization Extinction

Enough people die that global civilization is no longer feasible. Worldwide, the survivors number in the millions at most. Over 99% of the world's populations is dead, and the survivors have to focus all their attention on items essential to survival. The biosphere, without human intervention, will recover faster, overcoming evidence of human settlements. Some examples include worst-case climate change, serious orbital fluctuation, and a religious apocalypse. The most accessible sources for this level of catastrophe include the bleak future landscapes of the *Matrix* and *Terminator* films, as well as the Cormac MacCarthy novel, *The Road*.



## Ending it All

This section provides a wide range of apocalyptic scenarios. Included in these brief write-ups are factors specific to the scenario, including an action specific to the scenario and how quickly it can strike — some groups may want to play through the end of civilization, while others might want a sudden event that strikes without warning.

### Alien Invasion

**Category:** 1–2

**Warning:** Days to None

**Keywords:** Environmental Damage, Invasion

**Description:** Extra-terrestrial creatures invade the planet, killing everyone they encounter. A Category 1 invasion supposes enough warning time to prepare defenses and mobilize armed forces, even if nothing can actually harm the invaders. A Category 2 invasion is one where the invaders arrive without warning and slaughter billions of people before anyone knows what's happening.

Though most people think of “aliens” as the little gray men from late-90s conspiracy fiction, it's more likely that whatever invades is entirely outside of the human context. Consider the Triffids, from John Wyndham's famous novel. By all accounts they're alien, and after the meteor shower they quickly conquer humanity, but nobody considers them intelligent for far too long. More importantly, nobody knows what they want. Aliens don't necessarily have tangible goals; the fear of being hunted and killed by something that's fundamentally unknowable drives the victims of this kind of catastrophe.

Stories set during an alien invasion have to deal with the immediate preparations for survival — and for staying alive in the face of unknown invaders. After the fighting's over, characters have to struggle for resources, and the world has likely been fundamentally altered by the invaders. Whatever happens, remember that for all the films that play up campy situations and nonsense solutions to invasions, they're one of the fundamental crossovers between science fiction and horror.

**Considerations:** Many invading species may “seed” a planet prior to invasion with spores, eldritch energy fields, or other means to alter the planet to make it friendly to the invaders. That would alter the planet's atmosphere, making it harder for terrestrial creatures to find potable water, and even to breathe outside of sealed locations. Even if not, damage incurred during the invasion may have left the world unable to sustain continued human life. If the aliens remain on Earth, avoiding them is a primary concern.

**Supernatural Complications:** Everything apart from humans has a reflection in the Shadow. Do the invaders have what the denizens of the world recognize as “spirits”? If so, how do the extant spirits react to the invasion? If the invaders have no spiritual reflection, can that be used

## Communication

A character can try to communicate with the invaders, processing whatever signals she can find to determine whether the aliens even have a concept of language, and if so, what that language might be like.

**Dice Pool:** Intelligence + Academics + equipment (–3 without the “Linguistics” specialty)

**Action:** Extended (20–50 successes needed, each roll requires one day)

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character believes she has made a major breakthrough, but the alien frame of reference is so different that it affects her mind. She gains a mild derangement.

**Failure:** The character makes no progress.

**Success:** The character has deciphered the basics of the alien language. She might not be able to speak it, but she can decode spoken or written language, given time.

**Exceptional Success:** The character makes a significant breakthrough. She can teach others how to understand the alien language.

against them? How does environmental damage impact the Shadow?

Supposedly, everything in the world falls under the auspices of the Ten Arcana. Is the same true of the invaders? If so, do they fall prey to the usual Spheres, or do they require strange conjunctions? Given that any lore will be gained under battlefield conditions — most extra-terrestrial species won't have what we understand as “books” or other collections of knowledge — how useful is it in general rather than in specific.

**Inspiration:** *Independence Day*, *The Day of the Triffids*, *War of the Worlds*

### Asteroid Impact

**Category:** 0–2

**Warning:** Months to Years (larger asteroids give more warning)

**Keywords:** Nightfall, Societal Collapse

**Description:** An asteroid, large enough that it doesn't burn up in the atmosphere, impacts the planet. While the world has plenty of warning — anywhere from several months to several years — there's very little anyone can do. An asteroid large enough to do damage to the planet



after entry wouldn't be deterred by even a nuclear strike. The very real damage caused by the impact is only half of the catastrophe. In the modern world, news of a pending impact *will* leak out. With months to go, the whole world becomes aware of what's going to happen. At that point, everything goes to hell. With weeks to prepare, the authorities have just enough time to come up with half-baked plans for survival. How effective those are is debatable.

The societal collapse is what differentiates this from other explosive impacts. Weeks or even months beforehand, people are trying to get to safe areas, stocking up on resources — food, fuel, potable water — all before anything major happens. Most survival tactics work best when stockpiles of food only have to feed a few mouths.

When the rock finally hits, the impact could have different effects depending on its size and composition. A small rock (or large satellite) striking north of Paris would destroy France and the edges of neighboring countries, but the rest of the world would be unaffected. An asteroid the same size as the one that wiped out the dinosaurs hitting the same spot would obliterate Western Europe as far as Poland and the Ukraine. The destruction would reach from eastern Canada down into equatorial Africa and as far East as India. The secondary effects from the shockwave — tidal waves, ongoing earthquakes, and volcanic activity — would cascade around the globe. Steam, ash, and debris could blot out the sun, and the future of the human race would be in question.



## Harsh Air

A character can rig up a filter to breathe through the dust kicked up by an impact, making it easier to breathe.

**Dice Pool:** Intelligence + Crafts + equipment

**Action:** Extended (15 successes needed, each roll requires one hour)


### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The filter looks fine, but it actually lets harmful particles through. Count his Stamina as one lower when dealing with the hostile atmosphere (see p. 166).

**Failure:** The character makes no progress.

**Success:** The filter works. The character adds three to his Stamina when breathing in a hostile atmosphere.

**Exceptional Success:** The filter is particularly effective. Stamina rolls to keep active gain the 9-again quality.



**Considerations:** Of all the catastrophes detailed here, it's as fun to play through the run-up to impact as the struggle for survival afterwards. The chaos and confusion can cause national and even international laws to break down. It's every man — and every monster — for himself. After the impact, the chance of survival depends on how close the characters are to the impact point.

**Supernatural Complications:** During the period of collapse, many supernatural creatures can take the risk to make themselves public. Gathering a group of normal humans might help a vampire survive the period after the impact. Werewolves — especially those away from the impact zone — will likely become more obvious in holding territory, making it harder for other werewolves to escape the catastrophe.

**Inspiration:** *Armageddon*, *Deep Impact*, *Meteor*

## Astronomical Event

**Category:** 2+

**Warning:** Months

**Keywords:** Nightfall

**Description:** Astronomical events can be the cause of a whole range of disasters, the event that strikes closest to the World of Darkness involves the sun going dark. There's no way for that to happen through simple physics: something supernatural has to stop the sun from rising again.

If the sun ever did stop radiating, the damage done would be off the charts. Without external heat, the world would quickly become no more than a ball of ice — the ambient temperature of space is around 3 degrees Kelvin (-455 Fahrenheit), and the atmosphere and planet's core can't keep the surface much hotter. Within hours of the sun going out, the atmosphere would condense into liquid, destroying the biosphere.

Even if the only thing lost is sunlight and earth remains warm, plant life will still wither and die in a matter of days. Without visible-band light, plants can't photosynthesize. Losing basic plants — including grass — leads to a loss of most food animals, which rely on plants for food. While small-scale systems can create enough food for some people, most will slowly starve to death. Without the infrastructure to maintain power stations, electric lighting becomes less reliable, especially in urban centers like the Eastern Seaboard or Western Europe where very few people have their own generators. In most locations, it's easier to regress to fire as a means of making both heat and light. In the short- to medium-term, fuel is an easy resource to find.

In the long term, ongoing lack of sunlight doesn't just impact food production. Lack of vitamin D can lead to serious bone disorders, including rickets among children, and osteomalacia and osteoporosis in adults. Once scavenged food and medicine runs out, bone disorders and chronic disease will kill those who haven't yet starved to death.

## Hydroponics

A character can try to grow some food using artificial light, using wind or tidal power to power full-spectrum lamps. The necessary equipment is hard to scavenge (finding the equipment is an extended Wits + Science roll in an urban area needing 15 successes).

**Dice Pool:** Intelligence + Crafts + equipment

**Action:** Extended (30 successes needed per person fed, each roll requires one week)

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Something explodes, destroying the equipment and possibly harming the character.

**Failure:** The character makes no progress.

**Success:** The system reliably creates just enough food to consistently feed one person. Expanding it to feed other people requires another extended roll.

**Exceptional Success:** The system produces enough clean water for one person as a byproduct.

**Considerations:** A lack of sunlight doesn't just result in vitamin D malnutrition, it can also lead to severe depression. As moonlight is just reflected light from the sun, the moon would also appear black. Away from torches and electric lights, the only source of light is the stars — or nothing at all on an overcast night — which makes taking any action without a nearby source of light very difficult. Even if the sun still puts out enough heat to stop the planet regressing to a ball of ice, the atmosphere will cool noticeably over several months.

**Supernatural Complications:** The simple consequence of eternal night is vampires who can be active at any time. Away from sunlight, they can act whenever they like. Without their primary bane, several will likely go public. After all, with humans dying off at an alarming rate, the odds of facing enough people to best even the weakest vampire are vanishingly small. It's up to individuals how they survive, but survive they will — unlike many other scenarios, vampires won't die in the initial event, leaving their numbers untouched until scarcity of food drives them into open conflict.

Werewolves will feel the pinch. As well as needing to eat, the Shadow's all out of line thanks to wholesale

death by starvation. A pack can get by eating dead humans, but it won't help their Harmony any. Mages can create sustenance and even engineer crops, but those who know enough to be the most help are probably working out what the hell happened to the sun.

**Inspiration:** *Sunshine, The Time Machine*

## Biological

**Category:** 0–1

**Warning:** Days-Weeks

**Keywords:** Contagion, Starvation

**Description:** A highly contagious pathogen spreads like wildfire. Whether it's a natural disease or an engineered biological weapon, victims die painfully within 48 hours of contact. Before any emergency management can take place, the pathogen mutates to the point that it's viable in air for several hours. Decaying corpses and infected humans alike become possible vectors of infection. One man carrying the disease walks into town, and within 10 days everyone is dead. Those who go for help serve only to spread the disease. Thanks to advances in transportation technology, even a pathogen that isn't carried by another species (as the bubonic plague was carried by fleas riding on rats) can reach every continent within the first days of an outbreak. Quarantine procedures can limit the devastation to large areas (a category 0 event). If the disease is unpredicted, like a bioweapon, or an early infection catches someone with great freedom to travel then the disease will spread worldwide.

Some people remain immune to any specific diseases. That immunity might only be one person in a million, or one in ten million, but some people will survive no matter what. Given modern infection rates, a category 0 event will infect all but the smallest population centers in North America within two months of first emerging. If the event escalates to category 1, everyone who is not immune or in an isolated community will be dead within nine months.

Some infections don't just kill. A virus that's 90% fatal and strikes all but a handful of the remaining people blind makes the world harder to survive in. Not only do survivors have to provide for themselves, but the sighted must support the blind. Without the blind, the sighted wouldn't have the manpower to survive into the mid-term. A bioweapon might be designed to terrorize its victims; causing infectious blood to hemorrhage out of every orifice, or destroying the higher brain functions of everyone infected. That adds a palpable sense of menace that causes paranoia to run rampant.

**Considerations:** A pathogen that can be transmitted by both living people and dead bodies quickly turns



## Vaccine

Anyone with medical knowledge can try to create a vaccine. Though it will only help those who aren't yet infected, that can still be a massive boost.

**Dice Pool:** Intelligence + Medicine + equipment

**Action:** Extended (35–50 successes needed, each roll takes one week)

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character becomes infected with the pathogen.

**Failure:** The character makes no progress.

**Success:** Depending on the pathogen, a vaccine can take anywhere between 35 and 50 successes to create. The character synthesizes enough vaccine to inoculate five people. Attempts to replicate the vaccine take half the required successes.

**Exceptional Success:** The vaccine leads the character to believe he can use it to make a cure for the infected.

populated areas into infection hot-zones. Populated areas are also prime scavenging sites, especially for preserved food, medicine, and fuel. Anyone who believes himself immune will find his resolve tested every time a group of survivors needs anything. Taking care of the bodies is tiring work, and being so close to reminders of the cataclysm leads to stress, panic, and nightmares. A group of people who are not immune (or who don't know that they are) must remain vigilant, and will probably find it safer to shoot everyone they meet from a safe distance to stave off infection.

**Supernatural Complications:** A supernaturally potent disease could infect the vitae that fuels a vampire's existence. Even if the undead aren't affected, a vampire can still be a carrier; helping to transmit the disease to everyone from whom it feeds. Prometheans are likewise unaffected by biological events. A werewolf is immune to all but the most potent supernatural diseases, and her regenerative system would keep her alive for much longer if she becomes infected — giving her pack a chance to find a rite to cure her. Mages may be able to cure one or two people, but in the short amount of time available, those who do are just exposing themselves to the pathogen.

**Inspiration:** *Outbreak*, *Resident Evil*, *The Black Death*

## Climate Change

**Category:** 1–2

**Warning:** Years-Months

**Keywords:** Environmental Damage, Starvation

**Description:** Whether caused by human activity, a sudden fluctuation, or a near-miss by a massive object that actually alters earth's orbit, the climate alters drastically. The average surface temperature shifts either up or down, with devastating results. If the temperature rises, the polar ice-caps become a memory. Between the ice covering Antarctica and that over Greenland, the sea level rises by almost 75 yards — drowning most coastal cities. The raised sea level and increased temperature throws existing weather systems into chaos. Winters grow colder and summers hotter, and extreme meteorological events like hurricanes become common, making food much harder to produce. The loss of so many populous cities wouldn't happen in minutes; even with only a day or two of warning, wholesale evacuation would swamp those areas not flooded. Faced with millions of refugees and no way to feed them, areas fall to infighting and starvation.

If the planet cools, a new ice age would result. Sudden storms and freezing winds cover large parts of the world in a thick layer of ice. The sudden freeze easily defeats heating systems designed for temperate climates, and mil-

## Fortification

A character who notices the impending shift in climate can fortify a place to best withstand the vast shift in temperature before it happens.

**Dice Pool:** Intelligence + Survival + equipment

**Action:** Extended (20 successes needed; each roll requires 1 day)

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character does structural damage to whatever building he's working on, making it useless as shelter.

**Failure:** The character makes no progress.

**Success:** The character has fortified a building to better survive. The shelter has a month's supply of food and water, and has a means of keeping a steady temperature inside without the need to use external power.

**Exceptional Success:** The shelter also has enough reserves of fuel to run a large car or truck for a week.

lions die in their sleep. Those who remain alive become refugees, desperately seeking out sources of warmth, but as temperatures continue to plummet, people die. As with a global warming effects, the weather goes haywire as the chill disrupts ocean currents, and food becomes scarce.

In both instances of climate change, you're not limited to what's scientifically likely. The sudden glaciation of *The Day After Tomorrow* isn't good science but it is a great spectacle, and it makes for a wonderful lead in to a post-apocalyptic game set during a new ice age. Likewise, the barren wastelands of the *Mad Max* films or John Wyndham's *The Chrysalids* could easily be the result of a rise in global temperature rather than nuclear war.

**Considerations:** A change in climate will affect global food production. A rapid change would prevent people from adapting across the supply chain, making large-scale production impossible. In a warmer world, disease runs rampant through the refugee camps and most stores of medicine are underwater. A prolonged chill makes it impractical to spend much time away from sources of heat, but food and resources are again stockpiled in old urban centers, far from help.

**Supernatural Complications:** Vampires are unaffected by most climate change effects, though vampires in disease-ridden refugee camps may well act as carriers. If the planet warms, more and more people will be active at night, both giving vampires an easier source of food

and heightening the risk of discovery. The Created must keep warm, but have an easier time surviving overall. A changeling whose Keeper enjoyed unusually high or low temperatures might find herself better adapted for the new world. Werewolves, being naturally hardier than humans, can survive extremes of temperature — and in a cold world an Uratha might find it easier to sleep in Urhan form. As with most disasters, an individual mage is best placed to look after his own survival — though doing so burns through Mana, especially if he's also got Sleepers to look out for.

**Inspiration:** *The Day After Tomorrow*, real world climate change

## Natural Disaster

**Category:** 0

**Warning:** None

**Keywords:** Aftershock

**Description:** A natural disaster can devastate a region. The real world has no shortage of events from which to draw, including tsunamis, hurricanes, earthquakes, and volcanic eruptions. Many of these events happen away from inhabited areas, or in places where the authorities can properly co-ordinate evacuation and emergency management protocols. When the disaster is unexpected, or the authorities can't react in time, the disaster can cost thousands of lives. The initial event is





just the start; aftershocks, fires, and destroyed property can be just as devastating as the initial event.

A significant earthquake destroys an area larger than a city, but they're usually easy to predict due to showing up in areas that are already proximate to geological fault lines. If something causes such an earthquake (7.0 or higher on the Richter scale) away from a geological fault, nobody has a chance to prepare. Buildings made with no regard to earthquakes collapse, crushing those within. Gas lines rupture and broken electrical lines spark enough to start fires blazing, causing further damage.

Active volcanoes are usually far enough away from major population centers to deal major damage, but if a long-dormant volcano were suddenly to erupt — probably not by accident — the effects would be devastating. A number of extinct volcanoes form the basis for cities, especially in Europe, and any one suddenly becoming active again would destroy the city with a combination of lava flows and damage from ash and smoke.

Hurricanes and tsunamis can wash cities and even entire regions off the face of the map. Between powerful floods high enough to drown a family home and crashing pressure from wind and waves, anyone remaining in the area has only a slim chance of survival. Floodwaters breach sewage systems and carry dead bodies with them, adding disease to the risks of staying in range of a natural disaster.



## Rolling with the Blow

When a disaster strikes, your character flows with the circumstances. That way, he hopes to avoid significant injury.

**Dice Pool:** Stamina + Survival + equipment

**Action:** Instant


### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character suffers four points of lethal damage, and is trapped under rubble with no idea of where he is.

**Failure:** The character suffers three points of lethal damage, but gets out okay.

**Success:** Knowing when to duck and when to run has helped your character survive. He suffers three points of bashing damage, and gets out okay.

**Exceptional Success:** Your character escapes with barely a scratch. He suffers one point of bashing damage.



**Considerations:** Natural disasters can strike particularly close to home for some players, who might have lost friends or family members in similar circumstances. Earthquakes make it harder to move around, even when the ground has stopped shaking, as the resulting ground may not be the same shape as it previously was. A sudden volcanic eruption includes choking clouds of smoke, hot gas, and ash in addition to lava.

**Supernatural Complications:** Natural disasters wreak terrible damage in the Shadow, being perfect cover for spirits to consume each other — and to slip into the physical world during the chaos. A powerful spirit might be causing the disaster as it wakes from its millennia-long slumber. Many disasters strike during the day, and vampires will need to force themselves awake in order to survive. The recovery efforts from serious natural disasters can take years, and can mask the effects of a Promethean's Wasteland for much of that time. A mage who wards her sanctum against damage may find she's got the only undamaged structure for hundreds of miles — and a crowd of people demanding an explanation.

**Inspiration:** *Earthquake*, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, the 1906 San Francisco earthquake

## Nuclear

**Category:** 0–1

**Warning:** Hours-None

**Keywords:** Fallout, Nightfall (Category 1 nuclear winter)

**Description:** The threat of nuclear war has loomed large in popular culture, playing on the fear of annihilation during the Cold War. The war between East and West may be over, but the threat of nuclear detonation remains, re-imagined as the ultimate weapon of terrorist networks.

A single bomb, multiple detonations in a confined area, or a Chernobyl-grade power station meltdown is a category 0 event. The effects are mostly predictable — massive destruction close to the blast area, radiation damage over a much wider area, and lingering radiation in the affected area for years to come. The rest of the world will likely quarantine the affected area, evacuating those they can find. Survivors further in have to scavenge food and deal with radiation exposure. Depending on the circumstances of the explosion, a survivor might need to escape the zone to survive, or risk his life approaching guards who have been told to shoot on sight. If the zone contains valuable resources (everything from fine art to top-secret documents), governments and private individuals will hire mercenaries to find what survived.

A full-scale global nuclear war is a category 1 event. The bombs destroy many places outright and radiation kills millions more. Dust and ash thrown into the sky as a result of the explosions block out direct

sunlight, which plays havoc with the world's weather systems. In addition to small bands of survivors living in the bombed areas, people who live outside the irradiated zones are also safe. The large amount of radioactive material in the soil and water near impact sites makes farming harder in those areas; even unaffected areas will have to deal with radioactive rain. Despite the projections of Cold War analysts, even a nuclear winter scenario is reasonably survivable. The large areas that aren't direct targets only have to deal with the side effects, and in time the biosphere can recover. Between people in unaffected areas and those who survived through fallout shelters or dumb luck, humanity will survive.

## Shelters

The world's full of old nuclear bunkers and fallout shelters from the Cold War. Many have been abandoned, waiting for enterprising characters who must seal themselves in before the bombs go off.

**Dice Pool:** Wits + Drive + equipment

**Action:** Extended (10 successes needed; each roll represents 15 minutes)

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The characters seal themselves in the shelter, but the door refuses to open from the inside.

**Failure:** The characters find a shelter, but it's either too late, or the shelter has been breached.

**Success:** The fallout shelter will protect the characters from nearby impacts, though without food or water they'll soon have to head out to find something to drink.

**Exceptional Success:** The bunker has enough water and emergency rations to last the characters for a week.

**Considerations:** Technological devices that survive the blast will be rendered useless by the electromagnetic pulse. Irradiated soil is no good for farming, and even water can cause lethal levels of radiation to build up when consumed. Pre-packaged food and medical supplies can be contaminated, making them useless in the longer term. Areas of lingering radiation can be lethal and are undetectable without the

proper equipment. Irradiated water can be carried a long distance from initial impact sites thanks to new weather patterns.

**Supernatural Complications:** Vampires, being dead, don't suffer from radiation sickness like humans do. They can still be radioactive, and can actively spread it through their presence. Prometheans are likewise immune to radiation sickness. Powerful mages can control radiation enough to make life much easier, as long as they think to look for it. Werewolves heal fast, but not fast enough to avoid some of the worst effects. They've also got to deal with the spiritual impact of a nuclear blast, including whatever has awoken.

**Inspiration:** *A Canticle for Leibowitz, Last and First Men, On the Beach*

## Spiritual Invasion

**Category:** 1

**Warning:** None

**Keywords:** Invasion, Shifting

**Description:** A purely supernatural calamity, a spiritual invasion sees the Gauntlet that separates the world of flesh and spirit crumble to dust. Where before only small areas allowed spirits to pass between the worlds, now they can cross over where and when they like. Some are as physically present as they were in the Shadow, though others still choose to Urge or Claim people to achieve their own ends. Without warning, the world ends.

Each spirit is a fundamentally alien being, Manifestations of raw concept, all a spirit can understand is filtered through that concept. Plenty of spirits manifest based on the thoughts and feelings of humans, and indeed occultists have posited a symbiotic link between people and spirits before, but the vast majority of spirits simply do not care. To them, humans are tools, or pawns, or food. In the face of alien foes, many of whom can't be harmed by normal weapons, the outcome is simple: people try to fight, and they lose. One spirit of pain or murder spends weeks butchering every resident of a sleepy little town. The spirits of sports-cars and of highways engage in open warfare, not caring for people using the road at the time. Spirits of greed and avarice Urge their victims towards disturbing heights, killing over pennies — or collecting the still-beating hearts of unloved people. A few spirits fight, but none really want to go back to the old divide. To the denizens of the Shadow, the Gauntlet was a prison wall, and one taste of freedom cements the idea that nobody's going back. Within a year, continued spiritual harassment has left humanity devastated. With the majority of humanity dead, it's not long before the survivors huddle around the fire and create new folk-tales, passing on the knowledge of spirit-bans to help their children survive.





## Resonance

Spirits feed off the residual thoughts and feelings that permeate an area — the area's resonance. A canny person can alter the resonance of an area using all manner of occult rituals to ward off the worst excesses of spirits.

**Dice Pool:** Manipulation + Occult + equipment

**Action:** Instant


### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The ritual goes wrong. The resonance changes to attract the spirits the characters were trying to avoid.

**Failure:** The resonance of the area doesn't change.

**Success:** The characters manage to alter the area's resonance for a day per success.

**Exceptional Success:** The resonance of the area remains changed for a full week.



**Considerations:** Even with the Gauntlet long gone, most spirits remain dormant until something wakes them. Using decoys and even fake farms to distract spirits from the main sources of food can help people avoid a spirit's interest. Spirits can Urge or Claim people, and can Fetter objects, hiding themselves within. A person may look and act human, but the strange god-thing lurking within her soul, and looking after a stranger could see her turn the band of survivors into her personal spirit-cult.

**Supernatural Complications:** This is every sensible werewolf's worst nightmare. While some among the Pure — and a whole mess of Beshilu — rejoice, far more realize that everything from the death of Father Wolf to the fall of the Gauntlet was just training wheels. Some go mad, others believe they'll never survive. Some packs rise to the challenge, ready to show that Urfarah's legacy lives on. Ulgan Prometheans may lose themselves to the spirits who first tore them apart, or fight against the Shadow to forge their own destiny. Mages well-versed in the Spirit Arcanum can quickly set themselves up with an incredible power base, as long as they're willing to expend the time and energy to maintain their spells, though other people may see them as traitors.

**Inspiration:** *Poltergeist, Pulse, The Dark Tower*


## Theological

**Category:** 1–2

**Warning:** None

**Keywords:** Invasion

**Description:** While many of the apocalyptic scenarios presented in this system could be classed as “God's doing,” this scenario has Him affecting the world directly. As a category 1 event, a theological eschaton is the Rapture. The chosen — whether that includes virtuous atheists or hate-filled preachers spewing fire and brimstone — simply vanish one day. Those few people who have committed acts of actual, tangible evil also vanish. One morning, the world wakes up to a massive decrease in population: several billion people are *gone*, with no evidence as to where or why. Unlike other catastrophes, there's no loss of resources or infrastructure, but the sudden loss of population is a massive shock. For every one person who heads in to work thinking that the traffic's unusually light, five are never seen again. In some places, the breakdown is relatively quiet and simple as the machinery of the world folds into itself. In others, survivors fight over material goods and loot abandoned homes, venting their confusion and anger in the only way possible.



## Introspection

As one of the few people neither too good nor too bad for the world, each character must overcome sometimes crippling depression, trying to work out why she's been left behind and what that means for her. This roll may be required at Storyteller discretion, often when the story hits a quiet, introspective part.

**Dice Pool:** Resolve + Composure

**Action:** Instant


### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The character slips into a bout of depression (as per the derangement)

**Failure:** The character can't make sense of the world.

**Success:** Slowly coming to terms with what has happened, the character can focus on what's really important: staying alive long enough to make a difference.

**Exceptional Success:** The character discovers something about herself that she'd not realized before, and regains a point of Willpower.



As a category 2 event, a theological apocalypse doesn't just involve saving the chosen of each side. Vast forces of unknowable entities use the world as their battleground. The only humans who matter have already been saved, so any humans killed are mere collateral damage. While some people may expect the battling forces to be winged humans common in pop-culture, the "angels" and "demons" actually fighting are terrifying extensions of the Divine Will. One may look like a giant human with a platonic solid in place of a head, while another is a nightmarish cross between octopus, scorpion, and spider-monkey with venomous talons at the tip of each tentacle and fearsome agility. With the whole world as their war zone, survival becomes a matter of keeping hidden. Even when the armies have moved on, what will happen to Earth after the war is over?

**Considerations:** A post-Rapture game works well with muted themes, a subtle hint that nothing has any point any more. Describe everything as though it's happening on a TV screen or a long way away, and work hard to make the characters never really care about anything. The Divine warriors present during a Category 2 event are very dangerous. While a small group of humans might manage to hurt one or two, it'd take everyone on Earth to change the course of the war — and 5/6ths of the population have already gone and aren't coming back.

**Supernatural Complications:** Supernatural creatures aren't immune to the cull, though neither spirits nor ghosts are involved. A Sin-Eater can look for the shades of the departed all she likes, but nobody who vanished has left a ghost. Likewise, werewolves who think that marauding creatures are spirits will soon find themselves mistaken. Prometheans may recognize that the entities burn with Divine Fire, and Qashmallim show up wherever these "angels" have walked. Some mages, especially Obrimos and Magistos, may think they know what's going on, while others refuse to accept that the creatures walking the world have any relation to the angels and demons that roam the Supernal Realms.

**Inspiration:** *Spite: The Second Book of Pandemonium, The Road, The Rapture*

## Walking Dead

**Category:** 0–1

**Warning:** None

**Keywords:** Contagion, Invasion

**Description:** The dead walk. Sure, the exact means might be a virus that blocks pain signals along with higher brain activity — a common source of zombies in popular culture — but the end result is the same. Mindless creatures that were once human roam the streets, killing and eating anyone they find. Whether viral or purely supernatural, the victim of a zombie will rise up to become one of the shambling horde, and soon the

survivors must scavenge weapons and ammunition along with food and water if they want to survive.

A localized outbreak — a category 0 event — can be quarantined. Easy to do if the event happens on an island (like Britain), and the CDC can quarantine small towns in America, but an outbreak in a big city, perhaps because of the secret biowar research base under the subway, is impossible to contain. Whatever the case, surviving the onslaught is one thing. If the affected region has sufficient resources, then people on the outside will want in, and that means a re-settlement program. Depending on the whims of people involved, that could mean going through rigorous medical examinations or dodging security forces hell-bent on firebombing everything that moves. Even if a survivor gets back to civilization, he must live with terrible guilt. And when the dead rise again, will he retain enough spirit to fight and run and hide and survive once more? Or has bitter experience of what happens after the rescue dulled his will to live?

If the dead rise worldwide, anyone who waits and hopes for rescue is worm-food. Drawing attention only brings the walking dead, hungry for flesh. Long-term survival is possible, but it does require careful planning. One botched raid can bring a whole town's worth of zombies down on the survivors. Farms require a lot of land to feed more than

## Identifying Weapons

Zombie outbreaks frequently find a small group of survivors fending off the dead with whatever weapons come to hand. A character can identify ways that a common item can be used as a weapon in a pinch.

**Dice Pool:** Wits + Melee + equipment

**Action:** Instant

**Roll Results**

**Dramatic Failure:** The weapon breaks in the character's hands, driving jagged edges deep into his flesh and dealing a point of lethal damage.

**Failure:** The character can't find anything to use.

**Success:** Whether it's a shovel or a cricket bat, the character has found something that can help beat zombies back into the grave. Whatever he's found is as good as an improvised club, dealing 1(B) damage.

**Exceptional Success:** The weapon is particularly useful. It deals lethal damage, rather than bashing.



a few people, and keeping animals is like dangling a steak from each hand while swimming with piranhas. Heading for rural areas is the safest bet, but subsistence farming for more than a few people requires keeping control over a lot of land. Firearms start out as a good idea, but ammunition isn't unlimited. One day the dead will come, but will the survivors be too tired from months of back-breaking labor to fight back? Will they even want to fight?

**Considerations:** Good zombie apocalypses ask how far a person would go to survive, and what impact that has on his sanity and his approach to problems that don't involve the walking dead. Get too used to hacking at zombies with a fire-axe and next thing you know Dan's only got half a face, just because he was sleeping with your wife. That ties in very nicely with systems surrounding Morality — that sudden reliance on monstrous behavior isn't a good thing, and one moment of reflection can drive a man mad.

**Supernatural Complications:** Moros mages and Sin-Eaters alike have their work cut out for them. The walking dead need shuffling off the mortal coil, sometimes with extreme prejudice. If the zombies are the result of a virus, and thus still living beings, supernatural creatures used to dealing with the dead may be wrong-footed. A Moros trying to bind a mob with Death magic won't have any success, and may need swift rescue if he doesn't join their number. Many Sin-Eaters won't care if the zombies are living or dead. Finally given an opportunity to really cut loose, a Bound can banish them all to the Underworld and let the Kerberoi sort them out — assuming the zombies are still people enough to leave ghosts.

**Inspiration:** *28 Days Later, Dead Set, Night of the Living Dead, The Walking Dead*

These categories have some overlap. A virus that creates zombies takes aspects of both Biological and Walking Dead scenarios, while all manner of scenarios could be indirectly responsible for a Natural Disaster. Take inspiration from these vignettes, and build your own apocalypse accordingly.

## Keywords

The keywords attached to each scenario indicate possible complications that deserve representation in game mechanics. Not every scenario needs to have the indicated keywords — a global thermonuclear war that doesn't lead to nuclear winter doesn't call for the Nightfall rules — and this list is by no means comprehensive. Use it as a starting point when plotting your own world-ending event.

**Aftershock:** After the first event, others just keep on coming. Earthquakes have aftershocks, and the collateral damage can rupture gas mains, burning cities to the ground. Volcanic eruptions can cause earthquakes (and vice versa). Tsunamis and hurricanes rarely happen in a

vacuum, weeks of terrible weather happens soon after. The chapter after a major natural disaster, a smaller disaster strikes. This propagates through every chapter, presenting new complications, until the end of the story.

**Contagion:** Contact with dead bodies or living carriers can cause infection. Whenever a character spends more than a few seconds in close proximity to a source of a pathogen, his player must make a Stamina + Resolve roll with a penalty depending on the disease's virulence. The common cold applies a -1 modifier to this roll, while an experimental bioweapon is -5. Success indicates that the character isn't infected. See "Disease" below for more information.

**Environmental Damage:** The environment of the world is fundamentally changed. Finding food in the wild is impossible, and any rolls to produce food suffer stiff penalties (between -3 and -5). Scavenging for pre-prepared food is unaffected. Just being outside for an extended period counts as being exposed to an extreme temperature. See "Necessities" below for more information.

**Fallout:** Radiation is invisible without a Geiger counter. The Storyteller should make a note when a character has been exposed to radiation, and describe the symptoms as each character starts to suffer. Characters without a way to know how much radiation they've absorbed have to guess when and how to treat each other, though a successful extended Wits + Medicine roll (10 successes needed, each roll takes 5 minutes) should reveal the extent of damage to a given character.

**Invasion:** Unlike other scenarios, things still roam. Most of the things that a character sees are actively inimical towards him. The Storyteller should determine the Threat of any scene, from 0 (scene inside a safehouse with guards) to 6 (sneaking around a large pack of invaders). Roll the scene's Threat (including a chance die when the Threat is 0) whenever one of the characters takes any action that could attract attention. Success indicates that the invaders are aware of the characters' presence. Also see "Mob Rule" below for more rules for invaders.

**Nightfall:** Without sunlight, plants can't photosynthesize. This keyword includes the effects of the Starvation keyword. In addition, without sunlight, vampires have a much easier time acting. A vampire has to sleep only one hour out of every twenty-four, and expends a point of vitae upon waking as normal. Staying awake for longer incurs the effects of fatigue as normal for a living character, but doesn't require extra vitae expenditure.

**Shifting:** The walls between spirit and flesh break down. Spirits may enter the physical world at any point, rather than requiring a Locus to make the transit, and can remain in the physical realm for as long as they want (or until banished). While in the physical realm, spirits are immaterial but visible to humans. A spirit possessing the Materialize Numen only spends one point of Essence

to use it. Spirits using Claim, Fetter, Living Fetter, or Possession disappear from sight, condensing their Corpus into whatever they're possessing.

**Societal Collapse:** Most apocalyptic scenarios posit that a large percentage of the immediate population ceases to exist. In a societal collapse scenario, the same concerns apply as for other cataclysms — including the need to scavenge food and find secure shelter — due to the breakdown of public order, but most people are still alive when it happens, all hoping to stock up before the end. Rural scavenging rolls suffer a -1 penalty. Urban scavenging suffers a -3 penalty, and also risks running afoul of looters (“Mob Rule,” below)

**Starvation:** For whatever reason, the world is no longer amenable to growing food. Carefully attended farms might be able to yield some food, and technologically adept characters might be able to rig hydroponic systems that allow some plants to grow. All rolls to grow food, and for rural scavenging, suffer a -3 penalty and take twice as long per roll.

## Survival

The important part of any story set after an apocalypse is the struggle to survive. When characters don't know where their next meal is coming from — or what they're going to do when their stockpiles run out — they will suffer, and must make bad choices in the name of survival. This section demonstrates the consequences of those choices.

## Necessities

As a rough guideline, an average human being can go three hours without air, three days without water, and three weeks without food. Those are general measures, indicators of how long someone can last before he *needs* something or starts to die.

## Dehydration

As mentioned in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 175, a character can last one day per dot of Stamina without water before taking one point of bashing damage per day. Without food, he can last for Stamina + Resolve days. For a game focused on survival, having a character with average Stamina be able to live for 16 days without water is unrealistic. (For people wondering, that's 2 days for Stamina, 7 days of bashing damage, 7 days of lethal damage; on the last day, the character takes one point of lethal damage that becomes aggravated, and fades out in about 30 minutes).

Dialing up the lethality is easy, as the following options demonstrate. Use one, all, or whatever combination gives the feel that you want.

**Exercise Hurts:** Once a character is taking damage from dehydration, any scene in which the character takes strenuous physical actions — Physical Skill rolls — counts as an extra day for the purposes of dehydration.

**Thinking Through Fog:** Dehydration clouds people's minds. Once a character takes damage due to dehydration, he suffers a -2 penalty to all Mental Skill rolls.

**Heat is Murder:** If the temperature is consistently over 85 degrees Fahrenheit, the character takes 2 points of bashing damage from dehydration rather than one.

**Realistic Time:** Instead of working on a per-day basis, a character has to worry about dehydration every 12 hours.

## Starvation

The existing rules model going without food better than going without water. However, some groups will want to mix things up, either extending how long characters can survive or penalizing them for starving to death.

**Burning Reserves:** Taking enough lethal damage from starvation to incur wound penalties signifies the character consuming his own tissue. He loses one point from a Physical Attribute each time he checks off one of his three rightmost Health boxes.

**Pre-Conditioning:** Someone who eats sensibly and keeps stocked with nutrients can last for a lot longer than someone who lives off fast food. A character can add her dots in Survival to his Stamina and Resolve.

**Will to Survive:** Spending a point of Willpower can replace the effects of eating that day, mitigating any damage (though not for long enough for the character to heal).

## Hostile Atmospheres

Suffocation and drowning are based on a character's Stamina (“Holding Breath,” **World of Darkness Rulebook** p. 49). Sometimes, the air's breathable but toxic — whether through chemical or biological weapons, or the result of massive geological shifts releasing trapped pockets of gas into the atmosphere. In that situation, a character can remain breathing for longer, but he's still going to choke in the end.

Stamina	Time*
•	15 minutes
••	30 minutes
•••	One hour
••••	Two hours
•••••	Four hours
••••••	Eight hours
•••••••	12 hours

\* Each scene your character engages in combat or strenuous physical activity, he can breathe as though his Stamina were one lower.





When he has reached his normal limit, roll your character's Stamina. Each success grants 15 minutes of extra action (for practical purposes, assume that a scene lasts for 15 minutes). After this, your character takes one point of lethal damage every minute. He can only start to heal this damage once he's back in a normal, breathable atmosphere.

## Exposure

A character can act normally in temperatures that are 30 degrees Fahrenheit (15 degrees Celsius) either above or below what he considers normal. In temperatures outside that safe zone, he can operate for a number of hours equal to his Stamina + Resolve. After that, he takes one point of bashing damage per hour until the temperature returns to normal. When he suffers enough damage to start taking lethal damage, he loses one point of Dexterity, which heals at the same rate as lethal damage.

The following hacks can make it easier or harder to survive exposure to extremes of temperature.

**Comfortably Numb:** After taking damage from exposure equal to her Stamina, the character loses one point of Wits. This point returns at the same rate as healing lethal damage.

**Shelter:** Exposure to temperature extremes often comes hand in hand with punishing weather conditions. Even basic shelter can provide some respite. Under this

hack, the character operates normally for a number of hours equal to the *lower* of her Stamina or Resolve if exposed to the elements. Even a basic shelter — a tarp providing shade or shielding her from high winds — allows her to avoid damage for a number of hours equal to her Stamina over and above her normal limit.

**Slowing Down:** The character suffers a  $-1$  modifier to Strength and Dexterity rolls for each hour of exposure, up to a maximum penalty of  $-5$ . This penalty isn't modified by Stamina or Resolve, though protective gear can negate up to three points of penalty.

## Exertion

Surviving without basic necessities is a lot easier for anyone if she can remain still and doesn't have to walk for miles at a time or lift heavy weights. Heavy physical action really cuts in to how long she can survive for. Any time the character takes an action involving Strength or Athletics, she suffers a  $-1$  penalty to all Physical rolls until she next rests for at least 10 minutes. This penalty isn't cumulative, instead each extra instance of exertion increases the time needed to rest by 10 minutes. Once the needed rest time hits an hour, the character takes one point of lethal damage for every 10 minutes he keeps going.

As noted on p. 48 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, a character can carry 25 pounds per dot of Strength without penalty. For every 25 pounds over that, every

action involving physical exertion suffers a -1 penalty and reduces his Speed by one.

If using the system for exertion given here, carrying 25 pounds extra requires a Strength + Stamina roll every hour. This roll suffers a -1 penalty per 25 pounds extra. A character can't reasonably carry more than three quarters her maximum lift weight over any length of time (as per the Strength chart).

## Scarcity

An apocalypse destroys the means that people have to replenish resources. Food, water, transport, ammunition — after a cataclysm, what's left is what's available and when it's used, that's the end of it. For most people reading this section, that's an alien way to exist. If you ran out of food, you could go to the store. Water's off? Go buy a couple of big bottles. Car wrecked? Buy a new one. In a post-apocalyptic scenario, you can't do any of this.

Every time a character eats, every time she drinks, every pill she pops to stay awake another twelve hours, and every time she starts her car, she's consuming resources. When she shoots a gun? That bullet's *gone* unless she has the equipment and skill to make more, and even then she just needs resources of a different kind. Without mass production — without *any* production — resources become scarce and then they stop existing. Electricity relies on portable generators, and they consume diesel or other fuels. Even some of the most basic bits of infrastructure such as telephone networks are gone, because nobody has the resources to get them working again.

## Using Things Up

When times are tough, people need a steady supply of food. In general, the bare minimum to count as a "steady supply" is around 2,000 calories. Much less than that, and starvation sets in. Survivalists recommend two 15oz. cans of food (chili, pasta, stew, condensed soup) and one cup of dried goods (rice, lentils, beans, oatmeal) per day. As a rough and ready measure, that's two pounds of food for one day. That only counts for basic survival needs. An active lifestyle — such as fending off monsters, or building a shelter against the new ice age — requires almost double that amount of food.

Contaminated or rotten food isn't better than starving. Without the Iron Stomach Merit, consuming rotten food leads to vomiting up your character's last good meal, wasting that food. With the Merit, a character can benefit from the food as normal. Because of this, scavenging rolls for a character with Iron Stomach gain a +2 bonus, and half as many successes again are available.

Water is more necessary than food. In addition to drinking, it's used to clean everything from dirty food to

wounds. Just to drink, human beings need four pints of water each day. That's three and a half gallons a week. Those two pints of water add two pounds of weight. Extremes of temperature — both hot and cold — and heavy physical exertion can lead to dehydration quicker than normal, doubling your character's need for water. Drinking contaminated water can cause diarrhea, purging a pint or more of water from his system.

Groups who want a reasonably simple way to know how long their characters have before they start starving to death, or begging for water, can abstract the measures here to weight: a character who isn't engaging in physically demanding activities requires two pounds of food and two pounds of water. Working long and hard, or in extremes of temperature, shifts that to four pounds each of food and water. If the food or water isn't optimal — soda or low-calorie foods — increase the daily needed amount to three pounds generally, six pounds active. This ready-reckoning assumes that most foods are roughly equal, placing the onus on finding enough to survive.


## Urban Scavenging

At first glance, urban areas are great places to find portable food that will keep for some time. Supermarkets rely on canned and dried foods to supplement just-in-time delivery and are great places to stock up on bottled drinks — from water to soda. Mini-markets serve a similar purpose in dense urban areas; though individual stores don't stock anywhere near as much as a supermarket, the range of stores available more than makes up for that.



## Water

Any significant catastrophe will cut off an area's mains water supply. Buildings may have their own supply from rainwater tanks or water towers, but those supplies could well be contaminated. Short of making regular trips to the nearest river, that's what the characters must rely on in an urban area. Boiling the water will kill off basic bugs, adding a few drops of clear bleach will also help, but radioactive fallout and mutant plagues will survive both. Bottled water recovered when scavenging is a great source, but when that runs out the characters either take their chances or move on. Even with plenty of available food, lack of water means urban areas struggle as long-term homes.





If the area's patrolled by spirits, zombies, or invading creatures, breaking into a single store can be the focus of a scene — between Security rolls to break through locked doors, Survival rolls to find the best stuff to take, and Stealth rolls to remain hidden, a single looting run can present a lot of tension. And if a group of invaders (or other survivors) has taken the store as a place to hide out, tense negotiations or a desperate fight will surely liven things up.

## Finding Food & Water

**Dice Pool:** Intelligence + Survival + equipment or Wits + Survival + equipment

**Action:** Extended (see below)

Whether a character is looking for food or water, an urban area is a great place to look — at least, while it still has resources. It's up to the player how much food he wants to find: two pints of water or two pounds of portable food takes one success. Feeding and watering an active person for a day requires four successes. Finding food for more people, or for a longer time, simply requires more successes.

A supermarket or similar urban area that hasn't been touched since the cataclysm holds food enough for months. If other survivors have picked over the area, or more than a couple of months have passed, any area will have a maximum amount of resources available — and thus an upper limit on how many successes a character can shoot for. An area could have anywhere between 10 and 100 successes available.

Unlike many other tasks, it's up to the player how her character handles the situation. Formulating a plan, scouting around the area and conducting a thorough search uses Intelligence + Survival, and each roll requires 20 minutes. Running round grabbing whatever looks useful uses Wits + Survival, and each roll only takes 15 minutes. On the other hand, a character using Wits can only find half of the available food and water where resources are limited. It's not an all-or-nothing effort; your character can break off at any time and take away just what he's found up to that point.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Your character mistakes bad food for good, or encounters someone — or something — that's made its nest in the area.

**Failure** Your character doesn't find anything this time around. Has he exhausted what's available, or is it worth searching for longer?

**Success:** Your character finds something that will help her carry on, but can she risk searching for more?

**Exceptional Success:** Your character finds a whole load of food and water in a very short time.

**Suggested Equipment:** Unrestricted access to area

(+1), vehicle to help with carrying (+2), range of available food and drink (+3)

**Suggested Penalties:** Time after cataclysm (-1 per month), partially destroyed area (-2 to -4), area is suburban or primarily residential (-3)

## Rural Scavenging

Rural areas may have it easy, depending on your catastrophe of choice. A zombie invasion or local nuclear war strikes urban areas hard, leaving farms and wild areas relatively untouched. Unfortunately, finding food isn't as easy as wandering into the local CostCo and grabbing everything that comes to hand. Some characters will want to hunt their food, while others raid farms or grow it themselves.

Rural areas also present a lack of useful shelter. The occasional building is a useful place to rest up, but available shelter isn't there at the side of the road any more. Some characters may rely on tents or other temporary shelters, but unless they know that an area's safe, a tent's paper-thin walls won't help.

Fresh water, even taken from the source of a river, can be dangerous. Using bleach or boiling the water can help, as can taking it from the source. Unless the groundwater is actively radioactive, the water should be safe enough to sustain human life. Even if that's not the case, setting up a solar still to extract water is not at all tricky.

## Finding Food

**Dice Pool:** Wits + Survival + equipment modifier

**Action:** Extended (see below)

Finding food in the wilderness can involve raiding farms, hunting animals, and finding fruit and berries growing wild. People who know how to hunt stand a better chance of finding meat, while anyone who's watched a Discovery Channel special or read a Worst Case Scenario book has a rough idea of how to find edible plants.

The Storyteller should determine how many successes are available in the general area, based on what actions the character takes. Finding two pounds of food takes one success. An abandoned farm may have up to 50 successes available, while in the desert a character could have only one or two within walking distance. Feeding one active person for a day takes two successes. A character hunting for animals can make a roll every hour, raiding farms or other storehouses rolls once every 15 minutes, and one scavenging for edible plants takes 30 minutes per roll.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Your character mistakes poisonous food for something healthy, or attracts the attention of an animal.

**Failure** Your character doesn't find anything this time around. Has he exhausted what's available, or is it worth searching for longer?

**Success:** Your character finds something that will help her carry on, but can she risk searching for more?

**Exceptional Success:** Your character finds a whole load of food in a very short time.

**Suggested Equipment:** Hunting rifle or bow (+1 to +5), vehicle to help with carrying (+1), previous time spent living off the land (+2)

**Suggested Penalties:** Time after cataclysm (-1 per three months), scavenging during winter months (-2), desert environment (-3)

## Finding Water

**Dice Pool:** Wits + Survival + equipment modifier

**Action:** Extended (see below)

Finding potable water is easier in rural areas than in the city. Water coming from rivers may not be drinkable without some treatment — boiling or adding some clear bleach, say — but it's a damn sight easier to find than in the city. Even in desert climates, all it takes is a tarp and a cup to make a solar still, providing enough water to live on.

Each roll to find and make drinkable water takes 30 minutes. As with other scavenging rolls, the Storyteller determines how many successes are available. Making two pints of potable water takes one success. The Storyteller determines how many successes are available; a desert may only have one or two successes available, while near the source of a mountain stream 20 or 30 successes may be available on any one day. The Storyteller shouldn't indicate how much water remains, it's up to the player to decide how long he wants his character to scavenge.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Your character finds plenty of water but none of it is potable. If he tries drinking it, he's going to lose more than he consumes.

**Failure** Your character doesn't find anything this time around.

**Success:** Your character finds something that will help her carry on, but can she risk searching for more?

**Exceptional Success:** Your character finds a lot of water in a very short time.

**Suggested Equipment:** Water gained from melting snow (+2), fresh spring (+2)

**Suggested Penalties:** Only water sources are contaminated (-2) desert area (-3), character has no equipment (-5)

## Securing Shelter

**Dice Pool:** Intelligence + Crafts + equipment

**Action:** Extended (60 successes required; each roll represents one day)

Fixing shelter in the wild is a hard thing. Making a platform to sleep on is a fine temporary solution, but without constant reinforcement that platform will fall. A farmhouse makes a great place to hole up, but what's happened to the residents — and can the characters secure the house against wild animals and whatever strange creatures roam the wilds?

Securing a shelter isn't just about setting up four walls and a roof. It includes things like setting up large containers to gather water, finding dry places to store food over time, making sure those walls will hold up, and fixing a simple chimney so everyone inside doesn't die of smoke inhalation. Constructing a shelter from scratch takes 60 successes; starting with an abandoned farmhouse reduces the number of required successes to 30.

## The Benefits of Shelter

If a group bases itself out of a shelter built using this system, the characters have put a lot of effort into setting up a home for the mid- to long-term. Able to store food and drink, and live in the warm, characters gain a +2 modifier on rolls to find food and water, and can store excess stocks of both indefinitely.

If nothing else, characters suffering from starvation, dehydration, or exposure who get back to their base have a location where they can rest in safety and heal any damage.

Characters can take breaks in the middle of fixing up a shelter. Make a note of how many successes have been earned towards the shelter; further rolls simply improve that number. Every day that nobody works on the shelter reduces that total by one. Only one roll can be made per shelter per day, no matter how many people try working on it.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** The shelter's built, but it is fundamentally unstable. At some point in the near future it will collapse, possibly crushing the group's stocks of food and equipment.

**Failure** Progress isn't made towards the shelter.

**Success:** Add the successes made on the roll to the total successes rolled for the shelter. If you gain enough successes, the shelter is stable and able to support long-term habitation.

**Exceptional Success:** Much progress is made towards building the shelter. If five more successes are rolled



than are needed, the shelter is particularly well-fortified. Increase the Durability by one point.

**Suggested Equipment:** Metal or stone for building (+1), nearby water supply (+1), full set of tools (+2), generator and power tools (+3)

**Suggested Penalties:** Poor quality tools (-1), few resources to build with (-2), no tools (-2), no resources (-4)

## Farming

**Dice Pool:** Stamina + Crafts + equipment

**Action:** Extended (10 successes required per character; each roll represents one week)

After a while, existing stocks of food and water will run low, and characters will have to move on, finding new places to scavenge — or they learn to grow their own, setting up a still to purify water, sowing seeds, and even finding animals like chickens, cows, and sheep.

### Farming? What the Hell?

Where does farming come into a post-apocalyptic game? Surely it's all about the struggle for survival, scraping together enough food and water to get through the next week? Well, yes and no.

Some groups love the sheer visceral thrill of finding out what they'll do to survive — what a vampire will do for a sip of blood, or just how many dead people it takes to push a Sin-Eater over the edge — but those stories have a fundamentally narrow scope. Setting up a shelter and a small farm for food and water broadens that scope. You've survived the world ending, you've got through the shock and the pain. *What happens next?*

And just because the characters successfully eke out a meager existence doesn't mean that nothing bad can happen to them. A promethean who settles nearby for too long can ruin their crops, and one pack of vengeful werewolves can destroy everything they've worked for. Once again, the characters' whole world is trashed. Do they give up, or press on?

Farming is an extended action. As with constructing a shelter, characters can take breaks — but for each week someone doesn't work the land, further rolls suffer a -1 penalty. Characters without a Crafts specialty in "Agriculture" or "Farming" suffer a -2 modifier to all rolls.

The number of successes required depends on the size of the group that the farmers are hoping to feed and water; ten successes per person, including the person farming. This includes enough of a surplus for characters to stay active for weeks at a time. A successful roll produces enough food and water for the entire group to live for the remainder of the year, assuming nothing destroys their supplies.

### Roll Results

**Dramatic Failure:** Something goes very wrong, destroying the space used to farm. The group will have to move on.

**Failure** Progress isn't made towards growing food.

**Success:** Add the successes made on the roll to the total successes rolled to farm. If you gain enough successes, the farm provides a staple source of food for your group for the rest of the year.

**Exceptional Success:** Much progress is made towards growing food. If five more successes are rolled than are needed, the farm is especially productive. The group produces food enough for one extra person until the end of the year.

**Suggested Equipment:** Decent tools (+1), existing pure water supply (+2)

**Suggested Penalties:** Bad land (-2), no water supply (-3)

## Armament

In a survival scenario, going armed makes sense. A hunting rifle or bow in the hands of a skilled character can provide food for a lot of people. Axes are great for chopping firewood to keep off the cold, and a good knife can cut through undergrowth or shape wood.

From a purely defensive point of view, no group should travel without several guns, and as much ammo as people can carry. Going toe-to-toe with a bear, even if you have an axe, is a quick way to commit suicide by nature. On the flip-side, guns need ammunition — and that calls to issues of scarcity all over again. Axes, knives, and machetes are all basic survival tools, but other melee weapons often aren't a good idea. A weapon that doesn't provide a basic advantage such as range and that can't pull double-duty as a survival tool is a heavy luxury.

As a rough guide, take a melee weapon's Damage as its weight in pounds. Relatively small weapons can pack a heavy punch, but often they either deal that damage through added weight, or they rely on a sharp edge that can easily become blunted. That inconvenience makes carrying them a burden. Guns, by contrast, weigh two pounds per point of Size. For simplicity's sake, a loaded magazine weighs half a pound, as does a box of 6 shells or 20 rifle rounds.

## Click

Despite all the other abstractions in the Storytelling System's combat rules, one thing is spelled out: a single attack with a gun involves firing one round. Some groups may not want to count every single bullet, while other players want to feel the same surprise their characters do when firing blindly at whatever monster has chased them for the past three days. If that's the case, the only thing that players need to keep track of is how many magazines a character has spare.

Rather than needing to know how many rounds a gun can hold, divide the weapon's Clip by 10 (rounding up). That's the weapon's Ammo. Every time a character fires a gun, put an X next to the weapon's name on a piece of scrap paper. The Storyteller takes one die per X, subtracts the weapon's Ammo, and rolls the remaining dice pool as normal. If she succeeds, the weapon's out and needs reloading. The character (and possibly the player) doesn't know until the next time he tries to pull the trigger.

Firing full-auto uses an entire clip. Firing semi-auto adds marks equal to the weapon's Ammo rating + 1, while a three-round burst adds two marks rather than one.

Bows, crossbows, and thrown weapons never use this system.

## Making Ammo

Scavenging for guns and ammunition is an extended action, using Wits + the lower of a character's Survival and Firearms. Finding a gun and a clip of ammo may only take six successes, while finding ammunition to fit that temperamental target pistol can take up to 20 for a single magazine's worth.

Characters can make their own ammunition with an extended Intelligence + Crafts roll. Making arrows or crossbow bolts takes 15 minutes per roll, with each roll producing one arrow. Making bullets is trickier — especially with the low-quality equipment available after the apocalypse. Each roll represents 30 minutes of work, and every round made requires two successes. A character can lower standards to make more ammo, creating one round per success, but the weapon loses the 10-again quality and each die showing 1 subtracts one success.

## Transport

When it comes to getting around, it's a case of two feet bad, four feet good, four wheels better until the gas runs out.

Regardless of Speed, a human being can cover 25 miles per day and still remain active. Anything faster than that requires Stamina rolls, but some people can manage 40 miles in a day — if arriving exhausted is an option. Horses or other animals don't move much faster (at least, over long distances), but can carry a lot more

— a horse likely has Strength between 4 and 6 for the purposes of carrying loads. On the other hand, horses need three pounds of food and water per day traveling.

Vehicles are a better idea. Even off-road, a car can travel at two-thirds its Safe Speed without risking a crash. When it comes to moving loads, a car can carry two adults and 600 pounds of supplies, or four people and 200 pounds of stuff, and can travel for two or three days (10 hours on the road) on one tank of gas. Finding extra gas will be tricky, filling stations are effectively giant bombs, and in many apocalyptic scenarios most will be empty or the center of large craters. Jerry cans of fuel last for roughly five hours, but weigh 45 pounds when full.

## Abstraction

More than anywhere else in this section, any hard numbers are generalizations, there to give the feel of being in one of the few running cars on the road, desperately hoping to find a gas station that'll let you carry on. If your troupe would rather check out the specifics of the model of car they're using — checking its fuel economy and size of gas tank — by all means do so. Added verisimilitude is never a bad thing if everyone's having fun.

Horses get sick and die, and characters who haven't thought about what they'll do when that happens will end up stuck in the middle of nowhere. On the other hand, cars break down and run out of gas. An Intelligence + Medicine roll will get the next few miles out of a horse, while an Intelligence + Crafts roll will do the same for a car, if the characters are near their destination. Out in a remote spot, a last ditch effort probably isn't worth it.

## Mob Rule

Most catastrophes kill so many people that mobs don't have a chance. Sometimes, that isn't the case. Some gangs form as a response to a disaster that hasn't happened yet. Other mobs consist of the reason for the catastrophe — roving groups of zombies, or swarms of extra-terrestrial invaders. Whatever the case, mobs of people or creatures roam the world, presenting a very real hazard to people who only just want to survive.

A mob is any group of 10 or more individual Storyteller characters that share enough similarities that they're largely interchangeable. Mobs should use the optional rule for Large Fights (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 174), giving each one only four Health



dots. Implacable foes such as zombies should have higher Defense and not suffer wound penalties rather than having more Health. Further, members of a mob should also have the same Traits as each other to keep things easy for the Storyteller. That way it's still easier for characters who find an edge to put down a foe in one shot. Some of the re-tooled combat systems, especially Collective Combat (p. 90), may suit the troupe best. The other systems in this section demonstrate ways to specifically spice up small groups fighting against large mobs.

Avoiding mobs isn't easy. Players must succeed at a Dexterity + Stealth roll in a contested action against the mob's Wits + Composure (or Finesse + Resistance). If the characters succeed, they're good to go — but if the character's dice pool for any physical action is greater than his Dexterity + Stealth, the mob can make a reflexive Wits + Composure roll to notice the character.

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## Zombies and Angels and Spirits, Oh My!

Alien and supernatural creatures don't necessarily play by the same rules as human opponents. In addition to having Traits above five dots, the Storyteller should define one or two specific abilities that may come into play in combat — alien fungi that strike people blind if they do more damage than the victim's Stamina, or a zombie's ability to keep attacking with dismembered limbs.

Remember that larger mobs mean a greater chance of individual powers coming into play, and adjust the impact of individual powers accordingly. Storytellers who are unsure of their creations could try running through a couple of sample fights with different numbers on each side to get the balance right. Both **Antagonists** and **Hunter: The Vigil** provide a wide range of options to customize your monster.

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Storytellers who want to abstract mobs can treat them as a single entity, with a single set of traits. Like ghosts, spirits, and other abstract beings, mobs have three Attributes: Power, Finesse, and Resistance. Distribute six dots between the three, plus one dot for every five people in the mob. Mobs don't possess Skills, Merits, or Willpower.

A mob's total Health is equal to the number of people in the mob — every point of lethal damage knocks one member out. Mobs suffer wound penalties when tak-

ing damage to their last three Health as normal. A mob's Defense is equal to the lower of Power or Finesse, and does not suffer penalties from multiple attackers. Defense does not apply against ranged attacks, but ranged attacks can't deal more than one point of lethal damage (burst attacks deal damage normally).

In a fight, a mob has an Initiative equal to Finesse + Resistance. Mobs can make one attack every turn per two members — others just get in the way, or are helping out — using a dice pool of Power + Finesse. A mob of creatures with wicked claws or humans wielding knives deals lethal damage with each attack, while others only deal bashing damage. Supernatural powers that enhance attacks or damage apply as normal.

Any attack that deals more damage than the mob's Resistance deals an additional point of bashing damage, as individual members get shaken seeing what's happened to their compatriots. Alternatively, a character can try to scare a mob off, though only one attempt can be made per scene. Roll Presence + Intimidation — the mob's Resistance as an instant action. Every success deals one point of bashing damage.

## Disease

After an apocalypse, disease runs rampant. Decaying bodies can pollute fresh water supplies, and generally poor nutrition gradually erodes the body's natural defenses. After six months or a year living on scavenged food, even the common cold can be very dangerous. Chemical weapons have symptoms — and often antidotes — though they operate faster than diseases, so this section applies to chemical attacks as well.

As noted on p. 176 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, disease deals a pre-set amount of damage over a set length of time, with a Stamina + Resolve roll to resist the damage and an extended Stamina + Resolve roll to shake off the sickness. That assumes the world as it stands now, with access to clean water, decent food, and basic medicine. When a character has to hike 20 miles each day, that bad cough might turn out to be bronchial pneumonia or tuberculosis and the best doctor in the world won't be able to save him.

The existing system assumes that the character has access to at least basic medical supplies — a pharmacy, replete with someone qualified to hand out prescription medication as and when needed. Medical supplies can take from two pounds for basics — painkillers and broad-spectrum antibiotics in pharmacy dosages — to twenty-five pounds for a full set of tools and a wide range of drugs.

Diagnosing an illness is an Intelligence + Medicine roll, made with a -2 modifier if acting from memory alone. Without the ability to conduct basic tests —

such as a lumbar puncture, or a blood panel — that roll suffers an additional  $-2$  modifier. When diagnosed, most conditions can be treated with drugs — another Intelligence + Medicine roll to prescribe the correct dose and to avoid painful side-effects. This allows the character to make Stamina + Resolve rolls to beat the disease. Without effective treatment, that roll is reduced to a chance die. In many cases, people benefit from a herd immunity against many common illnesses, but someone who hasn't had basic vaccinations suffers more — her Stamina + Resolve rolls suffer a  $-2$  modifier if the disease can be vaccinated against, and the damage done is double normal.

Compromised medical supplies can do more harm than good. Drugs that have been irradiated, or altered by contact with a chemical agent, can deal terrible damage. A character with the Toxin Resistance Merit suffers no ill effects. Otherwise, the cure is as bad as the disease. The character immediately takes damage as though he had failed the Stamina + Resolve roll to resist poison and disease.

## Radiation

Lingering radiation can build within a character, killing off cells and eventually leading to a painful death from radiation poisoning — and leaving a radioactive corpse. Worse, radiation is a silent killer; nobody knows that it is present without a Geiger counter — and between weather patterns and water tables, heavily irradiated water can spread throughout the world, presenting a clear danger even if no bombs have struck nearby.

All sources of radiation to which a character might be exposed, whether it's the irradiated medicines from a pharmacy near a nuclear blast or the fallout from an atomic bomb, is measured with two traits: Intensity (how powerful the radiation is) and Damage (how much damage the radiation can wreak on the human body). The basics can be found in the table below:

Intensity	Damage	Situation	Symptoms
0	0-4(B)	Malfunctioning medical equipment	Sunburn
1	2-6(B)	Decades-old bomb site	Infertility
2	4-8(L)	Badly-stored radioactive waste	Nausea, vomiting, fatigue
3	8-12(L)	Momentary plutonium exposure	Hair loss, weeping sores
4	10-14(A)	Dirty bomb	Painful internal bleeding
5	15+(A)	Unshielded reactor core	Death

When a character is exposed to radiation, the Storyteller rolls Intensity + Damage — Character's Stamina + equipment. If the character lingers in the area, the roll is made once each scene. Supernatural creatures add their power stat to their Resistance trait. After one hour per dot of Stamina, the character takes half the damage. This heals as normal. A week later, he suffers the remaining damage at a rate of one dot per day, which doesn't heal until the full amount of damage has been dealt.

Anyone who takes a dose of radiation becomes irradiated, exposing all those who come close to radiation with an intensity three lower than the radiation to which he was exposed.

The sudden increase in deaths after a nuclear war has one significant impact beyond radiation sickness: the *Zeka*, the nuclear Prometheans, suddenly have a far greater supply of body parts to work with. These bizarre radioactive monsters are born from nuclear fires, and require the bodies of those who have died of radiation poisoning. Existing *Zeky*, suddenly aware that the new world might lead them to Redemption, may start creating new Prometheans at a startling rate.

## The Shadowed World

Humans surviving an apocalypse is one thing, but this chapter isn't just about the end of the world: it's about the end of the World of Darkness, a place where monsters walk among mankind. Every monster has different concerns when the end times come, whether it's a mage trying to undo — or advance — damage to the Fallen World, or a Sin-Eater who suddenly has millions more ghosts clamoring for her attention.

## Vampires

At first glance, Kindred have it easy in a post-apocalyptic environment. While in most cases a vampire must still find shelter from the sun — unless the sun goes out, or nuclear winter blots out harmful sunlight — she doesn't need to consume food or water, and can fake breathing as normal in hostile or toxic atmospheres. Being among the living dead also removes the vampire from concerns of over-exertion, though not from the limits on how much a person can carry.

So, in most survival situations, vampires stand a much better chance than mere humans with their need for food and water, right?

Wrong. Vampires still need blood. While at lower Blood Potency that Vitae can come from animals, most vampires require human blood to function. In order to live for one night, a vampire must harm a living human in a way



that doesn't heal for two days. To survive in equilibrium, a vampire needs a minimum of three human beings who know of his existence. That's four people who need shelter, three of whom breathe and eat and drink and piss. In the unlikely event that a vampire can find three or more people who know what he is, he can survive indefinitely, as long as he provides for his herd and none of them decide they're better off without someone leeching their resources. Using the supernatural powers of Vitae is one way for a Kindred to prove his worth — but to do that, he needs more people, or he has to hurt those who know him more.

Ultimately, a post-apocalyptic **Vampire** chronicle is a tale of addiction and desperation. Every time a vampire proves his worth, people get hurt. Not abstractions, like the hundreds of thousands who live in a modern city, but people close to the Kindred. People who otherwise ensure that he survives.

Kindred who want to survive have to sort out their priorities. First of all, find three people for each vampire to feed from. That's step 0, the same as humans finding a source of potable water. From there, a coterie has to do two things: find more mortals to add to their herd, and kill any other Kindred they encounter.

Finding more mortals is easier than it first sounds. The first two dots of *Auspex* can help locate people, and both *Dominate* and *Majesty* can bring them to the Kindred's side. In addition to giving the vampires a greater range of people to feed from — and thus more leeway to use *Vitae* — bringing people together serves a humanitarian role. Providing food, water, and shelter for 50 is harder than providing it for five, but those 50 are going to be a hell of a lot more grateful, and thus more willing to be used as food.

Killing other vampires is practically a requirement. Other vampires have humans around them. *Dominate* and *Majesty* can sway those humans to your side, assuming you're better with those *Disciplines* than the stranger.

Then, you've got to get rid of a predator who's just as likely to steal your resources as you are his. Every single surviving human being is a *resource* first and foremost. Not a person, not a friend or an acquaintance or a fellow survivor: she's food and water and ammunition. Anyone who would take her away is stealing your resources. Deal with that person appropriately.


## Werewolves

Unlike most other creatures, werewolves are built to survive. Between regenerating damage, enhanced senses, and forms that live naturally in the wild, the end of the human world isn't the end for the People. A werewolf can still starve, or die of thirst, but she's immune to infection, sickness, and disease — and given that, water and food both are in greater supply.

A werewolf without a steady supply of food or water suffers bashing damage that doesn't regenerate. The extra Stamina available in Urshul form can keep a werewolf going for longer without food or water. Between Stamina and its related increase in Health, a werewolf can keep active in Urshul for six extra days just by shifting form. Like humans, werewolves can't regenerate damage from deprivation without a steady source of food or water, but it's easier for a werewolf to *find* those resources. Add the form's Perception bonus to all rolls to scavenge for food and water; an Uratha can also ignore up to two dice of penalties due to her inherent resistance to

disease. If she's scavenging for supplies usable by humans or Wolf-Blooded, her dice pools suffer penalties as normal.





The real problem with Uratha being apex predators is a simple one: all werewolves are apex predators, including the Pure. And many Anshega have a better handle on surviving the fall of human civilization; whether that's the pack of Predator Kings who haven't set foot in a town or the Fire-Touched spirit cult in a Waco-like compound, the Pure will survive — and without the crushing weight of humanity holding them back, they're on the prowl for any and all Forsaken they can find.

Before the apocalypse, the relationship between Pure and Forsaken in a given area could be anything from the paranoia and half-caught glances of a cold war to the grimy, hidden violence of an underground hot war. After the apocalypse, that war spills over. Any temporary alliances break down as the demands of finding food and shelter turn pack against pack. Some werewolves, particularly those who haven't had long to get used to their condition, may even turn on their packs, but that's rare. Being part of a pack is so much a part of Uratha psychology that each member of the pack hunts for every member — but beyond that, it's every pack for itself.

The Forsaken have responsibilities beyond mere survival, even as the world ends. Theirs is the inheritance of Father Wolf, to act as a barrier between the worlds of flesh and spirit. An apocalyptic event throws the natural balance out of whack. If the catastrophe is large and destructive — an asteroid strike, or a nuclear detonation — it could have its own powerful spirit, fuelled by the dying thoughts of everyone in the area. All kinds of cataclysm have their own repercussions on the Shadow, and it's up to the surviving Uratha to stop the world getting worse. The sudden death of many werewolves allows other packs to expand their territory, but expanded territory means expanded responsibilities — and that's without having to find the basic necessities of survival.

## Mages

An apocalypse wracks the Fallen World, and only a handful survive. If the calamity is local, a cabal of mages can provide a safe, secure link to the outside world. A global catastrophe, on the other hand, destroys the very Orders that provide assistance to mages in need. Whatever the case, canny use of magic can see a cabal living large after an eschatological event. If they play their cards right, that cabal could even help other survivors — but the magical strain of keeping people alive is a significant one, and even if it wasn't, few cabals would willingly help people for free.

Without magical enhancement, a mage is fundamentally human. He gets sick from drinking tainted

water, he has to eat and drink and sleep just the same as anyone else. But a range of Arcana can make life a lot easier in short order. Scavenging is at least partially the result of luck, and judicious use of Fate can help feed a whole cabal. Forces magic can protect from heat and cold, provide light and even (with enough mastery over the Arcanum) mitigate lingering radiation. Life can create food and better adapt a mage to survive in harsh environments. Matter can create water and shape detritus into robust shelter. A mage can use Mind to locate other survivors, placate those she's already found, or set himself up as a dictator wielding ultimate power over those in her thrall. Space provides a vital link to other mages — and possibly to the world away from the catastrophe (if it's only a Category 0 event). Any Arcanum can provide insight into the supernatural repercussions of a disaster by way of Mage Sight, and armor spells can go some way to mitigating the dangers of life after the end.

Magic may be the great leveler, but an apocalyptic event is a grievous blow to the Lie. The reflections of Supernal perfection cannot heal the Fallen World, and trying soon exhausts a mage. Spell tolerance limits what any member of a cabal can do; simple protection spells — say, allowing the mage to go without food and water for a few days — can quickly hamper any attempts to work further magic. The presence of sleepers, despite a mage's best wishes towards them, makes vulgar magic that bit more dangerous. Ritual magic, such as the kind necessary to purify the air and water in an area hit by a biological weapon, is especially taxing. That's not to say it's not possible, just that every step back to normalcy should be a big deal.

Even among surviving mages, a Category 1 or 2 event effectively kills off the Orders. While each mage may try to keep her own Order's traditions alive, without the backup of a large society, she can't get many of the benefits. A strange device found where the first angel ripped its way out of the Abyss and into the physical realm is a puzzle that the Mysterium cannot help solve, and all the knowledge of the Free Council means nothing when individual members have no means of getting to it.

A post-apocalyptic **Mage** game has the same focus as a game featuring normal people, but with the details turned up to 11. What sacrifices will you make in the name of survival, and what will your legacy be?

## Prometheans

Living without life, the Divine Fire that permeates the body of one of the Created can consume nearly any fuel in order to remain burning. A Promethean can eat almost any organic matter, does not need to drink water,



and as long as he can breathe he can endure. Further, his mockery of a body does not tire as easily as a human would, and thus he can press on to scavenge food or resources for much longer than before.

All of these benefits are covered in more detail under “Physical Benefits,” starting on p. 161 of **Promethean: The Created**. Notably, a Promethean only needs one pound of food per day, and that can be rotten or contaminated — though not getting food for a number of days leads to Torment, rather than normal starvation. Prometheans also ignore any effects of dehydration, and don’t have to rest after exertion. Extremes of temperature affect one of the Created as normal, as does the need to breathe clean air.

After any category of apocalypse, a Promethean must deal with the necessities of survival. Some may want to find other survivors and help them. While such a selfless act is on the face of it noble, it can soon cause more trouble than it solves. Already jumpy, survivors may shoot first if they catch sight of a character’s disfigurements, or even if they just see what she’s eating. Others turn away from human survivors, preferring to make their own way in this strange new world. Disquiet spreads quickly through groups of survivors who encounter a Promethean. The noblest might adopt the Created as a sign of how well they’re doing — turning the character into little more than a mascot paraded for the morale of the other survivors, never letting him forget who is responsible for his continued survival. More often, Disquiet builds slowly among a group of survivors. That’s the worst point. Continued exposure to a Promethean, whether they scavenge with him or just keep crossing his path, builds the Disquiet until the survivors can take no more and give in. The much smaller communities found after an apocalypse mean Disquiet spreads much faster than it does in an unaffected area.

A Wasteland can also hamper others who attempt to survive. While one of the Created doesn’t find his ability to survive in the area impacted, other survivors — whether human or supernatural — will. The Nepri Wasteland, for example, causes problems for those finding water: at Stage Three, water doesn’t last for long and a character must scavenge for it each day with a –3 penalty; and at Stage Four, all water in the Wasteland’s area provides no sustenance and scavenging rolls automatically fail. Golem Wastelands impact farming and rural scavenging both. At Stage Three, the Wasteland imposes a –3 penalty to those dice pools as plants struggle to find purchase. At Stage Four, those rolls fail automatically. If a Promethean has any regard for his fellow survivors, he will move around and join a Branded throng, limiting his impact upon the area.

Creatures who strive to be human must re-assess their goals after an apocalypse. For all that the quest to attain humanity is a noble one, an apocalypse will change a character’s Pilgrimage. Even then, is it right to assume the mantle of humanity only to go on to consume scant resources and hurt the ongoing prospects of those humans who have already spent so long surviving? For many, the answer remains yes: it must be right to continue the Great Work in the face of any adversity. But beware of those who don’t even ask themselves the question.

## Changelings

Like mages, the Lost have no innate resistance to the rigors of life after an apocalypse. Though twisted by the Gentry, a changeling is human enough that she can starve to death, suffer the effects of chemical weapons, or die at ground zero of an asteroid impact. Neither Seeming benefits nor Contracts can save her. Unlike most people, a Changeling has some recourse to survive over time.

Infection — be it as a result of a bioweapon or radiations sickness — is less of a worry for changelings than it is for other characters. As noted on p. 174 of **Changeling: The Lost**, a character can add a bonus to all dice pool to ward off the effects of sickness or physical decrepitude. It may seem scant comfort, but the Lost have their own stories to tell, stories that a cataclysm would cut short. Though she may starve, a changeling has other sources of sustenance to hand — goblin fruits of the kind that normally heal damage can instead give the character her fill of food and water for the day. Fruits consumed in this fashion do not heal damage, though any other side effects from the stranger varieties of fruit still take hold. This effect only manifests for changelings, not ordinary mortals or other supernatural creatures. Fear Gortach is the exception; no matter how much a character eats she remains famished, and counts the whole day as one in which she has not eaten for the purposes of starvation.

Some gateways into the Hedge will remain intact no matter how devastated the surrounding area becomes. Finding such a gateway is a blessing for any motley, as it gives them a chance to escape the destruction. This is a good plan if the characters are (or suspect themselves to be) in the area of a Category 0 catastrophe, giving them a chance to regroup somewhere where civilization hasn’t collapsed yet. A few might even consider bringing humans with them, but asking normal folks to navigate the Hedge is a dangerous business even when those people haven’t just had everything they know destroyed. A motley would have to be very desperate to even consider the

idea, for fear that just one person steps off the path and into the Thorns.

**Changeling** is very much a game about loss and survival; throwing the characters into a post-apocalyptic survival scenario quickly externalizes those themes. Suddenly, everyone has lost what they once had, and only memories of those happier times remain. For some changelings, that's a good thing: one Woodwalker has never forgiven the Gentry who abused him and draws strength from having survived thus far. He becomes even more beholden to the idea of survival, whether he looks out for just himself or lends a guiding hand to a group of survivors who refuse to go down without a fight. Other Changelings think the apocalypse is worse than whatever punishment the Gentry could dish out. A Gargantuan scrapes together enough scraps of food to feed herself for a day, and ends her day tired and dreaming of being stretched on a giant rack, not feeling the hunger burning in her stomach. One night, she slips into the Hedge, desperately trying to find her Keeper once more. Whatever she believes about her Keeper, most will treat a returned changeling far worse than she can imagine, their ire at losing a favored toy overshadowing any relief to have it returned. Can her motley survive long enough to save her, or has each one of them already returned to his Keeper?

## Hunters

As normal humans — and make no mistake, even those hunters bearing strange Endowments count as normal humans when the sun goes out and aliens appear in the streets — hunters have no specific advantages in a post-apocalyptic survival scenario. On the other hand, they have no specific weaknesses or responsibilities, and most people who hold the Vigil for any length of time wonder what would happen if it all went to pot.

### The Right Tool for the Right Job

**Hunter: The Vigil** is a great toolbox for post-apocalyptic games that don't touch monster-hunting. Professions allow a character's previous role in society to have an impact on what he can do. Safehouses (per the Merit of the same name) can spice up what shelter the characters manage to secure. Dread Powers allow you to create alien invaders, zombie hordes, and creatures from beyond the boundaries of time and space with ease.

First-tier groups never had much support beyond their own members to start with, and they've got just as little now. On the other hand, a cell's local focus is also their greatest asset. If the survivors are part of an established cell of hunters before the catastrophe, any scavenging rolls made in their home turf gain a two-dice bonus due to familiarity with the area. Beyond that, a first-tier cell may find other survivors wanting to join, or take their resources — as one of the few organized groups after the catastrophe, they've got a natural advantage whether they know it or not.

Hunters who belong to compacts lose out the most. Cut off from their fellow hunters and all their backup, the small benefits of membership don't mean much. A Network Zero video-jockey doesn't necessarily have any more useful survival skills than anyone else. The benefits of Status in a compact still apply, but merits such as Allies, Resources, and Contacts are probably useless after an apocalyptic event. On the other hand, experience gained in the field and from swapping war stories can help in catastrophes where the supernatural is made manifest, whether that be rampaging spirits, warring demons, or the walking dead.

Conspiracies also lose the benefits of a wider network, but those hunters who bear Endowments don't lose access to their strange traits. Just because the Chieron Group as a whole dissolved along with the rest of human civilization doesn't mean an agent's Hand of Glory suddenly drops off. But now, the hunter only has his cell to remind him that he's still fully human. Without the conspiracy's support, he has to balance survival with the need to vindicate himself by hunting monsters — even if those monsters are just other survivors hoarding supplies.

## Sin-Eaters

Of all the supernatural creatures to walk the face of the World of Darkness, Sin-Eaters are the ones most affected by any eschatological event. Even a localized catastrophe, a category 0, has a lasting and meaningful impact: tens or hundreds of millions of people are dead. A fair number of those people will come back as ghosts. In the dead silence after a nuclear blast, it's the Sin-Eaters who hear the world screaming. An apocalyptic event that affected just the United Kingdom (such as the premise behind *28 Days Later*) would kill around 61 million people. Even if just 1% of those people became ghosts, that's 610,000 ghosts created in an instant. As agents of the boundary, those ghosts are a Sin-Eater's responsibility — whether she likes that or not. The sheer demand on a Sin-Eater's time is enough to drive her mad. She needs food and water, not a hundred thousand voices all calling her name. But what she wants and what she gets are two different things.



The Plasm flowing through a Sin-Eater's veins does give her some measure of protection from disease and infection; she reduces penalties by one (two at Psyche 5 and above) when scavenging for food and water as she doesn't have to be as careful as other people. Even tainted meat will help her survive. Unfortunately, she still needs food and water. Most Manifestations that could help her survive hunger and thirst don't last for longer than a scene. Unlike many other creatures, a Sin-Eater can spend Plasm to heal damage from deprivation as she encounters it, which converts to bashing damage at the end of the scene as normal. Though that gives her an extended lease on life, a Sin-Eater has to burn precious Plasm to keep going. Any damage that she doesn't absorb won't heal until she gets food, water, or shelter as normal. Sin-Eaters who die as a result of deprivation resurrect as normal, but must find food or water soon — just being dead isn't enough to repair the damage done.

The ghosts of those who died in any apocalyptic event seek out Sin-Eaters. Each one takes the end of the world personally, and it's up to the Bound in question how she deals with it — doubly so when she discovers that another krewe of survivors are sending any ghosts straight to a Dark Dominion in order to pay off the hundred souls each owes to the resident Kerberos as punishment for breaking one of the Old Laws. Sure, to ruthless Sin-Eaters the catastrophe is a boon, but for how long?

A Sin-Eater who chooses to listen to the ghosts around her soon discovers that many remain anchored to places hit hardest by the catastrophe. As a result, the Bound more than any other kind of being has reason to travel towards the epicenter, far from safe areas and accessible food. But what's life without a little risk, right?

A post apocalyptic **Geist: The Sin-Eaters** story is all about pushing the envelope. Instead of tens of ghosts needing your character's attention, now you've got tens of millions. Instead of skirting the fine line between success and failure, the Bound are fighting a losing battle — but many Sin-Eaters will fight, simply because it's against their nature to do anything else.

## The World of Dark Fantasy

Fantasy is about swords and magic against the forces of darkness. It's about a time ruled by sweat and cunning, where the brave rogues prevail against decadence and mad gods. It's about a secret world stirring behind the ragged curtain of our ignorance, or strange cities of sigil-covered machines and ceaseless intrigue.

The exact definition is a matter of taste. The fantasy genre doesn't have set borders, but a kind of cultural gravity. It draws an ever-shifting group of motifs into its orbit. Role-

playing games have a special spot in fantasy's history. They started out by adapting literary inspirations but in the decades since, have come to spark their own novels, video games, and standard tropes: swords, spells, elves, and all that.

What does that mean for the World of Darkness? Our game is a flexible one; like the fantasy genre, it has loose but persistent tendencies to explore horror and moral peril. Your chronicle's focus might be action, romance, or dark comedy, but those elements haunt the background. Dark fantasy applies these elements to the classic roleplaying genre.

Dark fantasy exploits horror traditions and frightening themes. You might call it a sub-genre, but for organizational reasons we'll treat it as more of a flavor. This is in keeping with fantasy's literary history, which has always borrowed from horror and the classic "weird tale." Conan creator Robert E. Howard exchanged letters with H.P. Lovecraft, and even Tolkien wasn't above mentioning vampires and werewolves.

## A World of Mail and Arrows

An ancient or medieval fantasy game requires some changes to your character sheet. Your character can't drive, and archery is too important to fold into the Athletics Skill. Remove the Computer, Science, Drive, and Firearms Skills from your character sheet. Replace them with the following Skills:

**Religion (Mental):** This Skill acquaints a character with religious symbols, doctrines, customs, and hierarchies. Use it to impersonate clergy or perform proper rites.

**Warfare (Mental):** This is the Skill of leading ancient troops into battle, planning their movements and reacting to enemy ploys. Resolve unimportant battles with opposed Intelligence + Warfare rolls, with significant modifiers for troop strength, experience, and equipment.

**Archery (Physical):** Athletics no longer covers bows and crossbows. This skill does. Roll Dexterity + Archery to attack.

**Ride (Physical):** Use this Skill to ride a horse at anything faster than a slow trot. Roll Dexterity + Ride to stay in the saddle during dangerous situations, or Composure + Mount to urge a mount in the right direction. Use Animal Ken for a horse and cart.

These adaptations first appeared in the **Vampire** supplement **Requiem for Rome**. While there's enough to hack these alterations here, you can read that book for a more detailed treatment.

## Sub-Genres

Fantasy's broad harbor contains more variation than we can briefly describe, so let's concentrate on sub-genres that strongly influence contemporary fantasy fiction and games, and how we can apply them to a World of Darkness chronicle.

### Sword & Sorcery

The earliest sub-genre on our list, sword and sorcery, is a plot-driven genre that's less concerned with creating a world than telling a straightforward story. Classic sword and sorcery tales happen in a vaguely defined fantasy world, a real or fictional era in Earth's history, or another planet. This sub-genre is the home of Conan, the Gray Mouser, and Elric. Sword and sorcery protagonists live by their wits through episodic stories (many of which were written during a robust short fiction market for fantasy) that tend to the picaresque, and frequently cross over with horror. Unspeakable monsters and deranged sorcerers are common threats.

Sword and sorcery is an excellent sub-genre for chronicles focused on a series of loosely connected stories, especially when they concern travel (protagonists often wander the world) or a riotous setting that's designed for variety over cohesion. Characters are competent (extraordinary mortals or heroes are appropriate) and supernatural forces have a sinister mien.

### High Fantasy

You can't talk about high fantasy without mentioning *The Lord of the Rings*. Its influence looms large, and it's why we think of elves and epics whenever we talk about fantasy as a whole. Nevertheless, that novel doesn't represent the whole of the sub-genre, which developed particular conventions thanks to a number of novelists... and roleplaying games. Supernatural good and evil is one of them: the realm of Dark Lords and their irredeemable minions. Another is an epic scope, with a plot arc extending across one or several novels. A detailed setting supports the story and can be almost as interesting as the main plot. High fantasy features the archetypal (or stereotypical) heroes' journey, calling a humble protagonist to adventure and tracking her growth to power, influence, and symbolic adulthood.

High fantasy presents clear goals for protagonists and is an excellent choice for a long-term chronicle. It also supports long-term character development that moves from low power to the peak of heroic potential. Metaphysical evil justifies darker elements but in most cases, good also has its mystical agents, even if they stay hidden through much of the epic.

### Weird Fantasy

Weird fantasy, or the "New Weird," is a recent sub-genre that consciously rejects high fantasy traditions without eliminating the idea of a detailed setting or falling

back on traditional sword and sorcery. China Miéville is the best-known New Weird author, and cites influences ranging from roleplaying games to Mervyn Peake and the *Gormenghast* trilogy.

Peake might be considered the forerunner of contemporary weird fantasy. Like modern creators, Peake approached class and culture with a critical eye. This element, where neither the author nor protagonists accept the inevitability of high kings, feudal chains of beings, or other social constructions, is probably the most distinctive element of the modern weird fantasy style. This fits chronicles awash in political intrigue and characters who are tightly integrated into the world: people with families and positions, instead of wandering adventurers.

### Modern Fantasy

Modern fantasy is just what it sounds like. Instead of taking place in a far-off imaginary land, it happens in a version of our world. A modern fantasy Earth has hidden places where supernatural beings congregate... in fact, that sounds familiar to World of Darkness players, doesn't it? The main difference lies in atmosphere and scope. **Mage: The Awakening** hides Atlantean ruins in obscure corners of the world; *Harry Potter's* wizards have huge schools, international sports, and newspapers.

If a modern fantasy world breaks your suspension of disbelief, try to focus on its potential, not its realism. Incorporating the supernatural at this scale is part of the fun. This great sub-genre provides a great opportunity to relax, take a break from figuring out the logic of a subtle supernatural world, and run with troll cities and sewer-dwelling dragons. And in case you think the genre might be a bit too lighthearted for the World of Darkness, remember that *Hellboy II: The Golden Army*, and Clive Barker's *Imajica* are as representative of it as juvenile novels or contemporary fairy tales.

## Magic

Magic is an essential part of the fantasy genre and one of the first things you'll want to define, since its nature influences social structures, animal life, natural laws, and countless other things. You can select some of all of the following rationales, but keep in mind that every choice will add an extra layer of complexity to your chronicle's background and chapter to chapter events. Even so, don't worry about consistency *too* much. There's a point where no amount of world building will answer every nitpick.

The following list includes previously published books that can inspire ideas for each type of magic. In addition to those, **World of Darkness: Second Sight** and **Witch Finders for Hunter: The Vigil** include interesting rules and concepts for all of them.

**Dark Forces:** Magic comes from alien or infernal powers: demons, Lovecraftian gods, or the capricious pa-



trons of Chaos. **Mage's Abyss** is one possible inspiration; so are **World of Darkness: Inferno's** demons and Possessed, and even **Changeling: The Lost's** Gentry. Settings where these *all* magic has a sinister origin are especially prevalent in sword and sorcery settings.

**Elements and Forms:** Magic is an academic philosophy — almost a science — that teaches the Art of manipulating Creation's core elements. Practitioners harness elemental and conceptual planes of power, and abstract entities that can be manipulated with runes, alchemy, and secret names. **Mage: The Awakening** includes a host of ideas, and alchemy is a core part of **Promethean: The Created**.

**The Gods:** If the gods are real, chosen followers might pray for divine intervention — and those prayers could be systematized into spells. Divine magic is a classic fantasy roleplaying motif, but in the World of Darkness, gods might be petty, venal, and cruel after the finest traditions of polytheistic myth. Alternately, the gods (or messengers of a higher God) could be the only source of uncorrupted magic. Everything else is demonic or spiritually tainted. **Mage** and **Promethean** both devote some space to divine magic.

**Mysticism:** Magic is a state of being, similar to some religions' ideas of enlightenment — or extreme, unbalanced self-debasement. Supernatural forces respond to an individual or community's spiritual state. Once again, **Mage** is an excellent resource.

**Spirits and Ghosts:** It's a pantheistic world where everything has a resident god, spirit, or patron ancestor. Magic entreats them to act through threats and bargains. **Geist: The Sin Eaters**, **Changeling: The Lost** and especially **Werewolf: The Forsaken** support this type of magic.

## Magic Systems

Here's where we get to the tricky part: what are the rules for magic? We could invent a whole new magic system for this book but it would be redundant; the World of Darkness already has dozens of spells and powers in print. **Mage: The Awakening**, **Hunter's Witch Finders** and **World of Darkness: Second Sight** are the most comprehensive general collections of magic rules produced for the game, but there are plenty of *other* powers to borrow from every line. We have two broad suggestions: jumping off points for your own efforts.

### Magic by Supernatural Type

Shamans learn Gifts as werewolves do. Academic sorcerers learn **Mage's** Atlantean sorcery. Wizards in league with the old Blood Gods learn a vampire's Disciplines. Necromancers unleash Sin-Eater Keys and Manifestations. Select a different supernatural being for every magical form, and let human beings learn their special powers.

In the cases of **Mage**, **Geist**, and **Hunter** you may even wish to allow full-featured characters from those games to represent particular schools. Note that they'll be significantly more powerful than characters who lack

a supernatural template. Play them alongside heroes (see p 188) to strike a balance.

This form of magic is flavorful but requires some adaptation to the fact that your sorcerers have the powers, but not the assumed templates.

### Spell Merits

Treat each individual supernatural power (not a group, such as an entire Discipline or Arcanum, but a particular application) as a Merit valued one point above the power's normal rank. Sorcerers learn them piecemeal, scavenging spells where they can find them. For example, instead of learning Majesty's second-dot Awe power by progressing through the Discipline, a spellcaster learns that particular power as a three-dot Merit.

This approach is compatible with **World of Darkness: Second Sight** and can be used to purchase individual rites from **Mage: The Awakening**. Best of all, **Hunter: The Vigil** possesses a Merit modification system ("R&D") you can use to alter these powers. In some cases, sorcerers will get the power at something of a bargain, compared to full supernatural beings, but remember that they don't get to add a supernatural power trait to dice pools.

## Power Costs

Some supernatural powers cost points in an expendable trait that most human characters don't have, such as Essence, Mana, Plasm, or Vitae. The quick and dirty rule is that if your character doesn't possess the trait, levy the same cost in Willpower, or double its cost in bashing damage. Make the choice on a case by case basis. In general, if a power already has a Willpower cost, the spell should inflict bashing damage instead.

Alternately, use core supernatural power traits (Blood Potency, Gnosis, etc.) as a model to develop a spendable Magic trait. A base of five to nine points suits many fantasy games. If you want more powerful sorcerers you can give them access to a Sorcery core supernatural trait that provides 10 points of "juice" for the first dot, +1 per each additional dot, up to the sixth dot (15 points).

After that, traits for other supernatural beings add far more power (usually 20 at seven dots, 30 at eight dots, 50 at nine dots, and 100 at 10 dots) but you may not want to follow that scheme if you'd rather limit even high-powered sorcerers. You'll also need to decide how sorcerers refuel their power, and whether the core trait provides any other benefits.

## Fantasy Peoples

One of the most common motifs in fantasy fiction and roleplaying games is the existence of people whose heritage sets them apart from typical humans. It's problematic to call these groups "races" as many games do; "race" is a subjective, culturally loaded concept. You might call some of these groups "species," but the label doesn't work in settings, where fantasy peoples sit somewhere in between. They're able to produce offspring and share common biological and social traits but don't seem "human" either. We'll just refer to them as fantasy folk, or peoples, and let you decide how they fit in.

It's difficult to place "normal humans" within this continuum and it's tempting to leave them as some kind of baseline, or blandly exceptional in a way that balances out against more fantastic counterparts. This is a classic stance and suited to games where you want fantasy peoples to be secondary figures, but think about what that choice symbolizes. It defines normalcy in a way that does a symbolic injustice to anyone playing anything else, and it lacks verisimilitude. In the real world, everyone is normal to themselves.

We could provide classic examples like elves, dwarves, and orcs, but it's easy enough for any imagina-

tive Storyteller to develop their own versions. Instead, we'll present fantasy folk that suit the World of Darkness. They're drawn from its mythology and tinged with an element of horror. Use these as examples to help you build your own fantasy folk.

Are these major supernatural templates? Minor templates? We've left the answer intentionally vague. Instead of limiting how you can stack supernatural templates with them, we'll just advise you that the fantasy peoples in the section are more powerful than standard human characters and leave it to you to make a choice that fits your chronicle.

## Atlanteans

**Your whole life before this time was an insubstantial shadow, but now you have stepped into the light.**

You are Atlantean — you just don't know it yet. You call yourself "human" but that's an ignorant slang term, developed in an age that's forgotten what it's like to share the world with other sapient beings.

Of course, not all Atlanteans call themselves that. They are heirs to a secret history so obscured by the passage of time not even they can say what it was, exactly. Legends speak of an ancient city, a primordial world-jungle, even another world around a distant star: the ancient capital of all humankind, called Mother Forest, Mu, Shambhala, and more. In this lost age, culture-heroes claimed the secrets of fire, agriculture, medicine, and arcane lore.

Why did the age of glory end? That's part of the mystery. Scrambled myths blame jealous gods, an ancient crime, a civil war, or a conflict with monstrous enemies. Now, most Atlanteans only have a dim collective recollection of their true history. Many don't even know they *are* Atlantean. They don't know their potential, and even though their hearts stir at stories of humans and gods, magic and passionate, powerful deeds, they don't understand that their reaction stems not from simple appreciation, but the fact that they unconsciously recognize something *true*.

Strange fate sometimes brings Atlanteans closer to understanding who they are, and once that happens they tend to attract supernatural events and weird dangers. They're thrust into reflections of the myths, to become heroes or horrors themselves.

### Description

Atlanteans come from every ordinary human heritage. One school of thought holds that they're simply everyday people who've changed after being exposed to the supernatural, but another says they belong to secret

## Pale Hordes

J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle Earth is in many ways an attempt to create a specifically English mythology. It was a product of its time, where even progressives thought of race and difference... differently. As a result, his work is centered on people with a pseudo-European heritage, or to put it less delicately, white guys. Lots of white guys.

His influence looms large over the fantasy genre, to the point where people imitate his conventions without working inside the same context. They're creating a setting now, in the 21st century, and they're not trying to create a synthetic English mythology. They don't have any excuse to make it all about white guys and neither do you. Remember that fantasy peoples are not "races." Assume that all of them come in a variety of skin tones and other phenotypes. Plus, of course, they're not limited by some of our less sensible biases about ethnicity. A fantasy culture doesn't need to reproduce our mistakes.



bloodlines, scattered across the world's nations. While it is true that Atlantean traits cluster in families, many people have discovered them in people who don't have known Atlantean relatives.

Atlanteans range across skin tones, heights, and builds, but one thing they have in common is that their physical traits and subtle aura seem more *real* against a mundane background. Their personalities closely match their appearances. A muscular Atlantean has the supple strength of a tiger and an aggressive, confident personality to match. A decadent Atlantean wears his indulgences on a cynical, twisted expression, and a body that's too fat or thin for his build.

## Advantages

Atlantean characters have the following game advantages. If an Atlantean begins play without knowing her true nature these traits manifest gradually and inconsistently until a moment of truth, where she understand who she really is.

**Excellence:** Atlanteans don't suffer penalties for being untrained in a Skill, and achieve an exceptional success for one success less than normal (for most rolls, this is a score of four successes, not five).

**Intense Passions:** Record any Willpower points an Atlantean gains from satisfying a Vice separately. When a player spends one of these Willpower points, add four dice to a roll, not three. If the Willpower augments a passive resistant trait such as Defense, add 3 to it instead of the standard 2.

**Unseen Senses:** All Atlanteans possess an expanded version of the Unseen Sense Merit. (Some occultists believe that people who possess the standard Merit have Atlantean blood,

or are on the verge of discovering their birthright.) Whenever a new supernatural phenomenon occurs in the immediate area, the Atlantean feels the hairs of his neck stand on end, a strange song only they can hear, or another personal signal of the player's choice.

Unlike the standard Merit, it applies to all supernatural occurrences, but it in no way confers the ability to discover the origin, nature, or exact source of the phenomenon. It's just a feeling.

**Willful:** Add one free dot to an Atlantean's Resolve or Composure and increase that trait's maximum score by 1.

## Disadvantages

Like an Atlantean's advantages, her disadvantages manifest inconsistently or not at all until she discovers her true nature.

**The Atlantean Mark:** Atlanteans are larger than life figures. Unless they take specific, conscious steps to disguise themselves, they're always memorable; give investigators the rote bonus on rolls to track them through social channels. If they do take steps to hide themselves, spies and followers don't get that bonus.





Traveling incognito without using a disguise or convincing acting (represented by a Skill roll such as Manipulation + Subterfuge) is useless; she'll either be recognized or seen as exceptional among her peers.

**The Atlantean Doom:** When an Atlantean fails a roll that she's augmented with Willpower points drawn from her Vice, or is still affected by an incoming action she spent that Willpower to resist (as per "Intense Passions") one other future failure (or failure to avoid an unwanted influence or attack) of the Storyteller's choice either will be treated as a dramatic failure, or as if the opposing force had scored two more successes. This usually happens in situations where the Atlantean is once again motivated by her Vice.

## Atlanteans by Chronicle

**Sword and Sorcery:** In a sword and sorcery chronicle, Atlanteans have two roles. In the first, they're the remnants of a great civilization fallen to decadence, clinging to the ruins of greater times. They often have access to ancient artifacts and ancestral pacts with evil creatures. In the second, they're exemplars of human potential who've turned their backs on past civilized follies. They're barbarians and reavers, prepared to crush the world under their sandaled feet.

**High Fantasy:** High fantasy Atlanteans are the "high people" of a previous epic age, heirs to lost thrones and guardians of older, virtuous ways. Their heritage makes them more susceptible to temptations from dark forces. They have the potential to restore justice across the world or cast it into eternal night. Their place at the center of world-changing events also hinders them, however, and more often than not they need the help of less prominent peoples to resolve dilemmas.

**Weird Fantasy:** In the weird fantasy genre, Atlanteans are the upper class, determined to maintain their position but consumed with intrigues against one another. Breeding is everything to them; they use chauvinism as a weapon to keep other fantasy peoples low, and hoard vital secrets about the world — especially when they involve powers to which even the Atlanteans must submit. Naturally, most of them dislike the idea that any human being could be Atlantean, and suppress evidence of it as best they can.

**Modern Fantasy:** Atlanteans are human beings who know the modern fantasy chronicle's secret world. They gather in secret societies and families to guard this lore from outsiders and help other fantastic peoples deal with extended forays into the mundane world.

**Mage: The Awakening:** Atlanteans borrow ideas from **Mage: The Awakening's** mythology. If you use **Mage**, all Atlanteans are "Sleepwalkers:" people who can see magic and don't count as witnesses that might cause a spell to go awry. Perhaps all mages are Atlanteans.

# Dhampirs

## Can you rise above the hateful song in your blood?

Everyone knows the dead can't create life — or at least, no life but that of the fly, rot-worm, and scavenging rat. But even though sterility and impotence play a part in some vampire legends, others speak of wicked bloodlines born of the dead. The genesis of these families always involves some exceptional situation: a crossroads on the New Moon, a cursed ruin or a secret corner of the world where monsters go to multiply. In these places, a dark seed blooms between the living and the dead: the dhampirs — the half-dead.

A dhampir's offspring are always other dhampirs. Dhampirs seek each other and avoid the truly living because they know they're heirs to unnatural desires. Given a few generations they form extended families. These keep to isolated mansions and haunted places far from human society.

Dhampirs aren't immortal but they are very long-lived (they live two or three times as long as most humans). They use family ties and their extended lifespans to build secret reserves of wealth and power. Dhampirs enjoy power for its own sake as much as anyone else, but the hoard is a prudent hedge against their enemies — and all outsiders eventually become enemies. People fear them for their too-pale appearance, their avoidance of the sun, and a resemblance to their monstrous ancestors. Sometimes these fears are warranted; some dhampir families are clans of sadists who perform blood rites to imitate the truly undead. Some are vampire thralls; their masters treat them as minions to be ordered about at a whim.

Despite being common vampiric cat's-paws, dhampirs are in a better position to fight them than most. They can't be made into vampires or given the gift of strength, longer life, or supernatural abilities from a vampire's blood. Many dhampirs resent vampires and sometimes become legendary vampire hunters, though they're often forced to hide their true nature from anyone they recruit for the hunt.

## Description

Dhampirs look sickly and extraordinarily pale from birth, but they demonstrate a strength and health that belies their appearance. Some are gaunt. Others put on weight that makes them resemble bloated, drowned corpses, or possess a defined musculature that instead of moving and changing like a living person's, looks more like the cold, sculpted stone of a statue.

A dhampir has a slight, bitter scent. It's blood, and other signs of it are always obvious. No matter the skin tone, a dhampir's veins add blue-tinted lines to his neck and arms. His eye sockets suggest the permanent bruise of a stereotypical hemophiliac or drug addict. He has no fangs, but his canine teeth are just a *bit* longer and sharper than normal.



## Advantages

Dhampirs manifest the following advantages from birth.

**Death Against Death:** Dhampirs possess certain immunities and special resistances to the powers of ghosts, vampires, and other dead or undead beings. These stem from their profoundly unnatural state, outside the scheme of life and death that even these monsters rely on to confidently enforce their wills.

Add +2 to rolls to resist a ghost or undead creature's

supernatural powers, or +1 to a dhampir's Resistance Attribute if it's being used to reduce the opponent's dice pool. Dhampirs cannot be turned into vampires or zombies, and their corpses can't be reanimated short of any force sufficient to provide true resurrection. Dhampirs can't be made into ghouls. If a dhampir ingests addictive blood, her player may roll Morality to resist its effects; success means that any addictive blood the dhampir has ingested in the last 24 hours has no effect.

**Death's Shadow:** Never truly alive, a dhampir's nature skirts the metaphysical border between life and death. Most are born with cauls over their heads: the ancient sign of a ghost-seer. All dhampirs possess Unseen Senses, tuned to ghosts and the undead. In addition to this, a dhampir can see, hear, and be seen and heard by any ghost that stands in his shadow.

### Half-Dead Flesh:

Dhampirs only suffer half damage from injuries that inflict bashing damage. Blunt trauma, exhaustion, and skeletal strains affect them differently. They don't bruise, and their tissues snap back into place despite horrible misalignments.

### Resistance of the Grave:

Add 1 to a dhampir's Resolve, Stamina, or Composure, and increase that trait's maximum score by 1. This arises not out of a special inner strength, but a morbid resistance to hardship that manifests differently from person to person.

## Disadvantages

Owing to their unusual backgrounds, dhampirs suffer from two disadvantages.

**Unnatural Flesh:** Dhampirs shouldn't exist; on some level, they're an offense to the mysti-



cal order of things. Born outside the proper laws of nature, every dhampir carries some malformation that goes beyond a simple birth defect. It could be a wound that never heals and slowly seeps (but never bleeds the dhampir to death), a fully formed eye mounted on one shoulder, or a permanently withered hand.

The deformity can usually be hidden by clothing, but not makeup. It isn't a hindrance or a benefit to anything but Social actions unless the player or Storyteller incorporates it into a particularly inventive description. It's a horrific supernatural mutation that's well known to those versed in the lore of dhampirs, and will probably send the average person running, or reaching for a weapon.

**Unnatural Vices:** Dhampirs carry a cursed mote of their vampire ancestors' predatory instincts. If a dhampir satisfies her Vice (even accidentally), her player must roll Morality each turn to avoid satisfying it again in the most extreme form possible during the situation, without any regard for morals, social niceties, or personal safety.

If the player scores at least one success per turn, the dhampir can't leave the situation, but fends off the urge for that turn. If he scores three successes across the following turns, the dhampir's moral center reasserts itself and she may act freely. If the player scores no successes, the dhampir pursues her Vice to its limit and the player loses all accumulated successes to resist the compulsion. The player may spend one Willpower point per turn to enhance the Morality roll.

## Dhampirs by Chronicle

**Sword and Sorcery:** Dhampirs are moody, inhuman protagonists, bringing a gothic touch to classic sword and sorcery motifs. They are the children of blood demons and the remnants of their cursed empire. Dhampirs hold themselves apart from other cultures except to trade riches from the Blood Demon Age for necessities, luxuries, and slaves. A few leave these enclaves because they're consumed with unfamiliar ideas — things called a "conscience" or "compassion" — but even the virtuous might dedicate blood and souls to their sanguine gods.

**High Fantasy:** In a high fantasy setting, dhampirs are a sign of Evil's stain on the world. Vampires were born of the original Darkness, and spawned offspring during the epic wars of antiquity. When a Dark Lord returns, he tempts dhampirs to join his army. Nevertheless, every dhampir can decide her own allegiance, and many of their barons and dukes could be swayed to the Light by the right argument.

**Weird Fantasy:** In a cosmopolitan weird fantasy setting, dhampirs are just another odd group with their own slang, traditional jobs, and internal secrets. People

trade rumors about a local dhampir's perversions and deformities. Dhampirs face discrimination on many levels, since they're seen as too unstable to hold sensitive positions. Yet none would deny the truth of their ancestry, and that they are who you must turn to when the dead rise.

**Modern Fantasy:** Every large modern fantasy city has a Sanguinary Road where dhampirs operate shops and taverns. Their ability to see ghosts draws them into other communities to investigate hauntings. They also send messages via shade (the dead travel fast) and negotiate with the undead on behalf of allies.

**Vampire: The Requiem:** If you incorporate **Vampire: The Requiem** into your chronicle, (and you don't have to — dhampirs are not necessarily derived from Requiem vampires) vampires use dhampirs as informants and agents in their nightly intrigues, but more cautiously than ghouls, who tend to be more loyal. To actually father or mother a dhampir is an embarrassment, even a crime, but this doesn't prevent a few ambitious undead from trying to do it in haunted or cursed sites.

## Wargaz

**When a harsh winter comes, the wolf claims his due.**

The blood of Father Wolf sings in three lines. The first are *Uratha*, werewolves, bound by rage and spirit-stuff to patrol the border of matter and Shadow. Then there are the Wolf-Blooded *uragarum*, close kin to the werewolves, possessed of the ability to understand some of their relatives' nature, but able to live fully human lives. But there is a third, secret, and outcast line: the *wargaz*. They are not so easily hidden, not so bound to the nature of werewolf and man. They are not initiates of the Shadow, of the spirits, but of Father Wolf's fleshly nature, mixed with the shape of mortal men and women.

The name "wargaz" does not come from the spirits' First Tongue, but the roots of Old Norse. It's the word for outlaw, literally "strangler," a class of men who were called wolves in ancient sagas. They've always stuck to the outskirts of civilization, either in wild places or the forgotten interstices of the urban landscape: forests, mountains, sewers, and deserted neighborhoods. They call these forbidding places home and don't see them as empty, inhospitable places. The outlands just have their own special rules, and if you abide by them you can live well. If you don't, move away or let yourself die — it's your responsibility.

Many wargaz are visibly members of their kind at birth, hairy and huge throughout their lives, but some



are born as typical babies. They may or may not manifest their ancestry at some point between puberty and middle age. Wargaz customarily render these children over to ordinary human foster families. Life among the wargaz might be too harsh for them and in any event, they should be allowed to choose. Wargaz watch these children closely and whether they change or not, eventually reveal themselves. If they do change, the wargaz welcome them into their birth families. If not, the wargaz ask them to be intermediaries between themselves and the outside world.

Wargaz have strained relationships with werewolves and Wolf-Blooded, who they believe are superstitious, overly-abstract thinkers who, despite their protests to the contrary, are too interested in blending in. Who cares about balanced spirits, corrupt spirits, or other Shadow things when real rivers flow or suffer pollution, and real monsters live in the flesh? This perspective is pragmatic, not narrow-minded. Wargaz have keen minds and especially excellent memories.

## Description

The average wargaz is six and a half to seven and a half feet tall, long-limbed, powerfully muscled and hirsute, with body hair that has human and wolf characteristics. At 275 to 350 pounds, wargaz are naturally strong, and grow even stronger in the harsh conditions they prefer.

In the right clothing, a wargaz can look like any very large person, but some signs can give them away. Their eyes shine at night. Some have additional wolf-like traits like black nails and pointed ears, or exhibit the classic marks of werewolves, such as joined eyebrows or unusually long third fingers. The player decides if her wargaz has these characteristics but they do tend to run in families.

## Advantages

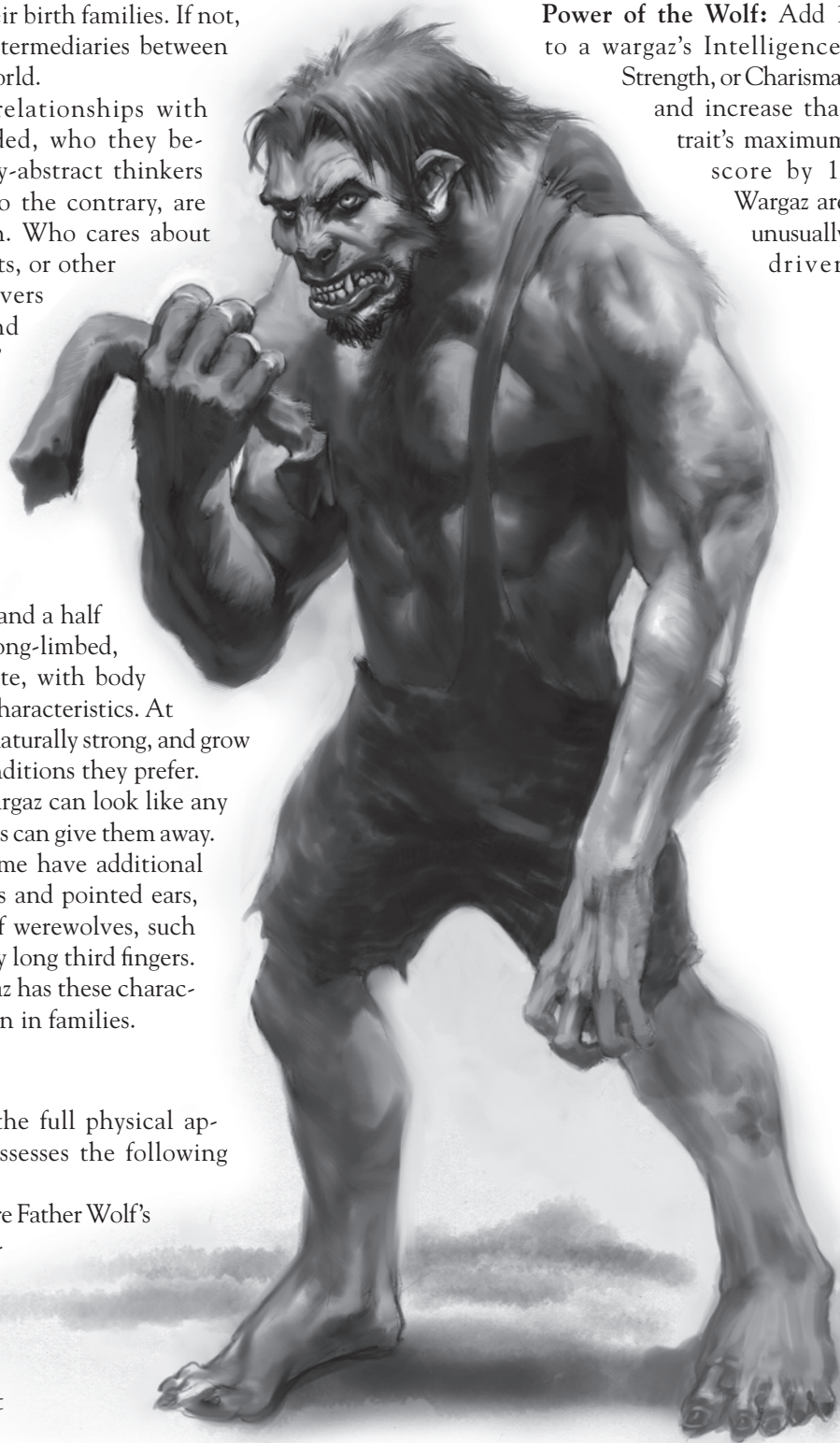
Once a wargaz assumes the full physical appearance of her kind she possesses the following advantages.

**The Wolf Incarnate:** Where Father Wolf's other children carry extra spiritual potency, wargaz have internalized his heritage. They don't have a special bond with the spirits but they are particularly resistant

to spiritual influence. They are immune to Lunacy, the madness that werewolves sometimes cause among human beings. Add +2 to rolls to resist a spirit of werewolf's powers, or +1 to a wargaz's Resistance Attribute if it's being used to reduce the opponent's dice pool.

**Giant:** All wargaz possess the Giant Merit, and are +1 Size (and thus, +1 Health), as described in the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, page 112.

**Power of the Wolf:** Add 1 to a wargaz's Intelligence, Strength, or Charisma, and increase that trait's maximum score by 1. Wargaz are unusually driven



and energetic in any field, but their particular talents vary by the individual.

**Will of the Pack:** A wargaz can select one person per dot of Intelligence as a member of her “pack:” a tightly bonded, cooperative social group. She must spend at least a week in regular, close contact with that person. To reject a pack mate (and open up a previously occupied “slot” that may be refilled), the wargaz must spend a week away from him. Wargaz usually devote this ability to immediate friends and family.

The wargaz gains a keen insight into how her pack mate acts and how to help and motivate her. If she can either speak to her pack mate or directly assist her with a task (repairing an object or fighting the same enemy, for instance), her player can spend a Willpower point to add +2 to that ally’s dice pool. This bonus stacks with the ally’s own Willpower expenditure, but not with another wargaz’s use of this ability.

## Disadvantages

A wargaz’s disadvantages manifest as soon as her advantages do.

**Killing Rage:** Wargaz have powerful predatory instincts. They avoid casual violence but once engaged, go for the kill. Killing Rage doesn’t kick in during playful struggles or sports, but only when an opponent intends to seriously injure or kill the character.

In these situations, a wargaz who wants to leave anyone who harms her alive must roll Morality each turn to avoid continuing to attack, even after she would choose to stop. If the player scores at least one success per turn, the wargaz can’t leave her opponent, but fends off the urge to kill him. If he scores three successes across the following turns, the wargaz shakes off the Killing Rage completely. If the player scores no successes he loses all accumulated successes and the wargaz continues the attack. The player may spend one Willpower point per turn to enhance the Morality roll.

**Predator’s Scent:** A wargaz’s physical traits aren’t the only way to identify her. Most animals react to her the way they’d react to a dangerous predator. Animals either flee or view her as a competitor for territory. For example, a domestic dog will react by either fleeing, demonstrating extreme submissiveness, or by attacking what it perceives as a threat to the humans it cares about.

## Wargaz by Chronicle

**Sword and Sorcery:** Wargaz in a sword and sorcery setting are rough barbarians from the outlands. Enkidu is the archetypal wargaz: a crude, hairy survivor who cares little for civilization or the celestial order. Wargaz

raise mighty bands against civilization, but like the early Mongols have little interest in replacing a city’s rulers. Whether they walk in small tribes or rule empires from their tents, they care less for wealth than the fundamentals of survival.

**High Fantasy:** High fantasy wargaz are favored servants of the Dark Lord: shock troops valued for their toughness, bloodthirst, and discipline. They might even be creations of an evil god, who corrupted a few werewolves to create ideal foot soldiers. Still, they have free will, and can rebel against their masters.

**Weird Fantasy:** In a weird fantasy setting, wargaz perform the dirty, physically difficult duties that keep society running. Most of them farm, hunt, prepare the dead for burial, and deal with garbage. A smaller number are craftsmen like smiths, tanners, and masons. Some cultures consider them to be unclean. Although many wargaz are uncommonly brilliant, few have the opportunity to apply their intelligence to anything other than their professions.

**Modern Fantasy:** Wargaz live in untamed parts of the magical world, in ramshackle estates that people are afraid to visit, or tenements that are much larger than they appear. They adopt the habits of backwoods clans, genteel lines of aristocrats, or street gangs, all to preserve their devotion to friends and family. Upscale wargaz tribes cultivate ties with normal looking relatives to better deal with the outside world.

**Werewolf: The Forsaken:** If you use **Werewolf: The Forsaken** in your chronicle (like dhampirs, wargaz don’t have to be related to anything described in a core supplement), wargaz are the werewolves’ distant cousins, distrusted due to their strong materialism. Wargaz don’t have much use for the Uratha either, but know better than to make enemies out of them. When a spiritual threat enters a wargaz’s secret home, they know it’s time to alert the Uratha, but aren’t eager for them to stay. Uratha in turn recruit them to fight the Pure, who believe wargaz are abominations: spiritually crippled by-blows of the Father who deserve to be exterminated.

## Dark Heroes

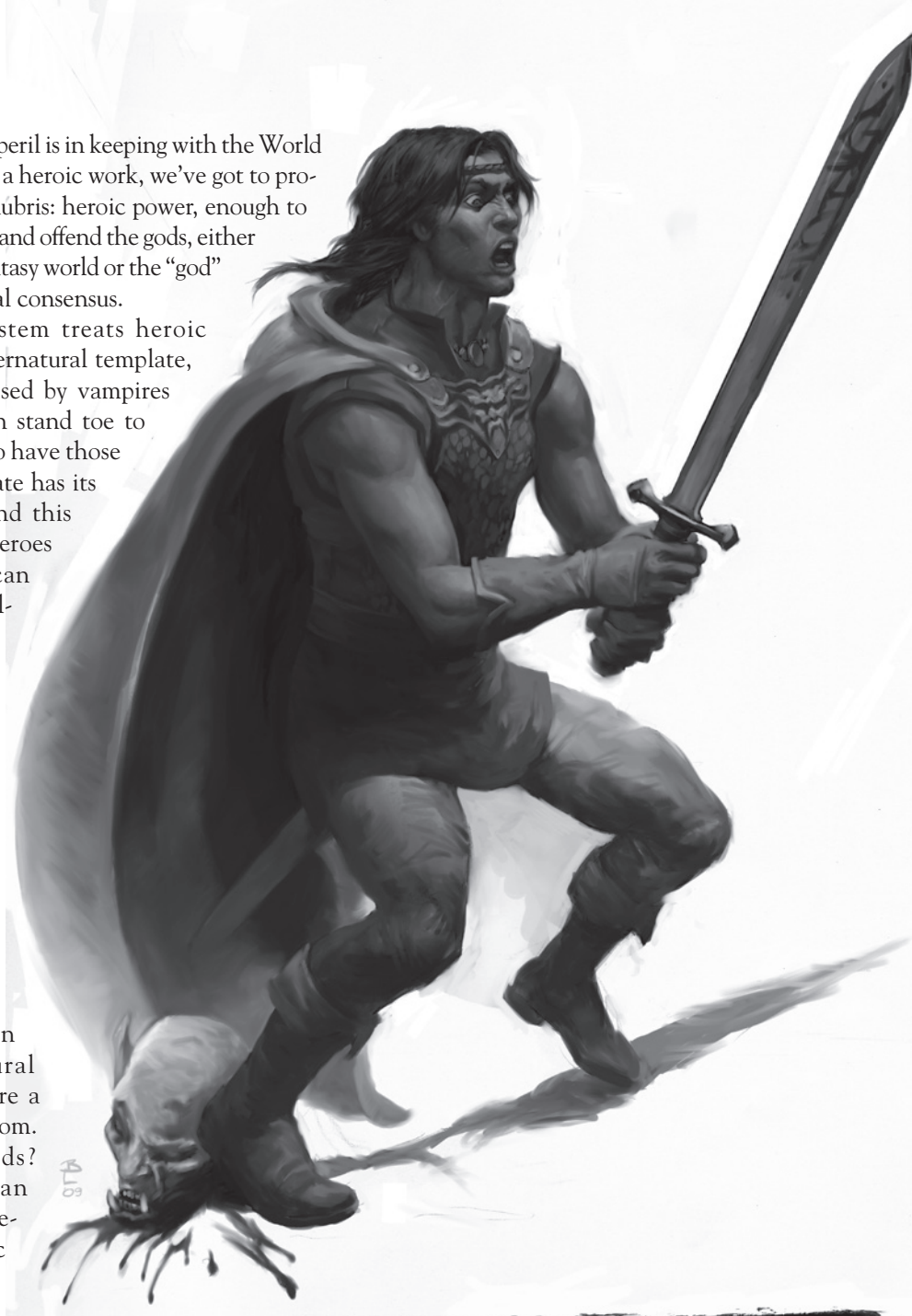
Even virtuous heroes are destroyers, shattering the old order to replace it with their vision or leave its wreckage for the “little people” to deal with. It’s almost clichéd to point out that ancient heroes weren’t always admirable, but always possessed of godlike excellence. Heroic status multiplies the opportunities to commit acts of hubris: another term that doesn’t mean what it used to.



That kind of moral peril is in keeping with the World of Darkness, so to make a heroic work, we've got to provide opportunities for hubris: heroic power, enough to damn the consequences and offend the gods, either the literal deities of a fantasy world or the "god" of your chronicle's moral consensus.

This section's system treats heroic prowess as a major supernatural template, similar to those possessed by vampires and mages. Heroes can stand toe to toe with characters who have those templates. Each template has its particular specialty, and this one is no different. Heroes excel at Skills, and can reach epic levels of ability in them. By default, a hero can't possess another supernatural template, though you can change this if you like.

The hero template works best in a high fantasy setting, but you can incorporate it into others. Just keep in mind that in other games, a hero's prowess is an obviously supernatural gift. Ask yourself where a hero's abilities come from. Are there secret gods? Is it untapped human potential? Are they reincarnations of mythic predecessors?



## Heroism and Morality

Hubris originally referred to many kinds of moral violations; Aristotle said it was at heart inflicting shame for one's own pleasure, upon other mortals, or to the gods and their laws. Heroes either destroy lives, or attack the moral order itself. They violate bodies, sack cities, and slay guards they could have avoided.

Should heroes be held to a different moral standard? That's up to you. In a sword and sorcery chronicle, morality is often a screen used by soft people who are too cowardly to take control of their own destinies. In high fantasy games, there may be objective spiritual forces for good and evil. In almost any genre, characters who exercise power self-indulgently and commit classic hubris fall to personal weaknesses or supernatural forces. See if the alternate moral systems in this book and elsewhere would suit your chronicle, or invent a system tailor made to your interest's and the game world's spiritual cosmology.

## Supernatural Advantage:

### Arete

Arete, a term synonymous with excellence, is a hero's core supernatural trait and the source of her exceptional abilities. Heroes begin with one dot of Arete. Further dots have a cost equal to the new rating x 8. Destiny has the following effects:

**Heroic Traits:** At Arete 6+, a hero can advance to a maximum number of Skill or Attribute dots equal to her Arete.

**Heroic Health:** Each Arete dot adds one Health point to the character's total. Track these separately, because a hero heals these Health points and standard Health points simultaneously so that (for example) a hero heals one point of standard bashing damage and one point of bashing damage to Heroic Health points every 15 minutes.

**Heroic Resistance:** Like other supernatural beings, heroes add Arete to other traits to resist supernatural powers.

**Masteries:** Most important of all, heroes possess Masteries: exceptional Skill enhancements that allow them to perform at the pinnacle of human ability and beyond. The table below lists the number of Masteries permitted per Skill at each dot.

**Willful Healing:** The player of a hero with at least one dot of Arete can spend one Willpower point to recover three points of bashing damage or one point of lethal damage.

Arete	Masteries by Skill					
1	1	1	1	0	0	0
2	2	2	1	0	0	0
3	3	2	2	1	0	0
4	4	3	2	1	1	0
5	4	4	3	2	1	1
6	5	4	3	2	2	1
7	5	5	4	3	2	2
8	5	5	4	3	3	2
8	5	5	5	4	3	3
10	5	5	5	4	4	3

### Masteries

Masteries represent heroic excellence. A swordsman-hero with a one or two Weaponry Masteries is a potential d'Artangan or Musashi; one with more is a living god of the blade. The lesser Masteries include the plausible limits of human performance; greater ones are the realm of superhumans, such as the ability to forge steel with bare hands.

Every hero begins with three Masteries at her first Arete dot: one for each Skill. She may earn further

Masteries across as many as six Skills, with the limit, per Skill and in total, determined by her total Arete.

A character must be competent at a Skill to acquire its Masteries. She must possess one dot more in the Skill than the number of Masteries she aspires to, so that a character seeking her fourth Crafts Mastery requires five dots in that Skill. Some Masteries also have additional requirements. These are noted in the Mastery's description.

A few Masteries are restricted to certain Skills, while others might apply to any of them. If a Mastery applies to multiple Skills, the hero's player must devote one Mastery "slot" for every Skill to which he wishes to apply that Mastery.

### Experience Cost?

Do Masteries have an experience point cost? If you're running a crossover game they probably should; 8 experience points per Mastery is reasonable, but give heroes their first three Masteries for free.

In a short term, all-hero game, dispense with Mastery costs. Give characters an additional Mastery whenever they acquire a new Mastery slot.

### Assess

*Ingrained habits? We all have them.*

At a glance, your character can tell if someone has any ability in her Mastery Skill, and with enough examination she can determine her precise talents.

**Requirements:** Wits 3

**Skill:** Any

**Benefit:** Your character can instantly read subtle cues to determine if someone has one or more, three or more, or five or more dots in her Mastery Skill. If the target is a hero she'll uncover one of his Masteries in the Skill every time his player rolls his dice pool.

### Beyond the Limit

*This is obsession.*

Your character may acquire more Masteries in a single Skill than is normally permitted for her Arete.

**Requirements:** None

**Skill:** Any



**Benefit:** By spending *two* Mastery slots from another Skill you may add one additional Mastery to any other Skill. Your character must possess the minimum required Skill dots for the new total number of Masteries and fulfill any other requirements noted by the Mastery, but the new Mastery does not count toward the limit imposed by her Arete.

You may take this a second time for the same Skill, but this costs *three* Mastery slots. You may not take this Mastery a third time for the same Skill.

## Blood, Sweat, and Tears

*I pour my life into my work.*

Your character can literally work himself to death by channeling vital energy into his efforts. This Mastery represents profound, body-straining exhaustion or even the ability to power his actions with some mystical life essence.

**Requirements:** None

**Skill:** Any

**Benefit:** You may spend (inflict upon your character) one point of lethal damage to add three dice to a Mastery Skill roll. You may only spend one point of lethal damage per roll, but you may do so in addition to spending Willpower.

Abilities that modify Willpower points do not modify the benefits of Blood, Sweat, and Tears.

## Counter

*It takes a thief . . .*

Your character's presence is enough to throw other users of your Mastery Skill off their game. He knows the perfect block, instinctively takes precautions against their actions, or unleashes withering insults that accurately expose their flaws.

**Requirements:** Manipulation 3

**Skill:** Any

**Benefit:** If your character can interact with or affect someone using her Mastery Skill, even through speech or visible gestures, he can make it difficult for them to succeed. Subtract a number of dice of your choice, but no less than two and no more than your character's Skill dots, from a single target's dice pool, whether she's trying to affect you or not. Your character may single out one target for a Counter at a time, but a Counter is not an action.

Note that Counter doesn't work on a character who *also* possesses Counter for the same Skill, but it's possible to take this Mastery multiple times, so that the character with the most Counters may exercise it against anyone with fewer.

**Drawback:** An exact Counter tries your character's attention. In any period of time where the Counter is

in effect, you suffer a penalty to dice rolls made for your character's actions equal to one less than the penalty you levied on your target.

## Eschew Conditions

*I only need my hands.*

Your character is so skilled that he can exercise his Skill without one normally necessary condition or piece of equipment. He can pick a lock without tools, disguise himself without makeup or a costume, or perform a similar feat thanks to his ability to improvise or even some innate magic.

**Requirements:** Mastery Skill 3

**Skill:** Your character cannot use this Mastery with any combat or vehicle-based Skill.

**Benefit:** You may take this multiple times for a single Skill. Each time you take it, it allows your character to use a Skill without one specific condition or piece of gear that he would normally need.

**Drawback:** The Storyteller may restrict this Mastery so that it doesn't allow feats that go beyond impressive into the realm of the absurd. This Mastery can't create something out of nothing, either, so it's not possible to forge a sword out of thin air by eschewing the required steel, for example.

## The Guild

*It's the unspoken code of true professionals.*

Your character can exude the confidence that only develops with true ability, and commands respect from others who've walked that same path. The Guild may be a literal organization with signs and customs, or an instinctive sense of belonging that arises even between the bitterest enemies.

**Requirements:** Presence 3, Mastery Skill 3

**Skill:** Any

**Effect:** You may use your character's Mastery Skill as a substitute for any Social Skill among anyone who has three or more dots in that Mastery Skill as well. If her Mastery Skill is a Social Skill you earn a +2 bonus when she uses the Skill for its intended purpose among the similarly-Skilled. Furthermore, nobody with three or more dots in your Master Skill can bring harm to her without either spending a point of Willpower or pausing for a turn.

## Powerful Success

*All or nothing.*

Your character never settles for half measures. If your character can successfully use her Mastery Skill she'll do so with distinction.

**Requirements:** Resolve 3

**Skill:** Any

**Effect:** If your character scores at least one success with her Mastery Skill, add a number of bonus successes equal to her Skill dots. Add these after you determine whether an action succeeds or fails.

## Rapidity

*Time is of the essence.*

Your character can use her Skill much faster than normal.

**Requirements:** Wits 4, Mastery Skill 5 to take this Mastery once; Wits 5, Mastery Skill 6 to take it twice.

**Skill:** Any

**Effect:** If you take this Mastery once, your character may use the Skill twice as quickly as normal. If the Skill's use requires an instant action, she may exercise the Skill twice per turn, making two attacks, two Athletics, rolls, and so on. If the Skill's use requires an Extended

If you take this Mastery twice, your character may use the Skill *three times* as quickly as normal, for three instant actions, or three rolls for everyone that you'd normally be allowed in the same period.

You may not take this Mastery a third time.

If you take this Mastery for more than one Skill, you may mix and match these Skills in a multiple action based on the lowest number of Masteries between all Skills. For example, if your character has Rapidity (Athletics) and Rapidity (Brawl) x2 you may perform one Athletics and one Brawl action per turn, but even though your character has two Masteries in Brawl she can't perform an additional Brawl action on top of that.

**Drawback:** If your character has an ability that already provides shortened or multiple actions it only applies to one roll; she can't perform double or triple the number of attacks allowed by certain Fighting Styles, for example.

## Self-Perfection

*Excellence is its own reward.*

Your character uses his incredible skill to refine his general abilities.

**Requirements:** Mastery Skill 5

**Skill:** Any

**Effect:** This Mastery's exact benefits depend on whether the Skill in question belongs to the Mental, Physical, or Social category. Pick one benefit from the list for each category.

**Mental Skills**

- **Extra Willpower:** Add one Willpower point to your character's total. You may select this again for each Mental Skill for which you choose Self-Perfection, but your character cannot add Willpower beyond double his natural score.

- **Extra Vice:** Your character acquires an additional Vice, doubling his opportunities to regain Willpower.

- **Indomitable:** Your character can automatically repulse an attempt at supernatural mind control at the cost of one Willpower point.

- **Mental Prodigy:** Your character acquires a permanent +1 bonus to all Mental Skills.

**Physical Skills**

- **Natural Armor:** Your character is tough. Add 1 point of armor against bashing and lethal (but not aggravated) damage. You may select this again (adding +1 armor) for each Physical Skill for which you choose Self-Perfection to a maximum of three armor points.

- **Extra Health:** Add +2 Health points. You may select this again for each Physical Skill for which you choose Self-Perfection.

- **Incredible Leap:** Double your character's jumping distance.

- **Physical Prodigy:** Your character acquires a permanent +1 bonus to all Physical Skills.

**Social Skills**

- **Connected:** Your character gains +3 Social Merit dots. These are open and undefined, and can be switched from one Merit to another in anywhere from a scene to a day, though they can't be combined with the character's other Merits. You may select this again for each Social Skill for which you choose Self-Perfection.

- **Inscrutable:** No supernatural power can read your character's thoughts.

- **Oathbreaker:** Your character may ignore the effects of a supernatural power that punishes you for certain behaviors, including certain spells and Changeling pledges. You may spend a point of Willpower to nullify the unwanted condition if it has a limited duration, or a Willpower dot (which you may purchase back with 8 experience points) if the power is permanent. If your character somehow benefitted from the power, he loses that benefit.

- **Social Prodigy:** Your character acquires a permanent +1 bonus to all Social Skills.

You may select Self-Perfection multiple times for the same Skill. Each selection adds an additional benefit from the appropriate category. You may not select the same Self-Perfection benefit more than once except where it's specifically noted.

## Skill Sense

*Awareness is the key to perfection.*

Thanks to subtle cues or a sixth sense, your character can sense whenever anyone attempts to use her Mastery Skill. She hears an archer strain at the draw or smells the bitter products of a poisoner at work.

**Requirements:** Wits 3

**Skill:** Any



**Effect:** You're entitled to an immediate, reflexive Wits + Mastery Skill roll to detect anyone attempting to use your character's Mastery Skill in the immediate area, as long as he has fewer dots in Skill than your hero. This takes place after he commits to acting but before he actually acts, allowing your character to preempt the action.

If you score one success, your character is merely aware that someone is trying to use the Skill. For example, she knows that *someone* is using Subterfuge at the party, but not who, or for what purpose.

If you score an exceptional success (five successes or more) your character knows additional details about the user's intentions, though not his identity or location. Using the previous example, a character with Subterfuge Skill Sense can detect that someone nearby is trying to lie, or set someone up for a mugging. In these situations you may add +2 to a single, subsequent roll to gather more information or counter the target's Skill use with an opposed roll; *or* add +1 to Defense or a Resistance Attribute against the target's Skill use. Pick the option that best suits that Skill's standard resolution system.

If you also possess the Assess Mastery, you may exercise it on anyone you sense, learning more about them even if you don't know exactly who they are.

## Skill Trick

Your character knows how to use her Mastery Skill with one specific advantage: a Skill Trick as detailed in Chapter One of this book ("Extraordinary Mortals," p. 52).

**Requirements:** None.

**Skill:** Any

**Effect:** Your character gains one Skill Trick.

**Drawback:** As listed for the individual Skill Trick.

## Extraordinary Heroes

Are Chapter One's "Extraordinary Mortals" actually heroes in the early stages of their development? In a high fantasy game you can decide that this is the case. The Arete trait is deliberately designed to allow three Skill Tricks to start, just as for an extraordinary mortal.

This doesn't have to be true, however, and your chronicle can easily support both types of characters. Be warned, however, that heroes are much more powerful than extraordinary mortals.

## Spell

*Secrets whisper at the very extremity of the Known.*

Your character knows a spell based on his Mastery Skill.

**Requirements:** Any Mental Attribute 3

**Skill:** Any, though many spells are based on Academics, Occult, or other Mental Skills.

**Effect:** See "Magic Systems" on pp. 181 for a discussion about what this represents. This Mastery assumes that you use the Merit-Based Spells option. Your character learns one spell with a Merit dot value equal to or less than his Skill dots. You *may* exercise additional Skill Masteries in concert with this spell, but not spells your character acquires in other ways.

**Drawback:** Drawbacks, if any, depend on the magic system your chronicle uses. The Storyteller may rule that using a slot on the Spell Mastery is a prerequisite to learning additional spells linked to the Skill.

If you're adapting another supernatural being's power to create a spell, your character does *not* get to use Arete in place of the listed supernatural power trait.

## Sublime Stunt

*Nothing is impossible.*

Your character can not only use her Mastery Skill in extraordinarily difficult conditions, but actually improves under pressure. A burst of inspiration permits a single, incredible feat.

**Requirements:** Mastery Skill 5

**Skill:** Any

**Effect:** Once per game session, the penalties to one roll using your character's Mastery Skill become a bonus.

## Woundgate (Setting)

Did you know that dhampirs farm suicide trees? It's a traditional profession. They tend small orchards: a few acres where the half-dead collect thick blood in clay vessels. Properly prepared, it will slake a vampire's thirst, though it's not as satisfying as the real thing. Dhampirs earn a modest fee in denarii from the suicide orchards. Their taxes help keep the Occult Republic alive, but earn them few friends; nobody likes a vampire's lackey.

Did you know that a hundred thousand people live in Quivira-Cibola? It clutches the Mississippi on both sides, but doesn't appear on any map you've seen. You could drive the road to the city ten thousand times and never see the quarter-mile Invictorium (shard of lost



Atlantis, say the Awakened) lurching over the river, or hear the shouts of goblin traders and their wares: hedge-fruit, memory flies, and Afghan hashish. On the other side, drug laws are lax; beyond the Wound, governments have too much else on their plates to worry about simple vice.

Did you know that dragons stalk the wilds of Lake Huron, brought down by Bloodthorn portals? That you can hold the world's blood in the palm of your hand? These are all elements of Woundgate: a modern fantasy setting for the Storytelling System.

Woundgate is designed so that you can integrate it into an existing chronicle and customize it beyond its modern fantasy base. Here, the World of Darkness isn't just a system of secret societies in our world. It includes hidden lands and cultures that may be invisible to ordinary eyes, but are populous, vivid,

and brazenly open, once you step behind a shield of mysteries. The mundane world is the Corpse of the true Creation. Other realms are more alive; invisible to ordinary people, but intangible. The world's true geography zones of nightmares and of wilderness are ruled by spirits and the will to carry a blade, but you can't see or touch any of it without walking past a Woundgate: a door to the other world. If you walk to where Quivira-Cibola should be without stepping through one, you'll skip the whole city in a single step, never knowing it was there.

One of the core concepts behind Woundgate is *zoning*: a term used in computer gaming to split regions into different themes and power levels. Woundgate is designed to accept any number of zones, from brutal sword and sorcery fiefdoms to bizarre cities powered by steam and incantations.





## Lexicon

The following terms are commonly used throughout the Woundgate setting.

**Accord:** The ancient pact that established Creation's laws before the *Wounding* violated them, and the age where that pact held: the time of Atlantis and other legends.

**Bloodthorn:** A red plant that grows anywhere with a root leading to the *Scarwall*. A large Bloodthorn creates a portal to the Faerie Hedge.

**Corpse, The:** The mundane world. Inhabitants are called Corpselanders.

**Creation:** The whole of existence, including the *Shatter*, *Corpse*, and *Wound*.

**Elding, The:** The age before the *Accord*, when the *Creation* was lawless.

**Incarnadine:** Inhabitants of the *Wound* that come forth to keep the existence of the *Shatter* a secret from most of the *Corpse* and protect the *Wound* from intrusion.

**Parallel:** A *realm* with a counterpart in the *Corpse*, or a part of the *Corpse* that mirrors a realm.

**Realm:** A location in the *Shatter*.

**Scarwall:** The wall of tortured, living flesh that prevents easy entry into the *Wound*.

**Shatter:** The lost supernatural world, divided into multiple *realms*. Its inhabitants are called Shatterlanders.


**Suicide Tree:** A plant in the *Shatter* that originally came from the Underworld. It circulates blood, not sap. If properly prepared, the blood satisfies a vampire's hunger.

**Technourgy:** Minor magical items that replicate the effects of ordinary technology.

**Worldblood:** The raw power of the universe that flows through the *Wound*: a rare commodity.

**Wound, The:** The great division of *Creation*; a metaphysical injury that separates the *Corpse* and *Shatter*. The current age is the *Wounded Age*.

**Woundgate:** A portal across the *Wound* that connects the *Corpse* and *Shatter*, or two *realms* in the *Shatter*.



## The World, the Wound, and the Shatter

The ordinary World — what cynics call the *Corpse* — is just a small part of *Creation*. Most people can't see the secret realms but it wasn't always this way. Long ago, the universe was whole. Magic was a shout, not a whisper.

It all began with the *Elding*, the *Coming of the Light*. *Creation* erupted from primordial chaos — but didn't leave that chaos completely behind. The *Elding* was an age of beast-people and gods in the Earth; monsters and demon-songs that wrought the world into shape like an unruly bar of white-hot iron.

Geography was fluid; new species arose when any two creatures mated, or even touched a mutating power. There was no safety or certainty except beyond what old heroes could steal from the young world, and wrestle into fixed form with a name. Some entities preferred to remain malleable and fought the first humans, beasts, and lesser spirits.

The *Elding* ended when all sides reached the *Accord*: the treaty that encoded the order of things into *Creation*'s heart. Written on the *Omphalos* (something that now lies deep in primordial dreams), the treaty ruled that *Above*, raw, divine potential would rest with the gods and their homes — what people call the *Heavens*, the *Realms Supernal*, or the *Empyrean*. *Below*, there would be *Death*, the *Underworld*, and the law that it claims all, so that all things would cycle between fixed and dynamic forms, never starving on one side or the other. In *Midrealm*, humans, beasts, and spirits would enjoy natural law, and the power to manipulate it to their own ends. So began the *Age of the Accord*, of might and vibrant life, that saw the rise of *Atlantis* (if that was its name), the spirit choirs, and the walls that separated all life from the powers that hate it.

Mages, werewolves, changelings — everyone has myths about how the *Accord* failed. They only know that *Midrealm*'s inhabitants fought among themselves. Perhaps one side created a terrible weapon, or the combined spite of all combatants became a destructive force of its own. Whatever it was, it made the *Wound*: a near-fatal laceration across *Creation*'s body.

Half of *Creation* turned into the *Corpse*: a place where the supernatural is a postmortem vestige, like the stubble that grows on a dead man's face. It's the world we know, with familiar countries, people, biology, and physics. The other half fell back to the *Elding*'s old chaos and became the *Shatter*: thousands of loosely-connected realms with inconstant rules. To trace *Creation* today is to explore the borders of a cancerous, scarred veil of tissue, cast over the great *Wound* between the *Corpse* and *Shatter*.

## Of Woundgates

Woundgates link the Corpse and Shatter, and the Shatter's varied realms. Stepping through a Woundgate takes you across in an instant; you slide along one of Creation's uncut tendons, over the Wound, and to your destination.

In the Shatter, a Woundgate is plainly visible and easily traversed. No special talents are necessary. In the Corpse they're disguised as doors, pillars, edges of haunted woods, even a pair of old wooden posts. Anything with a rough threshold might be a Woundgate to the Shatter. If the average person steps through, nothing happens — most of the time. Every Woundgate will allow anyone to pass during a special stretch of time — one that changes from one to the next. One admits ordinary visitors every night at 12:01 AM, but another could wait for certain planetary conjunctions.

Besides that, every Woundgate will admit anyone who knows its special ritual or token: a certain chant, a hat that's a specific color, or a phrase in angelic script. Like the time, the token or rite changes from Woundgate to Woundgate.

Supernatural beings or those who can sense any supernatural phenomenon via the Unseen Sense Merit have an easier time. They can sense Woundgates, and travel through them just by wishing to do so. Every such visitor has her own way of detecting the Woundgate, such as a telltale glow or whispering babble, but they're all equally able to sense it, though they might not understand what they're experiencing.

## Blood Between

At the dawn of the Wounded Age, supernatural sensitives didn't need to travel by Woundgate. They could sail the Wound itself, riding the currents of Worldblood — the raw medium of existence — from one realm to another, but more often, they'd walk to the ragged edge, to drink from the Wound. Worldblood is power. Witches used it in their veins to split mountains. Beasts mutated into hundred-limbed monsters. Worldblood drinkers even crossed back to the Corpse to live as gods and titans.

After an eon, nightmare beings walked out of the Wound. Western Shatterlanders call them *Incarnadines*: the Blood Born. They captured blood thieves and sculpted them into an infinite barrier of flesh: the Scarwall. It still exists; anyone who can see a Woundgate from the Corpse can walk to it in a few hours or days by concentrating on the destination. They'll see the wall's component faces, limbs, and bones undulate in endless torture: an object lesson to anyone tempted to violate the Incarnadine Law.

## Incarnadines

Incarnadines can look like anything, but usually appear as 10 foot tall, rough humanoid figures surrounded by a roiling layer of animated Worldblood. It forms tentacles, mouths and eyes, and other appendages out of the fluid. Gazing deeply reveals reflections, starry vistas, twisted images of the viewer, and other enigmatic images.

Shatter occultists say that they're Creation's "immune response," but a few myths assert that they never agreed to the Accord, and enforce their Law to actually worsen the Wound until everything perishes. There are malevolent beings in the Wound — Abyssal entities and Arcadian monsters, for instance — but Creation's ultimate power dwells there too, and it isn't good or evil.

Incarnadines travel in Twilight through the Corpse unless they feel the need to materialize and enforce their Law. Like other Twilight beings, they manifest bodily in the Shatter. Some have finite abilities and can be beaten in direct conflict, but on important occasions nothing can keep one from its duties. Use the rules for spirits in various books (**Mage**, **Werewolf**, and **World of Darkness: Book of Spirits**) with a bias toward higher power. In a Woundgate chronicle, they're the Storyteller's tool of last resort. Use them as a plot hook when you please, but they're a plot hammer when you need it, too.

## Keeping Secrets

Shatterlanders learned the Law by observing Incarnadine punishments. Sometimes the Wound-Born only warn, mutilate, or madden anyone about to break it, but when serious violations break out they inevitably drag offenders to the Scarwall, to join its infinite flesh. Two rules are well known: *don't enter the Wound*; and *don't let the Shatter's existence become common knowledge in the Corpse*. Scholars believe these rules exist to help the Wound heal by discouraging intruders and limiting the number of people who might develop the ability or will to invade.

Until recently, many Shatterlanders took children to the Scarwall to emphasize the importance of keeping the Law, but to modern sensibilities this verges on abuse. The experience is a traumatic one. Some elders still scream in their sleep, dreaming of their own visits.



## Parallel and Deviant Geographies

The Corpse and the Shatter share many locations. These are called *parallels*. A derelict building in the Corpse's Detroit might be a noisy, packed apartment complex in the Shatter, with additions and decorations that can't be seen from the other side. In the Corpse, millions of people live around the Great Lakes, but in the Shatter it's a frontier, the Wild Lakes, populated by adventurers determined to cut independent lives out of the land. Sometimes (but not always, as the Wild Lakes shows), new construction in the Corpse gives birth to a parallel feature in the Shatter, but never vice versa. Shatterlanders employ hedge geomancers to predict these events.

The Shatter also features locations that don't exist anywhere in the Corpse: regions where the world folds and stretches. Quivira-Cibola is one of these places, lying as it does along land and water that doesn't exist in the Corpse.

Perhaps the most important difference between the Shatter and Corpse is that the Shatter is not a single, unified realm. You can't take a plane from Quivira-Cibola to the Shatter city of Yuzhou, China. You have to travel through the Corpse or find a series of Woundgates to take you there. Some Shatter realms are the size of a house, but most are dozens to thousands of miles across. A few of them loop back on each other, or appear to be infinite, but grow less hospitable as you leave established territory.

### Subtle Places

The occult realms and states of being known to supernatural beings exist in both worlds, but manifest differently in each. Aside from the practical consequences, these variations have also affected what occultists believe about everything from the Astral Realms to the Underworld.

**Twilight:** The state of being known as Twilight *does not exist* in the Shatter. Ghosts and spirits are visible wherever they appear, and powers that manipulate Twilight don't function. Most spirits in the Shatter are content to slumber because its magical energies keep them well-fed, though strong emotions nearby may rouse them. Ghosts aren't welcome, and are usually driven to the Underworld by exorcists and Sin-Eaters.

**Astral Realms:** The Astral Reams are the same in both worlds. In fact, it's one of the few subtle realms that the Corpse and Shatter share. For this reason, psychics and dream-shaping sorcerers are valued messengers between worlds. In a Woundgate chronicle, the Ocean Oroboros (see **Mage's Astral Realms**) is red, and thought

to be a manifestation of the Wound.

**The Shadow:** The so-called Shattershadow is not a pervasive region but a series of geographically distinct sub-realms that spirits call their own. Any spirit can enter the material Shatter without effort, but material inhabitants can't enter the Shattershadow without special powers. They can't pass or step past, as if the location was a knot in space. The Shattershadow and Corpse's Shadow do not interact. Furthermore, there are no twisted spirits — what werewolves call *magath* — in the Shatter, though there are monstrous avatars of everything conceivable.

**The Hedge:** Bloodthorn is a hated plant; it grows without soil or water in hundreds of different shapes, set apart from other plants by its deep red color. The only way to kill it is to cut the root that extends all the way back to the Scarwall. When it grows about as large as a cottage, you can find a path to the Hedge within. It's thought that the Hedge is actually *part* of the Scarwall, some malignant growth or tunnel within it, as the True Fae are believed to live within the Wound.

**The Underworld:** The Corpse and Shatter share the same Underworld but in the Shatter, the land of the dead is a material place. Every large realm has an Avernian Gate to the Underworld (see **Geist: The Sin-Eaters**) that in theory, anyone could approach, but Kerberoi, Sin-Eaters, and a number of customs prevent this from becoming a common practice. For centuries, many Shatter societies have built labyrinthine tomb complexes in front of the mounts of Avernian Gates; foolhardy tomb robbers occasionally violate them, and criminals have been known to hide in the upper levels.

**The Uttermost Realms:** The most remote places — the Realms Supernal, Arcadia, Abyss, and more — are believed to lie within the Wound. The True Fae are believed to dwell on an island at the heart of the sea of Worldblood, and the Realms Supernal are said to be completely submerged. The Abyss clings to its semantic roots as the Babylonian *Apsu*, the Primordial Sea, and is believed to *be* the Wound. Its denizens are infectious agents preying upon an injured Creation.

## Realms of the Shatter

On one level, the Shatter is disarmingly mundane. It has towns, cities, and governments — even authorities that Corpselanders know about. People pay taxes, look for work, and muddle through their lives. But beneath that placid description is a strange collection of civilizations that have adapted to the magic around them and the fear that should they cultivate too many ties to the Corpse, the Incarnadines will annihilate them.

The Shatter is *huge* — at least the size of the Corpse — and heavily populated. While there's no reliable

census, there are at least several million people who've lived all their lives there. The majority has dwelled there for generations, but there's a sizable immigrant community from the Corpse: mostly psychic sensitives, petty occultists, and their descendants, though a number of people always wander through Woundgates by mistake.

Every major Corpse national government knows about the Shatter, and many lay claim to specific realms, but they never, ever share this information with the population at large. The reasons range from fear of a panic to Incarnadine intervention. The Blood Born tolerate this state of affairs, though they've occasionally curtailed Corpse-lander influence according to their own mysterious criteria.

Many realms have governments that only exist in the Shatter, or don't have a formal polity at all. Woundgates and the Shatter's effects on technology make it difficult to exert authority over long distances. Frontier towns, idyllic city-states, and slave-holds ruled by supernatural warlords exist through the Shatter. Historical, magical, and geographical factors shape the realms, but always leave enough variety to support any chronicle the Storyteller sees fit to develop.

## The Shatter's Shape

Every realm in the Shatter obeys the following laws:

**The Corpse Influences Them — Sometimes:** If somebody builds something in the Corpse, it will sometimes (though not always) appear in the Shatter. It's a hazy outline of dust at first, but eventually solidifies up to a month later. Once the Shatter exerts its influence on the new object (Shatterlander moves into the building, for instance) it can't be changed by events in the Corpse. There are some parallel realms (like Wild Lakes) where this doesn't happen, and it never happens when a Shatter realm doesn't have a Corpse parallel.

**Open, Obvious Woundgates Connect Them:** Woundgates in the Corpse are hidden, but the ones between Shatter realms can be identified by a reddish light, like the glow from a hidden sunrise. No supernatural force can close them. Travelers never need a special ritual or object or power to pass through. As a result, some realms set up checkpoints to regulate traffic. Some Woundgates are rare, hard to find, and hard to reach, however, leading to realms that are lightly populated and unknown to most.

**Strangeness Abounds, and is Bounded:** Realms feature gigantic trees, prehistoric animals, Cyclopean ruins — anything the Storyteller feels will fit her Chronicle. They're side effects of local natural laws, or the result of historical or prehistoric events. The Fae

Bloodthorn is a plague, and wargaz mammoth-riders patrol the Russian steppes. When obvious monsters (not including human variants like wargaz) and magical objects cross a Woundgate into the Corpse, they shift into Twilight — a troublesome effect, since in that state, most Shatterlanders can't touch them.

**The Supernatural is Well-Known, but Not Always Common:** Shatterlanders have no illusions about their home. The educated know about the Corpse and the range of supernatural beings, even if they haven't seen them all. In more isolated realms, people may not know of the Corpse or foreign monsters, but even they believe in curses, sorcery, and the Incarnadines.


**Technology is Unreliable; Technourgy is Slightly More Reliable:** Guns, electronics, and combustion engines work in many realms, but there are some places where any artifact of the Industrial Revolution refuses to function — and a few places where even steel is impossible. These are places where people rely on sweat, working animals, and the sword. Technourgy (see sidebar) works across a wider area, but even it fails in some places. According to shamans and werewolves, this happens because some realms don't have the correct spirits to metaphysically support these inventions.



## Technourgy

In the Shatter, *technourgies* are petty magic items that are functionally equivalent to common technologies. For instance, the memory fly is an insect preserved in amber whose brain remembers anything it “hears” via vibrations in the amber. When prompted, it vibrates again to replay it, acting much like a tape recorder or MP3 player. Technourgy doesn't function in the Corpse, but it works across more of the Shatter than standard technology.

Shatterlanders with a special Unseen Sense (Technourgy) and the Crafts skill can build and repair *technourgies* with as much difficulty as they would the equivalent item. Strangely, *technourgy* can't build items more advanced than what you'd find in the Corpse, and as Corpse technology improves, *technourgy* follows suit. Mages speculate that what really makes *technourgy* possible is the existence of certain thought-forms that arise when Corpse-landers develop new technologies. If it's true, it's a rare instance where the Corpse has a creative effect on the Shatter.







## The Occult Republic of America

For generations, the US government has hidden a secret population: thousands of citizens who live in Shatter parallels of American regions and their adjacent realms. They pay taxes and receive government services under the auspices of the Department of the Interior's Office of Insular Affairs.

It's unofficially administered as a US territory and doesn't have an official name — and can't, because it's too secret to appear on balance sheets, minutes, e-mail, or policy statements. In the Shatter they call it the Occult Republic of America (ORA): a name born from early revolutionaries who claimed realms as their own, and set up a government before the United States itself had formed. That's why it has its own currency (the denarius, pegged to the dollar), a peculiar title for its leader (Viceroy — the founders anticipated a Hamiltonian, monarch-like President) as well as distinct military, legal, and political institutions.

The ORA is a frontier government whose laws focus on the basics: killing, stealing, and other obvious forms of victimization. The Constitution applies to the ORA, but its Supreme Court sometimes interprets things a bit differently than the Corpse's America — and given that it's illegal to appeal an ORA case to the US Supreme Court for national security reasons, that's not going to change any time soon. Policing is handled through the Republic's autonomous arm of the US Postal Service. In the ORA, long-distance deliveries require tough, trained individuals.

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### Realms and Zoning

Remember the zoning concept we mentioned at the beginning of this section? Realms are designed to enable that. They come in enough variety to suit virtually any fantasy chronicle. Undergotham, Quivira-Cibola, and the Wild Lakes are all examples of this principle in action. If you want medieval fantasy, create a realm like the Wild Lakes, where Woundgates are rare and modern technology doesn't work. For contemporary urban fantasy, use a series of small realms as Undergotham does, so that your characters explore weird places without completely avoiding the real world. Quivira-Cibola is designed to be a weird fantasy locale: a densely packed city with plenty of room for politicking.

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For brave individuals, the best opportunities lie with the ORA's all-volunteer Exploratory Militia. It's chronically understaffed and erratically paid, but the ORA still issues letters of marque and grants taxation powers to groups assigned to govern new territories, giving EM units free reign to profit from mayhem at the Republic's fringes.

## Undergotham

Undergotham is one of the Republic's largest territories but it's also one of the most lightly governed, because it consists of dozens of small realms across New York City. Shatterlanders who want to travel a significant distance have to cut across the Corpse by Woundgate, and ORA officials tread lightly to avoid mundane attention.

Central Park is the heart of Undergotham life. It's the largest realm in the region — twice the size of its Corpse parallel — and filled with buildings, shops, and wildlife that its counterpart lacks, including the largest single suicide tree orchard in the ORA. Dhampir gentleman farmers make a steady profit selling to the Corpse-city's vampire elite, who rarely deign to cross a Woundgate themselves, but make their influence known by supporting these “protégés.”

The mayor isn't fond of his city being run from some vampire “Prince's” Manhattan drawing room. He's encouraged sorcery and technourgy businesses to set up shop. These industries are irrelevant in the Corpse, so he hopes to use them to center power back in the Shatter. Unfortunately, even though technology performs spottily in Undergotham, that doesn't matter to most citizens, who are rarely more than five minutes away from the Corpse. Despite this, more sorcerers visit Undergotham every day, attracted by a cosmopolitan atmosphere that gives them access to magical lore from around the world — and compared to Corpse New York, Undergotham rents are a steal.

## Quivira-Cibola

The Fallen Tower. The Big Chaos. The Secret Gold. These are all slang names for Quivira-Cibola, the biggest secret city in the ORA. Q-C existed long before the Occult Republic. It's technically a twin city, the last two of seven great cities founded around Atlantean ruins by a mix of indigenous peoples: Spanish clergy who wandered in by Woundgate in the 12th century; and lost vessels from Zheng He's 15th century fleet.

Quivira-Cibola isn't the ORA capital (that honor belongs to Washington, D.C. — or rather, parallels of several buildings and monuments) but it's where the Republic's elite live. These Atlanteans occupy a dozen floors of the giant Invictorium ruin, enjoying a spec-

tacular view of the city and the Mississippi River, all the way to the Louisiana border. Below them, the city spreads out like a spider web with a twisted, blue knife of water through its heart. Mid to late 20th century and later technologies operate with reduced performance, so runes, amulets, and bloodstains from sacrifices mark the elite's cars and laptops. Steam power is reliable, however, and is used across the city.

Trade is the Big Chaos' chief business, with sorcery a close second. Several Woundgates provide shortcuts across the Shatter and Corpse, drawing exotic goods from around the world. The highest spires of the Invictorium house the Azure College: the ORA's only fully-fledged magical academy. The city levies taxes on imports, commercial spellcasting, and gambling winnings only, but it's enough to keep the postal cops and fire department paid — and as long as the Big Chaos isn't on fire or embroiled in a civil war, the seven bishops of Quivira and seven imams of Cibola (they're ceremonial titles only) figure everything's running smoothly.

Food and waste are the city's biggest problems. It's a chore to haul either of them by Woundgate and there's not much land left to dump or grow anything. The wargaz, who've been the unofficial caste of farmers and garbage men for centuries, are tired of their lowly status, know the extent of the crisis, and have begun using it as leverage to produce some long-overdue social change.

## The Wild Lakes

Parallel to the Great Lakes, the Wild Lakes are the most weakly governed territory in the ORA. For the most part, government authority exists on paper; perhaps half the inhabitants or more don't even know the Republic exists.

Nothing more sophisticated than medieval technology works. Woundgates are few and far between, and the huge cities that make the Corpse's version glow from space are completely absent. That doesn't mean there were never cities, however. Explorers frequently come across ruins. They've also found remnants of huge, recently-vacated encampments. Wargaz are numerous; they attack the land's hardships systematically, displaying their usual brilliance at survival. Nevertheless, they can't account for all the evidence. Unknown people are on the move here, and sometimes, signs of their passing appear after entire settlements vanish.

Settlers who come here know they're due for a hard life, but one filled with freedoms they won't enjoy anywhere else in the Republic. The ORA takes a hands-off policy to law enforcement; there are no postal cops or prisons. The biggest official town is Wendake, and it's not much more than a castle town and trading post.



If you want an excuse to kill a man or beast, the Lakes have plenty to choose from. Self-styled barons, lake pirates, and rogue Exploratory Militia units raid and kill their way across the land. Bloodthorn infests the realm and with it, monsters who've climbed down the Hedge to prey on human beings. Spirits are particularly active. Most of them have never met a werewolf or shaman, and have no concept of what it's like to bargain with mortals. It's a place for dragon-slaying and empire building, tomb robbing, and anachronistic battles.

## Denizens of the Shatter

Most Shatterlanders are typical humans. Ethnicity doesn't follow geography to the same extent as it does in the Corpse. Some Shatter-born humans have unusual features like yellow eyes and birthmarks shaped like Atlantean runes, but in the modern age it's easy to pass these off as cosmetic affectations. Sorcery and unusual Woundgate connections allowed people to migrate more rapidly.

Immigrants from the Corpse are divided between those who wandered through a Woundgate on the rare moments it's open to all, and people who deliberately seek the Shatter. Life in the Shatter sharpens psychic senses, so that anyone who lives there for anywhere from several weeks to a year or so eventually develops an Unseen Sense.

Secret peoples like Atlanteans, dhampirs, and wargaz have lived in the Shatter for centuries. Most nations accord them the same rights as other humans, though unofficial discrimination is common.

### Unseen Senses

All Shatter-born possess the Unseen Sense Merit. The exact Unseen Sense strongly influences a Shatterlander's profession. The available senses extend beyond typical World of Darkness categories. For example, Unseen Sense (Technourgy) reveals the occult patterns that underlie technourgies, and is a prerequisite for creating them. Geomantic senses give some Shatterlanders the ability to sense when something in the Corpse will appear in a parallel, virtually guaranteeing a career in geomantic consulting.

Any form of Unseen Sense Merit allows people to sense and cross Woundgates from the Corpse at will, as noted in "Of Woundgates," p. 196.

## Atlanteans

Atlanteans live in almost every realm and always have. Most believe they're "true humans," left from the Age of the Accord. Corpselanders are little more than animals by comparison, weak and spiritually blind. In the cities, old Atlantean families enjoy social privileges thanks to their strong wills, entrenched traditions, and the fact that universal Unseen Senses give them the ability to enter any magical profession. Atlanteans in remote, wild realms live in self-reliant enclaves, relying on sorcery and force of arms to claim the land. Many are mages, but despite their own propaganda they're no more likely to Awaken than anyone else. More of them are petty psychics and sorcerers: professions where they do seem to enjoy a genuine edge.

Not all Atlanteans come from the Shatter. Some Corpselanders unlock their heritage shortly after crossing the Wound. Urban, Shatter-born Atlanteans traditionally adopt them into a family and discourage discussion of the "cousin's" past life, to maintain the illusion of an unbroken lineage that goes all the way back to the First City. In truth, they know little more about Atlantis than anyone else.

## Dhampirs

Dhampirs are relative latecomers. Most came across with vampires anywhere from 500 to 2,000 years ago, depending on the realm. They're distrusted in the Shatter, subject to slander and unkind superstitions thanks to the fact that their Kindred forefathers originated in the Corpse. Thanks to this and their own dangerous tempers, dhampirs live in their own settlements: towns and ghettos rarely visited by anyone else. In the ORA and most of Europe, the half-dead often live near burial grounds and Avernian Gates. Rich dhampir families are usually sworn to one or more Kindred, but most of the half-dead set their own agendas, even if it means they must do without wealth and influence.

Shatterlanders often mistake the large number of dhampir necromancers for fully-fledged Sin-Eaters. Dhampirs can become Sin-Eaters, but they can't work their way up to the post; the Geist chooses, not the dhampir. In the heart of the ORA, dhampirs are usually gravediggers, morticians, and common laborers. A large number farm suicide trees, as their chief product is primarily of interest to the Kindred. There are always rumors of old dhampir kingdoms hidden deep in the Shatter's known reaches: places with names like E'nesh, Irem of the Pillars, and Far Chorazin, where cruel nobles guard the most ancient blood gods.

## Wargaz

Father Wolf's fleshly children primarily live in wild places, recognizing no authority higher than their kin. Some are born in the Corpse and are more sympathetic

to civilization. They're more likely to gravitate to cities and their creature comforts, where they encounter the social problems endemic to their kind.

Before the modern era, wargaz were infamous pirates and raiders, though over the centuries people have exaggerated both the frequency and brutality of the raids. Ancient wargaz never took prisoners, but they rarely killed when it was unnecessary, and employed enough strategy to keep actual fighting to a minimum. Still, Shatterlanders have long memories, and the old, bloody legends still influence the way others treat them. Even though discrimination is illegal in the ORA, the elites still deny them authority.

When wargaz join a community, they're often given important, low-status jobs: enough to provide full employment without giving them significant influence. This isn't a universal rule; many have risen to high positions based on their intelligence, adaptability, and commitment to their comrades.

## Supernatural Beings

The Woundgate setting is designed to incorporate every core supernatural setting published so far. We don't have room to perform detailed adaptations, however, so it's up to you to fill in the gaps. One universal change is that every supernatural society knows about the Shatter. Some, like the Kindred, treat it with disdain, but for others it reshapes the very core of their beliefs.

### Magic and Worldblood

Except for Awakened sorcery, magic in a Woundgate chronicle uses the Merit-based option presented earlier in this section. Spells inflict bashing damage, draining energy and inflicting bruises, and minor cuts. The Shatter provides the means to *organize* magical forces, but not to fuel them; major spells require the caster's life force. In the Corpse, spells are difficult to cast. They inflict two extra points of bashing damage and automatically fail in the presence of Corpselander witnesses.

Worldblood provides an alternative fuel. A thimbleful substitutes for one point of bashing damage, and whenever Worldblood is used with any spell, it works in the Corpse regardless of the number of witnesses. It's extremely rare; a few sorcerers have stocks left over from the dawn of the Wounded Age. New supplies are nearly unheard of, and require contact with someone who's actually invaded the Wound. Incarnadines can provide it, but only do so if it would serve their Law.

## Vampires

*You call this the real world? We came from a place with steel towers, nuclear power, space exploration, and a culture born of what humans and Kindred achieved with their own blood and sweat. Our world is the true one; yours is the parasite, focused on mythic calamities and bizarre ruins.*

Shatterlanders hate vampires. They aren't of the Shatter and didn't exist during the Accord. They're symptoms of the Wounded Age, maggots in the Corpse. Many suspect them to be a line of Worldblood thieves, each sharing a trickle of power from some blasphemous communion at the beginning of time.

Kindred can father or give birth to dhampirs in the Shatter, though it isn't a reliable thing; one or two attempts in a thousand succeed. They *cannot* perform the Embrace there; recipients die instead. They can bring corruption from their own flesh, but can't pass it on. Even when you ignore the bloodthirst, the facts are damning, and drive Shatterlanders to deeply hate them even more.

Vampires take a dismissive stance toward the Shatter, with most believing it to be more trouble than it's worth. This posture is especially prevalent in the

### Suicide Trees

Blown up by the Underworld, the seeds of suicide trees have taken root in the Shatter since before memory, but until vampires arrived, the trees were considered to be ugly weeds with a talent for killing the plants around them, thanks to their inherent necromantic energies. When the first vampires visited the Shatter, they were drawn to the trees — a few even fell to blood frenzy at the smell. But saw suicide blood as unsatisfying.

The first generations of dhampirs discovered how to refine suicide blood into *dreyrvin*, a wine that tastes disgusting to most people but if consumed within a lunar month, nourishes a vampire as if was human blood (one bottle provides the equivalent of 1 point of Vitae). Dreyrvin turns into a clotted, useless disgusting mass in the Corpse, where vampires must rely on the hunt to sustain them.

In the chronicle, suicide trees provide a bit of high weirdness, and also give vampires a reason to be better-tolerated in the Shatter. It's a blatant violation of **Vampire: The Requiem's** core themes, though, so if it offends you, get rid of it.



Carthians, Invictus, and Lancea Sanctum (who have never found Theban Sorcery rituals in the Shatter). The Circle of the Crone is deeply invested in the Shatter's mythology. Creation is the Wounded Goddess, and they are the children of her blood. The Ordo Dracul explores in small parties and is tight-lipped about discoveries.

The Shatter's vampires emigrated in several waves several thousand to a few hundred years ago, most notably after the sack of Rome and the discovery of the New World. The Mekhet Clan's vampires are traditionally responsible for Shatter-lore, but the Daeva are actually the most common visitors. Occult exploration takes planning, but decadent curiosity is a quick whim.

## Werewolves

*The world is our Mother and she's bleeding to death. She's a widow shuddering, cold in the limbs. Our Father's gone; it is up to us to help her heal, and breathe life into her pale extremities. Do you see the Shadow? There is life — and hope.*

The Uratha say Father Wolf made the Accord. They slew him when he grew weak, but they were unworthy to replace him. He screamed his curse, his warning, and Creation — the Mother, his

mate — recoiled. One legend says that his old enemies took advantage of the power gap. Those great, lawless beasts of whom the Idigam are but fragments gnawed the Wound into the world. The other myth says that the Mother did it. She killed herself in grief, and has spent eons dying.

The Forsaken must save her. They *must*. It's possible; there's a Shadow in the Corpse: a sign that the spirits still live there, and might be reconciled with the fleshly world after the Uratha cleanse their numbers magath and other abominations.

The Shatter's spirits are savage, but live in relative harmony with matter. The Forsaken are warrior-healers on a quest to heal Creation and redeem themselves. They made a terrible mistake in the time before time, and see the consequences in the wargaz who turned their backs on the Father's spirit, and the Pure who despise them, prosecuting a war across worlds to kill them all. They say that Pure have entire nations in wild, technology-averse realms, where mortals are slaves and meat; that they're even planning a genocidal campaign against the human population.

Werewolves cross over to Shatter regularly. Many live there and a few have never seen the Corpse, though most of them visit out of moral duty. All serve a vital role in dealing with the Shatter's manifested spirits, especially since only they can enter their Shattershadow sanctuaries.

Shatterlanders don't *trust* the Forsaken, but respect them.

Lunacy has no effect in the Shatter. People can see werewolves for what they are.



## Spirits and Monsters

Spirits can be seen and touched in the Shatter. They're more than capable of filling the role of classic fantasy monsters. There's a fuzzy line between spirits and a realm's strange animals, so you can use the streamlined rules for spirits to represent any unusual creature. Creatures that aren't spirits don't have Influences or Bans but otherwise, it's a handy set of rules you can use to build anything you like.

## Mages

*Truth is sunken beneath the world's blood. We drag it from the depths. Don't let the Shatter distract you from a singular aim: to raise the Supernal from the Wound and reconcile all worlds.*

In the Age of the Accord, mages bent its laws, piercing the barriers between Midrealm and the world Above. They visited the Supernal Realms to partake of powers due only to the gods. The ancient Atlanteans grew addicted to power. Impatient with the trickle they won from the gods, they built the Celestial Spear to pierce the heavens. They cut open the limits of Midrealm, but instead of the expected rain of Mana, celestial power, the Supernal Realms fell through the gap. It pulled the cut down with it like a knife down a curtain of skin. It made the Wound and with Atlantis, the Realms Above sank beneath its Abyssal blood.

Magic doesn't reach up, but down, into the Wound and the submerged Truth. To mages, the Wound is infectious and corrupt. Incarnadines are not to be trusted, though opinions differ as to whether they're agents of the Abyss, the sunken Exarchs, or true advocates of Creation, even agents of the Oracles and their submerged Watchtowers. Once again, mages bend the rules, traveling beyond the Scarwall to Awaken and perhaps once more, at the pinnacle of power. What will the consequences be this time?

Mages are well-known denizens of the Shatter. Dhampirs, wargaz, and Atlanteans can all Awaken, and often train lesser sorcerers in small colleges of magic. Quivira-Cibola is the largest known school of magic, and the only one that caters primarily to Awakened students, but it is infamous for favoring Atlanteans over other apprentices.

Paradoxes occur in the Shatter but they are weaker. Nothing within it counts as a witness and players always

roll one die less to determine its effects. The Sleeping Curse doesn't hide magic, but it does make comprehension of the High Speech impossible, as usual.

## Prometheans

*We partake of the secret vitality of the world — but the world is too crippled to accept it.*

Shatterlanders see a lot of strange things — zombies, ghosts, animated machines — but even they don't know about the Created. Prometheans are rare and keep to themselves, even in the Shatter. Their disfigurements appear and vanish normally, so they can walk through a community without attracting notice for a time, though if they tarry the locals will quickly find a reason to urge her onward, anywhere else. Disquiet operates normally.

That's why Prometheans favor wilderness realms, far from the eyes of humans, but even these aren't places to rest for long. Spirits react to Disquiet as well, so when one of the Created lairs in one place for too long, she'll find herself battling monsters.

These facts make the Shatter particularly dangerous for Prometheans but no other place is as densely packed with secret lore, enigmas, and alchemy: things that can greatly assist a Promethean on her quest for true humanity. Some believe that the Shatter is closer to the Principle that lies beneath the Wound: that last shard of uncorrupted existence.

## Changelings

*Once upon a time, the Old Gods promised to return to their mountains and clouds, as long as they got a promise — "harm me not" — from everything in the Midrealm. Every stone and element, plant and beast promised, except for men and women — and iron. This was a trivial detail and they ignored it, but the three cooperated, made an iron knife, cut the Wound and brought the Gentry back, bloody as the Caesarian-born, and lonely.*

Changelings say Arcadia is a Thorn-girt, infinite island in the Wound's storm-tossed Worldblood oceans. The Bloodthorn vines crawl over and under the waves in every direction until they pierce the Scarwall, create the Hedge, and run farther, infiltrating every part of the Shatter. Nothing can deny the Gentry prey and companions.

A Changeling's mien hides itself in the Shatter, just as it does in the Corpse. That's fortunate, because Shatterlanders believe the Lost are ill-omened visitors, tricksters who deal in dark bargains. Where they go, mad gods follow. Changelings keep a low profile so even though Shatterlanders know more about them than people in the Corpse, they still harbor misconceptions. Some communities still expose strange looking babies for



fear that they're Changelings, and they are only *slightly* more likely to believe that a Changeling's double is an inhuman fetch.

Changelings are mysterious, but the True Fae know better. They're the source Bloodthorn and the monsters that erupt from its undergrowth. When it comes to kidnapping victims, the Gentry don't discriminate between the Shatter and the Corpse. Even though Shatterlanders are more likely to wander into the Hedge, there are plenty of creatures that might find them long before the Old Gods take notice.

## Sin-Eaters

*Death abides.*

When the Wound opened, everything changed but the Underworld. The Sin-Eaters, guardians of the Great Below, care for the only part of the Accord that holds.

Sin-Eaters are vital participants in Shatter society. Ghosts have substance and form there and anyone can step through an Avernian Gate, but nobody wants to rub shoulders with the dead, or lose sons and daughters to an ill-considered jaunt into the Great Below. Curiously, geists do *not* take material form in the Shatter. Not even Sin-Eaters know why geists have this ability, but it's just one of the mysteries that surround their patrons.

Atlanteans, dhampirs, and wargaz can all become Sin-Eaters and the dhampir Sin-Eater is a common

stereotype, but nothing can force a geist to choose a particular proxy. There are rumors that suicide rituals exist to increase the chances that a particular person will be selected but there's no solid evidence, and most people aren't eager to try them.

## Heroes

*The world wants to destroy us, but excels at perfecting us.*

Do members of the hero supernatural template exist? It's up to you. In a hero-focused chronicle, other supernatural beings are antagonists and occasional allies, and have less of a presence in the world than we describe here. You can also run a crossover game where every character type brings its unique talents to the fore.

Heroes are subtler than other supernatural beings. They don't have expected social roles and can disguise their talents more successfully. Still, Shatterlanders are pretty smart; if heroes exist, they'll identify them and expect their help during a crisis.



# Appendix: House Rules

**The golden rule  
is that there are no  
golden rules.**

**—George Bernard  
Shaw**

Everybody has their house rules. That's the strength of the game; nobody plays it exactly the same way. Maybe they follow 99% of the rules, but they handle *one rule* differently from the next troupe. Maybe they ditch half the systems to supplant with their own, or not to supplant at all — they just say, "Fuck it, those systems are a tangle of rope around our ankles, and dammit if we don't want to run free."

It's easy to assume that the writers and developers of these books present a unified front, that they're all universally 100% on-board with every little rule and setting tidbit and splat that crosses their desk. To a degree, they are. We're all paid to be here, and it's our job to take the system as it is, and make it look good.

(We like to think we've been successful. We do accept fan-mail. And bags of money.)

But don't mistake it. A lot of the rules that have crept into the books and supplements are exactly the house rules that the writers and developers have used at their own tables. Such rules have been playtested. Their groups like them. So why not use them?

Here, we're giving everybody a more clear and prominent platform to talk about their house rules, or about how they handle certain elements of game, setting, or "play theory."

This is the soapbox for the writers of this book (and the developer, he adds coyly).

As with all things in this book, it is your choice what to do with these essays.

Read them, please.

Then consider them. After which, you may...

Use them, discard them, laugh at them, or elevate them to canon at your own table.

Whatever works for you, because *your* games matter most. Not ours.

## It Is Your Destiny Not To Suck

*By Ben Baugh*

I'm not crazy about the zero-to-hero model of character advancement. I'm not even all that thrilled with the notion of advancement at all. Some of my favorite games are pretty static this way. But then, the same goes for many of my favorite stories from various forms of media. Character change is interesting to me, but it need not come with broad steady increases in stats.



Sometimes too, you get mixed groups of characters, some objectively more powerful than others, yet they share the spotlight equally (or perhaps more often, the lower-powered character gets more attention). In a role-playing game, better stats usually mean you can grab a bigger share of the action and the Storyteller's attention. You have the dice, you say how it goes.

So how to remove the obligatory linear accelerator of advancement, allow for groups of mixed experience while not hosing the "weaker" characters, and letting players not Storytellers decide when they're characters are ready to change and grow?

## Character as Closed Loop

Eject experience points, woosh, gone. Their chute doesn't open, and they get pancaked across a potato field. Instead, characters are built with Magic Character Beans (MCBs). You can call these "Destiny" or "Fate" or "Potential" or whatever, but for the purposes of your amusement, they're Magic Character Beans.

You have a fixed number of these to both build and grow your character, and the Storyteller sets this number as a way of scaling the chronicle. This number can be increased to show how the chronicle itself is increasing in scale and grandeur, and the rate that you can spend your MCBs to buy pretty-shinies for your guy is also tunable to suit the tone of the chronicle.

Chronicle Scope	MCBs
Mean Streets	30
Neighborhood Players	40
The City Trembles	50
Nations Crumble	70
The World by the Balls	100

MCBs are spent to get Attributes, Skills, Merits, and Advantages. Here's the exchange rate:

### MCB Costs

**Attributes:** 5 per dot

**Skills:** 2 per dot (1 per specialty)

**Merits:** 1 per dot

**Willpower:** 8 per dot

**Power Stats:** 8 per dot

**Morality:** 3 per dot

**Power or Advantages:** Double the advantages dot or rating (a ●●● power would cost six MCBs to acquire)

So, you build your character based on the normal character creation rules (though you ignore the bits about 4th or 5th dots costing double), and then you have your MCBs to consider. Spend some or all of these to make your character exactly the character you want to play. (The Storyteller might even suggest, "You can only spend half now, round down.")

## Leftover MCBs?

These are your potential for growth and advancement — for getting new shiny things later on. They also represent, in a fuzzy way, your importance in the overall arc of the chronicle's stories. The more unrealized potential you have, the more your character is what the chronicle is about. You can spend them all to create a crackling badass, but at best you'll be playing the mentor to the protagonist rather than the main character.

MCBs become a pool of dice you can spend to add to any roll you like. If you have 10 MCBs, you have 10 dice you can add to any pool (or to your resistance against somebody else's action; though note that you can't gain more than a +5 bonus at any one time). Luck, fate, random chance... these things conspire to keep the innocent and the fool safe. These bonus dice refresh between stories. They're also refreshed when the Storyteller makes the story about your character, and the guideline is that the spotlight falls on the character with the most unspent bonus dice. If you've only got five bonus dice spent, and I've got 10, then by rights my character gets the Storyteller's attention, it's his drama that gets center stage, and his hated childhood rival who returns with all the powers of hell to exact revenge.

You can also spend your magic bean bonus dice to buy the scenes you want — a die lets you frame a scene and say who's there (so long as it doesn't totally hose the flow of play). If you want the chance to confront a rival, and there's nothing immediately on the table for the group, you can throw a die to the Storyteller, and say that you're all at *The Rack... of Ribs*, the best vampire-owned barbecue joint in the whole South East, and who walks in but that goddamn sumbitch with whom you want to have words.

## Getting More Badass

During play, you can make an opportunity for yourself to spend more of your MCBs — seeking out a master to teach you White Lotus kung-fu, or scoring a few doses of Haitian zombie drugs to enhance your psychic potential. Make it interesting, play it out, and then when you're satisfied, spend the MCBs to buy the new shiny bits. You've realized some of your potential, made it concrete and specific. You trade the flexibility of the dice pool you can add to anything for a specific kind of advantage that appeals to you.

When you let the Storyteller know you want to buy something, she's got to work it into the chronicle. This isn't a bad thing, because the opportunity to learn things, get stronger, or dabble in hideous inhuman powers is a source of great excitement and drama. Eccentric masters, vigorous workouts in seedy boxing gyms, forbidden tomes, or night school. When your teachers told you this, it was

a lie to get you to sit still and memorize the multiplication tables, but here it's actually true: *learning can be fun*.

How do you get more MCBs? You don't. They represent the entirety of your character's potential. If the Storyteller ups the scale of the chronicle, then *everybody* gets more, but these are not like experience points, and nobody tells you when you earn them.

## Tricks and Tweaks

**Amnesia** — Perhaps you're not learning new Skills... perhaps you're *remembering* Skills you've somehow forgotten.

**Going to Seed** — Your old Skills have withered on the vine, unpracticed and near-forgotten. Cash some of them out for more MCBs to represent how your once-fine brain has decayed. You can cash them out for the same price they were bought for, unless the Storyteller wants to, say, halve it.

**Death and Other Inconvenient Things** — The Storyteller may offer you a buyoff if your character gets killed. Permanently pay some MCBs (or cash out like in Going to Seed), and miraculously survive your hideous fate, but in a reduced state.

**Mind Leeches** — Imagine a monster that eats memory, experience, identity... some antagonists may be able to drain your MCBs (temporarily, unless the Storyteller is a total bastard). Alternately, could deals with the Devil do the opposite?

**I Know Kung-Fu** — MCBs can also represent "programmable" potential that can be assigned, used, and then reassigned when needed. Now, you need martial arts. Later, you need to fly a chopper. After that, prepare a traditional Argentinean holiday meal.

## "Closed Loop"... O Rly?

Pop-Quiz time. Did you notice "Morality" listed on the MCB cost table above? No, you did not. *Well, you say, Morality tends to decline... so if I spend my MCBs to buy it back up, I can lose them!* Yep — no system is perfect, the center cannot hold, and entropy eats you in the end. Morality is a leak in the loop, and maintaining it in the face of horror and self-disgust chews into your larger potential.

## The Payoff

You can build a hulking kill-machine who feels no pain, no pity, and absolutely will not stop until every Storyteller character is dead, but then you're always going to be second-fiddle to the young bright-eyed kid with piles of magic beans to buy Storyteller attention. And maybe that's okay. Maybe that's the way this story goes.

You get to create the character you want but perhaps more significantly, the character you *deserve*.

# Quick Background Building

By Rob Donoghue

When starting a new chronicle, the first session is often the biggest hurdle. If you start with none of the characters knowing each other, then a certain amount of time and effort needs to be committed to building up the group rather than getting right into the cool stuff. This can be fun, but it's time-consuming, and it gets a bit dull after the fourth or fifth iteration of a game where a bunch of strangers are gathered by their superior, sent on a mission, and told to play nice. Worse, it can sometimes reveal incompatibilities that were not apparent at character creation that can derail a game entirely.

The obvious solution to this is to have characters share a certain amount of background, so they have a history going into play that they can use to help answer questions like, "Why are we sticking together, again?" and "Why am I listening to this guy instead of hitting him until candy comes out?" Though obvious, this solution has its own problems. I can invite a lot of work, especially if players have differing levels of investments. Even if the players are willing to put in some time before play to hash out backgrounds, you must find common ground between the player who has a sprawling, lavishly illustrated wiki of his character's history, cross-linked with 17 generations of family and notes on critical events in a three-dimensional animated timeline and the player who has three bullet points scribbled on a Post-It note. All to say nothing of the burden on the Storyteller, who has to read all the material and make sense of it.

For Storytellers looking to strike a balance between these extremes, this method creates a shared background among players without spending a lot of time or effort on the process.

## Group Character Creation

Players tend to have different approaches to character creation. Some come to the table with little more than a loose idea that needs filling in, while others arrive at the table with a fully detailed character sheet. If you have the time to have everyone make characters together, that can be incredibly helpful, since the simple act of discussing things can make for a more coherent group, but that's not always an option.

Ideally, you want to take this step after everyone has discussed their idea of their character, but before they've gotten into the nitty-gritty of spending their points, but if it has to wait until characters are finished up, that's fine too. What's important is that everyone sits down after they have a vision of their character in mind.



At this point, get each player to write their character's name on an index card or slip of paper, then hand them to the Storyteller. The Storyteller will ask the group a number of questions with a name omitted, like "How did (blank) save your life?" and with each question he will deal out the names randomly to the players (or at least reasonably randomly — the Storyteller is encouraged to check names to make sure no one gets their own). After each question he takes back the names, asks a new question and deals them out again.

The questions are:

- How did (blank) save your life?
- How does (blank) know your secret?
- Why do you owe (blank) a favor?
- What member of (blank)'s family do/did you know?

What did you think of them?

- What bet did you lose to (blank)?

Players need to work with the subject of their question to come up with an answer that satisfies both players. The Storyteller can offer suggestions if the players can't find a compromise.

Both Storytellers and players are welcome to make up their own questions, either general ones they think might be interesting, or ones tied into specific elements of the chronicle. New questions can be added to the list or substitute for existing questions, and if the Storyteller has enough questions, he might even consider randomizing them.

## Discovery in Play, Prima Donnas, and Brooding Loners

Some players may drag their feet at answering any questions about their character. These tend to fall into two camps. The first will protest that they don't know the answer until they've played. The second will not want to surrender control of their characters enough to owe anyone anything, or to have any sort of "weakness" like family or friends.

You'll have to deal with these challenges within the context of your specific group. The mature way to deal with them is to sit down and talk about how this is a group game, and that this is a reasonably small burden to bear in return for making the game more fun for everyone. For the discovery-in-play guy, you can emphasize how this sets very little in stone, and instead just helps establish starting direction. For a prima donna, emphasize how this ties everyone to him. For the brooding loner, you can point out that this gives him dirt on other characters.

The less mature but possibly easier way to deal with this is bribery. Simply tie the number of experience points a character starts with to the number of questions they answer. Give out one experience point for every question answered; two if they answer it in a really cool way.



## Merit: Secret (• to •••••)

**Effect:** Secret is a unique Merit in that its value is set by the Storyteller and it costs nothing. It can be taken in conjunction with the Flaw of the same name, and it is designed to represent secrets with somewhat higher stakes, like shadowy patronage or an illicit background. It's appropriate to the sort of secret that includes benefits that last only as long as the secret stays hidden.

The benefit of this Merit is that it allows the character to take two free dots of Merits for each dot of secrets. These merits cannot be intrinsic things (like Quick Draw or Striking Looks), rather they must be Merits that could potentially be lost, like most Social Merits. So long as the character's secret remains hidden, these Merits remain; if the secret ever goes public, they are immediately lost.

When taking this Merit, the player describes the secret, and the Storyteller assigns its value. Practically speaking, this allows the Storyteller to set the maximum value of Secrets in his game. Secrets above •• are very powerful, and are best suited to games with a heavy emphasis on intrigue and politics. In such games, allowing a high threshold of secrets is a quick and dirty way to allow characters to be movers and shakers without also making them combat monsters.

(You'll also find information on secrets earlier in this book, on p. 132.)

## Monsters Are People Too

By Marty Henley

In playing games as ageless monsters, people abducted to alien landscapes, or those who have already died and gotten back up, we get caught up in their daily (nightly) struggles. Surviving another night to plot our insurrections or simply to survive the machinations of others takes up so much of our time at the table. When creating characters, we barter and argue with ourselves over what is just the right amount of flavor and what will save our ass when the fur inevitably flies. So much time is spent thinking about what separates our characters from the sleeping, unknowing human herd that we sometimes forget what keeps them connected to same.

Time marches on and like anyone else, the monsters of our fantasies have long tracts of boring nights ahead of them, especially between games. So your Circle of the Crone Gangrel Primogen is a brooding loner who's mastered the arts of kung fu and Crúac? What else does she do with her time? Card tricks? Carpentry? Does she

watch *House* or *CSI*? Is she a Trekkie? Is she a sports nut who has found an affinity for the local team? Do sports remind her of her girlhood when gladiators did battle for sport and lions ate Christians at intermission?

Same goes for werewolves, mages, changelings, etc.; their every moment is not and cannot be spent honing themselves to monstrous perfection. Monsters are people too. Even the Prince of the City has enough time on his hands to have a hobby or two. What makes his blood sing out in joy? Does he paint miniatures? Does he collect WWI memorabilia? Does he have a kickass vinyl collection or is he into comic books? It only seems silly when you forget that these powerful badasses and Machiavellian power brokers were once people. Sometimes extraordinary people, sure, but even extraordinary people are boring a night or two of the week. Don't shy away from it, embrace it (no pun intended). Do you know the vampires of Brazil get together once a month to have bloody, muddy football matches? The powerful Lancea Sanctum contingent is protecting the title versus the upstart Invictii for the fourth month running. Did you know that the Stolen Thunder pack has organized a baccarat tournament among the wolves throughout Nice, France? They rotate players every other Wednesday to ensure their territories are tended to. How about the Consilium of Leningrad putting on a citywide scavenger hunt for the newly Awakened? They put magical clues, codes, and indicators throughout the city to follow to the annual State of the City meeting.

It might sound cornball at first but just because the monsters and enlightened personnel of the World of Darkness have moved on to harder existences and eternal struggles doesn't rob them of any chance of joy and distraction. Constant tragedy is just as empty and boring as a lack of opposition. Every krewe, throng, and cabal deserves a night or two off.

Just when you think you're done your character sheet or finished designing the power structure of the city for the next adventure, take a step back and remember they were people once. Who were they? What passion did they keep a secret or share among a select few? Does he still go fishing every last Sunday of the month like when his father was still alive? Does she take in the late show every Saturday because the cinema is a part of who she always was, and always will be? Splash a little mundane in the character cocktail to taste. All but the most inhuman monsters should retain some vestige of innocence that they are loathe to give up. Of course, some creatures never had a fair chance at growing up human (such as Prometheans), so perhaps it's a fascination rather than a nostalgic remembrance. What is this "baseball" thing, or what is it about dancing that brings people joy?



Not every relationship has to be about give and take and *quid pro quo* either. Vampires can have friends, mages can be quite fond of their colleagues, and werewolves might genuinely enjoy the company of a werewolf two territories over. The more they get cut off from the real world and entrenched in the dark mysteries of their respective conditions the more the company of peers becomes a rare and valued treat. The Prince and Priscus might have once been in the same coterie causing trouble for the powers that be of the time or a mage's student finally surpasses the need to be taught and can be seen as a friend. Relationships, touchstones to humanity, and common interests all serve to ground the character and flesh them out. The more like people they feel the easier it is to get in their head and play.

None of this serves to lessen the horror of the World of Darkness. In fact, by splashing some humanity (small "h") onto your character (or Storyteller characters) it has quite the opposite effect. It highlights the darkness even more when monsters still have something left to lose. More often, however, it simply adds a little depth that even you might not have expected and just that little extra dimension can bring some verisimilitude to your chronicle.

Enjoy and Cheers!

## Why I Hate Experience Points

By Stephen Herron

Okay, I suppose "hate" is a strong word. As a player, I won't refuse experience points when they're offered and I will spend them with wild abandon. As a Storyteller, I also tend to be generous when handing out experience points. I believe that it's important for characters to progress along not just their story arcs, but their "system" arcs as well. If they have an end goal in sight that's represented by a combination of Skills or supernatural abilities, then they should get there before the end of the chronicle. I want the player to have his time in the sun (or in the moonlight), to tell the story he wants to tell. Throwing this kind of experience around isn't for everyone and it feels fundamentally unrealistic, even within the context of a game.

The Storytelling System works just fine with experience points, and it allows for slow and steady improvement that mirrors real life more closely than some games do. However, experience points just don't work hard enough. They make pretty crappy individual rewards, since they tend to be standardized across the group (despite what the rules on page 216 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** actually recommend). "Everyone

gets three experience points," may seem unfair when one or two members of the group have had a big week, with lots of role-playing opportunities and some big character arc resolutions. Then again, saying "Everyone gets three experience points, except for Stephen, who gets five," may not actually be unfair, but it might feel like it is. Admittedly, game balance is built into these rewards. By the mid-way point of a longish chronicle, it's probably not good for some of the characters to be significantly more powerful than the others, but if they've experienced more, shouldn't they be, well... more *experienced*?

Also, experience points don't realistically reflect the passing of time — a fast-paced story that takes place over a week of game time might actually involve a half-dozen or more sessions. In this case, characters could earn the same amount of experience points in a week as others would earn in a year of game time, or longer. Capping the amount of experience points that may be earned in a 24-hour period would be an effective way of controlling this, but it seems clumsy and awkward. Really, there's not much that can be done here, other than telling players that they'll not be getting experience points for a game that takes place over the course of a week. For short stories or one-offs, experience points shouldn't be a major concern. If you run a series of linked stories with the same characters, experience points can be given out and spent "between sessions" and make for realistic development of the characters' backgrounds and abilities.

The Storytelling System presents some interesting alternatives (and supplements) to the existing experience points system. Practical Experience, introduced in **Hunter: the Vigil** is one example of a parallel experience system. Here's another example of a parallel system — Skill-specific experience.

This system is based on rolling exceptional successes. For example, if a character manages to get an exceptional success on any Skill roll, they gain one extra experience point for that session. Only one extra experience point can be gained this way per session.

Alternatively, every time a character rolls an exceptional success on a Skill roll, they gain a point of experience that can *only* be spent on that Skill. Players should record this Skill-specific experience point with a check mark next to the Skill. They can combine regularly gained experience points with this Skill-specific experience to raise their Skill or purchase Specialties.

This system can also work for dramatic failures — if a character suffers a dramatic failure on a Skill roll, they gain an extra experience point for that session. Only one extra experience point can be gained this way per session.

You may also want to consider other alternatives to experience points. In game, players can be very amusing and they can be smart. They come up with ideas that crack everyone up, they can posit theories about the situation that are staggeringly clever and inspire not just the fellow players but the Storyteller. You see it all the time.

These are times when a player (and his character) could be rewarded for this kind of... we'll just call it "awesomeness." Several games utilize action points or other instant rewards that either regenerate throughout the game or are handed out when a character does or says something cool. This is a nice, quick way to reward players for being involved and entertaining everyone. It's even better when these rewards are immediately usable in game. Bonus dice are a great instant reward (as are Willpower points).

Tracking bonus dice is as easy as handing out poker chips or other tokens to the players. These chips can be traded back in for an extra die for Skill rolls or other checks. You can limit players to having two or three bonus dice or make the limit their character's Willpower. Points should probably not hold over between sessions (to encourage players to use their bonus dice often) and, as an optional rule, players can even give share bonus dice with other characters, if they're in a pickle. Teamwork is a beautiful thing, especially in games where teamwork is part and parcel of the group (among hunters and werewolves in particular).

*For example, Kerry's Hunter: the Vigil character's cell has been tracking down a creature that's been stealing victim's faces (ripping them right off the front of their heads). She suggests that the cell should try wearing masks when they are out hunting, as this may offer some degree of protection from the creature, which will, she theorizes, go for the mask before trying to rip off their actual faces. The Storyteller likes the imagery of the hunters wearing Halloween masks as they work. He hands Kerry a poker chip for use later.*

*Later, as the cell finally meets their quarry, one of the hunters is in bad shape. The face-eater has not fallen for the mask trick and has its claws buried deep in Jonathan's character's face. It starts to pull and rip, and Jonathan has one chance to fight back. He pulls his hold-out pistol and checks his dice pool for the roll. After all's said and done, he's down to a chance die. Kerry pushes her poker chip across the table, along with two others she picked up during the session. Jonathan's chance die has turned into handful of hope with three dice in the palm. He closes his eyes, rolls the dice, and fires a shot into the belly of the beast...*

Ultimately, the best reward a player can get is to have a fulfilling time at the game table — they get to tell their own stories while taking part in each other's, while

the Storyteller slowly unveils the greater tale around them. Anyone hungering after experience points in this kind of situation may well be missing the point of playing in the first place.

## Relationships

By Howard Wood Ingham

The World of Darkness games are really designed to be played for a while. We write this stuff to facilitate the chronicle model of play, a series of stories that may or may not head towards a defined end, like an ongoing TV show rather than a one-off film.

Now the main thing that makes a TV show work week after week is its relationships, even those shows that don't appear to have constant relationships at first glance. The 1970s version of the *Incredible Hulk* might have depended upon Dr. David Banner having to leave town every week and go somewhere else, but every time, investigative reporter Jack Colvin rocked up and started asking questions. The source of conflict that drove the show every week, even when each new town had a different story, was the relationship between those two men. In a show like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, of course, it's obvious. Even during the monster-of-the-week episodes, the shifting relationships between Xander, Willow, Angel, Giles, and Buffy herself defined what happened over the course of the series and kept people watching. Even shows where the protagonist is, apparently, a loner usually has or develops some sort of relationship — whether adversarial or friendly.

So the World of Darkness games already have a number of Merit mechanics to define who's going to help you out in a fix, who you know, who's your mentor and best of all, who's your minion. But what if we kept these and added an element of emotional involvement? And then gave that a mechanic that made bringing those relationships into the game really attractive?

How about this?

### New Merit: Relationship (● to ●●●●●)

**Effect:** The character has a reciprocal relationship with a Storyteller character, in which he has at least some emotional investment — the more dots, the more significant the relationship.

This relationship is a source of strength and aid. It could be a parent, a sibling, a child. It could be a lover or an ex-lover. The relationship doesn't have to be a positive one: that ex-wife who you've got to see every week because she's got custody of the kids is still important to you, even if love turned horribly



sour long ago. Your feelings for your going-right-off-the-rails teenage son may be appallingly conflicted, but he's still central in your world.

Each purchase of the Merit counts for a relationship with one specific Storyteller character. The character can be human or supernatural.

*Once per scene, you may add your dots in the Relationship Merit to one, and only one dice pool, provided that you can give a plausible rationale as to why the relationship should aid you. If it is plausible, the Storyteller must accommodate the rationale.*

It can reward any dice pool at all. You can even get the bonus relationship dice while using supernatural powers (if you have any), but only in a circumstance when the player can justify the bonus.

Be creative with your rationale for getting the dice.

Sometimes, this is simple: when you're trying to convince your ex-wife that you need to see the kids a day early because you're going to be out of town (and no, you can't tell her you're off risking your life), add your relationship dice to your Manipulation + Persuasion roll.

The relationship might be at stake in some way: you'd get the bonus while trying to convince the head teacher at your deadbeat teenage son's school not to expel him for truancy and the stuff they found in his locker.

You might decide that the object of the relationship is doing something to help your character (or hinder your character): you're trying to talk a vampire you know out of coming into your house, and you say "my five-year-old daughter calls down the stairs and says 'Daddy, who's that?' and I decide that I mustn't let her see him..." And you take the dice for your relationship with your daughter.

You might even take the bonus for a person with whom you have an adversarial relationship turning up. You're desperately fighting a horde of zombies; you declare: "But each zombie carries an amulet around his neck, exactly like the one (my arch-enemy) wears! He sent them! He must have learned how to make them!" And you take the dice, and if the Storyteller hasn't already decided that your character's arch-enemy did send the zombies, he has to re-jig the story to cover that.

**Drawback:** Relationships are reciprocal and complicated. The Storyteller character with whom you have the relationship gets the same bonus on dice pools when it's relevant to you. Also, relationships need to be kept alive. You actually need to have some contact with the character with whom you've got the relationship — phone, face-to-face contact, running arguments, office conflict, whatever — or risk losing dots in the Merit. The Storyteller can decide what

constitutes a reasonable interval for lack of contact (perhaps if the character doesn't engage in the relationship once per game session, a dot in the Merit is thrown into jeopardy for the next session). Finally, if the subject of a character's Relationship Merit dies, the Merit is lost.

## Power in Relationships

That's an extremely powerful Merit, isn't it? You get a pile of free dice for bringing friends and enemies into the story. But, I hear you say, wouldn't that mean that the players end up dictating much of what happens in the story, as they force you to bring in their relationships again and again?

The answer to that question is: yes. Absolutely. That's the whole idea. What it does is take some of the responsibility for driving the story away from the Storyteller and put it firmly in the hands of the other players. If the players get into it enough, the amount of work a Storyteller does to keep the story going should become more and more minimal.

The Relationship Merit is also there to show how even a tiny mechanical change can fundamentally alter the way you play the game. But you can make it even more extreme: consider:

- Allowing characters an extra seven Merit dots at character creation set apart solely for Relationships, giving every character the chance to get those lovely extra "relationship" dice.
- Allowing players to shift around the Relationship dots they have at the end of a story, the better to reflect how their personal relationships have shifted. (Though perhaps they can only move one dot from the Merit at a time?)

It's not for everyone. But if you're cool with everyone taking responsibility for driving the story and you're willing to wing it, it can make for some fabulous evenings of play.

## Credit Where Credit's Due

In game terms, this isn't exactly an original idea. Readers with big game libraries may recognize the idea of getting extra dice for narrating in relationships from several games, particularly Vincent Baker's *Dogs in the Vineyard* and our own Benjamin Baugh's *Monsters and Other Childish Things*. Both of those are fine, fine games, and I recommend them for any time you fancy a change of pace.

# Stupid Storyteller Tricks

By John Newman

No, I'm not calling all you Storytellers out there "stupid." Instead, I'm referring to the tips and tricks to Storytelling I'm about to relate. Some of them seem so easy it's damn near stupid. But they work! I offer the following advice from the perspective of a fellow player and Storyteller with more years of experience to which I care to admit. I'm not claiming every trick was handed down to me by the gods of gaming, nor that every trick is the best thing since sliced bread, but they can be useful. Use what you like, ditch the rest.

## Beg, Borrow, and Steal (and Lie)

You have a game to run tonight and you haven't prepared a lick. I know as well as anyone that sometimes life gets in the way of gaming and sometimes you just can't be bothered to prepare because you had a tough day at work or couldn't sleep last night. Now, you could just cancel the game and work on the next session, but what fun is that? The whole point of gaming is to get together with your friends, tell a story, bullshit about unrelated stuff, and gobble down foods of dubious caloric value. So, buck up! Get out a notepad and spend 10 minutes scribbling and you can come up with enough content to run a 2-3 hour game. Mind, these tricks work best with an ongoing chronicle.

### Beg

The first trick is to beg. Not literally. Metaphorically. By begging in a game what you do is place the burden of the story on the shoulders of your players. Make those slackers that show up expecting to be entertained do the work, and the best part of it is, *they won't even know it*. It works something like this. Ask your players what they want to do. Make sure to include everybody, even that significant other that only comes to the games to be with their boyfriend/girlfriend. Players are an ornery lot and generally what each player will want to do will have only the very slightest overlap with what another player wants to do. Usually, this is a negative. It means the group splits up or otherwise makes a hash of the story you had prepared. Well, turn that frown upside-down. When you're under-prepared for a game, this kind of behavior is exactly what you want.

Occasionally you will find the group as a whole is fixated on one particular thing. Not a problem. This is the point where you dig out those background hooks





you've been seeding the game with (you have been doing this, right?) and dangle them in front of the player's noses. It's pretty certain that the guy with an ex-girlfriend turned vampiric slave will drop whatever he's doing if you hint she's been seen back in town. At his mom's house. Better yet would be at his brother's house (jealousy is a prime motivator). The character will haul ass to his mom/brother's house to find... no one is home. Look at that! Now you've given them something to investigate.

Whether you had to prod the players to action with a hook or they started moving on their own, this is the point those notes you spent 10 minutes working on come in handy. They should include general ideas of the Who, What, Where and Why of your hasty preparations.

*Who* is the most important bit. Your notes should list every critical Storyteller-controlled character involved (and here we refer you back to Rapport and Relationships on p. 119, or Wood's Relationship Merit just above). It doesn't need to be that long a list, but it should be comprehensive. Make sure it includes the names of all the major actors in the story. Don't waste a bunch of time pondering names either. When in doubt, *just fuckin' Google it*. (I'll be saying this a lot. We'll shorten it to JFGI.) There must be at least 10,000 random name generators online. Use one. Write down names. In fact, having a list of randomly generated names is useful all the time. You can never tell when the players are going to fixate on a random character and the worst thing you can do is let them know it's a random character by not having a name ready or calling them something horribly generic like Bob.

## Borrow and Steal

Right now you're asking where the What, Where, and Why went. For starters, let's admit that most ideas we have for stories have already been done. You may think you're the first person ever to write a story about a functional hermaphrodite werewolf that created its own ghost wolf children, but you'd be wrong. And that's perfectly fine. Every story told stands on the back of other stories. We borrow and steal ideas all the time without even thinking about it. Now I want you to intentionally think about it. Think about the last movie or TV show you saw, or the last book you read. Was there a cool bit in there? If not, JFGI. Pick an interesting book or movie and read the blurb or a review about it. Presto! You have a cool bit (and even better if the other players aren't familiar with the source material). Take that cool bit and use it for your game. I'm not saying copy the bit like a Xerox; rather, grasp the essence of the bit and run with it. Make it the same, but different. This is the *What*. It's how the Storyteller characters end up in your *Where*.

As an example, I recently read *Heart-Shaped Box* by Joe Hill. The ghost in that book was a hypnotist in life. In undeath it retained the ability to hypnotize people, magnified a thousand-fold. That's a cool bit. Let's make it the same, but different. We'll say the ex-girlfriend has learned the vampire hypnotic gaze trick. That's how she got the mom/brother out of the house without a struggle. Better yet if the hypnosis has convinced the mom/brother that the ex is really the related player. This can add confusion later.

Next is the *Why*. This should be simple to determine by this point. Why did character X do what she did? Revenge is a fine *Why*, as is a trap for our plucky heroes. More complex *Whys* include ideas like luring the character out of his home to ransack the place or because someone else is pulling the strings. You don't even have to know exactly what character is pulling the strings at this point. Make it up later. The *Why* should also include a clue that leads to the *Where*. Obvious tricks work best. A dropped matchbook with the name of a bar, a scribbled note left on the fridge, an answering machine message and so on. If you want to connect the *Why* with the chronicle as a whole, include already established Storyteller characters as the *Whos*.

Now, about the *Where*. More often than not, the *Where* will be determined by the *Who*, *What*, and *Why*. If *Why* is a trap, likely the *Where* will be somewhere desolate, like an abandoned warehouse or a stretch of woods outside of town. Again, don't think about it too hard. Your first instinct is probably going to be the strongest, or at least your most comfortable, idea. If you get stuck, JFGI. Pull up a map and scan it for potential *Wheres* or just use an idea from another source (borrow and steal a second time).

Here's a fleshed out example, using my vampiric slave girl. All names were randomly generated.

**Who:** Althea Pavlik (vampire slave ex), Hugh (brother), Christian Ausherman (vampire owner of ex), Gemini (vampire blood tainted Doberman, Christian's pet)

**What:** Althea uses hypnotism to get Hugh to believe she's actually his brother. Takes Hugh to Christian.

**Why:** Petty, petty revenge. Christian can't stand the way Althea mumbles the name of her lost love while she's sleeping, so the vampire has decided to kill him using Hugh as bait. Althea has intentionally dropped a matchbook with the name of a bar on it.

**Where:** The name of the bar is "Pure." (No, really. I found that name in two seconds. JFGI.) The *Where* works best for this scenario if the players get there after closing time when the bar is empty.

Done! Is it Shakespeare? No. Will it allow you to play with almost zero preparation? Absolutely. You

needn't limit these tricks to on-the-spur games, either. I could run a whole chronicle based on the skeleton listed above, with some extrapolation and some secondary storylines thrown in.

## Lie

"Wait!" I hear you saying. I have characters but no *stats* for them. Easy-peasy. The quick fix is to use pre-gen characters out of the World of Darkness books you have lying around. Just change the names and descriptions. No handy books? Go to the White Wolf site ([www.white-wolf.com](http://www.white-wolf.com)) and download a quickstart or two. You could also use some of the ideas presented for quick character creation elsewhere in this book (see p. 16).

If all else fails, *lie*. Here is the math on lying. A three dice pool equals a basic chance for success in the Storytelling System. If you think a character should be competent at something, give him a five dice pool and you virtually guarantee success most of the time. Is it a combat character? Add three more dice for attack rolls and *ignore* the Defense of the players (hey, if you were going for a strategic simulation, you'd have made the character in advance). Contested roll? Ask how many dice the player is rolling and roll one less. The only thing you must absolutely keep accurate track of is Health. Wimps have five points of Health, steroid monkeys have eight points. Decide where your character falls on that scale and jot down the appropriate amount (don't tell me you can't draw a few half-assed circles for this). Supernatural abilities? Pick out a couple and bookmark them. The most important thing about lying is being consistent about it. Take notes. Write down how many dice were used for what. In fact, taking notes is a good idea in general. It only takes a couple seconds to jot down what just happened and those seconds help maintain consistency.

That's it, folks! Using some of the stupid tricks outlined above can help you create entertaining scenarios on the fly or can aid in the creation of more detailed storylines by giving you a skeleton to build on. Now, get cracking!

## How to Min-Max and Not Feel Ashamed

By Matthew McFarland

In case you're fortunate enough not to know the terminology, to "min-max" in a role-playing game is to arrange your characters traits (or "stats") in such a way as to maximize success for a certain kind of roll or

action, typically combat, at the expense of other types of rolls. The rolls that usually fall by the wayside are social or mental ones. The thinking, here, as best as I understand it, is that combat *always* comes down to dice rolls, whereas the social stuff you can just roleplay out. Another hypothesis is that the lingering feeling is that combat is the most important part of the game, so that's where the points should go to have a "successful" character.

You're probably expecting me to make some kind of crack about "roll-playing" and tell you what a lousy idea min-maxing is. I am, in fact, going to do just the opposite. Min-maxing is a great idea. You just have to do it right.

## How to Min-Max

Assume that good min-maxing should get you at least three successes on any given roll. Yes, for non-combat rolls, more than one success is superfluous, but in combat or contested rolls (or in extended actions, for that matter), three successes is quite respectable. Besides, to bank on an exceptional success, you need something like 15 dice, and that's hard to manage even *with* good min-maxing.

Okay, so the goal is three successes. Eight dice gives about a 50/50 chance there, so let's say we want between eight and ten dice for our min-maxed rolls. Taking it step by step:

**1) Identify the rolls at which you want your character to succeed.** Be general at this stage; "combat," "research," and "social stuff" are all fine. While you're at it, spare a thought to how the character got so kickass at this sort of thing. Schooling? Natural talent? An obsessive drive to be the best? Secretive instruction by a character who only appears at night?

**2) Narrow it down.** You can't be superhuman at everything, at least not to start with. Take the type of rolls you identified before and get specific. Think about the types of situations they'd be useful in, and about how you envision your character making use of them. If you said "combat" before, then figure out what kind of weapons (if any) your character should use. Is he a crack shot? A martial arts master? An expert swordsman? At the end of this step, you should be able to identify the character's most common dice pool.

**3) Assign Attributes and Skills.** Obviously, you could just give yourself a dice pool of 10 right now. Just pump the Attribute and Skill in question up to five, and you're already there! The problem with that, of course, is that the **World of Darkness Rulebook** (p. 34) says that taking five dots in a Skill, Attribute, or Merit costs two dots. That means that, where Attributes are concerned, you're going to put all five dots in your primary category into one Attribute, while the



other two get stuck at one dot. For Skills, it's not quite so bleak — you'll be left with one or five dots to put into the other Skills in a given category, depending on whether your chosen Skill is in your secondary or primary group.

Now, I personally house-rule that “five dots costs six dots” thing right out the window. The intent behind it was to prevent min-maxing, I guess; actually, the stated intent might have been to reflect the awesome effort and talent that's necessary to get to that level of mastery. Here's a dirty secret, though: five dots means one more than four dots. That's it. You don't inflict lethal hand damage at Strength 5, you aren't Sherlock Holmes at Investigation 5 (but go check out *Extraordinary Mortals* on p. 52!), and you aren't going to automatically know your enemy's thoughts at Empathy 5. You get *one more die* on applicable rolls with five dots in a trait. Hell, you can get *one more die* by using the right kind of cologne (no, seriously, p. 85 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**), so the reality doesn't match the logic.

Fortunately, that's not a hard one to fix. Just drop the “fifth dot costs double” thing (and do it for Merits, too; it's really hard figuring out Merits like Haven and Safehouse and the like with that rule in effect) and let's move on.

After you've assigned Attributes and Skills, you want a base dice pool of not less than six. Let's assume you're making a gunfighter, because it's an easy one. Your dice pool is Dexterity + Firearms. If you put your character's Dexterity up to four (assuming that Physical Attributes are primary, that leaves Strength and Stamina at 2, which isn't bad) and you give your character Firearms 3, that's seven dice as a base. That's fine.

4) **Assign Specialties.** Pretty obvious what to do here, right? Be as general as your Storyteller will let you get away with. Here's why: I can take a Firearms Specialty in “Pistols,” or I can take one in “.357 Magnum,” and they do exactly the same thing, except that one is a *hell* of a lot more useful. And remember, a Specialty nets you exactly *one more die*. So for our hypothetical gun-bunny, I'll take Specialties in Shotgun and Pistols. My dice pool is now eight with either of those kinds of weapons. (Plus, if my character is good with a .357 Magnum, is it really weird to suggest he'd be good with a 9mm, or a .45 ACP?)

5) **Assign Merits.** The **World of Darkness Rulebook** is by no means the only source of Merits. **Armory** and **Armory Reloaded** have a bunch of Fighting Styles between them, and books like **World of Darkness: Asylum** and **World of Darkness: Midnight Roads** have other, non-combat-related ones. I'm just going to mention the ones in the core book, but if you've got other sourcebooks, use 'em! (But check with your Storyteller.)

When you're checking out Merits and you're trying to min-max well, have a look at the systems for the traits. A good choice for a Merit is one that has a clear, easily-defined effect on game mechanics. A Merit that's not appropriate for the min-maxer is one that doesn't have a mechanical bonus, or one in which the bonus is too small for the dot rating you're spending. A good example here is Striking Looks. For two dots, you get one die on certain rolls. Granted, it's a good variety of rolls, but in my humble opinion, you're better off figuring out what Skill you're going to use the most often and taking a Specialty. That doesn't eat two of your Merit dots (which you could use to buy, say, Resources — money should *always* be good for an equipment modifier), and it doesn't carry the “people always remember you” drawback, which can be a bit of a pain.

Now, for our gunslinger, I'm thinking that the Merit of the same name is appropriate. What it does (allow two attacks in a turn) is well worth three Merit dots. The decision I have to make then is whether I want to blow three more dots on Ambidextrous (negating the offhand penalty; I think it's probably wise, given that I can't decide to go back and get it later).


Okay, there you have it. I now have a character with a base of eight dice to shoot people with pistols or shotguns. Since most pistols have a 2(L) bonus, I get 10 dice on my first shot and nine on my second. I can bank on about three successes per roll for those pools, meaning I can take a normal opponent (Health 7, that is) down in one turn. If I spend Willpower, that adds three more dice. With a shotgun, we add new wrinkles; my dice pool goes to 12, but I also get 9-again, which means I'm likely to get even more successes.

6) **Min-maxing in play.** Of course, if you're not min-maxing a combat roll, you're going to have to work for it a little more. The key, here, is equipment modifiers. The guideline is no more than +5 from equipment on any given roll, but the **World of Darkness Rulebook** advises little modifiers for being well-dressed, having the right tools, and choosing your surroundings carefully. When the Storyteller describes a scene, ask if a given facet of that scene is good for a bonus on your chosen roll. This might seem like grubbing for a few extra dice. It *is*, but that's not a bad thing (see below)!

Finally, remember that you can get a three-dice bump for any roll by spending a point of Willpower. If you get hit with a modifier that you didn't expect (maybe because of some supernatural influence — could happen, right?), that's a good way to offset it.

## Why to Min-Max

Role-playing games began as modified war games. This is why a lot of role-playing games have huge combat systems, whether or not the setting really



calls for a lot of combat. In a game like that, it's not at all unreasonable to want your character to be great at fighting, and since he gets better at fighting when certain numbers on his sheet go up, it makes sense for you to arrange those numbers in the best way possible.

And then games like **Vampire: The Masquerade** came along, and asked people to redefine how they look at mechanics vis-à-vis having fun in the game. And suddenly we had this weird assumption that if you paid attention to game traits and how they impacted your character, that was, well, kind of gauche. It's not that everyone expected the characters to suck (lots of games out there make pathetic starting characters), it's just that attending to mechanics just wasn't "cool."

Well, to hell with *that*. The Storyteller system works when you use it. Besides which, if a player cares enough to read the rules, learn them, and put the effort into realizing that 9-again is only of real, mathematical benefit at the 12-dice mark or thereabouts, well, that player has something invested in the game. And those are the players I want at my table. I'm by no means suggesting that someone who *doesn't* want to crunch numbers isn't invested, of course — I'm not a math guy myself, by nature. I just feel that it's okay to want your character to be *awesome*.

We could talk all day about genre, setting considerations, horror tropes, and the like, but let's be real. Some games you play because you want to watch your characters go slowly insane, die in horrible tragic pain, or get eaten by their big, red god. The World of Darkness isn't that sort of game. It's about dark mystery, maddening symbolism, occult exploration and, in a lot of ways, the triumph of cooperation and ingenuity over malicious forces (or forces more malicious than your characters, anyway). In that kind of setting, your character *can* be impressive in his chosen arena, because no matter how impressive he is, someone or something that can kill him with a thought is just around the corner.

There's one more step involved in min-maxing, and I saved it for the end here because it ties in with the second bit of the title of this essay: don't be ashamed. Talk to your Storyteller and tell her you want opportunities for your gunslinger character to hold off an advancing mob of zombies with two pistols. Tell her you want your social charmer to be able to navigate a room full of vampires on sheer charisma and a strategically placed shaving cut. Tell her you want your researcher to burn the midnight oil to unlock the secret of the Chamfort Letters. Tell her *there is no shame in being awesome*, and you've got the dice pools to back it up.

## Authenticity: A Fire in the Heart of the Game

By Malcolm Sheppard

I'm going to lead off with some contentious statements to get you thinking. Here they are:

- You can play a game the wrong way, even if you're having fun.
- Sometimes fun actually *means* you're doing it wrong.
- Sometimes the Storyteller should just say "No."
- The popular notion that a good game session runs smoothly, with a kind of consistent pleasantries and not one whit of disputation about character motives, the system, background, or situation, is wrong, wrong, wrong.

Don't worry — I'm indulging in a little bit of rhetoric. It's okay to love everything I just damned. This is play, not heart surgery. But "play" shouldn't evoke some soft-focused, sentimental, selectively remembered childhood experience. Play is where you skin your knee. Play is where you cry. Play is learning, exploration that narrows in on a certain, specific template for our experiences. The exact destination depends on the activity. I personally believe that as a medium, tabletop roleplaying's distinctive, best destination is the authentic experience of fiction.

My friend Jenny once said something that I now carry with me into every game and writing project. I've never gamed with her, but when we drank into the second and third pint at our local bar's big, graffiti-laden back table, she told me she played. She talked about surviving the winter in a game, trekking across a blasted post-apocalyptic landscape, where the weather mixed snow, nuclear ash, and trceries of magical energy.

She said, "I have all of these real memories that never happened to me."

I instantly knew that this is why I was roleplaying, and that this makes the form so fantastic. I'm tempted to say, "That's what makes it an art," but people give that word a privileged context, and fuck that. Lots of things are art. Most things are *bad* art.

Let's just say that this is what I think roleplaying does better than everything else. So when I talk about all the things You're Doing Wrong in the first paragraph, I'm talking about dogma that can bar the way to what I feel is the most profound part of roleplaying — the fire in its heart, or just "good art."

Authentic experience is impossible to fully define, but it's got plenty of characteristics we can easily spot:



human things we encounter every day. They're not always easy to implement because they're not only different from what we're trained to accept in fiction due to other mass media (where we've got omniscient narrators, master shots, and other constructions) but they're occasionally unpleasant, too.

One of these characteristics is subjectivity. People who theorize about roleplaying talk about a shared imagined experience, but that's bullshit. Nobody's in a telepathic hive mind. You — the real you — have individual, personal experiences that are given the illusion of a shared experience when you mediate them through shared cultural references. When the goal is authenticity we always understand that every character experiences something different, and so does every player. We understand that a "shared" experience is a fiction in the fiction.

This fact makes itself known in your game sessions whenever two players disagree on where a person or object is in an imaginary space, or when the Storyteller and player visualize an action differently. When subjective experiences threaten to derail the game, the Storyteller or group steps in to choose the facts of the shared social reality of the situation. The lesson? Power shapes our perceptions, both in and out of character.

That leads us to another sign of authenticity: the break between expectations and reality. Some players want to jump into heroic exploits and others want validation for a theory about the situation or an emotional state. The easy — and when your objective is authenticity, wrong — response is to let the player have her way. Real people miss. Real people get the facts wrong, and don't get the catharsis they're looking for.

It's easy to use this as a justification for some kind of power trip but that's not the goal. When you say "No" or let the game system carry an action to failure, do it to create the break between vision and truth that says: *Despite my expectations, this is how I'm limited, and this is where I really am.* Keep in mind that a fictional situation often lacks the detail that would let players act in character to do many reflexive, commonsense things: hailing a cab when the Storyteller doesn't say whether they're around, or acting on something they may or may not know. Don't use this blindness to screw the players.

You'll bump up against the break between facts and expectations when a player proposes a character action and is told that it's either impossible, or harder than she thought. This sparks a round of negotiation where you figure out a plausible alternative. This is an integral part of the process, and it's important for everyone involved to bargain in *good faith*, from a position of respect and an understanding that the result should rest between pure wish fulfillment and obstinately blocking every

idea. It may be a bumpy, spirited ride to the conclusion, but that's okay. It *should* be emotional — it's a sign of investment in the game.

Those emotions represent the last sign of authenticity I have space to talk about: that it happens to *you*. Yeah, we're supposed to remind you that You Are Not Your Character to save you from moral panic and the delusion prone, but to level with you for a second, you really are your character. He has no reality outside of you; his emotions are *yours*.

Once you recognize this fact, you can harness it to great effect by identifying the emotions you hope to express through the character and recalling situations from your own experience where you felt that way. This is one of the classic forms of method acting, and starting with Stanislavsky's *An Actor Prepares*, you'll find dozens of resources to draw from to understand it — but the best resource is your own life.


This truth works for Storytellers, too. Once you really get to know your players you can draw upon themes, motifs, and situations that not only fit your chronicle, but provoke an emotional response from the *players*, not just their characters. This is a powerful, dangerous technique. It can create incredibly vivid scenes, but it risks offending the players. The best way to go about it is to discuss this ahead of time. Ask everyone in the group to draw on ideas they want to explore that they know would create that kind of stimulus, but in a more tightly knit group (such as mine, which has been together in some form for about 13 years) you might be able to do it spontaneously.

These are just parts of an authentic experience: hallmarks, techniques, tricks. Sometimes you'll hit the mark, or you'll get *so close* you can taste it. Sometimes you'll just have fun "doing it wrong." As roleplayers, you're already close to the heart of that authenticity, playing through the best way to find it. It's difficult and sometimes, socially dangerous. Like fire, it can warm or burn. In my experience, the best way to do it is to start on the basis of compassion. Come into the game with real friendship and even love for the other players, and that fire will light your way to memories that are stronger than anything I can describe. You'll feel it in your heart.

## Compression for Fun and Profit

By Stew Wilson

Pop quiz: your players want their characters to shadow a guy over a few days, building a behavioral profile that will help them strike at their target. What do you do?



As Storyteller, you can run a few scenes detailing the shadowing, some others involving hitting the books, and a third scene where the characters (and through them, the players) sit around a whiteboard with what they know and try out different ideas. Ideally, if they succeed at the final action, the Storyteller alters his plans so their ideas turn out to be right, but that's a different subject. Importantly, a whole bunch of scenes and actions all go into building the profile, many of which have a chance to go wrong and might draw the interest of the characters' target. A whole chapter could go by just on profiling the target.

Alternately, you can tell the characters that it's going to be a teamwork action. Each player gets a dice pool depending on what part his character's playing in the affair, and everyone rolls. Mechanically, that's it. One instant action and the whole thing's over and done with; time to hit the next scene.

Which one's right? Both of them.

## Decompression

Most Storytellers play out any complex situation as a series of actions over a set of scenes. In comics, "decompression" refers to a storytelling style that emphasizes character interaction and the visuals of what a character is actually doing, and that's a fine term to carry over to roleplaying games. If it takes a whole chapter (i.e. game session) to come up with a plan, so be it — because you'll know as a player what your character has planned and why. A player can really get into his character's head, and the Storyteller knows what's going on in enough detail that she can act and react appropriately.

Decompression shows up all over the place. Combat's a good example. With time sliced into three-second turns, everyone knows what's going on and even though one action could represent a flurry of blows or a swift double-tap, that action still represents one single attempt to hurt someone.

Beyond a certain point, that stops being helpful. If you're not careful, simple actions turn into a handful of scenes, each featuring multiple actions. Take investigating a crime scene. It only seems natural to use Wits + Investigation to find fingerprints, a Wits + Medicine roll to divine information from blood splatter, and Intelligence + Science to MacGyver up some forensic tests. All of a sudden, what would have been one extended action (check p. 59 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook** if you don't believe it) is taking up most of the chapter. Worse, if only one or two characters — or players — have any interest in the minutiae of crime scene investigations, they can unintentionally monopolize a whole chapter by leaving the other characters with little to do. As a Storyteller,

even if you're comfortable with decompression, it helps to know when to draw the line.

## Compression

To get glib for a second, compression is the opposite of decompression. Compression involves looking at the characters' goal first, and building a single action to encompass that. Shadowing a guy? Teamwork action. Working a crime scene? Investigation action. One action. Look at the action from the top down, and go for a single action — often a teamwork action — that works towards the characters' goals.

While several actions in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** compress what's going on into one roll — including investigating a crime scene, applying medical treatment, and foraging for food — compression of actions really shines through in the Tactics used in **Hunter: The Vigil**. If you don't have Hunter, Tactics are defined teamwork actions where different actors have different dice pools, and a successful action (often instant) resolves everything. It's a very simple system that can really help a group who want their game to flow.

Just because you're compressing actions doesn't mean you have to compress everything around them. Putting more detail into a description helps bring the scene alive, and through that description the Storyteller should see fit to apply bonuses and penalties to the final roll based on what's actually going on.

A game that makes heavy use of compression plays out quickly, especially if the troupe focuses their description on the highlights — the added complications and interesting bits that make any action worthwhile. It *feels* fast-paced as well; if everything's going well then scenes can last less than ten minutes of real time while keeping the whole troupe engaged.

Over-using compression when your troupe's not seeing the same benefit can really hurt the connection players feel for their characters, however. What's the point in playing an investigative genius if every scene is five minutes of description and one dice roll? That goes double if you play combat out by the book, giving players who want to kick ass more time to directly portray their character. Outside of downtime, when the story calls for dramatic tension and the very real risk of something going wrong — whether that's a brutal slugfest or exploring the lair of a serial killer looking for clues to his next target — it's time to decompress.

## The Law of Dramatic Necessity

What it all boils down to is this:

- Decompression involves representing the *process* a character goes through as a series of actions.



- Compression involves a single action that moves a character to his desired *result*.

Think about the pacing of the story when using both techniques. By default, the actions suggested in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** decompress when tension builds — combat and car chases — and compress when the tension eases off. If you want a faster-paced game, or players who really identify with their characters, then you may find it helps to shift that balance.

Compressing a lot of the time can make the story feel fast and loose, and through the mechanics it can introduce a bit of a devil-may-care attitude. That's a good thing — back that up with some more cinematic rules tweaks and you can throw the whole Storytelling System in the back seat and roll on down to Vegas, baby! You might have to deal with all manner of monsters when you get there, but they'll be a whole bunch of different monsters than you found in San Francisco.

Decompression naturally lends itself to tense, slower-paced games. Danger lurks around every corner. The plot progresses slower, but it gives time for tension to build and players to develop their characters. The system's there with you in the abandoned warehouse, finding the key to the back storage room and creeping between the bodies of animals and humans both, tickling your spine until that final moment when something finally makes hideous sense and your heart turns to ice as you realize who the monster really is.

Both are useful tools. One isn't "better" than the other. But taking the time to think about both in relation to your story can help you deliver the punch you're looking for.

## Last Words: The Hat Trick

By Chuck Wendig

Okay, I have to make this fast, because this book is swiftly running out of words and pages. Only have so much room, after all.

I've got three problems — er, excuse me, "challenges" — that come up at our game table.

And, now I've got three solutions. Ready? Here goes.

### #1: The Elusive, Mythical Dramatic Failure

You know the rule: down to a chance die, you roll a "1," and your character is fucked. The gun explodes in his hand. He missteps and tumbles down a set of stairs. He sprays himself in the face with hot muffin batter.



My gaming group has been playing the Storytelling System since the **World of Darkness Rulebook** hit shelves. We love it.

But we can count on one hand the number of times we've had dramatic failures at the game table. It's a rare occurrence, like playing table tennis with Bigfoot, or accidentally shooting the Loch Ness Monster in the ass with a dart gun.

I want more! I *like* failure in games. Failure represents conflict. It's fun. It creates new challenges, and deepens the story. Dramatic failures even moreso — stories are often driven by *bad situations* that get worse. We want to simulate that, but the dramatic failure mechanic as it stands is far too infrequent.

Let's talk solutions. Three options.

## Botch This

The old "botch" mechanic in the earlier World of Darkness games (the *oWOD* to the *nWOD*) was a good system, though it perhaps created the dramatic failure effect far too often. But it was fun, and you can still use it.

That system is: you roll your dice. Any die that comes up a "1" can eat (read: remove) a success. If the roll comes up more "1's" than successes, that's a botch. The car flips into a ravine, the character accidentally calls the vampire a "llama-fucker."

## Botch This II: I Was A Teenage Botch Mechanic

Okay, that mechanic was fun, but it maybe creates *too many* awful cataclysms at your game table. Let's soften the rule.

Any time a roll comes up a *failure* (meaning, no successes) and you have "1's" come facing up on one or more dice, that's now a dramatic failure. (So, "1's" no longer eat successes.) The tool bench catches fire, or you muck up the gang lingo so bad that you bring the entire Latin Kings crew down on your family's doorstep.

## When Good Failure Goes Bad

Maybe you want to build a rule off the existing dramatic failure rules, something *akin* to the chance die, but with a little more punch and frequency. Try this on for size:

Any time a roll comes up a failure, roll *one die* — we'll still call this the "chance die," because that name is perfectly delightful.

If the chance die comes up a "1," then welcome to Dramatic-Failuresville, Population: You. You mispronounce the demon's name and he curses your family tree, or you accidentally launch the lockpick into your eye and tumble into an open manhole.

## #2: Me-Too Syndrome

It's not the players' fault. Everybody wants to succeed.

But here's the scenario.

Maybe it's a Lockpicking roll. Or Investigation. Or some other relatively repetitive task.

The player has his character attempt it. The character fails.

What happens? The next player steps up. "I'll have my character try it."

In effect: *me too, me too.*

What's the problem? For one thing, it slows down gameplay. You suddenly have five people all making cumulative Research rolls. Two, it significantly reduces the chance for failure. Failure can be fun in a game. Too much success can equal boredom (strange it as sounds). Three, it meta-games a little too much: "Tom read the book, didn't learn anything, but Tom's *player* knows he failed, which means so does *Eddie's player*, so now Eddie has to have a crack at the book."

Once more, three solutions, quickly presented—

## Teamwork Actions Are Awesome

It's true. They are. You want to cut down on the number of rolls, then make repetitive actions a province of the teamwork mechanic. One character is the primary actor, and everybody else is backup. In a Lockpicking roll, only one guy is actually hunkered down by the lock with the pick set, but another guy watches the hall, a third guy hands over the right tools, and so forth. The successes of secondary actors become bonus dice for the primary actor. Failure is failure.

If anybody doesn't want in on the teamwork action, then too bad. They don't get to have a second crack at the lock. Invent narrative reasons why, if you must (*guards are coming*).

## One & Done

Second option — only one player gets to roll. It's recommended, of course, that the player whose character has the highest appropriate dice pool does the rolling, but hey, it's their funeral! Anybody else wants a crack at it, tell them "no." If you aren't comfortable telling them "no," then say, "yes," but with caveats — either the second player must spend a Willpower point to join in, or take a -1 dice penalty.

## Hide the Roll, Not the Outcome

In some cases, it can help if the Storyteller does the rolling, and hides the dice. He still discusses the outcome, but never needs to say the words, "succeed" or "fail."



This won't really work with the aforementioned Lockpicking example, but it'll work great on any Perception-based roll, or something geared toward Research.

Tom's player has Tom check out the mysterious "Minturn Mirrors Catalog," but the Storyteller does the rolling. The roll is a failure, but the Storyteller simply says, "The book discusses the mysterious mirrors at length, and shows some images." In other words, exactly what anybody opening the book might find at a cursory glance. The Storyteller never says, "You fail," or, "You don't turn up any information."

Ideally, this gives the other players pause — maybe Tom really found all there was to find in that book.

## The Cup

Last thing, I promise.

Life is random. We can't choose everything. Hence, at our gametable, we sometimes throw in a random element as represented by *The Cup*.

The cup is any cup, preferably a large one (like one of those 32 oz. Thirst Abortion Mega-Drinks from your

local mini-mart), and one without liquid in it (unless you like soggy, sticky roleplaying).

Into the cup go several strips of paper with game elements written on them.

Game elements might include: free two-dot Merits at character creation, dark secrets, plot points, prophecies, a free Skill Specialty, whatever.

Players pass around the cup, and pick one strip of paper.

Whatever's on that paper applies to that person's character. It often requires one to connect this new element to his character in some interesting, story-based way. ("Why does my character have free two-dots in Allies?" or "I'm sorry, does this piece of paper say my character found a severed finger in the mailbox? Holy shit.")

Some elements are best kept secret. Some are best shared. Up to the players.

We try to do it every session, where appropriate. Keeps everybody on their toes, and the players really seem to both love and fear the cup, and really, that's what every Storyteller wants, isn't it? Both love and fear, holding hands and skipping in giddy tandem?



# Afterword

As I stand here atop Stone Mountain typing this message into my iPhone and preparing to send it to my laptop waiting at the North American office of CCP, I can't help thinking about how much has changed at White Wolf, in the paper RPG business and in the world since Mark Rein•Hagen wrote the Afterword to Vampire 2nd Edition almost two decades ago. Through all of those crazy changes, White Wolf has continued to evolve and adapt while we've kept our eyes on one shining star that guided us through the chaos: we love to create worlds that allow people to engage in storytelling.

For example, when the time came to re-imagine the World of Darkness when the previous version was destroyed in Gehenna/Apocalypse/Ascension/Oblivion/you-get-the-idea, we wanted to organize the new books in such a way that the World of Darkness itself was featured in the forefront rather than as a somewhat consistent backdrop. We wanted a World of Darkness where all of the supernaturals could be involved with each other, but which was scary and mysterious all on its own with creatures and places that couldn't be explained by reading one of the other lines. From there it was a pretty short conceptual jump to starting all characters as mortal in one book that detailed the basic, freaky world (and the base rules set) and which opened the door to the World of Darkness. This allowed the other supernatural game lines to link up as desired and reveal further layers of "the truth."

To peel back our company's own layer of "truthiness", this decision was not universally agreed to be the right one at the company. In fact, NO decision, direction or initiative has ever had a hive-mind positive response in all of White Wolf's history and I can't see that, at least, ever changing. But we were encouraged by how energized both our in-house team and our wonderful dark army of

freelance talent became as they worked on the project. It's a good sign that something cool is happening when the teams aren't just professionally excellent, but wildly enthusiastic.

Then the World of Darkness corebook was published and the fan response blew us away.

So we travelled to Mysterious Places, encountered Antagonists, re-equipped at the Armory, were granted Second Sight, and hung out at Precinct 13. We experimented with playing children and teenagers in Innocents and even gave the line its own spin-off, in a way, with Hunter the Vigil. When we at last began publishing our Alternative Publishing PDFs, some of the first Storytelling Adventure System products that we made available electronically were for the WoD line. All in all, the success and fantastic creativity of this version of the World of Darkness proved that the setting itself was rich enough, complex enough and mysterious enough to evolve into new forms and still engage the imaginations of players and storytellers around the world.

I write all of this in celebration of what the World of Darkness line has achieved, even as this book that you hold in your hands is the last of the line that we'll be publishing using traditional methods. This was not a decision that was made lightly or without considering how it would impact our fans; because without you to bring the WoD to life, as it were, we would never have come this far. The next stages of evolution for World of Darkness and White Wolf are upon us. And that shining star still guides us as we venture towards the creation of a new World of Darkness filled with incredible stories yet to be told.

We hope you'll take the journey with us.

Thanks—  
— richt

Richard Thomas  
Creative Director, White Wolf







What would I be, if God wanted me to be something different?  
I would be whatever God saw fit to make me.

I would be a crow picking at the bones of the dead.  
I would be a worm nestled in the heart of my enemies.

I would be a faceless angel.  
I would be a rabid wolf.  
I would be a broken mirror.

But make no mistake, my children,

Whatever God sees fit for me, one thing will never change.  
I will always be a monster.

— Solomon Birch

This book includes:

- An unholy host of alternate systems for you to option into your characters and games, including (but not limited to!) Morality, Virtue/Vice, Merits, character creation.

- Brand new systems for you to incorporate: social and mental combat, miniatures combat, relationships and Rapport, Conviction, Insanity, and don't forget to check out the Extraordinary Mortals template (with built-in Skill Tricks).

- Three new "what-if setting hacks" for the World of Darkness. The World of Darkness Revealed, wherein the monsters stand exposed for all humanity to see; The World of Darkness Destroyed, which gives you the option of playing out the global apocalypse; and The World of Dark Fantasy, a fantastical spin on the system and setting.

- A handful of essays from the writers and developer of the book, bringing you their own personal "house rules" and hacks for you to consider.

For use with the World of Darkness rulebook.



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