



# URBAN SHADOWS

# BERLIN

# THE CITY

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For many years, Berlin was a divided city, with the separation between West and East running as a visible wall through the middle of the former city center.

In 1961 the Soviet sector of the city was closed off; within the next years, the border installation had grown into the Berlin Wall—a concrete barrier guarded with deadly force. West Berlin formed an isolated island of the capitalist West, surrounded by the communist East—the two great power blocs of the Cold War had divided the city among themselves. The Berlin Wall fell in 1989 after several crises in the Eastern bloc countries; this was the first step of the German reunification. The two parts of Berlin were no longer divided and began to grow into a new and united city.

Nowadays, the few remains of the border fortifications such as the infamous border-crossing Checkpoint Charlie are only sightseeing attractions for the crowds of tourists who visit Berlin from all over the world. The modern city is in a constant process of change, which seems to continuously increase in speed. The city is a single, never-ending construction site.

With the reunification, the great reconstruction of the city began. The new government and embassy quarter was built. Shopping centers, malls, and chain hotels are still springing up everywhere. Berlin is a city of contrasts: alternative districts with small cafés and shops, dilapidated old buildings full of graffiti, and brand-new apartments and luxury shops are often only a few blocks apart. Venerable buildings and museums compete for attention with modern architectural extravaganzas.

Berlin consists of many neighborhoods that are like small cities with their own centers, and many inhabitants of Berlin feel more part of their *kiez*—their neighborhood—than of Berlin. While Berlin Mitte (downtown Berlin) offers a mixture of modern skyscrapers and historic buildings, the suburbs appear much more rural. In the middle of the city, the Tiergarten provides a large, quiet green area. The Berliner Stadtforst and the Grunewald are extensive forest areas at the outskirts of the city.

While the streets in the city are always crowded and parking spaces are scarce, Berlin has a dense network of bus, underground, and train connections—however, these are frequently slowed down by construction sites, police and rescue operations, or train cancellations. The Spree and several canals run right through the city, making it possible to explore the city by boat.

Berlin is a city of contrasts: Politics, celebrities, and luxury are just as much a part of the city as alternative districts, the May riots, and cheap shop and restaurant chains. Big companies and innovative start-ups open their offices to acclaim, yet neighborhood protests can keep an internet giant from developing a new campus in Berlin. While many ambitious building projects are realized, the new airport is always behind schedule. The constant modernization of apartment buildings in the last few years have caused rents to rise astronomically, driving the former occupants out.

In the supernatural world, Berlin has become one of the hot spots of Europe, but the reunification of the city also caused conflicts between various groups. The open hostilities between the Night and Power factions, in particular, led to the rise of a group of hunters and agents of the Mortality faction who gave the other factions a choice: stop the fighting and keep a low profile or face a war with professional and well-armed hunters. While an uneasy ceasefire between the factions was achieved, the dream of ruling the supernatural world of Berlin still remains.

Thus, there are always newcomers trying to establish their power base in the city, challenging the established order; the city seems to be a nexus drawing in supernatural beings from all over Europe. All these attempts to break the status quo are met with the same reaction: swift and hard retribution from the currently dominant faction. While the leaders of the city cannot agree on much else, none of them is interested in new competition.

## **CITY MOVES**

- Complicate a journey with delays, building sites, and traffic jams
- Introduce a surprising celebrity or tourist
- Reveal a hidden shop with tempting and forbidden offerings
- Intimidate passerby with an aggressive, drunken group

## **IMAGES AND HOOKS**

A homeless man eloquently tries to sell his newspapers on the subway train, invisible to the wealthy-looking businessmen. After work, colleagues drink cocktails in a fancy bar at the Spree, while some punks hang out next door begging for change. After a near-collision, car drivers honk and shout at each other—a group of tourists takes selfies and blocks the way. A construction site spreads noise and dust while, across the road, a small park promises some tranquility.

## FACTION MAPPING

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### NIGHT

The city's undead are called the Nosferatu—a reference to the 1920s silent film by Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau. In contrast to their name, however, they don't look like monsters on the outside, but rather belong to the rich and beautiful. The Nosferatu form an elitist circle that is entirely under the influence of its leader: an undead necromancer known as the Pale Empress. While the vampires are the dominant group within the faction, the werewolves are feared as their enforcers. The ghosts of the city dread the necromantic rituals of the Pale Empress, and most of them keep a low profile. It's rumored that some of the werewolves and ghosts plot to remove the Pale Empress from power, but until now there has been no real challenge to her reign within the Night faction.

Before the Wall came down, the Nosferatu controlled West Berlin, using the isolation of the walled city to fortify their influence against any other supernatural power. With the fall of the Wall, the Nosferatu aspired to extend their dominion over the entire city. This claim was far from undisputed—the Power faction represented by the Chess Club has its own plans for the city. As a result, violent clashes between the groups were inevitable.

The Nosferatu can be found in the most exclusive and trendiest places in the city. As with anything that attracts their interest, they bring these places under their control. They surround themselves with the rich, the beautiful, and the famous. Their existence seems to be a never-ending party of luxurious excesses. Some Nosferatu keep groupies, who hope to be accepted into the circle of the elite eventually.

### POWER

Most of the members of Power are united by a common course through an organization called Schachverein (Chess Club). Behind the mundane name hides the conspiracy of influential people who claim they can see the threads of fate and thus try to steer the destiny of Berlin—and mankind in general. The Chess Club has great plans, even if its true goals are unknown outside its ranks. Most wizards, oracles, immortals, and other members of Power are members of the Chess Club, and the few remaining independents are watched by the organization and provide easy targets for the Nosferatu.

The name "Chess Club" refers to how the magicians use people in their great game of fate like pieces on a board. From the Chess Club's point of view, Berlin is a central nexus, where several great threads of fate come together that can influence the entire world. The magicians claim to manipulate these threads of fate to prevent a terrible catastrophe in a possible future.

While it's relatively easy for them to control individuals or minor events with their magic, it's not clear how far fate can be tampered with. There are rumors that the fall of the Wall was one of the Chess Club's plans, but there is also the opposing theory that this turn of events surprised the magicians and they lost a large part of their surveillance and control. The Chess Club itself is silent on this subject.

However, with the reunification of Berlin, it was clear to the Chess Club that the Nosferatu stood in the way of their growing ambition. When subtle changes to the threads of fate didn't break the power of the Pale Empress and her followers, the magicians used direct means: they summoned demonic creatures with magic as shock troops to exterminate the Nosferatu with brute force.

## MORTALITY

During the Cold War, Berlin was an important hub for various espionage activities, as the West and the East clashed here in a confined space. Accordingly, many agents of different secret services operated together and against each other in the city. When the war between the supernatural groups of Nosferatu and Chess Club broke out after the reunification, one of the veteran agents was drawn into the conflict and he recognized which powers were at work here. He no longer wanted to be the plaything of the secret rulers of the city, so he brought together a group of specialists from among his former allies—and also his former opponents—who were prepared to oppose the supernatural threat.

The Nightguard ("Nachtgarde" in German) consists of former agents and mercenaries who have joined forces to keep the excesses of Berlin's supernatural creatures at bay. Through their former professions, they are perfectly trained and are pros at staying hidden. In addition, through contacts and old connections, they've been able to gather a large arsenal of high-tech equipment, weapons, and explosives. Organized in small, secretive cells, perfectly trained and well-equipped, the Nightguard agents are ready to take quick and hard action against any type of monster.

The shadowy war between Night and Power brought the hunters of the Nightguard on the scene—mortals who eventually forced both warring factions into a tenuous ceasefire. The Nightguard targeted both the Nosferatu and the Chess Club and sent a clear message to the respective leaders: either they would settle their conflict and stay out of the mortals' concerns, or the Nightguard would finally eliminate them with military precision. Both sides took the threat seriously, and the clashes ended. The Nightguard still exists, keeping an eye on Berlin's underworld, only to strike when its inhabitants dare to leave the shadows too much.

### WILD

The Wild Faction seems to remain in the background in Berlin. When the city was divided and isolated by the Berlin Wall, the fae left the city as the bleak, constrained situation seemed to drain them of their magic. During the last decades, some fae returned and now enjoy the wild potential and constant change of the city. Most of them keep a low profile as both Night and Power factions would like to enlist them as allies—or target them as enemies.

Although the fae don't appear to play a significant role in city politics, there are rumors that an ancient fairy noble house is planning to establish itself in the city and claim some ancestral rights. These rumors are unsubstantiated as yet, and the whole story may be some attempt at misdirection by another faction. There is the urban legend that the power of the Wild led to the fall of the Berlin Wall.

Although the fae are rare, many demonic creatures walk the streets dressed in human flesh. Since finding a suitable human body in a metropolis like Berlin is easy, they are literally legion. At first it was the experiments of mad cultists who brought beings from foreign dimensions into our world and bound them to physical bodies. Over time the barrier between the worlds became thinner and the demons came of their own accord.

While the name suggests the contrary, the Legion is far from a united force—it's primarily a label the Chess Club gave them. Each of these creatures follows its own vices and lusts and enjoys what the city has to offer to sate its perverse hunger. To outsiders, it seems that the demons can each be correlated to one of the seven deadly sins; for the Legion itself this classification seems to be irrelevant.

During the war between Night and Power after the reunification, the Chess Club summoned more packs of these beings into our world to use them as shock troops against the undead servants of the Nosferatu. But the Legion was not bound to the Chess Club, so the Nosferatu were able to offer them temptations they couldn't resist. Soon the Legion waged a proxy war for both sides. Some claim that the Legion didn't care against who they fought for and who their targets were as long as they could collect the souls of other supernatural beings and wreak havoc. The massive collateral damage caused by the Legion's fights finally brought the Night Guard on the scene, forcing Nosferatu and the Chess Club to a ceasefire and thus ending the Legion's excesses.

For members of the Legion, Berlin is a great playground full of people to seduce, corrupt, and hunt—and they are trying to tip the city to a dark side...

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## MAJOR CHARACTER PROFILES

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### THE PALE EMPRESS (NIGHT)

Nobody calls the leader of the night faction in Berlin by her name—either she is addressed by her subordinates as “her sovereignty”, or she is called the Pale Empress behind her back. Only her innermost circle knows her personally—and getting an audience with her is either a special distinction or a death sentence.

The Pale Empress is a powerful necromancer. She is said to have survived centuries as an undead. It’s unquestionable that she has the ghosts of the city firmly under control and that the other children of the Night are also her subordinates.

The Pale Empress is greedy for power: she will not rest until the entire shadow world of Berlin obeys her will. She learned the hard way that the Chess Club is very good at guessing her strategies and that, despite their mortality, the Nightguard is perfectly equipped to wage war against the Night. Whoever helps her can be sure of her generosity—but nobody should make the mistake of ignoring her orders...

### WALTER SCHMIED (POWER)

Mr. Schmied is almost as inconspicuous as his name. Small, a little overweight, with dwindling hair and glasses that went out of fashion 20 years ago, he seems utterly insignificant. Yet his actions often appear to catalyze far-reaching changes. Nobody knows his true goals, but he claims that Berlin is a nexus of fate and that his mission is to guide the city through some cataclysmic events.

Some mockingly call him “The Chosen” and think he’s just lucky. While Mr. Schmied often appears to be a calm and inconspicuous man, he can be very unforgiving and seems to enjoy the power he has over other people. Since he knows the rituals to sense and change the threads of fate, his vindictiveness makes him a very dangerous person.

### ALBERICH (MORTALITY)

Only the man with the code name Alberich knows which side he worked for as an agent during the Cold War. The former agent, now approaching retirement age, founded the Nightguard and coordinates all its activities. He’s still physically fit, but his best years are past, so he pulls the strings as a strategist in the background, leaving the fieldwork to others. He keeps an eye on the activities of the monsters of Berlin, organizes equipment and resources, and, if necessary, sends agents of the Nightguard to solve problems the hard way.

If the Pale Empress or the Chess Club knew how to get to Alberich, both sides would gladly take him out. But the former agent has survived more than one assassination attempt in the last few decades, and the people who ordered these attacks have always paid a high price. For the moment, his opponents leave Alberich untouched.

### **MOLOCH (WILD)**

Even though the entire Legion is feared, the name Moloch makes even the most powerful beings of Berlin tremble. In the body of a gigantic, overweight man with stringy hair and sickly grey skin, Moloch is an entity whose thirst for violence is only surpassed by his insatiable hunger. No one in Berlin matches his sheer strength and brutality. There are countless stories from the nights of the shadow war in which Moloch slaughtered dozens of Nosferatu. Moloch's approach knows no subtlety, and he loves to show off his raw power. His reputation for literally tearing his opponents to pieces and devouring parts of them alive has ensured that so far no one has attempted to collect the bounty allegedly placed on him.

### **THE ANTIQUARIAN (INDEPENDENT)**

If you're dealing with magicians, undead, and other monsters, you better keep your true name a secret; the antiquarian strictly follows this rule. For many years, her predecessor was a firm fixture in certain circles of Berlin and he was known for being able to obtain the most unusual relics and oldest books—for the right price. So, it was surprising when a few months ago the small, dusty shop in a quiet alley had a new owner. The young woman who continues the business also claims all the debts owed to her predecessor.

On the other hand, she doesn't feel responsible for his outstanding debts. Even though she offers the same services as her predecessor, her customers have to renegotiate with her, and she is much more uncompromising about the prices of her services. She has no outright enemies, but only because she offers an essential service to the supernatural inhabitants of Berlin.

### **NEMO (THE COLLECTIVE)**

Some time ago, Nemo attracted the attention of the other powers in Berlin. The attractive and friendly man, who is always well-dressed and in a good mood, is the mouthpiece of a group that calls itself the Collective. Nemo represents the Collective's interests to the other factions—the Collective itself remains independent. He conducts negotiations so the Collective and the other factions don't get in each other's way. Nemo is always understanding and willing to compromise, yet he has always succeeded in achieving the Collective's goals.

The Collective is a relatively unknown new factor in Power that has gained a foothold in Berlin. The members of the Collective appear to be normal people. Their only peculiarity is that they've lost their individual personality and are permeated by the common consciousness of the Collective. Basically, the members of the Collective are an entity that has control over a multitude of bodies.



# THREATS

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## BOOK WAR

The antiquarian has a special book: the *Liber Obscurum*, which is said to be a powerful, demonic grimoire. Walter Schmied had requested the predecessor of the antiquarian to procure the book, but his successor doesn't feel bound by the commission and is willing to sell the book to the highest bidder.

### Custom Moves

**The Price is High:** When you **unleash an attack**, **escape a situation**, or **figure someone out** using the *Liber Obscurum*, mark corruption and give the book a Debt to take a 10+ instead of rolling.

**Power from the Dark Side:** As long as you own the *Liber Obscurum*, you can mark two additional corruption advances (beyond your limit) to Take a Corruption Move from another Archetype. If you lose the *Liber Obscurum* and have more corruption advances than your playbook permits, you become a Threat.

### Countdown Clock

**3:00** - The antiquarian offers the *Liber Obscurum* for sale. The Pale Empress makes her bid offering protection from the Nosferatu, undead servants, and a considerable sum of money. Walter Schmied demands that the antiquarian sell the book to him, which she refuses to do.

**6:00** - Furious at the other bidders, Walter Schmied hires a few Legion thugs to retrieve the tome. The antiquarian narrowly escapes the attack.

**9:00** - Walter Schmied promises a generous reward to the one who obtains the book for him. A bounty hunt begins throughout the city.

**10:00** - The antiquarian faces Schmied in a duel. Using the grimoire, the antiquarian obliterates him. The magicians who accompanied Schmied commit suicide for reasons unknown.

**11:00** - The antiquarian declines the Empress's offer; the Empress resorts to death threats and demands that the grimoire be surrendered to her immediately. Tempted by its power, the antiquarian uses the grimoire once more and shatters the ritual bindings between the Nosferatu and their enslaved spirits. The undead and spirit slaves go berserk and rebel against their former masters.

**12:00** - Corrupted by the whispers from the grimoire promising absolute power, the antiquarian targets Moloch to establish dominance over the Wild faction, too. The battle devastates a huge area, but spells from the grimoire have no visible effect on the demon. Moloch consumes both the antiquarian and the *Liber Obscurum*. With the power from the tome, he becomes the dominant factor in Berlin.

# TIME OF REVELATIONS

Portents of a dramatic change begin to appear everywhere in Berlin. Divination magic indicates that a chosen one is about to appear who will be vital for the fate of all the factions in the city. The hunt for “Fate’s Chosen” begins as the different factions either want to control him or to destroy him.

## Custom Moves

**Portents Dreaming:** If you try to divine the city’s portents, roll with Mind. On a 10+, you get vital insights into the fate of Berlin; take +1 forward on your next three Faction Moves. On a 7-9, you see glimmers of potential futures; take +1 forward to your next Faction Move only. On a miss, your visions drive you to darker deeds before you can stop yourself; the MC will tell you what sins you commit.

## Countdown Clock

**3:00** – Portents begin to appear throughout the city promising a chosen one who will drastically change the fate of Berlin’s factions—at first these portents are small coincidences which only a few sensitive people notice. Within weeks the signs become more prominent. This leads to discussions on social media and then to articles in the paranormal press.

**6:00** – Oracles confirm that “Fate’s Chosen” will appear in the city. While the Chess Club prepares for the arrival, the other factions are not convinced.

**9:00** – A small group with Power, calling themselves Fate’s Children, begin preaching of the arrival of Fate’s Chosen at the Siegessäule (the victory column monument). The other factions begin to investigate the situation.

**10:00** – Visions about Fate’s Chosen reach a fever pitch. A prominent wizard is found dead; his notes describe a presence so strong that his magical essence was torn from his soul when he tried to investigate the phenomenon. The Chess Club begins to confer with their allies in other factions, looking for deeper insights.

**11:00** – The Pale Empress offers a considerable bounty on Fate’s Chosen. As stories about people dreaming of Fate’s Chosen and the Siegessäule appear in newspapers, tourists and esoterics flock to the monument. The Night and Wild factions clash, killing several innocents. The Nightguard threatens to destroy anyone from the other factions who approaches the monument.

**12:00** – On the day Fate’s Chosen is prophesized to appear, agents from all factions congregate to the Siegessäule. Violent clashes occur. The conflict gets out of control, resulting in a mass panic. A teenage girl publishes evidence of the supernatural factions on social media. Fate’s Children claim her as Fate’s Chosen. Agents from several factions target her, but all assassination attempts fail and the agents vanish without a trace. She begins to amass followers under the name of “The Children’s Crusade,” and starts to order them to act against the supernatural from unknown locations...

## I AM NOBODY

The Collective—led by Nemo—is recruiting new members. As rumors spread of supernaturals being forcefully assimilated, the other factions are confronted with a powerful entity who tries to claim Berlin and all its inhabitants as its own.

### Custom Moves

**Double Agent:** When you try to unmask an NPC you suspect to be taken over by the Collective by spying on them, roll with Mind. On a hit, the MC reveals if the NPC has been absorbed. On a 7-9, you attract too much attention; give the NPC a Debt or explain yourself in full, your choice. On a miss your snooping attracts the attention of a third party who is doing some snooping of their own.

**Finding Nemo:** When you follow a Collective drone through the city, roll with Spirit. On a 10+, you reach the Collective's central hive without being noticed. On a 7-9, the drone catches wind they are being followed, but don't know for sure it's you. On a miss, the drone leads you into a trap.

### Countdown Clock

**3:00** – Rumors spread about someone calling himself Nemo who is successfully converting people for the so-called Collective. While Power plans to approach Nemo to enlist him for the faction, the other factions deem him irrelevant.

**6:00** – The Collective claims several influential bosses from organized crime. Everyone under the influence of the Collective begins to work as a drone for the goals of the faction. Nemo vanishes.

**9:00** – Nemo directly approaches the leaders of the different factions, offering for them to join the Collective. All factions decline, but Nemo is always prepared with enough support from his drones to walk away unharmed from these confrontations. Afterward, Nemo begins to aggressively expand its power base by attacking the other faction's interests.

**10:00** – The Pale Empress declares a shadow war on the Collective, leading to violence in the city. The Collective assimilates the majority of the Nightguard and begins targeting the Chess Club which was able to divine that Nemo is the home of the Collective's hive mind.

**11:00** – Collective drones actively hunt everyone from the supernatural community of Berlin. The survivors ally against the common enemy, but the Collective seems nearly unstoppable. No one can stand against Nemo's power.

**12:00** – The Collective assimilates so many drones that it's impossible to stop the new faction. All former factions have suffered massive losses, pushing them to the brink of extinction. Instead of expanding even further and wiping out the other factions, the Collective begins to withdraw and consolidate its power base as several drones go into hibernation.

## AUTHOR'S NOTE

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When I read *Dark Streets*, I found the various cities and their different stories fascinating. Although London was presented as a European city, the book focused on North America, and—in my view—a similar entry for a German city was clearly missing.

With Hamburg, Munich, and the vast tapestry of Ruhrgebiet cities, Germany offered several worthy candidates for *Urban Shadows*. But in the end, Berlin seemed the most suitable candidate for a new city guide.

I've visited Berlin regularly for many years, and I am always fascinated by how much the city has changed—and is still changing. The one constant about Berlin is that it is in a state of continual change—sometimes for the better and sometimes for the worse. It is a city full of contrasts, a place where dramatic juxtapositions are located within just a few streets. Berlin is the kind of city where I have always felt supernatural factions could be at work behind the scenes, hiding within webs of intrigue and fighting for dominance.

## CREDITS

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