

THE LIVE-ACTION GAMING MAGAZINE

Mind's Eye Theatre™ JOURNAL

BECAUSE THE MIND'S EYE NEVER BLINKS



ISSUE no.6

Mind's Eye Theatre™ JOURNAL

BECAUSE THE MIND'S EYE NEVER BLINKS

WELCOME TO THE
MIND'S EYE THEATRE JOURNAL,
THE MAGAZINE THAT PICKS UP WHERE OTHER MIND'S
EYE PUBLICATIONS LEAVE OFF.

THIS ISSUE PRESENTS:

- THE SECOND PART OF MET'S LOOK AT
WRAITH: THE GREAT WAR
- WEREWOLVES IN THE DARK AGES
- YULAN-JIN AND DHAMPYRS
- WORLD OF DARKNESS FICTION
- TOPICAL ISSUES ON LIVE-ACTION ROLEPLAYING
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Mind's Eye Theatre

THE LIVE-ACTION GAMING MAGAZINE



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JOURNAL

BECAUSE THE MIND'S EYE NEVER BLINKS



CREDITS

Authors: Bruce Baugh, Richard E. Dansky, Laura Hanson, David Kizzia, Cynthia Summers, Peter Woodworth

Developer: Carl Bowen

Editor: Richard Ruane

Art Director: Aaron Voss

Photographer: Lora Robles

Front and Back Cover Design: Pauline Benney

Layout and Typesetting: Pauline Benney

WHAT YOU'VE MISSED

Issue #3

- Live-action rules for playing the Thallain of the Shadow Court
- World of Darkness Fiction
- A human's perspective on the terrors that stalk the World of Darkness
- A look ahead at one of the most eagerly anticipated **Mind's Eye Theatre** releases of the year

Issue #4

- The secrets of the wraiths of the Jade Empire.
- The conclusion of the *Mayday!* Chronicle.
- Live-Action **Mage** rules... sort of.

Issue #5

- The first part of **MET's** look at **Wraith: The Great War**.
- A look at the Bunyip for **Laws of the Wyld West**.
- The *einherjar* of the Dark Ages.



735 PARK NORTH BLVD.
SUITE 128
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USA

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WELCOME!

Hello again, everybody, and welcome to the sixth issue of the **MET Journal**! For those of you who are new to the publication, let me take a second to acquaint you with just what you've got here. (For those of you who already know, you may skip ahead to *The Current Thinking*.)

The **Journal** is a quarterly publication dedicated to filling in the gaps in your White Wolf LARP environment. We offer rules for new character types, original story lines to work into your chronicles, guides for keeping your games under control and running smoothly and rules updates you won't find in any other **Mind's Eye** release. Plus, you'll find answers to the questions that have plagued you, original World of Darkness fiction and columns from people who've been LARPing or working here at White Wolf (or both) for years.

In this issue, we finish taking a look at the wraithly environment of the Great War era, including rules for Maelstrom effects and making Mortwights playable characters. You'll also find advice from the **Mind's Eye Theatre** line developer and rules for creating Yulan-Jin and Dhamphyr characters for your **Laws of the East** chronicle. And that's just a sample of what's in store for you here. We'll also take a look at what you've missed in previous issues (if you're joining us late) and what to expect in the future of **Mind's Eye Theatre** and White Wolf in general.

In future issues of the **Journal**, we'll present some more of the material that had to be left out of **Laws of the East**, tips on acting and some expanded information on the hideous fomori.

And you can help make the **Journal** even better. Send us letters on your opinions about the state of live-action roleplaying today. Send us questions about the features and rules you see here, as well as notes about the broken rules you come across in different **MET** publications. Send us horror stories about games gone wrong and how your player characters fixed them. We're interested in all aspects of live-action roleplaying, and we want to know what you think.

Stick around. The **Journal** is on the cutting edge of the live-action genre; we've got something for everybody. And if we don't have it yet, let us know. We'll get it for you.

Carl Bowen, Developer
carl@white-wolf.com

White Wolf

Attn: Mind's Eye Theatre Journal Developer

735 Park North Blvd, Suite 128

Clarkston, GA 30021

USA



THE CURRENT THINKING

*It hasn't been long since the revised edition of **Laws of the Night** has hit the shelves, and already the deluge has begun! So, in the interests of world peace (or at least, peace in your game), here are the answers to some questions that have started cropping up.*

Q: I don't like the new Virtue system, where vampires can be sent to frenzy just by lighting a cigarette. What can I do about this?

A: First, remember that any stimulus under the vampire's control doesn't cause a Virtue Test. Therefore, you needn't make a *Courage* test just to light your own cigarette or throw a *Flame Bolt*.

Second, the circumstances for Virtue Tests are determined by the Narrator or Storyteller. A player can call for his character to make a Virtue Test if he thinks that his character would be affected by a situation (testing for frenzy due to an insult, for example), which is recommended as good roleplaying. It's up to Narrators to keep players honest if some big-time scene breaks out, such as pillars of flame landing in your character's yard. Of course, chances are good that there's already a Narrator on hand if there are pillars of flame landing in your yard....

Last, if you think that it's just too easy for vampires to lose control, and your game has degenerated into a mass of screaming, frenzied Cainites, you can strip out the stimuli for one- and two-Trait *Self-Control/Instinct* and *Courage* Virtue Tests. Therefore, characters will only frenzy when something really egregious comes up. This mechanic does numb the "personal horror" angle of *Vampire* a bit, so be careful with it. Under such a system, vampires will be likely to frenzy or enter *Rötschrek* only when they face direct sunlight, starvation and the sight of blood, or actual fire damage. It's important to make sure that the *Morality* scales stay intact just to keep people honest to their *Humanity/Path* rating.

Q: I noticed that characters never suffer a loss of Virtue Traits under the system presented. What should I do if a player is buying up his *Conscience/Conviction*, *Self-Control/Instinct* and *Courage* to maximum levels, since they never drop?

A: At his or her discretion, the Storyteller may *always* choose to strip a character of a Virtue Trait for particularly severe events. A vampire who suffers too many shattering defeats of his *Courage* may lose a *Courage* Trait permanently. This loss is part and parcel of the degeneration into inhumanity and the fight with the Beast. However, losing Virtue Traits is not a common event, since it can easily wreck characters rapidly if it occurs too often. At the very least, a player should have to lose a Virtue Test, risk a retest and lose that as well before having the possibility of losing a permanent Virtue Trait.

If you do decide to strip a character's Virtue Trait, then you probably shouldn't inflict the temporary *Derangement*, just to keep the player from getting *totally* hammered. Note that if a character is stripped down to having no Virtue Traits in a given Virtue, then the player can't even enter Virtue Challenges of that type. He suffers the appropriate effects automatically. In such a case, the *Derangement* assigned should probably be permanent (although it could be overcome normally).



Furthermore, improvement of Virtues is a long and difficult road for vampires. Never allow a vampire to improve a Virtue without extensive roleplaying, soul-searching and exploration of his or her values, convictions and inner strength. As a guideline, don't let a player increase a character's Virtue more than once every three or four games, and your standards of roleplay to justify improvement of a Virtue should get stricter and sterner for higher Virtue-Trait totals.

Q: If a player ties on a Virtue Test, what happens?

A: The player is considered the defender in a Virtue Test. Thus, if the player ties and his Virtue Traits equal the difficulty of the Virtue Test, then the character does not suffer degeneration/ frenzy/ Röttschrek, but the player does expend the temporary Virtue Trait he bid. The character does not lose permanent Traits or gain any Negative Traits.

Q: Can I use a sword or gun in conjunction with the *Sepulchre Necromancy* power *Torment*, since it's a physical attack?

A: No. *Torment* is a spiritual attack that uses a physical strike as a sort of focus. The actual strength or type of the necromancer's blow has no effect, because channeled spiritual energy is what damages the wraith. Thus, normal weapons cannot grant bonus Traits to such an attack. However, the vampire can include any additional Traits gained through the use of Blood.

Q: Speaking of swords, where are their stats?

A: You're playing modern vampires, right? What the heck are you doing carrying around a broadsword?

Oh, very well. If you must:

Broadsword— Three or four feet long, designed for chopping and with a chisel edge for hacking through armor, a broadsword is a heavy, no-nonsense weapon that will definitely raise eyebrows in a modern setting. Police in particular enjoy having chats with people who carry around these weapons. ("You put down the sword, and I'll put down the gun.") Still, Inquisitors and the like find them handy in hunting vampires, as long as the weapons are well-concealed.

Bonus Traits: 3

Negative Traits: *Heavy*

Concealability: Trenchcoat (maybe)

Damage: Two health levels

Availability: Any. Be warned, though, that most over-the-counter swords are not battle-worthy. Getting an honest-to-goodness, real combat sword may cost several hundred dollars.

Q: Can I ignore equipment's negative Traits of *Heavy* or *Bulky* with my *Potence*?

A: Heck no. Regardless of whether you can swing a sword harder, it's still got its own balance and mass. Armor is bulky not only because of its weight but also because it slows you down and may sometimes restrict movement in certain directions (although not nearly as much as some people would think; armor that kept you from moving would be worthless in combat, after all). Also remember that vampiric Disciplines don't necessarily obey the laws of physics in any case; supernatural powers are quirky like that.

Q: I'm confused about the compressed blood scale. How does it work, and why would I use it?

A: The compressed blood scale is designed to speed up play and make it easier to keep track of Blood Traits. After all, it can get annoying to carry around twelve little cards labeled "Blood." The compressed scale lets you simplify this system.



When using the compressed scale, all Blood and Willpower Traits are halved from the normal scale. Thus, a thirteenth-generation vampire, who would normally have 10 Blood Traits and two Willpower Traits, instead has five Blood Traits and one Willpower Trait.

A couple of things to keep in mind with the compressed scale: First, all Blood Trait expenditures are also halved, rounded up. Thus, using the *Feral Claws* Discipline, which normally costs one Blood Trait, still costs a single Blood Trait. Healing an aggravated wound costs two Blood Traits (half of three is one and a half, rounded up to two). Healing a normal wound still costs one Blood Trait. Waking up in the evening costs one Blood Trait. You get the idea.

The limits on expended Blood Traits are also halved in the compressed scale. Therefore, only an eighth or better generation vampire can spend more than one Blood Trait in a turn.

If you use the compressed Blood/Willpower scale, you should probably also use a compressed Health scale. Under that system, all vampires have one level each of Healthy, Bruised, Wounded and Incapacitated, after which they're in torpor or they hit Final Death. *Fortitude* and *Potence* work normally, but all weapons only cause half damage, rounded up, in such a system. Therefore, most attacks do only a single level of damage.

Q: How many Blood Traits do mortals have?

A: A mortal has 10 Blood Traits under the normal blood system. Each one removed causes a health level of lethal damage to the mortal (and yes, this injury will kill a mortal before the individual completely runs out of blood). If you use the compressed scale, then mortals have five Blood Traits, but each one lost still causes one level of lethal damage. Remember that mortals take additional damage when Giovanni vampires feed from them.

Ghouls have normal Blood Traits like humans, although they replace one of their human Blood Traits with a Trait of ghoul blood in order to become ghouls in the first place. This Trait of blood can power Disciplines and the like, although its use causes injury to the ghoul just as if the blood had been lost through other means. Ghouls can still be overfed; see *Liber des Goules* for ideas on giving a ghoul extra blood to convert his human Blood Traits into ghoulish Blood Traits.

Q: What are the relative strengths/ speeds/ endurance levels of the various levels of *Celerity*, *Fortitude* and *Potence*?

A: Try this for comparison:

Power level	<i>Celerity</i>	<i>Fortitude</i>	<i>Potence</i>
Basic	Outrun a bike	Take a punch	Throw a large television
Intermediate	Outrun a horse	Take a baseball bat	Throw a refrigerator
Advanced	Outrun a car	Take a blowtorch	Throw a small car

Q: I'm having trouble with the *Vanish from Mind's Eye* power of *Obfuscate*. It's cumbersome to test against everyone every time I want to say a simple sentence!

A: You always risk detection if you interact with your surroundings while *Obfuscated*. If you need a simpler system, you can simply expend a Mental Trait each time you speak a full sentence while *Obfuscated*, as long as you have *Vanish*



from *Mind's Eye* or better. However, this system is up to the approval of your Storyteller, and it applies to everyone — including those pesky enemies you've been trying to catch.

Q: The new limits on *Thaumaturgy*, particularly the *Path of Blood*, seem pretty restrictive. What can I do to make sure that *Thaumaturgy* still has utility?

A: *Thaumaturgy* is a powerful Discipline, but its strength lies in its flexibility. If you are really having a problem with the fact that *Potency of Blood* is now limited so that a 13th generation vampire can't pretend to be fifth, that *Theft of Vitae* can no longer rip away enough blood to keep a vampire from using *Celerity* or that *Cauldron of Blood* can no longer kill someone in a single blow, you can always increase or waive the limits on expenditures for *Thaumaturgy*. Don't do so without a careful look at the consequences across the game, though. *Thaumaturgy* should not create a "one-shot kill" any more than any other power. Remember, too, that *Thaumaturgy's* success in tabletop relies on the rolls of the player. A *Vampire: The Masquerade* player cannot expect to automatically tear away 10 blood points from an individual, and the live-action version is no different. At most, we recommend an upper limit of five Traits on the various limited expenditures, unless you want the Tremere to get really gross. (*Cauldron of Blood* in particular, with its aggravated damage, can be extremely dangerous if misused.)

Q: The example of breaking *Obfuscate* with *Auspex* is confusing. The example in the *Obfuscate* Discipline says a one-for-one Trait bonus to the higher Discipline, but the description only gives two Traits for a character using *Vanish from Mind's Eye* against *Heightened Senses*, which would be a difference of three levels. How should this work?

A: You get a two-Trait bonus for each *power class* that exceeds your opponent's. That is, if you have the Intermediate power and your opponent has the Basic power, you get two extra Traits against him. If you have the Advanced power and your opponent has the Basic power, you get four extra Traits. These Traits cannot be used for bidding, but they can be used for resolving ties and for calculating overbids.

Q: Now that *Thaumaturgy* and *Necromancy* rituals cost Experience Traits, what should I do with characters who already have lots of rituals?

A: Don't worry about it. You can always adjudicate that a character can learn a ritual through hard effort and study with appropriate Influence. If you want to be strict, you can charge such players a small fraction of their earned experience (say, one point each month) until they're "paid up." If they complain about it, point out that you're not taking away all of their experience, and that they have already had all of these rituals for free for some time.

Q: The *Thanatosis* power of *Withering* makes it impossible to use *Celerity*, *Fortitude* and *Potence* if it strikes the head. Shouldn't it affect Mental Disciplines and not Physical ones?

A: Whoops! That sentence should read "Doing so kills mortals instantly and causes vampires to suffer the Negative Traits *Oblivious* and *Witless* in addition to rendering them unable to use any Disciplines except *Celerity*, *Fortitude* and *Potence*." Note that a vampire with a withered head can still use other non-Discipline powers such as healing or boosting Physical Traits.

Q: The *Summon* power is causing me problems. People are summoning their enemies from several miles away, and forcing them to travel during the day, killing them! What should I do?



A: The *Summon* power dissipates at dawn at the victim's location. Also, the power cannot place someone in a dangerous situation. A summoned individual will take steps to avoid danger and mitigate risk, and the summoning is broken if there is no way to reach the summoner except through dangerous or fatal territory (such as walking through flame or traveling through gang territory alone and unarmed).

Q: The suggested Ability retests don't make sense for some of the Disciplines. Why would I use *Leadership* instead of *Intimidation*, for instance, with *Dread Gaze*?

A: At your Storyteller's option, you can specify different Abilities for each Discipline, but doing so gets nightmarishly complex and requires each player to remember exactly what Ability is used for a retest with each level of every Discipline. If you do so, we recommend that you make up cards for the Disciplines, so that the players can remember what Ability is appropriate. In any case, no Discipline should get a retest from more than one Ability. You shouldn't be able to use *Leadership* or *Intimidation* with *Dread Gaze*, for instance. Use one or the other for all uses of the power.

Q: Where are the Sabbat Paths of Enlightenment? Kiasyd? Children of Osiris? Ahrimanes?

A: Later book. We only had so many pages.

Q: The Disciplines section mentions "eight common Disciplines," but only lists seven. Which one is missing?

A: *Auspex*.

Q: How do caitiff work in the new version?

A: A caitiff picks three Disciplines as primary Disciplines. Unless the Storyteller says otherwise, these should come from the "common eight." The caitiff advances in these at "clan costs." Caitiff cannot begin play with Status, and they generally are of very weak Generation. More information on caitiff will be forthcoming in a later book.

Q: How do I use other *Mind's Eye Theatre* games with the new rules?

A: If you use the compressed scales, your games should work just fine. Under such a system, everybody keeps the same health levels, and the relative balance of power is maintained.

Should you use the full Blood/ Willpower/ Health scales, you'll need to accommodate with the other games. Werewolves, changelings and mortals should use the health level scales listed in the revised edition rules. (Wraiths always had their own Corpus scale, and it doesn't change.) Their Trait ratings can stay the same; a vampire with five Blood Traits is still in trouble when running into a werewolf with four Rage Traits. Under this system, a werewolf heals one lethal or bashing health level of damage *every turn that he's not in a challenge*.

Use your best judgment when arbitrating the effects of powers. *Razor Claws*, for instance, probably stays the same, but some of the higher-level Gifts might automatically do two levels of damage in the full-scale system.

Q: On page 111, time in involuntary torpor is measured in game sessions based on Morality. On page 199, there's a chart with concrete (generally longer) times. Which is it?

A: Use the chart on page 111 so that you can scale torpor times according to your own game's schedule.



Q: Willpower must be spent to attempt a challenge if you don't have the appropriate Ability. Does this include challenges like Brawl and Melee?

A: No; you only spend Willpower to attempt a challenge without the Ability if the Ability would normally be required for the action. You can always fire a gun, swing a sword or attempt a similar action. You can't necessarily read Sanskrit without the right training.

Q: Under the Awareness Ability, it mentions using retests for the Ability with the Occult Ability. Why would someone retest an Ability with a different Ability?

A: This is probably a little unclear. When you use the Awareness Ability, you're sensitive to unusual supernatural things going on in your vicinity. However, you may not actually know what they are without the Occult Ability. Thus, your Awareness may tell you that something magical just happened, but you'd need Occult Ability to recognize it as, say, *Thaumaturgy* if you didn't actually see exactly what happened or weren't familiar with the effect in question.

Q: The Flaw Intolerance shows up under the example of character creation on p. 129. Where is it?

A: Technically, this Flaw no longer exists. However, the Storyteller may always adjudicate the use of additional Merits and Flaws.

DEADGUY SPEAKS

by Richard E. Dansky

THE ROYAL SOCIETY FOR
STACKING PROPOSALS ON
TOP OF OTHER PROPOSALS

OR

WHY I HAD FOUR MILLION MAGE SUBMISSIONS IN MY OFFICE

Now that Jess and Carl have opened the can of worms I spent four years trying to bury in ferroconcrete, I suppose that now is the best time possible to shed some light on what some called the most enduring mystery of my tenure developing *Mind's Eye Theatre*¹. The most enduring one above and beyond, "Cripes, why did they give you the job? Were there no trained lemurs available?" that is.

No, the one thing everyone wanted to know about my work on *MET* was, oddly enough, the whereabouts of the one book I never did tackle, a book that's absence mandated that *MET* would never be a letter-perfect translation of the tabletop *World of Darkness*.

In the chat rooms, on the newsgroups and forums, at conventions and in disturbingly phrased phone messages left on my intermittently checked voice mail, the question was always the same: Where's *MET Mage*²?

After all, it would seem like an obvious next book at any given juncture. All the other *World of Darkness* games had gotten their translations, even that icky *Wraith* thing³. Why not *Mage*, which was more popular, and quite likely to sell rather well as a result? Why was that rat bastard Dansky so intent on never, ever doing live-action *Mage*?

Well, for the first time, you're going to get the real, honest-to-Murgatroyd answer, right here in these pages. At last, the terrible secret that swallowed so many submissions is about to be revealed. The time for secrecy and discretion is over. You can learn the truth now. You're ready.

The truth is, soylent green is made of people. Oh, hang on, that's not it. Sorry about that.

The real reason I never developed *Laws of Magic* (or *Laws of Magick* or *Ascension* or *Laws of My God I Hope For Once in Their Bloody Lives Our Artists Don't Feel Compelled to Turn in Shots of Bare Breasts for a Book with a Purple Cover, Because I Really Don't Want to Have to Try to Explain this One to the 700 Club and My Mother*) was always a very simple one. And it wasn't one that anyone ever guessed.

Oh, sure, there were theories. There were guesses. There were cries of outrage⁴ about how all of those umpty-gazillion live-action *Mage* players were being cruelly ignored out of sheer spite⁵. In truth, I spent a not-so-brief period collecting various conspiracy and other theories as to why the book never got made. I heard that then-*Mage* developer Phil Brucato refused to allow it. I heard that Phil wanted to develop it and that I wouldn't let him. I heard that people at *White Wolf* knew that various folks of the neo-pagan persuasion would curse us if the book ever saw print and that we were determined to save our own skins by killing the book. I heard that various branches of the Religious Right were getting ready to march on the *White Wolf* offices like extras

from *Young Frankenstein*, waving their torches and demanding that the book be burned. I even heard from one sadly deluded chap who dug up a fossilized April Fools' Day post wherein I promised live-action tantric sex rules for **Mage**, complete with a bound Paradox spirit and one pair of edible undies⁶. The poor guy thought that I was A) serious and B) about to run afoul of various federal statutes by doing so.

In short, I heard every possible reason for my refusal to produce **Laws of the Purple Cover** on demand short of someone insisting that the Secret Masters had forbidden me to do so. After all, with all of those compelling reasons (or "REA\$ON\$" as some not-terribly-clever folks felt the need to phrase it) to do the book, there had to be some horrible secret behind the fact that it wasn't seeing print.

Now, to their eternal credit, some folks out there decided to put their money where their collective mouth (and good Lord, isn't that an image out of Bosch?) was, and submit proposals for rules sets for **MET Mage**. Sending in a submission to a publisher is a work of utmost bravery, and I have respect for anyone who dares to attempt it. After all, it's one thing to have your friends tell you how great your ideas are or your game is, but it's quite another to put it out there under the cold, critical eye of someone who doesn't know you from Adam (and who has absolutely no compunctions about telling you that the 400-page submission you've spent two years cobbling together is Not Good Enough). It's hard, putting your work out where you can't be there to shepherd it, to smooth over the rough spots and explain the places where you might have been unclear. Once you put the manuscript in the envelope, it's out of your hands. It stands or falls on its own merits, and it goes before a judge as legendarily harsh as Minos or Rhadamanthus — the developer. It takes a lot of courage to submit your work to an impartial judging from someone who is bound to be — because of time constraints, if nothing else — swift, merciless and impartial. Furthermore, by submitting your work, you're implicitly accepting the responsibility of writing the book should your proposal be accepted, and as any professional writer can tell you, writing to deadline is hard, intense labor⁸. So those people who sent in proposals for their particular versions of **MET Mage** did and still do have my respect for making that attempt.

And so, the submissions came rolling in. Some were done in the format I'd requested a hundred times — cover letter, outline, writing sample, SASE — while some were complete manuscripts the size of the latest Clive Barker literary Dagwood. Some were incredibly professional, while others lacked basics like SASEs and cover letters or hadn't been proofread. Some were very good, some, well, weren't. A couple approached excellence. But every single one got rejected, put in the pile and turned over to my successors for their perusal when the time came to hand off the reins.

Why?

The answer to this long-running conundrum is, unfortunately, a blunt one. In so many words, none of them worked, and after certain incidents early in my tenure as **MET** developer, I swore that I was never going to let a book that didn't work — that would destroy more games than it would create — out with my name on it⁹. And so as each **MET Mage** submission came in, I dutifully unwrapped it, read it and then broke it.

Broke the rules, that is. Found ways in which the particular rules set could be contorted until it cried for its mama, and game-play went out the window. Then the submission would get put on the ferry to the Island of Misfit Toys, or more accurately, on top of the towering, teetering stack of unsuccessful **Mage MET** proposals, and wait for the next one to come along.

Unfortunately, most of the submissions came in sharing one fatal flaw — the assumption that since this particular batch of rules worked with a local group, it would work, period. Sadly, that was never the case.

The three main pitfalls of doing **MET Mage** were always playability, faithfulness and balance. The first was exemplified by the dreaded “I *Brutally* assault you/I *Wisely* teleport to Saturn” dilemma. To do **Mage** properly was to invite all sorts of incidents, transformations, teleportations and so on that the imagination was better suited to handle than the live-action arena¹⁰. If a proposal turned **Mage** loose in all of its wild, rambunctious glory, all Hell would no doubt break loose five minutes into the first session as characters turned other characters into lawn furniture, jaunted around the various levels of reality and otherwise made the Storyteller’s life something out of Dante’s best book.

Furthermore, there was always the matter of Paradox. Assigning it correctly would call for far too many Narrators — a one-to-one player/ staff ratio would have been optimal — lest players get away with vulgar murder (and magic) when no one was looking. On the flip side, some proposals did away with Paradox entirely as being too much trouble. These rules systems promised utter chaos. They also made rude gestures in the general direction of faithfulness, the second major hurdle any proposal would have to get across. After all, **Mage** without Paradox isn’t **Mage**. It’s a mid-period **Avengers** comic, with the pillars of heaven shaking on a regular basis because there isn’t anything in place to keep them from doing so.

Other proposals abandoned Spheres in favor of making an entirely rote-based system, which was, in my opinion, contrary to the spirit of the game. After all, **MET** has always been about translating existing material, not creating new things. Hacking major bits of the game system out would have, I felt, been rather contrary to that mission.

Finally, the question of balance always came up. Would some characters be too powerful or not powerful enough? Would everyone get a fair shake from the get-go? Moreover, would a live-action version of **Mage** play well with others? Would a single **Mage** character be able to walk into a **Masquerade** game and turn all of the elders into papasan chairs without working up a sweat, and was that fair to the **Vampire** players¹¹? For all of the insistence on pure venues here, there and everywhere, we all know that crossovers happen. Ten minutes after **Laws of Magick** hit the stands, *someone, somewhere* would stroll into an Elysium with a Euthanatos character and try to reduce everyone to little piles of dust just ‘cause he could. That sort of thing tends to distress players, and I always felt that distressing players unduly was a bad idea¹².

The real problem, however, ran a bit deeper. It ties into the same root reason that Justin Achilli’s eyes spit thin jets of blood every time someone sends in another proposal for **My Extremely Small Suburb by Night**, which features 35 vampires living in a bedroom community that sports two gas stations, a single strip mall and a high school that isn’t necessarily large enough to field a decent football team.

The thing that so many people forget when sending in proposals (and indeed, it’s almost heartbreaking sometimes to see the labor lavished on proposals for books that simply cannot see print) is that *the books have to be for everyone*. They can’t just be for “good roleplayers,” whoever that is. They can’t just be for people who play a certain style or people who know not to abuse the rules in a certain way because that’s not the way it works. Just as a would-be writer loses control of her submission the instant she puts it in the mail, the developer loses control of the book the instant it gets shipped out to stores and distributors and — *Deo prohibe* — players. That means that the book has to speak for itself. It has to cover all of the bases. It has to be useful from the get-go for everyone from the most immersive roleplayer to the rampaging gunbunny twink who wants to play a HIT-Mark just so he can blow stuff up real good. The book has to be accessible to everyone

and useful to everyone, and it has to do that all at once so that if those two examples end up in the same game, they can play nice together. A book can't be designed for just some players. The notion of putting a snobbish disclaimer reading, "Buy this book only if you're a good roleplayer!" is beyond ludicrous. Instead, it has to be usable by everyone, so that anyone can get anything he wants from the setting and genre out of it.

So that meant that rules sets that were only good for small-troupe play had to go bye-bye. That meant that proposals that relied on superior roleplaying and personal assessments of Paradox had to go out the window because, let's face it, you may not cheat, but you know someone who does. It meant that systems that relied on too many Narrators or too many this or that had to be put aside. Most of all, it meant that games that worked perfectly for a particular group, with a particular Storyteller and Narrator staff, had to get chucked because you're just not going to get that dynamic anywhere else. What works perfectly for one game almost inevitably hits some bumpy spots with any other group of players because they don't play the way you do, and the delicate checks and balances that come from a tight-knit group with a guiding hand on the rules tiller just don't translate.

So that's the real reason I never did **Mage** for **MET**. It wasn't because the submissions were bad because many of them were quite good, and I could certainly see circumstances under which they'd work well. The trouble was I could never see them working quite well for *all* circumstances and, in the long run, that's what the book had to be in order to make it out the door. And since none of those submissions, and not even any combination of those submissions, was going to be able to be transformed into that sort of book, that's as far as the project went. Had a suitable proposal come in, I would have done it in a heartbeat¹³, but sadly, that was never the case.

And that, sad to say, is the truth of the matter. If folks really want, I'll swear up and down that it was alien mind control that made me not do it, but sad to say, it was a lot less complicated than that. Will there ever be an **MET Mage**? Who knows? I haven't seen the revised edition of **Mage** yet, and that just might make it possible. But that's the future; I'm talking about the past.

I know, the conspiracy theories were a lot more fun. But that's just who I am, the mean guy determined to ruin everyone's good time...

...at least, until I Wisely teleport to Saturn.

-the deadguy-

ENDNOTES

¹ No, it's not "Why did you spell that last word 'Theatre?' It looks kind of pretentious, man." Although I must admit, that one got asked a lot, too. (If you really must know, it was in place before I got there, and inertia is a powerful thing. I didn't dare change the name of the Angst stat in **Wraith**, either.)

² I was always tempted to answer "Poughkeepsie" when asked, but I realized that no one actually knows where Poughkeepsie is.

³ Go ahead. Comment. I dare you.

⁴ Mostly from the authors of **Mage MET** submissions, who made up a fairly significant market demographic by the time I hid myself to North Carolina.

⁵ Not true. Sheer spite takes effort, and I simply didn't have the energy for it.

⁶ You can find the post on DejaNews if you really feel like looking for it. I *think* it was funny, then.

⁷ One of the single most annoying habits of the gaming community, in my vitriolic and withered opinion, is the inane compulsion to replace every single "S" in a company's name with a "\$" as a representation of how T\$R or WWG\$ or \$JG (or whoever else) has Sold Out and is no longer concerned with anything but money. First of all, if anyone involved in the whole bloody gaming industry liked money that much, they wouldn't be in the bloody gaming industry in the first place. I'll clue you in on the worst-kept secret in the gaming field: IT DOESN'T PAY JACK. The day I left White Wolf after four years of service, I was making less than a starting assistant manager would have pulled down at the Quick Trip minimart down the road from the office. Yes, a few people *have* made nice piles for themselves in gaming, but the odds of doing so are slightly lower than the odds of you popping up on a network game show, kneeling Regis Philbin in the shorts between questions and absconding with the loot while the nation looks on in shocked dismay. Second of all, I've been a gamer of one stripe or another since the 1970s (back before they shipped dice in the D&D box), and I don't think I've gone a single week in the intervening 20 or so years without seeing that same stupid joke somewhere. IT'S NOT FUNNY ANYMORE. Geez. The horse is long dead, people. Put the Renfaire Special Cat o' Nine Tails away and stop beating it — you've turned Secretariat into Elmer's Glue.

⁸ Anyone still laboring under the delusion that writing consists of locking yourself in a room with your computer, some candles and a bottle of red wine, then waiting for inspiration to strike is in for a rude surprise. Inspiration doesn't keep timetables. Publishing houses and magazines do. And since inspiration doesn't cut checks while publishing houses do, you learn to write to the latter's demands. Practicing your writing on a regular basis, doing writing exercises and otherwise learning the technical side of writing makes it that much easier for inspiration to find its way onto the page, but sometimes the lightning bolt just isn't going to strike, and the deadline isn't going to shift. Those are the nights when you just have to knuckle down and labor in the literary trenches, and it's sure as hell not "lowering" yourself as an "artist" to do so. Only the independently wealthy can afford to wait for their Muse; the rest of us use project outlines.

⁹ I also swore that I was never going to spend another religious holiday on my hands and knees in the office, trying to fix the index on a **MET** project, but that's another story.

¹⁰ The best solution for this dilemma that anyone ever fed me, incidentally, was that the offending player should go stand in the cleaning closet and get a few whiffs of ammonia for that fresh, clean gas-giant smell. Mr. Clean works well, I'm told.

¹¹ And would those **Masquerade** players violate the No Touching rule and pound that smart-ass mage into a bloody pulp after the game? Let's face it, that's just asking for it.

¹² Of course, now that I've got this column I can distress anyone I damn well please. You have no idea how relaxing it is.

¹³ Assuming, of course, I didn't get a coronary from shock in the process.



WRAITH: THE GREAT WAR

by Bruce Baugh

This article is part two of a two-part feature. Part One, printed last issue, included:

- An overview of the **Great War** era, including the **Insurrection**.
- The **Legions and Guilds** during the **Fourth Great Maelstrom**, along with a general sense of existence during the **Great War**.
- **Character creation**, including new **Archetypes, Abilities, Thorns** and the like for the era, along with period versions of some **Arcanoi**.

Part Two includes:

- **Rules for Maelstrom behavior and survival**.
- **Guidelines on using Charon in Great War games**.
- **Arcanoi of other Dark Kingdoms**, for use by wraiths stranded in Stygian territory by the storm.
- **Mortwights as characters**, including revised versions of some **Dark Arcanoi**.
- **Some prominent places and people of the era**.

STORM CLOUDS HIGHER THAN THE MOON: THE GREAT MAELSTROM

A Great Maelstrom is an event and a condition. It's a storm cast up out of the Labyrinth, blasting through the Tempest to the Shadowlands, battering against the Shroud itself. It carries the inanimate debris of the Labyrinth and Tempest, and it carries vast legions of Spectres, forced from their Oblivion-tainted homes, constantly wounded by the vibrancy of the upper lands of the dead and eager to inflict compensatory pain on others.

Cumulative pain and suffering in the Skinlands feeds the cycle of change within the Labyrinth. The more the material world feeds Oblivion, the more servants of Oblivion rise up to reap the dark harvest. Spectres don't want to be there, however; they yearn for the day when the storm clouds settle and they can return to the now-deserted Labyrinth. In the meantime, there are souls to destroy.

The storm begins with gale-force winds pouring through Nihils or ripping their own passages from Tempest to Shadowlands. The stronger the storm, the sharper its onset. The Fourth Great Maelstrom began with miles-high geysers of black sludge erupting at the Somme. Within days, clouds carrying shards of dead soldiers' dreams and the poisonous remains of dead soldiers' tears towered over the moon. It took more than a decade for the last of them to subside.

The strength of a Great Maelstrom ebbs and flows. Sometimes the storm is almost as intense as in the initial outbreak. Other times, it's nearly calm. Wraiths can find no rhythm or pattern to these changes. Experience shows that wraiths must simply watch carefully, take advantage of lulls and act swiftly when the storm returns.

Fighting the storm requires wraiths to act on several fronts. Airborne, ground-based and seafaring soldiers set forth to fight the Spectres the storm carries. Arcanoi and force of will can drive back the storm itself. Finally, the Skinlands conditions that feed the storm must change to reduce the flow of passion into the void. Doing any of that in the midst of civil war (as is the case during and after the Great War) is hard, and it breeds unusual alliances. Some wraiths join forces against the storm

no matter what else their fellow warriors may be doing while others would rather let the storm prevail than allow the wrong opponents to succeed.

Wraiths depend on Citadels and Haunts for shelter during the years of a Great Maelstrom. Unfortunately, corporeal structures aren't always much good. The strongest walls don't help when the enemy comes from the skies, for instance, and stout roofs don't help when defenders become demoralized. Oblivion's generals routinely mobilize newly created Spectres as shock troops because the spectacle of one's former friends and allies having become ravaging creatures of the enemy weakens any wraith's will to resist. A wraith who can turn off his feelings and deal with the problem without emotional burden is a wraith well on the way to becoming Shadow-Eaten himself.

Wraiths caught outside shelter when the storm winds pick up must improvise as best they can. Some put hooks into the ground to keep themselves from blowing away. Others link their armor together to form a single unit massive enough to resist most efforts at displacement.

The Great Maelstrom carries pieces of wraiths and of souls that never became wraiths, along with a lot of generic plasm and countless Plasmics. Fragments of bone, shards of memories and the occasional relic bullet fall from the sky during a storm. The Scavenger Folk specialize in following storm fronts and harvesting whatever looks useful. Most are skilled craftsmen and relic maintainers. They maintain a complex language of their own, much like wandering nomadic traders in the Skinlands, and they are rumored to possess special arts in *Fatalism*, *Phantasm*, *Lifeweb* and *Usury*.

Limb markets flourish in every Necropolis after a particularly strong storm blows through. Relic and Artifact limbs, whose owners are now so much shredded plasm, are always in demand. Some wraiths enter the Shadowlands missing one or more limbs while more lose them in the course of the war. Gleaners must be quick: Severed limbs dissipate unless kept wet in plasm until a master Moliator can stabilize them. The resulting trade encourages all sorts of official and unofficial deals for sponsorship, protection rackets and even (sometimes) peaceful, mutually profitable commerce.

MAELSTROM FORCE LEVELS

The Beaufort-Granogrec Scale, developed by members of the Iron Legion's Office of Maelstrom Preparedness, classifies storms on a 1-5 scale.

- **Force One.** Winds blow to 40 mph, with occasional gusts higher. The storm consists mostly of water-like liquids brought up from the Tempest. The little solid debris that falls includes few pieces more than an inch or so long, almost none of it with sharp edges or other dangerous features. Dead and dying Plasmics sometimes fall. Few Spectres travel in Force-One storms. Exposed wraiths take no more than a maximum of four levels of damage per hour, generally no more than one. Two levels of armor provide complete protection, as do even minimal walls and ceilings. Haunts reduce damage by two levels per *Haunt* rating, even when the structure itself is physically weak.

- **Force Two.** Winds blow to 80 mph, with some stronger gusts. Rain falls constantly and generally contains smelly, strangely colored liquids and live, wriggling Plasmics. Solid debris, ranging from divots of Shadowlands ground to wind-polished shards of bone and Stygian steel, falls constantly. Spectres move routinely through the storm. Wraiths take a one-Trait penalty to movement-related challenges while exposed, and they suffer four to six levels of damage per hour outside. Some or all of this damage is aggravated about one-quarter of the time. Armor provides its usual protection, while Haunts reduce damage by one level per *Haunt* rating. The storm breaks windows, rips away loose roofs and the like, but it cannot blow through solid structures.

- **Force Three.** Winds blow to 120 mph or more. Torrents of rain fall, mixed half-and-half (or more) with bizarre and dangerous liquids, unknown living creatures and hazardous debris. Spectres move through the storm and converge on wraiths out from under cover within a few minutes. Exposed wraiths take six to eight levels of damage

every hour, and this damage is aggravated up to half the time. Armor provides one less level of protection than usual. Haunts reduce damage by one level per *Haunt* rating. Wraiths take a two-Trait penalty to all physical activities while outdoors. The storm smashes through flimsy doors, roofs and walls, leaving occupants vulnerable.

- **Force Four.** Winds blow 200 mph or more. Rain and debris slashes in from all angles to penetrate any space not tightly sealed off. Spectres converge on exposed wraiths in as little as a minute. Wraiths take a three-Trait penalty to all challenges while outdoors. Exposed wraiths suffer eight to 12 levels of damage every hour. One or more levels of this damage is aggravated half the time. Armor provides one less level of protection than usual, and Haunts block one less level of damage than usual. Structures that are not reinforced collapse in short order.

- **Force Five.** No means exist to measure wind speeds, which far exceed those of Skinlands hurricanes. Anyone outside gets whisked away, never to be seen again. Spectres converge in seconds on anyone outside. Exposed wraiths take 14 or more levels of damage every hour; some or all of this may become aggravated at the Storyteller's discretion. Armor and Haunts provide half their usual protection. Only the best-prepared structures survive intact.

Force-Five winds blow only at the outbreak of a Great Maelstrom or in the most dire conditions. Force-Four storms occur occasionally in response to massive genocide and other horrors and in the early years of a Great Maelstrom. Force-Three winds strike most Necropoli every few decades, and Force-Two winds do so every few years. Most Necropoli experience a Force-One wind at least once a year and almost continuously during a Great Maelstrom.

THE OTHER ARTS OF THE DEAD

The Great Maelstrom makes long-distance travel very difficult and dangerous. It disrupts the ties that bind wraiths to faraway Fetters so that even a Harrowing won't suddenly take a wraith back to the motherland. Souls of foreign soldiers that would normally go to another Dark Kingdom are stuck in Stygian lands for the duration, just as the souls of Europeans and Americans who die elsewhere seldom make it back to their own homes. The presence of these exiles creates social tensions.

Soldiers from the various colonies in Asia and Africa fight in Europe on behalf of their colonial masters, and some die. Wraiths from Africa generally hide, particularly after the Ivory Trail begins. The wraiths in the Bush of Ghosts work a powerful ritual that compels trapped wraiths who'd normally go to Stygia to walk — without rest — from Africa to Europe. A great many Stygian wraiths perish in the storms or from other adversaries, and those who survive generally suffer permanent injuries. Wraiths capable of imposing such a curse seem monstrous and fearsome, and they risk capture by the Hierarchy or destruction at the hands of frightened mobs.

Indian wraiths face a much less dire situation. They don't know the full scope of the horror that waits for them back home, and many suffer from profound disillusionment at finding how little of Buddhist, Hindu or other faith seems true in the Underworld. Some Indian wraiths exhibit a special *Arcanos*, one valuable in many contexts. Some become enslaved, but others find comfortable patronage. Those who can't go home pursue an independent existence.

BEHEST

Stygian observers speak of the Bush of Ghosts as if the African Shadowlands were a single thing. Some would-be scholars take words from a single language and assume that all African wraiths use them. In truth, Africa is a continent with hundreds of peoples. Their languages vary, as do their concepts of the nature of the soul, the afterlife and the role of the dead. The reality of the Underworld doesn't precisely match any mortal's teachings; all African wraiths face surprises.

Behest is part of that partially glimpsed truth. It works on some of the same forces that *Lifeweb* and *Fatalism* deal with, and a wraith who knows *Behest* cannot learn *Lifeweb* or *Fatalism*. *Behest* has no limit in physical range.

INNATE ABILITY

- **Link.** The wraith senses areas, individuals and objects connected to some target wraith. He medicates and exhales a cloud of smoke, which condenses into a series of images that show points that the target regards as significant. The images don't provide clues as to scale or distance.

System: Make a Mental Challenge against the target. If successful, the wraith using *Behest* sees an image of a place the target recently visited, or an object important to the target. Spend one mental trait to see a significant relic or Artifact, two Mental Traits to see the target's chief Haunt and three Mental Traits to see one of the target's Fetters.

Using *Link* with a skinmask or severed extremity of the target gets a Mental Trait bonus of one. The user gains no difficulty modifier for using *Link* in the target's chief Haunt or while handling one of his Fetters. Using *Link* with just some object the target recently handled or in a place the target's been recently imposes a Mental Trait penalty of one.

BASIC ABILITIES

- **Delve.** The wraith enters a trance state and senses part of the target's recent experience. *Delve* doesn't reveal what the target thought, just what the environment was.

System: Spend one Pathos and make a Social Challenge against the target. If successful, the Delver learns the target's recent mood. Spend a Mental Trait while roleplaying being in trance state to receive impressions from one sense about the target's surroundings. With three or more senses activated, the Delver receives a vivid and complete re-creation of the environment in those senses, as details from one sense complement those in another. Spend another Mental Trait to learn when the target had this experience.

- **Trace.** If the wraith grasps an object belonging to the target or occupies a space the target recently vacated, she can determine where the target is. The wraith expels a cloud of smoke which illuminates strands of Fate. The one leading to the target glows.

System: Spend one Corpus, take one level of damage and make a Mental Challenge. If successful, the wraith knows the direction in which the target lies. Spend one Mental Trait to learn the target's general distance or two for a precise location. If the tracer spends two Mental Traits thus, the target can make a Mental Challenge to be aware of being watched. The glowing strand remains visible to the tracer for one hour per level of *Behest* he knows.

(Note: *Behest* includes two distinct paths of development at the Intermediate level. Wraiths must learn the Right-Hand Path arts of *Scry* and *Divine* first. They can then turn to the Left-Hand Path arts of *Twitch*, *Murmur* and *Veer*. There is no known Advanced ability for the Right-Hand Path. If it once existed, it's been lost now, or its teaching has long been guarded closely. No Stygian wraith has ever encountered an African wraith who knew it.)

INTERMEDIATE ABILITIES: RIGHT-HAND PATH

Intermediate and Advanced Abilities in *Behest* are visible with Soulsight. A wraith using Soulsight can spot a psychic intruder with distinctive marks — unique to each wraith who knows *Behest* — like a sunburst and rays around the chest.

- **Scry.** The wraith enters a trance state and shares the target's present experiences. Like *Delve*, this art provides sensory and emotional data but not access to the target's thoughts. The Scryer's Shadow can speak freely with the target's Shadow while *Scry* is in effect.

System: Spend two Pathos and one Willpower, while roleplaying a trance state. Then make a Social Challenge against the target. If successful, the Scryer experi-

ences everything the target does. The target may make a Mental Challenge to notice someone observing her, and if she does, she can make a Willpower Challenge to drive the Scryer out. Scry lasts for one turn per level of *Behest* the wraith knows.

- **Divine.** *Divine* is the most powerful Right-Hand ability Stygian wraiths have yet encountered. Rumor says that masters of Advanced abilities on the path exist back in the Bush of Ghosts. Rumor also credits these abilities with an impressive, even self-contradictory, variety of powers. In any event, *Divine* allows the wraith to glimpse what Fate has in store for another wraith. It does not require a link, only meditation upon the target. The Diviner expels smoke that coalesces into a vision of a scene in the target's future.

System: First, roleplay entering a meditative trance. Next, spend one Corpus, two Pathos and one Willpower, then make a Mental Challenge. If successful, the wraith sees a blurry vision of a scene from the target's future. Making out any specific detail, like the identity of an individual or the setting, requires a separate Static Mental Challenge against eight Traits. Failure disperses the smoke so that the wraith can't examine it any further. Spend a Mental Trait to bring the scene into clear focus and avoid the need for separate challenges. The Smoke lasts for one turn per level of *Behest* the wraith knows.

INTERMEDIATE ARTS: LEFT-HAND PATH

- **Twitch.** The wraith must first use Scry on a target, and he can then move the target's Corpus in small ways. A rolled eye, a peculiar tingle or a stumble may not seem like much, but at the right time, they can be devastating.

System: First use Scry, as usual. Spend one Pathos and gain one Angst, then make a Physical Challenge. If successful, the wraith can give the target one minor nudge in some specific way, plus one per Physical Trait spent. The target can resist each by spending a Trait of Willpower to cancel the action.

- **Murmur.** This art lets the wraith speak through the target's mouth, using the victim's own voice.

System: First use Scry as usual. Spend two Pathos, gain one Angst and make a Mental Challenge. If successful, the wraith can make the target speak one specific sentence, plus one per Mental Trait spent. The target may resist each by spending a point of Willpower to cancel the action.

ADVANCED ABILITY: LEFT-HAND PATH

- **Veer.** The wraith can direct the target like a puppet, controlling the target's motor skills.

System: First use Scry as usual. Spend two Pathos and one Willpower and gain one Angst. Make a Physical Challenge. If successful, the wraith controls the target for one turn, plus one turn per Physical Trait spent. The target can resist the wraith's direction for one turn by spending a Willpower Trait.

DISPLACE

This Arcanos combines elements of *Kinesis*, *Moliate* and *Usury* to create the "foods" and other decorations that make Swar, the Dark Kingdom of India, seem so lifelike. No Stygian can learn this art.

The Tvashtriya, the practitioners of *Displace*, organize themselves into something like a Guild. The Hierarchy maintains no treaties with Swar, so local authorities set policy as they wish. In general, known practitioners of *Displace* within Stygian territory face enslavement, or — if they're lucky — recruiting pitches they'd be unwise to turn down. The Artificers', Usurers' and Masquers' Guilds seek Tvashtriya just as enthusiastically as the Hierarchy, hoping to master the Arcanos themselves.

Innate Abilities

- **Straddle.** The wraith inserts himself into a Skinlands object, masking himself from most wraithly senses at the cost of removing his own ability to sense the environment.

System: Make a Static Physical Challenge against the number of hours the wraith wishes to remain hidden. If successful, the wraith merges with his target. Only the Artificer ability *Sense Rider* can detect him. Destruction of the object inflicts one level of damage and reveals him back in the Shadowlands.

- **Sense Rider.** The wraith may detect other wraiths in her vicinity who are Straddling material objects or Wraithriding the Corpus of someone else (or herself).

System: Make a Static Mental Challenge against six Traits. If successful, the wraith learns whether a target material object or wraithly Corpus is being ridden. Spend one Mental Trait to determine the number and general nature of those using *Straddle* or *Wraithride* and another Mental Trait to determine whether a currently vacated target has been ridden recently.

Basic Abilities

- **Wraithride.** The wraith makes contact with another wraith's Corpus and slips inside for an indefinite period. She finds herself in a dark, quiet place, and she can sense nothing of her environment except knowing when the host is in Slumber or when someone is trying to detect her (which produces a faint buzzing noise). She cannot control or influence the host; she suffers equally whenever the host takes damage, and she can be dragged with the host into Harrowings. Likewise, if she does something to trigger a Harrowing for herself, the host gets dragged with her.

System: Make a Mental Challenge against the target wraith to invade his Corpus. If successful, the Wraithrider merges until she chooses to leave. Another would-be Wraithrider must win a Physical Challenge to displace her. *Sense Rider* and *Sense Kinesis* may detect the Wraithrider, as may *Transfer* and other *Usury* arts if the user of these arts wins a Mental Challenge against the Wraithrider.

- **Deflect.** The wraith learns to conceal himself more thoroughly and to deflect damage his host suffers. The *host* still suffers said damage, but the passenger may escape by using *Deflect*.

System: The wraith must first use *Straddle* or *Wraithride*. To avoid detection, the wraith must notice someone probing for him (intentionally or otherwise). Make a Mental Challenge against the examining wraith. If successful, the wraith using *Deflect* wins on ties in upcoming challenges by the examiner, and he may reduce the examiner's Mental or Social Trait total for a single challenge by one for each point of Pathos spent. (The wraith must commit this energy *before* resolving the designated challenge.) To avoid taking damage, the wraith must touch a target who can receive it. Make a Social Challenge. If successful, the wraith transfers one level of damage per level of *Displace* the wraith knows.

Intermediate Abilities

- **Transfuse.** The Wraithriding wraith lends Pathos to (or takes Pathos from) her host. The host notices this transaction if he is not in Slumber, and bystanders see a brief scintillation when the Wraithrider lends Pathos. Likewise, they notice a brief wave of darkness when the Wraithrider takes Pathos.

System: First use *Wraithride*. Make a Physical Challenge. If successful, the Transfuser can give or take one level of Pathos, plus one per Physical Trait spent. It costs one Angst to take Pathos, none to give it.

- **Reconfigure.** The wraith can modify his host's Corpus. He can make it luminescent, transparent or conductive to sound, or he can rework it as if by *Moliate*. Minor alterations that don't change the wraith's corporeal configuration can take place during Slumber without rousing the host. More serious work always attracts the host's attention.

System: First use *Wraithride*. Spend one Pathos. Gain one Angst if the host is willing, two if the host resists. Make a Mental Challenge against the host. If successful, the wraith can start modifying the host. Doing so always costs the host one level of Corpus. Minor changes proceed automatically. Changes comparable to the *Moliate* art of *Sculpt* require the wraith using *Reconfigure* to spend a Mental Trait or more for particularly complex changes. *Reconfigure* effects remain in place until undone with *Reconfigure* or *Sculpt*.

Advanced Ability

- **Transmogrify.** The master of *Displace* can change a host's Corpus into almost anything, including forms suitable for consumption as Pathos "nourishment."

System: First use *Wrathride*. Spend two Pathos and gain three Angst. Make an Extended Mental Challenge against the host. A single success lets the wraith work general transformations. Three or more successes let the wraith turn the host into an edible form, often a pile of fruit in which each fruit holds one Trait of the host's Pathos. *Transmogrify* creates permanent changes.

OBLIVION'S FOOT-SOLDIERS: MORTWIGHTS

Every pyramid has a bottom. The Mortwights are the lowest of the Shadow-Eaten, the ones that all other Spectres despise. Until modern times, only a few Mortwights appeared in the Shadowlands in any year. However, the psychic traumas of mass life and mass death make more of them every year. Other Spectres see this population boom as an infestation of vermin. Cut off from the living, from the Restless Dead who aren't yet Shadow-Eaten and from the mass of Spectral societies, Mortwights form communities of their own or pass a solitary time until Oblivion claims them altogether.

Playing a Mortwight isn't easy, and Storytellers should feel free to go very slowly in approving Mortwight characters for their chronicles. Some Mortwights band together to strike out at their enemies on both sides of the Shroud. Some pursue Spectral status and authority. Some seek redemption... as a form of suicide, hoping to turn the mind they now have into nothing more than an echo in the back of the head, a fading memory soon lost as the Psyche goes on to some condition far from the Shadow. All three of these motives can play serious havoc with a chronicle. Plan carefully.

Each Mortwight normally takes two levels of damage for each day spent in the Shadowlands from the spiritual stresses of being so close to life. The storms sustain Mortwights, however. While Maelstrom winds blow, make a Static Angst Test against a difficulty of nine Traits, minus one per level of the storm. If this test succeeds, reduce the day's damage by one if the storm level is Force Three or less. Cancel the day's damage altogether if the Maelstrom force level is four or five.

CREATING A MORTWIGHT CHARACTER

- **Concept.** Choose a Nature and Demeanor from the Shadow Archetypes that appear in *Oblivion* and part one of this article (*Mind's Eye Theatre Journal: Issue 5*, p. 45). Remember that a living person becomes a Mortwight by dying in some particularly terrible and unpleasant way.

- **Attributes and Abilities.** Assign Attribute and Abilities levels as usual.

- **Arcanoi.** Great War-era Mortwights begin with one level in *Hive-Mind*, one level in *Tempest Weaving* and five levels of other Dark Arcanoi. Mortwights created when the Great Maelstroms don't blow begin with one level of *Hive-Mind* and five levels of other Dark Arcanoi. Mortwights can only learn regular Arcanoi in the course of play.

- **Backgrounds.** Assign five levels of Backgrounds. Mortwights cannot acquire *Eidolon*, *Notoriety* or *Status*.

- **Dark Passions and Fetters.** Choose four Dark Passions and four Fetters as usual. Most Mortwights have the place of death as a Fetter, and all the Fetters related to painful or otherwise unpleasant moments. Mortwights cannot resolve Fetters, but they can lose them to destruction.

- **Angst and Being.** Your character begins with five Angst Traits and three Being Traits, as given in *Oblivion*.

- **Corpus.** Your character begins with 10 Corpus. Each time the Mortwight fails a challenge, make two Simple Tests. If both fail, the Mortwight loses a level

of permanent Corpus. When the Mortwright reaches zero Corpus, a small Nihil whisks the Mortwright off to Oblivion, never to be seen again.

- **Free Traits.** You have five Free Traits to allocate as you wish. Use the chart in *Laws of the Night*, p. 71. Basic Arcanoi cost four Traits to acquire at this time; Intermediate Arcanoi cost seven Traits, and you cannot begin play with Advanced Arcanoi.

CONTAMINATE

This Dark Arcanos feeds the power of Oblivion in others. It manifests in many ways, much like Castigation does: Some Spectres practice a sick form of battlefield medicine, while others peddle Spectral booze or drugs. Each Spectre has a distinctive style to *Contaminate*.

Innate Ability

- **Diagnose the Darkness.** The Spectre sees Oblivion's strength in others, gauging the strength of Shadows and Dark Passions in both living and the Restless Dead.

System: Make a Mental Challenge. If it succeeds, the Spectre gets a general sense of the target's condition — whether Angst is over five and when the target last gained Angst from a Dark Passion. Spend a Mental Trait to learn each of the following: whether the target has more, less or the same amount of Angst as the Spectre Diagnosing the Darkness; whether the target has more Dark Passions than the Spectre; the target's Shadow Archetype; the nature of the target's Dark Passions.

Basic Abilities

- **Dissect.** The Spectre discerns the target's Nature by examining its echoes in the target's Shadow.

System: Make a Mental Challenge to learn the target's Nature.

- **Contamination of the Tongue.** The Spectre can speak directly to a wraith's Shadow, and the Shadow can provide brief answers even when not in Catharsis.

System: Make a Social Challenge. If successful, the Spectre can ask the target one question or make a one-sentence statement and get a one-sentence response. Each Mental Trait spent lets the Spectre add another question or statement. The Shadow takes momentary control of the target, speaking with the wraith's voice and mouth, which is both obvious and disconcerting.

Intermediate Abilities

- **Contamination of the Soul.** The Spectre drains her own Angst (usually as a dark noxious fluid) and pours it into the target, strengthening the target's Shadow. Some Spectres spit the liquefied Angst; some open wounds and "bleed" into them; some inject the Angst with a Moliated syringe; others use even less pleasant methods.

System: Spend one Angst and make a Static Physical Challenge against the target's Willpower. The Spectre transfers one point of Angst, plus one per Mental Trait spent. The Spectre's Psyche gains a point of Composure. The Angst remains fluid for one minute to allow time for injection or other handling.

- **Contamination of the Mind.** The Spectre helps another's Shadow into Catharsis.

System: Spend two Angst and make a Physical Challenge. If successful, the target's Shadow gains control immediately as if it had won a Catharsis Test. If the Physical Challenge fails, the Spectre and target Shadow each lose another Trait of Angst.

Advanced Ability

- **Contamination of the Will.** The Spectre concentrates Oblivion's power in the target, providing the means to develop temporary powers.

System: Spend three Angst and two Being and make a Social Challenge. If successful, the target gains two Free Traits to spend, plus one per Social Trait the Spectre's player chooses to spend. The Abilities the target buys manifest immediately — the points can't be hoarded. Nobody can use this art on himself, and a target can receive the benefits of *Contamination of the Will* only once per day.

The temporary Abilities last for one hour, or perhaps more. At the end of the hour, the target makes a Static Willpower Test for each Ability gained against a total of 10 Traits, minus the Maelstrom force level. On a tie or loss, the target loses that Ability.

CORRUPTION

This art is the Spectral analogue to *Puppetry* — techniques for turning a mortal's soul into something sufficiently tuned to the Spectre so that the dead manipulator can take control without ever seeming obvious about it.

Innate Abilities

- **Sense Likeness.** The Spectre looks for the signs of Oblivion already working in mortal targets.

System: Make a Static Mental Challenge against the local Shroud rating, minus the Maelstrom force level. Success lets the Spectre find a suitable mortal victim in the area, receptive to manipulation. The Storyteller defines the nature of the target: a villain, an ambitious but weak soul, someone in the grip of a Dark Passion or whatever suits the story.

- **Soul Leech.** This art is the Spectral version of possession, more powerful and more dangerous than *Puppetry*.

System: Spend one Angst and make a Social Challenge. If successful, the Spectre slips unnoticed into his target, and he can use the other arts of *Corruption*. The Spectre experiences the target's senses, losing all the distinctively wraithly senses like *Deathsight*. The limitations of *Puppetry*, such as vulnerability to electroshock, apply to *Soul Leech*. The possession lasts for one hour, plus one for each Social Trait spent.

Note: The Basic, Intermediate and Advanced abilities of *Corruption* all require the Spectre to first use *Soul Leech* on the target.

Basic Abilities

- **Lurid Visions.** The Spectre inflicts a momentary, violent flash of imagination on the target. The information content of the vision must fit in a single simple sentence, like "Go through the fire escape door," but the emotional content and associations in memory can be very complex.

System: Spend one Angst and make a Social Challenge to inflict a single vision on the target.

- **Unbidden Hands.** The Spectre makes the target's physical body do something without the target realizing it consciously. The task cannot be lethal or self-destructive.

System: Spend three Angst and make a Physical Challenge. If successful, the Spectre gains covert control of the target's body for 10 minutes, plus 10 minutes for each Trait by which the Spectre's Being is greater than the target's Willpower. The target cannot spend Willpower to resist *Unbidden Hands*. Example tasks include writing, "The bastard must die!" over and over while thinking about an ex-lover, or tying nooses while thinking about how much fun it will be to play with a new dog.

Intermediate Abilities

- **Urges.** The Spectre forces the target to take a single action which satisfies one of the Spectre's Dark Passions and which, on some level, the target would like to do.

System: Spend two Angst and make a standard Passion Test. If the Spectre would gain Angst from the intended action, then make a Social Challenge to force the target to act that way. If the Social Challenge succeeds, the Spectre gains the Angst indicated in the Passion Test; otherwise the two Angst just go down the drain. The target may spend Willpower to resist the compulsion. If the Social Challenge fails, make two Simple Tests. If both tests fail, the target feels a deep revulsion toward the command, and the Spectre can't try to Urge the target to any other action based on the chosen Dark Passion for the next full day.

• **Fetter Rape.** The Spectre taints a corpse to make it capable of Rising temporarily. The body must have been a Fetter, have Risen previously or have been attuned for purposes of *Corruption* or *Puppetry*.

System: Make a Static Physical Challenge against a total of three Traits, plus the local Shroud rating, minus the Maelstrom force level. If successful, the Spectre reanimates the target body for one day, plus one day per Mental Trait spent. Treat the Spectre as a Risen who needs no Conduit during this period. *Housecleaning* drives the Spectre out, although it doesn't protect the corpse permanently from future incursions. *Fetter Rape* destroys the body as a Fetter, and forces a wraith who had it as a Fetter into a Harrowing.

Advanced Ability

• **Blissful Unity.** The Spectre makes a permanent place for herself in the target's soul. The target retains self-awareness, but he carries out the Spectre's instructions without realizing that they come from someone else's will.

System: The Spectre must first attune the target as a Consort (see *Oblivion*, p. 98). Spend five Angst and one permanent Being, and make a Social Challenge, with no modifications for Consort status. If successful, the Spectre plants the first hooks. If the test fails, make two Simple Tests. If both fail, the Spectre botches and can never again attempt *Blissful Unity* with that target.

Once established, the Spectre wears down the target's resistance by accumulating successes on Extended Social Challenges equal to the target's Willpower. The Spectre may make one such challenge per day, at the cost of two Angst and one temporary Being. If the Spectre accumulates no successes at all on a particular Extended Challenge, the next effort costs an additional point of Angst. Once the Spectre does get the necessary challenges, the target is hers to do with as she pleases. The target counts as a Fetter, and the Spectre can use *Soul Leech* against her automatically, at the cost of one Angst but without a challenge.

Most victims of *Blissful Unity* go immediately to Oblivion when they die. A few become Mortwights.

HIVE-MIND

Oblivion's touch breaks down the walls of individual personality. Spectres can probe through the links with their fellow Shadow-Eaten to acquire knowledge.

Innate Ability

• **Distress Signal.** The Spectre sends out a non-verbal call for help; it carries only the message "I'm in trouble!"

System: Make a Static Social Challenge against seven Traits (or six Traits if the Maelstrom level is from three to five). If successful, the Spectre summons one Spectre who appears within a few turns via Nihil or Arcanos use, plus another Spectre for each Social Trait spent. Storytellers may delay the summoned help a few minutes on some occasions, but *Distress Signal* is supposed to be useful. Spectres who arrive after the crisis do no good, and players shouldn't feel that they're wasting their effort.

Basic Abilities

• **Silent Whispers.** The Spectre sends a mental message to any other Spectre within line of sight. This ability only sends messages; it does not grant the recipient the power to reply without also using *Hive-mind*.

System: Make a Social Challenge. If successful, the Spectre can transmit one simple sentence, plus one per Social Trait spent.

• **Distant Whispers.** The Spectre engages in a two-way telepathic conversation with any other Spectre known to the one using *Distant Whispers*, regardless of the distance between them.

System: Spend one Angst and make a Mental Challenge. If successful, the Spectre and the recipient can each send one simple sentence, plus one each per Mental Trait either chooses to spend.

Intermediate Abilities

- **Recall the Known.** The Spectre can access information he once knew but has since forgotten, or learned only in passing.

System: Spend one Angst and make a Static Mental Challenge against eight Traits (or seven Traits if the Maelstrom level is from three to five). If successful, the Spectre recalls one specific piece of information (and he can attempt one specific use of an Ability), plus one per Mental Trait spent.

- **Recall the Unknown.** The Spectre can probe through the Hive-Mind into other Spectres' thoughts and memories, including those who've since gone on to Oblivion.

System: Spend two Angst and make a Static Mental Challenge against eight Traits. If successful, the Spectre recalls a particular piece of information for one turn, plus one turn per mental Trait spent. Recall the Unknown cannot teach the use of Arcanoi, but pretty much everything else is accessible through this art.

Advanced Ability

- **Racial Memory.** The Spectre can draw on all knowledge in the Hive-Mind, including Arcanoi and Dark Arcanoi she hasn't learned herself.

System: Spend two Angst and one Being, and gain one temporary Composure. Make an Extended Static Mental Challenge against nine Traits. If successful, the Spectre learns one Arcanos or Dark Arcanos at one level per two Mental Traits (rounded up). He retains knowledge of the Arcanos for one turn per success in the challenge.

SHROUD-BENDING

Only Mortwights learn this Dark Arcanos; other Spectres lack the lingering ties to the mortal world that make it possible, and in fact most other Spectres don't even suspect it exists. Spectres of other castes cannot see Mortwights who've entered the Skinlands via *Shroud-Rending*.

System: Spend two Angst and one Being; the Psyche gains one Composure. Make a Static Challenge of the Mortwright's Physical Traits plus levels of *Shroud-Rending* against the local Shroud rating minus the Maelstrom force level (minimum difficulty of five Traits). If successful, the Mortwright rips open a hole in the Shroud and plunges through, taking a level of damage while crossing the Shroud. The Mortwright exists in the Skinlands in intangible form. She can use all Arcanoi and Dark Arcanoi that affect the Skinlands, but not ones that normally work only in the Underworld. The Mortwright's safe time in the Skinlands and how often the Mortwright can use *Shroud-Rending* depend the levels of *Shroud-Rending* the Mortwright knows.

The Mortwright can travel freely, but must he return to the exact spot she crossed the Shroud to return to the Underworld. *Shroud-Rending* works only when initiated from the Underworld, so a Mortwright unable to return to the point of entry is in serious trouble until she can return or some other Mortwright opens a hole through which she can return.

After the safe time passes, the Mortwright loses one Trait of Angst per hour, down to a minimum of one Trait. Exercising Dark Passions adds new Angst, which also drains away. After Angst reaches one, Being falls by one Trait per hour to a minimum of one. Then Mental and Social Traits drain away one per hour, in whatever order the player chooses, down to zero. At this point, the Mortwright is a mindless hulk driven only by its Dark Passions. The Dark Passions drop away, one per day, leaving behind only the one that last generated Angst

in a Passion Test. The now-monomaniacal Mortwright gravitates to spots with low Shroud ratings where she can try to exercise her remaining Dark Passion.

She senses other uses of *Shroud-Rending* in the area automatically and can jump through portals created by other users during the creators' safe period. Once back in the Underworld, the lost Attributes return in reverse order. Permanent Being falls by one, as a mark of the trauma.

Arcanos Level	How Much Time	How Often
one level	one hour	once per two weeks
two levels	two hours	once per week
three levels	four hours	every three days
four levels	eight hours	every two days
five levels	16 hours	daily

TEMPEST WEAVING

The art of Tempest-exploitation comes naturally to Mortwrights. Spectral scholars theorize some hidden connection or covert plan of Oblivion's greatest servants, without (so far) any evidence to support their speculations.

Innate Abilities

- **Storm-Horn.** The Spectre can hear the distinctive voice of every Nihil in the area so as to recognize each one in the future. (The Shadowlands and Tempest or Labyrinth ends of a Nihil sound recognizably the same.) The Spectre can also speak to a Nihil, quieting its own voice so that the Spectre can hear the sounds coming from the other end.

System: Make a Static Mental Challenge against six Traits. If successful, the Spectre hears the nearest Nihil, plus one more (in order of increasing distance) per level of Maelstrom force level over Force One. The ability has no upper limit on range. The Spectre's player may make a Static Mental Challenge against four Traits to recognize a Nihil she's heard before, and she may make a Static Social Challenge against four Traits to quiet the Nihil for one hour. During this time, she hears whatever's said at the other end.

- **Hole in the World.** After identifying a Nihil with *Storm-Horn*, the Spectre can travel through it, even if it's been sealed off.

System: Make a Static Physical Challenge against eight Traits, minus the local Maelstrom level. If successful, the Spectre opens a closed Nihil for one turn and can even jump through. It takes a few turns, at the Storyteller's discretion, to emerge at the other end.

Basic Abilities

- **Storm-Lash.** The Spectre draws strength from the Maelstrom. She steps bare, free of all clothing, equipment and other encumbrances, into the storm and emerges invigorated.

System: Spend one Angst and make a Static Physical Challenge against 10 Traits, minus the local Maelstrom level. If successful, the Spectre regains one point of Corpus or temporary Angst per level of Maelstrom rating. If the Spectre has full Corpus or Angst (not necessarily both), extra points may raise temporary Being. The process takes one turn per Trait regained, and the Spectre can use it as often as she likes.

- **Thread of Corruption.** The Spectre infects a relic with Maelstrom force. The taint of Oblivion requires anyone not yet Shadow-Eaten to gain Angst in the course of using the relic. Tainted relics emit unique notes that Tempest Weavers can track.

System: Make a Static Mental Challenge against seven Traits, plus the relic's rating, minus the local Maelstrom force level. If successful, the Spectre corrupts the relic. Thereafter, anyone except a Spectre or a wraith in Catharsis gains one point of Angst upon using the relic. All arts that detect Oblivion's presence reveal the corruption.

Intermediate Arts

- **Unweave the Self.** The Spectre unravels her Corpus into storm-carried threads.

System: Spend one Angst and make Static Physical Challenge against nine Traits, minus the local Maelstrom level. If successful, the Spectre becomes a small collection of Maelstrom debris resembling a shredded garment, capable of moving wherever the wind blows. The Spectre can remain unwoven for one hour per level of Maelstrom rating. It takes one turn of concentrated effort for the Spectre to weave or unweave herself.

- **Reweaving.** The Spectre pulls pieces of objects from the storm or Destruction Harrowings and reassembles them, albeit without much control over what the storm delivers.

System: Spend one Angst, gain one Composure and make an Extended Static Physical Challenge against seven Traits minus the local Maelstrom level (minimum difficulty of four Traits).

One success produces a small object without combat applications — a favored toy or other small Fetter of a wraith now lost to Oblivion, for instance. Two successes let the object carry a Trait of Dark Passion, which the Spectre can suck out and convert into Angst. Three successes produce the pieces of a one- or two-Trait relic, generally one destroyed recently in the storm.

The Spectre can attempt to find some specific sort of object. A broad class of objects, like any pistol or any pocket watch, raises the base difficulty of the challenge to eight traits, while the hunt for a particular object raises the base difficulty to 10. Reweaving takes one turn in any event. The object lasts for one hour per success in the challenge unless the Spectre chooses to let it collapse earlier.

Advanced Ability

- **Carve the Chaos.** The Spectre imposes his will on the Tempest, turning it into a solid form. It works in the Labyrinth and the Tempest all the time, and in the Shadowlands when the Maelstrom level is Force One or more.

System: Spend two Angst and one Being, gain two Composure, and make a Static Mental Challenge. The difficulty is seven Traits in the Labyrinth or Tempest, nine Traits during Force Three (and greater) storms or 10 Traits in Force One or Two storms. If successful, the Spectre can make whatever he chooses out of a space 20 feet on a side. Only the Spectre's imagination limits the range of possible creations. The carved chaos reverts to its normal form in one hour.

OTHER DARK ARCANOI

This list is not an exhaustive one of all available Dark Arcanoi. See **Doomslayers: Into the Labyrinth** and **Wraith: The Great War** for more. Use the given Dark Arcanoi as guidelines for conversions. In general, when the tabletop rules provide so much result per success rolled, make a Simple Test and provide extra result per Trait spent of whatever sort the challenge requires.

THE KING OF THE DEAD: CHARON

One of the most distinctive features of the Great War era is that Charon, founder of the Stygian Empire, still exists in the Shadowlands. He's absent from his public duties, traveling incognito through his territory. He's filled with doubts in the early 20th century. Did he do the right thing in founding and

maintaining the empire the way he did? Can he, or anyone, govern it justly and compassionately? What are the Restless Dead like in this, the fourth of the great storms? What promise or dread does the future hold?

As the single most powerful individual in the empire, Charon doesn't really need statistics. He can, within very broad limits, do what he wants. Therefore, Storytellers who want to use him in their chronicles must do so very carefully because he can easily destroy characters and everything meaningful to them. Charon the man doesn't wish to shatter his empire but to understand it. You must make sure that Charon the character doesn't wreck your chronicle.

The Emperor travels incognito, Moliated by the very best of the Masquers' Guild and assisted with the mental powers of the Mnemoi. Work out the statistics for the cover identity, and expect that Charon stays within his chosen boundaries most of the time.

In his own form, Charon is a somewhat small man of Greek appearance. (Average human height rises over time thanks to improved medicine and nutrition.) He's quiet most of the time, but intensely alert. His accumulated power manifests as a subliminal pull. Like him or hate him, *nobody* can ignore his presence unless he makes a constant calculated effort to appear average. The whole point of his traveling in disguise is that he wants to see what others say when they're not compelled to treat him as Emperor. When he deems it necessary to act, though, nobody doubts who he is. Only later do people realize that he commands a great deal more power than commanding appearance, and conflicting stories of his actual appearance circulate.

Remember that Charon knows his fate. The Lady of Fate explained it to him long ago. He knows when this Great Maelstrom ends and how the Insurrection ends; he knows when the next Great Maelstrom begins and the tangled web of his last moments in the Shadowlands. He won't tell anyone else their fates, but he knows far more than anyone could and still remain happy. Very occasionally he tries to issue a warning to someone he's become fond of, but experience shows that his doing so almost never works out well.

An appearance by Charon should be a very special moment in the chronicle. He doesn't spend very long in any given place. Introduce him in disguise and gradually make it clear that he knows far more than he should if he were no more than he claims. When he's understood what's going on where the characters are, he may reveal himself to them all, to a chosen few or even just to one soul. Then he's on his way to somewhere else, in a new persona. In his wake, he should leave awe, perhaps a renewed determination to protect the Restless Dead in accordance with his driving dream and maybe a touch of confusion among the wicked.

Charon has a lot of things in mind, and he may interact with the characters in many ways. These suggestions are just some of the possibilities.

- **The State of the Empire.** Charon pays particular attention to the Anacreons and other officials in a Necropolis. He doubts that he's built his empire wisely, and he wants to see just what they do. He usually presents himself as a soldier of the Emerald Legion weary of the war, uncertain of his loyalties and seeking sanctuary. Once in place, he listens to what others say about the officials, and he compares it with what the officials say and what he sees them doing.
- **Shadows.** Charon often travels as a typical Pardoner, plying his craft and studying the Shadows of his subject. He sometimes intervenes to stop particularly sadistic Pardoners. Depending on the circumstances, this action can unleash a complex network of ramifications among the local Pardoners and the groups for whom they provide services.
- **Custodians.** When he finds wraiths whose spirit he admires, Charon reveals himself and assigns them the task of guarding a particularly dangerous

relic or Artifact. It might have great power or exhibit impossible-to-remove taint or be the focus of an ongoing rivalry between powerful Hierarchs, and Charon wants it out of the way. Both Insurrectionists and Loyalists will try to take the item if they find out about it. Depending on the Storyteller's preferences, Charon may return later with reward for service, or the guardianship may stretch on, or the item may prove critical in saving a Necropolis or even the empire as a whole. When imposing a duty on the characters, make sure to offer some compensatory benefits, such as a one-time grant from Charon of a boost in an Arcanos, or some other gift that helps them perform the task.

- **Testing Hearts.** Charon sometimes disguises himself to resemble an escaped Thrall seeking the help of some random Circle of wraiths. He tells a story of escaping vile slavers; later he fakes Catharsis and tells a story of being enslaved for horrible crimes. Do the characters help, and if so how? He doesn't think there's any single right answer, and he wants to see just what some random subjects of his empire do.

- **Rescuers.** Charon introduces himself as a Hierarch in exile seeking to return captured wraiths of other Dark Kingdoms to their homes. He wants to remove the rescued slaves as tools for the Hierarchy and the Grim Legion to fight over, and he needs the characters' help in getting the wraiths on their way. Secretly, Charon also wants to tell the wraiths to tell their respective masters of his desire for a peaceful, honorable end to their antagonisms. He wishes to avoid the doom he sees coming for his empire.

THE LANDS OF THE DEAD: PEOPLE AND PLACES

The following is just a quick overview to suggest the range of settings possible during the Great War. See **Wraith: The Great War** for details of many more.

Barcelona

In the Skinlands, the glory days of the Spanish empire are long gone. As long as their memory remains, however, the Necropolis in Barcelona will continue to glitter with the gold extracted for centuries from the Americas. Old-school Roman Catholicism flourishes openly and rumors circulate that Fishers aren't hard to find. The influenza pandemic hits Europe in Spain, and Skeletal Legion forces are particularly strong here.

Berlin

Chancellor Bismarck presides over the safest Necropolis in Europe. Every wraith in the Necropolis spends one day a week in his assigned "Day Corps," supplementing the permanent troops in patrol and guard duties. Bismarck isn't a hidebound reactionary. In life, he sponsored educational and social reforms to deprive revolutionaries of fodder, and he keeps it up in death. The Song Wars allow individuals or groups with quarrels to resolve disputes peacefully. Each side chooses a representative Chanteur, who attempts to move the crowd. Bystanders get free entertainment and vote on who was most persuasive.

Constantinople

The strongest Necropolis in the Mediterranean, Constantinople stands firm against the storm and against the Grim Legion's revolt. Stygian troops use this city as their base for operations throughout the region, including Wolseley's multi-Legion force fighting Coldheart's Spectral army in Russia, and traders cluster here under the troops' protections. Existence continues here much as always.



Chicago

Penitent Anacreon Joseph P. Altgeld presides (or tries to) over a Necropolis in disarray. Some neighborhoods are calm and peaceful. In others, Spectres and Renegades manipulate mortals openly for personal advantage. The city's living gangs get supernatural assistance; after all, it's all Pathos for the harvesting.

New York City

The Grim Legion holds sway. It's dominated the city since the 1860s, and subduing the Loyalists therein didn't take long. The Spooks' Guild operates openly, trading the first fruits of Maelstrom gleaning for official protection. On the other hand, a small enclave remains in the hands of the Legion of Fate and another in the Hands of the Hierarchy's Fifth Legion. Independent wraiths move back and

forth as they see opportunities, and they dodge the incessantly shifting frontier. Graft and corruption define all administrations in the area.

Paris

Paris is a city in love with revolution, and the steady death toll of war and plague keeps the Necropolis well-populated. The Smiling Lord finds a willing audience for his message at first, until the populace grows bored and decides that restoration would be more interesting than the Smiling Lord's earnest regime. Anacreons come and go every few months. Heretics of all sorts flourish, with Christian and other religious movements clustered around the city's cathedrals while Renegades build fragile utopias in the sewers and catacombs. The only constant for Paris is change.





COSTUMING FOR LIVE-ACTION PLAY

by Laura D. Hanson

This article is the second in a limited series on the hows and wherefores of historical LARP costuming. We found Laura at the 1999 Gen-Con, and we're glad we did so. And for those astute readers out there who caught issue #4 of the Journal, no, Laura is not "Auntie Csilla."

Greetings once again! My name is Laura Hanson, and I work as a part-time costumer in New York City (among other things). I have been costuming myself and others for various Renaissance festivals and LARP's for about 10 years, and somewhere along the way, I managed to pick up a degree in medieval history that has given me all kinds of insight into various amounts and kinds of research.

In my last column, I discussed costuming concerns in Dark Ages Europe, the American Wild West and the Great War, and I gave a very brief overview of the fashions and clothing styles of each time. I also included some tips on how to dress and where to shop for items that would help to emulate that period without falling back on stereotypes for inspiration.

When I turned in my first article, our illustrious developer said "Great! It's just what I wanted! Now, could you please reverse all of that for your next piece? Maybe something about identifying headwear and accessories, and a bit with a dog. People love dogs."

"Sure," I said, smiling. You always smile when talking to your developer. Even when he can't see you. Even through clenched teeth. "I'd be happy to."

So, this time, I take a look at some of the more common (and accurate) character stereotypes from each of these three time periods. I also discuss ways to emulate them easily using evocative headgear, accessories, jewelry and so forth. Hopefully these suggestions will work as visual cues to your alter-ego's role in society so others don't have to spend the first half-hour of play asking, "What is it your character does, again?" Consider this article sort of a "fast-and-dirty" guide to costuming.

THE DARK AGES

Mention the Dark Ages to most people, and most of them (who know what you're talking about) will bring up some fairly common stereotypes. Figures such as King Arthur and his knights, Guinevere and her ladies-in-waiting, court jesters, monks and Robin Hood tend to get mentioned the most. Those figures do actually have some basis in fact, although not always to the full extent to which they appear in media today. Kings, queens, knights, ladies, merchants, serfs and farmers all populated the period.

The basic costume of the time was relatively simple. It consisted of long-sleeved, long-skirted dresses (sometimes in multiple layers) for the women, belted at the waist with a girdle of metal or cloth and with a veil of linen worn over the hair, which was worn long, often looped and braided into elaborate hairstyles. For the most part, men wore either short, thigh-length tunics with



tights covering their legs or floor-length robes in much the same style as the women. Sumptuary laws governed who could wear what sorts of fabric, fur and colors so that clothing clearly defined each layer of the social strata.

THE CHATELAINE, OR LADY WITH THE KEYS

Due to the fact that the Lord of the manor was often away at war under the banner of whomever he owed fealty to, the Lady of the estate would often find herself in charge of the general upkeep of the estate and its surrounding lands. Her Ladyship was the only person on the estate who held keys to all of the locks in the castle or manor house, making her ring of keys a significant visual cue to the power she held. To emulate this station with a prop, find the largest metal ring that you can and thread keys onto it. Antique keys work best, of course, but if you aren't lucky enough to have an eccentric aunt with an attic full of nifty props, you can often purchase modern copies (of the keys) from craft or do-it-yourself jewelry or bead shops. After you have your ring assembled, tie it to a length of ribbon, cord or chain, then allow it to dangle authoritatively from your waist over your skirts.

THE COURT JESTER, OR THE FOOL

Without question, the most distinctive piece of costuming you can invest in is the jester hat. This hat is *the* definitive article of clothing for a court jester, and it comes in a variety of styles, all of which have several basic things in common. For instance, jester hats have multiple points that either hang down like floppy dog ears or have stuffing so that they stand away from the head. They come in multiple colors, and they often have bells sewn on at the points and a stiff brim cut to resemble a crown (something that developed from the fools mockery of kings and princes). These hats are fairly easy to find at costuming shops or Renaissance Festivals (or even those funky hat shops that show up in malls).

The rest of the costume of the fool is also quite distinct and very brightly colored. Often, his clothes were the cast-offs of his betters, pieced together from worn out suits of clothing so that he might have one legging in one color, one in another and a tunic from still a third outfit, none of which matched. The best way to evoke this look for your jester character is to make sure that nothing matches; avoid co-ordination completely. Even if the clothes are modern, if you think like a little kid getting dressed on her own for the first time, you can look pretty clownish. After that, add jingle bells. Tie them onto your clothing at your wrists, ankles, knees, elbows (anywhere really) with ribbons in bright, obnoxious colors. Okay, so you can't sneak up on anyone with bells tied all over your body, but hey, you're a fool; no one should be afraid of you anyway (or should they?). One final effective touch is that of the mock scepter or wand. This prop can be as simple as a painted wooden dowel rod with ribbons and bells tied around the top or as fancy as the jester-headed styles sold in gift shops and at fairs.

OTHER OFFICERS OF THE COURT, INCLUDING LORDS

The ranks of office were all in the jewelry. During the Dark Ages, wealthy men often wore as much jewelry as (if not more than) their female counterparts. Chains of office were decorations rather like oversized necklaces that draped over the shoulders. They could be as simple as a thick, unadorned gold or silver chain or as elaborate as linked medallions covered in gemstones. (Think of 1970s disco belts for an approximate visual.)

Also, go heavy on the rings. If you can find really heavy bands with large "gemstones," you'll be on the right track. If you can wear enough of them, even class and fraternity rings give you the right look. I have had a lot of luck in the



past shopping at antique malls and flea markets for these sorts of props. I have also been known to invest in "real" jewelry in this style, but doing so can get pricey. It also helps to have stuff that you don't care about losing. At this time, men did not really wear earrings. This accouterment was a fashion that seems to have picked up when Europeans came in closer contact with "Eastern" cultures, so if you wish to wear them during play, don't, or keep them small.

MONKS

The costume of the monk has never really changed, much. It consists of a long, plain robe with full sleeves and a cowl or hood. Tie the robe at the waist with a length of rope that has been knotted at each end. In addition, these monks wore plain leather or rope sandals similar to the Birkenstock brand of today. And that's it, folks. Some might also have carried a wooden cross or rosary beads, but nothing more. Unfortunately, there really aren't any short-cuts or easy visual cues here. You really do need the robes. However, if you just can't come up with them, dress very plainly, in loose clothing of all one color. Avoid black in favor of gray or brown, or even white or off-white. Then track down a length of rope long enough to tie around your waist with the ends hanging down to about knee-length. And, if your character is very penitent, you can add a wooden cross to wear around your neck or hanging down from the rope belt on a leather thong.

THE WILD WEST

The old days of the American Wild West are stuffed full of stereotypes that most of us have been familiar with since we were children. Gunslingers, gamblers, old prospectors, saloon girls, dandies and soldiers are just a few of the many cast members found in the Wild West. The basic Western man's outfit consisted of a collarless shirt, wool pants or denim jeans (blue only), a belt or suspenders, boots and sometimes a vest and a coat or jacket of some sort. The two other common and vital elements were a wide-brimmed hat and some sort of kerchief to keep the sun off your head and neck. Women were still tightly corseted, and they went about in long skirts, fitted jackets and high-necked, long-sleeved blouses. While most stock outfits of the time are fairly complex, each normally had one or two significant pieces of equipment that define the wearer's role in society.

GUNSLINGERS

Lets face it, the most visual cue for a gun-slinger is his (or her, thank you Sharon Stone) gun. This cue presents a problem in live-action play, of course, because carrying actual firearms or even decent replicas in public is pretty much the height of folly. It's also not the easiest task to find guns of the appropriate genre at short notice. My solution is to skip the guns and wear the belts. Wear one as a regular belt; wear the other as a gun belt substitute. Make the substitute something wide and leather, slung low over one hip (or low on both if you want the double-holster effect). Throw a long coat or duster over the whole outfit and hide the fact that your guns are missing. Or wear empty holsters and stuff your item cards for your pistol(s) into them so that the ends show prominently. Then add a bandana (tied bandit style) around your neck.

GAMBLERS

These characters wear a look close to that of the gun-fighter, but with a touch more style. If you think about the vital visual cues here, four come to the



forefront: the fancy brocade vest that can be easily acquired from a formal wear shop, the bolero style cowboy hat, the string tie and some symbol of the gambler's addiction. A deck of cards, pair of dice or a coin the character flips all the time give instant hints to your character's walk of life.

THE DANDY, OR CITY SLICKER

This common character is usually, but not always, the butt of jokes in Western fiction. Dandy types are proper little Victorian-era clerks, the Western equivalent of modern geeks. A quick fix here should include some of the following: a bowler hat, marking your character as someone either just visiting the area or too new to know any better (since seasoned westerners wore broad-brimmed hats to keep the stronger western sun off their faces and necks); wire-rimmed eyeglasses; sleeve garters (elastic bands worn just above or below the elbow and used to hold white suit sleeves out of your work); and finally a pocket-watch, or at least a chain dangling from pocket to pocket to give the appearance of a watch. If you don't actually have the watch, don't worry. A lot of the actual dandies didn't either!

THE SALOON GIRL

This archetype represents one of the most stereotyped characters of the Wild West. Usually presented in the movies as a pretty young thing, or at least a still-attractive matron, a real saloon girl was not quite so glamorous. There was no standard uniform, other than bright, gaudy colors and as little fabric as could be gotten away with in public. This standard produced dresses that had the sleeves cut off and the top cut down, and the full, petticoat skirts of the day were cut short to show off the legs. Sometimes (in very rough establishments), the girls simply wore bloomers, chemises and their corsets.

But who cares? I'd rather take my cue from the movies, especially since that's what people are most familiar with. So do the following: Wear something tight and corset-like on top and a full skirt that you can gather up over your knees. Then add fishnet hose, with a garter around your exposed knee, and lace-up ankle boots. Pile your hair up on your head, then tuck in ostrich plumes (available in most craft stores) and tie a length of black satin ribbon around your neck as a choker. Voila!

SOLDIERS

After the Civil War (as well as during), many soldiers wanted nothing more than to get away from the bloodshed and bad memories of the eastern United States. In so doing, they went west to build new lives for themselves, often with nothing more than the clothes on their backs. Those clothes were highly likely to be the uniforms they had deserted in. To emulate this look, start with either dark blue or dark gray pants (choose a side), a white shirt, suspenders and black boots (riding style, no laces). The uniform jackets are a bit harder to come by, but they aren't necessary. If you can, check out costuming supply stores for the combat uniform caps.

THE GREAT WAR

The most difficult thing about fast-and-easy dressing for this period is that there simply aren't many stereotypes to copy. The only solid, stable images from this time are those from the military services. Civilian men's clothing was not that markedly different from that of the Victorians who came before or the swingers of the '20s who followed after. Women's fashions, on the other hand, ranged all over. A woman who began the war era as a corseted Edwardian (wearing a floor-length dress covered in



lace, with long, tight sleeves, high collar and a hat the size of a wagon wheel) could end it baring her arms and ankles in loose, flowing gowns that left her unrestricted. The hair of the "modern" woman changed as well, moving from the long "Psyche" knot styles of graceful curls around the face and a loose bun worn at the back of the neck to chin length in permanent waves. And that was just at the beginning and the end of the time period. In the years between, there was no set style at all.

MILITARY SERVICES

By far the most prevalent image associated with the Great War is that of military service personnel. Many modern uniforms either saw their start with this war or even now are at least in the "tradition" of the uniforms introduced here. So the following is a short run-down of each American branch's uniform and some (hopefully) quick steps you can take to dress accordingly.

Soldiers (or doughboys, as they were called) wore khaki-green uniforms that resembled the modern dress uniform of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in a more subdued color scheme. When not in the midst of battle, soldiers wore "campaign hats," rather like a khaki version of a Canadian mounty's hat. During combat, they wore metal helmets that looked rather like an upside-down soup bowl with a chin strap.

Sailors dressed in navy blue bell pants with a matching "middy" shirt that had full sleeves and a white collar, square at the back and coming to a point at the front of the blouse. In addition, they wore the standard white sailor hat and a solid black kerchief tied around the neck. Sailors' shoes were black, and this costume is absolutely the only one with which it might be okay to wear black athletic shoes.

Pilots were a new breed who flew for both the Army and the Navy, as the Air Force did not exist yet. In addition to the well-known brown leather jacket, goggles, tight-fitting leather flight helmet and white silk scarf, the uniforms' shirts, ties and pants were tan in color, and the boots were dark brown. A dark brown baseball jacket (no logo) would work well as a substitute for the bomber jacket. Leather winter hunters caps (with the ear flaps) suffice as flight helmets, and some of the sturdier swim goggles on the market will masquerade well as flight goggles as long as you keep them on the helmet.

CIVILIAN DRESS FOR MEN

Things to look for: Men sported bowler hats, fedoras and straw "boaters" (think barbershop quartets) in the summer. The silk top hat was still in vogue for evening, as was the walking stick. Pocket watches were still in use, and they often had small "Swiss Army" knives suspended from their chains. Wristwatches had also become popular as the war demonstrated their practicality. If you decide to wear one, go for the "classic" styles that included utilitarian metal faces on leather straps.

Men wore gloves for both day and evening. They wore thin kidskin or leather during the day and white fabric in the evening. They still carried handkerchiefs of colored fabric (or white with a colored border) during the day and plain white ones during the evening. Leather wallets and billfolds had replaced the earlier pocket change purse. And last, but certainly not least, the cigarette made it's appearance, replacing the pipe and making way for all sorts of nifty cigarette carrying-cases made of polished metal or leather. Just make sure you realize that it was only the cases that were cool and stylish at the time, not the actual cigarettes. (Okay, sermon over.)



CIVILIAN DRESS FOR WOMEN

As I believe I mentioned earlier, women's fashions of this period were all over the place. The corset had finally fallen out of fashion in about 1912, helped along no doubt by the need to use steel for more military purposes. The fashionable silhouette then changed from the "S" curve (bust pushed forward, rear pushed backward) to a more relaxed reverse curve with shoulders comfortably slouched back and the hips forward in a permanent leaning posture.

Basic rules of dress for the look of this time are as follows: Skirt lengths should be about six to eight inches above the ankle for both day and evening wear except for the most formal of fashions. The tunic dress became popular at this time, so any sort of straight, sleeveless dress should work to emulate this style. Just remember that women were glad to be rid of structured clothing, so the fashion moved away from anything form-fitting. Fabrics were soft, and they draped easily. The only definition of figure on the tunic dresses came from occasional scarves or belts at the waist, usually closer to hip level than the true waistline. Many tunic dresses had straight skirts and tops that bloused over the belt.

Pearl jewelry was very much in style as well. You can wear both choker and long varieties of pearl or bead necklaces, and pearl and dangling earrings. Folding fans and paper parasols are also great accessories. Because the clothing became so simple, both jewelry and accessories became more elaborate, and that is the visual idea you should follow when costuming yourself for play.

In conclusion, there are just a couple of things I would like to add to enhance playing with props. First, if you have something that you know would be just perfect for your character, but you don't want to lose it, don't take it to the game. Leave stuff that you care about at home where it's safe and it won't get lost. Even if you know you're careful with your stuff, sh*t happens, and it's better to be safe than sorry.

Second, most of the things that I mentioned in this article can be found at the following kinds of stores: craft shops (even Hobby Lobby or A.C. Moore), fabric stores (such as So-Fro or Northwest) and, my personal favorites, antique malls, flea markets and garage sales. These stores are a goddess-send to any costume designer, and I highly recommend going to as many of them as possible.





WEREWOLF: THE DARK AGES

by David "The Deuce" Kizzia

ROLEPLAYING GAROU IN THE DARK AGES

The Dark Ages represent the final hours of glory in the sun before the twilight of the oncoming Apocalypse. In the immediate years to come, European cities will expand in both population and technological advancement. Hungry empires will cross the threshold of the Atlantic Ocean to conquer the indigenous tribes of the Americas, slaughtering thousands of Wendigo Kinfolk. The progress of mankind will empower the Wyrms in ways yet undreamed while pushing Mother Gaia to the brink of Apocalypse.

But for now, the Wyrms are relatively hidden and the Black Spiral Dancers gather their strengths in secret. The greatest dangers for the werewolf come from the expanding human population and each other. The Church still controls the daily lives of all humans, from commoner to nobility. As a result, most humans are generally superstitious and suspicious of anything that seems foreign to the status quo. Anything from strange travelers from foreign lands to learned studies of medicine and astronomy can be branded "the devil's own" in these highly religious times.

But the greatest threat to Garou at this time comes from their fellow Garou. Although the Litany is enforced, tribes still clash violently over political issues large and small. With the exception of the Red Talons, the End Times are a distant dream, uncertain at best. For now, the Garou revel in their heroic deeds and tales of glory, unaware the true battle lies ahead of them. . . .

THE TRIBES

At this time, the Garou Nation is firmly led by the Silver Fang Tribe, a fact that irritates the Shadow Lords to no end (and will continue to do so well into modern day). Most Garou will yield judgment to the Silver Tribe simply for expedience and because the Fangs will probably demand it anyway. The Shadow Lords wait patiently for any political error or sign of weakness on the part of the Silver Fangs in order to unseat them from their traditional role.

The Fenrir maintain a healthy dislike for the Shadow Lords, feeling their scheming ways are a sign of weakness. There is also bad blood between the Fenrir and the Fianna, who blame the Fenrir for much of their kin's woes. Indeed, the Fianna harbor deep-rooted resentment towards the Nordic tribe and would prefer nothing better than its demise.

In the cities, the Warders have begun to build ties with the Bone Gnawer tribe, finding a common bond in their mutual preference for human settlements. Although the Warders are still mistrusted and the Bone Gnawers reviled, this burgeoning friendship will prove more and more useful as time carries on.

The other tribes revere the Red Talons, although the Talons themselves have developed a deeper dislike for the city-bound Warders. Warders smell too much like humans in the Talons' estimation, and very little good can come of that.

Finally, all of the tribes still harbor lingering suspicions about the nomadic Silent Striders, unsure of their wayward travel and lack of permanency in this day.

BLACK FURIES

The Furies of the Dark Ages are creatures of wild woodlands and long fangs, fiercely defending the old pagan ways from the expansion of the Christian Church. Traditionally all female, most Furies will kill any male children born to them, but a progressive (or weak-spirited) minority has begun to give its male cubs to the Children of Gaia and Silent Striders.

Backgrounds: No Restrictions

Beginning Gifts: *Heightened Senses, Man's Skin, Sense Wyrn*

BONE GNAWERS

Reviled for their scavenger ways, their numbers are found among the poor of European society — common folks and the outcast dregs. Gnawers manage to survive despite the harsh conditions, and although several tribes deride them for the diversity (calling them "mongrels"), it is this diversity that creates their fortitude in the adverse conditions thrust upon them. Unlike modern times, there is no great shame in being a beggar; in a way, the Dark Ages are actually pleasant for the Bone Gnawer Kin.

Backgrounds: Bone Gnawers may not buy *Pure Breed* or *Resources*.

Beginning Gifts: *Cooking, Scent of Sweet Honey, Trail of the Larder*

THE CHILDREN OF GAIA

Found among the greater Muslim cities and in Constantinople and Rome, their numbers are few throughout the mainland of Europe. The spread of Islam throughout Spain and Italy has begun to increase their numbers on the continent, but their presence is less than welcome among the smaller Christian villages. A few Children can be found among the pacifistic Christian sects, however, using their positions to promote religious and social tolerance for all.

Backgrounds: No restrictions

Beginning Gifts: *Eve's Blessing, Mother's Touch, Resist Pain*

FENRIR

These fierce Viking warriors from the Germanic and Nordic regions of Europe spread across the continent as their Saxon ancestors invaded. Their invasions of the Celtic homelands have created an enmity with the Fianna tribe that will extend well into the 20th century. Still, their valor on the battlefield is unquestioned, and the Fenrir are always willing to sacrifice themselves for the good of Gaia, fighting all of her enemies (in addition to their own kinsmen within other Tribes).

Backgrounds: Fenrir may not purchase *Contacts*.

Beginning Gifts: *Razor Claws, Resist Pain, Snow Running*

FIANNA

Coming from the British isles, the Fianna struggle to regain their culture and homelands from foreign usurpers, notably the Fenrir and Silver Fang tribes and Kinfolk. Their connection with the Fae remains strong, as well as their memories of their lost brethren, the White Howlers. Indeed, the Fianna have a special hatred for the Black Spiral Dancers and hope to score vengeance for their lost brethren upon these foul creatures.

Backgrounds: No Restrictions

Beginning Gifts: *Faerie Light, Persuasion, Resist Toxin*



RED TALONS

As the chosen of the Wyld, the Red Talons have watched the rise of man from their early inception, fearing the eventual onslaught of the human population across their homelands. Although they quietly attempt to cull the human herd whenever possible, they and they alone can see the dark future ahead for both their Tribe and Gaia as a whole. If only the other tribes would hear them...

Backgrounds: Red Talons may not purchase *Allies*, *Contacts* or *Resources*.

Beginning Gifts: *Beast Speech*, *Prey's Cry*, *Scent of Running Water*

SHADOW LORDS

Deeply entrenched within the Carpathian Mountains, the Shadow Lords practice their machiavellian dominance upon the townfolk as well as their own brethren. Known for their harsh discipline, the Shadow Lords quietly challenge the leadership of the Silver Fang tribe within the Garou Nation, promoting the concept that the strong shall not only survive, but also conquer....

Backgrounds: Shadow Lords may not buy *Allies* or *Mentor*.

Beginning Gifts: *Aura of Confidence*, *Fatal Flaw*, *Resist Toxin*

SILENT STRIDERS

Wanderers of the open terrain, the Silent Striders seek knowledge across the continents, quiet loners without a permanent home. Yet, their nomadic ways provide a source of information from other lands and other tribes. Still, in a time where common folk never leave the villages in which they were born, such nomads are looked upon with suspicion and mistrust.

Backgrounds: Silent Striders may not purchase *Past Life* or *Resources*.

Beginning Gifts: *Heavens' Guidance*, *Sense Wym*, *Speed of Thought*

SILVER FANGS

Spread throughout European royalty, the Silver Fangs pride themselves in their right to rule the Garou Nation. Descended from kings, they strive to preserve their high-ranking position both in blood and in deed. As a result, they strive to lead their Lupine brethren in any and every crisis, whether welcomed or not.

Backgrounds: Silver Fangs must spend at least three Traits on *Pure Breed*.

Beginning Gifts: *Eye of the Falcon*, *Lambent Flame*, *Sense Wym*

THE WARDERS OF MAN

The tribe that will one day be called the Glass Walkers focuses primarily on the development of humanity and its creations. They work towards encouraging enlightenment in human society, walking a fine line between the critical traditionalists of the Garou and the watchful oppressive eye of the Dark Medieval church.

Backgrounds: Warders may not purchase *Pure Breed* or *Mentor*.

Beginning Gifts: *Artisan's Command*, *Persuasion*, *Smith's Blessing*



THE OTHER TRIBES

STARGAZERS

Although the golden road to Cathay will eventually open the path for these Eastern Garou, their existence is largely undiscovered by European Garou at this time. If you should opt to bring the rare (and we do mean *rare*) Stargazer into your chronicle, the modern-day stats will be sufficient.

UKTENA AND THE WENDIGO

Although the Stargazer tribe may be considered exceedingly rare among European Garou, these Native American tribes are completely unknown. Although Theurges may have heard spirits speak of "faraway brothers to the West," no one knows specifically what the spirits mean. In time, these tribes will join their European brethren in the fight against the Wyrms... but not today.

ANTAGONISTS IN THE DARK MEDIEVAL WORLD

Black Spiral Dancers: In the Dark Ages, Dancers are extremely rare, virtually unseen by most of the other Tribes. Although they are known as the remnants of the fallen White Howler tribe, their lack of strength and numbers makes it difficult for the other Tribes to consider them a true threat. Thus, they wait in secret in massive tunnels throughout Europe, slowly building their strength, rarely allowing their Garou adversaries to see them. They are an unknown enemy, usually hiding in the shadows until it's to their best advantage to strike.

Fomori: Although fomori do occasionally appear, they are employed in an overt fashion only rarely. Instead, they pervert their surroundings quietly, attempting to attract as little attention as possible. Entire villages can be tainted and corrupted by a patient fomori, given enough time and human frailty.

Glutton Worms: These worms are the most common sort of Wyrmonsters in this era. They live underground, burrowing tunnels and digging out nests for themselves far below the surface. For some mysterious reason, adult Worms come out into the open country on nights of the new moon, where they gorge themselves on anything they can find, be it plants, livestock or people. Although this blight will eventually be extinguished by the end of the 17th century, they remain a current and constant foe at this time.

Glutton Worms are usually as wide as a horse's belly and long as two pikes — although rumors tell of even larger creatures. They resemble a cross between a giant grub and a bloated, skinless serpent with large sets of barracuda-like jaws.

Kindred: Most Garou know of the Undead, although few truly understand the differences between what the leeches call their "clans." To the Garou, one dead thing is the same as the other. The Silent Striders still hold their greatest enemy to be the vampires of Egypt, commonly called "The Followers of Set," and remain eager to exterminate any that cross their path. The Shadow Lords particularly despise the Kindred they have encountered in the Carpathian Mountains, a twisted spawn of evil with hideous flesh-rending abilities. More than any other tribes, the Shadow Lords feel the Undead to be their greatest threat. Bone Gnawers also hold a particular rivalry with the misshapen squalid Undead they have heard referred to as "Nosferatu."

Magi: Magicians are mysterious in their ways, even to the werewolves. Although a scant few have shown respect to the Garou, most remain aloof and secretive. Like werewolves and fae, magi harbor secret places of power and seek out other sources of



such mystical strength. It is the rare and foolish magus, however, who overtly attacks the Garou. Wizards, warlocks and witches are far more subtle and clever.

The Fae: Although most of the fae remain on cordial terms with the Garou, they hold a particular aversion to the Black Furies, due to the Furies' over-protective nature toward the kin on whom the fae play their tricks. While the time of the Shattering is close at hand, it is not complete in the 12th Century, so the fae are not as weak and desperate as the changelings of the modern world. Fae remain whimsical and tricky to deal with, both as useful allies and problematic foes.

The Church: The power of the Church is both the greatest ally and foe to the Garou. The Church controls the Dark Medieval world completely, from its peasants to its royalty. High-ranking church officials wield powerful political influence and sway, often dictating the policy and edicts in the name of the Church's interests. In addition, the fear of God and eternal damnation keeps local villages and hamlets under the control of their local clergy. Strangers and odd behaviors are easily branded servants of the Infernal in such superstitious times. And yet, because of the reverence and subservience given to the Church and its methodology, its beliefs actually help contain the influence of the minions of the Wyrms. Active fomori often find themselves facing a clergy-led local militia, wielding the power of True Faith. Such "divine" intervention, however, can easily be turned upon a band of traveling Garou as well.

THE WYRM

Unlike the situation in the modern day, the great enemy of the Garou is not at its peak in the Dark Medieval setting. This is a time before the wild uncontrolled expansion of human civilization and the subsequent pollution left in its wake. Although Dark Medieval cities are filthy and unkempt, their squalor is inconsequential compared to their future destruction of Gaia's lands. As a result, The Wyrms have yet to see the full progress of society's cruelty and corruption. As such, it isn't strong enough to spark the Apocalypse yet.

At this time, however, the Wyrms do bask in the success of corrupting the entirety of the White Howler tribe, a dark metamorphosis into the dreaded Black Spiral Dancers. At this time, Black Spiral Dancers work in secret, breeding and expanding their ranks quietly within their dank caves, only venturing forth sporadically to appropriate new breeding stock and occasionally scout out the current state of Gaia. As minions of the Wyrms, they realize it is not their time yet. But like their master, they are more than willing to wait.

For now, the Wyrms are content to continue its gradual war of attrition upon Gaia, keeping her warriors busy with its Glutton Worms, as well as the occasional fomori that burrows its way into an unsuspecting village to slowly corrupt its inhabitants. The passing of time serves the Wyrms, as humanity blissfully hastens to its extended, welcoming arms.

THE DELIRIUM

In these days of superstitious belief, the commoner does not explain supernatural encounters with the same sort of rationalizations of a modern mind. Monsters do indeed exist in the dark, and the Delirium does not make such encounters fade away. Instead, their minds react with abject terror or berserk rage, and survivors will have a hazy, albeit skewed, retention of the encounter. The descriptions listed in **Laws of the Hunt** remain the same, although with a different percentage rating.



THE UMBRA

Although the rules of the spirit world have not changed much from the Dark Ages to modern day, the Umbra of the Dark Medieval world is a much stronger entity. The spirits of Gaia are more populous and active, and Banes are far rarer. In this pre-industrial age, the Weaver has yet to go mad in its creation and the Wyrn remains quiet. Thus, the spirits are in full bloom at this time.

The Gauntlet stands, yet its walls aren't as thick as they eventually will be. Magic and mystery still populate the hidden places of the Earth that retain a close bond with the spirit world. Everywhere, from the backend streets of the largest European cities to the strongest of caerns, Gauntlet ratings are lowered by one, compared to the ranking in modern day.

THE BREEDS

HOMID

Homid-born Garou walk through their villages, hiding their secret from the prying and superstitious eyes of their neighbors. In the enclosed environment of a hamlet or village, secrets and public gossip are far more dangerous to the Garou's safety. Most leave home after the First Change in order to prevent too many questions about their comparative "strangeness."

METIS

In these Dark Medieval times, the metis breed is usually killed outright as soon as possible, wisely considered more of a detriment than a benefit to the tribe. In the rare occasion a metis is allowed to survive to maturity, she will have the same Gifts as the modern day breed. However, if discovered to be the product of an unholy mating between Garou, more often than not, her tribe-mates will ostracize her as a freak of nature—provided they do not hunt her down and kill her outright.

LUPUS

The lupus breed thrives in the Dark Medieval times, as demonstrated by the numerous Red Talons of the day. All the tribes (including the Warders and the Bone Gnawers) benefit from a healthy lupus population within their tribes. The lupus are considered "distinguished citizens," carrying a certain modicum of respect of the Garou Nation.

CHARACTER CREATION

The Trait mechanics of character creation for a Dark Ages werewolf don't differ significantly from those of a modern-day werewolf. You still assign Attribute Traits and Ability Traits as stated on p. 28 of *Laws of the Wild* from the lists that begin on pages 36 and 42 respectively. Obviously, some Abilities listed in that book are inappropriate to a Dark Ages chronicle (such as *Computer* or *Drive*). Check *The Long Night* for period-specific Abilities and Backgrounds.



ADDITIONAL MERITS AND FLAWS

Church Rank (1-3 Trait Merit): You have become part of ranks of the Holy Church — although you do not necessarily share its beliefs — thereby possessing some of the advantages of rank. You can influence local politics to some extent, and locals respect you as a representative of God. One Trait of this Merit might mean the character is a summoner or deacon; two would be a monk, nun or pardoner; three traits represent a local priest or ranking monk. Higher rank (abbess, bishop and so on) should only be allowed with the Storyteller's permission (and at an even higher cost) — these ranks carry a greater amount of influence and responsibility. Red Talons cannot take this Merit.

Nobility (1-3 Trait Merit): Due to good birthing, you possess a noble's title and enjoy the advantages thereof. One trait of this Merit translates roughly as a minor title with little prestige (like a knight). With two traits, you could be the younger child of a ranking noble, and with three you might be a baron. Greater titles should only be given to players at Storyteller discretion. In the Dark Medieval world, such titles wield great power, but also require an equally great amount of work to maintain. The Silver Fang Tribe expects its members to be of some sort of noble lineage and are often judged within their own tribe by their family's nobility and their personal rank within the land. Red Talons cannot take this Merit.

Manse (2 trait Merit): You may own a large manor — a home with 25 or more rooms, as well as the surrounding estate. The servants, if you have any, are provided for you if you have the Merit, although they cannot be Kinfolk unless additional points are spent. Nobility and great tracks of land often go hand in hand.

Spy Network: (2 trait Merit) You begin play with access to a group of humans who frequently bring you information. Their information is up-to-date and fairly reliable. Many Shadow Lords groom such networks specifically to maintain control over their territories.

Second-Class Citizen (2 trait Flaw): The simple happenstance of birth has made you a second-class citizen in Medieval Europe. This tends to appear in two forms. First, you might be female: Mortal men treat you as a natural inferior, and many Garou may also discriminate against you.

Alternately, you might be a member of a disliked or persecuted social group, and your appearance, speech or local reputation marks you as a member of this group. You are excluded from local politics and are distrusted by most locals.

Bear in mind, with the exception of the Black Furies, you need not take this Flaw. Take this Flaw only if you want to roleplay a Garou at a social disadvantage. Silver Fangs cannot take this Flaw.

Dark Prophecy (2 point Flaw): Like the Red Talon tribe, you experience visions of the horrors to come in future days when the Wyrms runs rampant across Gaia and the Garou are helpless to stop the gradual degeneracy of all humanity. Red Talons cannot take this Flaw.

DARK AGES GIFTS

Many of the Gifts in use during the modern period have existed since time out of mind. Therefore, those Gifts apply just as easily to a Dark Ages chronicle. The changing times will see most of these Gifts replaced or adapted. Most modern Gifts (excluding ones that affect or rely on modern technology) in *Laws of the Wild* are available to Dark Ages Garou.



BREED GIFTS

LUPUS

Basic

Sense Prey: This Gift allows the Garou the ability find prey for feeding purposes after the player wins or ties a Static Mental Test against five Traits. This Gift can only be used in the forest setting, and humans are not considered "prey" for feeding purposes.

METIS

The Gifts available to this cursed and scorned breed are no different than those available to modern-day metis Garou.

HOMID

Intermediate

Speech of the World: This gift allows the Garou to speak any human language she encounters, albeit with a slight accent, as long as the player spends one Mental Trait.

AUSPICE GIFTS

Since the responsibilities of the auspices have not undergone significant change, the Gifts allotted to the auspices have not done so either. The Theurge and Philodox Gifts, for example, are entirely the same now as they were during the Dark Ages.

RAGABASH

Basic

Snow Running: Heavy snow can immobilize an entire village or even stop a traveling wolf pack. With this Gift, a Garou may run across ice or snow as if it were solid ground, neither sinking nor leaving tracks. The player must spend one Gnosis Trait in order to activate this Gift.

Intermediate

Reynard's Lie: With this gift, even the greatest of the Ragabash's blatant lies will be believed (at least for a while). The Ragabash's player must beat the listener in a Mental Challenge after telling a lie. If the speaker does so, the listener will believe the lie he just heard, no matter how predisposed he might have been to distrust the speaker beforehand.

GALLIARD

Advanced

Call for Vengeance: Rather than the modern Gift: *Head Games*, Dark Ages Garou learn this Gift. When a traitor to Gaia is to be punished, the Galliard howls this call to all Garou who'll listen. The player spends a Rage Trait and a Willpower Trait, then engages the traitor in a Social Challenge. If the traitor loses the test, he cannot spend Willpower Traits for the rest of the session (or the next week of game time), and he is one Trait down in all Social Challenges. Loyal The call does not compel loyal Garou who hear it to hunt down the traitor, but the invitation to do so is plain.

AHROUN

Intermediate

Gift of the Salamander: Since silver is not as ubiquitous a threat as it is today, the Ahroun auspice has not yet developed the Gift: *Sense Silver*. Instead, Many Ahroun Garou learn this Gift. With it, an Ahroun becomes virtually



impervious to flame. After the player spends a Rage Trait, the invulnerability lasts the duration of the scene. Withstanding extremely intense flames (such as having a burning building collapse on a character) may require the expenditure of further Traits, at the Storyteller's discretion.

TRIBE GIFTS

BLACK FURIES

Basic

Man's Skin: The Dark Ages subscribes to "conventional" stereotypes for the female gender, potentially causing many a problem for the Black Fury on hunt. Using this Gift, however, a Black Fury will pass visibly as a man to onlookers. Her appearance will be decidedly masculine, although not completely removed from its true form (eye and hair color will remain the same, for example). Although her garb will also adapt to resemble male clothing, its social standing will remain the same. One cannot use this Gift to look like a noble if the Garou does not look like one to begin with, for example. Further, this illusory change confers no biological transformation.

It costs nothing to enact this Gift, but a successful Mental Challenge allows an onlooker to pierce the illusion.

Intermediate

Flames of Hestia: When using this Gift, the Fury's hands are surrounded by a purifying white flame. The player must spend a Gnosis Trait to activate this Gift. When she does so, the flames can purify enough food or water to fill a barrel, heal one health level of damage that resulted from disease or poison or inflict one aggravated health level of damage on a Bane or fomor (as long as the player wins a Physical Challenge).

Advanced

Arrow of Artemis: In the aspect of Artemis the huntress, Luna granted the Black Furies this powerful and destructive martial Gift. When firing a bow (Artemis' chosen weapon), the Fury allows Luna's power to infuse and guide the shaft. The player must spend one Gnosis and one Willpower Trait to activate this Gift. When she does, she gains three Traits to hit her target and ignores any negative Traits her bow may have. When the arrow itself hits, it does five extra levels of aggravated damage.

BONE GNAWERS

Basic

Trail of the Larder: After the expenditure of a Willpower Trait and a successful Mental Challenge against a difficulty based on amount and distance, this Gift allows the Gnawer to smell the closest source of *surplus* food and follow the scent to its source. The Gnawer may not know where his stomach is leading him, but it will definitely lead him to grub.

Intermediate

Plague Visage: This Gift functions the same way as *Man's Skin*, except it creates the illusion that the user suffers from Leprosy or some other fearsome disease. Players of mortals must expend a Willpower Trait to approach the character using this Gift, and even those who do not fear disease (such as the undead) must defeat the character in a Static Willpower Challenge in order to get close.

Call the Rust: By whistling through his teeth (and spending a Gnosis Trait), the Bone Gnawer makes metal corrode and deteriorate in seconds. Objects like swords, chains and metal shields are the most susceptible to this

Gift. This Gift will not destroy an entire suit of armor all at once, but spending extra Gnosis Traits increases its immediate range of effect.

CHILDREN OF GAIA

Basic

Eve's Blessing: By spending a Gnosis Trait and laying his hands on an expectant mother's belly, the Child confers an extra health level to both the mother and the new baby. This extra health level lasts for the next week after the child is born, and it makes the woman and child much more likely to survive the delivery.

Intermediate

Grandmother's Touch: Identical in nature to *Mother's Touch*, this Gift allows the Garou to heal himself as well as others.

Angel's Semblance: This Gift allows the Garou to act in Crinos form without invoking the terror of Delirium. When the user's player spends a Gnosis Trait, the user appears as an avatar of the witness' own spiritual beliefs rather than a rampaging beast of the wilderness. A Christian would see an angel, and a Norseman might see a Valkyrie, for example. Use the Delirium chart in *Laws of the Wild* (taking the Dark Ages Delirium reduction into account) to determine the effect, but replace feelings of fear with feelings of spiritual reverence and bliss.

FENRIR

Basic

Wearing the Bear Shirt: Once a Fenrir Garou learns this Gift, she will never again enter fox frenzy. Any frenzy she enters becomes a berserk frenzy automatically, and the Fenrir's player may make a Static Rage Test to resist supernatural powers that incite fear.

Intermediate

Iron Can't Bite: This Gift protects the user from damage done by any weapon made of iron or steel. The Fenrir carves the "iron can't bite" rune into his flesh (and the player spends one Gnosis and one Rage Trait) to activate this Gift. It lasts for the duration of the scene.

FIANNA

Basic

Faerie Light: By spending a Trait of Gnosis, the Fianna may create a pale, eerie will-o'-the-wisp that moves at his command. The orb is too weak to ignite other materials, but its light is sufficient to see or even read by. It lasts for one scene.

Howl of the Banshee: The werewolf howls long and loud, driving fear into the hearts of even the most stalwart listeners. When the player spends a Gnosis Trait and the character howls, *anyone* who hears the sound must defeat the character in a Static Willpower Challenge. Those who lose the test must flee for the duration of the scene.

Intermediate

Lleu's Spear: This Gift adds supernatural force to the throw of a spear, enabling it to pierce armor or plow clean through a foe. The player of the user of this Gift spends a Willpower Trait and makes the standard Physical Challenge to throw his spear. If she succeeds in the challenge, the spear completely ignores any armor or shield the target might be wearing and does its regular amount of damage. This Gift allows the user to throw her spear through even a heavy oak door or a moderately thick stone wall. It only works on thrown spears, however.



Warp Spasm: The character using this Gift works himself into a berserk frenzy that is even more dangerous than normal. When the player spends a Rage Trait, his character enters a berserk frenzy and generates an intense heat. Flammable objects the character touches burst instantly into flame, metal objects touching the character melt, and the character's attacks do an additional level of aggravated (fire) damage.

RED TALONS

Basic

Prey's Cry: Red Talons use this Gift to lure mortals to dire ends in the woods. By defeating the intended victim in a Mental Challenge, the Talon creates a convincing sound that would be likely to lure a human out into its territory. Examples of such sounds include cries of distress, the crying of a baby or the sounds of game animals.

Snuff Flames: The player may extinguish any flame within two yards of his character by spending a Willpower Trait. Each additional Trait spent increases this range. Flames thus extinguished are more difficult than usual to light again.

Intermediate

Snap Man's Chains: With a feral howl (and the expenditure of a Gnosis Trait), the Red Talon breaks the mental bonds of slavery in nearby domesticated animals. The werewolf cannot influence the actions of those animals, but the effect is instantly chaotic. Spending more Gnosis Traits expands the area affected by the howl.

SHADOW LORDS

Intermediate

Raven's Curse: Raven's Curse is the curse of death by arrows. The Shadow Lord using this Gift must touch her target with her fingers (requiring a successful Physical Challenge), win a Mental Challenge, then spend at least one Gnosis Trait. Laying the curse puts the user's victim one Trait down on all Physical Challenges thereafter in which she's the target of arrows. Expending more Gnosis Traits puts the victim at even more of a disadvantage. The Rite of Cleansing will remove this curse, as will other methods at the Storyteller's discretion.

Dolorous Stroke: This Gift allows the Shadow Lord to do fearsome injury to a target and intimidate enemies who witness it. The player spends a Gnosis Trait before making the standard Physical Challenge to hit. If she hits the target (and only if she hits), she does an additional health level of damage, and the blow intimidates anyone who sees it. Onlookers must bid an additional Trait when attacking the Shadow Lord for the rest of the scene. If the Shadow Lord's original attack misses, the Gift has no effect and the Gnosis Trait goes to waste.

SILENT STRIDERS

Basic

Heavens' Guidance: Once a Silent Strider learns this Gift, he will forever retain an unerring sense of direction and distance, as long as he is under a night sky. Not even cloud cover can interfere with this Gift.

Intermediate

Dam the Heartblood: This power prevents supernatural creatures from using their blood for any reason. By spending a Gnosis Trait and defeating the target in a Mental Challenge, the werewolf blocks the flow of supernatural blood

completely for a turn. The werewolf may use this power against a particular target only once per scene.

SILVER FANGS

Basic

Eye of the Falcon: By spending a Gnosis Trait, the werewolf's player gains an additional Mental Trait for use in vision-based perception tests for the rest of the scene.

Intermediate

Divine Regalia: By spending one Rage, one Gnosis and one Willpower Trait, the werewolf creates a mystical suit of armor that inspires her comrades and terrifies her foes. The armor functions (statistically) as full plate armor, but it allows the wearer to treat silver damage as lethal, rather than aggravated damage. At the same time, any of the Silver Fang's packmates who are fighting in line of sight of her are one Trait up on all challenges while the Gift is in effect. The Fang's enemies must defeat her in a Willpower Challenge before attacking, and they must flee in terror if they lose the Willpower Challenge.

WARDERS

Basic

Artisan's Command: Similar in nature to the modern Gift *Control Simple Machine*, this Gift allows the Warden to operate mechanical and manmade devices as he sees fit. The player must spend a Willpower Trait to use this Gift, and the character's control over the device in question lasts for one scene.

Smith's Blessing: After winning or tying a Simple Test and the expenditure of a Gnosis Trait, this Gift restores any broken item to good working order. Doing so requires that all of the pieces to be present, as well as in some state of wholeness. (Burnt or obliterated pieces will not suffice.) The mended item will not be returned to a perfect state, but it will function as a well crafted, although used, tool that has been maintained and well kept.

Gift of Salt: By spending a Gnosis Trait, the Warden can preserve up to 20 pounds of food perfectly. The food tastes very lightly of salt thereafter, but it remains preserved and free of pests for one month per Gnosis Trait spent.

Mask of the Predator: Werewolves' inner Rage makes most animals (especially domesticated ones) extremely uneasy. Using this Gift, however, fools animals into believing that the Warden is no more than human. The Warden's player must win a Social Challenge against the animal, and the Gift's effects last for the rest of the scene. The Gift does not work on wolves, and it stops working on other animals if the Warden changes out of Homid form.

Intermediate

Tongues: This Gift functions just as *Speech of the World* does, but it grants literacy in the given language as well as fluency.

Weaponmaster: Learning this Gift grants a Warden (even one of the lupus breed) the ability to use any weapon developed by humans, excluding firearms. The player receives an additional Trait in all challenges to use the weapon and ignores the weapon's negative Traits.





ON THE SIDE OF THE ANGELS

by Peter Woodworth

*It's time again for an illustrative piece of MET-inspired fiction. This piece comes in from Peter Woodworth, who's made a name for himself writing Mind's Eye Theatre material such as **The Shining Host** and **Laws of the East**. Now, Pete shows that he can write fiction as well as gamespeak, with this tale about the difference between idealism and activism in the World of Darkness.*

No one else cared. That was what really bothered him.

No one cared, God damn it!

Michael flowed gracefully out of the muddy ocean of people washing down the dirty avenue and into the dark, swirling tidal pool of the alley. Only one other person seemed to visibly notice, and that one only gave him a look of complete incredulity. Seduced by the lullaby whispers of their television screens, most people didn't believe such places still exist — if they ever did. They thought that back-alley crimes existed only in film noir and cliché television scripts.

Bullshit.


Michael's trained eyes adjusted to the gloom as easily as another person would to turning on the lights in a room, bringing the familiar scene into its full, pitiful clarity. Three actors this time: a gangly reed of a boy lurking inside his battered leather and borrowed pride, an obviously dope-sick girl standing two paces behind him and a cringing mess of bloody denim Michael took to be male from the sound of the cries. The girl was holding a shaking knife as her boy gave their victim a vicious kick to the ribs, not seeming to notice even as Michael increased his pace to intervene. That was another comfortable fiction of popular culture. People assume that girlfriends of even the worst sorts of scum would always hang back from an attack, pulling on their boyfriend's arm and saying stupid things like, "We got the money, Brett, just let him go," or "Stop it, Slash, you don't need to hurt him that badly."

Nor was their victim the usual poor-but-noble old lady or hapless wide-eyed tourist. By the look of him, he knew the intimate thrill of the needle better than his attackers. His skin stretched like lifeless white parchment pockmarked with fresh bruises and old needle tracks like a masochist's map. That was exactly why it was so easy for everyone else to ignore them, really. They were no one anyone would miss, doing things no one approved of, and if they fought and killed each other doing it, so what? Best instead to just keep your feet moving, keep your head down, cross your fingers and pray to God that when your time came, you wouldn't be the one everyone else pretended not to have heard.

But Michael always heard.

When he finally reached the scene, he didn't try to stop and reason with anyone. One of the first things he'd learned when he'd joined the Guardian Angels was that if the perpetrators were this far gone, pat little speeches and platitudes were less than useless. No, this was a different sort of intervention.

In his more darkly introspective moments, Michael liked to think that this action was the last resort of civilization. It was a demonstration that lawlessness



simply will not be permitted; the punishment for violation would be swift and overt. So when the boy finally noticed him and turned with fists raised, Michael simply took one step forward, grabbed the kid's wrist and performed a deft magic trick with it. One second the boy was on his feet and yelling, and the next he was lying on his back clutching his fractured forearm.

Ignoring the boy's surprised wailing, Michael used one hand to toss aside the girl's dirty knife, and he sent the other solidly into her solar plexus. She went down with a thin cough, gasping for air. Sparing a speculative glance at her howling boyfriend, Michael knelt by her side. Taking her chin in his hands, Michael burned his gaze deep into her eyes, willing her to see the righteous fury and absolute disgust she inspired in him. It had an immediate effect. Her eyes widened, first in shock, then in absolute, naked terror.

"Do you have any drugs?" he demanded. "Money?"

The girl nodded. Michael held out his hand, and she put a small bag of coke (just residue really) and a pair of crumpled twenties in it. Michael tore the money in half with a practiced twist and ground the baggie to pieces beneath his boot.

"Him?" She shook her head violently. He couldn't tell if she was lying or not, but he wagered she wouldn't risk it in her condition. He'd made his point now anyway.

"Leave," Michael said, his voice as calm and measured as the morning news anchor reading the weather report. "If either of you ever comes back to this neighborhood, I'll know, and this pain will be a skinned knee compared to what you'll feel. Understand me? *I'll be waiting.*" The girl nodded with tears running down her cheeks. "Now go."

She stumbled crazily to her feet, paused just long enough to haul her boy up where she could shoulder his weight. The two of them limped out of the alley and away into the night, hopefully never to return. Michael listened to the sounds of them fading, then headed over to their victim. The boy was younger than he'd thought at first and had been plenty sick on something before they'd gotten to him. He barely seemed to register anything at all, even as Michael called for the ambulance on his cell phone.

"It's okay, buddy," he said gently. The rage he'd felt a moment before evaporated, revealing nothing but caring concern beneath. "Help is on the way, I promise."

The boy turned to look at him as Michael leaned down. His left eye — the one that wasn't swollen shut — was glazed, but it still tried to cling to lucidity. Michael saw real and immediate fear growing there. The kid whimpered like a rabbit, and his purple, dislocated jaw kept trying to move. He clutched Michael's arm with thin fingers, his lips moving ever so slightly, rasping words that were not quite sound.

"Don't let them take me."

"It's all right, friend," Michael assured him between the directions he gave the emergency operator on the phone. "They're gone now."

The kid shook his head, fighting to keep his eyes open. "They're watching."

"You're going to be fine," Michael said again, hanging up on the operator. "Those two won't be back to bother you any more."

Without responding, the boy relaxed against the wet concrete and closed his eye. Unconsciousness had finally taken him. Just for safety's sake, Michael kept looking around for the attackers' return until the ambulance arrived.

• • • • •



"You're late," Marsilio chided him half an hour later.

Michael looked away, embarrassed. "Sorry. Something came up that I had to take care of." He bowed his head, and shame burned him.

To his relief, Marsilio waved the matter away. "No matter, Michael, no matter. I was just discussing some ventures with an associate anyway."

Michael couldn't suppress a quick frown at that. He had seen Nigel — the wiry Englishman who had started keeping the company books a little over two weeks ago — leaving as he was coming in, and he had gotten the same false smile and dead eyes from Nigel that he always did. Of course a man in Nigel's position had every right to be in conference with Marsilio whenever the latter so chose, but something about Nigel's look unsettled Michael just the same. Jealousy, maybe? Somehow, Michael didn't doubt it, but he'd also never had much time for those games before.

Personal politics always irritated him. He'd originally joined the Guardian Angels because they offered a chance to make a real, concrete difference in people's lives instead of simply adding to the corrupt web of red tape that neatly entangled and eviscerated the so-called "social initiatives" that the city council was always pushing. The trick was using one's fists effectively and not adding to the violence. Having learned to do so, Michael's skill and tolerance for social maneuvering had dried up, leaving him edgy and tense whenever he suspected that it was at work. Now that he worked for Marsilio, however, petty politicking had become a necessary skill. Everyone in the organization wanted the boss' ear or a piece of his time.

"Is something upsetting you?" Marsilio asked, looking at him closely.

"There is, sir." Michael licked his lips. He felt like he was doing something dirty, but he couldn't ignore what was building up in the back of his mind any longer. "A problem."

One fine eyebrow went up. "Oh? And what might that be?"

"The real reason I was — that is, I've been — I mean—" Michael shifted nervously from foot to foot under the weight of Marsilio's gaze, took a deep breath, and pulled his focus back together. "I've heard some rumors lately, sir. I was checking into them when I was delayed."

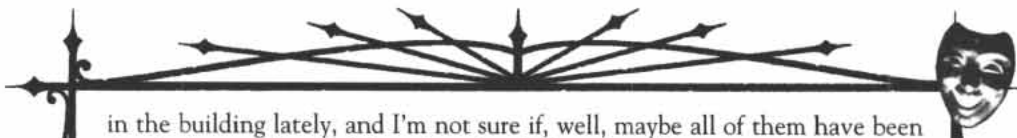
Marsilio leaned forward with a concerned frown on his face. "Checking into them? What does that mean? What kind of things are you talking about, Michael?"

It took all of his will, but Michael didn't break eye contact. "I've started hearing word on the street, sir, that says this company isn't just running renovation efforts anymore." Marsilio looked at him blankly, waiting. His tongue grew sluggish, unwilling to pronounce the words he was compelling it to say.

"Sir, what I'm saying is that I've heard there are all sorts of things going on: extortion, loan-sharking, prostitution, bribery." He shook his head. "I've even heard that some kind of cult has started kidnapping people off our streets!" His tone became even more sincere, pleading for acceptance. "Growing up in the city, I learned something about rumors, sir. Hear something once, ignore it. Hear it twice, remember it. Hear it three times...?"

"Is this laundry list supposed to be an accusation of some kind?" Marsilio's tone was measured, but menace simmered beneath its surface, barely restrained. Michael flinched away from the force of the emotion.

"Not against you specifically, sir," Michael said quickly, horrified that he might have implied as much. "But it's just that there have been a lot of new faces



in the building lately, and I'm not sure if, well, maybe all of them have been checked out as thoroughly as they should have been."

That wasn't nearly as strong as he'd wanted to make it. Michael had strongly suspected some of the new employees were up to no good from the first moment he saw them. It was the most forceful charge he could manage under that burning stare, however.

Marsilio held his gaze a moment longer, then sighed and leaned back in his chair. "Michael, do you suppose *you* are the sole reason that this neighborhood has gone from one of New York's worst to one of its fastest-growing enterprise zones in the year my company has been here?"

Humiliation touched his cheeks. "No, sir, but—"

Marsilio held up a hand. "Please. I didn't mean to insult you." A wry smile twitched at the corners of his mouth. "You're my most trusted lieutenant, Michael, and I hope you know that. Without your expert assistance and the aid of your other Guardian Angel friends, I never would have known where to start in a place like this neighborhood used to be, let alone been able to purge it of the filth that infested it."

Even as Michael's heart swelled with pride, however, Marsilio's smile fell away. "But as my representative to the community, your presence is required there most of the time. Where does that leave me? Or the times when I need help with something more esoteric, like a federal tax form?" Marsilio shrugged. "Do you see where this is leading, Michael? We're a growing company. I need to bring in new people to make it work." The smile returned. "I *always* need new people."

That just about sealed the discussion, but part of Michael's mind still wouldn't relent. "Yes, sir, I understand, but there *have* been a lot of new projects, and as far as I can see, not all of them seem to be in line with what the company goals have been in the past."

He paused, realizing his hands were shaking. "For instance, why did the company buy the Jackson Apartments? I thought we were just supposed to renovate them."


To Michael's surprise, Marsilio actually laughed. "Well, you didn't think we'd just keep putting up new storefronts and locking up hoodlums forever, did you? The city's done that for ages, and look at how little progress has been made! No, my friend, that's just the beginning. If we're going to make a difference here, we're going to have to start investing in other areas." He gestured to the door. "That's why Nigel was just here, in fact. We were discussing diversifying our assets, getting more involved in day-to-day life instead of just putting up buildings for people to fill."

He rubbed his chin thoughtfully. "Still, perhaps I should've been more cautious in hiring. I'll tell you what, I'll personally do a review of all our employees and their current projects, and if anything comes up suspicious, I'll let you know and we can work out a solution. Does that sound good?" Michael nodded slowly, and Marsilio gave him a radiantly apologetic smile. "I'm sorry if I haven't kept you as updated as I should have."

"No, really, sir, don't worry about it," Michael said, hanging his head. What was he thinking, bringing this up without all the facts? "I just wanted to make sure things weren't being overlooked, that's all."

"Don't worry about it. It's that kind of dedication I selected you for, Michael."

With the matter apparently concluded, Marsilio rose and went to the window, which overlooked one of the many restoration projects the company sponsored in the neighborhood. He clasped his hands behind his back like a lecturing professor, rubbing the impressive gold ring on his right hand idly. The ring was the only display



of anything approaching ostentation that Marsilio ever allowed himself. "I have some business I want you to attend to, Michael. Very important business."

Michael drew himself up straighter. "What is it?"

"Rumors have arisen of another gang trying to move into this neighborhood. They call themselves the 'Midnight Killaz,' or some such nonsense, and they have made it clear that they wish to begin pushing poison in this territory." A hint of anger crept into Marsilio's voice, and Michael took a step back. That was more emotion than nearly anything ever evoked in his reserved superior, and the thought of Marsilio's full fury shook him with fright. "Perhaps they assume that the neighborhood is free for them to claim since we disposed of the last bunch." His eyes, hard before, took on the cold sheen of gun barrels as he looked across his desk at his favorite lieutenant. "Prove them wrong, Michael. Before this happens again." Long fingers pushed a newspaper clipping across the table.

Michael didn't need to see what it was. Two nights ago, a poor couple and their three young children had been found shot to death, apparently for complaining to the police about men who were dealing out of the apartment down the hall. Michael had known the couple himself; they had been early supporters when Marsilio began the plan to revitalize the neighborhood and drive out the criminal element it contained. New York at large had relegated the killing to the isn't-that-horrible world of page three in the press, quick to chalk it up to the daily horrors of the notorious South Bronx. Michael himself had even believed it to be a random act of violence, brutal and deserving of the full extent of the justice they could muster, but essentially an isolated, senseless, horrible and still all-too-common incident.

But this news changed everything.

"I'll take care of it, sir," he said. "Don't worry."

He felt the familiar righteous fury building within, tempered by the knowledge that now he knew where to direct it. A plan of action began forming as he contemplated the different tactics he'd have to use. This many enemies might call for some outside help, but he knew where to get that, too. He found himself gazing at the tiny golden cobra that adorned Marsilio's finger and thinking that was exactly the right symbol for their operation: fast, decisive and very, very deadly. "They don't have long now."

Marsilio smiled at him, and Michael's spirit soared with pride. "Very good. Take these with you, then, and give them to your allies before the battle. It will help fortify them for the rigors of combat, as it does for you."

Marsilio extended a hand, revealing a number of small vials filled with dark red liquid, and Michael felt the craving within him leap even as he pocketed them. Marsilio hitched off his suit jacket languidly and rolled up the sleeve of his silk shirt. He then pierced his wrist with the stylized fangs on his ring and offered the crimson wound to Michael as casually as a mortal might offer a tray of hors d'oeuvres at a party. "Of course, you must be thirsty as well."

He hadn't even finished before Michael fell upon his wrist, drinking deeply of the blood he had missed and wondering how he had gone so long without it. Something within Michael wanted to hesitate, wondering at the justice of giving his friends such a gift without their knowledge, but such concerns were insignificant next to his need for the blood. He'd do whatever Marsilio wanted, as long as he could keep coming back like this.



Three days passed, but not idly.

"It's a dangerous mission, no doubt about it," Michael concluded, stretching a bit. The entire briefing and planning had taken well over two hours, and he felt like he imagined a sergeant must feel before asking his men to overtake an intimidating enemy position. "I know just about everyone here, and I know that together we've all seen some rough places before, but everybody has a breaking point, and I respect that. Recon work is one thing, but this is a lot rougher. If anyone wants out now, feel free to go. There's no shame in knowing when the water's gotten too hot for you."

He looked out at the assembled Guardian Angels, but none of them quite met his gaze. In fact, they had done very little during the presentation of the plan, except to murmur a few questions here and there. Michael frowned; solemnity was fine in the face of danger, but this reticence wasn't like them. Had he embarrassed them when he offered them an out?

"Well? Anyone?"

Nobody budged.

"C'mon, guys, talk to me." He tried to make his words friendly, and a few pairs of eyes swiveled his way, but none of them held his own for more than a second. Michael felt his temper rising, and he clenched his fists at his side. "*Nobody?*"

This was crazy. Sure, he hadn't been around as often since taking Marsilio's job offer, but he couldn't imagine a response like this. "OK! If no one here is willing to commit to finishing this, then I guess I'll just have to go to the company and ask them for help. How about that?"

A few heads jerked up in response, wide-eyed, and he could feel the reference sizzle through the room like electricity. There was another moment of shuffling silence at that, but this time all the eyes returned to him. At last, Pat — who'd been Michael's friend since they joined the Angels together — stood up. All eyes turned his way.

"If it's that important," Pat said, not holding eye contact with Michael for more than a second, "we're in. Right?" He looked at the other Angels one by one, and they all gave Pat the grudging assent they had been withholding from Michael.

"Well, thank you, guys," Michael said, glad that everyone seemed to be back in his camp. He checked his watch. "OK! We'll plan on arriving at just before one and getting out of there by quarter after one at the latest. Sound good?"

Everyone nodded, if not overly eagerly.

"Now, how about a little hot toast before we go out into the cold night, eh?" His own loud laugh drowned out the desultory response from the others, but Michael wouldn't have cared either way. This phase was too critical to allow a lukewarm reaction to spook him. He produced and passed around the preparatory nip of hot cider he'd brought along.

As they drank, Michael found himself on the verge of mentioning something about the toast being really "special" — considering what he'd spiked the cider with — but he caught the thought before it could escape his lips. He knew what Marsilio would think of him revealing his nature to others, and his cheeks colored in shame at how he nearly let Marsilio down yet again. A part of him distantly felt bad about not telling these men about what he was doing to them, but that part fell silent soon enough. After all, he thought, this was war of a kind, and that meant he was morally obligated to do anything necessary for his soldiers to stay alive. And to win.

Even if they didn't know exactly what kind of aid he was offering.



As a rule, the Guardian Angels never carry weapons. That decision was as much a point of pride as it was practical, really. Walking through a rough neighborhood with a weapon on your belt not only begs any number of problems with police, possibly being mistaken for a criminal yourself, but it also makes you an immediate lethal threat to any criminals you come across. A gun's a gun, after all, and not many criminals have a problem drawing on someone who's also strapped. But walk through unarmed, and not only are you daring them to pull their weapon on an unarmed opponent, you're also making a statement about how committed you are to what you're doing.


Keeping that factor in mind, Michael and Pat had spent that much extra time planning, making sure the Angels would have the advantage of surprise long enough to get to close quarters with the gang members as fast as possible. At that range, the chances of any of the Angels suffering serious injury were as low as they were going to get. Operating unarmed is one thing, but going into danger defenseless is something else entirely. Fortunately, like a lot of young, overconfident toughs, the building the Midnight Killaz had picked to occupy was a poorly defensible structure. A quick recon of the area showed that not only had they left a back entrance poorly guarded by one slack and restless sentry, but the rest of them were either thoroughly stoned or well on their way there by one o'clock.

Only one complication arose. Two of the gang members weren't there — probably out checking on dealers or the like — but the Angels would simply have to let that slide. Two Angels out of the 10 stayed out front as lookouts and drivers, and the entire force was equipped with walkie-talkies for constant communication. Michael further divided the group into two teams, each responsible for a floor, and he outlined their plan of attack in blocks as small as 10 or 20 seconds each, making the plan as precise and airtight as possible. Time frame for the whole operation: ten minutes maximum, then they were gone, just in case any unexpected company decided to drop in or anything else went wrong. They went over it enough that when the plan actually went into effect, it was almost routine.

The true irony of a well-planned combat situation is that there's usually not much to see. In fact, if a plan goes really well, chances are that nobody else around will know exactly what's happened until much, much later. In this case, it was over in eight minutes, thirty-four seconds, including the time spent getting to and from the two old vans the Angels had borrowed for transportation. Even the brief "chat" Michael had with the assembled Killaz — once they had been properly subdued, of course — ended swiftly.

It had gone off almost entirely without a hitch; one gang member, apparently less stoned than his friends, had actually managed to pull his pistol out and disengage the safety before Michael got to him and wrestled him to the ground. The punk wound up earning a shattered wrist, a dislocated knee and a mouthful of loose teeth for his alertness.

Other than that one flash of danger, however, the entire experience was simply a rush of reeking rooms, moldy hallways, yelling gang members, shrieking gang girlfriends and a flurry of confiscation and destruction of drugs and drug money. The other Angels kept a scowling guard as Michael summoned every shred of anger and outrage he had and turned it loose on the kneeling Killaz. Marsilio had taught him how to add a supernatural degree of intimidation to his words if he concentrated, and he used it to full effect that night. The weeping, terrified young men confessed everything and swore on their own souls that they would let the Angels turn their guilty members in to the police while the others left the neighborhood for good.



After some judicious extra punches and kicks — not too much but enough to drive the point home — the Angels were gone back into the night, escorting two broken men and leaving behind a crowd of staggering, weeping criminals.

All in all, a good night's work, Michael thought as he left the two Killaz with the police. Justice had been served, and he was as certain as he was sitting there that they'd never see any of those kids again — and quite probably no other gangs like them, either. As dawn crept up and Michael retreated to his apartment to sleep, the vivid afterglow of victory kept from his mind the dark, nagging thoughts of what he had done to his friends, and he thought nothing of it.

After all, a win's a win, right?

• • • • •

A few nights later, Michael took an unscheduled patrol, just walking and reveling in the feeling of freedom that always accompanied defeating another menace to the sanctity of the neighborhood. He was in such a good mood that he didn't even notice the strange emptiness of the streets. An old reflex simply chalked it up to the perpetual hostility most residents displayed as a natural defense mechanism. It was such an ingrained instinct, in fact, that he never even questioned why they would still have such an outlook when he had been helping make their neighborhood safe all this time. Old habits born from self-preservation died hard, and Michael didn't begrudge the neighborhood people any of them. He actually whistled a little as he walked.

Even when the first lookout bolted at the sight of him, he didn't think too much of it. He simply focused his thoughts and followed the kid's footsteps down a pair of alleys and side streets. The boy was obviously a green recruit; experienced lookouts didn't budge from their posts until absolutely certain they had been made. And most relayed their messages by walkie talkie these days instead of by word of mouth. So when the boy ducked through a network of rotting boards into a decaying brownstone, Michael didn't hesitate to follow, convinced he'd ruin the night of a group of huddled pipeheads or, at most, a small-time dealer. He did notice that he passed the faded sign announcing he was welcome to the Jackson Apartment building — "soon to be re-opened by the friendly community builders at New Horizon Enterprises" — but that fact just made him more determined and less cautious. Some vermin had actually made a nest in the very building Marsilio had just bought for renovations. Michael moved forward, determined to teach them the error of their ways.

Which is precisely how he ran into something most unexpected.

He had scarcely taken two steps into the darkness of the building when he came across a thick, moldering maroon curtain, which someone had apparently drawn across the hallway in an attempt to block out the chill. Brushing it aside, Michael managed only a handful of additional steps before coming to a thunderstruck halt. His fists, raised high and ready, wavered, faltered and finally fell to his sides.

There were renovations going on inside this building all right, but not any Michael suspected would be on any construction invoice. The downstairs dividing walls had been ripped away to create one large common room that was now alight with dozens of tiny red candles. The candles cast shadows in a shifting phantasmagoria around the room, and a black altar stood at the far end, flanked by two tall poles stylized to resemble giant, golden serpents.

Dozens of people knelt in rows before the altar, dressed in simple white robes intermittently streaked with red. The smell of blood hit him so strongly he nearly staggered. As he entered, the people turned to face him, and Michael saw the



familiar faces of a score of neighborhood families and business owners gazing back at him. Even the junkie boy he had saved from muggers less than a week ago peered at him with bored anticipation. Their faces were blankly curious, like children teasing animals at the zoo.

Other people were arrayed around the kneeling crowd, seemingly watching them. These individuals wore sickly green robes with gold trim, and each had a hood drawn down to hide his face. It was behind one of these latter types that the lookout was cowering. The figure advanced on him slowly, and his nearness finally roused Michael from his stunned fugue.

"What the hell is going on?" he yelled, raising his arms defensively but feeling his words fall oddly flat even as he let them fly. "What do you think you're doing to these people?"

The figure before him said nothing in response. He only raised his hands and let his hood fall limply back. Michael felt his reaction like a punch to the gut; Pat's face stared expressionlessly at him, still touched by the signs of life but pale as a dying junkie's and utterly calm. A spot of fresh blood lay on the corner of his mouth, and he licked his lips, obviously savoring the taste. When the others removed their hoods as well, Michael saw the faces of his former Angel comrades. They surrounded him like a damned Greek chorus.

"How?" was all he could manage, looking at the familiar faces and wondering whether this nightmare would dissolve into wakefulness soon.

"This neighborhood needed a new beginning," another voice said. It came from across the room, from yet another hooded figure perched behind the altar like some demented caricature of a televangelist. The room's — the *temple's* — acoustics distorted the voice into an oddly echoing bass that Michael had never heard before.

"These people were going nowhere. They live in decaying buildings, destroying themselves with drink and drugs, allowing gangs to rule them like feudal lords. It was time for a change, and thanks to the tireless efforts of you and your friends, they finally got one." Silence reigned for just a fraction of a second, but in that time, Michael could swear he felt the darkness smile.

"Now their streets are cleared of scum and crime, their buildings are being renovated, and their bodies grow strong on the offerings I give them. Only the most foolhardy would dare to intrude on this territory after your... *examples*. We're free to move to the next step of the process." The figure gestured broadly at the roomful of huddled supplicants, revealing slowly bleeding wounds in his palms as he did so. At the sight of the blood, the crowd moaned with longing, and even the other robed figures appeared entranced. "This is just the next phase in their evolution; a new spirituality, to replace the one that failed them so miserably before. It's not so much to ask after all that we've done for them, don't you think?"

Michael stood still, unable to think, let alone respond.

"So come join us, Michael. You're due for a promotion, if anything, and you've been such a help so far, it would be a shame to have to release you now." The figure gestured, and Michael felt the tug in his blood drawing him near. One last pause, one that set his teeth on edge, ready to loose a scream. "No secrets anymore, right, Michael?" But Michael didn't look as the figure pulled back his hood. Michael didn't need to see the figure behind the altar to know who it was.

He had already recognized the ring on his finger.





OTHER CHILDREN OF THE EASTERN NIGHT

by Peter Woodworth

*Given the fulfillment of our wishes, we'd cram every ounce of information we could into each book White Wolf publishes. However, conservation of space (and trees) often forbids us from doing so. With the advent of the **Journal**, however, we can — as the back cover proclaims — pick up where our other books leave off. In this article, we take a look at some of the more unusual shen who didn't make it into **Laws of the East**.*

DHAMPYRS

CHILDREN OF THE LIVING DEATH

While such an event is rare, the union of a Kuei-jin and a mortal sometimes produces a child. Born of worlds both living and dead, these beings grow up with a measure of the blessings Heaven has conferred upon their vampiric parent... as well as a touch of the curse. Known as dhampyrs, these creatures typically grow up in a shadowy world between the everyday life of their mortal parent and the savage splendor of the courts of the Kuei-jin, fully accepted by neither. Their long life spans, touch of supernatural power and residual evil of the P'o within set them apart from ordinary mortals from a relatively early age. And yet, the Kuei-jin view them as vastly lesser beings and seldom take notice of them except to exploit their daylight capabilities.

Furthermore, when one or more parents isn't available during the daytime and has a good chance of tearing apart a friend or playmate from time to time, dhampyrs tend to grow up in a bizarre environment simultaneously filled with intense fear and overpowering love. Such a polarized upbringing is hard on dhampyrs, and many of them only become more bitter as time goes on. They watch their mortal friends age and die before their eyes, and they turn away from all emotions in hopes of finding some means of stemming the pain of the loss. Most dhampyrs do not wish to take part in the games of the Kuei-jin, but after they witness the dissolution of everything mortal they once knew, they take their place in the courts. They realize that the immortal plots of the vampires are the only constant they can ever expect to last.

For their part, the Kuei-jin often employ capable dhampyrs as servants, spies and even assassins. (A killer who walks the day has a real advantage over vampires!) They even grant some dhampyrs the title of heimin both as recognition for their service and a means of calling on them for aid. Like their counterparts in the West, the ghouls and revenants, dhampyrs often exist in the shadow of their more powerful relatives. Yet, unlike the pathetic lap dogs of the Kin-jin, a dhampyr who comes of age needs not rely on any undead patron to secure her destiny; she is free to walk her own path.

(At least in theory. Some Kuei-jin seek the creation of dhampyr children for just such daylight services, and they have strong opinions about letting their progeny simply walk away from them!)

Particularly stubborn dhampyr who refuse to join the Shadow Wars of their undead kin may even find themselves declared *akuma*, necessitating a quick flight to avoid an unpleasant fate at the hands of the undead. No matter how well they may think the Kuei-jin esteem them, all dhampyr must remember that their position is ever a hair's breadth from disaster. The Kuei-jin are notoriously unforgiving, especially with those they consider to literally embody the concept of "half-person."

It's no wonder, then, that many Shade Walkers strike out on their own in some form or another, selling their services to the highest bidder or even simply seeking to find the solution to the problems raised by their unique state. In many ways, dhampyr find themselves in analogous situations to children of extremely wealthy means. They are distanced from most ordinary folks by the very circumstances of their birth, and yet, they must also deal with "parents" who have little consideration for their own ambitions and dreams. Indeed, conceived as mere tools, dhampyr must struggle hard to establish themselves and their own identity away from the courts. They must learn how to cope with passion when almost everything they see around them is fleeting. They must manage the powers they have without encouraging the Demon to new heights of evil. It is a constant struggle just figuring out how to place themselves in a world that always seems to be either moving too quickly or too slowly for them.

(And before anyone asks, no, there have never been any dhampyr Shih, and there never should be unless the Storyteller is in the mood to add a ridiculously powerful and overly cinematic character to the game. For those still interested, the screening processes of SF0 would detect a dhampyr early on, which would mean a short trip to the vivisection chamber for the unfortunate Shade Walker caught in their clutches.)


However, for players seeking a change of pace or who wish to explore some of the dark alleys and hidden places of the Kuei-jin world, dhampyr present an interesting dimension to any **Laws of the East** game.

For more on dhampyr and their relations to the Kuei-jin, see the **Kindred of the East Companion**.

DHAMPYR CHARACTER CREATION

Dhampyr should use the rules for creating mortals found in **Laws of the Hunt**, with the following alterations:

- Dhampyr characters receive 7/5/3 for their starting Attributes; the blood of the immortals within them makes them slightly stronger than most beings. Dhampyr may have a maximum of 10 Traits in an Attribute category.
- Dhampyr receive one level of a Kuei-jin Discipline, provided it is a *Shintai* Discipline or *Demon Art* (the other Disciplines are beyond their ken). They may learn Disciplines during play at double the usual cost. A dhampyr's age in centuries determines how many levels of a single Discipline he can possess (round up). Therefore, a 269-year-old dhampyr may learn up to three levels of a given Discipline.
- Dhampyr must choose normal Virtues (Courage, Self-Control, etc.), and they do not have a Dharma rating — they possess Humanity instead. (See **Laws of the Night** for details on these Virtues.) When it comes to determining things like effective Chi Virtue ratings and how much Chi they may access and so on, use the same rules for Chi expenditure as given for Shih and SF0 agents in **Laws of the East**.
- Dhampyr begin play with one P'o Trait. Their Demons are not awakened as are those of the Kuei-jin, and they cannot initiate shadow soul. Theirs is more of a barely noticeable urge toward monstrosity. Dhampyr may access Demon



Chi and use it for the same benefits that Kuei-jin get from it. Of course, this dark side can grow stronger over time. Any time the character loses his last Humanity Trait from committing an evil act, she gains a P'o Trait along with the standard derangement. A dhampyr can have no more Humanity Traits than five minus her P'o rating, so those who slide into monstrosity rarely regain much human empathy. Dhampyrs with three or more P'o return as Kuei-jin when they die.

- Dhampyrs cannot access Kuei-jin powers such as *Ghostsight* or *Lifesight*. They are not truly reborn souls in dead flesh, but half-living, half-dead beings. However, Dhampyrs may use their Chi to heal themselves in the same manner as Kuei-jin, at a rate of one health level of lethal or two health levels of bashing damage per Chi Trait. Dhampyrs require normal mortal amounts of food, drink, sleep, etc., although the need for these things can be staved off for a day with the expenditure of a Chi Trait. Dhampyrs also do not suffer from Chi imbalance as Kuei-jin do, although they may certainly become imbalanced as the result of supernatural manipulation.

- Dhampyrs regain Chi normally, as mortals do. They may also regain Chi by eating flesh (they lack the enlightenment necessary to gain sustenance from blood or breath). Each health level offers one Trait of Chi. Of course, gaining Chi in this fashion is sure to provoke a Conscience test in all but the most depraved of dhampyrs.

- Dhampyrs are hardy creatures. Once they mature, they effectively age at a rate of one year for every 10 years that pass. Furthermore, dhampyrs are more difficult to kill than normal mortals. Not only can they heal themselves with their Chi, but dhampyrs' players may also make a Static Physical Challenge against six Traits whenever their characters are reduced below Incapacitated by lethal damage (aggravated still kills normally). If successful, the dhampyr effectively hovers at the brink of death for one scene/hour, during which time he appears dead to all normal and supernatural probing (thus typically fooling his attackers into believing they've destroyed him). At the end of this time, the dhampyr may begin spending Chi to heal normally. If no Chi is available, the character is considered Incapacitated, and must heal normally (i.e., very slowly).

YULAN-JIN

WHIRLWINDS OF TATTERED BODIES

Not all souls survive the Road Back with the same resilience that the Kuei-jin do. The lacerating winds of Hell cripple some souls, and those souls have trouble holding on to their mortal forms when they return to the Middle Kingdom. These unfortunates must leap from body to body constantly as they try in vain to hold onto some sense of identity. Yulan-jin — or Soul Jumpers as the younger Kuei-jin call them — are tragic creatures indeed, for the ceaseless transition between bodies makes Dharmic advancement next to impossible, dooming most of these poor souls to a brief, confused stay in the Middle Kingdom before sliding back to Yomi once more. It takes a truly determined and focused soul to make any kind of unlife out of such difficult circumstances, and many more Yulan-jin slip back into Yomi than remain. However, those Yulan-jin that somehow manage to curb their constant wandering become some of the most focused souls under Heaven, determined as they are to battle off the might of Hell itself to retain their identity.

As if their unives weren't difficult enough already, Kuei-jin society rejects those Soul Jumpers it uncovers. Destroying these creatures is considered a mercy

killing, as the Kuei-jin believe that the Yulan-jin only pose a threat to others with their unstable lifestyle and since their Dharmic difficulty makes them more likely to become murderous *chih-mei* or even seek out the Yama Kings for aid. Of course, a Yulan-jin is essentially identical to a Kuei-jin in the beginning, and some are even inducted into a court or a *wu*. At their first "death," however, the vampire's true nature becomes apparent. Instead of hovering near the body during the Little Death, the Yulan-jin's soul whisks off in search of another corpse to inhabit. Yulan-jin are thus forced to live alone or in small communities of their own kind. Most Soul Jumpers adopt a single name that they retain from lifetime to lifetime (often prefaced with "Yulan" so that it can be distinguished from a Kuei-jin — "Yulan-Lei" or "Yulan-Wang," for example). This practice is often their only means of retaining some sense of identity, for they may awaken in a new body hundreds of miles from friends and allies each time they "pass on," and material possessions don't accompany the change. Thus, Yulan-jin seldom form lasting attachments, and they deal with each other on the basis of reputation. Those who accomplish great deeds or hold onto their forms for a long time are accorded much respect.

Since their constant body-shifting can pose intense demands on a Storyteller (who wants to have a character who drops in wearing a different face every few sessions and who sometimes must come from a hundred miles away or more!), players should secure permission before creating Yulan-jin characters. They should also be aware that while it is possible for some of these vampires to rise to great station and standing, it's far more likely that they will have a much shorter stay in the Middle Kingdom than normal Kuei-jin. If playing this kind of tragic character suits them, then fine, but if they're not comfortable with the long odds stacked against them, perhaps they're better off playing another type of character.

YULAN-JIN CHARACTER CREATION

Yulan-jin are created and played identically to regular Kuei-jin, with the following alterations:


- Yulan-jin start with one fewer Willpower Traits than normal Kuei-jin, a mark of the terrible damage done by the lacerating winds of Yomi.

- Yulan-jin may have any Dharma, although they seldom progress very far. As a note, these Kuei-jin don't tend to do well even with the Thousand Whispers Dharma. That path requires that a life be studied until everything possible has been learned from it, and Yulan-jin are frequently forced to discard an identity before learning everything they can.

- Body swapping — A Yulan-jin is forced to leave her current body from time to time. During such times, her soul is forced to endure the torment of Yomi for days or even weeks until another suitable body has been found to host the spirit. (Storytellers are encouraged to describe such periods, if not actually roleplay them out with the player.) Once the Yulan-jin leaves the body, it immediately becomes entirely dead and decays as appropriate for a corpse of its age. A Soul Jumper passes on whenever any of the following conditions occur:

- Temporary Willpower is reduced to zero
- Temporary Chi of either type is completely exhausted
- She suffers torpor. (Final Death sends the Yulan-jin to Yomi for good.)

After settling in a body, the Soul Jumper is always disoriented and may even experience some permanent memory loss, thus sliding the vampire closer to




oblivion with every leap. The Yulan-jin's player must make a Static Willpower Challenge against four Traits. Success means the character suffers some disorientation but is otherwise all right. Failure means the character suffers more severe amnesia (only the barest details remain clear) and must remove one Ability level permanently. In addition, players who fail must immediately win or tie a Simple Test. Failing this test means the character loses a permanent Willpower Trait as her soul frays even further from the stress of the change. Characters reduced to zero Willpower this way pass into Yomi for good, the soul dissipating in the winds of Hell. All *guanxi* previously established are also broken on assuming a new body.

- Yulan-jin lose a Dharma Trait automatically when they pass on, which makes it difficult to hold on to enlightenment for any period of time. Yulan-jin who pass on with no Dharma Traits are blasted back to Yomi permanently.

- It should be noted that while the player of the Yulan-jin must still make sure other players know of any differences in their character's appearance as they move from body to body, the vampire's soul seldom chooses a body radically different from its original. Therefore, unless the Storyteller rules otherwise, Yulan-jin do not change Attributes, Attribute totals or Abilities when they shift bodies. They may look different, but it's the same soul within.

- Yulan-jin are normally indistinguishable from regular Kuei-jin, unless one witnesses them pass on (watching their soul flee), or successfully uses one of the following Disciplines on them: the *Cultivation* Discipline of *Scrutinize*, the *Obligation* Discipline of *Soul Bridge* or the *Chi'iu Muh* power *Purification*. Note that the character may not know exactly what he's looking at unless he possesses a few levels of the *Occult* Ability. He just knows that whatever it is, it isn't a Kuei-jin.



Here lies my beloved Character.
He was brawny, robust,
charismatic, eloquent,
magnetic, alert, insightful
and wise.



THE MOURNING AFTER

by Cynthia Summers

*Cynthia knows things. She's been developing **Mind's Eye Theatre** for more than a year now, and she's been playing **Mind's Eye Theatre** since she started working for **White Wolf** in 1994. She's one of the resident LARPing experts in house here, and as an observer of the dynamics of live-action roleplaying society, she is without peer.*

DEALING WITH CHARACTER DEATH

It's only natural that when you engage in something that has you figuratively climbing into the skin of another person, you get attached to that person. Likewise, when you're spending a great deal of time and energy on something that's a close part of your life, you get used to that activity as part of the order of things. Therefore, when a character dies, it can throw you for a real loop. Some players grouse, but they go fetch out the back-up character they created for just such an emergency. Some leave the site in a rage to find a beer to bitch into and a computer by which to spread the news. Very rarely, some are not sorry to see the character go at all. Maybe they weren't crazy about some aspects that developed over time, and the death was a neat *exeunt* into the final night. And then there are those folks for whom the event is a wallop upside the head that leaves them floundering around trying to figure out what happened.

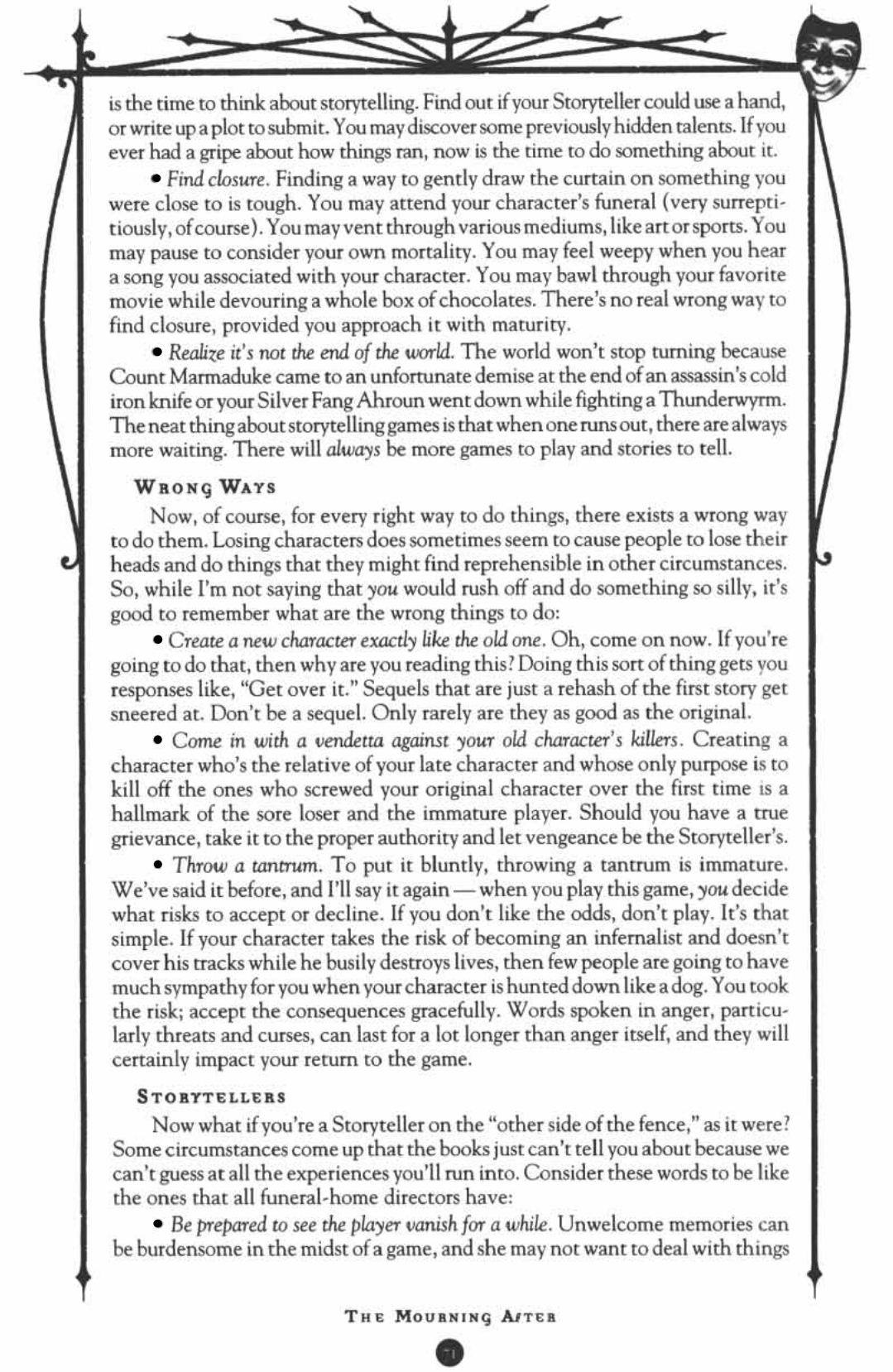
RIGHT WAYS

The first thing to remember is that the death of a character isn't the end of the world. All stories end. Some take longer roads than others, but eventually, the tale comes to an end. Still, if you've had a long run with a character, or you're particularly fond of it, a sudden end of the road can be hard. So what should you do? Here are some ideas to grab onto during those first few days:

- *Take some time off.* Consider taking a break to just chill out and rediscover those hobbies you enjoy when you're not LARPing. As that favorite button slogan goes, sometimes death is Nature's way of telling you to slow down. You may find this advice helpful to give yourself a little distance in creating a new character or to ensure that you don't gravitate automatically toward your old character's former allies and friends. If you want to keep playing, consider seeking out a different venue to get your "fix."

- *Do a 180 in your next character.* Consider death a new beginning when creating your next character. If you played a combat-active former Navy SEAL, try playing a scholar who gets green at the mere idea of a fight. If you previously threw all your energy at a **Vampire** chronicle, redirect it toward **Changeling**. At the very least, such a change-up ensures that you won't be mistaken for your old character. You've got a clean slate — make the most of it.

- *Try your hand at storytelling.* So you want to take some time off from playing, but you don't want to sit at home in front of the tube or the computer? Maybe this



is the time to think about storytelling. Find out if your Storyteller could use a hand, or write up a plot to submit. You may discover some previously hidden talents. If you ever had a gripe about how things ran, now is the time to do something about it.

- *Find closure.* Finding a way to gently draw the curtain on something you were close to is tough. You may attend your character's funeral (very surreptitiously, of course). You may vent through various mediums, like art or sports. You may pause to consider your own mortality. You may feel weepy when you hear a song you associated with your character. You may bawl through your favorite movie while devouring a whole box of chocolates. There's no real wrong way to find closure, provided you approach it with maturity.

- *Realize it's not the end of the world.* The world won't stop turning because Count Marmaduke came to an unfortunate demise at the end of an assassin's cold iron knife or your Silver Fang Ahroun went down while fighting a Thunderwyrn. The neat thing about storytelling games is that when one runs out, there are always more waiting. There will *always* be more games to play and stories to tell.

WRONG WAYS

Now, of course, for every right way to do things, there exists a wrong way to do them. Losing characters does sometimes seem to cause people to lose their heads and do things that they might find reprehensible in other circumstances. So, while I'm not saying that *you* would rush off and do something so silly, it's good to remember what are the wrong things to do:

- *Create a new character exactly like the old one.* Oh, come on now. If you're going to do that, then why are you reading this? Doing this sort of thing gets you responses like, "Get over it." Sequels that are just a rehash of the first story get sneered at. Don't be a sequel. Only rarely are they as good as the original.

- *Come in with a vendetta against your old character's killers.* Creating a character who's the relative of your late character and whose only purpose is to kill off the ones who screwed your original character over the first time is a hallmark of the sore loser and the immature player. Should you have a true grievance, take it to the proper authority and let vengeance be the Storyteller's.

- *Throw a tantrum.* To put it bluntly, throwing a tantrum is immature. We've said it before, and I'll say it again — when you play this game, *you* decide what risks to accept or decline. If you don't like the odds, don't play. It's that simple. If your character takes the risk of becoming an infernalist and doesn't cover his tracks while he busily destroys lives, then few people are going to have much sympathy for you when your character is hunted down like a dog. You took the risk; accept the consequences gracefully. Words spoken in anger, particularly threats and curses, can last for a lot longer than anger itself, and they will certainly impact your return to the game.

STORYTELLERS

Now what if you're a Storyteller on the "other side of the fence," as it were? Some circumstances come up that the books just can't tell you about because we can't guess at all the experiences you'll run into. Consider these words to be like the ones that all funeral-home directors have:

- *Be prepared to see the player vanish for a while.* Unwelcome memories can be burdensome in the midst of a game, and she may not want to deal with things



for a while. Give her some space, and don't demand she return to the game. Just let her know she's welcome when she's ready.

- *Be prepared to listen to some venting.* When a player's character dies, you'll probably hear some griping about the unfairness of it all — it's a given. When things devolve into tantrums and other unpleasantness, however, put your foot down and don't give it any more credence.

- *Make sure everything is on the level.* If there's evidence that character death was brought about *solely* due to cheating, out-of-character knowledge or dislike of the player, you've got a problem. While you may not be able to bring the lost character back, you can ensure that justice is done.

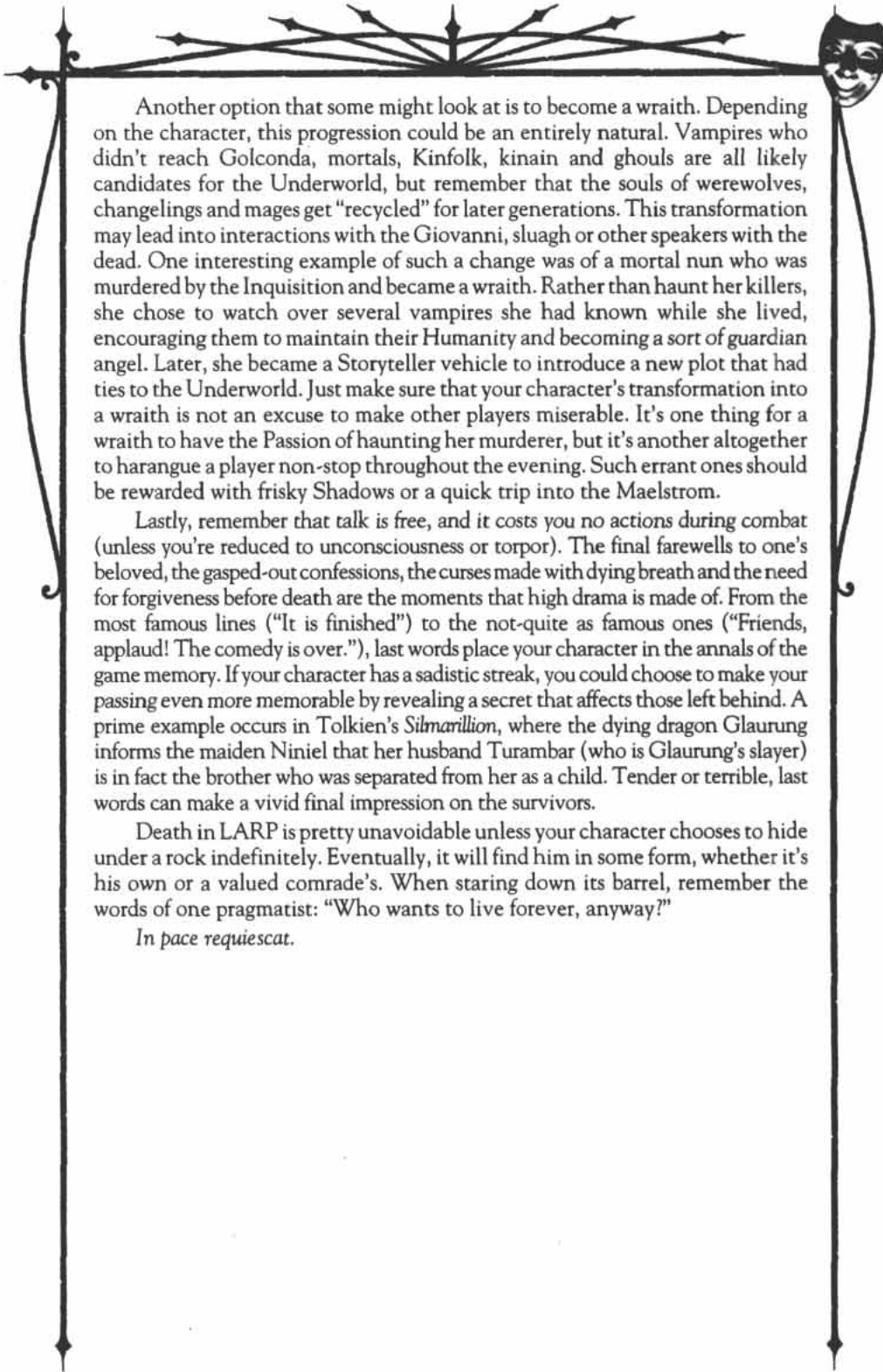
- *Don't be mean.* Admit it — we've all had those characters or players who have been thorns in our sides, and we find ourselves hoping that said character will go away (and take the player with him). Should you have such a player, then don't celebrate when the day comes. There are still people who are unhappy about the event, and gloating about it just makes you look like a weasel.

MEMENTO MORI

One of the biggest fears of death is that we will be forgotten by the living once we are no longer around to assert our presence. It's part of why we erect gravestones and monuments, to ensure against such an outcome. Legacies of one sort or another are a possible way to cheat Death. Many a building has been built, a library founded or a patronage made to ensure that *someone's* name was not forgotten. This tradition isn't limited to the real-life living.

Consider having a character write a will at some point, perhaps with the idea that he's providing for his dependents (be they ghouls, childlings, Kinfolk etc.) or seeing that his resources and possessions are disposed of properly. Check with your Storyteller to see if she will allow Backgrounds like *Resources* to be distributed. The last requests of a will ("Bury my ashes in Poland," "Make sure my daughter can finish school") could send characters into the arms of new plot while carrying out the late character's wishes or provide some exciting roleplaying opportunities. What if someone contests the will, or your character chooses an unlikely executor that many disagree with (a Fianna entrusts her will to a Bone Gnawer)? The resulting plot will have the recipients certainly thinking about your late character, although whether it's to take his name in vain or to praise him is another matter. Let the Storyteller know that should your character be declared dead, there's a lawyer or lawyer-type with a letter for someone, which may be interesting in and of itself if a character has a public persona you weren't aware of.

Another idea is to leave documents in a secret cache for some lucky player. Examples of such might be the letters a Nosferatu was writing to the Tremere he loved from afar (which give some hints about his impending death), a set of very spiritual Gaia poems created by a Kinfolk (which give some observations that prick the sept's conscience a little too fiercely) or an eshu's travel journal written in Farsi (complete with comments regarding other courts). Uncovered documents can be fodder for smaller, more personal plot lines. (Who might the documents embarrass, or what secrets will they reveal?) Again, it takes pre-planning. Start working on such things *now*, even if you don't think that your character's in trouble. Once your character passes on, give the phys-reps to the Storyteller and give her the complete scoop on where the items are so she knows what to do when someone finds the secret passage or discovers the magic box.



Another option that some might look at is to become a wraith. Depending on the character, this progression could be an entirely natural. Vampires who didn't reach Golconda, mortals, Kinfolk, kinain and ghouls are all likely candidates for the Underworld, but remember that the souls of werewolves, changelings and mages get "recycled" for later generations. This transformation may lead into interactions with the Giovanni, slough or other speakers with the dead. One interesting example of such a change was of a mortal nun who was murdered by the Inquisition and became a wraith. Rather than haunt her killers, she chose to watch over several vampires she had known while she lived, encouraging them to maintain their Humanity and becoming a sort of guardian angel. Later, she became a Storyteller vehicle to introduce a new plot that had ties to the Underworld. Just make sure that your character's transformation into a wraith is not an excuse to make other players miserable. It's one thing for a wraith to have the Passion of haunting her murderer, but it's another altogether to harangue a player non-stop throughout the evening. Such errant ones should be rewarded with frisky Shadows or a quick trip into the Maelstrom.

Lastly, remember that talk is free, and it costs you no actions during combat (unless you're reduced to unconsciousness or torpor). The final farewells to one's beloved, the gasped-out confessions, the curses made with dying breath and the need for forgiveness before death are the moments that high drama is made of. From the most famous lines ("It is finished") to the not-quite as famous ones ("Friends, applaud! The comedy is over."), last words place your character in the annals of the game memory. If your character has a sadistic streak, you could choose to make your passing even more memorable by revealing a secret that affects those left behind. A prime example occurs in Tolkien's *Silmarillion*, where the dying dragon Glaurung informs the maiden Niniel that her husband Turambar (who is Glaurung's slayer) is in fact the brother who was separated from her as a child. Tender or terrible, last words can make a vivid final impression on the survivors.

Death in LARP is pretty unavoidable unless your character chooses to hide under a rock indefinitely. Eventually, it will find him in some form, whether it's his own or a valued comrade's. When staring down its barrel, remember the words of one pragmatist: "Who wants to live forever, anyway?"

In pace requiescat.

EVENT HORIZON: UPCOMING LARP EVENTS

VAMPIRE EVENTS

NORTHWESTERN US

Blood Moon Social Club;
Las Vegas, NV
<http://www.bloodmoonsocialclub.com>
(702) 877-1813

Ruby Rain Society; Mountlake, WA
Tracy Soldan, tarot01@juno.com

Dark Necropolis; Kitsap, WA
mrdeath@u.washington.edu

Tacoma; Tacoma, WA
sheperd@darkdestiny.com
(253) 581-8728

The Outlands;
South King County, WA
Christopher Buser,
Buserc@mindspring.com
425-687-8093

Of No Concern; Eugene, OR
Jmcloud@gladstone.uoregon.edu

Trails End Troupe; Oregon City, OR
TheChylde@aol.com

Theatre of Roses; Portland, OR
Kewi-Cee Chu,
kc@csua.berkeley.edu

Dark Salem; Salem, OR
Preston Malone,
Coordinatrix@hotmail.com

Nox ad Infinitum; Fairbanks, AK
fsdck@aurora.alaska.edu

Ivory Masque; Anchorage, AK
glitter_boy@hotmail.com

Dark Tears; Walla Walla, WA
annapuma@hotmail.com

All Seattle Camarilla-run games
seattledc@hotmail.com
<http://www.lovelys.com/seattlecam>

MIDWESTERN US

Crimson Facade; Indianapolis, IN
Paul M. Starr, tophat@indy.net
(317) 466-9064

SOUTHWESTERN US

Baptism of Fire; San Diego, CA
Maggie MacDonald,
maggie5@home.com
<http://www.larp.com/vespasian>
(619) 425-1587

Paraiso de Espinas/Paradise of
Thorns; Phoenix/Tucson, AZ
Jonni Crowell-Griffith,
Salvjedora@aol.com
(520) 722-2688

EVENT HORIZON: UPCOMING LARP EVENTS

Moonlight Masquerade;
Marysville, CA
Jennifer Young, kaidin@syix.com

Phoenix By Night; Phoenix, AZ
Wm. R. Szabo II,
wrszabo@asu.edu
<http://www.public.asu.edu/~jamesb/pbn/>

Labyrinth of Crying Shadows
(Sabbat Game); Sacramento, CA
Adam Abramson,
vallombrosa@hotmail.com

Domain of Mountain Shadows;
Provo, UT
Nikki McCoriston,
N.Burton@m.cc.utah.edu
(801) 363-3959

NORTHCENTRAL US

Dominion of Solitude; Topeka, KS
Jeffery P. Harrington,
harri999@geocities.com

Ebon Seraph;
Omaha, NE
davosburgh@aol.com

Ground Zero; Colorado Springs, CO
Travis Page, Darkholme@kktv.com
(719) 328-0605

SOUTHCENTRAL US

Crimson Tear Society;
Jonesboro, AR
Tom McFarland,
thomasmc@fastdata.net
(870) 931-0959

Fourth Tower Falling; Dallas, TX
David Doub, Brujah@gte.net
(972) 788-1895

Central Texas LARP;
Killeen/Temple, TX
D.R. Hood, Pangea@vvm.com
(254) 947-1339

Legio Noctem; Dallas, TX
Billy Lucas, williamlucas@juno.com
(972) 788-1895

Garden of Thorns; Clear Lake, TX
wesley_ooc@juno.com

Kentucky Fried; Dallas, TX
Lance Gillson,
nooneofconsequence@usa.net
(972) 788-1895

Midnight Rose; Clear Lake, TX
prefect@texas.net

Eighth Legion; Dallas, TX
James Potter,
kingsnight@hotmail.com
(972) 788-1895

House of the Eternal Rose;
Clear Lake, TX, prefect@texas.net

Bryan/College Station;
Bryan/College Station, TX
Ken Reinertson,
khr7057@unix.tamu.edu

THE GREAT LAKES

Coterie of the Crimson Night;
St. Louis, MO
Jamie Schneider, jaclon@juno.com
(314) 837-3640

The Redemption Chronicles;
Edwardsville, IL
floodrk@earthlink.net

Impiorum Pecatta
("Sins of the Damned");
Warrensburg, MO
Storyteller: Jason Hibdon,
eugee@cyberjunkie.com
<http://www.cyberjunkie.com/eugee>

NORTHEAST US

Severed Sun; Boston, MA
Sean Donnelly
(617) 656-2891

House of the Crescent Moon;
Boston, MA
giovanni@cybercom.net
(617) 576-1097

EAST CENTRAL US

Bay of Blood; Baltimore, MD
Ed Adelsbergermailto:edla@erols.com,
edla@erols.com
<http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/Sideline/5931/>

Dayton: Valley of the Shadow;
Dayton, Ohio
Lee Highfield, schlgrmstr@aol.com
937-222-2330

The Most Deadly Game;
Baltimore, MD
Joseph Palser,
palserj@columbia.aim-smart.com

The Dark Capital Domain
Chris Herr, mephis@juno.com
(703) 273-5530

Towson LARP; Baltimore, MD
Ryan Sachse, tsachse@ycp.edu

Das Dae'Mar;
State Capitol Complex, WV
WachuDancR@aol.com

Vitae Aeternus; Hyattsville, MD
Royal Connell, underdog@clark.net
<http://members.home.com/stevesar/>

House of the Unknown;
Pittsburgh, PA
cam@andrew.cmu.edu

Blood Masks:
Cincinnatus By Night; Cincinnati, Ohio
Brian-Joseph Baker, Elomae@aol.com
513-777-7778

Mudge Lounge; Pittsburgh, PA
cam@andrew.cmu.edu

EVENT HORIZON: UPCOMING LARP EVENTS

A Stake in the Heartland II;
Northeast Ohio
Ryan S. Cope, cedric@neo.rr.com
(330) 923-4483

Shadows on the Mall;
Washington, D.C.
Abigail Moore Shoemaker,
ams@gwis2.circ.gwu.edu
[http://members.aol.com/dellacruz/
SotM/Index.html](http://members.aol.com/dellacruz/SotM/Index.html)

SOUTHEAST US

Club Seraphim; Norfolk, VA
club_seraphim@hotmail.com
[http://www.angelfire.com/va/
ClubSeraphim](http://www.angelfire.com/va/ClubSeraphim)

Seraphim Saloon; Norfolk, VA
club_seraphim@hotmail.com
[http://www.angelfire.com/va/
ClubSeraphim](http://www.angelfire.com/va/ClubSeraphim)

Ft. Lauderdale; Ft. Lauderdale, FL
PrintError@mindless.com

House of the Sanguine Moon;
Tampa, FL
Hope Summerall,
zandria@hotmail.com

Athens by Night; Athens, GA
Storyteller List:
abn-st@math.gatech.edu

Night's Children; Atlanta, GA
Jason Norred,
hemlock@mindspring.com
<http://larp.digitribe.org>

Macon by Night; Macon, GA
Shonda Slaughter,
LucindaWst@aol.com
<http://www.cityofshadows.org>

New Orleans Nightfall;
New Orleans, LA
Mark Leberecht,
Frost@acadiacom.net
(504) 943-9814

Shades of Pale Society;
Chattanooga, TN
Laura Middleton, shades@larp.com
(423) 876-4561

Blood Moon; Charleston, SC
Ian Betts, alisterlegare@hotmail.com

Charlestonus Ab Noctum;
Charleston, SC
Ian Betts, alisterlegare@hotmail.com

Eclipsed Moon; Charleston, SC
Ian Betts, alisterlegare@hotmail.com

Kindred of the Shadows; Auburn, AL
boudrej@mail.auburn.edu

Shadows of Vulcan; Birmingham, AL
Sarah Riggs,
coordinator@shadowsofvulcan.com

Libertas Aeterna; Charlotte, NC
Tim Harris, harrist@cs.winthrop.edu

GAROU

NORTHEAST US

Apocalypse Rochester,
Rochester NY
Chris Manos,
cmanos@worldnet.att.net

NORTHWEST US

Ruby Rain Society; Edmonds, WA
Tracy Soldan, tarot01@juno.com

Theatre of Roses; Battleground, WA
Kwei-Cee Chu, kc@csua.berkeley.edu

Tacoma; Tacoma, WA
sheperd@darkdestiny.com
(253) 581-8728

Of No Concern; Eugene, OR
Jmcloud@gladstone.uoregon.edu

Olde Guard; Anchorage, AK
Tom Alexander,
nightstalker@customcpu.com

EAST CENTRAL US

The Sept of the Awakening;
Washington D.C.
Mindy Williams, terhunepayson@juno.com

NORTHCENTRAL US

Knights of Rage; Colorado Springs, CO
Dan Page, AllmityBob@aol.com
(719) 447-0399

SOUTHCENTRAL US

Crimson Tear Society;
Jonesboro, AR
TomMcFarland, thomasmc@fastdata.net
(870) 931-0959

Bryan/College Station;
Bryan/College Station, TX
Ken Reinertson,
khr7057@unix.tamu.edu

Fourth Tower Falling; Dallas, TX
Matt Ragan, matt_ragan@hotmail.com
(972) 788-1895

EVENT HORIZON: UPCOMING LARP EVENTS

SOUTHEAST US

House of the Sanguine Moon;
Tampa, FL
HopeSummerall,zandria@hotmail.com

OnyxIlluminatus; Charleston, SC
Ian Betts, alisterlegare@hotmail.com

SOUTHWESTERN US

Rage Against the Darkness;
Tempe, AZ
Collin Toohey,
Cybertec@cyberdude.com
(602) 942-4994

Song of Sonora; Tucson, AZ
Kevin Lynch II, KWLYnch@aol.com
(520) 722-2688

OTHERS (UNSPECIFIED AND MIXED GAMES)

Dark Carpathia, Portland, ME
[http://home.maine.rr.com/
darkcarpathia/darkcarp.html](http://home.maine.rr.com/darkcarpathia/darkcarp.html)

More Than Night; Portland, Oregon
(Independent game that sometimes
playtests upcoming supplements)
Bruce Baugh, bruce-baugh@sff.net

East of the River, Vernon, CT
D. Scott Stewart, storyteller@eotr.org

Nox Imperium; Longview, WA
katzmeow@kalama.com

Fortress of the Mind's Eye;
Lansing, MI
Aaron Ledger, ledgeraa@pilot.msu.edu
(517) 372-1452

Of Shadow & Light; Cincinnati, Ohio
Brian-Joseph Baker,
bakebjb@email.uc.edu
(513) 777-7778

Imagination Shop Theater Guild
Fridays: Sacramento, CA
Alternate Saturdays: Santa Cruz, CA
Sundays: Santa Rosa, CA
Pete Magnetti,
ISTG_MAIN@hotmail.com
(916) 369-6948

Trails End Troupe; Salem, OR
Coordinatrix@hotmail.com

United San Diego; San Diego, CA
Dennis "Tristan" Hanson,
Dollphynn@aol.com

GAMES AROUND THE WORLD

Camarilla Cambridge;
Cambridge, England
Andreas Beck,
pooka@globalnet.co.uk
+44 (0) 122 350 3674

Vampire LARP; Reading, England
Robert Baker-Self, Robert@fiddlers-
green.demon.co.uk

Vampire LARP;
Cambridge, England
Scott Sommerville,
some@globalnet.co.uk

Mage LARP; Darlington, England
Jonnikiss@hotmail.com

Garou LARP; Darlington, England
Jonnikiss@hotmail.com

Vampire LARP;
Darlington, England
Jonnikiss@hotmail.com

Vampire LARP;
Greenwich, England
David Young,
david_young@smokeandmirrors.
freeserve.co.uk

Vampire LARP;
High Wycombe by Night
Contact Ritch or Barry
+44 (0) 149 445 0570

Mage LARP; Hampshire, England
Grim@postmort.demon.co.uk

Vampire LARP;
London, England
Angus Abranson,
angus@cubicle7.freeserve.co.uk
+44 (0) 181 343 4960

Vampire LARP;
Manchester, England
Kyne Brooker,
Mfx6kab@fs1.art.man.ac.uk

Changeling LARP; Reading, England
Robert Baker-Self,
Robert@fiddlers-green.demon.co.uk

Vampire LARP; Stafford, England
Ian Dickson, ian.dickson@gecm.com

Vampire, LARP; Stoke, England
Alan Brumpton, Finn@mcm.com

Garou LARP; Stoke, England
Alan Brumpton, Finn@mcm.com

Changeling LARP; Stoke, England
Alan Brumpton, Finn@mcm.com

Mage LARP; Stoke, England
Alan Brumpton, Finn@mcm.com

Vampire LARP; Wakefield, England
Josie Murtagh,
Josie@imhome.freeserve.co.uk

Vampire LARP; Edinburgh, Scotland
Kevin Drugan,
kevin@gehenna.prestel.co.uk

Vampire LARP; Glasgow, Scotland
David Evans,
misty@mudhole.spodnet.uk.com

Paradiso Perduto
("Paradise Lost"); Rome, Italy.
Marco Visconti, azrael@dada.it
+39 (0) 338 704 5747

An up-to-date Calendar of all Dutch
games and European Camarilla games
can be found at
<http://www.troy.demon.nl/vampire>