THE LIVE-ACTION GAMING MAGAZINE

Mind's Eye Theatre™ JOURNAL

BECAUSE THE MIND'S EYE NEVER BLINKS

ISSUE No. 8

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:

- Tips on creating memorable antagonists
- Advice on managing large or long-running LARP chronicles
- A look back and a look ahead
- World of Darkness fiction
- Topical issues on live-action roleplaying

and more

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Mind's Eye Theatre

THE LIVE-ACTION GAMING MAGAZINE

Mind's Eye Theatre JOURNAL

BECAUSE THE MIND'S EYE NEVER BLINKS

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What You've Missed

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.

Issue #6

- The second part of **MET**'s look at **Wraith: The Great War**
- Werewolves in the Dark Ages
- Yulan-Jin and Dhampyrs

Issue #7

- A guide to acting in live-action play
- Dharmas heretical to all self-respecting Kuei-jin
- A look at the hideous fomori
- Motivation to torch me in effigy

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WELCOME!

For Those of You Just Tuning In...

Hello again, everybody, and welcome to the eighth issue of the **Mind's Eye Theatre 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.

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.

At least, that's been the pattern thus far. Now, however, I'm sad to say that this very issue is the last one that will be available for the foreseeable future. As we ramp up and fine-tune our front-line **Mind's Eye Theatre** releases, the **Journal** has simply become less and less necessary. Every resource that goes into making the **Journal** what it is is a resource that could just as easily go into a **Laws of...** book to make it that much better. That being the case, it frankly just doesn't make much sense to continue to divide our resources as we have been. Although many of us will be sad to see the **Journal** go, the **Mind's Eye Theatre** line will emerge stronger for the change. Its books will get bigger, its rules will get sharper, and it will become more inclusive in the long run.

But let's forget about that for a moment and take a look at what's actually *in* this issue. There's no sense drawing the curtain before the end of the first page....

In this issue of the **Journal**, we take a look into the future of **MET**. Richard Dansky gives advice on what to do when your game has run its course. Cynthia Summers talks about the future of the game line she develops so tirelessly and about the genre itself. Steve Balfour, the president of the Camarilla fan club, foreshadows a future **MET** release with an article on some of the concerns surrounding chronicles that are larger than the average chronicle. Newcomer David Tancredi also makes a good showing with an article on creating convincing antagonists, and Peter Woodworth gives tips on personalizing the supernatural World of Darkness experience. And, as always, you'll find a little World of Darkness fiction and an event listing that's as accurate as it can be, considering the circumstances.

And even though the **Journal** is going away, you can still contribute to the future of **MET**. Send letters on your opinions about the state of live-action roleplaying today. Send questions about the features and rules you've seen here, as well as notes about the broken rules you come across in different **MET** publications. Send horror stories about games gone wrong and how your players' characters fixed them. Check out the Forum section of our web site and post your observations there. We're always interested in the opinions and desires of our readers, so don't stop letting us know what you want to see.

After all, where would we be without you?

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THE CURRENT THINKING

When something you've worked on for a long time has to go away for reasons that are beyond your control, it's tempting to point fingers and lay blame. When I heard that the **Journal** *was being cancelled, I felt that temptation. Instead of going on a petulant useless rampage, though, I decided to look back at how the* **Journal** *had been received thus far throughout its run. I paged through old emails and posts I had saved from our old online forum — you know, the one that worked — and I found these collected comments.*

The Journal I think is a great idea, though I have to say I've been a bit disappointed in the way it's turned out. Some of the information in the Journals is very useful, while some of it I can't help but feel is just filler. Some of the things would be useful, but there just isn't enough information.

For example, a useful bit that came out of the Journals were the listings of what levels of Lore provided what information (and what misconceptions!). On the other hand, we don't need a section detailing Asian wraiths. The section on Bastet would have been useful if it had included information on more tribes, or a more complete listing of the Pumonca powers even.

I would like to see something giving definitive information on Ghouls. Liber des Goules is a waste of paper and the newer books are both incomplete and also contradictory at points. Translations of more Werewolf material to MET would also be very useful.

Overall, the Journal is a great idea that has had mediocre follow-through. It would be a terrific forum to have official FAQs published and release MET information that doesn't fit into the standard books. It needs less fiction and fluff and more solid material.

—Tanuki (tanuki_st@hotmail.com)

I must say that, over all, the entire concept and run of the Mind's Eye Theatre Journal has been a good one. There have only been a few small problems that I have personally had with the Journals. Well, one really. One very big problem that continually pisses me off everytime I see that copy of the Journal. It's about the Lores... Now, many of you out there might be happy that White Wolf finally came out and downright said what each level of each of the most predominant Lores does. But let me tell you something about those levels. They suck. If I spend more than fourteen seconds in an actual LARP game with one of those creature types, chances are I will be able to learn more about said creature type than someone with a Kindred Lore of 40. How do I know it's 14 seconds? I timed it.

In short, the system screws anyone who wants to come into a game knowing more than a first-night Embrace/Changed/Dead/Faerie-stuffed/whatever because spending three minutes with characters of that type will give you more info than any level of the "Lores" will. Maybe the Lores should be called "Lies and Useless Info." It's much more accurate, and I could stop putting quotes around it because that name would be far more fitting.

Yeah...

—Unagodd (frederick@csus.edu)

I'm very fond of the concept of a magazine as support for a game. Games Workshop does the same, TSR does (did ?? i don't fallow them anymore) the same. when issue 1 and 2 came out, i was very enthousiastic, but i'm somewhat dissapointed by the amount of usefull info i find in them. half of the time, there is not a single item of use in them to me.

the things i'm after is metaplot and rules(clarification). a magazine gives the possibility to influence the WOD, a bit like the updates on the WOD in books like TOTB & NOP. a magazine is a perfect tool to bring the changes on a regular timed base. example : issue 10 talks about the changes in california, issue 11 about the takeover by the cama from ny, issue 12 about ... you get the picture.

also, things like (much more) FAQ's are something that i would like to see in the magazine.

I suppose all in all these are good publications, but they don't offer what i'm looking for.

—Xavier Muylaert (Muylaert@mail.com)

For me, I enjoy the MET Journal. The additional rules for minor bloodlines and updates to the MET gameworld (like Hunters, recent events in Wraith matters, etc.) are a welcome bonus. Articles detailing history and/or exposing metaplot information are wonderful as well, because not all LARPers follow the tabletop game.

Much to White Wolf's chagrin, I suspect!

I would like to see more FAQ's, official updates and perhaps optional rules. The MET Journal is the perfect place to publish Oblivion updates to 3rd Edition Vampire MET core rules, additional character types, and even direction on costuming or helpful Storytelling guidelines. Granted, some rules will probably need to be saved for a future book, but hints and tips — like the recent Mage article — go far to help fill in those gaps until the official versions are printed.

What I do not like to see published in the pages of the MET Journal are "ultra kewl powerz" that only serve to have players BEG for them, at least those powers that are not tempered in some fashion. I am also not a fan of fiction within the pages. I know, I know, just because it's not my cup of tea I shouldn't be too harsh to judge. But, the beauty of roleplaying is that WE get to create the stories. I don't want to read about your ideas, I want to make my own.

"But James, some people aren't that creative and they need some ideas!" Absolutely, but there is plenty of theme, flavor and fiction within the rulebooks to get us started, generally found at the beginning of a rulebook and often between the chapters.

While the World of Darkness isn't about rules and systems but about Storytelling, this is not the World of Darkness Journal. This is a journal dedicated to one specific set of rules and one specific line of rulebooks. If I want fiction set in the World of Darkness, I'll go pick up any number of paperbacks published by The Wolf. I don't buy rulebooks or supplemental material for the gripping fiction. I don't believe many people do.

If you must, use the fiction to illustrate an MET scene. Don't simply provide a gripping tale that only exists to entertain. Let the Storytellers do that for their players.

That's why we buy the rulebooks.

Additionally, the MET Journal could be the best place to publish errata that goes beyond mere FAQ level. Official, authorized, "we screwed up, here's what

Page XX should have said" errata. No one likes admitting mistakes but we all make them: customer, author and publisher alike. Unfortunately for the authors and publishers, the customer is traditionally right. Make us happy and give us the clarifications and updates we seek in a timely fashion.

—James A. Hussiere (drjamez@maine.rr.com)

I like the MET Journal for a number of reasons, some of which I'll describe below. However, I must clarify a point before I list my pros/cons.

I am a mature role-player who prefers the richness of the World of Darkness setting and the Mind's Eye Theater rule system.

I do not consider myself a "Mindless Fanboy". I do not purchase a periodical "just because it's cool!" I do not purchase every single White Wolf product that comes along, "A Vampire cigerette lighter? No thanks, I don't smoke." I do not preach about my characters, past and present, to unsuspecting game developers.

I do consider myself an "MET Evangelist" and I try to set a good example of our hobby. I do purchase a product when its content is good and the MET Journal gives me the content that I want by providing MET setting and rules clarifications that enrich my chronicle.

What do I like about the MET Journal? Here are my top three Desert Island answers.

1. The MET Journal has a sense of humor. Unlike other trade publications that shall go nameless, the MET Journal is grounded enough to poke fun at themselves and the product they create. When was the last time a certain company of upper-west coast of magic-users actually warned their players about the risks of overindulgence in their product. Bye Rich, I'll miss the wit!

2. The MET Journal is not a sales engine, but is an advertisement free publication focused on the Mind's Eye rule system. I don't have to wade through articles, ads or reviews of other systems that I'm not interested in. I like my content to be direct and I get that with the Journal.

3. The MET Journal is inexpensive. Heck, I've paid more for graphic novels or user guides that have been far less informative or enjoyable.

What would I like to see improved in the MET Journal?

1. I would like to see the MET Journal published on a more timely basis, perhaps every two months, instead of quarterly. Given the large volume of new material being published by White Wolf, we - the MET Storytellers, Players and retailers - need a more reliable schedule for purchasing and stocking your fine periodical.

2. I would like to see the most current MET rules clarifications (especially the increasing cross-over questions) addressed and published in a timely fashion. Instead of having to wait and then buy a new MET Rules book to see the current FAQ, I would like to find it, indexed and accurate, in the MET Journal. It would save me and my players from having to search through the various MET rules books to find the approprate data, and time saved means more time to play!

3. I would like to see more articles focused on improving our Live Action hobby. While you already have a number of articles formatted for the Journal, I would like to see a few more columns on such topics as, chronicle creation, storytelling techniques and pitfalls, legal aspects such as waivers and insurance, and how to handle the press without digging your own roasting pit.

—Cybertec (Cybertec@cyberdude.com)

The biggest problems I see in the Journal are the fiction. It has been said that the fiction in the book is the basis of White Wolf, ie the storyline and flavor of the game. With all of the books out there, be they novels or sourcebooks, there is plenty of fiction for the backdrop of the game, and to add flavor. Most people look to the MET Journal as a guide to the questions that are overlooked in the other MET soucebooks, things that the FAQs just don't cover satisfactorily. That, and rules for characters out of the norm, like the nihilists and other bloodlines/kiths/tribes/etc... are the selling points of this publication. The tips on "newbie's first night", costuming, and location acquisition are also very good sections to have in the books, along with the humor over gamer types. The only thing that it is missing at this point is a subscription option, which any die hard WW gamer would utilize.

—Jeff Szappan (radallyn@hotmail.com)

I enjoy the fiction a great deal. Keep it.

The sense of humor is necessary, and utterly appropriate.

The info on more esoteric/ rare splats (clans/ tribes/ bloodlines/ kiths/ guilds/ traditions/crafts/whatevers) is GREAT, and one of the main reasons I pick up the mag.

I also REALLY like the letters columns, and the game listings are great as well. Although I wish the magazine included more web site listings for games, I also understand that many games don't have a site, so that may not be 'fixable' on your end of things in either case.

More FAQ's, though. Definitely.

That's all I can come up with right now...

Chimp Pimp out.

—Monkey Love (TheChimpPimp@monkeyman.com)

My favorite issue, by far, was #3. I believe that was the one that was 90% role-play, 10% kewl powerz. While kewl powerz are interesting to see I, personally, don't feel that my character is any less complete because I don't have that brand spanking new ritual.

I would like to see more articles on how to bring the 'personal' back into the storytelling system. How to efficiently identify aspects of a character that will most effectively develop their own personal tie to the chronicle. With a game averaging 80 players I find myself delving into meta-plot more often than I would like and sometimes have to refocus on individual-specific events. I'm sure other chronicles have the same problem.

How about an article on different management techniques? How do games divide up the storytelling responsibilities and what have they learned as good/bad techniques? We have our own way of doing things but I bet someone else here may have figured out a better way to handle game duties and vice versa.

—D. Scott Stewart (storyteller@eotr.org)

OK. Things in the journal that I like:

1.) All the conversions for stuff that falls between the cracks is great. Even the Wraith/Wyld West stuff is pretty good.

2.) the "how to deal with problem players" articles were excellent. Let's see more detailed troubleshooting stuff in the future.

3.) I know a lot of you have had a problem with this one, but the Lores article was a godsend...Now I no longer have to deal with those who think that a lore of one let's them know everything. As far as the spending XP issue, look at it this way: You may be told all the things, but unless you sit down and commit them to memory, it's going to go right in one ear and out the other. Spending XP reflects that.

4.)The humor articles have been great.

5.) Carl is very willing to listen to the readership....There aren't many at WW who are willing to risk posting here.=)

6.) The games listing is a wonderful idea. Not every game has a net presence, and the listing is a invaluable resource.

Things that I don't like or need work:

1.) I'd like to see less of the historical conversions. To be honest, I've always felt that, while they work great in TT, in LARP they become problematic. This being due to issues of location, proper costuming, players not familiar with history, etc. Here in cleveland, he have multiple larps running, only one of which is Dark Ages. I've never even heard of any of the others being run. I'm not saying eliminate them, but the biggest area of LARP has always been VAmpire, and the focus should stay there.

2.), Ah geez, Pete, I'm sorry, but...The fiction just seems kinda out of place. There's plenty of it in the other books, and the Journal, I think, is the place for whatever falls short of needing a whole book. However, there is one thing that would make it interesting...Start having readers (or staff) submit fiction based on events that actually happened in game, taking a particular scene and turning it into written fiction.

3.) The games listing is great, but there should be a touch more detail, and some of the games are listed under the wrong areas.

Things I'd like to see in the Journal:

1.) Please, PLEASE do an article on Ghouls in Revised LOTN. Liber is kinda worthless now, and it's going to suck to do a conversion, and then find out the official rules have come out. Maybe WW is planning a rev. Liber, but give us something to work with.

2.) Articles on character creation-Not so much telling ppl the "right" way to make up a character, but suggestions for making a fully formed character, as opposed to a collection of stats.

3.) Even thought I don't use it in my game, I would like to see more detail given on the WW metaplot. There have been a couple cases in the journal where an event has been referred to (such as the fall of the True Black Hand), but not explained at all. This would come in really handy for those who are really into LARP, but don't really play TT. Maybe even a time- line of some sort, with pertinent events listed?

4.) I'd also like to see articles submitted from STs about any "experiments" they may have run in their games and how they worked. For example, STs have always been encouraged to make up their own settings for games. I'd like to see how successful (or not) other STs have been with "going outside the lines."

Overall, the journal has been a great help to LARP, and I'd like to commend Carl and all those who have worked on the Journal for doing a great job.

—Avatar_X (Avatar_X@nospam.angelfire.com)

Mind's Eye Theater Journal is a great idea, but there are a few problems that I have seen with the Journal itself.

1. Too Expensive. I can buy a book for the price of two journals. If there is any way to write this and make it cheaper, or if there is anyway you can make subscriptions for the year, that would be the best thing.

2. Too Much. There is too much on the things that are not played much and not enough on the things that are. How about crossover rules for Garou to the new 3rd ed. We have a mixed venue vamp/garou game and it would be nice to figure out how to even the balances.

3. FAQ's. Would be nice. (It would be nice to know if the designers intended for speed of thought and speed beyond thought to be used in the same sequence, and if it was, it would be nice to question them as to why they believe Garou should be able to be able to take up to 60 steps a turn for 8 hours.) Things like that question plague every Larp.

4. Storylines... Nuff Said...some MET SL's for beginning ST's

5. TOO MUCH CHANGELING AND WRAITH...I know that Changeling and Wraith need a boost in the MET world, but most people play Vampire or Werewolf. I would like to see a little more about them in the future. All we've seen on Vampires are (True Black Hand{kind of useful} Stuff on Camarilla and OWBN {Semi Useful} Types of players {Twice and not useful except for a laugh} Lores {Usefull but I would like an expanded section of Lores so we don't get into fights, also what does one start out with. I.E. does a Garou have werewolf 5 and Garou 2?}

Other than that, I've liked the editorials, and gotten a good laugh from some of the articles. Also, it's great that you take suggestions from people. It makes life easier.

—Nurain (nurain@hotmail.com)

SO LONG, FAREWELL, BYE-BYE

by Cynthia Summers, **Mind's Eye Theatre** developer

Well, for starters, **Mind's Eye Theatre** isn't going anywhere, although the **Journal** is falling by the wayside. Don't all jump for joy at once....

Mind's Eye Theatre still has places to go, things to do and people to meet. The upcoming **Changing Breeds Book 1** and **Vampire Storytellers Guide** will continue to blaze new trails for LARPers of all stripes. Looking to the future, I definitely want the game line's focus to be on telling stories and giving folks the best tools with which to do so.

Typically, last issues are considered a place to air prophecies, predictions and similar vaporware. Based on what I've been seeing in the course of my job, I'll venture to put on my foresight cap and play at prophet. I think the live-action genre is in for some interesting times ahead. This hobby has been around for at least a decade, if not a little longer. The LARPing world of today is not the same as it was when **Masquerade** first came out. Some of the conventions of modern LARPing will change, and all of them will have to face up to the times. Exactly how audiences' tastes will change as days go by is up to social scientists (and our marketing department) to figure out, but you can be sure that **MET** books will adapt to fit them.

The folks who've been engaging in live-action roleplaying for several years now, like myself, are admittedly getting a bit long in the tooth. The folks who saw **Masquerade** come into being are getting married, having kids and experiencing various other grown-up rites of passage. But now that we're doing all this growing up, will we need to give up "playing pretend"? Will new games give rise to "elders" mourning for the good old days and wondering what's the matter with kids today, while the "kids" wonder when those "fogies" are going to retire to the old LARPers' home? Those OG's (original gamers) who have continued to press on often have more collective roleplaying experience under their belts than their new (and younger) Storytellers do.

This potential conflict could go several ways. It could result in clashes of age where those who reach a certain age find themselves increasingly unwelcome or where a youth must spend time in entry-level positions (both in and out of character) for a long time. On the other hand, old chronicles might enjoy a resurgence in popularity and vitality as fresh new players infuse the scene with their enthusiasm. A coterie of experienced power-players might rise to prominence in an aging game and alienate the young, inexperienced players who would otherwise keep the game alive. Conversely, a group of old hands who are the Storyteller's most mature and competent players might take mentor roles and help integrate bright-eyed young LARPers into the game in such a way that the game goes on and continues to strive.

Prediction: They're not quite the Geritol set, but older players are becoming a fact of life. We're only beginning to see the impact they'll have on the hobby, and it will be an important factor in its future.

Those coming in fresh to the games are entering with less knowledge of the material under their belts. They're less likely to have encountered the World of Darkness in a tabletop format than to have been recruited via a friend's recommendation, word of mouth or just happening upon a **Laws of...** book in a local store. This concern has already been addressed tentatively with the changes to the books that give new **Mind's Eye** readers a glimpse of the setting. New rulebooks now start with ambient fiction and setting material that puts the rules material in some kind of context.

The newer generations of gamers are also coming in with wildly different background materials. We came to the games with impressions of *The Crow* and *Interview with a Vampire*, and we wanted to play what we saw. Our younger siblings, however, are more familiar with Buffy and *The Matrix*. This difference isn't necessarily destructive to the hobby, but it will become a factor as groups try to create stories that pander to both sets of creative expectation.

Prediction: Stormy waters lie ahead for those who are plotting the courses of chronicles. Storytellers will have to find a happy medium between brooding anti-hero stories and post-industrial epic tales of success against seemingly insurmountable odds.

Speaking of youth, what about those kids that the older players now have. Are we looking at the *real* next generation of LARPers? Is LARPing going to be one more activity to juggle in between Little League games and ballet lessons? While much of the new gamers coming into the hobby are in their late teens and early 20s (as many of us were when we started), a growing group of youngbloods is made up of elementary-school age kids who want to know what Mom and Dad are doing when they head out for the night dressed up in laced shirts or green velvet. Certainly the enthusiasm surrounding the Harry Potter books suggests that a wealth of youngsters are thirsty for fantasy and they just need the opportunity to take the next step. Simply ignoring this group or rebuffing its interest may be one of the more ill-considered moves the LARP community could make.

Prediction: Groups may need to reconsider their approach to young people beyond a blanket policy of non-admission.

And that's all that my psychic powers can endure for now. Now we sit back and see what the future brings.

Closing out also means that you give out thanks to everyone who spent time working on the thing. So — thanks to Carl for putting this puppy together from a few harebrained ideas and turning out a silk purse from the sow's ear. Thanks to the remarkable crop of writers who gave us so much to play with and think about, taking roleplaying beyond a few sheets of paper and playing "let's pretend" down in the basement. And of course, thanks to you, the loyal readers, who've followed us thus far. We wouldn't be here at all without you.

Take care, have fun, and we'll see you around Elysium.

DEADGUY SPEAKS

CHANGES, ENDINGS, BEGINNINGS AND OTHER 'INGS THAT SEEM PROFOUND

by Richard Dansky

Let me give one final round of praise to Richard for everything he's done over the years. Although he's no longer with us — the company, that is, not the living — his presence has had a resounding influence on this game line and this hobby. In fact, I wouldn't even have a job here if it wasn't for Richard. When you see this man, shake his hand, thank him for all the hard work, and let him know that the contributions he's made will not be forgotten.

Years and years ago, back when vinyl was the best form of music you could get (as opposed to a statement about your retro chic muso cred like it is now), the Alan Parsons Project recorded a song called "Where Do We Go From Here?" For those of you who don't know who the Alan Parsons Project was, they're the band best known for that thunderous instrumental that gets played before most sporting events these days. For those of you who do know about APP and are currently sneering because let's face it, *Vulture Culture* was probably not one of the cooler albums ever recorded, relax. There's always someone out there who thinks your taste in music sucks. And for those few of you who actually own Alan Parsons Project CDs — or even albums — well, we're getting old, guys. Still, it could be worse: I could be leading off the column by discussing what LARP plot lines can be extracted from Emerson, Lake and Palmer's *Tarkus* album. Count your blessings, folks.

But, as usual, I digress. My point, or at least my moderately blunt conversational object, is that it's always time to think about what comes next. What do you do when your game crashes and burns, or it gets taken over by no-talent munchkins? What happens if your favorite game system (*cough* **Wraith** *cough*) gets canceled. In short, what do you do if the status quo of your gaming universe, *Deo prohibe*, changes?

Mind you, this notion isn't one that the gaming industry — or the gaming audience — necessarily takes to heart with a whole lot of love. The phenomenon that I call "gaming crystallization" that takes place an awful lot, and it hits players, writers and developers with equal frequency. In so many words, gaming crystallization is the notion that when someone finds gaming for the first time, he seizes on the first good game he plays as the Platonic ideal of roleplaying. Nothing else can ever measure up to that first sublime experience, and any changes to the game line are a betrayal of that one, shining, magical moment when the dice first hit the table.

Unfortunately, everyone crystallizes at different times and with different systems. That's why you get edition wars on UseNet and mailing lists, for one thing. It's also why some folks get verrrrry nervous or dismissive about games and styles of play that are different from the ones they're used to. Not everyone crystallizes thus, certainly — not by a long shot — but it does happen, and it's something to watch out for. After all, if

you decide that **Street Fighter** is the ultimate RPG, the fact that they're not making **Street Fighter** any more probably puts a crimp in your enjoyment of the hobby.

You know what? That's just plain silly. What we're doing is — and I'm only going to say this once — a hobby. It is intended for enjoyment. Every other aspect of it — from the educational, *a la* the bulk of the content in **Charnel Houses of Europe**, to the humorous internal swipes you'll find in **Pentex** — is secondary. It's a game. You're supposed to have fun with it. You're supposed to get together with people whose company you enjoy to do things you enjoy and, with any luck, acquire stories that will bore the living hell out of everyone you know upon their umpteenth recitation.

That being said, your primary responsibility to yourself is to allow yourself to enjoy the gaming that you do. If you're clinging to something that's gone and not coming back — be it a since-replaced edition or a since-canceled product line — you're doing yourself a disservice. Now, that's not to say that just because a company kills a game, it's time to stop playing that game. After all, I still haul out Ye Olde **Wraithe** Bookes on occasion, and I enjoy doing so. I just don't look out at my players from across the **Buried Secrets** screen, sniff in best Etonian fashion and announce that no gaming experience henceforth can possibly compare. You love what you love, but you shouldn't allow it to keep you from enjoying something new.

So what does that pithy bit of wisdom mean for you? And no, this doesn't mean that **MET** is going to be canceled. **MET** is going to grow and thrive for a good long time, and that's great. It's also going to change as things go along — hopefully there won't be another **Laws of the Night**, but there might be — and you'll have the choice of how you're going to take it. In my opinion, at least, the best thing you can do is recognize that change is coming and inevitable, and do your level best to make sure that the change is for the better. So write cards and letters with feedback and critique. (And make them polite ones, damn it. Nothing turns someone off to your feedback faster than saying, "You screwed up, but I, in my infinite armchair wisdom, know how to fix everything.") Make sure you mention what you like in your letters as well. Positive feedback helps immensely, believe it or not.

But, to quote Monty Python, that's as may be: It's still a frog. Some of you folks are going to crystallize in your gaming with **MET** as it stands, and there's nothing wrong with that. If it works for you, it works. It's that simple. Nobody's saying that you always have to jump on the newest, hottest thing to come along just because it's new and it seems to be all the rage. Just because it's new and hot doesn't necessarily mean that it's any damn good, or that it's something you'll enjoy as much as what you're doing now. I keep my old **Villains and Vigilantes** books easily accessible for a reason, and it's not just so I can haul out "Organized Crimes" for purposes of taunting my erstwhile manager, Ken Cliffe. It's because I have fun with the game, even despite the fact that the system is simplistic and the book's falling apart. Ten years from now, some of you are liable to be saying the same thing about your shabby, dog-eared copies of **Laws of the Night**. And last time I checked, that's what this whole thing is about.

(I'm also fully cognizant of the fact that some of you are going to be systematically burning every picture you can find of yourself in character costume and bemoaning the time you wasted on such a childish hobby, but such is life. Remember what happened to Susan at the end of the Chronicles of Narnia. Different folks take different roads, and they're perfectly happy with them.)

But that's the big picture, or at least one panel of it. (One suspects that the really, really big picture looks a bit like Rodin's *Gates of Hell*, complete with three scary,

lurching guys up top and various other jagged bits of bronze scattered about.) There will come more personal moments when asking "What now?" is entirely appropriate. Take, for example, the horrifying, soul-shattering moment when you suddenly realize that...

...you're bored to freakin' death with your game as it now stands. So, to borrow a line from Dennis Hopper, whaddaya do, whaddaya do?

The easy step to take is the boldest: Quit. Write a snide or angry or regretful email — your choice — to the Storyteller, the Narrators, your fellow players and random passersby announcing your departure and enumerating your reasons for jumping ship. Doing so provides no small measure of catharsis, but it also pretty much eliminates the possibility of ever returning to the game. Phrases like "bloated, flaccid storytelling style" and "emotionally dishonest bouts of Rock-Paper-Scissors" may seem fun to write, but they do a wonderful job of ensuring that you're never going to be welcomed back.

Of course, if you're feeling particularly spiteful, you can quit and try to start your own game, with the express purpose of putting the old one out of business. This idea is bad on any number of levels, not the least of which are A.) it's a hell of a lot of work to do just to put a dull stick in someone's figurative eye, and B.) if you do succeed in killing the other game, all of the players you felt compelled to leave behind will then seek to while away their evenings in your chronicle because *there's nowhere else for them to go*. Oops.

A more sensible approach is to sit down and dope out what exactly bothers you about the game as it's currently configured. Writing it out helps. If nothing else, doing so forces you to formalize and organize what your thoughts on the matter actually are. Also, putting those thoughts in black and white (or green or red or whatever color ink you're using, although I recommend against crayon) is a great way to see if you've got legitimate concerns or if you're just being pissy. For instance, "My character is getting slapped around," isn't a legit concern. "My character is getting stomped like the 1998 Minnesota Twins because the Storyteller gives his buddies all sorts of kewl powerz and ignores the rest of us," is.

Once you've got those concerns mapped out, you can look at them with a sufficiently jaundiced eye and decide what's called for next. Maybe quitting — or just taking some time off — is the appropriate solution. The trick is remembering that it's a solution, not a grandiose gesture of defiance. In the grand scheme of things, quitting a LARP is not quite on the same level as, say, standing in front of a tank in Tiananmen Square. Maybe a little time off is all you need to get your batteries recharged, or maybe you're done with that game for good, but it's still just a game you're talking about.

What that means is, if you're going to go, go. Do it. Don't make speeches about how it pains you to leave, don't wait for your adoring ghouls to beg you to come back and save the game, don't expect the world to end just because you're walking away. Just go, and move on. Nothing is more annoying (including the brain surgeons who throw something that looks like an obscene hand gesture from a deranged gibbon during R-P-S and claim that it's alternately a scrawny rock, curved scissors or really thin sheets of paper) than an ex-player who tries to imitate Banquo's ghost by sticking around for the feast. Who knows? Maybe once you're away for a bit, you'll decide that you want to come back. Maybe you'll want to start your own game after all. And maybe you'll decide you've just had enough, and you'll close the book on that particular aspect of your life. Who knows? Not I. My psychic powers don't work on days that end in "y." Just make your choice and follow through, whatever that choice may be.

Then again, there are times when the big shakeup isn't your doing. Games have been known, for any number of reasons, to fall down and go boom. Maybe the main Storyteller moves, quits or (*Deo prohibe!* — again with the Latin! It means "God forbid, in case you're wondering, but let's face it, *Gladiator* made this stuff cool again.) acquires another commitment that requires a sizable time investment. (Kids, for example. Kids are a big one.) Sometimes the game just winds down of its own accord, as the story line wraps up and nothing arises to take its place. Player attrition is another killer, especially if the game is one that relies on existing community to the extent that it rarely draws new blood. (In case you're wondering, that's a nice way of saying "Someone kills off all the newbies' characters until the players stop coming back.") And sometimes you just show up and the only people there are the Storyteller's SO and the janitor, swapping war stories and comparing their favorite vintages of chardonnay. Hey, it happens.

When it happens, though, you have to figure out what you're going to do next. The easiest approach is just to sit on your thumbs and hope someone else decides to start another game up. The flaw with this approach, however, is twofold: One, you're at the mercy of someone else's gaming style and choice of material. Two, as one of my coworkers says, "Hope is the beginning of unhappiness."

Of course, if you feel disinclined to sit around and wait for someone else to bite the bullet, you can go the opposite route and start a game yourself. (There's actually a third route, which can best be summed up as "guilt/ manipulate/ sucker someone else into doing it for your pleasure," but we don't condone that sort of thing here. Well, not often, and not when management is looking.) By doing so, you're making sure that the game you want to play is getting run, and you're taking squarely on your shoulders the responsibility for continuing the gaming community in your area. (Note: If you actually do decide to run a game, you have my respect, sympathy and admiration. You also probably have a need to hit yourself on the forehead with a large brick five or six times, just to prepare yourself for what's coming next. It pretty much accurately simulates the unpleasant aspect of running a LARP, but with less photocopying.) Just make sure that if you do decide to run a game, you're prepared for all of the hard work and the criticism that comes with it. If you value your life, sanity and stomach lining, do not expect people to kowtow before you in swooning admiration because you saved the game. Instead, be prepared for endless kvetching about how the old game was better, how they could do it better and quite possibly how a one-legged bullfrog who moonlights as a banjo player at the local *Dukes of Hazzard*-themed watering hole could do it better. However, I can also state with some confidence that a storytelling staff composed of Taliesin, Sam Clemens, Senchan Torpeist and some balding dude named Bill would get the identical reaction. It's when you don't get any griping that you have to worry. That means they don't care enough to bitch.

In the end, it all boils down to this: It's going to change. All of it. Your gaming group, your chronicle, even the very game you're playing. Get over it. It's going to happen. There's no sense playing Canute and trying to hold back the waves, because it's just not going to work. (No, I can't tell you what clan Canute was, though I'm sure he's in a book somewhere. Don't blame me; I stuck to minor British nobility and people who were dead already. It seemed safest.) The inevitable end result is that you'll end up all wet, with lots of people asking you who the heck Canute was.

Ultimately, you have two responsibilities. The first is to yourself, and it's a responsibility to have fun. Otherwise, why bother playing the game? Trudging grimly along to session after session doesn't win you any metaphysical merit badges for

persistence. There's no great *Pilgrim's Progress*-style reward for enduring the most gatherings of a game you're not enjoying. So find a way to enjoy your gaming, or find gaming that you enjoy.

That's because the second responsibility is to be something other than a pain in the ass to everyone you're playing with. You've got no right to keep others from having fun, even if you in your superior wisdom know that they're playing the game wrong or by inferior rules or whatever. (And of course I'm not talking to *you*. I'm talking to that guy you know who'd act that way. Yeah, you know the one I'm talking about. He's a jerk, isn't he? What a bastard.) If other folks are having fun, let them. What exactly do you gain from deflating the tire of their happiness, other than more angry, sweaty company by the side of the road? Back off and respect their enjoyment, even if you can't share it. If, however, you're only happy when other people are embedded in the same morass of misery wherein you pass your darkened existence, you need to find the local **Oblivion** game and volunteer as a Shadowguide. To every thing there is a season, and all that. Make yourself useful.

That's what it all comes down to, then. Find a way to have fun with the game, regardless of its incarnation or rules set or setting or whatever, and don't step on anyone else's enjoyment. In the end — and Steve Wieck is going to kill me for daring to put this in print — you don't have to buy every new book that comes along. You just have to be willing to have fun and to allow for the possibility that a new title or a new edition or a new game (or even a new way of playing that game) might actually be enjoyable. Mind you, I certainly hope you don't give up on the old stuff. Those of us who worked on the old books will salute you for your loyalty, and then surreptitiously check the amazon.com sales rank of each of our titles when we think no one's looking. You just can't let your love of the old stuff preclude you from the possibility of having fun with the new.

Come to think of it, that's actually a pretty good way to approach life. Give it a shot. Start small, say, with LARPing. After all, this cockamamie hobby just might be good for something after all.

–the deadguy–

PS: It's been fun, folks. Thanks for reading along, and here's hoping you got a smile or two out of this column. Me, I generally got enough to go out for a really nice Chinese dinner about once a month, plus an audience. I'd call that a fair trade. Now go have fun, or else I start writing another one of these, and God knows none of us wants that.

LARGE GAMES AND LONG CHRONICLES

WHY THEY BREAK AND HOW PLAYERS AND STORYTELLERS CAN FIX THEM

by Steve Balfour

Most of us are not into **Mind's Eye Theatre** live-action roleplaying for one-shot games. We want a rich chronicle with a history and story that evolves and changes as our characters plot, scheme and act. A slightly smaller set of us are into large games in chronicles or at conventions. Have you ever been to a live-action game with over 300 players dressed to the nines and roleplaying their hearts out? Oh, it's a unique experience! Your character is always at risk. The biggest-name characters are there. A scene done right opens a dozen doors, and a scene done poorly closes them all. It's astounding.

Big games and long chronicles are not just different and desirable for the players, they're a real challenge for the Storytellers and organizers. Game sites must be found, plots must be interwoven, characters must be directed, teams of Storytellers need coordinating, and all of the rest of the stuff we all help with to get these huge albatrosses to soar and swoop like eagles must be done. They are outrageous fun when everything goes well. They are mind-splitting headaches when they do not.

So, do you want to play in or host a huge game? Have you ever wanted to storytell or play in a sprawling multi-city chronicle? How about just adding a few more ideas and possible solutions for that big game you already enjoy or run?

Well, that's why I'm writing.

Partially. I couldn't address all the things that make large games and chronicles fantastic successes, but I can cover some of the most important elements that will help you shine as a Storyteller or player — the rules and the dynamics of large games. And no, this article shouldn't prove unhelpfully esoteric; I've become a practical guy since I started coordinating larger LARPs in 1994. I've seen a lot after being a Storyteller at several of bigger conventions like Dragon*Con and being on the production and storytelling teams of many of the Camarilla's large games (White Wolf's fan club called the Camarilla, not the fictional vampire sect). As far as tips go, I've worked and roleplayed with some of the best in the World of Darkness LARP scene. Plus, I have a secret weapon that helps me make sense out of some of the odd problems we face in large LARPs and international chronicles: I have a few degrees in psychology.

SO, WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL?

Big games and long chronicles cause rules to break, plots to break, players to break and Storytellers to break. LARPs become large at about 150 players — the kind of games you find at the larger conventions and some of the season finales of the really big LARP groups. In the Camarilla, we run about a dozen

large games each year, ranging from 150 to 350 players and one really enormous game with close to 1000 players at the annual International Camarilla Convention (ICC). Some people find my lower boundary of 150 players too high, of course; a 70-person game is too large for some. Whatever the case is for you, I'll stick to describing the game and plot logistics that I've learned in the school of hard knocks, because that's what's relevant to the majority of large games. You're probably not too interested about how to rent out an entire hotel for three nights like the ICC does.

I think of a long-running **MET** chronicle as one that's been running for at least a year and has some pretty good continuity-reinforcing mechanisms in place, such as email lists, a solid group of core players or some long-lived characters. Although long chronicles can take place in just one city, several groups — including the Camarilla (club not sect), One World by Night and Shared Universe — host multi-city chronicles. The Camarilla's chronicle, for instance, has about 250 cities on four continents playing in a 6000-person chronicle that started in 1992. The Camarilla runs weekly or biweekly events with 20 to 100 players and maintains numerous email lists to keep Storytellers coordinated and everybody roleplaying to their hearts' content.

How Big Games Break and Why

Big games and long chronicles cause rules to break, plots to break, players to break and Storytellers to break. Smaller games allow for more personal interaction between Storytellers, players, plots and the rules. If your **MET** chronicle consists of seven players and one Storyteller, you can run it very much like a table-top game with the Storyteller describing the reactions of the World of Darkness and helping everyone through challenges that they perform. The feel is personal, the plots can be grand and world-changing, and the mechanics of the rules can be governed by consensus. The Storyteller has a good idea of what each character is doing, and he can work on character development, personal horror and intriguing plot twists from each character's past.

As the game gets larger, more players end up in conflict with each other so that the chronicle shifts subtly away from the Storyteller describing the World of Darkness to the players defining the World of Darkness for each other. Even if the ratio of Storytellers to players is the same as it is in a smaller game, the larger game becomes less personalized to each character. Unlike a game with one Storyteller and seven players, a game with 10 Storytellers and 70 players means that no one Storyteller knows the general plans of each and every character and that lots of player actions and challenges take place outside of the Storytellers' view. Social dynamics also become a factor in the 70-person game, whereas personal dynamics are more prominent in the seven-person game, so the psychological rules of play change for everyone involved.

When a game branches out to multiple cities, a whole new level of complexity occurs. All of the sudden, the plots have to shrink in scope to accommodate the diverse views of the Storytellers in different cities. Yes, the plots have to *shrink*. In a seven-person game, for instance, the Storyteller can dictate that the characters burned Atlanta to the ground. Even in a 70-person game in one city, it's not that big of a deal (*logistically*) to have some monstrous force sink Vancouver or wipe out an entire supernatural character type. But, as

soon as two different cities join the same chronicle, the Storytellers and players have to deal with what each other city does. The Storytellers and players cannot write and perform plot lines with worldwide effects without having all the Storytellers (and the majority of players) in all the cities agree and accept them.

For instance, the Brujah justicar cannot both hold a conclave in one city and be diablerized in another at the same time. High King David cannot disband the Parliament of Dreams in one city but charge the Parliament with a task in the other. Therefore, the possible plots for multi-city chronicles must shrink in scope as the number of cities in a chronicle increases, and that shrinking changes players' opportunities and Storytellers' plot tools.

Multi-city games also put more stress on the Storytellers and the rules, because it is much harder to coordinate information for two or more teams than it is for only one. What happens if a character destroys a police station in one city and then plays in another nearby city the next night? How quickly do police respond in the World of Darkness? How is everyone with *Police* and *Media* Influence informed? Does that character's action impact the levels of Influence (or danger) in each city? Were the Willpower Traits that the character spent last night in the other city marked off for play tonight? Many of these questions are easy to answer in a one-city game, but they become problems when two or more cities are involved. When you add the elements of players with email or ICQ, you start to see how the Storytellers can be outpaced by the players in two or 250 cities.

How Rules Break

Let's go back to large games for a while. The goal of the **MET** system is to help players have fun roleplaying and acting out stories. In larger games, some categories of rules begin to fray. The first category of rules that break in a large game is that which encourages lots of tests. As an example, an Elysium scene with 100 players in the same room descends into across-the-room testing hell when a single obfuscated Malkavian walks into the room among its security-paranoid court officials and supernaturally observant spectators. What happens when two or three such characters walk in at the same or different times? Another example relevant to all **MET** rules is mass combat. In a room of 70 players, mass combat requires a charismatic Storyteller and a few assistants to coordinate. The problem is compounded if only 35 of those 70 players in the room are actually in the combat while the other 35 are trying to roleplay other scenes occurring in the same place.

Another category of rules that break in large games involves those rules that rely on Storyteller interpretation. Large-game Storytellers are not part of a hive mind. They will inevitably make different rulings about the way bonus Traits from supernatural powers work, the amount or type of information that supernatural detection gives or what effects some powers have. Aside from the complaints that can generate among players, this inconsistency causes incongruities in the story. Most of these sorts of problems are not a concern in games with up to five Storytellers. Adding any more Storytellers, though, makes every little ambiguity a possible frustration for everyone that can lead to a break from roleplaying.

The last category of rules that break in large games comprises rules that introduce complexity to the game or record keeping for the game. In a room of seven, it's not a big deal to mark a Trait off a character sheet or even track

temporary Trait totals. In a room of 70, the game changes. Large games have more action going on all the time. Players have to attend to and remember a lot more information, and the information is often less organized or predictable than information in a smaller game. The nuances of rules end up being annoyances in large games. The larger the game is, the greater its need becomes for fewer rules, simpler rules and rules that are easy to memorize. Also, it is much better to eliminate rules that require dragging out character sheets in large games. Stopping the action for one player can potentially affect the rest of the players in the room negatively.

Multi-city chronicles face most of the large-game problems, but with a higher negative-impact potential. Two additional concerns that arise in those games impact rules for multi-city chronicles. First, the frequency of character death should be minimized for the sake of both player satisfaction and chronicle continuity. It is often to the advantage of a chronicle to power down offensive supernatural abilities and Merits while giving a character's defensive capabilities more weight. Second, keeping records and managing rules for refreshing used Ability and Background Traits becomes difficult in multi-city games. Consistent, easy-to-remember rules about refresh rates can lighten the burden of record keeping and decrease the chance of player mistakes in multi-city chronicles.

How Plots Break

The stresses on rules in large games can sometimes be smoothed over by a dynamic Storyteller attending to the story and circumstances at the time. However, stresses on plots in large games can ruin any chance of creating a chronicle or allowing for meaningful character development. A challenge for any game with many Storytellers lies in coordinating plot lines over space and time. Just the layout of the place where a large game is held can make communication between Storytellers easier or harder. Technology can help. So can regularly scheduled meetings during the course of play. (But beware, though, that Storytellers cannot just walk away from certain situations because they have a meeting to attend.)

As games increase in size, players begin to define the World of Darkness for each other more than they rely on the Storytellers to define it for them. This effect occurs partially because more players are introducing their characters' agenda into the game, adding a multitude of character-driven plots to the story. As the game increases in size, some players grow more independent of the Storytellers and the rest of the players, so their character's plots also begin to diverge from what can reasonably be expected.

While this divergence makes larger games more interesting, it poses a significant challenge to Storytellers writing plots. On one hand, character-driven plots can be the focus of a large game (with a little Storyteller facilitation and moderation). On the other hand, character-driven plots can evaporate rapidly as the characters achieve their goals and begin to look for something else to do. In smaller games, it is much easier to understand where the characters are going and provide the necessary elements in the plot to deepen the roleplaying experience. In larger games, not only is it harder to track and understand where the characters are going, but having more characters means opening the door for many more character-driven plots. Add in the fact that each Storyteller has a

slightly different style of working with character-driven plots and you can see why games with more and more Storytellers, such as multi-city chronicles, face many different challenges for moderating character-driven plots and writing their own plots.

Plot lines have to be satisfying to the players, something that a Storyteller can build into a plot he writes, but that character-driven plots do not necessarily include. However, each degree of uncertainty introduced by increasing the number of players or Storytellers makes writing plots more challenging. In a game governed principally by character-driven plots, Storytellers need a set of stock plot lines that can be implemented quickly when the character-driven plots dry up. A set of stock plots may sound less interesting or challenging to write than tailored plots, but such is not the case. A set of stock plots must cover the range of players that may be attending a game. The plots must be interesting, satisfying and linked into the chronicle in an understandable way, rather than randomly throwing a treasure-laden Judas goat out for the characters to fight over. Shrewd storytelling teams in multi-city chronicles weave lots of plot line hooks into the chronicle so that they can put a plot into play at the most opportune time.

In large LARPs, players do not always create their characters' agenda with a concern for entertaining the assembled group. Moderating character-driven plots can seem as difficult as negotiating trade rights between hostile countries. Players, you can help by keeping the group in mind as you decide what your character will do each night. Storytellers, you have to balance the enjoyment that the group is drawing from all the combined plots in play and the desire for players to have their characters in the spotlight just enough to make their roleplaying experience.

How Players Break

Small games are based on personal dynamics and regulated by friendship and understanding. Large games are less personal, and they begin to rely on larger-scale social dynamics. For instance, it is much harder for a character to be left out of a small game. The players or Storytellers involved can reintegrate any neglected characters quickly. In large games, players and Storytellers feel less accountable to each other and take less action to help each other. This effect is called the "bystander effect" in social psychology, named after the fact that people will act like bystanders if they consider themselves anonymous parts of a large group. Larger games present each player and Storyteller with a zillion things to attend to and do, more than enough to feel less accountable to the entire game than a group of seven would. Players and Storytellers have to be aware of the bystander effect and how it affects a LARP.

It is also true that people feel that they need to do less individually as the group size grows. One reason is "social loafing." That is, the players feel less likely to be evaluated by others because they are in a larger group. Another reason is the "free rider effect" in which people believe that someone else is likely to solve the problem first so they do not try themselves. Both of these behaviors increase the percentage of players who rely on Storytellers for providing plots in larger and larger games. This claim seems at odds with the fact that having more characters leads to more character-driven plots. What is really happening in a

larger game, though, is that one set of players becomes more independent and begins introducing character-driven plots while another set of players becomes more dependent on the Storytellers or other players for plots. The combination of these effects makes it necessary to increase the ratio of Storytellers to players in large games without structured plots. Because doing so is often unfeasible, players can be educated to help other players if they are willing. Furthermore, simplifying the rules, decreasing the number of challenges called for by the rules, decreasing the complexity of rule-to-rule interaction and making rules easy to memorize can decrease the need of players to rely on Storytellers.

Another social dynamic that governs large games is the "risky shift effect." When excitement gets high, people in large groups tend to feel that their actions will meet with fewer consequences, so they attempt to do more outlandish stuff. In live-action roleplaying, this behavior results in more challenges per player in larger groups than smaller groups. The number of challenges increases exponentially as both the number of players and challenges per player goes up. Each of the challenges has the potential to require a Storyteller or require looking up rules or require many other breaks in roleplaying. Therefore, it is better to decrease the potential number of challenges to improve game flow for larger groups. The risky shift effect also causes players to act in less predictable and more diverse ways with their characters in large games or on large email lists. It also means that some characters will hop on the fast-moving bandwagon just for the thrill. Storytellers and other players have to plan and compensate for the fact that larger groups give rise to more diverse and bolder reactions than they would encounter in small groups.

How Storytellers Break

The two problem areas for Storytellers lie in setting up the chronicle and running the game. That covers just about everything, right? Setting up a large game or a multi-city chronicle is a difficult task. In small LARPs, the players can select what they want within the Storyteller's comfort zone. Because the players and Storytellers in a seven-person game are able to negotiate and define the entire world themselves, character creation and setting are much different than a game with many cities. When 70 players are involved, the World of Darkness ratios play a role in character creation. The conventions of the genre start to unravel when the Lasombra *antitribu* outnumber the Brujah two-to-one. Similarly, any deviation from the actual place and time in which the players are involved has to be explained meticulously to large groups. Imagine the out-of-play disaster that happens when the group patrolling the park accidentally comes into the same play area as the group hunting in the forest, and it takes several rounds to figure out that the groups are not in the same place in character. Multi-city chronicles require an even higher level of attention to initial characters and setting, especially if the chronicle adds players as it goes. Rules for character type distribution, setting variations and using places that are not in any of the participating cities have to be worked out between all the Storytellers. It is terribly embarrassing when a new city joins a multi-city chronicle with a great background only to find out that the new city was a war zone in the existing chronicle.

Large games also seem to suck Storytellers into the most protracted problems and challenges. As the number of players increases, the diversity of problems that are possible also increases. Instead of regulating story flow, the higher number of challenges and higher chance for mass combat in large games stakes a claim on the Storytellers' time.

Can You Really Fix All This Stuff?

Yes. To be completely honest, and with apologies to Murphy, not everything that can go wrong will go wrong. Most of the problems for large games or multi-city chronicles stem from two sets of core elements. The first set of problems can be addressed with a supplement to the **MET** rules. These problems are the complexity of the rules, the escalating number of challenges in a large game, ambiguity in the rules and inconsistencies in the expectations of the participants. The second set of problems can be addressed with procedures and technology. These problems include lack of information management, lack of support for Storytellers' auxiliary needs and lack of planning for plot contingencies.

More Rules?

No. Fewer. Before I get too much further along, I want to say that I'm not writing the actual supplement for your specific game or chronicle. That's for you to do. I want to show you the areas in which you can eliminate or simplify rules while still using the **MET** system. The Camarilla club has a supplement that addresses its needs for the global, 24/7, live-action and internet chronicle it runs between 250 cities on four continents. That supplement might not be too helpful if you are planning a 120-person one-shot convention LARP. The thing to keep in mind, whether you are thinking about the Camarilla supplement or your own, is that new players will expect to recognize the rules you are using. In some cases, they'll ask you to justify why you are using those rules, and it's good to be able to answer. (Hint: Show them this article!)

So, here is the punch line on rules:

Large games should use a few, simple, easy-to-memorize rules that minimize the number of challenges and minimize offensive power.

Need a few examples of where you can trim? Anything that can be done to eliminate the need for referring to a character sheet should be done. Players in complex costumes who are engaged in roleplay should not have to drag character sheets out of their pockets, let alone have to find a pencil to mark on those sheets. An ingenious character sheet design can make things that have to be marked off like Blood, Willpower, Gnosis and Glamour Traits, not to mention health levels, easy to mark off without unfolding. Other things necessary for challenges should be easy to remember, such as using numbers instead of Trait names or relying on permanent Trait totals for challenge-resolution instead of temporary Trait totals.

Game mechanics that interrupt roleplaying should be minimized. For example, the Camarilla uses White Wolf's table-top rules as a basis for Auspex versus Obfuscate challenges in its vampire LARPs; the higher level of Auspex pierces the lower level of Obfuscate automatically. This change minimizes the number of across-the-room challenges because players hold up the number of fingers for the level of Obfuscate or Auspex they're using, and everyone knows with minimal challenges who can see whom, or who cannot be seen. This idea

can be applied to other **MET** systems that pit invisibility against perception-based powers as well.

Try to reduce the number of tests that the rules require. Streamline mass combat when the outcome looks clear. For instance, the 50-on-five mob scene can be resolved with everyone pointing once and holding up a sign once. The Storyteller then narrates the results of the entire battle without further challenges save death blows. Combat in the **MET** system is always slow, and it takes a charismatic ST to control the room and get things done efficiently any time 15+ characters are involved.

Standardization helps in large games. There are a few examples of the way that **MET** rules can have multiple interpretations, so make rules calls so that all Storytellers will be consistent. Some of the problem points that the Camarilla has found are the way that *Awareness* was written, the way *Rapidity* was written and the way *Dominate* was written. What is the *Awareness* retest? Does the multiple-action penalty still apply when a character uses *Rapidity*? Does the one retest mentioned in the *Dominate* description refer only to one Willpower retest, or one retest *period*? You'll find others as your Storytellers make rulings in your game.

Also, rules that help set the expectations of the participants are good additions for large games. For instance, the character types, powers or Merits with the best game effects will be the most numerous in large games, despite what the World of Darkness calls for. If players make their own characters, simple and fair rules for regulating rarity are a must.

In multi-city chronicles, minimizing offensive power is generally a good thing. High offense is great for one-shot convention games, but it's bad for a long-running chronicle in which players travel through terrae incognitae four times a year. Cities or regular travel circuits tend to develop a pulse that helps their character interaction along. Often, the players have characters of about the same power level, they understand each others' habits, and they tolerate each others' flaws. Going outside that travel circuit places those characters at serious risk, so it is best to take steps to see that the beating the characters can get will not be a fatal one. Eliminate one-shot kills. Select the least damaging optional rules in the **MET** books. Think about the weapons you allow in your chronicle. Don't compound aggravated damage. Reduce the effects of powers and Merits that give certain characters excessive advantages over others, both to discourage every character having the same set of Merits and to discourage the rise of unbeatable Narrator characters. For instance, the *Herd* Background for vampires is incredibly powerful in a chronicle that runs 24 hours, seven days a week, and it should be toned down.

Other things that can get difficult in multi-city chronicles are supernatural effects that work over a distance. Powers that allow clairvoyance effects should be regulated because they can cause time freezes or delays in getting information that characters should have immediately.

Other Helpful Procedures

Large games and multi-city chronicles need good policies and procedures for managing information, supporting Storytellers and handling plot contingencies. Technology has provided many ways for Storytellers and players to distribute information quickly. In larger games, it is often a good idea for Storytellers to get

help gathering information from the players. Players of harpies, Galliards, bards and many other character types can be encouraged to get a copy of their observations to the Storytellers. Storytellers can set up email lists for Influence information and expenditures, rules-call archiving, actions that affect the World of Darkness; whatever information might be necessary for you to communicate to many others. Web pages are great ways to keep all game participants up to speed. Everything from game times and places, character biographies to information about setting and rules, and even tips about how to get more involved in the game are helpful additions to large games and chronicles.

Too much information can also be a problem. As the person who has been writing a quarterly summary of the North American chronicle for the vampire genre of the Camarilla (about 4000 players), I can tell you about information overload. Finding the appropriate level of information for your Storytellers and players is very important. Some Storytellers will need more information about particular things like Influences, plot details or monumental actions taken by characters. Reporting to each other becomes a necessity for multi-city chronicles.

Speaking of administration, auxiliary Storyteller support helps a great deal in larger games and chronicles. Having a person who helps settle disputes between players keeps all the Storytellers on the floor during the game. Other types of non-Storyteller assistance — finding sites, doing web work, writing and communicating — can also help.

Using Psychology and Cunning to Plan for Everything

Using psychology and cunning to plan for everything is perhaps the best key to a great game. In large games, plans must include character-driven plots, lulls in the story, players who rely on the Storytellers to inspire them, risky character behavior and other players jumping on the bandwagon that others set in motion. A common saying in large games is that a player must also act partially as a Storyteller. Character-driven plots take on great force in a larger game or multi-city chronicle. The Storytellers lose direct control over the majority of plot lines that enter the game.

With respect to character-driven plots, Storytellers become plot moderators. They watch and police, using the World of Darkness and its long-standing characters to regulate the machinations of the characters. Storytellers can divert and redirect character plots by introducing higher-priority tasks like a visiting dignitary or serious attack. Altering the priority of a character-driven plot is useful if a player is not restraining her character well, but don't do it too often. Players become resentful, and they may even stop trying to put their characters' agenda into play if they get stonewalled too often. Try to listen to the discussion that your players have before, after and long after the game. Are they getting what they want?

Storytellers can use less overwhelming plots to regulate character plots. Putting a situation in play that competes for the plotting character's attention is a nice tactic, and you can also learn something about the goals of the character and motivations of the player. Characters who usually attend to the Storyteller plots over their own plots can help build momentum for other characters.

Characters who stick to their guns when a competing situation is introduced can be used to provide a second set of plots for players who are bored. All it takes is a little bit of material to move the character forward when a lull occurs. Be shrewd, learn the habits of the key players in your large game. You can also introduce competing plots with the intention of drawing off some of the characters working for a lead character who is progressing too quickly. These types of "control-rod plots" are a great way to draw out stories based on character-driven plots that are sometimes fulfilled quickly.

If character-driven plots are moving the story along well, the Storyteller can sometimes introduce a minor side-plot to involve the few characters not already taking part in the action. Introduce these "sweeper plots" carefully, though, so that the characters without anything to do take the lead. You can then build that plot into something that will take over in the inevitable lull that character-driven plots are so susceptible to. Just make sure that the secondary plot takes over the large-group action only when the character-driven plots are beginning to wane.

Character-driven plots are delicate. They require a light touch and a strong commitment to helping a large number of players get the most enjoyment out of the scenes. Be cautious that you are spending the most time moderating the character-driven plots that incorporate lots of other players. It is easy to get caught up in the development of a personal plot for a character because of the rewarding roleplaying and progress that you get to see, but Storytellers at large games have to watch the whole game and foster the larger story.

Players can also help keep a game interesting by developing character-driven plots. By taking the character's goals and translating them into action in the game, each player becomes a catalyst for story. As more characters get involved in the character-driven plots, the driving character will experience more roleplaying. Beware, though, that marching straight in with a new character and lots of 50-player plots in your character's mind will be a disappointing experience. Take the time to build some relationships between characters and form some ties that allow for the larger plots. In some instances, it can take a year or more to integrate your character's agenda into a chronicle in such a way that he can interact effectively with 50 other characters in one project.

Getting Rid of Lulls

Aside from using moderation techniques on character-driven plots to alleviate lulls in the story at a large game, Storytellers can raise the intensity of background plots. Doing so is similar to the idea behind bringing a sweeper plot into the limelight when character-driven plots slow down. Background plots can come from a host of little plots that the characters in the game have forgotten about. It is good to make sure that each Storyteller at a large game has one or two of those background plots in mind as well as a prop or character that can kick off the plot. Using background plots in this way brings a sense of continuity to the game, and it results in a lot of players trying to remember what happened before to set the plot in motion.

To set up background plots, have several Storytellers introduce plots in threes for the first few games in a chronicle. Then, strengthen the plots that the characters respond to and let the ignored plots fall to the wayside deliberately. Write down the forgotten plots. Look at the characters' Backgrounds, Flaws and

Negative Traits to find a way to integrate the forgotten plots. Then, wait for the opportunity to re-introduce each plot.

Long-running Storyteller characters that are either mentors or foils (or even both) are also good tools for getting rid of lulls. It is best to get a distinctive costume, a real attention-grabber, for Storyteller characters such as this. Talk loudly or very softly, but speak distinctively when portraying the Storyteller character. Use the Storyteller character to generate continuity and remind the players of what has happened in the past. Set up relationships with many characters, and use those relationships to introduce plot after plot when the story needs it.

Involving Everyone

...is very hard. Sometimes, players are at the game to watch it like television or just to socialize with friends. Having an out-of-character room at larger events is a godsend. Character creation can take place there, as can plenty of socializing. Players (and their characters) who are there to watch the game can be entertained by keeping a high level of interesting roleplaying going on among your resident hams. Make sure that you are initiating sweeper plots every once in a while to see if the wallflowers will nibble, but if not, do what you can to keep the center stage lively.

Players who are interested in involving others should take the initiative and approach the quiet ones. Sometimes these players are new, and sometimes they are just playing quiet characters. Take one of your character's goals and present it as a joint venture. Let the quiet ones get involved at whatever level is comfortable for both of you. Have your character introduce them to your associates. You can make a player's night by bringing the game to him for just a little while.

Never forget that you have out-of-character mechanisms to help players stay involved. After the game is over, ask those who seemed to do little if they had fun. Ask them what they are looking for and if they need some help getting involved. Make out-of-character suggestions to some of your movers and shakers that there are a few who might like to get involved in some of the grander schemes. All in all, involving everyone is a significant challenge and takes the action of both Storytellers and players in large games.

Risky Character Behavior and the Bandwagon Effect

The crowd of characters is getting worked up, and they reach that critical moment. The acting is grand, the tensions reach their crescendo, and combat beings! Now what? First, have an organization plan with a few other Storytellers to handle mass combats and big groups. Make sure that you have simple and fast procedures to name a lead Storyteller for the group, and get a few supporting Storytellers for the inevitable branching off and group action. Know your mass-combat rules, and be prepared to set the tempo for any such group action. In short, be energetic, positive, fair and in control.

When players make risky moves with their characters, evaluate what the story might gain from the character's actions and consequences. Sometimes,

capitalizing on these types of actions is the best way to make a game more fun. The benefit rarely carries over longer than a single game, though.

One of the more troubling aspects about players taking risky actions with their characters is that they will often look back at what they did and wonder why they did it. If things went well, they'll just shrug and move on, but if the situation went poorly, regret sets in. Talking to players who messed up in front of a group if you have the chance. Help them to see how the setting world and the other characters respond to that sort of thing. Usually, it just takes a positive perspective to help players see that, while their actions may seem like huge screw-ups, they're actually just giving birth to new stories.

I call the phenomenon that arises from this perspective the "soap opera effect." Nothing exciting would happen on a soap opera if the characters didn't get caught doing all the bad stuff that they do. Similarly, the story in a LARP improves for a number of characters when their characters' machinations become the object of inquiry. People follow the muddiest political battles and the most outrageous court cases because it interests them and gives them something to talk about. Characters making large mistakes in front of huge groups can have this same, glorious effect.

In fact, some players believe in the soap opera effect so much that they make in-character mistakes with their favorite characters deliberately. They use their characters to drop hints about bigger plots and then backtrack with guilty obviousness at times. Some players advocate getting your character into all sorts of sordid little plots that could provide a minor scandal at a large game. After you teach yourself to appreciate the story that you can create, it's kind of fun to stir up the mud on purpose. Oh, and your character has to catch a few others at their dastardly deeds and expose those rascals. It's an obligation to the story, of course.

The bandwagon effect is a bit harder to manage, and it really requires that you have contingency plans as Storytellers. Storytellers with a couple of plots in their pockets can use the departure of the bandwagon characters to turn a large game into a small game for the remaining players. It is the perfect opportunity to build a wonderful roleplaying session with just a few characters — which is a treat in any large game.

Wrapping Up

There are so many more possibilities for what you can do with large games and multi-city chronicles as a player or Storyteller. Each large game or multi-city chronicle is a unique organism that's very different from a smaller game because of the changing roles of Storyteller and player, the scope of the plots that are possible and the social factors that start to manifest. Storytellers, remember the Golden Rule: Use the rules and suggestions that promote the story and fun in your game. The **MET** system is wonderful in its flexibility and the allowances it makes for the story over the rules. I hope that some of the insight into large games has been valuable and will help you creating pleasing stories the next time you run or play in one.

HOW DOES IT FEEL?

by Peter Woodworth

When you play **Mind's Eye Theatre**, you usually take on the role of a character whose daily life includes powers and states of being that are completely alien to normal human experience. Such a role demands a correspondingly creative mind and some in-depth roleplaying on the player's part. Obviously, meeting this demand isn't always easy, even for the best gamers. Sometimes, players come instead to see their characters as little more than tragically hip humans with a range of special talents and a few really killer allergies. In turn, this misconception robs some of the mystery and drama from a character's supernatural existence and generally turns the game from modern myth to more of a Gothic superhero comic.

This article's goal is to help give players a gut-level sense of what it really *feels* like to walk as one of the Awakened. Read on for some points of reference on some of the more common powers and experiences for those looking to really step into their character's shoes. Remember, as always, that none of this information is set in stone. It is all material for handy reference intended to spark the right creative fires. If you want Garou shapeshifting to be painless or faerie enchantment to be purely delightful, by all means, go right ahead. It's your game, after all.

Bearing that in mind, it often helps to remember these basic rules for playing a supernatural creature "accurately":

- Repeat after me: "My character is *NOT* just a human with neat super powers!"
- Supernatural powers are not accidental, and characters can't simply learn them from thin air. Even fae magic still operates according to rules, however bizarre or arcane those rules might be. Most powers take some concentration or ritual; many require the expenditure of vital energies. Most importantly, *all* powers require some time to practice and master, even those that a character acquires instinctively.
- If your character is a vampire or a wraith, he was once human, but now he's *dead*. He may linger on in some new, shadowy existence, but underneath it all lies the fact that he cheated final judgment; that he simply *should not be*.
- If your character is a shapeshifter or a faerie, she was *never* human to begin with. She looked like one for a while, and she might think like one still, but like it or not, she was born of a different *species*. She cannot escape what she truly is forever.

Now that that's out of the way, let's see what the night has in store....

VAMPIRE: THE MASQUERADE

AWAKENING AFTER THE EMBRACE

"They'll tell you it's like waking up. Uh-huh. Like being born is waking up, maybe. First you have to *die*, remember, and that *hurts*. Sure, it's blissful and sweet at first, but then the last of your blood goes, and you realize you've actually been climbing to the top of a cold, dark mountain, with nothing but blackness below. You slip, you fall, you feel numbness spreading as the blackness reaches out to suck you in. Then you splash down, liquid all around, and everything is on fire. You hit a pool of gasoline two seconds ahead of a match. Your throat is scorched, your limbs are burning, your whole body is a block of ice thawing out in a crematorium, and

believe me you feel every inch of it as the flames pass over you. It drives the best of us crazy with pain, let me tell you. Strangest thing, though: One of the first thoughts you have is *I'm still cold.* As much hot blood as you get then or ever, you'll never quite get back what you had when you were alive."

— Ad, Brujah philosopher

The Hunger

The Hunger is not the unpleasant ache of skipping lunch or dinner. A human going without food or water or sex or sleep for several weeks, now there's someone who is beginning to understand a glimmer of what the Hunger feels like. It is more than just a gnawing, consuming physical pain, though it is that too. Indeed, the Hunger is more aptly named because it is a drive that devours a vampire's thoughts, one by one, until only the idea of feeding — feeding *NOW*, without shame or caution or conscience — remains. It is loud, it is impatient, it is savage, it is everything inhuman. What's more, it always, *always* wins in the end.

Frenzy

The world shifts to black and white, with just a few brilliant points of color. Threats—color. Prey—color. Everything else simply fades into the scenery. Speech is an aimless, unintelligible mess, and other noises sound like they're distorted and far away. That is, unless they indicate a threat of some kind, in which case even the softest noise is as loud as a pistol fired next to the vampire's ear. To make matters worse, this black and white film changes speed constantly, without warning, going from painfully slow motion to a frantic flurry of images at the edge of comprehension.

Pain

Without living nerve endings, the pain of the undead isn't a biological response anymore, more like outrage embodied. It's a primal sense of fear and anger that something is actually threatening the vampire's immortality. A human feels agony as nerves sever and blood flows. By contrast, the vampire registers a knife's cut, but ordinary pain is replaced by a instinctive fear for his unlife combined with a rising feeling of, "How *dare* she hurt me!?" In game terms, both are suffering the same Trait penalties due to the distraction of their wounds, but the sensation vampires experience is quite different.

Drinking

Once he is able to overcome his revulsion and disgust at what he is doing, a vampire experiences each mortal from whom he drinks as a unique "vintage." The young are energy embodied, and their blood flows sweet and bright, while the elderly are usually sluggish and heavy with an almost flat taste. Mortals who have just exercised (or run or fought) have an adrenaline tang to them, while those sleeping have a low warmth instead, like a soothing cup of tea. Blood itself has a faint metallic aftertaste and slightly thick texture as it is consumed. The victim's emotions play a role in the experience as well. Fear comes through as a delicious sour twist, while pleasure has a round, comforting taste. Each mortal at each moment has a slightly different flavor, and each should be savored accordingly.

"Spending" Blood

"First there's a kind of push inside, like trying a move an arm or a leg that's fallen asleep. It's not too much effort, but it's not a purely unconscious action, either. Then

there's warmth in the arm or leg or wherever it was you willed blood to go, but it's not a comforting heat. It's more like the warmth you get when you throw the last log onto the fire. It may keep you for a time, but you know it's gone just the same. You know that before long, the cold will drive you out to search for more. And our winter never ends."

— Favian, Elder Setite

Changing Forms

Certain wise Cainites can force their bodies to flow like blood, allowing them to assume different shapes. Doing so requires great discipline to avoid dispersing oneself, which explains why most such vampires know only one or two other shapes. First blood saturates the vampire's entire body, spreading a warm, almost lifelike tingle along the skin as it travels. Next there's a sickening, almost helpless feeling of floating apart as the blood flows into its new shape. Finally, the blood recedes from the outer edges of the body, surrounding the vampire's entire new form with a chill hardness.

The Moment of Being Staked

Some say that the heart only finally stops when the weight of years becomes too much for it to bear. Now try to imagine what the weight of immortality must feel like. Pierced through a heart unceasing, staked vampires feel first as if the world has fallen upon them, a dull, immense, unyielding pressure that smothers ever part of the body until the slightest movement becomes impossible. Sensation vanishes next, as if the normal world has suddenly fallen away around them, dropping them down into an endless well of silence, where at last they sink into the cold waters of torpor.

Werewolf: The Apocalypse

Shapeshifting

Consider what happens in the most popular shift, from Homid to Crinos. Your bones warp, lengthen and fuse together again. Your muscles ripple under your skin, swelling and straining. Your flesh stretches and splits apart as your size shifts and your claws slice their way free. Fur grows, and each hair jabs up through the skin like a needle. What's more, your senses all hit overload at once. You're awash in smells you hadn't caught, sounds you hadn't heard, sights you couldn't see before. The pain of shapeshifting is short but sharp. It's a good pain that clears your head and sharpens your will. It puts all senses on alert and readies you for battle or the hunt. Most of the time, all of this happens in six seconds or less. Even though the damage done during the change heals up instantly, the experience is no less intense for it.

And this happens *every time*.

"Spending" Rage and Gnosis

One doesn't spend Rage so much as explode with it. It's anger in its purest molten form, vented outward in burning, barely controlled pulses of fury. It gives you power, but it also leaves a scorched, sour taste in its wake, like the aftertaste of a marathon or a supremely powerful adrenaline rush.

By contrast, spending Gnosis is the same as those rare moments where it suddenly feels like the Earth is breathing with you; the perfect synthesis of you and the world around you. When a Gift powered by Gnosis takes effect, it seems only natural because for the briefest instant, you and the world truly are *one*.

Four-Legged Mobility

"Running on all your legs isn't the same as crawling on hands and knees. For one thing, your entire center of balance is slung low and evenly distributed along your body, allowing for quick, coordinated movements, and making it very hard to budge you if you're so inclined. Also, all your limbs are equally important. Tool-users that they are, this arrangement takes most humans a while to get used to. Sights are limited a bit by your lower vantage point, but the rich scents and tastes found near the ground more than make up for it. And there's nothing quite like feeling fresh earth on four paws."

—Sasha Bloody-Trails, Silent Strider Ahroun

Regenerating

Like shapeshifting, regeneration is essentially a natural rather than totally mystical process, although it works *incredibly* fast. However, the Garou must endure all the normal unpleasantness of healing, just in a much shorter amount of time than others do. Bones grind and knit back together, punctured lungs drain fluid, guardian cells attack infections and diseases, torn muscles sew up, and new skin spreads to cover missing patches. It's painful, but the pain fuels the Rage that helps the Garou heal. The pain is Gaia's way of ensuring that her guardians stay as healthy as possible.

Stepping Sideways

"At first you think, 'This is stupid, I'm just staring at my reflection,' but then you feel this cold shiver down your spine, you know? And then things start to get really blurry, like you're looking up at everything from underwater. There's a jarring shove — that's the Gauntlet — and then the world around you ripples, like someone threw a rock in the pond you were staring up from. But instead of everything coming back together the way it was, it comes back looking like the Penumbra. But that's right too, 'cause it's just the other side of reality, and by the time you realize that, hey, you're there."

—Eric Ledge-Jumper, Glass Walker Ragabash

Attacking Something with Your Teeth

Teeth are the one attack both wolves and humans have in common, and while the human side likes claws for their reach and flexibility, the combined instincts in most Garou prefer to use fangs for the kill. Fangs are the most intimate and deadly of weapons, and when matters are personal, many Garou finish them with fangs. The smell of the target's hide, the tearing punch as the teeth break through, the bitter taste of blood in the jaws, the grinding push of a struggling enemy or the pulsing twitch of a dying one – fangs seldom leave any doubts.

Changeling: The Dreaming

Encountering Something Banal

Even from a distance, truly Banal things seem to be surrounded by a reverse heat haze, where instead of being all wavy and squiggly, things seem flat, colors are nondescript, and outlines are painfully clear. None of it has any mystery or charm. As one gets closer, the mouth goes dry, the stomach bubbles with low-level nausea, and a dull headache sets in behind the eyes, making concentration hard and forcing the fae to struggle for any graceful movements or clever words.

Those who actually manage a creative act feel absurd and self-conscious, as if being watched by a bored and disapproving audience.

"Spending" Glamour

"Imagine how it thrills the heart to make a wish and see it come true. Glamour is a wild, radiant burst of energy coursing through mind and body. Sometimes, even the best of us start to wonder if we can control what we've called up, just because it's always so *powerful*. Even once the Glamour is spent, its fades into pleasant exhaustion, a sense of beauty wrested from nothing. Putting the final stroke on a painting, jotting down the last few notes to a song, finding the perfect closing for a story and relaxing after a wonderful lovemaking session are the only things that approach the sublime experience of Glamour's passing."

—Lady Casey, satyr photographer

Gaining Glamour

Like the blood vintages of the Cainites, Glamour's "feel" largely depends on how a changeling gains it. Some fae gather the dark essence found in frights, chills and nightmares, and they come to crave the icy burn of such twisted Glamour as it suffuses their frames. At once forbidding and as enticing as a dead lover's whisper, it flows over their flesh in chill night breezes. Other fae drink deep of the heady, intoxicating passion to be found in physical ecstasy, musical abandon or other headlong flights of Glamour. They savor the surging tingle of primal joy and happiness that accompanies it. Glamour from children's art is often sticky and sweet, like summer candy, while the works of older artists make up in subtlety and nuance what they often lack in immediate energy and vibrancy. Mortal creativity is a boundless rainbow of sensation, and no faerie ever experiences quite the same sensation twice.

When rewarding Glamour, Storytellers should take care to remember where it's coming from, and describe it accordingly, even if only briefly. Players will think a lot more about spending the dreams of a good friend or an innocent class of amateur poets than they will if they're simply told, "You gain three Glamour Traits."

Bedlam

"You besmocked fascists are all deluding yourselves. The colors I see are brighter; the sounds I hear are sweeter. The chimera aren't afraid of me any more; they gather around, even here. Sure there's some pretty strange stuff out there around the edges, but I don't care. This is the world we wanted. We've finally won. The Autumn will never come now. It's not even cold in here, surrounded by steel and the Dauntain. You fools. I may be a prisoner, but you've all failed! You're too late."

—John Doe, Devereux Foundation, Kennesaw, GA

Losing Yourself to Banality

Describing this sensation is tricky, because the fae won't remember sliding into Banality. That's kind of the point, actually. For those who have a little more time to witness their own decline, though, the ride is no less horrifying. First, the colors of the chimerical world start looking bleached, the sounds come across flat, the once-charming scents become tired and musty. Like a receiver picking up two stations at once, the mortal world begins to overlap the chimerical more and more often. The overlap from mere flickering seconds to several minutes at a time, which can have predictably disastrous consequences in moments of stress

or drama. Worst of all, the character starts forgetting the details of his faerie life as Banality climbs higher. Chimera seem frightening and strange; putting names to faces becomes a real chore, even with close friends and oathmates; reminiscing on times past, be they good or ill, is an exercise in tearful frustration.

Finally, the changeling can't remember who *she* is, what her place is in this strange world or why she's seeing the things she is, and she simply drops out of the chimerical world. Her Banal mind chooses to ignore what she is no longer capable of understanding.

Wraith: the Oblivion

Gaining/ Losing Pathos

Gaining Pathos from positive feelings can only be compared to those sublime moments in life when you feel like you could live on an emotion alone, that if you felt it any more intensely your heart would simply soar away and burst into a brilliant shower of fireworks. It's a tangible pulse formed from the moment when you look into someone's eyes and think to yourself, "I think I could lift the world and live forever, if they asked me to." Pathos gained from negative feelings, on the other hand, is a concentrated morsel of the icy, rotten surge of pleasure that you receive when you drag a hated rival through the mud or witness the anguish on a former lover's face when your words open their old wounds afresh.

Losing Pathos is just the opposite. It's the empty, spent feeling that comes when you've given everything you have to give, or the chill, listless void that replaces the heart when one's beloved breaks the bond for the final time. Memory of the passion remains, at once comforting and painful, but that is all.

Gaining/ Losing Angst

Angst gained whispers, "You have come all this way and suffered and felt so much, but it's all for nothing, *nothing*, NOTHING." Different from the energizing if wicked rush that is gained from negative Pathos, Angst is a crippling, burning poison of the soul. It rockets through the character like a bullet train of sickening despair until it reaches the deepest recesses of the heart. There it crashes in an explosion of defeat and shame, leaving a festering, oozing wound on the psyche. No matter how much Pathos you lose or gain, Angst remains the mocking voice of nothingness beneath it all. It laughs and reminds you always that come rise or fall, the void is ever watching... and ever hungry.

Angst lost surpasses in intensity only a dozen or so things: an eleventh-hour pardon for the condemned, a joyous reconciliation for the broken-hearted, a Christmas armistice for the weary soldier, a child born to the previously barren. Regardless, the underlying truth is the same. The void *can* be defeated, the soul *can* triumph, and existence *can* be everlasting and glorious.

Stepping through Something Solid

"It's a weird mix, man. When you first touch something solid from the other side, there's this really intense, really *plastic* feeling, like your skin's trying to morph around it instead of going through. Half a second, tops, but it's scary. You think you might just stretch and stretch and *stretch* until you just *are* that thing, you know? Then this deep, hollow feeling eats your guts, and you get the serious

itchy-crawlies, like little spiders are walking all over you. Then poof! You're you again, but a little less you, like some got left behind, you know?"

— Skinny Jimmy, enfant Spook

Losing Control to Your Other Side

One moment, thoughts are flitting by normally; the next, it's like you're pulling each one from quick-dry cement. They're still coming, but slower and with more and more effort. That feeling keeps getting worse until you realize that your thoughts aren't getting stuck, something else is *pulling* from the other side. As thoughts slide away faster and faster, fear pounces, a sliding, lunging, gripping terror of quite literally losing your mind to this *thing*. You dig in as hard as you can, ripping your nails, tearing your mind, but at last — in agony — you black out... and wake up to a nightmare.

Moving through the Tempest

Crossing into the Tempest immediately swirls the senses into a dizzy blur. You can see sounds, smell textures and touch the darkness all around you. This disorientation lasts but a moment for experienced travelers, but for others it can easily prove their undoing. Moving is like walking at the dim bottom of a weightless sea, surrounded by an intangible, enveloping fluid, where sudden movements or bright lights seem alien and out of place. And although your other senses return to normal, the feeling of being able to touch the darkness around you never completely fades away.

Being Moliated

"Funny how the worst memories stick with you, even now. I remember being in high school, wanting so badly to fit in *somewhere*, but no matter what I did or how I tried to change, I was always rejected. I went from too fat, too prudish, too nerdy and too casual to being too thin, too popular, too slutty and too snobby. Strange as it sounds, being Moliated is a lot like that. You watch as someone else's hands take your *soul* and twist it into whatever shape they want. It doesn't always hurt — not physically — but it's always intrusive and clumsy, like someone trying to add a piece to your personality by slapping it on with bricks and mortar."

—Karen Harrington, Reaper

Skinriding

First contact with the skin of the mortal to be ridden is electric. There's a sharp, sizzling tingle, as if the soul inside is warning off its competition. Once inside, it's like being wrapped in a warm, pulsing cocoon. The sights and sounds of the Underworld are blessedly indistinct, as if perceived through a thin, breathing membrane. The sensations of the host, however, are vivid and clear, although they too sometimes feel as if they're being received on a slight delay, which is a source of endless frustration to wraiths trying to vicariously relive the pleasures of mortality.

Humans

Being Fed from by a Vampire

"When you're bitten, you have just enough time to think, 'Hey, that hur—' before the ecstasy begins. Every nerve ending is active, every sense is wide open, every switch is flipped to 'YES!' You even start feeling like your life force is

floating right in front of you. You could reach out and actually touch your soul if you wanted to. Of course, that's because the bastard is stealing it from you, and part of you even knows it, deep down. But it's so beautiful, so powerful, that the rest of you doesn't even care. *That's* the scariest part of all."

—Bethany, former Blood Doll

The Delirium

"When I was sixteen, I was in a car accident. I only saw the other car right before it hit. Time seemed to slow down, sure, but there was still this horrible sinking feeling in my stomach. It was disbelief wrapped up with the knowledge that it really *was* happening, and that I was almost certainly gonna die. That's what it feels like when you see one of these monsters start changin'. It's big, it's scary, it's all happening far too fast to be real, but deep down your instincts know better, 'cause they take over. There's no bravery or retreat or thought. You just run until you can't move, and you scream until your lungs want to collapse. Then, if you're lucky, you'll only remember that slow-time in your nightmares."

—Tasker Garrison, Chicago

Being Enchanted

"'It's magical!' 'It's glorious!' 'It's every dream I've ever had!' *Bullshit!* Like it or not — and believe me, most of the time they don't care either way — you're in *their* world, and you can't get out until *they* say so. Sure, it's not too bad at first; your heart races, there's a fluttering in your stomach, and this bright, refreshing feeling, like you're finally using your senses for the first time in your life. And it *is* pretty damn amazing, especially the first time, like a storybook painting come to life, if you'll pardon a cliché. Trouble is, deep down you know that this story won't go away when you want it to, and trust me, it doesn't take much of creepy little feeling of unreality before you start sliding to the edge of the big cliff marked 'CRAZY.' Especially when you remember how nasty the endings of most fairy tales are."

—Steve Rhodes, embittered Kinain

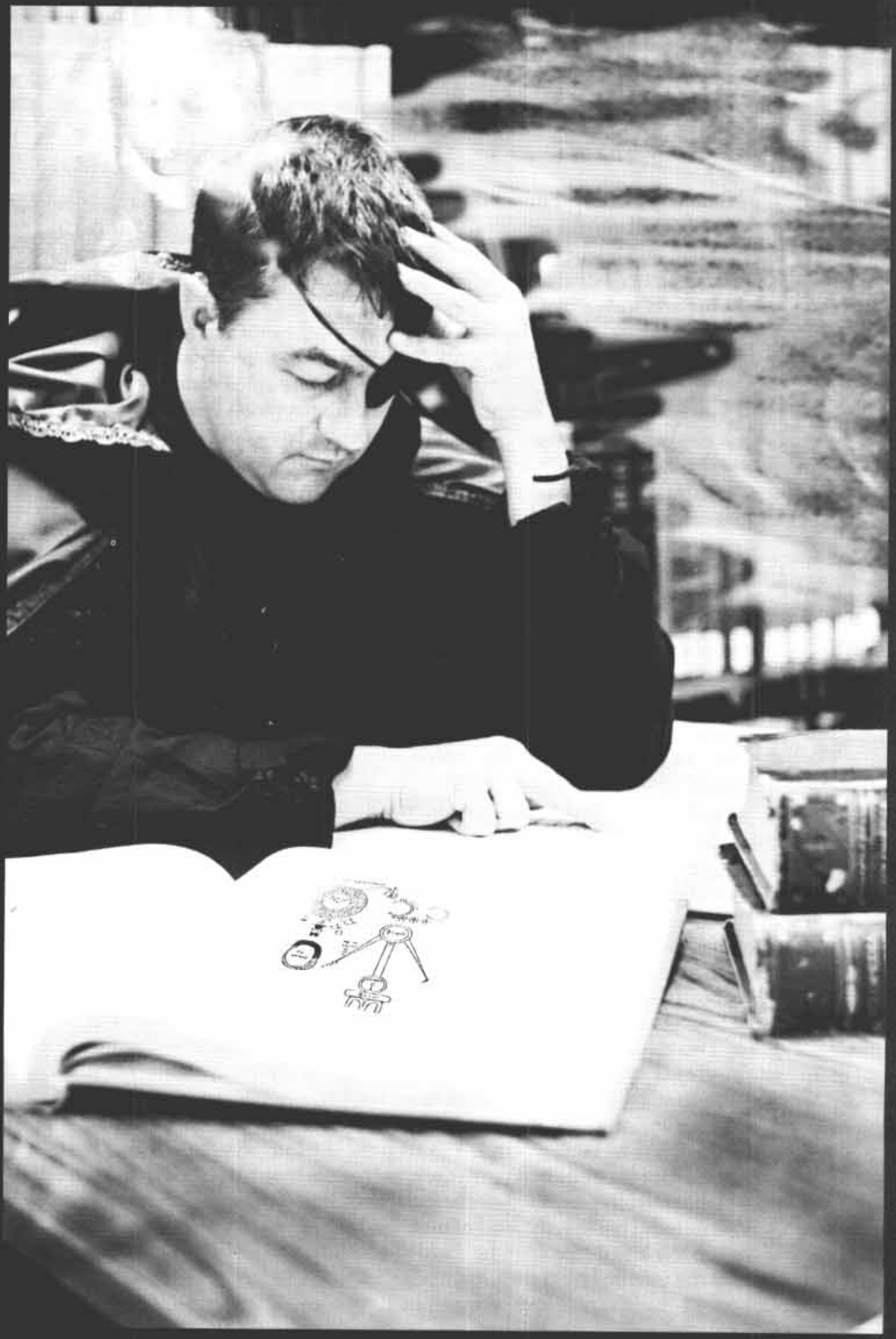
Being Possessed

"It starts with a sudden shudder, rising from your toes and going up your spine and into your soul. There's a quick, cold pain, right in your heart, and then it's like you're standing a step behind yourself. You're just watching a movie, and your skin feels either too tight or too loose. You really start to know what those big, awkward steam shovels and cranes on construction sites would feel if they could feel anything.

"Then you start hearing *it*. *It* starts talking, and you can scream and shout all you want, but your body doesn't hear you. Your arms and legs just follow orders that aren't yours, and you can't even fight it. The voice doing the talking doesn't hear you either. Except sometimes it does.... Sometimes it's just as aware of you as you are of it. And sometimes it *laughs* when you try to fight it.

"Please. I don't want to talk about this anymore."

—Marcus Delacourt, shattered medium



THERE ARE MONSTERS EVERYWHERE

by Peter Woodworth

"Catch me, Daddy! I'm flying!"

Jessica sailed into his arms in what seemed to be cinematic slow motion, her long red hair and bright green sundress with its starburst pattern of sunflowers fanning out around her as she drifted through space. Laughing carelessly, Martin caught her and spun around in dizzy circles.

"OK, that's enough of that," he rumbled as his own stomach started to protest, using his deepest Daddy voice. "I don't want us to be all woogly before we have the nice lunch Mommy made for us, OK?" She giggled some more, then dashed away. He watched her go, his pride and his happiness spreading a slow smile across his face. He was not as young as he used to be — not by a long stretch — and the effort and the sun had given him a nice sheen of sweat.

"Martin!" He didn't need to feel his wife's hand on his arm to know she was there. On magical days like this, he thought, no one would. "Honestly, honey, I thought you were going to make her sick, you spun her so hard!" There was no reproach in the words, though, just a little humor and more love. Still, taking the position of The Responsible One was as natural to her as he guessed it became for all mothers.

"Bah!" Martin exclaimed, catching Carol by the waist and spinning her around as well. She laughed, stammering something about not messing up her hair. "I can still do this as hard as I want!"

Carol batted at his shoulders playfully. "OK, strong guy, put me down!"

"Why should I?" He spun faster, and she redoubled her laughter. "I could do this for hours, and besides, if you don't stop making so much noise

"you'll wake up Jessica!"

Carol's voice was hot and scandalized in his ear. He just grunted in response, lowering his head to kiss the warmth at the nape of her neck. She purred, digging her nails into his back with luxurious ease, their beat at once sweet and merciless as they fulfilled each other.

"You were saying?" He whispered, not letting up. Her only response was to plant her hands on his chest and roll him over, their bodies slipping exquisitely across the silk sheets they saved for occasions like this. His promotion, the one they'd been waiting for, the one that would move them from the tiny apartment to the house by the park they'd been talking about since before Jessica even came along. Two champagne flutes — both emptied about half an hour ago — stood on the dresser by the bed, looking almost elegant in the candlelight. "Do you want me to stop?" he teased, leaning up to kiss her.

"Don't you dare!" she hissed, pushing him back down with a wicked smile. She moved, and he moved with her to keep the rhythm. She glanced over her shoulder at the trim white bassinet in the corner where Jessica was (hopefully) still deep in the blessedly peaceful sleep she had slipped into at the start of the evening. A smile rounded her lips, the kind of smile he'd only seen since Jessica was born, and when she kissed him next, he could almost taste the love flowing between them at the infinite bridge their lips made. "I just don't know if we should be

"making so much noise, if I were you."

A face like sculpted wax loomed out of the darkness, eyes burning like twin red candles, and Martin nodded as best he could, blinking the blood out of his good eye. Against his will, his pained, red-tinted gaze kept wandering to where Carol lay, not five feet away, her eyes gazing at him purely by chance, a thin line of blood dripping from the corner of her mouth to a growing puddle on the floor. In his head, a panicked voice kept repeating the same phrase over and over, in disbelief: *Her head can't be like that; it's not a natural angle. Her head can't be like that; it's not a natural angle.*

The cadence continued until he felt like screaming again. He wanted to scream so loud that he couldn't hear himself anymore, inside or out.

"If I take my hand away, will you scream again?" the candle-man asked. Martin shook his head and hoped he was right. "Not that it much matters anyway. I doubt there'll be much wind left in you when you see this next treat I have in store." The other hyenas around him laughed, savoring their prey's fear.

Oh God not Jessica please please God don't let these animals take her too. God if there's any mercy in Heaven please don't please please please...

There she was before him, still in her pajamas with her arms pulled behind her. One muscled arm cinched around her neck, and those hideous eyes burned just over her shoulder. She was tall and beautiful — his eyes, her mother's hair, her very own face and form — and the fear in her eyes sent a fresh surge of pain and hatred through him. He tensed to spring, not caring about himself, but a dozen cold, iron hands snapped out and pulled him back.

"Daddy?" Jesse asked, her voice small and frightened, pleading and believing in the father who had once spun her around so easily to carry her away from this nightmare.

Then the creature angled his head, opened his mouth, his obscene fangs long and deadly in the dim light, and Martin's world collapsed.

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"Sir? Sir, are you alright?"

A hand grabbed his shoulder and shook him like a carrion-eater worrying a warm body for signs of life.

Martin blinked as a face — woman, elderly, the head librarian if he recalled correctly — sharpened into focus. He sat up slowly, shaking his head as details of where and when he was started filtering back. Pittsburgh? Allentown? No, that had been a while ago. Philadelphia? Yes. That was it. At the public library. He brought his watch into view — 6:30. So early? His body would've sworn it was midnight. The dream came back to him as well, full on, and he felt his blood turning cold even as his breathing grew faster. The final scene ran in an obscene Moebius strip motion picture behind his eyes. Too much, too much, too much....

That never happened, his inner voice of reason reminded him. *That never happened. You're taking their faces and putting them onto other people's bodies, and you have to stop. You're afraid — and you better be — but that* never happened, *and it* never will. *Carol and Jessica are safe, away from this madness, just like you left them.* Martin had given this speech to himself every time he woke up for two years, and it still brought tears to his eye. *Left them.* But he didn't need that now. Besides, the litany had worked its familiar magic and he felt the tension begin to release its nervous grip. He began fumbling with his good hand for the sheaf of notes on the table; he was supposed to meet Valentine in 15 minutes.

"Sir! Are you sure you're alright?" the librarian demanded. He could see in her eyes that she was moments away from calling an ambulance. Or maybe the police. *Yes, Officer, there's a suspicious-looking man here, and he seems to be having some kind of an episode. Well, I thought you should know because he looks like he's been through a war. That's right. He's got an eye patch on his left eye, and his right hand is a lump of shiny pink meat. Dangerous? Yes, he looks very dangerous. Come right away.*

Putting on the best smile his weary heart could manage, he said, "I'm sorry, ma'am, I must've just dozed off." With all the energy he had left, he stood up and stretched tired, cramped muscles. "Guess these old county records weren't as fascinating as I thought, eh? Not exactly Ian Fleming, I have to say."

She hesitated, standing well away now that Martin was wide awake and standing. She gestured to the wide leather ledgers still splayed across the table, avoiding direct eye contact. "Do you need to look at these some more, or...?"

Martin scanned the notes he'd made. At least it looked like he'd been productive before he slipped off. "No, that's OK, I think I found what I was looking for." She swept up the books and was about to walk away when he called to her. "There is one more thing I need, actually." The librarian stopped warily. "I think I need to find a nice hotel for tonight," he lied, smiling. "Do you have a city phone book?"

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Valentine waited for him outside, sitting on the curb seemingly absorbed in watching the traffic. His tall, lanky frame was lost in a heavy overcoat that puddled around him where he sat. He was dressed exactly as Martin had first seen him, in fact, coming through the hotel room door in Pittsburgh with the others that night as the creature who had attacked and crippled him was about to finish him off.

That business trip would have been Martin's last if not for Valentine and the others. They had been stalking the creature for almost as long as it had been stalking Martin, but its bold early-evening attack had surprised them all. Neither they nor Martin had any idea why it wanted him so badly — Martin hadn't even known that such horrible things *existed*, much less might be looking for him — but his saviors never gave it a chance to explain. As a result of that night, Martin had lost most of one hand, one of his eyes and any chance that he might sleep soundly again. The others had convinced him to stay with them "for the time being" until they could be sure that he and his family were safe from further depredation. Like a revenge-bent madman, he had given up everything to join a group of strangers who hunted monsters.

Yet despite everything he had given up, he was still alive now, and that counted for something. His family was at least marginally safe as long as they stayed away from him. He and his partners were successful for the most part, and he had not been wounded again. In fact, they had lost only one of their number since Martin had joined them. Regardless of the madness of their lifestyle, Martin knew a strange sort of security that he wouldn't have felt had he turned his fellow hunters down that night a lifetime ago in Pittsburgh.

Martin looked around — force of habit once the sun went down — and hurried to where Valentine was waiting for him. "I thought I was meeting you at FDR Park," he said when they joined up.

Characteristically, Valentine's shrug said almost as much as his words did. "Changed my mind. Didn't feel like waiting." He stood and brushed off the city

grime, and the two of them walked to where Valentine's car was parked. Soon, they were just one more moving piece in the nightly commuter parade. Once they were safely underway, the young man spared him a casual sideways glance. "Find what you were looking for?"

Martin held up his notebook. "Fake name, old address and even a phone number. Took a damn bit of digging, but I finally found a deed that hadn't been buried in legalese, and it looks like he — *it* — still owns the place, judging by the listing I came across. It was about 10 years old, but what's 10 years to one of these things, right?"

"Right," Valentine said evenly. "Good job."

"Thanks."

As was usually the case, Valentine faced this mission with steely equanimity. He never got excited before or during a hunt, he claimed, because giving in to excitement made him sloppy. Since what had happened in Allentown, Valentine never said much of anything anymore. Martin, on the other hand, remained quiet and outwardly calm for a different reason. The only excitement he felt on the hunt was the ice-water pulse of clammy fear. It took his every reserve to marshal it and rein it in, even though he never faced the monsters in person.

"So where did we wind up this time?" he asked, hoping to change the subject.

"Hilton. Kevin and Chambers are there now. Denise and Kurt are getting dinner. Your news should be nice for desert, yeah?" Valentine drummed his fingers on top of the steering wheel idly, but he might have been asleep for all the excitement he showed.

The silence stretched out between them, and the song on the radio separated them like an invisible wall. It was nothing Martin recognized, of course, but it had a decent beat, so he watched the river, the city and then the busy anonymity of suburbia flow by, trying not to see himself reflected in the glass.

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"So tomorrow Denise and I will do some recon, learn the layout of the neighborhood, exit routes, anything else that we might need to know about," Chambers began once everyone had eaten and given their reports. "Martin, I'd like you to go to city hall and see if you can get the plans for the building interior. Most places in that area are rowhouses, though, so if you can't find that specific one, see if you can get a plan for that type of house. We'll structure our strategy to work around any alterations it might've made if needs be. Valentine, escort him, same as before."

Chambers was making his usual rounds, the casual authority they'd granted him full in his voice. He'd been a Marine for 10 years before starting this ludicrous crusade, and everyone deferred to him when it came to planning an actual attack. "Last but not least — Kurt, you and Kevin mind holding down the fort while we're away?" Sounds of agreement all around. Chambers grinned, reaching for the last of the lo mein. "Alright then, I'd say we're ready to go. Nine o'clock sound good to everyone?"

The others winced a little, but Martin and sleep were old enemies now. "Fine by me," he agreed, and the others voiced their assent behind him, not wanting to be shown up by their oldest (and newest) member. That brought the official meeting to a close, and out came the celebratory alcohol. They didn't drink too much, of course, but they had enough to bring on a temporary feeling of release.

Except Martin. Pleading eyestrain from a day of paging through old records, he wandered off to bed, shrugging off their familiar pitying looks. *Poor old guy*, he figured they were thinking. *He's crippled, and he still does more than his share*. He didn't want or need their pity. The only thing he wanted from them — a reliable way out of this insane life they led — was something they couldn't give him, no matter how they promised to be trying to find it. No matter how much they'd done for him since he joined them, he couldn't help but hate them all a little when they pitied him. He wanted to go home, but they kept telling him that it wasn't safe. They kept relying on him to help them while they protected him, and they tried only occasionally to find out what he had done to attract the ill attention of one of the undead. They convinced him not to leave, yet they pitied him for still wanting to.

After lying in bed thinking along those lines for nearly an hour, Martin still felt nowhere near sleepy. Instead, he found himself groping through his knapsack until he found the notebook he'd been using earlier that day. He flicked on the bedside light so he could make out his looping handwriting.

Frank Clark, the notes read. Hmmm. Nice anonymous name for a monster to hide under, totally unaware that it had been discovered. Thanks to Martin's dogged research, his people knew where Mister Clark lived. In 48 hours, they were going to make their move, and the monster didn't even suspect. They knew its defenses and its disguises, and they were going to kill it. They were informed, armed and ready. They had been tracking this particular creature since before the Allentown fiasco, and they were finally in a position to strike.

It was a hollow thought, though, as it had been ever since Allentown. Martin still remembered the sick smell of blood and the look on the others' faces after they had left Greg behind with half his face blown off. Instead of a sleeping, undead monster, they had found no less than 10 armed men waiting for them, and Greg had been the first through the thing's haven door. The rest of them had fled instantly, spattered with their comrade's blood, bone and hair, but their escape was a narrow one. After everyone regrouped at the temporary safe house, they nearly disbanded their crusade, even over Chambers' enraged protests. They would have gone their separate ways entirely if not for the fear that they would be hunted down individually.

And there was truth to the fears; after Allentown, they had been unable to deny that at least one of the monsters was aware of who they were and was tracking *them*. Martin's hindsight wondered at how they could've been so foolish as to be believe that word of their efforts wouldn't travel eventually. Allentown had been a trap, pure and simple, and although they'd managed to get everyone except Greg out alive, there was no need for anyone to point out that they couldn't possibly be so lucky next time. They didn't even know what they'd done to give themselves away the last time, and the one who'd uncovered them was still out there.

What if this is your time? the nagging voice in Martin's mind demanded. *How sure are you that the information you found isn't exactly what the monster wanted you to find? If you don't kill this thing that calls itself Clark, you'll all be dead. No use in denying it. Even if you do destroy it, though, how long until another one picks up your trail? You don't even know how many are on to you. What, you think the other creatures are going to come out, shake hands, say 'Well played' and let you off the field? That's crazy and you know it.*

Martin did know it. He had said the same to the other hunters since the beginning, and they just turned it around in his face as another reason that he couldn't go back to his family yet.

You're getting old, Martin, and you're crippled on top of that, his voice of reason persisted. *How many more months can you live like this?* Cold sweat beaded on his brow. *Always looking over your shoulder for things that you might not even be able to see coming at all anyway? Living on takeout food like a scavenging rat. Let's be realistic, Marty old boy — maybe four or five tops.*

"Stop it," he whispered to himself, closing the notebook and turning over fretfully. He knew it wasn't too healthy, talking to himself like that, but ever since Greg had died he'd worked through his feelings by making them into an adversarial inner dialogue. Besides, if a little indulgence like this helped keep him mostly sane in the long term, he was more than happy to put up with it. "I'm doing this because it *needs* to be done. Because the monsters have to be stopped."

Don't be an idiot. You'll wind up dead somewhere — you and probably everyone with you now — and for what? Do you honestly think this little group can destroy them all? What will it really mean that you gave up your life for this bloody crusade? One that no one else even knows about anyway? Don't try to kid me. You know the answer as well as I do.

"But the others—" Martin rolled over, hearing the laughter and low tones of conversation in the room beyond. "I owe them for saving my life."

You've repaid any debts 10 times over. Besides, they're as good as dead now too anyway, and you know it. Sure, they're younger than you, but sooner or later they'll all wind up like Greg. They don't have forever to plan and wait like the enemy does. Greg wasn't stupid or unprepared or even afraid, but he's still dead. It's going to happen to all of you. You're not going to save the world, Martin.

Martin began weeping softly, as he had so many nights before this.

And knock that off. It's distracting. Martin's tears obediently hitched into shallow breaths as he listened. *So you're all doomed, so what? It's just time you faced it, that's all. I don't like it any more than you do, but while you just lie there and pine for Carol and Jesse all the time, I've been thinking. I've been doing a lot of thinking, and I think I might have found a way out after all. Now listen closely Martin, and maybe some day soon you won't need a friend like me anymore. You've still got the thing's phone number, and your little attack isn't going to happen for two more whole days...*

In the darkness, Martin listened.

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Two endless days passed.

Recon came and went, watching the house for signs of dangers that might have been missed the first, second, even third time around. Chambers came up with the plan of attack, as usual. He, Kevin and Valentine would go through the front door, while Kurt and Denise swept through the back exit and Martin would wait in the van, which would be idling and ready to roll as soon as the last team member jumped in. Out of arrogance or stupidity, the monster lived alone, so they would go in before sundown, cut the thing's head off and torch its home before it even woke up. Attacking in daylight upped their risk of being spotted and recognized, but the idea was preferable to that of facing one of these things after dark. Plus, they'd managed to avoid police entanglements thus far with no problems.

Martin smiled at all the right points, nodded when it was his turn and joined the team prayer with true sincerity. Denise even commented on how cheerful he seemed for once, and Martin simply clapped her on the shoulder with his healthy hand.

"Each one we get is one step closer to going home, right?" he said, and they all shared a laugh at that. Valentine even grunted an affirmative, which was as close to hearty approval as Martin expected to get from him.

Half an hour more passed, and Martin sat alone in a van two blocks from the monster's den. The others had crept to their places at either door of the house, and everyone wore radio earphones to remain in contact.

"Everybody ready?" Chambers asked quietly over the crackling, staticky frequency.

Everyone murmured assent one by one.

"Good," Chambers said back. "On the count of three. We'll meet in the middle then head in the basement where it's probably hidden."

"God be with you," Martin said calmly into his headset mic. He said it every time, but the words caught in his throat. One word of warning would bring them all back to the van. One word would stop the attack and reel them all in so they would be safe. Martin folded the hinged microphone away from his mouth and clenched his jaw shut tight.

Chambers counted down slowly — agonizingly slowly — and the five hunters made their way into the beast's lair. They moved quickly, calling out, "Clear," as they walked from room to room. Martin listened to them deciding curtly to go downstairs, and he held his breath. He heard what must have been the basement door creak open, and he saw the dark stairwell leading downward in his mind's eye.

No turning back now, Martin, his voice of reason told him. *Start the car. Get going before you find out if that thing in there changed its mind since yesterday.*

Martin started the car, but he didn't drive away right then. Before he could convince himself otherwise, he folded down his radio mic and said, "I'm sorry everyone. There wasn't any other way."

The sound of heavy-caliber gunfire cut off his comrades' sounds of confusion and thundered in his earphone. Someone screamed — Chambers maybe, or Kevin — and Martin yanked the radio apparatus up off his head. He dropped it in his lap on top of his crippled hand, put the van in gear and peeled away in a smoky squeal of tires. His voice of reason congratulated him on doing the right thing, finally, but the tinny, small shouts coming from the earphone in his lap drove nails through his ears. He tossed the small piece of equipment into the back of the van, but even then, he believed he could still hear the confused and angry screams of people who have been betrayed.

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Martin could've made it home in under six hours if he'd been driving full-tilt, and indeed every time he ducked off the highway to take a detour down a back road, his heart cursed him for delaying his reunion with Carol and Jesse that much longer. Reason won out, though, and his paranoid habits were just too strong. He hadn't come this far just to let some two-bit flunky of "Mister Clark" follow him home and renege on the deal, after all. So he kept to back roads as often as he could, checked his rearview mirror often and otherwise turned a six-

hour trip into a full 22-hour trek. By the end, coffee was all that kept him awake... that and the voice in the back of his head. He wondered blearily if it would stay with him forever, growing louder even as his current nightmares faded in the renewed light of family life.

But the thoughts faded away as Martin turned off the highway for the last time. All he had to do was ditch the van somewhere and call a cab to take him home. Not a safehouse or a dingy hotel that accepted only cash. Home. *His* home. He'd need a convincing lie to explain where he'd been for so long, but he could think of that later. All he could think about now were two smiling faces he hadn't seen in a lifetime of fear.

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His key still worked, as he'd prayed it would, and he found himself standing in the foyer of his house, overwhelmed by the sheer familiarity of it, the sense of belonging, the smell of the house itself. How had he ever forgotten what it smelled like? Martin couldn't imagine, but there it was again, full force, the scent of his very own house and family.

He took a step toward the staircase, but froze in sudden indecision. As happy as he was, should he really go upstairs right then? He'd surely scare the life out of his wife and daughter if he did. He looked like a monster that was falling apart, and that was nothing to wake up to in the dead of night. Plus, what if Carol and Jesse didn't even want to see him? What if they thought he had run out on them, and seeing him only made them angry? The waiting was intolerable now that he was actually home, but he wanted to do this right so his family would welcome him back. Surely they'd be glad to see him again, but maybe...

"Tough call, isn't it?" a scratchy voice said from the shadows through the doorway into his kitchen. At once Martin's heart became a block of ice. He could actually feel the muscle clench like a stalled pendulum; pregnant with motion and yet unmoving. The voice was as hot as his blood was cold, and hate sparked from it like fire seeds drifting from a lava flow. The presence of such strong emotion was alien to the sound, but Martin recognized the voice immediately.

It was Valentine.

Well shit, Martin, his voice of reason whispered lamely.

"Wake them up now, give them heart failure?" Valentine continued, coming no closer, "or sit on the porch and play with yourself until morning, hoping that the sight of you in daylight won't drop your pretty wife in her tracks?"

Valentine stepped forward into the pool of streetlight illumination that came in through the window from outside. He clutched a thick wad of deeply stained cloth against his neck, and a dark beard of dried blood stained the front of his shirt. A long, superficial cut trailed out from under the makeshift pressure-bandage and split his earlobe in half. Chambers appeared in the door behind him, leaning on a shotgun as a crutch. A cinched belt squeezed his left leg just beneath the crotch, choking off a bad cut in the middle of his thigh. Both men came toward Martin with fire in their eyes.

"Love of God," Martin managed to gasp, speaking as slowly and softly as possible so as not to wake up his family. "I thought you were dead! Thank God you're alive."

Valentine's eyes narrowed.

"Don't, old man," he rasped fiercely. Talking screwed up his face with pain, but he didn't stop. "Don't even."

Chambers bumped into the banister rail and sat down on the bottom step. The stairs led up to Martin's family's bedrooms. Chambers' eyes were glassy and unfocused, but he held the shotgun steadily. He propped it up on the step beside him and pointed the business end at Martin.

"I'm going to kill him, Val," the man said.

"Quiet," Valentine said over his shoulder. "I told you no."

Martin had never seen Valentine like this. Even after Greg had died, Valentine had showed little emotion, despite the fact that he and Greg had been the best of friends. He had cried with the rest of them, but he had gotten on with his life and his mission afterward. Now, he was a man possessed.

"Valentine listen," Martin said, raising his good arm warily. "What I did—"

"I said *don't lie to me*!" Valentine shouted. Shouting ripped the inside of his savaged throat raw, and he coughed up a wad of bloody phlegm for his effort. When he spoke again, it was in a whisper. "Clark told us everything, you piece of shit. If you lie again, it'll be the last thing you do."

"Clark?" Martin gawped.

"Clark," Valentine said. "Yes, he was there, waiting behind a line of his little rent-a-cop soldiers. That bastard stayed up all day waiting for us. He had an awful lot to say when the gunfire stopped and he was the only one left, though. He told us about your little phone call. He told us about Greg."

"Greg?" Martin whispered in horror. "What about Greg?"

From the stairway, Chambers cocked the shotgun viciously and half rose from his seated position. The end of the barrel wobbled, but it pointed mostly in Martin's direction. Valentine glared angrily at Chambers, while Martin looked with rabbit eyes, but Chambers stood his ground.

"I'm going to do it," he said. "He's lying."

"Put it down," Valentine hissed at his partner. "Now."

Chambers hesitated for a long time then finally sank back down on the step. He still pointed the shotgun at Martin, though.

"I told you, Martin," Valentine said. His voice layered anger over a barely noticeable hint of sorrow. "Don't lie to us. Clark told us everything before we put him down. He told us about how you set us up in Allentown and again yesterday. We know *everything* already."

"Allentown?" Martin said. His jaw hung down, and ice ran in his veins. "I didn't have anything to do with Allentown. I don't care what Clark told you, Valentine."

Valentine just shook his head. "I almost want to believe you, old man. But that's what got us here. It's really amazing how many of us you got rid of before we figured you out."

"Valentine, please," Martin said desperately. "You've got to believe me."

"We already made the mistake," Valentine said. "We're not listening any more."

He went over to the stairwell and helped Chambers to his feet. Chambers wobbled dangerously, and Valentine had to strain to support him. They stood and made their way slowly back toward the kitchen and

the house's back door. Martin stood mute in shock then took a tentative step toward the two wounded men.

"Where are you going?" he asked. "What are you going to do?" Why had they even come, if not to kill him?

"Nothing," Valentine said thinly, breathing heavily in his effort to keep Chambers moving. The light had gone out of Chambers' eyes, but he shuffled forward zombie-like anyway. The shotgun hung limply from his hand by the trigger guard that had caught around his finger. "We're leaving. If you're smart, you'll do the same."

"What?" Martin walked over and grabbed Valentine by the arm. "What are you saying?"

Valentine shook free, nearly dropping Chambers as he did so. "It's the best chance you're going to get," he said. "And it's better than you deserve. We thought Clark was lying about you, but we looked through his stuff before we left. He had your name and address and everything else he might want to know about you printed out in his records. When the rest of the bloodsuckers come looking for him, they're going to find out about you, and they're going to come looking for some answers. They're going to come here first, you can be sure."

"But... my family," Martin said helplessly. "I've got to—"

"They're not here," Chambers mumbled, seeming to fight for every second of consciousness. "Dumb shit."

"What?"

Valentine scowled at his wounded comrade, but he turned back to Martin with a pained sigh. "They're not," he confirmed at last.

"Where are they?" Martin half demanded, half pleaded. After what he'd done and how far he'd come...

"We moved them after you joined up with us."

"What?" Martin said again stupidly. The muscles in his knees tried to stop working, and he had to lean against the doorjamb just inside the kitchen.

"We didn't tell you because we didn't want you running out to try and see them before we figured out why the bloodsucker was stalking you in Pittsburgh," Valentine said. "Once we took care of that one, we were going to take you to see them. We couldn't risk it before then, though. That's how we work."

Martin started crying, and Valentine snorted in disgust.

"They're not here?" he said, mainly to himself.

"Better follow their example," Valentine said. He said it without turning back, now that he had gotten Chambers moving again. He paused at the back door just long enough to open it, but even then, he didn't look back. "You'd best get going now, Martin. There are monsters everywhere, and they know where you are. And if I ever see you again..."

Valentine finished the threat and carried Chambers the rest of the way outside, but Martin didn't hear it. He also didn't hear the sound of Valentine's car pulling away into the night. He couldn't even enjoy the silence now that he was alone in what had been his home. His voice of reason was far too loud in his ears. It laughed and laughed, drowning out all other sounds.

ANTAGONISTS THAT MATTER

by David Tancredi

Regardless of its scope, depth or genre, every story has the same basic ingredients. Each tale follows a viewpoint character. Every character strives to attain some goal. Some obstacle always stands in the way of any worthwhile goal. The action of any story that can rightly call itself a story includes the character overcoming the obstacle in order to achieve his goal. In many stories — especially in stories told through live-action roleplaying — the obstacle in question is represented by a dynamic, thrilling antagonist. An antagonist makes an obstacle of himself by either striving to reach the viewpoint character's goal first himself or by doing everything he can to keep the viewpoint character from reaching it at all.

Creating thrilling adversaries on a regular basis isn't easy, though. It takes time to develop an opponent that can challenge players. Care must be taken to ensure that antagonists don't overrun the current story, overpower the troupe or draw the spotlight away from players. When you, as a Storyteller, bring an antagonist to life successfully, you add an intriguing new personality to the game. One that will inspire interest in the current story and attract new players.

In recent years, a large number of types of antagonist have been converted to the **Mind's Eye Theatre** system. Storytellers can choose from a variety of denizens of the World of Darkness and inject into their games whichever ones work best for the story. While it's hardly exhaustive, the following list shows gives advice on how to use the various types of antagonists to their best effect in your live-action chronicles.

(Keep in mind, though that what type of monster an antagonist is shouldn't be what carries its importance to the story. A strong antagonist will carry itself whether it's a Sabbat vampire, a Spectre, a fomori or a mortal. A poorly conceived antagonist will not be redeemed as a story ingredient just because it is Kuei-jin or a Pentex employee. Determining the type of antagonist to use is one of the last steps in the creation process, and many other choices must be made long before any statistics get written.)

VAMPIRES

CAMARILLA AND SABBAT

One of the main conflicts that exists in a **Laws of the Night** chronicle is that between the Camarilla and the Sabbat sects. The ideologies of these two societies are completely incompatible. The Sabbat revels in its inhumanity and believes firmly that the Camarilla is a front for the manipulations of the Antediluvians. Alternatively, the Camarilla is convinced that vampires can survive the Final Nights by hiding behind the Masquerade and holding onto some semblance of humanity. On a more base level, Camarilla and Sabbat vampires oppose each other for resources like territory and food. Whoever controls the distribution of food in a given area retains the power, and the sects come together internally more to protect their resources than to butt heads over ideological disagreements.

That aside, however, vampires are nothing if not masters of self-delusion. Centuries of conflict and top-down micro-management have created long-held

stereotypes in each sect about the other. Since the Anarch Revolt centuries ago, surviving Camarilla elders have been telling their new childer that the Sabbat are honorless hooligans who crave only elderblood and reprehensible diablerie. Conversely, the Sabbat have always preached that participants in the Camarilla's system feudal slavery are hypocritical pawns of the Antediluvians who would just as soon throw a beloved childe to the wolves as defend themselves and their childer. These impressions are set so firmly in the vampiric experience, that they affect the way Sabbat and Camarilla antagonists react to members of their rival sect. While slavish devotion to type becomes predictable and boring, a Storyteller would be remiss to discount these impressions out of hand.

Sabbat vampires believe that they are monsters, but it is important not to treat them as that alone. Sabbat packs are more than tools to incite combat. Only physically oriented characters get involved in senseless fighting, and encouraging too much of that kind of conflict alienates the players who prefer less overt pursuits. As an antagonist force, the Sabbat is a much more complex and organized sect than would seem apparent from the behavior of the average War Party. With proper preparation, Sabbat vampires can creep subtly into a Camarilla city, and then overrun it when the time is right. While their methods and perspective are different, canny Sabbat elders understand the value of using Influence and manipulation against their mortal herds. They also know how to attack the holdings and resources of their enemy in such a way that leaves him powerless before an assault. Carefully staged attacks of Sabbat rabble-rousers draw attention away from more subtle and insidious maneuvers. Those players that decide to refrain from combat still have an opportunity to interact with the story by discovering the real motivation for an attack. Those Camarillists who have been treated poorly by the Camarilla hierarchy must also test their faith against cunning Sabbat recruiters who would rather make allies than enemies.

Camarilla vampires make equally compelling antagonists as well. They do not bide their time in their lavish havens, sitting in repose and drinking bloodewyne. Nor do they sit idly by while Sabbat vampires assault their cities. They fortify their havens, manipulate mortal forces within cities for their defense and even engage in counter-strikes against invading vampires. In securing resources and expanding their power base, ambitious (or ballsy) Camarilla Kindred are not averse to invading Sabbat territory themselves. They do so differently (i.e., far more subtly) than Sabbat invaders do, but the threat is still very real. Defeating a Camarilla antagonist takes perception, wit, determination and ferocious cunning.

Kindred of the East

A new enemy marches against the children of Caine in the World of Darkness. The Kuei-jin from the opposite side of the world have existed for ages behind a veil of secrecy, but now they have begun to make their move on western vampiric territory. When compared to Kindred and Sabbat, these Eastern vampires have a radically different philosophy on their place in the world. They feed differently, they relate to one another differently, and they exist for a purpose that few western vampires can understand. Kuei-jin consider western vampires barbaric and self-absorbed heathens without a proper respect for their place in the world. Kin-jin who are aware of the existence of the Kindred of the

East find them inscrutable, stuck up and violently opposed to even peaceful cultural exchange. Using Kuei-jin as antagonists in a western vampire chronicle (or vice-versa) can add an exotic flavor to an otherwise staid or stale setting. Care must be taken to represent the alien culture (whichever one it is) appropriately, of course, in order to do it justice beyond the stereotype.

Infernalists

Infernalist vampire characters make occasional appearances in live-action vampire games as antagonists as well. The topic of Infernalism helps players and Storytellers explore issues of absolute good and evil, especially when the story calls for a clear distinction between the two. Vampires of both sects and even the Kuei-jin all have problems with those who have sold their souls to Hell's legions, and Infernalists themselves have few redeeming qualities. Allied with the legions of Hell, an Infernalist can truly put a character's faith and conviction to the test. Unfortunately, conflicts against Infernalists reflect the broader issues of spirituality, humanity, corruption and common evil poorly. When an antagonist starts sprouting horns and singing the praises of Satan, it's pretty easy to see what side she's on. While opposing evil for the sake of opposing evil does make for a fun game, you can tell a more compelling and intense story by blurring the absolute boundaries of morality and forcing characters to choose where they stand.

Generic Vampire Antagonists

Regardless of their internecine distinctions, vampires make great antagonists just by virtue of being monsters. Boiled down to their essential story elements, vampires are undead monsters who drink human blood. They represent humanity's fear of the dark and of the dark places in the human mind itself. While they seem human and even genteel to casual inspection, an uncontrollable feral half lurks behind the predatory gleam in their eyes. They'll stop at nothing to make themselves safe and keep themselves fed. This self-serving determination and ruthless instinct makes vampires of all stripes fearsome and deadly opponents in any chronicle.

Werewolves

In many werewolf chronicles, Fomori, Black Spiral Dancers, Banes and other Wyrm-spawn get lumped under one banner mistakenly. It's important to look at each type of antagonist a werewolf character might face, in order to use it to its best effect in a story. You should also keep in mind that "minions of the Wyrm" are not the only compelling antagonists out there.

Black Spiral Dancers

As former members of the Garou Nation, Black Spiral Dancers have an intimate understanding of werewolf culture and lore. They know how to invoke fear in a steadfast Ahroun, and they can corrupt the purest Silver Fang. Black Spirals are not howling beasts that rise up from their tunnels, attack without any strategy, then retreat back into the dark. Black Spiral Dancers are some of the most cunning and dangerous adversaries a werewolf can face. They're able to utilize every resource a Garou can access with the added support of the Wyrm. They fight in packs, they organize, and they are just as skilled in seductive spiritual corruption as they are in physical combat. Worse yet, they are arguably

more focused on their Wyrm-given spiritual mission than many uncorrupted Garou are in Gaia's defense. Converting and cleansing a Black Spiral Dancer of his taint is far more difficult than corrupting a Rage-filled Garou who's sick and tired of fighting of what seems a losing battle.

Pentex

Agents and supporters of the Wyrm-ridden Pentex corporation are enemies that many Garou aren't prepared to deal with. The company exists to spread the taint of the Wyrm to the common man by wrapping it up in attractive packages. The company provides modern luxury and convenience with nary an apparent down-side, and yet every product carries a subtle hint of the Corrupter's taint.

But how does one fight tooth and claw against paper and marketing? Even connected Glass Walkers have difficulty dealing with this corporate monstrosity. Eager young recruits flock to Pentex every year in hopes of a good, high-paying job. Even if werewolves manage to take out a Pentex lackey, scores more are waiting to fill the void of his passing. Even if werewolves put a stop to one villainous goal on a Pentex agenda, numerous contingencies and other goals exist to see that the Wyrm's work is done. As long as the corporation exists, werewolves' work to keep the Wyrm in check will never be finished.

The most compelling reason to use Pentex antagonists, however, is for the moral dilemma they represent. Pentex and its subsidiaries have touched every modern convenience in the World of Darkness, many of which homid-born Garou have relied upon all their lives. From the power that runs the lights at night to the plastic bristles on the tip of a toothbrush, Pentex products make life easier. So what if a few trees are cut down or the carbon ratio rises in the atmosphere? And what does it benefit a pack or sept of Garou to remove Pentex's influence entirely from an area, only to have the bereft citizens of that area riot and revolt over its absence? A story involving a Pentex antagonist forces a troupe to examine how far werewolf characters are willing to go in their holy war against the designs of the Wyrm.

Fomori

The much-maligned fomori are generally of small consequence in a live-action werewolf chronicle. They're not strong enough individually to take on a Crinos Ahroun, but groups of them can still cause plenty of trouble. Alas, orcs in fantasy games get more character development than fomori. Fomori are tortured souls that go through unimaginable suffering. They're desperate to survive in a world where their own lives have no value. This desperation makes them truly dangerous. Fomori can become versatile antagonists. They can be molded with different powers and abilities to get any job done. It is important not to overlook the usefulness of fomori when creating long-term opponents against the Garou.

Spirits

Many different types of spirits exist in the Umbra. A few are helpful, others are mischievous, and even more aid the Wyrm's corruption. Spirits fill specific niches in the Umbral ecology, and their story utility is more that of obstacles rather than specific antagonists.

Most spirits do not set out to wreck characters' goals on purpose, but many spirits oppose said goals just by virtue of what kind of spirits they are. A totem spirit may disagree with the actions of a sept and try to enact some form of punishment. A Wyld-spirit may attempt to stop a pack from completing a quest just because. A Weaver-spirit might attack interlopers in the Umbra and make them part of the Pattern Web just to cut down on the unacceptable randomness.

Spirits also have many different levels of power. Some spirits have existed for eons, and can be more than a match for a wise elder. Spirits are neither subservient nor automatically indebted to the Garou. Without the aid and powers of the spirit world, the Garou would be lost. Spirits teach rites and Gifts, and they empower fetishes and talens. They must be propitiated and charmed in order to convince them to be of assistance. Numerous stories can abound from the interaction between werewolves and spirits. A werewolf troupe has definitely gone awry when it views spirits as weak or easily duped Gnosis batteries.

Other Werewolves

Even with all of these forces working against them, werewolves are their own worst enemy. For centuries, the tribes have quarreled over territory, rank and prestige, and a complex system for resolving conflicts and disputes has grown from this bickering. When passions run so high among creatures to whom dominance and position are of paramount importance, conflict is sure to arise.

Creating rivals from within the ranks of a sept gives Storytellers the opportunity to explore social and political issues. The way in which Gaia's crusade is carried out is just as important to some Garou as the crusade itself, and disagreements of that nature have raged as long as the Garou have. Garou have always had trouble compromising on issues of how far they are willing to go and what amount of carnage equals an acceptable casualty figure. While this infighting distracts the Garou from their Gaia-given role on Earth, it makes for wonderful dramatic tension in a long-running chronicle.

Generic Werewolf Antagonists

Werewolves are terrifying opponents in any chronicle. They live in the woods, practice bizarre rites, eat flesh and fly into berserk rages of bloody destruction with little provocation. They're supernaturally strong and resilient, but even still they travel in packs. Fury bubbles inside them, waiting for the first opportunity to explode. As story ingredients, werewolves represent all the unreasoning violence "out there" in nature that has frightened city-dwelling men and women for so long. Furthermore, they seem bent on destroying so much of what makes human life bearable for what it is. When you don't understand — or find yourself on the wrong side of — the holy mission that drives World of Darkness werewolves, these beasts are horrifying to behold.

Mages

The Technocracy

The future of humankind is intricately linked with reason, technology and progress, and Technocrats work day and night all over the world to see that that link remains unbroken. They hold that order and science can explain the world

and make it safe for humanity in perpetuity. The magic they engage in involves convincing the Masses that this view is correct and demonstrating as much through technological advances and miracle breakthroughs in all fields of science. Since its inception, the Technocracy has done a superb job of making the people of Earth accept its paradigm.

Despite its noble goals, however, the Technocracy is responsible for agents who make compelling antagonists. Part of creating a worldwide consensual paradigm lies in enforcing that world-view, which calls for the containment and "correction" of any element that defies that view. Unfortunately, all supernatural creatures are unacceptable divergences from the norm, and Reality Deviant mages are even less welcome. The very existence of the supernatural defies scientific codification, and as such, it must be eliminated from the consensual reality.

In fact, anyone who opposes the Technocratic paradigm (or any part of it) must eventually be eliminated from the consensus. The Technocratic vision for the future is one of *complete* conformity and cooperation, in which everyone is safe and well cared for thanks to the infallible arms of science.

Generic Technocrat antagonists include field operatives who prowl in search of "unacceptable" levels of deviance from the paradigmatic norm, Control scientists who must test their theories and creations on expendable samples of the population and less-than-human constructs created to supplement the efforts of the other two. For the most part, Technocrat antagonists are more concerned with the bottom line and the greater good than the needs of the individual. In the Utopian future, the individual has no significance anyway, right?

The Traditions

The Traditions have grown their own fair share of monsters. Greed and power are strong motivators among Awakened willworkers. Without proper apprenticeship, proud mages are more likely to abuse their magic regardless of the consequences. Even experienced mages cause trouble when their spells fail spectacularly or they simply feel like flexing their mental muscles.

What's more, many Tradition mages are caught up in the age-old Ascension War. They stand up against Technocratic "tyranny" and assert that humanity has just as much a right to accept and rely on the supernatural as they do on science. Humans should be allowed to make up their own minds and open themselves up to the infinity of possibility that True Magic offers. As such, however, these mages are forced to take on people's long-held reliance on the foundation of scientific thought, and they have to rock the boat constantly. Characters who are comfortable with the status quo don't usually appreciate actions that amount to terrorism for its own sake.

Further compounding the problem is the fact that not every magical Tradition agrees on what would make an ideal world. Each Tradition does magic in a different way, some of which are opposed to each other directly. Inter-Tradition maneuvering for advantage in the Ascension War can generate just as much conflict as the war itself. Especially as older mages realize more and more clearly that the war to which they've given so much of themselves is all but hopeless. These embittered spell-weavers have grown desperate and canny, which makes them all the more dangerous.

Mortals

An antagonist doesn't need supernatural powers to be an awesome foe. In many situations, a human with the right amount of influence, abilities and money is much better suited to achieve a goal than a supernatural creature. Humanity is the force that runs the World of Darkness, and supernatural creatures all exist outside that force. Humans have numbers as well. A large industrial city could hold 40-50 vampires, but a mortal crime lord could have hundreds of people working for him alone. While one human being isn't much of a threat to, say, a rampaging werewolf, a large group of smart, well-armed human beings who have time to plan can put a careless werewolf in a world of hurt. Any vampire who wants to stake a claim on a citywide sphere of influence must first deal with the humans who make it up. No supernatural creature can afford to discount the power humanity has over the modern world.

Creation Guidelines

When creating an antagonist for any genre or any chronicle, it's important to give him a real personality. His personality determines how he does things and why and what lengths he's willing to go to. An enemy who's an enemy for the sake of enmity isn't compelling or memorable — he's a monster of the week. Creating a complete person as an antagonist, one with whom some characters can even sympathize, will establish that antagonist in the players' memory as a character rather than a collection of Traits with which to play Rock-Paper-Scissors. Using the following guidelines will get you started.

Motivation

In-Character Motivation

Defining the motivation of an antagonist is the first step in his development. The motives can be simple greed, envy, lust or self-preservation, or they can be complex and hidden behind a web of deceit. The antagonist could be the unwitting pawn of a greater force, or he may be the greater force himself. Whatever the case is, the antagonist has no purpose without a motive. Real people do things for reasons, no matter how bizarre, and the same is doubly true for characters in stories. An antagonist's purpose in a story is prevent the characters from reaching their goals, but he does not do so just for the sake of doing so. His reasons for opposing the characters are what make him memorable as a character in his own right.

The motives also define the antagonist's targets. It's important to recognize early in the creation process which opponents an antagonist will face. For example, a vampiric Anarch bent on wreaking havoc in a Camarilla domain may have to worry about the prince's sheriff and deputies. By listing targets ahead of time, the antagonist can prepare for future conflicts. The motivations of an antagonist help determine its targets as well. A simple lupine-hunting Gangrel vampire should know better than to rush into a caern's bawn and throw down with the Warder. An Amalgam of Technocrat agents isn't going to pursue vague suspicions that City Hall is run by vampires when the agents have very real proof that Reality Deviant mages are blowing up cancer-research laboratories.

Declaring the motivations of an antagonist helps determine its power level as well. An enemy who's too strong for some might be too weak for others in the same game, especially as the number of players gets larger. After creating a set of specific motives, think about how much power the antagonist needs to meet those goals. Does a character need Methuselah-level vampiric Disciplines to stake his claim on the underworld? More likely, several levels of Influence and the appropriate Abilities would be sufficient.

Don't go overboard assigning an antagonist's power level as per his motivation. Make antagonist characters powerful enough to have a *reasonable expectation* of achieving their goals; don't stack powers upon powers to make the villain's victory a sure thing. Players deserve a fighting chance to overcome their adversary, after all. That's where the action and drama in any good story comes from. The contest has to be close and always in question until the very end, otherwise you won't be able to maintain the players' characters' interest.

Out-of-Character Motivation

Popular opinion states that Storytellers create antagonists only to torment players. While that is an amusing benefit of the position, it is not the sole reason for including adversarial characters. Storytellers have their own motivations outside of the needs of the story for incorporating antagonists in play.

Each setting in the World of Darkness works on many levels and has a rich background. It is impossible for a Storyteller to incorporate everything in a game, no matter how large the LARP is. However, antagonists can draw attention to certain aspects of a setting that may have been neglected up to that point. In a **Laws of the Wild** chronicle, for instance, spirit antagonists focus a player's mind on the Umbra as more than just an otherworldy duck blind or shortcut, while Kinfolk antagonists deal with issues of community and fellowship. When a theme has been missing from a game for too long, an antagonist can bring it back to the forefront. Furthermore, an antagonist can emphasize the core concepts within a setting by introducing players to ideas and possibilities they wouldn't normally consider.

Other than directing the flow of a game as a whole, antagonists can alter the course of individual players and characters. By setting up situations that force characters to make tough decisions, an antagonist can direct the development and direction of certain players' characters. If done well, players won't even realize that their characters are being set up to follow a particular path. Interacting with carefully selected types of antagonists can mold a player's behavior too. Given the option of butting heads against an antagonist or taking a less attractive but easier route to success, most players choose the easy way out. Guiding players isn't always a desirable option, but it can become necessary when they're about to perform an act that would disrupt the game for everyone else. Some players chafe at any type of restraint or scripting of events, but it goes on all the time with players being none the wiser. Guidance and scripting are out-of-game keys to preventing long-running games from degenerating into chaos, and antagonists are excellent in-game tools for doing so.

Antagonists are also good devices for introducing new, misused or *un*used system mechanics into a game. Having an antagonist exploit a game mechanic promotes the system in question and make her more difficult to defeat by conven-

tional methods. Virtue Tests, for example, are new to many **Laws of the Night** games. An antagonist who watches a chronicle's vampire characters, learns their habits and sore spots, then uses that information to play with the vampires' minds in hopes of inciting self-destructive frenzies would present the system to players by forcing them to use it. Knowledge and understanding of these rules will then spread slowly until they are common knowledge. Given time, players will come to recognize these unfamiliar systems, freeing Narrators to work on other aspects of the game.

The only caveat about using antagonists in game to pursue out-of-game motivations is to do so responsibly. While it is fair to plague a mage character with the persistent attentions of an Amalgam of Technocrats when he's going crazy shooting fireballs around in public with no regard for safety or secrecy, it's not fair to create antagonists that hound a particular character just because you think his player's a jerk. Even if that player *is* a jerk, it's still not fair to pick on him. It's also a bad idea to punish players' characters with inordinately powerful bad guys because you think the players are playing their game the "wrong" way. Always be fair when using in-game antagonists for out-of-game reasons.

Background

After determining the character's motivation, it's time to begin laying out the particulars. Antagonists are people too, and they deserve to have as much attention lavished on them as any player's character. What's tricky about this stage of creating an antagonist is that it seems to fall out of sequence. You should determine the antagonist's goal (i.e., his motivation) first so you'll know where to put him in the story. Then, you have to go *back* and create a background that logically leads up to the character's present state of mind.

A detailed background is key to making the character appear realistic. It's the foundation on which everything about the antagonist is based. The background shapes the motivations, tactics, attitudes and appearance of the antagonist. Without a background to tie all of these sections together, the villain won't be much of a character at all. Players won't be able to understand how their foe has developed if he's just sprung half-formed from your mind into the game. If players can't understand their opponents, they certainly will not relate to them or be able to interact with them in the meaningful, memorable ways you intend. What's more, the person playing the antagonist will be lost without a good sense of what made the character what he is.

Tactics

When you're plotting out what role an antagonist will play, you also need to specify the ways an antagonist will pursue her goals. An antagonist can be confrontational or subtle. She can take the hands-on approach or work through lackeys behind the scenes. The tactics a character uses depends on her motives, her targets and especially her abilities. An apostate troll is not going to walk into a sidhe baron's court and start randomly blasting away at the courtiers with twin Colt .45s just so he can send everyone back home to Arcadia. He'd know that that is no way to accomplish his goal successfully. Define clearly the risks an antagonist will take in pursuit of her motives. Antagonists don't work in a vacuum either. Who are they willing to deal with and what can they offer potential allies? Does the antagonist need a clear victory, or is partial success acceptable?

Try also to figure out what opposition the protagonists in your story will provide the antagonist. Every good villain has contingency plans for the day his schemes run awry. Assassins prepare multiple escape routes in the event that one is compromised. Lawyers prepare multiple arguments against one another when they battle in court. Technocrat agents study their enemies' SOPs and arm themselves accordingly. Put yourself in the mind of your antagonist and figure out what sort of friction he can reasonably expect from those who are likely to stand in his way. Then prepare him to face that friction to the best of his ability.

(You should also consider out of game what friction your antagonist character will face from the players themselves. Will they be resentful of being beaten on occasion by a more powerful foe? Are certain players likely to shoot first and ask questions later, thus shafting your grand scheme before it begins? Will they accuse you of picking on them? Take all these considerations into account when you're making up an antagonist so you'll be prepared for the players' response. Don't be afraid to send an antagonist into game just because the players won't like it — they're not supposed to like being challenged in pursuit of their goals — but use your antagonists responsibly so that everyone can still have fun.)

Presentation

One of the most overlooked components in creating an antagonist is the presentation. The performance of those playing the antagonist is generally given little thought. However, poor attention to the acting details can be the downfall of an otherwise great adversary. When players meet their opponent for the first time, they're not going to see the hours you spent creating his background and motivations. The players are not going to know about the nefarious plots set against them. All they'll have to go on is the first impressions the new character makes. The word "theatre" wasn't inserted into the title of the game system accidentally, after all. With the proper amount of practice, several tools can help convey a convincing performance. Two of the most important tools that are often overlooked are the character's voice and his mannerisms.

Start with the voice. By choosing a voice, the antagonist has a key feature that distinguishes it from other characters. Speak in a higher or lower tone. Add a foreign accent if it's appropriate. Other than the sound of the voice, the way one speaks is often noticeable. No one speaks perfect English, French or German for that matter unless he has a reason for paying attention to his verbal grammar. A person that has lived in the inner city will often have a different sentence structure and vocabulary than a character from suburbia. Think about a character's background and consider how his life experiences make his voice distinctive.

Paying attention to characters' mannerisms is another facet of acting. Does the character have a limp or other physical discrepancy from the norm? Does she twitch when she gets nervous or pace when she's forced to wait? Did that limp the maniacal hunter walks with come from his first confrontation with a rampaging monster? Is that why he hunts monsters in the first place? Does that vampire smoke cigarettes like Andrew Dice Clay because he thinks it's cool or because doing so reminds him of the one comedian who's still able to make him laugh since his violent embrace? Even a character's most minor quirks come from somewhere, and making them noticeable makes the character's themselves

memorable and real. What's more, some quirk or odd habit might just hold the key to defeating the antagonist in the end.

Guidelines

If you're not portraying the antagonist you've created, make sure to sit down with the player or Narrator taking on the role and sketch out some guidelines. Guidelines should be simple, one-sentence explanations on how to react to common situations, and these explanations should all be grounded in the character's history and motivation. While there's really no wrong way for a player to play a protagonist character, an unprepared player can definitely portray an antagonist character incorrectly. If you have specific out-of-game plans for what you want an antagonist to accomplish, make sure you spell them out to the person portraying the character for you. While the idea of maintaining strict control of a LARP is patently ludicrous, you should certainly take the proper steps to keep it moving in the right general direction.

Statistics

Once you've gone to all the preceding trouble, declaring the statistics for the antagonist should now be relatively easy. All of the previous steps in creation have built up to this point. The general power level, techniques, experiences and motivations of the character outline the stats. All that is left is to have them explicitly written down on a character sheet. As far as this aspect of antagonist creation goes, you can check in any **Laws of...** book's Character Creation chapter.

With so many steps in the creation process, it may seem if building an antagonist takes a lot of work. Antagonists aren't characters that can be written in a couple minutes. They're a precious resource requiring a large investment of time and ingenuity. An antagonist is a long-term character that can hopefully appear in several stories or many game sessions within a single story. With preparation and effort, some truly insidious fiends can be concocted, as can lasting characters that will carve a niche in their troupe and electrify a game.

EVENT HORIZON: UPCOMING LARP EVENTS

I bet you can think of what state you live in much more quickly than you can think of what region of the country you live in. Hence the new format for this section. Why is it that the best ideas always come to you on the way out?

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CALIFORNIA

Moonlight Masquerade; Marysville, CA
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Labyrinth of Crying Shadows (Sabbat Game); Sacramento, CA
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The Redemption Chronicles; Edwardsville, IL
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Ruby Rain Society; Edmonds, WA
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Tacoma; Tacoma, WA
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The Sept of the Awakening; Washington DC
Mindy Williams, terhunepayson@juno.com

Others (Unspecified and Mixed Games)

California

Sacramento by Night; Sacramento, CA
www.Justicar.net
Sena Wakeland, Celeste.d@mailcity.com
United San Diego; San Diego, CA
Dennis "Tristan" Hanson, Dollphynn@aol.com
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

Connecticut

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

Georgia

Macon Twilight Theatre: Londinium; Macon, GA
http://www.chaos-enterprises.com/mtt/mtt.html
mtt@chaos-enterprises.com

Indiana

Tales of the Nomad Storyteller; Elkhart, Indiana
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Kansas

Twilight Masquerade; Wichita, KS
twilightmask@yahoo.com

Maine

Dark Carpathia; Portland, ME
http://home.maine.rr.com/darkcarpathia/darkcarp.html

Michigan

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

Ohio

Of Shadow & Light; Cincinnati, OH
Brian-Joseph Baker, bakebjb@email.uc.edu
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Oregon

More Than Night; Portland, OR
(Independent game that sometimes playtests upcoming supplements)
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Games Around the World

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  +44 (0) 122 350 3674
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  Scott Sommerville, some@globalnet.co.uk
- Garou LARP; Darlington, England
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- Mage LARP; Darlington, England
  Jonnikiss@hotmail.com
- Vampire LARP; Darlington, England
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- Changeling LARP; Stoke, England
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- Garou LARP; Stoke, England
  Alan Brumpton, Finn@mcmail.com
- Mage LARP; Stoke, England
  Alan Brumpton, Finn@mcmail.com

- Vampire, LARP; Stoke, England
  Alan Brumpton, Finn@mcmail.com
- Vampire LARP; Wakefield, England
  Josie Murtagh, Josie@imhome.freeserve.co.uk
- Bologna by Night; Bologna, Italy (Vampire Camarilla LARP)
  Erminio Serio, bigcobra@tin.it
- Fiat Nox; Rome, Italy (Vampire LARP)
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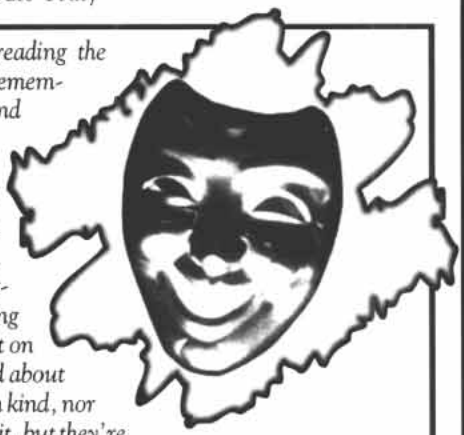
  +39 (0) 338 475 3403.
- Paradiso Perduto ("Paradise Lost"); Rome, Italy
  Marco Visconti, azrael@dada.it
  +39 (0) 338 704 5747
- Vampire LARP; Edinburgh, Scotland
  Kevin Drugan, kevin@gehenna.prestel.co.uk
- Vampire LARP; Glasgow, Scotland
  David Evans, misty@mudhole.spodnet.uk.com

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

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED

by Yours Truly



Those of you who have been reading the ***Journal*** *faithfully since the first issue remember a segment just after the welcome and introduction in that issue to which I gave the unfortunate title Up From the Pipes. In that column, I talked a little about who I am and how I came to be the developer of this publication. Now, with the* ***Journal*** *going on extended hiatus (which is to say, being cancelled), I'm back to shed some light on what I've learned about this hobby and about my part in it. Not every lesson has been kind, nor has every teacher from whom I learned it, but they're all important in their own way.*

TRENDS AND OBSERVATIONS

The first thing I noticed was that certain behaviors were endemic to the world of LARPing. I've realized over the past two years that the way we play storytelling chronicles and the commonality that arises says a lot about us.

Crossover Lunacy:

Lunacy abounds when crossover is at issue in a live-action chronicle. Age-old enemies meet, forget all about their differences (for some reason) and work together to a.) defeat the ancient evil plaguing both their peoples or b.) maintain a paper-thin treaty between their kind. Sometimes the former leads to the latter in the post-story wrap-up. You know those Garou in your vampire chronicle? The ones everyone call "Garou" instead of werewolves or even lupines? The ones who aren't allowed to kill any vampires lest they be hunted down by the vampires who vastly outnumber them? They're evidence of this crossover lunacy.

Another brand of crossover lunacy in LARP chronicles is the emissary syndrome. This syndrome accounts for the tissue-thin rationale for why a character in a specific type of game has knowledge of some or all of the other supernatural denizens of the World of Darkness. Think of a character saying this: "I lived among the Garou for years after my embrace into Clan Gangrel. Now I work with the lupines to rid the world of the Wyrm's influence. Let me talk to that Get of Fenris for you, my prince." That character is an emissary. So is the rogue Tzimisce who's packed up the wagons and joined the Camarilla in a new city. So is the Gangrel who's left the Camarilla and who now runs with your werewolf pack.

Crossover also leads to the inevitable scene of explanation when two supernatural creatures of different types meet and begin discussing the whys and wherefores of what it means to be what they are. Basically, you

see one character trying to nutshell the essence of his kind for another character with no frame of reference whatsoever. The other character usually understands right away, and they move along. A variant of the crossover explanation scene involves the emissary (qv) explaining to members of his own people the alien ways of the people to whom he is an emissary. An even stranger twist on this scene is that of the occult scholar who can explain the alien ways of any [World of Darkness] culture because he's "read about them before."

The Squad:

This phenomenon has many names — the whoop squad, the beat squad, the gack squad, the hit squad — but it has one real meaning. What happens when one uses a squad in LARPing is that one character has a beef with another character, so he rallies a group of like-minded thugs to his cause. Having so rallied, the beefer then leads his thugs to wherever the beefee is (preferably under the power of Cloak the Gathering, or through a convenient Umbral shortcut), and he [and they] proceed to whip the ever-loving crap out of the beefee. The resulting nightmarish mass-combat scene takes about two hours to play out (depending on who jumps in on whose side), but the in-game time the scene takes is about 15-45 seconds.

The Ratio:

Supernatural creatures vastly outnumber the mundane denizens of the World of Darkness. Especially in small towns and college campuses. Fortunately, though, these creatures maintain their intricate web of secrecy that veils them from prying eyes. If there are any.

The Umbra:

I'm not sure why, but the Umbra is the most important aspect of the world as we know it, no matter what kind of **MET** LARP is going on. It is a protected, impregnable haven. It's a mystical gym locker for important things. It's a great back door into any place on Earth. It cuts travel time radically. It's the spy's ultimate hidey hole. It's even full of biddable, naïve spirits who will pretty much do what you ask as long as you give them a unit of supernatural power.

The only bad thing about the Umbra is that unknowable, destructive monstrosities seem to live there. And those monstrosities want nothing more than to cross over to the physical world and wreak havoc.

Villains:

The choice of villains that appear in LARPs say an awful lot about folks who play LARPs as well. LARP bogeymen include:

Setites. Tremere. Sabbat. Spectres. "Wyrm creatures." Black Spiral Dancers (whom many right-minded Gangrel have hunted in the past). Fomori. Umbral monstrosities. Demons. Setites. Men in Black. Iteration X cyborgs. The Inquisition (unless the characters are supernatural creatures who work for the Inquisition in their search for Golconda/ Transcendence/ Ascension and have slipped in under the radar). Or any weird mixture of any/all of the preceding.

The use of these villains often has no relation to the LARP venue in which they appear, oddly enough. Vampires often fight — and call them — BSDs. All Garou (not just the Silent Striders) are particularly offended by Setites. There's

nothing a generic vampire antagonist can accomplish in a hunter-related chronicle that a *Sabbat* vampire can't accomplish 10 times better. All of the supernatural denizens of the WoD are monsters, but some monsters are more monstrous than others.

The Time Cycle:

Conveniently, all of the important events in the World of Darkness occur on a weekly, biweekly, monthly or yearly scale. Nothing much happens in the "downtime" in between.

Common Equipment:

No self-respecting LARP character leaves the house for a night of social interaction without some or all of the following equipment:

Sword-cane. Chain-mail vest. Cellular (or PCS) phone. Trench coat. Mirrorshades. Desert Eagle .50 pistol. Katana. Slug of silver for bullets or blade-coating. Vessel of Transference item (and everyone knows what "you feel a cold chill" means). A d10 on which *Principle Focus of Vitae Infusion* has been cast. "Occult tome." Sawed-off shotgun. Armor. Stake (or bandoleer thereof).

Dialogue:

Think of every self-important politician trying to sound well-educated. Think of every high-school play you didn't actually enjoy. Unfortunately, many LARPers with powerful or very old characters talk this way:

"We must put aside our respective people's age-old differences and join our forces against this adversary from the spirit world — which your people call the Umbra, if I remember correctly. If we do not do this, we are destined to fail, for we cannot stand against our foe separately. For, as Benjamin Franklin said, 'We must stand together, lest we all hang separately.'"

That is to say, they overdo it. You know you've heard people orate thus. You may even be guilty of it yourself.

Turnover:

Princes/ elders/ nobles/ Hierarchs who rise to power in the course of a live-action chronicle are in no way capable of maintaining a power base. Their reign usually lasts a few months/weeks/ years before they're cast down by some disgruntled faction growing right under their noses. People participating in squads are often responsible for this rapid turnover of the noble elect. Power blocs of voting second-tier authority figures are equally guilty.

Justice:

When the events of an out-of-control LARP inevitably become ridiculous — say the Brujah have blown up the registrar's building on the local college campus one too many times — some form of Storyteller justice occurs. Often deliverance of said justice involves a justicar descending from on high to "clean up the rampant breeches [sic] of the Masquerade." Incarnae can appear and scold wayward Garou who should be BSDs, but for the leniency of the Storytellers. Other measures involve "unkillable" Inquisitors (or hunters or *imbued* hunters), the involvement of the National Guard or crashing an asteroid into the LARP's city setting in order to bring about a "reset." Some LARPs even survive such heavy-handed treatment and grow into much more reasonable chronicles.

Lessons

And what have I learned from these observations? Actually, I've learned quite a lot. (No, I didn't just write all that in order to verbally lambaste the loyal readers who've been helping pay my salary these last two years.)

The first is to never be too critical, especially in this "industry." I first came at the **Journal** with the perspective that White Wolf is right, and other people are wrong. If somebody played the game differently than the way we recommended in a book, that person was wrong. If somebody ran a game that may as well have been a dungeon-crawl of undead superheroes with fangs, that person was wrong too. Basically, anyone who deviated in their gameplay from the "canonical" decrees of the home office (all in the name of villainous and illiterate "fun") was a loser and a goob who deserved to be ostracized from the *haut monde* that is the gaming community.

Fortunately, I finally came around to realize that that attitude was the worst sort of undeserved snobbery. The people who are playing with our materials thus are still the people who are buying those materials. To say that they're wrong implies that they're dumb. And it doesn't take a team of rocket-scientist philosopher kings to figure out that calling your customers dumb is a bad idea. If they (or you, or *I* frankly) diverge from the printed text in a way that makes a White Wolf game more fun, who are we behind the desks at this office to say that that's wrong? That's the worst kind of corporate jack-assery, and it's no basis for developing a quarterly magazine.

Without that built-in condescension working against me, it's easier to see the good that's hiding behind the otherwise judgmental observations that opened this essay. It's easy to see that people approach LARPs with basically good intentions and reasonably good ideas.

The biggest thing you notice is that LARPers want, expect and even demand a unified World of Darkness setting. You can tell it from the crossover lunacy and the scenes of explanation and the choices of villains. The people who buy our products, we can't deny, don't usually read one game line and one game line only. They see how the varied pieces fit together from each game line, regardless of that line's cloistered perspective, and they expect their characters to live in an inclusive setting. Granted, it's difficult to wrap one's mind around a world in which clockwork brass robot constructs shared land with blood-sucking undead lords of the night, but that sort of cross-brand inconsistency is more the exception to the rule. People have been after us for years to admit that the World of Darkness is a singular supernatural melting pot, and they've got a point.

The other big revelation I've made is that LARPers generally have a strong desire to be heroes and do what's right. While they're often cartoonish caricatures rather than characters in their own right, LARP villains are almost universally *bad*. They're drug-dealers or gun-runners or corrupt bureaucrats or Hell-bound magicians or devil-spawn themselves, and they must be destroyed for the good of the community, or even the entire world. Common beat-squad rallying causes are those of freedom and justice; nothing gets a group of biddable head-thumpers together like the promise of a relief from tyranny. While many methods characters in LARPs engage in

are extreme (such as short-range ambushes or sniper assaults), the core of motivation is usually a noble one.

Plus, LARPers are some of most dedicated adherents to the concept of multi-cultural diversity you could hope to find. You see evidence of it in every Gangrel Wyrm Foe and Tzimisce *antitribu* and Kinfolk ghoul vassal to the local sidhe lord. It makes sense to LARP players that a reasonable explanation of oneself and a trustworthy practice of what you preach will gain one the trust and eventual respect of any culture — no matter how opposed to your own it may be originally. While that hope may not prove true reliably in our real-world experience, LARP players believe in it because that's the way they feel. That's a special kind of idealism that it does a heart good to see. It helps me remember why I got hooked up with the gaming crowd in the first place waaaaay back when.

Other Lessons

These last several lessons are the ones I've learned while doing this job. Consider them a peek behind the curtain, and keep them in mind if you should ever decide to seek glorious and gainful employment in gaming design and publication.

• *Gaming is not an industry*. No, despite the notoriety and acclaim you can gain by becoming a public figure in gaming, gaming will always be a niche of a greater industry. As such, the concomitant pay one makes reflects that status.

• *Freelance game writers leap at the opportunity to miss their deadlines*. If our accounting department allowed me to supplement my paycheck with the penalty fees that are written into every White Wolf freelance contract for turning in work late or incomplete, I'd be sitting on a golden La-Z-Boy watching a 70-inch projection screen television and lighting my duty-free Cuban cigars with rolled-up giant panda pelts while bellowing for Elian Gonzales and the "Whazzup!?" guys to make me a sammich.

• *The writer-developer-editor triangle is not a self-supporting mechanism*. It is, instead an autocannibalistic mess that somehow manages to work despite its own best efforts. Each point in the triangle is convinced of its own intellectual and creative superiority, as well as the relative incompetence of the others. Unless the others happen to be right and able to prove it. Having been a part of each vertex of this triangle, I can state for a fact that this is unequivocally the case.

• *It is hard to be topical and clever in a quarterly publication that gets to stores approximately six months after it leaves your hands*. It's also pretty hard to coordinate a coherent Event Horizon calendar on that schedule, as I'm sure you've noticed.

• *A young editor with only three months of experience who's thrust into the position of developing a quarterly magazine should not "contribute" his own fiction to that magazine*. Hindsight is a painful teacher. I apologize for "A Position of Strength" and "Any Mother's Child." No, really.

• *You have to settle sometimes*. No writer or artist or typesetter or editor (or developer) lives up to your ideals all the time. Fortunately, that's okay, because this isn't exactly brain surgery or UN translating. Usually when you "settle" for a finished product, it's every bit as good as your ideal despite how different the two are.

• *All things being equal, you can't really ask for a better job than doing what you love for enough money to live on.* Even without the duty-free Cuban cigars and the sammiches.

Special Thanks

I can't end this without giving credit (and my heartfelt gratitude) where it's due. My special thanks go out to these folks:

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The **Mind's Eye Theatre Journal** wouldn't be what it is without all the work you four have put into it from the start. Others have come and gone to help keep the **Journal** aloft, but it wouldn't have gotten off the ground without you. It's been an honor and a pleasure, and the fact that the **Journal** is going away despite your fine efforts thus far royally stinks.

And lest I forget, let me thank *you* folks who have been buying and reading the **Journal** all this time. You make the effort and the headache and the stress and the craziness worth it when all is said and done. I'm sorry it has to end, but I'm glad for the time we've had.