

BOOK OF SPIRITS™

the
World of Darkness



I have looked too deep into the shadows, and I have heard voices uttered by no human tongue, and I have felt the touch of the invisible ones.

They are all around us, unseen, hungry for our flesh and our souls.

May God protect us, for nothing else can.
— Anthony Sheldon, Baptist pastor (lapsed)

This book includes:

- A comprehensive look at the spirit reflection of the World of Darkness, designed for mortal and supernatural chronicles alike
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- A variety of mortal perspectives, as well as an extensive selection of antagonists that come from the other side
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the World of Darkness®

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BOOK OF SPIRITS™

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Prologue: Get Away

From Weird Tales of Georgia (unpublished manuscript)

"Flames of Smithonia Bridge," by Edward Holcomb

October 19, 1980

Near the small Georgia town of Monticello, workers completed the Smithonia Mill Bridge in 1922 - the longest single-span covered bridge in Georgia. The DOT rebuilt the bridge in '54, removing its claim to fame by building a large support pillar in the center of the stream. Perhaps the original builders respected the waters more, but whether out of ignorance or sheer bad luck, that column made the terrible events of this story possible.

A family called the Ebberds lived on the north bank of Smithonia Creek, just pass the hairpin turn on the old road. They worked the cotton mill there until it closed in 1937. They were mostly good people, faithful attendees of the Smithonia Baptist Church, both married and buried their people there. All their children were saved beneath the Smithonia Mill Bridge. The Ebberds boys went off to wars, and they were mostly good to their women. But that was only until Lemuel Ebberds came along in 1936. Lem couldn't read too well, even though he was the product of a 4th-grade education, but he bought every printed thing he could about the gangsters like Dillinger and Pretty Boy Floyd. Lem dreamed of escaping his boring life and the rules that his folks tried to beat into him. He dreamed of the freedom of the road, and the life of fast cars and guns won his heroes.

In '52, a flatbed truck came to Macon bearing the shot-up remains of Bonnie and Clyde's car - the notorious

"Death Car," in a promotion for new documentary about all of his favorite gangsters, Killers All. The movie was terrible, but Lem remembered the thrill as he slipped the man an extra 10 cents to run his hands over the rippled green metal. Lem cut his index finger after sticking it into one of the holes left by the .45 caliber bullets. He thought about the fact that his blood may have mingled with theirs, his heroes. Lem felt a stirring then of something deep inside of his soul. That experience was so much more powerful than his dunking in the cold waters of the creek beneath the bridge. Lem told his mother that this shedding of blood was his true baptism.

Life definitely changed for Lem after that. He fell in with the Donnely boys, moonshiners. He was drinking by the time he was 13 and driving liquor into Atlanta three years later. Good-for-nothing Lem, as his family called him, was good at bootlegging. His mama cried her eyes out over how her boy had gone bad. But Lem was good enough at running moonshine that by '57 he could afford to buy his own car, a Chevy Bel Air, complete with the optional 283 cubic-inch Super Turbo-Fire V-8 engine. Lem loved that car, and he painted "My Get Away" over the roomy trunk. He wanted people to read that before he let them eat his red Georgia dust.

The rains of the spring of '59 poured into the headwaters of Smithonia Creek, and the creek swelled full but hungrier still. Its clay-stained waters ate away at the rough banks with teeth of foam, and rocks lifted from their beds. The roots of hickory and scrub pine were washed bare, and the trees toppled into its waters. A wall of deadfalls swam free, and these new victims of the flood hit the new support pillar on the Smithonia Mill Bridge as if the creek

itself was striking out at the concrete leg that had the gall to step into its world. The concrete footing shuddered and tilted, and at 10:30 that night, the north end of the bridge sagged and dropped into the river, right where the church drowned the sinners and pulled out the saved.

That spring had seen a falling-out between Lem and Frank Donnely, since Lem had started driving for other shiners north of town, too. So Frank had been purposefully late on his payment to Sherriff Richard of Jasper County. When Lem turned onto Highway 83 and headed north, the sheriff decided to cut into the Donnely boys' profits. Lem was surprised when the sheriff did not fall back after he passed the Sutter house. But no one knew the roads like Lem, and no one could take the turn after Smithonia Bridge as fast as him. The south end of the bridge must have looked fine as Lem Ebberds and his car took it at 30 notches over the speed limit. His roomy trunk was filled with 300 quart jars of 110-proof skull cracker.

The heavy steel car impaled itself on the wreckage of bridge members and pine spars at over 50 miles an hour. Several of the pines tore through the car, puncturing the passenger compartment, gas tank and the trunk. The resulting flames formed a wall inside the bridge - warning the sheriff that he'd better stop in his tracks or be roasted as surely as poor Lem and his loaded car.

Local say that on nights after a hard rain you can still see the flames from the south end of the bridge. Others say that sometimes you can hear that Super Turbo-Fire V-8 eating up the road behind you. Stick out your thumb and Lem will gladly give you a ride to . . . wherever he went.

• • •

Tony was forced to belly-roll over the concrete barrier that separated the north- and southbound lanes of I-475. His left hand still gripped the .25 pistol shoved in the right pocket of his G Unit hoodie, and he was so scared he couldn't let go of the gun and couldn't even take his hand out of his pocket even long enough to climb over.

A small black-rimmed hole on the outside of the pocket was the only evidence to show for the bullet that was gonna send Tony's ass to jail — hard time now. No four-month stays in juvie. He'd graduated to the big leagues for \$53, four cartons of cigarettes, a bag of Doritos — and the bullet he fired at the screaming Mexican clerk. Tony, in other words, had just swung his third strike.

When he walked into the QuickStore, he was fuckin' dead inside. Just didn't care anymore. With cash, he could make himself feel again, with just a quick stop on Plant Street. The sounds brought him back to reality. Truckers flashed their lights and blew their horns at him as he crouched behind the barrier and looked back the way he had come.

Tony was dressed for the part, the *hard* man with street cred — keepin' it real — except for the fact that he was poor white trash from Eatonton, Georgia. He'd hoped that the clothes he couldn't afford and his lame street lingo would make up for his pimply skin, peach-fuzz moustache and round face that, at 20, still seemed swathed in baby fat.

Still, the hard truths played out here in Macon just as well as in the ATL or Detroit — better even since meth rolled into town fueled by plenty of abandoned real estate and all the raw materials the cooks needed at the local farms. The shit-kickers were still too stupid to lock up the ammonia proper. Times were so good that rural Georgia attracted the real talent from Mexico. Tony worked for them for a while, scouting the best places to set up the labs — until he started using too much and the pros cut him off.

Sirens blared from the convenience store on the access road, and he saw the jiggling flashlights held by the cops stop at the hole

in the chain link fence Tony squeezed through. His heart beat even faster, and he barely held his bladder in check.

He looked into the oncoming traffic desperate for a way across. Tony made a run for it, but a moving wave of lights and horns drove him back into the concrete wall, minus the bag he took from the store. He watched as the tires chewed it up, sending a cloud of ones, fives, cigs and chips bouncing down the interstate. Cursing, he crouched low and moved with the traffic, praying for a way out, praying that the cops would have just as hard a time getting across the road as he had.

Then he noticed light spilling over him. Tony finally managed to pull the gun out, pointing it at the car lights that were coming for him. But, instead of running him down, the car was stopping!

Tony jumped up and ran around the driver's side slapping the glass with the automatic's barrel, "Get the fuck out! Get the fuck out of the car!"

A less desperate man might have noticed how strange the car looked, a failed experiment in merging a '57 Chevy with a rhino. Its sides were warty, plated. The seams looked like crawling folds of skin. A pair of crazy dome lights flickered on, and he could see that the car was filled with garbage. The old woman driver was screaming and fumbling for the door handles unsuccessfully.

When Tony was 12, he had to help his foster parents clean out trailers from folks who had been evicted. The car looked as bad as any of them — half-eaten fast food, clothes and flies — even the glass was yellowed with dirt. He finally grabbed at the handle and felt the



lever, warm in his hand, not so much as unlatch as *flex*. With a moist pop, the door opened.

Jesus-God the smell! Tony would have puked but for the adrenaline.

The woman, gibbering in fear, couldn't even get out on her own she was so freakishly thin. Tony reached in, grabbed her by her sweater and tried to jerk her out of the car.

"Let me go! Please God, let me go!" screamed the woman. She immediately grabbed at Tony, but instead of pushing him away or fighting him off, she was scrabbling at him like a cat trying to climb up his arm and onto his back.

Tony noticed that she was just wearing a lap belt, and he reached down and pulled up at the latch. For a second, he could have sworn that the belt itself tightened against him. Then it unhooked. Tony almost fell over as she came at him, but her weight was nothing, and he easily lifted and twisted her body, tossing her down onto the pavement. To his horror, he saw that the old bitch had shit herself — a huge stain visible on her backside spread as she lay on the asphalt.

He heard shouts coming from the cops; a break in the traffic meant they were finally making it across the road. Flashlight beams splashed over him, and ignoring the smell and what it might mean to his baggy FUBU jeans, he jumped into the car, slammed the door and floored it. No matter what it smelled like, the damn thing could fly. He swore all four tires squealed as it accelerated out of the median and into traffic.

Tony heard the staccato pops of the cops' guns, and the back window shattered. The engine seemed to growl a bit more, but the car sped on. Tony could barely see for the grime on the inside of the window, and now for the trash swirling around due to the back blast of air from the shattered window. At least it smelled better. He did not want to think about the warm wet he was sitting in.

The damn thing looked to have been half-way pimped on the inside by some crazy hick. Unknown lights, amber and green, were set into the controls, and they winked at him in a rhythm that made him a little dizzy. A row of black spheres were set in an irregular pattern across

the dash — like miniature security camera globes, or the eyes of a spider. The wheel was massive too, and it felt warm in his hands. But by God, the heap could fuckin' fly. The steering was a little off, as if the fluid were low. Though based on the ancient look of the car — handles to roll down the windows, the chrome and steel, the lack of AC, etc. — Tony doubted it had *power* anything.

He felt the weight of his chest pushing back into the seat as the engine slowly moved up through the gears. A glance down at the dash left him mostly confused; the gauges didn't have numbers or letters he recognized, except for one. The gas gauge set flat on "E."

"Fuck!"

Still, he was getting away, and for about half a minute, he felt like his luck had turned for the better. He just needed to put some miles between him and the cops, ditch this car and then... that's when he noticed the flashing lights behind him.

"Goddammit!"

Tony punched the accelerator again, and the car took off with a snarl. It was as if he was willing the traffic out of his way. As he approached, the cars would suddenly dart out of the lane, but then move back in behind him. It was fuckin' weird.

In no time, the flashing lights faded far into the distance. He knew that he had to get off the interstate before they called in a helicopter; he took the next exit, though he had to fight the wheel a bit. He debated for a moment, then decided to head north up 441 or 83, get into the country and ditch the car. No, first he needed gas, and so he began scanning the road. Tony wanted nothing too busy, no cops, but he didn't want to stand out either. That's when he glanced down at the gauge again. It was resting now between a quarter and half full.

He let out an involuntary, "What the...?"

Maybe he had been too scared, too strung out; maybe the frickin' gauge was busted.

He was tired, and as he moved to the outskirts of town, he found what he was looking for: a Petro with two cars parked out front, no cops and an island with no cars. Again, he had to fight the wheel, but he managed to get the



car over and parked. He turned off the ignition, but left the key in.

That's when he noticed that the driver door handles didn't work. Neither did the passenger side. He had decided to climb out the back, risking the glass, when Tony noticed that the rear window wasn't broken any more.

He thought to himself, *Fuck, did I imagine that too? How strung out am I?*

Tony climbed over into the back seat anyway and checked those doors — nothing worked, the latches, the windows, nothing. Then he remembered the woman fumbling at the door.

Was she was trying to get out?

The engine turned itself on.

Tony felt the terror swell in his guts and without thinking, he rolled over on his back and started kicking the window. His shoes skidded around, streaking the grime on the glass, but it held. He kicked until his legs burned before giving up. Even with the tears at the side of his eyes, he almost laughed, thinking about the Petro attendant watching him trying to get out of the car.

He forced himself to take a breath and say, "Calm down, man, this ain't what it looks like."

The electronics of this wreck have got to be fucked up, everything on the car is fucked. God, how long had he been in there? Someone was going to come over soon as much as he has been rocking it. That's what he needed to be worried about, not the goddamn boogeyman.

He looked back at the dash. The gas gauge was a little lower. Beyond the black orbs in the dash and across the parking lot, he saw a new car in the lot. A police car.

The lights of Tony's car flickered to high and back to low beams — pointed right at the police. The passenger side of the cruiser opened, and a cop, a black man, got out of the car with his flashlight, his hand shielding his eyes from the glare of Tony's lights. He started to walk toward him.

"Stop! Stop!" screamed Tony.

He heard a slithering sound, and the seat belt unrolled from the crevice and hung there.

It wants me back behind the wheel.

With a "Fuck this!" he pulled the gun out of his pocket and pointed it at the rear window. Shielding his face with his other arm, Tony pulled the trigger. The blast punched a golf-ball-sized hole in the back window, and the sound sent the cop running back around his cruiser.

Then the car started to move, *creep* toward the police car.

Tony screamed and jumped back over the seat and gripped the wheel. He couldn't budge it. The accelerator and brake flopped down and back limply. Tony felt the belts move against his side; with a groan of resignation, he grabbed them and fastened himself in.

The engine roared to life as he saw the black cop reappear from the passenger side with a shotgun. The car leapt into the driver's side of the police cruiser, slamming it sideways. The shotgun fired high as the man was flung back by the impact. Tony swore that he could almost feel the car chewing on the side of the cop car. Then the Chevy-thing backed off and sped back down the highway.

Tony was filled with terror, not to mention the need to escape. The gauge now read between half and three quarters, and it was rising.

The hole in the back of the window was already gone.

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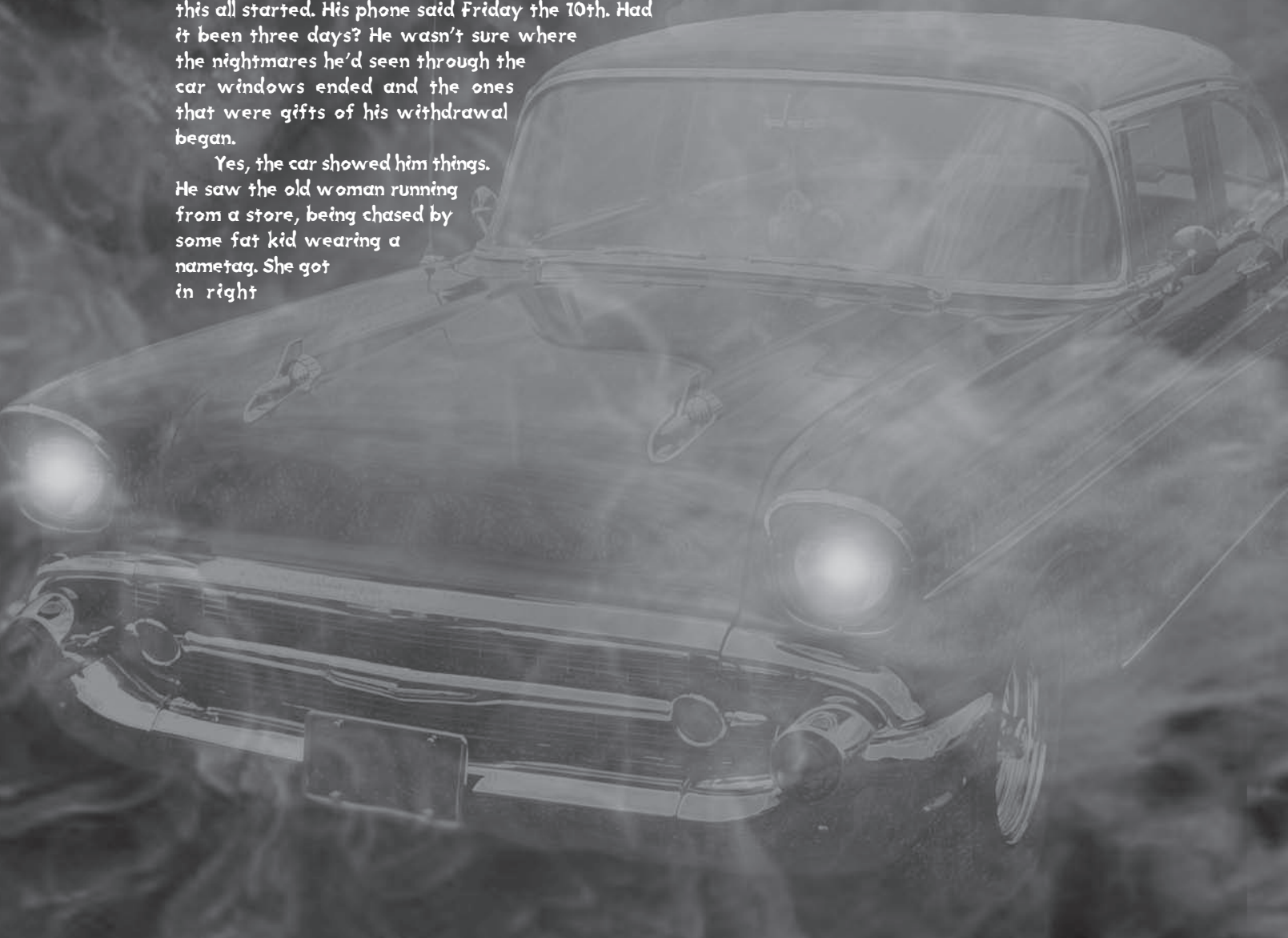
Tony sat there looking at his phone. His hands shook now, and he tried hard to remember the date this all started. His phone said Friday the 10th. Had it been three days? He wasn't sure where the nightmares he'd seen through the car windows ended and the ones that were gifts of his withdrawal began.

Yes, the car showed him things. He saw the old woman running from a store, being chased by some fat kid wearing a nametag. She got in right

on top of Tony, and sat there, crying. Then it was a black guy with a harelip, then face after face, until he got to the worse one of all, the burning man. The man Tony saw only in the mirror. Tony watched the fire burn, the skin fall off the man's naked skull and Tony started to join in the laughter.

The car took him places, and he saw a nightmare landscape through those grimy windows. He saw neon rain, and green fire, he saw men hung by their necks, jerking from lampposts. He saw dark shapes moving within the old Indian mounds of Ocmulgee, across the river from downtown Macon. He'd had field trips there and pushed that fag Buddy Moran down the stairs of the sweat lodge. But these shadow-things weren't Indians, or even men. They had heads of vultures and bodies of turtles whose shells were studded with jabbering skulls and ringed with writing that hurt his eyes to read.

And God, he was hungry; he found all kinds of cans and candy wrappers in the garbage heap up front — the only one he could reach now he was belted in. Whoever that woman was, she was lucky enough to have a couple of bags of food with her. Of course, she was even luckier to find Tony, her replacement. Lucky bitch.



After awhile he started chewing the candy wrappers. Sometimes he thought he could taste the chocolate, but maybe it was his own blood. He managed to fish a cleanly licked ravioli can out of the garbage to pee into, but then the can turned over anyway.

Tony shook his head and tried to hang onto his thoughts. He looked down and saw that the gas meter was falling. He no longer feared being caught, he *prayed* for it. He could tell the car was not happy with him, but the damn thing would not let him go. The seat belt was really cutting into him. He hoped that when it was time, he might be able to move his legs. He thought about calling the police, but at best he'd end up dead in a car shot to pieces. He did not want to go that way.

He shook his head again and forced himself to look at his phone. He had one bar left. He had a plan, and what could it hurt to try? The old bag lady got lucky, maybe he would, too....

He was talking to the car now, "All right, I know where you can get some food. See, you dumb fuck machine, this is my cell. I'm going to call the cops and tell them where the cookers are. Then we drive over there and wait until we see the cops coming. Then, I'll call the cookers and tip them off so that they run out. Then me and one of them will trade places, understand?"

It did not talk to him, but he saw the weird lights begin to blink rhythmically, hungrily on the dash. The car let him drive for a while, and even weak as he was, he managed to maneuver the car on the dirt road behind the last place he'd scouted for the cookers. It was an old chicken house — 50 yards long, and big enough to park cars in and not leave anyone the wiser. He backed the car into some bushes and pulled out his phone and called the police.

They did not show up until nearly midnight. He saw no headlights, but heard the cars on the road, and the whispers of the strike team. He gave them a minute and made his second call, then waited for the gunfire.

The car suddenly roared to life and churned up the brush, flicking on its lights. He saw three officers dressed in black; one moved too slow and bounced off the left fender, shattering the glass. At least one of the others fired his gun into the side of the car, but the bullets somehow missed Tony.

Tony steered the car alongside two of the people running from the building, and he prayed that the car would stop.

One of them screamed out, "Stop, Stop!"

Tony felt the car braking — he was no longer sure who was working the pedals.

"Open the fucking door! Let me the fuck in!"

He heard hands on the car door, on the front door latch, and Tony closed his eyes and prayed. The dome lights came on, blinding Tony.

A door opened, and someone crawled in the *back* seat. Tony looked behind him in shock and saw that

it was Javier, one of the cookers, one of the pros from Mexico.

The man blinked in the light, looking at him in a mix of relief and unbelief. "Tony?"

Then Javier recovered, and he waved his gun. "Thanks! Vamenos, go, go!"

The car did not move. Tony was stunned that such a little thing had gone wrong — the *back* door — *fucked by a fucking sedan*. Tony put his hands over his eyes and then beat his fists on the wheel. "Let me out, just let me out!"

A bullet took out the right rear window, and Tony felt Javier's gun at his ear. "Tony! Drive you fucking bitch, or I kill you right here!"

Tony could hear the cops screaming at them to get out as they ran up from behind. Tony looked at the gauge; it was on a quarter of a tank.

...

The gray-haired sergeant threw down the report on the officer's desk. "You really want to file this, son?"

"That's what happened. I don't understand it, but that's what I saw."

"You cased the car down 83, and it turned off on Smithonia Bridge Road, and it *disappeared*? Bill, it takes all kind of stupid to lose a car on a road to nowhere. That road just doubles back onto 83 on the other side of the bridge. There *are* no other outlets."

The officer pushed back from his computer and brushed back his brown hair. "Sarge, my partner was following me. When we saw the perp take the old road, he stayed on 83 and sealed off the only exit. I drove the entire length of the road. The car was just... gone. I only slowed down at the bridge itself..."

The older man looked into the younger's eyes. "What is it?"

Bill chose his words carefully. "...Um, well I could have sworn that I saw red light coming out of the south end of that bridge, like brake lights, maybe something else, but there wasn't anything there. I searched the banks, the old mill houses, nothing." He paused, looked down, and then back at his sergeant. "I swear it on the Bible, sarge."

The veteran sighed and waved him off. "Okay, Ebberds, we'll have to go with that. Sherriff ain't gonna like it, but we'll keep up the bulletin for a while and maybe that'll keep things cool. Goddamn election year."

The young officer nodded, wishing he'd done better, wishing he could explain. That red light burned like fire in his mind, summoning up stories of the old bridge and flames from hell, stories he'd heard since childhood in the Smithonia Baptist Church. Of course, he'd never actually seen those flames, but none of his folk walked or drove down that road without thinking about hellfire, and what could take you there... if you really wanted to go.

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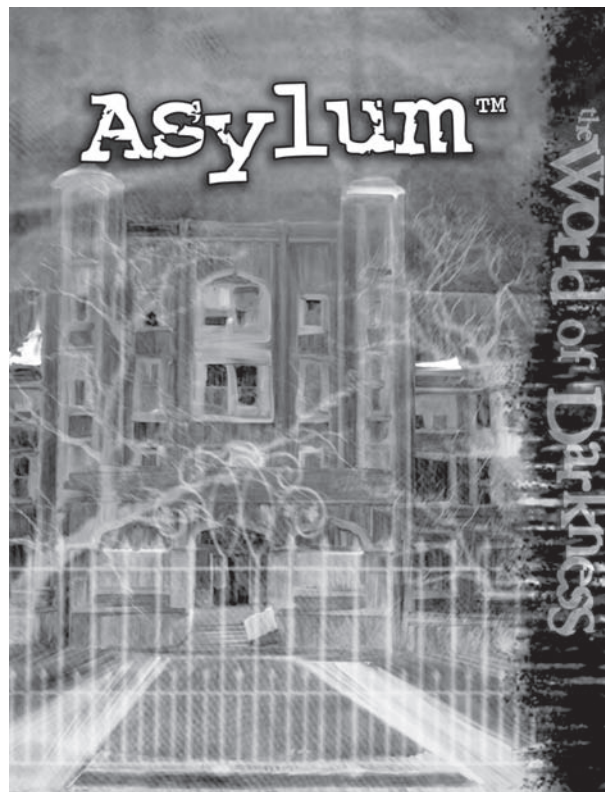
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Introduction

BOOK OF
SPIRITS

On the road where
traveling is one-way only,

To the house where
those who enter are
deprived of light,

Where dust is their
food, clay their bread.

— *The Descent of
Ishtar to the Underworld*

There's more to the World of Darkness than meets the naked eye. Every mirror is a window to the invisible things that swim on the other side. The texture of human emotion is a siren song that calls to unseen spirits, drawing them to feed on our joy and suffering. Most of the time, they are mercifully kept apart from us, caught on the other side of the invisible wall that separates our world from theirs.

But there are cracks in the wall. And things creep through.

World of Darkness: Book of Spirits is a guide to the hidden spirit side of the World of Darkness. This spirit world, also called the Shadow Realm or simply the Shadow, has been explored previously in the pages of **Werewolf: The Forsaken** and **Mage: The Awakening**. The werewolves and mages have, after all, been those best-suited to cross into the invisible world and treat with — or oppose — the entities that breed there. This book is the passport to the rest of the world.

While **Werewolf: The Forsaken** and **Mage: The Awakening** have already offered some details on the spirit world, this book doesn't assume familiarity with either of those games. The material here is ready to be incorporated into any chronicle, the spirits ready to shadow, challenge or victimize characters of any sort. That said, this book should also prove invaluable for **Werewolf** and **Mage** chronicles. Although some of the material here should already be familiar to players of those games, this book expands and builds upon already established lore, offering more detail, tools and antagonists than what was previously available. When combined with the spirit lore already available for those lines, **Book of Spirits** presents an even more comprehensive cross-section of the Shadow.

The Shadow Realm

The basic way to explain the spirit world is that it's an unseen reflection of the World of Darkness, a place where the metaphysical takes form. Many things are reflected there, and some become sentient spirits in their own right. The spirits of animals and plants vie with the spirits of machines, elements, emotions and even abstract ideas in the Shadow ecology.

The spirit world is separated from the physical, co-existing in the same space but in another dimension, of sorts. If a predatory truck-spirit goes barreling down Tenth Street in the Shadow Realm, it doesn't contact any of the cars on Tenth in the physical world. The knowledgeable have noted that there is some form of wall between both worlds, something they call the Gauntlet. Like a windowpane at a zoo house, the Gauntlet keeps the spirits on one side and the realm of the flesh on the other.

But even when the worlds don't touch, they influence one another. The physical world affects the spirit world. When Chicago burned, flames ran through its Shadow reflection. When riots broke out across Los Angeles, the spirits of wrath and violence watching became fat and strong on human anger. And the spirit world can affect the physical world, too. Spirits of certain strength can use their powers across the Gauntlet to influence people. Spiritual resonance that builds up in the Shadow can pollute the physical world; a tree that dies or a hospital with a bad streak of losing patients might have been the victim of too much death resonance building in the spirit world.

And the Gauntlet is imperfect. Cracks appear here and there, and spirits wriggle through into the oh-so-tempting world of the flesh. Though still unseen and untouchable, now they have the power to do more. They might take command of an object — a gun begins to "misfire" and draw blood at strange intervals, or a car suddenly swerves out of its driver's control and into a terrible accident. They might exert a rising power over an area — more and more shootings break out in a neighborhood

when a spirit of violence has decided to feed there. And they might even take a direct hand in a person's life. It might be as subtle as worming into a policeman's heart and fanning the faint embers of jealousy in his heart, or it might be a violent, direct possession of a young child's body and mind.

The worst part is, we can't see it coming.

Nasty, Brutish and Short

The Shadow isn't a nice place. We don't state this out of some spiteful need to criticize any real-world faiths that believe in spirits or angels in a more benevolent form — far from it. The spirit world of the World of Darkness is nasty not because of some hidden authorial agenda, but because it's meant to be a funhouse mirror reflecting an already dark and ugly world. As the horror setting it is, the World of Darkness fully deserves an unseen aspect that adds the potential for more horror stories, rather than making it less probable that bad things are likely to happen to good people for the wrong reason.

That, at least, is why the Shadow is what it is. It doesn't have to be that way, of course. Players who are interested in presenting a more optimistic take on the spirit world should find it easy enough to adapt spirits accordingly if need be.

Spiritual Inspiration

As guiding themes go, **World of Darkness: Book of Spirits** is actually very open-ended. The Shadow is designed to be incredibly versatile — a spirit or spirit-possessed human could be the antagonist in virtually any horror story you care to mention. The material found here can be used to create stories about demons, unstoppable serial killers, splatterpunk mutants, killer vehicles, unnatural animals, twisted cryptozoology, less-than-human-seeming men in black, cursed objects, haunted houses, you name it. They can even provide interesting alternatives for already existing supernatural archetypes: what if the new killer in town doesn't turn out to be a vampire violating the Masquerade, but instead a woman Ridden by a blood-spirit that is following its own insatiable thirst? And those who are fond of a more science fiction-themed brand of horror than is normal for the World of Darkness can use the Shadow as an excuse for science that just doesn't seem right. The spirits of machines and the surreal mechanisms of the Shadow can provide an environment that physical science alone would find difficult to match. A bizarre room full of shifting, sharp-toothed gears that seems as much alive as mechanical may not be built by human hand, but rather accessed by going into the wrong door at the right time.

Because of this versatility, material from the **Book of Spirits** is particularly well-suited for stories that add a more episodic feel to a chronicle. A spirit-haunted object might make an interesting one-shot story, perhaps as an interlude to a chronicle's main plot. Some troupes might even use the material here to create a chronicle that's meant to feel more like an

episodic TV show, with new threats emerging each week that may or may not tie into the chronicle's overarching story.

Fair Warning

Spirits are dangerous even to those who have specific tools to deal with them, such as werewolves and mages. These spirits make even more vicious antagonists for ordinary human characters, who often have little to no chance of fighting them off. As such, these spirits not to be used with intentions of providing a fair fight. Even for werewolves and mages, the best way to deal with a spirit is often to discover its ban, the secret weakness that each spirit possesses, and exploit it appropriately. When a spirit becomes involved in a story, simply driving the spirit off may take great effort and risk. Be well aware of the level of menace your troupe will be up against. The things of Shadow can't be stopped with bullets and fire.

How to Use This Book

Chapter One: Invisible Lore is a collection of stories and theories created by those humans who have had actual contact with the Shadow. These myriad explanations for the unseen world are presented as potential information that characters might discover in their research, or perhaps story hooks for the Storyteller. The information is inaccurate and incomplete, colored by each observer, but it provides a look at how people might desperately attempt to explain their fleeting glances of a world that is all too willing to feed on them.

Chapter Two: The Shadow Realm presents much more reliable information. This chapter details the truths of the Shadow, from the chains of its spirit ecology to the many ways in which the Shadow might bleed into the physical world. The information found here is not at all common knowledge within the World of Darkness, of course, but there's no reason readers should be as ignorant as the luckless humans who only see a stained facet of the Shadow at a time.

Chapter Three: Keys to the Kingdom is full of enablers. The various Merits, artifacts and supernatural powers found within can help characters who ordinarily have no means of interacting with the Shadow Realm or its progeny to get involved... very likely to their detriment, of course, but such is the price of power. Many of the objects in particular would make good hooks for entire stories.

Finally, **Chapter Four: Denizens of Shadow** provides extensive mechanical information on spirits and the people that these spirits possess or influence. While certainly this is a "bestiary" of potential antagonists and dangerous supporting cast members, there's also enough information on spirits to allow you to devise your own.

Whether you've already walked in the Shadow Realm, or whether this is your first time, enjoy the twists and hooks that line this book. The invisible hosts await.



"Listen... *she bore giant snakes, sharp of tooth and unsparing of fang...*"

"Mom..."

"...She filled their bodies with venom instead of blood."

Angie hugged herself with her left hand, and gently squeezed her mother's hand with her right. "Mom. Listen. Don't talk about that. Let me turn on some more lights in here for you."

"*She stationed a horned serpent...*" The old woman's breathing began to clear. "*...a mushussu-dragon, and a lahmu-hero. The serpent is Simumus. The dragon is Fir-Usum. The hero... the hero is As-Lakama.*" Her grip tightened on Angie's hand, strong as it was 30 years ago. "This is important, girl. *Ugallu-demons, rabid dogs, and a scorpion-man.*"

"Mom, please. You're scaring me. You shouldn't get so worked up over this... this pagan nonsense."

"Angie, please! You have to know all their names!" The tiny old woman jolted upright. "You have to know... the rabid dogs are the Izidakh..."

"Mom, don't! Please, lie back, relax!"

The old woman shook her head. "No... you have to... *aggressive umu-demons... the scorpion-man is Nirdaf...*"

"Mom?"

Angie sighed. The old woman was still, at last. She felt like she should cry, but she couldn't. Her mother had been so frantic, these final months, insisting she'd left something unfinished and then... where had all this come from? These strange names, this... witchcraft? Angie just didn't know.

At least you'll be at peace, Mom, she thought. I'll go get the priest now. Don't worry, Mom, you'll soon be at God's side, and all those strange nightmares will be long gone.

Something scratched at the window.



Chapter One: Invisible Lore

A world exists that none of us can see.

Our blindness is a good thing. To see clearly into that other world, with no capacity to understand just what we're seeing, would more than likely drive most of us insane. Sometimes not knowing is safer — safer for the state of the soul and safer for one's mental health.

This chapter is about stripping away that safety. It's about peeling back the protective layer of ignorance that protects humans in the World of Darkness. It's about staring into the blackness of the Shadow and hoping to understand what we see. More than that, it's about hoping to survive when inhuman creatures look back at us.

Most humans will rarely encounter the Shadow in any intuitive or even apparent way. Their contact with the world's dark reflection will be minimal, though perhaps frequent. They will brush past an incorporeal spirit, overlook a possessed man on the subway or stay in a hotel without ever realizing that the bathtub where someone slit their wrists nine years before emanates out sickly, poisonous Essence of loneliness that has inspired three divorced men to suicide. Yet for all their ignorance, they will still touch the Shadow. It permeates the World of Darkness, touching everyone in the world to some degree.

Sometimes it is a matter of seeking out the darkness. Other times the darkness finds us.

In the eeriest, darkest, unluckiest moments of our lives, we feel the touch of this secret world and the presence of the creatures living there. We see these monsters out of the corners of our eyes as they crawl behind us, yet see nothing when we turn to look. We sense them, for just a moment, watching us from the darkest corners of a room at night, yet nothing is there when the lights come on or the dawn breaks. We hear them down unlit alleyways as we walk hurriedly past, when the streets are silent in the early hours of the morning. For a moment we know something is out there, something that feels *wrong*, but that's as close as we get to the truth.

We never see it all.

The Truth

True understanding of the Shadow is denied to mortals. Instead, those who see any of the hidden world are half-blind and forever ignorant of the complete picture, grasping at as many lies as truths and following as many flaws as facts in the lore they gather.

Misconceptions about the spirit world arise from people applying what they see to their own worldviews. Cultural traditions, occult knowledge and religious belief color these perceptions heavily, rendering what the person sees into something his mind can encompass and relate to. Ultimately, the inaccuracies of human perception save most people from a terrible truth. No matter how they apply what they know, sense, feel or have painstakingly researched, the 'other side' is never exactly what they believe. It's usually much worse.

There is no controlling the Shadow; quantifying it and breaking it down are practically futile endeavors, despite what people might hope when they take their first steps into understanding the hidden world. They are not scholars learning all lore of an intriguing subject; they are imperiled souls unaware that they can die for failing to understand the rules and laws of a world that most

The science which
teacheth arts and handi-
crafts is merely science
for the gaining of a liv-
ing; but the science which
teacheth deliverance from
worldly existence, is not
that the true science?

— Thomas Hobbes

people are not even aware of. Whatever they do learn is never entirely true, never completely reliable. A thousand unknown, unknowable dangers exist just out of sight.

The people discussed in this chapter are not “in the know.” Many (most, even) believe they are, or at least that what they’ve found is closest to the invisible truth of the world. Most may not fully understand the true secrets of the World of Darkness and its Shadow, but they believe they do because of their faith, their research, their occult lore or their cultural traditions.

Some among them are souls that glimpse fragments of a dark world that mirrors our own and are certain they see a Truth that everyone else is blind to. It is their privilege, their gift, their talent or their curse: to see what no others see. Some want to share their gift with other people, showing them the light, opening their eyes to the hidden truth. Others keep their secrets, hoping for power if they cling to what they know. Many are just too scared and too confused to share what they see. These are the wisest ones, for they know they don’t really understand what they are dealing with.

When the realm behind the mirrors and within the shadows bleeds through into the real world, the results are usually ugly. What the Storyteller and his players are presented with here are ignorant people struggling to understand horrors and ideas they’d never dreamed of before. They cling to their beliefs, their folklore or their faith — anything that allows them to make sense of what they perceive.

For a great deal of these people, madness or death is the reward for their efforts. Few prosper with what they know, for few know anything true enough to be valuable. If ever Storytellers or players wanted to know what the Shadow can do to people who are unprepared and uninformed, this is the chapter to answer those questions.

And the answers aren’t pretty.

Faith and the Occult

Many people encountering the Shadow, even without any ties to a specific faith, will see echoes of religious lore in what they see. Perhaps the most obvious (if not exactly rational) answer to seeing a spirit would be to assume that it was a ghost or a demon. In instances of spirits using their Influences to noticeably change the world, it might seem to many people that they are seeing evidence of demonic possession or Satan’s influence in the world of man.

While this is certainly the most obvious human reaction to dealing with the invisible world around them, it has a number of possible permutations that can take such incidents in a variety of directions. Some compelling stories can be told around characters who seek to apply their religious knowledge to the horrors of the Shadows. Think of an average office worker, maybe a lapsed Catholic, who

suddenly finds his family bedeviled by “demons” that resist all attempts at exorcism. Think of the young man getting his first car, only to find that at certain hours of night, when the car is parked, he can see *things* in the rearview mirrors, prowling around outside: things that look like demons, though he can never be sure from the short glances he gets. Think of an old woman who hears the voices of “ghosts” crying out to her every time she falls asleep, screaming inhumanly as they burn in Hell.

Think of the stories that could be told in trying to help these people overcome their troubles or help them understand the truth. Some characters might be driven to investigate further, unraveling more of the Shadow’s mysteries. Others might see the need to ensure that these tormented souls learn no more and are prevented from delving any deeper into the existence of spirits beyond the Gauntlet.

The notion of the occult is a blanket concept that covers a lot of ground. In some instances those people who turn to the occult for answers to what they are experiencing will be seeking out a mishmash of religious lore from old faiths and old cultures that will mesh with what their religious background taught them. In other cases, what they seek will be more recent occult works penned or devised by more modern minds — thinkers and philosophers perhaps not so bound to notions of religion — and could therefore be more relatable to atheists and agnostics. Think of a person frantically researching online and in libraries for any occultist who has written of experiences similar to the ones he has suffered through lately. Simply stumbling across a sentence that speaks of a familiar concept could be enough to sway the desperate researcher into believing he’s found the answer to his plight.

Just because a person believes he knows what the Shadow and its beings are does not mean he knows how to react. Worse, it also means the deeper he follows his ideas of the truth, the more lost and wrong he will become. In short, explanations of occult lore and matters of faith are genre tropes rather than clichés, and if handled well, they can make for some great stories.

Sometimes all it requires is a little twist in the tale.

Sheol

“Sheol is not a lie. It is not some mythical Hell made up to scare people into being good to one another and breaking no laws. All of the dead go there, righteous and unrighteous alike. Their spirits are twisted and malformed, eternally hungry but with only dirt to eat. They’re always starving, see? That’s why the souls in Sheol break their own rules. That’s why they feed from us when they are sure they can get away with it.”

Sheol is the bleak, joyless afterlife foretold in the writings of Judaism. It is the realm of the dead, where all souls must go to rest in silence after death, existing in echoes of the lives they led as mortals. Every single human is destined

for Sheol regardless of his deeds in life: saint and sinner, killer and newborn babe.

Some interpretations cited that the shades of the dead toiled as they did in life, doing the same work and performing the same actions. Others tell of how the dead rest forever, moving only to eat dust and dirt to stave off complete dissolution.

Cain Mendoza knows Sheol is not some slice of religious poetry or a mythological metaphor. Sheol is as real to him as everything else in the world. What scares him most is that the Sheol he knows about is not quite the Sheol of the religious texts. It is worse, more savage, more threatening to the world of flesh. The souls residing in Sheol should be eating dust and silently awaiting the Day of Judgment. Instead, he sees the shades of the dead somehow influencing the mortal world.

This is a perfect example of how faith and religion — which often detail their mythologies in terms vague enough that they are more than open to interpretation — fail to explain the Shadow despite the beliefs of those humans that witness it.

Cain Mendoza

When humans encounter the Shadow and the beings that dwell within it, religion offers the most obvious explanations for the perceived phenomena where reason and common sense do not. When he was sorting through his deceased father's effects, Cain came across the scrawled writings of his great-grandfather, a rabbi in Russia some 130 years before. The books were well-kept and had apparently been handed down the generations to finally rest here, stored in his father's attic.

The writings of his great-grandfather spoke of Sheol, in great, sweeping, terrifying detail. The rabbi had collected the stories of an entire village, writing the testimonies and tales related to him by those who came to him with their problems. These stories spoke of spectral creatures, the spirits of the dead, twisted and malformed and leeching the life of locals, cursing crop harvests, possessing children, sending husbands mad and aborting babies yet in the womb of pregnant mothers.

Cain was chilled by what he read. Sheol, the afterlife of Judaic belief, could bleed into the real world.

The book was filled with diagrams as well as scrawled notations and quotes. Many were interpretations of the creatures the villagers described. Others were simple charts showing how the gloomy afterlife is divided up into four parts, where the souls of different people go to await Judgment Day according to the way they lived in life. The first section was for those who died as martyrs for their faith or their people; they lived in bliss, allowed to watch over those they had loved in life. The second section was for those who lived righteous lives but did not die as holy martyrs. They were bound to exist as they had in life, only rarely seeing those they had loved and instead performing the same toils until Judgment Day where they would be raised into Heaven

along with the martyrs. The third realm was for sinners who had been punished for their wrongs in life. They were allowed to exist in Sheol as all souls were, though they were destined to be slain in agony come Judgment Day.

Then the writings took a turn for the dark. The last place of Sheol was reserved for those sinful souls who had never felt any punishment for their wrongdoings. These souls were destined for destruction on the Day of Judgment and were forbidden from anything beyond silent rest and the consumption of dust, dirt and the ashes of burned earth. Cain's great-grandfather believed many of these souls were refusing to face their fate. They broke the laws of Sheol and plagued the living with hauntings, possessions and other phenomena.

The test was littered with testimonies. A tale of a farmer who ate five times the meals of a normal man, yet wasted away as if from starvation, led into a retelling of how anyone who drank water from the second well in the village would spend days in wracking depression, hearing voices and speaking in his sleep — talking in languages he had never learned, in voices that were not always his own.

This is how Cain Mendoza first learned of the Shadow as Sheol. He has kept the book ever since, believing every single word written down on its pages. Now he looks everywhere for signs of these bitter, rebellious dead souls afflicting the living world with their presence. When he finds evidence of spirits, he knows them as the shades of the dead, twisted by their hatred and unwilling to face silence and starvation in Sheol.

Three years ago, when driving one night, Cain hit a pedestrian. Cain had been drinking; not much, but enough to be over the legal limit, and he fled the scene, leaving the injured man to die on the ground. It was reported in the local news as a hit and run, and Cain is sure that getting away with the accidental killing has damned him to the final section of Sheol. Guilt wracks him, and the intensity of his emotional agony has attracted the attention of Sheol's murderous escapees. Spirits are drawn to him like a lodestone: nasty, brutish, dark-hearted spirits that are attracted to his fragile mental health and his fractured misunderstandings of Sheol and the Shadow.

Now he suffers in a parasitic alliance with the spirits of death, guilt, fear and pain that plague him every time he dwells on matters of faith or tries to perform religious observance. At first they were silent. Invisibly, unknown, they preyed upon his mind and fears, feeding from his pains, content to grow corpulent on his anguish.

Then they fuelled his fears of death and his guilt over the accident, subtly heightening his emotional instabilities. A Wound, where the Shadow was festering and saturated with sick emotion, tore open in the spirit realm where his bed rested in the physical world. A bed with once-white sheets that reeks of sweat and piss is reflected into the Shadow as a mattress and sheets soaked in blood.

Within the last year, the strongest of the lurking fear-spirits made itself known to Cain. It saw within his mind

what the man believed and manifested before him, knowing the human would believe it to be a dead soul that refused to rest in the afterlife. Its message was simple: *The Dead know what you have done. The Dead know what you have learned.* The spirit's instinct-driven mind desired only to breed more fear in its food source. The spirit was wholly successful.

Since that moment, the 'ghost-haunted' Mendoza has known the spirits of the dead are aware of him. He lives in constant terrified need to appease them so they don't harm him. All the while these spirits sink their tendrils of influence deeper into his mind, feeding from the Essence born out of his anguish.

He is a shell of the man he once was. Now he spends his waking hours looking for Jewish lore pertaining to Sheol in the hopes of banishing the dead that bedevil him. Memory lapses and narcolepsy erase hours and days at a time from his mind, though, and he stands at the very edge of a nervous breakdown. When he closes his eyes for more than a moment, or sits somewhere in silence, he hears the shrieks of the dead crying out all around him.

What he is really hearing are echoes from across the Gauntlet, as the spirits fight each other for the flow of Essence his pain creates. But by this point, there is nothing Cain Mendoza would not do to appease the ghosts of Sheol.

Nothing.

Hell

"The presence of demons in the world is something that Christian writings have detailed since the first men of God put quill to parchment paper. Before that, demons still lived, doing the Devil's work and seeking to corrupt mortal men. I have seen these things myself. I have seen demonic possession; people's flesh twisted and their minds warped by the Devil himself and his minions. Sometimes it is subtle, other times it is horrifically clear to all who witness it.

Hell is never as far away as we like to think."

The Shadow's most obvious counterpart in the Western world is, quite simply, that of the Christian Hell. When a mortal learns something of the hidden world, he is likely to assume that it is the influence of ghosts or demons, purely because such concepts have been around for so many centuries and are never entirely disproved. With even the hint of doubt, a Westerner faced with something unnatural from the spirit world is likely to fall back on what popular religion and modern culture (through movies and books) often explain in detail.

Agnosticism and atheism are increasingly spread throughout Europe, though much slower in the States, but when a man hears malicious voices in his head or finds his daughter shrieking blasphemies, slicing her own flesh and speaking languages she never learned, then the gut instinct is 'demon' no matter how irrational it seems to think it.

Similarly, 'ghosts' is a simple and well-fitting explana-

tion for a great deal of Shadow phenomena, such as the sounds and appearances of spirits around a locus (a haunting), or a multitude voices in person's head. To a Christian, such things potentially represent lost souls: beings that have never reached Heaven or Hell, likely because of their ties (or unfinished business) on Earth.

Father Edwards

A little faith goes a long way, and Father Malcolm Ignacious Edwards has a lot of faith. In his own mind, he views himself less as a local priest for a small church in New York City and more of a modern-day inquisitor. Secretly, away from the eyes of his inner-city congregation, this is exactly what he is becoming.

Heresy is everywhere. The numbers of faithless multiply across the Western world as reason replaces religion. The corruption of Man through the Devil's machinations is something that people tolerate without rancor, without indignation, without fear of damnation. Seven years ago, Father Edwards learned a terrible truth. The dwindling numbers of people who came to his church every Sunday were all, in some way, touched by the Devil's minions. Each had sinned in his or her life, misled into blasphemy or defiance of God's laws by the influence of Hell. Malcolm sees no shades of gray in the world — he lives as if all were black-and-white. When people do good, it is because it is the natural way of humanity. When people sin, it is because Satan has reached out and twisted their hearts or tempted their weak flesh. In a city such as New York, gripped by crime, fear, apathy and immorality, what other answer could there be for the faithlessness he saw each day? Lucifer was powerful in the modern world, simple as that.

The priest's brother, Robert, listened to all of this with an impatient ear. He tried to explain that Malcolm's ardently pious nature was leading him to seek supernatural excuses for a declining congregation. Father Edwards took that as a powerful insult against his faith, and the two men have not spoken since.

Edwards didn't adopt this fierce belief without evidence, however. He performed an (ultimately unsuccessful) exorcism on the young daughter of a Mexican immigrant family, during which he saw her display many signs of demonic possession and more besides. He had no way of knowing she was possessed by a despair-spirit that had grown swollen and powerful at a nearby locus in the tenement. To Edwards, he was speaking to one of the Devil's own.

The ritual lasted three weeks, during which the little girl tore at her flesh and shrieked in First Tongue. By the end of the exorcism, she had half-flayed herself through her self-harm and died of her wounds. All thought of banishment had fled the priest's mind after the first week, as he sat up through each night and day alone with her, speaking with the creature that now possessed the child. During these sessions, he gained the most rudimentary understanding of the Shadow, mistaking it completely for Hell. Spirits were demons. Loci were nameless areas of the world where great



In two instances, Father Edwards has killed members of his own congregation. They were repeated sinners; souls whom Malcolm judged could never be saved and were too mired in the influence of the demons. The first was a woman who was a serial adulteress, and her infidelity had torn her family apart. The husband had killed himself in shamed grief, the son's grades had slipped drastically and he was showing signs of mental illness such as clinical depression. Father Edwards paid a local street gang \$3,000, most of his life savings, to shoot her dead in her car outside her house. The second death was much harder: one of the men in the confessional admitted to ped-erasty. Malcolm met him privately and strangled him without a word, burying him in one of the fresh plots in the church's graveyard.

This is all God's work, of course. Malcolm is in no doubt as to that. He regards himself as something as a radical — fighting fire with fire, using the Devil's tools and the Devil's knowledge to banish the influence of Lucifer from his congregation.

He watches his people like a hawk, alert for their gravest sins. If his words cannot sway them from letting demons within their hearts, then he will end their lives in the name of the Lord.

sins had been committed and the barrier between demons and humans was significantly weaker.

Edwards does not like to think of that girl now. He hides her memory deep within his mind for he knows that he let her die, let the demon stay within her, just so he could keep talking to it. Even if he believes it was a worthwhile sacrifice (a necessary evil to accomplish greater good in the future...), her agonizing death haunts him still.

For the last seven years, Edwards' attitude to his congregation has been colored by that event. He spies on them now, with a combination of neighborhood gossip, in-depth video-taped confession booth sessions where he pries into their lives and asks repeated questions under the guise of trying to help or understand better, and several thousand dollars worth of surveillance equipment, such as hidden microphones and cameras in his clothing when he pays visits to church attendees at their homes.

He also marks local areas of the city where acts of great malice or sin occur, which he believes must be observed in case of demonic possession nearby. This has actually led to Malcolm having a relatively firm understanding of several large Wounds and loci within the closest neighborhoods to his church. Secretly, darkly, he prays for another demonic possession so he can learn more.

The Spirits and Father Edwards

He's clearly already affected by the Shadow and is not, by any stretch of the imagination, an entirely stable man. But some Storytellers might prefer to take it one step further: Spirits feeding from emotional responses to faith, fear, violence

or any other of the aspects entwined within Malcolm's zealotry will find him one hell of a valuable human to be around, maybe even to possess. What would his secret crusade become if he had the supernatural powers of a Ridden? What if spirits begin to cluster around the Shadow reflections of his confession booths or the church itself? They might begin to influence certain members of the congregation into acting in ways which will trigger Malcolm's suspicion, thereby forcing the priest to act against them and creating even more suffering.

A particularly dark possibility is that a spirit with enough intelligence recognizes how useful Father Edwards can be. Such a spirit might create demonic possessions in order to converse with the priest, or may even manifest before him. The trick to such an apparition is that Father Edwards is still, at least by his own reckoning, a holy man. He will not willingly deal with a demon unless an immense greater good will rise from such a bargain.



But then, you know what they say about the road to Hell...

Jahannam

Islam, similar to many religions, has a complicated view of the afterlife. After death, the soul rests in *Barzakh*, a kind of stasis sleep that lasts until Judgment Day. After *Yaum al-Qiyama*, the Day of Judgment, Allah will reward those of faith, obedience and purity, allowing them into Jannah — Heaven. This is not limited only to Muslims. The holy *Qur'an* states that all people who believe in Allah, no matter what name they call him by, will find a place in Paradise if they are true to the Lord.

Jahannam is the Islamic Hell, where those who sinned, wronged their fellow man and either renounced or only pretended to believe in Allah are consigned to eternal suffering after Judgment Day. In Jahannam, as in the Christian Hell, there are levels of torment that the dead souls can endure depending on how they behaved and believed in life. Highlighting the Islamic hatred for blasphemy against God, the last and lowest level of Jahannam is called *Hutama*, reserved for those who were false to Allah, acting faithful while concealing their true lack of belief in God.

In Jahannam, the spirits of the damned, called *Khati'un*, are forced to eat *Ad-Dhari*, the bitter, spiked fruit of the *Zaqqum* trees, which is shaped like a devil's head and boils inside the sinner's stomach, increasing his suffering greatly. They may drink only *Ghislin*, the blood and pus from their own wounds.

The Children of the Truth

"Only Allah knows who will rise to Jannah and who will fall into Jahannam. We are taught that after death, our souls shall await in Barzakh, until Qiyama comes. On this day, the Day of Resurrection, the souls in Barzakh will be sent to Paradise or Hell, Jannah or Jahannam, rewarded for their righteousness or punished for their sins against God's words and God's laws. But know this! Listen and know this now! Qiyama has already come! Judgment Day is passed, friends. Jahannam surrounds us, populated by unholy souls. All in Jahannam are forced to eat the spiked, bitter Ad-Dhari fruit of the Zaqqum trees! They are forced to drink the pus from the wounds of the dead and the damned! I have felt their touch. They can be controlled, these souls. They can be put to use to serve those among the faithful that still live. Come to my teachings with open hearts, and I shall show you how."

Ayesha Rahman is the last person anyone would suspect to be a cult leader. She was born in Pakistan to a wealthy family, sent to excellent schools abroad and finally graduated from Yale with a degree in history. She is tall, slim and beautiful, green-eyed, black-haired and dark-skinned. She works part-time as a researcher for an entertainment company, earning a very decent wage. She is ostensibly of the Islamic faith, though she eschews any outward trappings for Western clothes and never lets any aspect of her religious observance interfere with her work. She appears singularly career-minded above all else, yet she is also charming, witty and friendly.

She is also a religious fanatic, though not in the way most people would understand. Her fanaticism is not born out of any spite to harm others or spread her beliefs, but is born from her assured knowledge that the world has already ended. She wholeheartedly believes that the Day of Judgment has come already, and that the world simply carried on as normal afterwards. Unseen by mortals, the faithful dead are now risen to Jannah, and the faithless and blasphemous are sent to suffer in Jahannam.

She developed this belief because she has been spirit-haunted for much of her life — a fact she has never shared with anyone else. Sent away from her parents from an early age, she has grown up fiercely independent, used to loneliness and, secretly, hounded by spirits that never saw her outward competence or grace under pressure. They saw only a mortal who was desperately, achingly lonely. Ayesha's sadness and fears, which the world never saw, were like a siren in the Shadow, drawing spirits of loneliness and sorrow to her. Such is her hidden discontent that at several times in her life, when she has stayed in the same place for extended periods of time, she has created minor loci in the spiritual reflections of her homes. These spirit fonts are ugly, hateful places that attract sinister creatures on the hunt for Essence.

At first she simply heard the alien voices of the creatures she was feeding. Then she began to sense them: chills on the skin, breath on the back of the neck, and so

on. Then, finally, they began to appear to her, seeking to heighten her fears and unhappiness. Many times in her life she has seen these spirits around her, always the same hideous and frightening beings that mirror her loneliness and doubts back at her when they manifest, feeding from her so often that they even take on aspects of her own form. She sees these not as the jinn-demons of Islamic belief, but as the souls of the dead who did not deserve Jannah, and seek to plague her and, out of jealousy, steal what little happiness she has. She could find no reason that demons would bedevil her, so she believed instead it was the dead, envious of her life and seeking to make her feel worse.

Ultimately, Ayesha is a deeply self-pitying and jealous creature, which attracts even more unpleasantness in the Shadow. Her cult started when she realized she could manipulate these spirits into making her life better for her. She would spend her days studying hard, being popular in college and achieving good grades, while she spent her nights weeping to the spirits that drifted around her room and pleading with them to appear to others. In a sense, they answered, now valuing her as a parasite values a perfect host. Even through all her successes and achievements, even in a life where she is genuinely well-liked and often desired, she sees only her flaws and the flaws of others. The spirits use their Influences to keep it that way. Her inner emotional conflicts at the divide between how unhappy she is and how happy she should be only fuel the spirits' powers. Yet Ayesha is too proud to seek help (such as therapy) so instead she sought those who might understand her.

Tentative contacts over the Internet soon became meetings among fledgling cult members. As the beautiful, charming organizer, Ayesha was the natural leader. Soon she found herself at the head of a dozen men and women, each desiring her to some degree and increasingly of the mind that she was blessed by Allah, a prophet come to them to reveal that the Day of Judgment was passed and that the modern world was so corrupt and hellish anyway that the great judgment of God had largely gone unnoticed by humanity.

With the help of her cult, called the Children of the Truth, she believes she has developed rituals that allow her faithful followers to press the souls of the dead into serving the living. By sacrificing blood, writing hours-long epic poems to honor the spirits of the dead, by fasting, flagellating herself and by scourging her own flesh, she has been able to plead with the souls of the dead to do tasks for her, which usually involve bedeviling others or visiting ill luck upon them.

What she and her followers are actually doing, of course, is creating such pain and suffering among themselves that the spirits are well pleased and sated on their travails, and doing as they asked in order to encourage such future torment the next time the ritual is performed. She taught her ritual to her followers. Now spirits flock to them, too. When the cult actually gathers in the basement of Ayesha's apartment building, the Shadow is alive with malicious and

cunning spirits seething around the mortals. What these beings lack in individual power they more than make up for in numbers and intensity.

Getting the spirits to kill someone requires intense sacrifice and devotion, sometimes even the life of a cult member. Particularly ardent members of the cult trying to gain the spirits' service actually act as if they *were* bound to Jahannam, spending days or even weeks eating only rotten fruit and drinking blood and licking pus from self-inflicted injuries. Such devotional behavior is almost guaranteed to be viewed favorably by the spirits attracted to the Children of the Truth.

Naraka

The many hells of Buddhist faith hardly resembles the Shadow Realm, though mistakes can be easily made depending on the nature of a person's contact with the Shadow and what is perceived. This afterlife, consisting of the many Narakas, are neither places of eternal torment nor are they ruled over by a Satanic figure at war with a divine Creator. They are the natural place for all souls to travel after death, reborn there depending on the state of their karma — the balance of the soul. Yama, the god who judges the dead, watches over the Narakas with his demonic attendants. The souls of the dead will reside in the Narakas for hundred, thousands, even millions of years at times, depending on the state of their karma.

These hells exist below *Jambudvīpa*, the human world on the surface of the Earth. The Narakas are a tiered realm of caverns, each situated below the other and offering a different torture for a spirit to endure while it works off the karma it accumulated from evil, hurtful, selfish or sinful deeds in life. Once the soul's karma is used up, the soul may move on to Paradise or reincarnation. No cohesive, comprehensive listing of the possible Narakas exists; many texts each create new and awful fates for souls as they balance their karma in the afterlife. A popular record of the layers themselves is that of the Sixteen Hot and Cold Narakas.

The Cold Narakas are *Arbuda* (the 'blister' Naraka), where souls dwell naked on a dark plain and blisters rise on their skin from the cold winds; *Nirarbuda* (the 'burst-blister' Naraka), where the plain is even colder than in *Arbuda* and the blisters on the bodies of the souls burst and cover their forms in frozen pus and blood; *Atata* (the 'shivering' Naraka), where it is so cold the souls of the dead convulse in the winds; *Hahava* (the 'lamentation' Naraka), where the souls cry out in pain at the cold; *Huhuwa* (the 'chattering teeth' Naraka), where the souls are so pained by the cold they can only chatter their teeth; *Utpala* (the 'blue lotus' Naraka), where the flesh of the souls turns blue in the cold, like the petals of the utpala water lily; *Padma* (the 'lotus' Naraka), where the flesh of the souls split with hideous wounds and leaves them raw and bloody; and *Mahapadma* (the 'great lotus' Naraka), where the bodies of the souls split with wounds so terrible that their organs are exposed and split in the cold as well.

The Hot Narakas are *Sanjiva* (the ‘reviving’ Naraka), where souls live in a field where the ground is iron heated by a fire underneath, and they are attacked by the attendants of Yama who pour molten metal upon the souls. The souls in this Naraka are always revived as soon as they are killed. In *Kalasutra* (the ‘black thread’ Naraka), the torments of the previous Naraka are added to as demons draw black lines on the flesh of the dead souls and slice along them with saw and axes. In *Samghata* (the ‘crushing’ Naraka), the torments of the reviving Naraka are added to endless deaths under the weight of falling, crushing rocks. In *Raurava* (the ‘screaming’ Naraka), shelters exist in the landscape, but each time a soul hides in one, it is mystically sealed, and the mortal screams as it burns around them. In *Maharaurava* (the ‘great screaming’ Naraka), the heat of the burning shelters is infinitely more painful than the previous layer. In *Tapana* (the ‘heating’ Naraka), for tens of millions of years, the servants of Yama will impale a soul on fiery spears until flames erupt from the soul’s mouth and eyes. In *Pratapana* (the ‘great heating’ Naraka), the souls are pierced more savagely by tridents of fire for hundreds of millions of years. And in *Avici* (the ‘uninterrupted’ Naraka), the souls of the dead are roasted in an eternal oven by the attendants of Yama for thousands of millions of years.

These sufferings are merely the tip of the torment iceberg. With hundreds, even thousands of possible hells — each populated by agonized people twisted by that which they endure, and the demonic servants of Yama (with colorful names such as Ox-Head and Horse-Face) who inflict such harm, it is easy to see how Shadow lore arising from Buddhist lore takes a certain shape, even when it becomes perverted by misapplication. There’s a lot to go on, after all.

Gareth McIntyre

“I do this because I must do it. I am an agent of Yama. In the Narakas you will suffer at the hands of his demons. Here you will suffer under mine.”

Gareth is a rep for a huge trading and loans company in Los Angeles. He lives up to the stereotype of the works-hard-plays-hard yuppie, keeping long hours, closing important deals and spending petty cash on nights out at strip clubs with his co-workers. He used to be the kind of guy to read books about how the Ancient Art of War applied to modern business, and how the code of Bushido could increase productivity and skill in the workplace. At one point, he began to get into martial arts, though it was something he was feigning to look interesting in front of his colleagues.

Recently, he converted to Buddhism. Unlike many high-flying corporate workers, this is not a choice made because the religion is “in” right now or to bolt on another interesting facet to his life and his résumé. As he reached his late 30s, Gareth really began to feel like he couldn’t keep up with the frantic pace of his work environment the

way he could when he was 25. His new faith has changed his life, literally. He finds himself keeping focused, staying on the ball, and his health and happiness are better than ever. No more power naps to keep the long hours.

He picked up Buddhism not from books, but from a local teacher (calling himself a sage) who spread the religion around when he was able, as well as teaching classes such as yoga and meditation. Soon after he was first hooked on the philosophy that was making his life so much more manageable — and made so much sense to him — Gareth was even researching in his spare time, fascinated by the multi-layered underworld and hoping to get enough time off work at some point to try and make a novel out of what he was reading. It was around that time that the dreams started.

He began to dream of the many Narakas, though one always predominated. It was a blasted, ruined cityscape populated by faint images of people who vanished as horrific attendants of Yama fed from them, or killed them over and over. In his notes after the dreams, which he planned to include in his novel, he called it the gray Naraka, where the spirits of the dead lived in dark reflections of their home cities and were drained of their remaining life by Yama’s servants.

Unbeknownst to Gareth, he was being subtly manipulated through these nightmares. A powerful spirit born of a Wound, enslaved to the concepts of violence and pain, traveled the city seeking those gullible or susceptible to its Influences. This spirit wants mortals who will leave themselves open to becoming Spirit-Urged or Spirit-Claimed, acting as hosts for the spirit’s lesser brethren. Through deception — appearing as iconic figures from the religions of various weak-willed people across LA — this spirit intends to create a small army of mortals that will do the being’s work in the flesh world.

This spirit has appeared as Satan more than once, offering deals with the Devil. For Gareth, who had fallen headlong into a fascinating belief system, the spirit of violence seeded the mortal’s dreams with images of the Shadow, which Gareth interpreted as a Naraka. After several months of these recurring nightmares, the spirit manifested inside the man’s dreams, charging him with a simple task. The spirit stated that Gareth was doomed to walk the gray Naraka unless he served Yama now as an agent in the flesh world. It was his duty to kill those with bad karma so that they could go to the hells now and accrue no more sins upon their soul.

It took almost a year for Gareth to act on these nightly dreams, but the Wound-spirit is a patient creature. Now Gareth is Spirit-Urged, bonded to a lesser violence-spirit, devoting increasing amounts of his time to the work imposed upon him by Yama’s attendant. Gareth grows less like himself by the day as the spirit overwhelms him and drives him on to committing acts of increasing brutality. In the moments when his brain is less sluggish and dulled than normal, he believes he is going to be reincarnated as an attendant of Yama for this dutiful, grim service. This

is what the spirit promised him, after all. Gareth has no conception that the “sinners” he is killing for their bad karma are actually the wolf-blooded family members of local werewolves, and he is just one of many, many humans caught in the powerful spirit’s web of influence — a pawn in a war he will never understand.

Chuntao Tsang

“The hungry ghosts I see are not the spirits of my ancestors. They are the spirits of those ancestors whom nobody honors, who no one remembers. And they are angry now. I think they hate us all, for we are still alive and our ancestors are still beloved.”

Reverence for one’s ancestors is something that features in every culture, to some degree. Even people who don’t believe in any afterlife will still put flowers down on graves as a means of remembering or honoring the dead. Acknowledgement of the deceased and the hope that they are either at peace or have moved on to a better place is a natural human reaction to death.

In Beijing, Chuntao Tsang’s family is heavily devoted to worship of their ancestors, offering gifts useful in the afterlife to those who have passed from the living world. Some of the devotional items are of the traditional variety, such as ‘hell dollar’ bank notes that can be used to bribe Yama, King of Hell, into allowing a soul a shorter stay. Other items, such as paper representations of combs, clothing and slippers are of a more mundane variety, designed to make the soul more comfortable as it pays of its karma or resides in nirvana. Offerings are ritually burned along with incense sticks, and it is believed the items manifest with the ancestors who so richly deserve remembrance on honor from the living members of the family.

Chuntao Tsang is a teenager, still in school and hoping to study in America if she is lucky enough to get the opportunity. Raised in a traditional family, she devoutly believes that the offerings they make for her ancestors keep them happy and healthy beyond the grave. What frightens her is that she sees evidence everywhere of people no longer worshipping their own ancestors. Do these people not understand the affront they place on those who came before them? Do they not understand that the spirits of the dead will not rest easy and suffer such treatment? She knows the reverence paid to her ancestors is not about begging for good fortune; it is about thanking them for living the lives they led, and allowing her to be alive today. But she sees so many people who seem to forget their responsibilities. It scares her deeply.

Chuntao is unique among the outlooks presented in this chapter in that she has no real connection to the Shadow. If she saw a spirit, she would know it to be the twisted remnants of a lost soul who was no longer remembered or honored by its family. She would, perhaps, try to help it as long as it did not endanger her or if the being did not seem too inhuman.

Her comprehension of the Shadow is weak at best. To her, it is a realm of the forgotten and the dispossessed, where souls no longer anchored to the Wheel of Life drift aimlessly without hope or memoriam.

It is a depressing, bleak view of a place already pretty grim. Yet Storytellers should take note, since in the endless capacity for humans to misinterpret the Shadow Realm, some of the things people will come up with are just as dark as the truth, even without being focused on hellish underworlds or eternal damnation.

Gaea

The notion of the planet having a spirit or a soul is nothing new, whether it’s the beliefs of Bronze Age cultures or the philosophy of the New Age faithful. For some people affected by the Shadow or confronted with evidence of its existence, a haunting notion will come to them: that the hellish Shadow Realm is, in fact, the soul of the Earth. Judging by the state of what they perceive, the planet is in very bad shape.

Some might believe the Shadow is Earth’s cry for help, perceivable only by a few, while others could be convinced that they are literally seeing the result of humanity’s mistreatment of the world. Ironically, the latter isn’t too far off the money; the Shadow has become savagely worse in places where human depredation and suffering has taken hold over the passage of history.

The following group is an example of what can happen when people who see the Shadow as Gaea, the Earth Mother herself, act on their misguided suppositions.

Blood of the Earth Mother

“There have been further reports today of guerilla activity in the southeastern rainforest region where logging has been brought almost to a halt for over a week. Current estimates pin the number of casualties among the work crews at seventeen, with three confirmed dead. Over thirty members of the resistance fighters have been killed or captured by army forces, who moved in on Thursday...”

There are two kinds of people in the group known to the media as Blood of the Earth Mother. The first and by far the least numerous are Western eco-terrorists who arrived in order to fight the logging companies through a combination of store-bought rifles and shotguns, and home-made explosives. But these are the opportunists, the poster children of the movement who coined the group’s name — and though they are the ones who receive most of the media coverage, they are neither the heart nor the soul of Blood of the Earth Mother. They are merely its face.

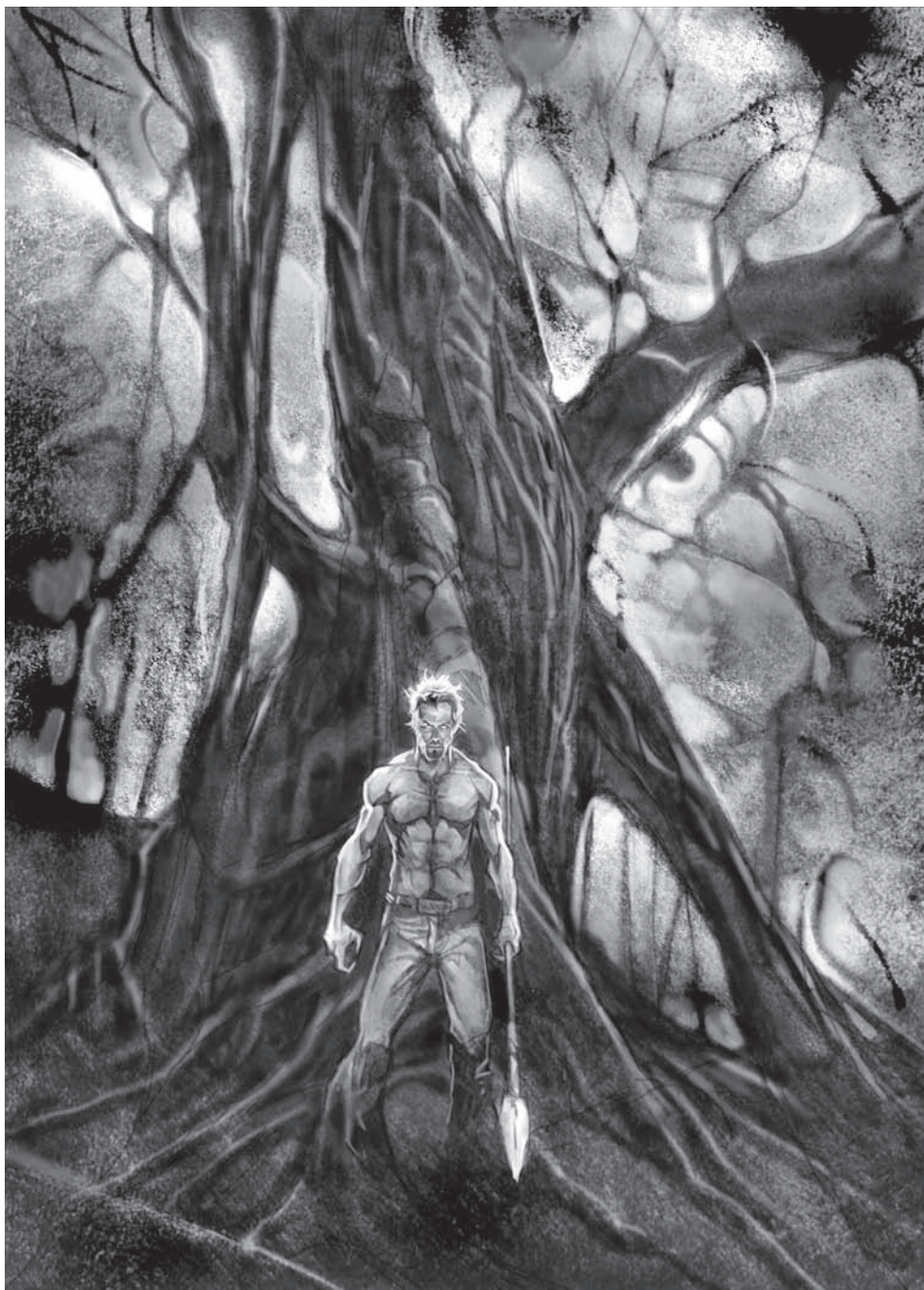
The second type of people in the movement are all unwilling conscripts of a sort, forced into this duty not through desire but through supernatural influence. They are made up of people who live within or close to the rainforest: such as villagers from nearby settlements as well as members of the

logging crews who have “defected” to the other side. The Westerners in *Blood of the Earth Mother* were affected by the local spiritscape and its denizens after they arrived in recent weeks. The villagers and crew members were taken by the souls of the trees long before that.

The spirits of the rainforest have existed untouched by humanity for millennia. Compare this to the Shadow of Europe, which in the past 1,000 years has changed from lush forests to urban sprawls — punctuated briefly by world wars that ravaged the Shadow irreparably in many places — before being built back into urban jungles. The spirits of the South American wilderness have no capacity to understand humanity the way many other spirits do, which is saying something considering how inhuman most other spirits are. But the Shadow-beings here may not have even seen a human, or seen spirits born from human influence or emotion. So when the bulldozers and the chainsaws came and the tree-spirits had no weapons that would

affect the human loggers and their machines, the spirits reacted in other ways. Instinctively, many tree-spirits and other spirits of the wild quested out to find other humans in order to control them through *Numina* or *Influences*, and even simply to possess them, in order to create an army of flesh-beings that could fight the invading loggers.

What the media calls the *Blood of the Earth Mother* organization is not some militant branch of Greenpeace. They are villagers and logging crew members almost devoid of any emotion but unending, infinite love for the forest. The hundreds of spirits that manipulate these humans have little comprehension of what they are



doing. In one case, a dozen spirits seeking to influence one person resulted in the woman going insane with the voices in her head. The most affected (read: those rendered nearly mindless) among the flesh puppets have actually started to die of thirst and starvation if they are not fed and cared for by others in the group. If these souls wander into the wilderness alone looking for other humans to kill, the chances are they will die of thirst before too long. The protective love these people feel for the rainforest is a sinister passion, meaning many feel little or no guilt when they attack logging crews and bludgeon the workers to death. By this point, many are so hungry

that if they are in control of their actions enough to do it, they'll eat the bodies of the people they murder.

The Westerners among the group brought weapons with them, adding to the lethal attacks tenfold. While these eco-terrorists were initially sickened at the state of the "resistance" here, the spirits have gotten to them as well now. Some are possessed outright by nature-spirits that know nothing of humans; others have had their dedication to the cause amplified immeasurably by supernatural Influences. Some believe, as do many of the villagers, that they fight for the soul of the rainforest. More than a few are simply too far gone under spirits' influence to think *anything* about their actions beyond the most primal hunting instincts.

What would happen if one of these spirits — a truly powerful one — manifested before the fighters of Blood of the Earth Mother? Would a slavishly loyal cult spring up around this manifestation of the Earth Mother? Would other supernatural forces nearby (such as werewolves) seek out the source of this great deviance and put an end to it because of the risks it poses?



A Concerted Attack

The spirits manipulating Blood of the Earth Mother are disorganized in the extreme. As time passes, a general consensus of cooperation develops among some of them, but most are as they were when this first began: working alone, seeking to affect the humans and sharing only a basic intention with the other spirits. So why are they working together at all, given how spirits prey upon each other naturally? The answer is simple: survival. The region's Shadow is being butchered. While it will not happen in all regions, in this one the spirits have loosely banded together through common interest. Not all of them, not even most of them, but enough to make a difference.

The possibility of such cooperation occurring in other areas, such as urban locales with a high mortal population, is something a Storyteller might like to explore in his own chronicle. A historic building previously protected by a national heritage foundation will have its own reflection in the Shadow Realm, and what will the spirits of the area — or the *spirit of the area itself* — do to save the physical reflection from demolition in favor of, say, a highway, a mall or a parking lot?



The Kachina

"I will see if my spirit will heal your leg. I must ask first. Give me your knife and I shall bleed to attract Angak's eyes to me. Then we will see if he can help you."

Acoma

Acoma, named after the town in New Mexico where he lives, is a young Pueblo boy 14 years of age. He is respected by his family for his connection to the Kachina: the spirits that act as intermediaries between mortals and the gods of the Native American Pueblo people. The Kachina are supernatural beings with the power to influence the physical world, and the Pueblo culture has ceremonial dances in their honor, where females are barred from taking part. Traditional belief holds that during these masked dances, the Pueblo men become the Kachina, earning favor so that the spirits will bless the families with good fortune and speak well of the mortals to the gods. Every Kachina is portrayed with unique ritual dance steps, vocalizations and often the mask must be crafted by the dancer who wears it.

Acoma was inducted into his family *kiva* two years ago, as tradition dictates. The *kiva* is a ritual room for the males of the Pueblo to gather and perform their secret rites to honor the Kachina beyond the public dances. Here he shed his blood as a spontaneous offering to Angak, a healing Kachina and the spirit Acoma most identified with. The wound sealed immediately, and the blood evaporated before it hit the floor.

The boy's bond with his healing-spirit had begun with haunting clarity. At the dances later, Acoma honored Angak with the slow ritual dance appropriate to the spirit, and after each night's dancing, Acoma always offers blood from his cut palm in the *kiva*. The same thing happens every time; the blood dries and the skin seals. To the community, Acoma is a blessed boy. He has managed to heal the sick and the lame, though the people are careful about never letting American tourists discover this truth lest they spread the word and the boy is taken away by scientists. The fetish dolls Acoma makes in Angak's image are kept as treasured keepsakes by the women of the town, especially cherished by mothers in childbirth and used as benedictions against disaster.

Acoma knows the key to his bond with Angak is his blood. Only when Acoma sheds his blood does the spirit heal as the boy bids it. And greater injuries demand greater offerings of blood. To heal a broken leg last year, the boy almost bled to death. He believes he was saved at the last minute by Angak, who values his mortal friend too highly to see him die.

Acoma has the Residual Spiritual Energy Merit, as described in Chapter Three. The Shadow-denizens around him regard the boy as a source of delicious Essence each

time his blood is shed, and they seek to please him as best they can. This usually means healing people, which not all of the spirits are capable of doing, which in turn leads to his miraculous ability working only sporadically. This does not, however, dim the affection his community holds for him.

Across the Gauntlet, Acoma has attracted a mixed group of faith-, healing- and joy-spirits, each subtly reinforcing his confidence in his abilities and urging him gently to use his 'powers' more often. The spirits are becoming increasingly parasitic in nature, despite their seemingly innocent root concepts, and if they continue to pressure the boy into healing as much as he does, there is a strong chance the next major illness or injury he tries to heal will kill him. Several times, the healing-spirits have brought him back from the edge of death, but they are working against the greedy actions of the other spirits that simply want the boy's blood, even if it comes in one last glorious rush.

Acoma is also in danger from other spirits that are beginning to pay attention to the boy's entourage in the Shadow. Word is spreading in growls, shrieks and sibilant whispers that the human child is some kind of living locus with sweet, nourishing Essence. Even his healing spirits — who are more symbiotic than as parasitic as the others — will be unable to defend him from a truly powerful spirit that decides to kill the boy for the sake of an infusion of Essence.

Torment of the Ghul

"Good people have always been tormented by the ghul. In English, the word would translate to 'ghouls,' but this word carries false meanings. I speak of the ghul — demons — jinn created of smokeless fire at the whim of Iblis, also called Shaitan. Islam teaches us that the jinn are real, much in the way Christianity teaches of demons. But I am wise. I am not some faithless American who no longer knows all of the truths set down by God. I know the ghul are real, for I have seen them with my own eyes. Indeed, a ghul's face was the last thing I ever saw."

Mayur Patel

Mayur Patel is a middle-aged British Asian man who has taken mandatory early retirement from his work in a pharmacy after a car crash resulted in head trauma that left him completely blind. Before the accident, he was earning an excellent wage, providing well for his family, and was a practicing Muslim with many friends at the local mosque. Since misfortune took his sight, Mayur has immersed himself in his faith, seeking comfort to compensate for the fact he is now supported by government-given benefits and his wife's new job in a supermarket. A traditionalist such as Mayur is galled that he can no longer provide for his family.

Worse, he knows his accident was not an accident at all. He knows exactly where the blame lies.

Mayur always believed in the jinn — good and evil spirits born of the Islamic Devil called Iblis. He knew the evil spirits, the *ifrit*, existed only to harm man and lure him from Allah's grace and light with demonic temptations. He grew convinced that his own home was plagued by secret, hidden *ifrit* that for some reason lurked close to him, though he knew not why such creatures would ever believe they could tempt him into evil.

The reason was simple enough, though it was one Mayur has never acknowledged. He is a terrible husband and a poor father, often (before he went blind) beating his wife when she displeased him and making his children's lives miserable by endless chores, strict rules of study, little freedom and social time, and even going so far as to hire tutors to home school them to keep them away from the 'sickly' other children in the neighborhood, whether they were white, black, Pakistani or Chinese. Mayur's irrational attitude did not stem from racism — it stemmed from a deep, unhealthy mistrust of others' personal hygiene, especially children, which extended into a bitter dislike of practically all other people.

It might seem an odd way of thinking for a pharmacy worker who sold prescription medication every day of his life, but the explanation for his growing, deepening prejudices actually came from his workplace. Thirty years of sick and diseased people coming in all day, every day meant the small drugstore was swarming with weak spirits of disease and depression, and their invisible presence wore on Mayur's mind. No other member of staff felt the same, but then no other member of staff had worked there for 30 years and never once missed a day of work.

A powerful spirit of disease grew fascinated with Mayur's ever-increasing aversion to illness, and worked on making the people who entered the drug store sicker in order to antagonize the pharmacist. This creature took great joy in the human's roiling emotional state, especially on those nights when the man would go home and take out the day's aggression on his wife. The spirit soon found it was becoming respected by the weaker spirits of sadness and violence at Mayur's home.

Ultimately, Mayur was healing people, and the spirit of disease could not become any more powerful while that was happening. Its instinctive reaction was to kill the thing holding it back, rather than move elsewhere. Out of primitive spite (or perhaps just for amusement) the disease-spirit decided to end the man's life. The spirit used its Numina to manifest and terrify Mayur while driving home one night; the pharmacist lost control, and the car ploughed directly into a wall. In the panicked second before his head hit the steering wheel and stole his sight forever, Mayur saw the vicious, demonic face of an *ifrit* jinn leering at him from over his shoulder. He knew it was a *ghul*, come in the form of a dead woman with corpse-white flesh, disease-yellowed eyes and a bloody maw.

The car crashed, and he has seen nothing since.

Mayur confided in his friends at the mosque that a *ghul* sought to kill him, but by the grace of Allah he escaped with his life. The religious leaders and his fellow pious Muslims believe him, though it is unlikely most of the local community would if the secret got out. His friends are baffled as to the meaning, though they advise Mayur never to give in to any extramarital temptation and to maintain his faith even through his disability. In the past year since the ‘accident,’ the lesson Mayur has learned from his ordeal is a twisted one. In the quiet moments when he is left alone in the house, he blames his family for their sins bringing him to this fate despite his best intentions. Even blind, he has managed to beat his wife several times, once almost killing her by strangulation.

He dreams nightly of the *ifrit* within his home that he is now certain he can feel around him, and in these nightmares he implores them to come to his aid in avenging himself against the *ghul* that ruined his life. He is right in that malicious spirits (or at least, spirits of negative emotion) encircle him. They use their Influences on him, bringing him closer to the edge and further from the already violent and bitter man he once was. It will not be long before one of the more powerful spirits sees Mayur as the perfect host-body, and what stability remains in his soul and family life is shattered irrevocably.

The Old Gods

As a species, humanity has always believed in the supernatural, even if people generally prefer the term “divine” for religious beliefs. But the principle is the same — certainty in the existence of inhuman beings outside human perception, and realms outside of human ken.

The human race has worshipped spirits since the dawn of time. Men and women have praised and offered reverence to spirits throughout history, often believing they were worshipping their pagan gods or holy elemental beings. Just as spirits have been misunderstood as demons and angels in times past, so, too, have they been viewed as pagan deities, and been worshipped as such by both ancient peoples and New Age souls.

Perhaps centuries ago, a spirit took it upon itself to manifest before Viking worshippers as Loki, Odin or Cernobog in order to charge them with a task that would benefit the spirit. Or in ancient Carthage when the religion of the Phoenicians held sway, a family’s child-sacrifices to Baal Hammon came with great fortune when a spirit of faith sought to repay them for their offerings. Before either of these ages, there may once have been a spirit in Ancient Greece who visited curses upon the humans of a household if they did not worship the being as Hestia, goddess of hearth and home. And back before recorded history, tribes of men and women may have appeased sun- and fire-spirits with offerings in the belief they were chanting directly to the Sun itself, thanking it for the light of the day and pleading with it to rise again tomorrow.

The lines between flesh and Shadow have always been blurred. It is a timeless notion. When people today worship the old gods of various religions, reviving them into neo-paganism, it can serve as a perfect example of how spirits will gladly choose to interact with humanity... if the humans leave themselves open to being deceived.

Frank Jenner

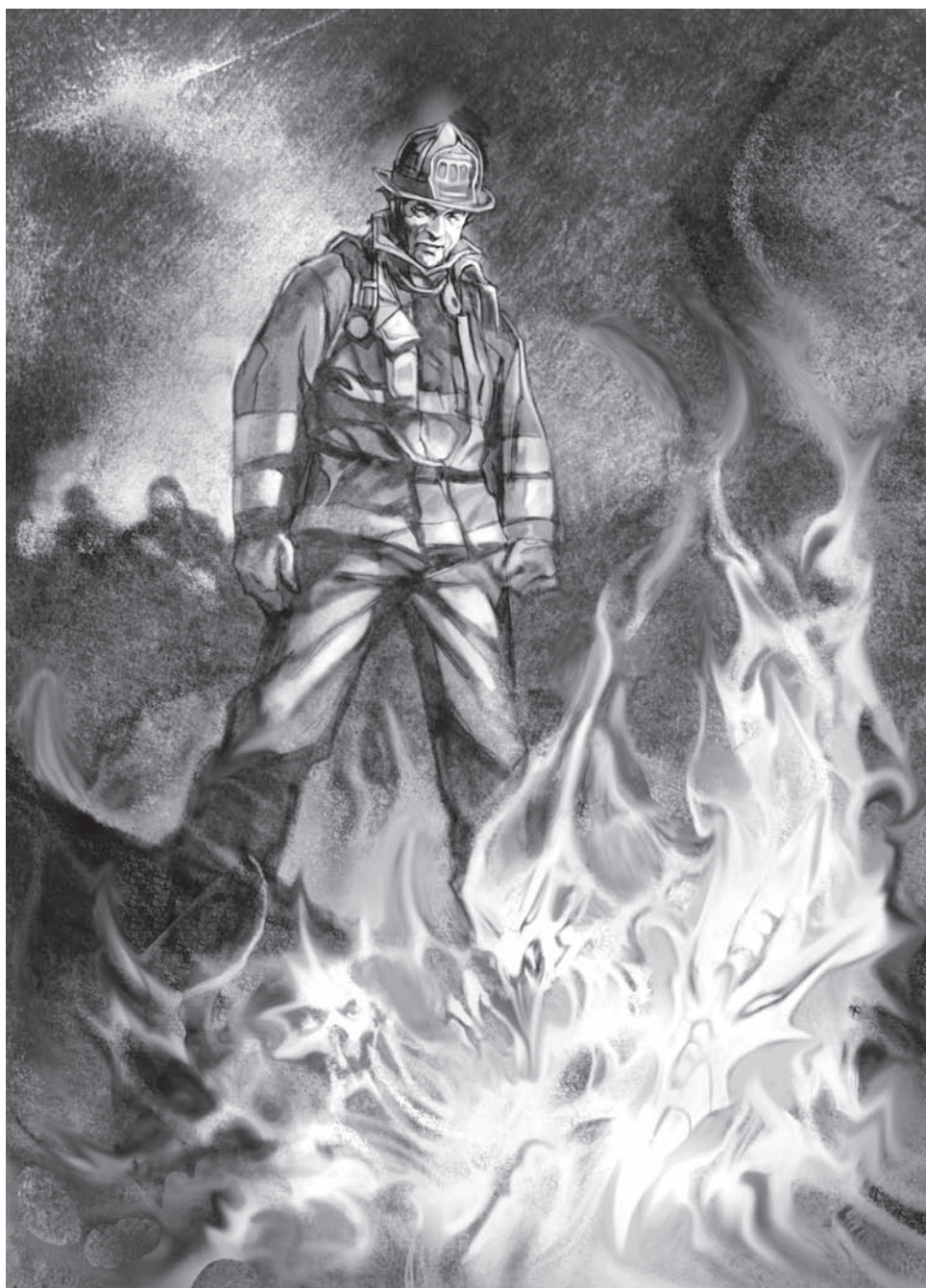
“You ever stared out across the sea and felt just... just small, like this feeling in the pit of your stomach that what you are looking at is terrifying even though it’s not even moving all that much? How about a fire? You ever sat around a campfire and just stared into the flames, unable to look away until your eyes start to water? Why do we do that? Why do the elements do this to us? What is it about them?”

Frank is a firefighter in London, England, though he’s a soulful sort of guy who spends most of his free time online running a Wiccan webbing and interacting with other neo-pagans on various message boards. His co-workers like him okay, though they view him as a man heading toward a childless and probably lonely middle age. In many workplaces, there’s the ‘quirky one’ who gets on with everyone but no one seems to really be close friends with. In Frank’s station, that’s him. Since he got divorced five years ago, half his colleagues have come to suspect Frank is gay. There’s no malice in the suspicion, as Frank gets on well with everyone, and though it’s actually true, it is still not something he feels comfortable admitting to anyone he works with.

He became attracted to Wicca 15 years ago while he was in college, and was soon heavily invested in the faith, letting it fill the spiritual void in his life. For years he has cast luck spells for family members, love spells on colleagues who needed a date — even a spell to help bring a serial killer to justice. The tools of his spellcasting trade are candles, incense, chants to the old gods and a firm belief in what he is doing. Do his spells ever work? Well, they never seem to fail, what he wants to occur usually does, so in his eyes they work just fine. He may not feel a tremendous, palpable moving of energy when he works his magic, but he figures it can’t hurt to try and put a little goodness back into the world. He’s a firefighter, after all. He’s seen a lot of bad things in his time.

Frank has a theory. It’s one he has only shared on his message board (which is anonymous, so as to prevent him catching too much flak from co-workers) but it has captured the imaginations of those who come to his website. He believes that humanity’s fascination with fire and our fear of it comes from elementals — living spirits of flame and heat. These elementals are what drive humans to create flame, and they rejoice and grow strong when fires burn.

He’s seen figures in the flames before; dancing, thrashing figures made of fire and smoke that caper through the burning houses. His ex-wife, whom he



remains on friendly terms with, is a psychiatrist. She (as well as many of the folks on his website) says these figures are just tricks of the eyes, the sense misfiring in moments of extreme stress. Some of the board members on his site agree with him, though, that these dancers are the manifestations of the fire-spirits, or perhaps even aspects of the old gods such as Loki, who are often associated with fire in various pagan pantheons.

Frank is not sure what they are. He seems them infrequently, and they are rarely there a split-second later when he does a double-take. On several occasions, one of the figures has turned out to be a survivor of the blaze, burned horrifically and stumbling through the flames. But while Frank's not certain what they are, he does believe

he knows. He thinks he is seeing fire elementals, mocking him as they dance in the fires they cause. When a pyromaniac strikes or fires are purposely set, Frank believes these actions are also the deeds of the fire elementals, which possess people temporarily or affect human minds with mystical influence.

The members of his message board who believe him cast well-wishing spells of their own for Frank — spells of protection or magic designed to appease pagan fire-gods. He tells them it helps, which is a lie. Each time he answers a call, he fears seeing the elementals again. They terrify him like nothing else in life, especially since they only ever seem to appear to him at the largest, fiercest fires where there is always a loss of life. He finds that coincidence deeply unnerving.

So while he fights fires nightly and puts great stock in the bravery and skill of his colleagues, he also designs little rituals himself: spells to appease the elementals of fire and prevent them from taking lives.

Manipulation and Belief

When humans mistake spirits for the elementals or gods of ancient religions, most spirits will not comprehend anything of the human's delusion. Many spirits will not be intelligent enough, or know enough of humans, to make the connection. Others will ignore it as irrelevant whether they perceive what the human thinks or not. But some will see an opportunity for power and control. And they take it. This can form instant

cults, or at least instant servitude, as the spirit's devout worshippers work hard to appease their new "god." It's a cushy life, though it will probably attract other supernatural interest, such as from werewolves or other spirits wanting to get in on the action.

A spirit knowingly masquerading as the deity of a pantheon is probably at the higher end of the intelligence spectrum for Shadow-denizens. At least, the ones that expect their charade to last any length of time will be. Those who learn only parts of the mythology they are supposedly part of will have their deceptions discovered before too long, though there is always the potential to intimidate a human into still believing, insisting that it's the mythology itself that is inaccurate. When confronted by the inhuman force of an angry god, coming face-to-face with a being of clearly supernatural origins, one hardly takes to the time to question his authenticity. Panic is a much more realistic reaction — panicked obedience or panicked flight.

Lost Souls

"You won't believe me if I say what's wrong with me. No one ever believes me. Lemme ask you three questions, and if you've got answers to all of 'em, I'll talk. First, if you die and there's no Heaven or Hell to go to, does that mean you just go bang! Out of existence? Second, if ghosts aren't real, why's there so much evidence that they do, huh? Third, why do all these religions and cultures and stuff, even if they don't have, like, eternal reward and eternal damnation, why do they mention an afterlife of some kind? No answer, huh? Then we're done, doc. Take me back to my fucking cell."

Morgan Coles

Many religions over the course of human history have laid out in either implicitly clear or vague, uncertain terms what happens to the souls of sinners in the afterlife. Not all faiths speak of a hell or an underworld, and not all promise eternal punishment for those who die after living evil lives.

When someone struggles to find explanations for the strange and frightening spirits he has encountered, the answers will not always match his cultural background or religious belief. Sometimes the answers are simply the only ones that seem to fit, no matter how unconventional they are.

Morgan Coles is someone who saw a fragment of what the Shadow held and then came to an unusual conclusion. As an avowed atheist, he believes in neither Heaven nor

Hell. What he does believe is that spirits are the souls of the deceased, existing in some kind of "Otherworld" — a realm of the dead that exists in an invisible parallel to the real world.

It started as many mortal encounters with spirits do; with a breach in the Gauntlet and a human witnessing a spirit's manifestation. Morgan started out as a mugger, and was not above killing his victims if they put up too much of a fight. His first encounter with the supernatural happened in an alleyway where he was mugging someone. A spirit of murder came through from the Shadow, excited by the Essence caused by the death and seeking to possess the killer. Morgan fled in terror at the sight of a being resembling himself, only punctured in 100 places by knives of various sizes and shapes.

Over the course of the next three years, the same thing began to happen at irregular intervals. Sometimes he'd be killing a victim and he'd get a powerful sense of being watched, right before some monster looking like a cut-up version of him would leer out of the shadows nearby, from behind a fire escape, or a Dumpster or from the back of an alley.

Morgan became a prolific serial killer. He remained uncaught for more than 20 murders — he no longer knows exactly how — and was arrested, charged and sentenced to life without parole two years ago. While in lockup, he was regularly sexually abused by his cellmate. It was a relationship that terminated in the cellmate's murder, when Morgan could suffer it no more. At 2 AM one night mid-"session," he bit off his abuser's penis and savagely beat his cellmate while the man screamed and tried to stem the blood flow as he went into shock. Morgan killed the man with his bare hands.

Seconds later, from the darkest corner of the cell, the spirit he had seen in back alleys so many times manifested and reached for him. And this time, trapped behind bars, Morgan had nowhere to run. He became Spirit-Urged, possessed by the murder-spirit that had become obsessed with him.

The spirit has loose and sporadic control over him. Morgan feels the creature in his head, pushing him on to more murderous deeds and twisting his emotions and his temper so that some nights he can't think straight. He has been moved to a special care institute since killing two more prisoners and, at one point, trying to break his own head open on the bars of his cell. While here, Morgan has taken advantage of the expansive library and his own half-finished education. He slowly read through the holy texts of several religions, not seeking solace and faith as the staff suspected, but seeking answers to the "ghost" he is sure possessed him. Where holes remained in his understanding, he used his friendly relationship with several staff members (cultivated when he wasn't raging incoherently at them while restrained) to order other books on various mythologies.

After reading of the *gaki* and the *jikininki* of Asian cultures, the *pretas* of Indian mythology and the *sluagh* of ancient British paganism, Morgan believes he has nailed it. These creatures are all eerily alike in nature — the souls of the dead spurned from both Heaven and Hell to walk in an invisible world people cannot see. They are lost souls, the spirits of dead sinners, whom Morgan believes must seek comfort in those who resemble them in life through deeds. The spirit of a long-dead murderer, which Morgan recognized as a caricature of himself, has possessed him and wants him to kill, kill, kill.

While the doctors here at the institute are curious and amused at the thuggish murderer pouring over mythology books, they chalk it up to behavior akin to a serial killer seeking salvation in the Bible. And they certainly never believe Morgan when he tries to speak of what is wrong. Privately he keeps searching for folklore stories of how people resisted possession by these sinful souls, though again, he is limited in his resources to a few hours online a week, monitored closely by hospital staff.

He has a sickening sense of dread that he is running out of time. He searches now for some way, any way, of “exorcising” himself, though his resources are limited and he is under constant supervision. The murder-spirit within him still uses its Essence and Influences to affect both Morgan and some staff members, and Morgan has had to endure beatings from Influenced staff members while he was bound and unable to even move to defend himself. And all the while, he feels the lost soul sinking deeper into his mind. Perhaps it will not be long before he becomes Spirit-Claimed, and then the staff at St. John’s Maximum Security Hospital will *really* have something to worry about.

The Naismith Family

“This way has been good enough for a half-dozen of your kind before now, son. It’ll sure be good enough for you. Now stop kicking and it’ll all be over real quick.”

Harold Naismith is another man plagued by lost souls. He’s what some of the locals refer to as a good ol’ boy, well-liked in town and a hard worker on his farm. He provides well for his family, he supports the most arch-conservative politicians “no matter what the liberal media or the Jews say about them” and he likes to kick back at the weekends with a crate of chilled beer and watch sports. He hopes one day to become the Grand Dragon in his local cell of the Klu Klux Klan, which sees fewer and fewer members each year, so his chances are looking better as time passes.

His daughters, 11-year-old Nellie and 7-year-old Bethany, have a lot of acreage to play in when they’re not at school. The one place they consciously avoid on their family’s land is the old farmhouse by the tall tree, about a quarter mile walk from their home. Their father has never warned them away from there, but they avoid it anyway. The girls once heard shouting and crying come from inside the farmhouse, and have never plucked up the guts to go back

since. From a distance, on certain nights, they sometimes think they see someone hanging from one of the tall tree’s lowest branches. Harold tanned their hides the first few times they mentioned it, and they’ve never said a word about it since.

Nellie and Bethany are not Harold’s only daughters, though they are the only ones still alive. His eldest girl, Maryann, vanished 12 years ago, several months before Nellie was born. Maryann’d been missing for three nights when Harold drove into town to ask around after her. When he discovered she’d been secretly dating a black kid, he called his Klan buddies together and they had themselves an old-style hanging. There was no danger of the law getting involved — the local sheriff and two of his deputies were part of the lynch mob.

Adam Jameson, who also had no idea where his girlfriend had got to, was beaten despite his protests and strung up to strangle, hanging from the tall tree by the disused farmhouse on Harold’s land. The Klan were sure justice was served, though they still kept their hopes up for finding Maryann. The following month, her body turned up in the next state over, and a traveling salesman, as Caucasian as Harold himself, was arrested (later getting a lethal injection) for the murder.

The tall tree is a powerful locus in the Shadow — a locus of abusive pain and sickening desperation. Spirits are drawn there for the rich, if bitter, Essence. On some level, Harold knows this, or at least senses it. The tree was used by his grandfather and the Klan 100 years ago for executing black people, and he felt a savage pride at getting to do the same. But he senses there’s something wrong at the tall tree, and he knows *things* go there because of what was done. He’s heard them many times, and on nights when the wind howls and almost sounds like 100 baying voices, he’s seen things there, too.

The Gauntlet is so thin around this locus that it is practically a verge — a complete split in the spirit world where Shadow and substance overlap. Turning to the Bible has answered few of his questions, for he does not believe the things at the tall tree to be demons or messengers of the Devil, or that they are the ghosts of those who hanged there. In his innermost thoughts, he sees black people as so close to animals that he’s not even sure they have souls.

So what Harold suspects instead is actually close to the truth — some kind of creature comes to this place of suffering in order to feed from it. The idea he clings to is the possibility that the tall tree is the haunting ground for those Klan members long dead; the ghosts of those men righteously buried as Christians down in the town. He is not certain of it, but he hopes it hard enough that he’s beginning to convince himself. He now thinks that dead Klan members are coming to see and enjoy the place where people are still getting strung up the old-fashioned way. The shapes he has seen on the windiest nights certainly do resemble robed figures, often with pointed hats (or heads?), though details are difficult at best to make out.

He would go down and get closer if he was sure they were the ghosts of his people. But he's not, so he doesn't. The biggest worry on his mind lately is that he can now hear the crying and the cheering and the yelling even when he is out in the fields near the tall tree. This is a recent occurrence, as the locus grows and spreads. Harold, with his cobbled-together and ramshackle understanding of the situation, does not know this. He worries that the ghosts are getting angry at him for only using the tree once. When he hears the alien sounds of the spirits feeding and killing each other over the Essence, he hears recriminations that his proud monument to the "good old days" is going unused. And he fears that if it stays unused, the ghosts will be angry with him.



The Tall Tree

This is a nasty locus, but those just like it, born of human suffering, are found everywhere across the world. Those near loci this foul will rarely be able to help being affected by them in some way, even without direct spiritual interference. Harold is slowly going mad, being driven to repeated homicidal urges because he worries his own life is at stake if he does not. And what evidence does he have?

Nothing except ignorance and a hope based on his own bigotry. Yet even without a spirit actually coming to him or using its powers in any way, Harold's mindset is turning him into a cold-blooded murderer. Before he could at least couch his bigotry in anger and worry over the loss of his daughter. Now that he has lost even that hollow defense, he is likely to suffer mentally even more. Depending on his actions, he could be in prison or an asylum within the year — not bad going for a pillar of the local church and community. This is how loci can twist what people believe and perceive. This is how dangerous the Shadow can be when only a fraction of the truth is gleaned.



Developed Occultism

"John Dee spoke to angels, but he was a vain and arrogant man, using rituals to force divinity into sullying itself by coming to the world of flesh. I intend to discover how to do the opposite. When I speak to angels it will be because I have mastered a way of entering their realm."

The Bedford Hermetic Coalition

The occult holds great fascination for many people, whether they believe in any mainstream religion or not. Some will adopt the beliefs wholesale. Others select the parts of the spirituality that apply to them, and still others will mesh doctrines in order to create something unique that conforms to the way they see the world.

Before his coma began in 1997, John Bedford began his occultist research (as well as his small-time career as an occult writer) as a member of the Hermetic Society of the Golden Dawn. He published mediocre, uninspiring texts on the topic of Hermetic Theory, which were outsold by the books by established and renowned writers such as Aleister Crowley, which said much the same thing but with a higher production value and more concise language.

John was a man who knew his own limits. He was not capable of dreaming up an entirely new worldview for occultists to follow, and ultimately he believed the truths of the Hermetic perceptions anyway, so he had no desire to establish a "competing" doctrine purely for the sake of it. After putting his writing career on the back burner, he eventually began to look to other writers for further inspiration. From Crowley John went to the works of the Victorian numerologist John Dee, and the stirrings of a hybrid theory began to twist in Bedford's mind.

Similar to John Dee, with his many recorded "conversations with angels," John Bedford believed in the Hermetic notion that mankind could achieve divine power through certain rites and rituals. This connection to the divine was no godlike power of creation or destruction, but a way of altering the world around the occultist in minor but specific ways. And similar to John Dee, Bedford believed that the entire universe was a product of numbers, with numbers underpinning every concept in existence and with even God himself being a numerical equation.

Hermetic theory states that there are Four Worlds: the Spiritual, the Mental, the Astral and the Physical. John came to believe that every human lives in these four overlapping worlds at the same time. The Physical world is where a person's body remains. In the Spiritual world, a person's esoteric brain functions like intuition, emotion and instinct reside separate from the Mental world, where conscious thoughts dwell. In the Astral world dwelled the soul, separated from both flesh and thought. Soon, as John fell deeper into this amalgamated theory he began to fill hundreds of pages of notebooks with calculations as he tried to map the Four Worlds. In his apartment after work each day, John Bedford was trying to map the universe itself. He was no genius and many of his calculations were flawed, but he worked on the project for almost 10 years, neglecting friends, family and employment as he worked. In 1995 he released *The Tablet of Universal Hermetic Theory as Applied to a Map of Existence*. It was more than 1,000 pages of poorly written

notes, equations and countless charts. It sold less than 300 copies worldwide, and Bedford was finally dropped from his publisher.

It was an unmitigated failure, despite the truths John saw in his own work. And yet, some of the few people who got hold of the book got in touch with him and praised his insight. With his bastardized Hermeticism, he had impressed a small number of people who had come to similar (if less well-documented) conclusions. They met online many times in the next year, correlating their findings and establishing the Bedford Hermetic Coalition, a group dedicated to mapping out the universe and, better yet, finding ways in which the aspects of humanity in each of the Four Worlds could be used to contact the entities dwelling in those planes of existence.

Something that had been lost in much of Bedford's numerological work was the notion of angels and demons, which featured heavily in both Hermetic thought and the works of the magician John Dee. The Bedford Coalition began to collate copious amounts of notes pertaining to these beings, storing them on a communal website and mapping out the various possible ways of contacting and manipulating these divine beings. Some of the equations were hundreds of pages long, some thousands. It was an epic undertaking. The equations dealt with separating the soul from the other four qualities of human life and thereby entering the Astral world with no 'baggage' from the Physical, Mental and Spiritual. It was transcendence incarnate — shedding all mortal trappings in order to become purely the divine parts of human existence.

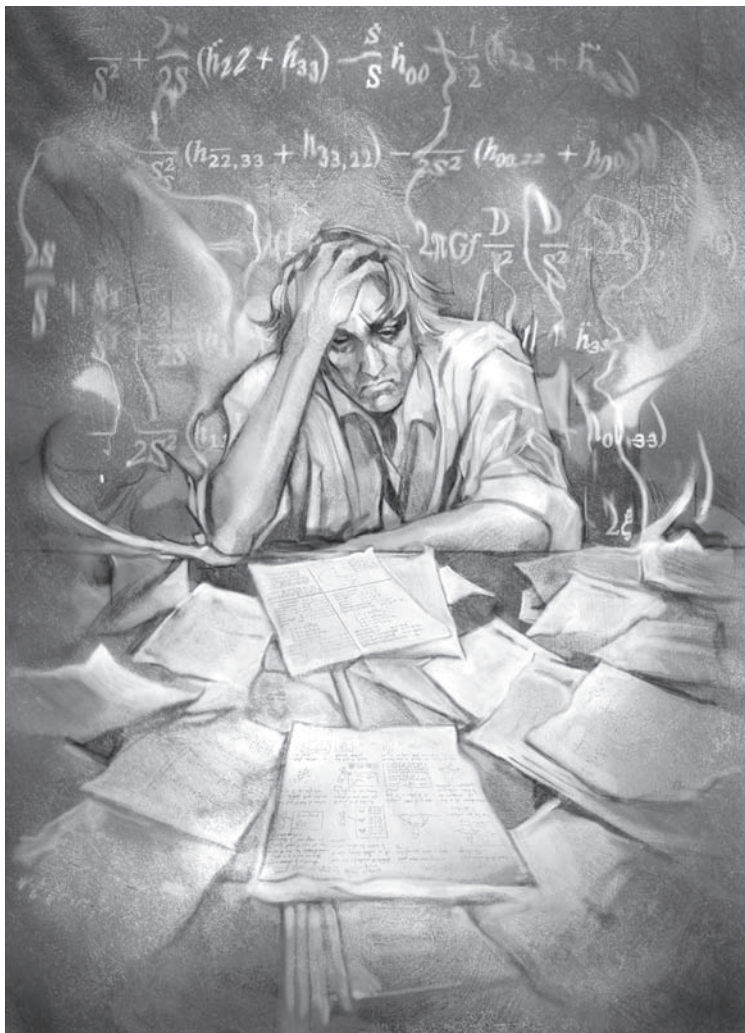
The five members of the Coalition met face-to-face only twice before John Bedford's incapacitation, since they lived so far away from one another. On the night allotted for each of the members to attempt to contact angels in the Astral world, they all agreed to perform the numerologi-

cal ritual at the same time. Despite emails of failure and disappointment throughout the night and the following morning, Bedford never replied to any of them. In fact, he never replied to anything again, and the Coalition has heard nothing from him directly since.

His comatose body was found at his home a week later when a worried neighbor called the local authorities about the foul smell coming from Bedford's house. The smell was

Bedford's dog, locked in the bedroom and rotting on the bed after dying of thirst several days before. Bedford himself was in a comatose state bordering on death, but a medical examination revealed no signs of a struggle, no illness, no signs of organ failure due to stress or inner trauma. Through judicious bribery and subtle questioning, the Coalition has learned of this. They believe that their leader was partially successful, entering the Astral world as just soul matter but at the cost of his physical, mental and spiritual self. Soulless, the rest of John Bedford just lies in bed with no *anima* at all.

That brings them to the obvious question: what is out there that prevents John's soul from coming back to his body?



The Blind Leading the Blind

The Coalition's map of the universe through equations deals with many concepts that are out of the realms of this book's coverage. What syncs up very well, however, are the Hermetic notions of the Astral plane and the truth of the Shadow Realm. The Coalition members are not sitting passively as regards the loss of their leader. Now they focus their equations and numerological rituals on nights of astrological significance, seeking to contact

angels or other entities of the Astral world and demanding answers.

This aggressive spirituality is ultimately what many occult movements and the cults that spring up around them begin to practice, no matter their origins. Magic, be it chanted spell-working or precise numerological astrology, is about extending human control over the inhuman, sometimes reaching the divine, sometimes reaching the demonic. The Coalition's plight highlights the problems of mortals dealing with the Shadow in half-understood ways, especially when occult concepts are so rigidly defined. These men and women are fully expecting to speak with angels when they go seeking their leader's soul. If their map of the universe is as accurate as it seems to be and they have found a way to perceive or even enter the Shadow, then who knows what Shadow entity is going to answer their calls? When manifesting before them, the spirit that answers might choose to play along with their half-baked occultist views, or simply end their ignorance forever by possessing them and showing them all the gaps in their pet beliefs.

Truth Fragments

Many people whose lives noticeably intersect with some aspect of the Shadow have no frame of reference, nothing in their worldview that could ever explain what they have experienced. These people cobble together fractured explanations based on their flawed perceptions and frightened conceptions.

The City's Soul

"I've seen shit you'd never believe. On the streets? Hell no. That's a cliché made up by cops who want sympathy for doing the job we've all got to do. No, I'm talking about things in basements and back alleys; the kind of things that never make the news except in the vaguest terms, months after the latest mess there has been cleared up. And that's if they make it into the public eye at all. Most don't.

The city is sick, see. You sometimes hear freaks and hippies jawing about how all cities have a personality. That's about the only sense they ever talk, the way I see it. New York wakes up every day to another load of murders and beatings and rapes, and crap like this has happened for centuries. That's a lot of suffering. Too much to ever understand.

So yeah, I think New York's got a personality and a soul, just like every living thing. Only problem is, this city? She's

sick as all hell. All the suffering in the city has bred some foulness out there in the shadows."

Detective Leary, NYPD

Kieran Leary believes his city has a soul. It's something a lot of people say — in song lyrics, literature, art, poetry, spiritualist theories.... Yet what Detective Garrett believes bears no similarities to pop culture, masterpieces of the arts or what he would view as "hippy nonsense." He believes that the soul of a city is made up by what takes place in it, and New York is a hateful place full of poverty, depression, stress, murder, rape and abuse.

Many cops, especially detectives, will come into contact with the worst that humanity and the world has to offer. In the World of Darkness, what they deal with is that much worse. Perhaps it means law enforcement officers deal with a few more crimes each month, and perhaps it means they deal with some that are simply more violent or somehow more extreme. In a lot of these cases, it means that the crimes they are faced with are the results of supernatural influence and the effects of the Shadow Realm.

Kieran Leary was born to an Irish American family and started as a beat cop, just as his father and father's father had before him. During his career in uniform, he encountered the kinds of criminals and crime scenes any police officer in New York City can expect to deal with. When he became a homicide detective, things got much worse.

Kieran has never seen a spirit, or felt one's direct influence upon him. But what he can see is that some crimes just seem to happen because of the *place* and not the *people*. Every city has its bad parts of towns, its abandoned buildings, its haunted houses and its dangerous back alleys. But when his colleagues on the force joke about a "murder alley" where several prostitutes have turned up dead, or a "haunted" hotel room where three separate murderers coincidentally stayed in the weeks before they struck their victims, Leary sees the city's sickness. He sees a New York so tainted by all the bad things that go on, that there are places where the city itself is wounded. He calls these places "bruises," and knows that in and around these bruises — of which there might be hundreds, maybe even thousands — bad things go down.

In Leary's time, he has come across many examples that lend his belief all the credence it needs, such as one particular subway station being a regular haunt for junkie murders, the same cab company losing so many staff to fatal incidents of road rage, the same humble orphanage strangely filled entirely by children whose parents were murdered. When others put it down to coincidences, ganglands or bad parts of the city (when they notice these things at all), Kieran puts it down to the city being so ill in these places that the city itself now *makes these things happen*.

It began when he noticed specific crimes and areas where violence or various kinds of abuse were taking place with alarming regularity. His research deepened as he be-

gan to realize there was no greater pattern of organization, beyond everything occurring in places where crimes had taken place regularly before. Though he was not aware of what he was researching exactly, Detective Leary was actually mapping out areas of verges, loci, shoals and Wounds. Over the years his pet theory of these being “bruises” came about without intention, just from him regarding certain places as injured parts of the city.

Leary’s information is not exactly accurate or reliable, by nature of his beliefs as much as his perceptions. He has missed many weaker areas where the Shadow Realm influences the physical world, and he knows nothing of spirits. In some instances, he has made notes of a ‘bruise’ where in actuality it is a normal area of criminal activity. And a ‘bruise’ itself is not always indicative of a locus or shoal, for example. In many cases, the area is actually the lair or regular haunt of a spirit (or even a ghost), yet Leary sees only the crimes and the dark acts going on there over time. He has no way of knowing exactly what causes them, or why, believing it is simply the place itself.

However, as an advantage he will never be aware of, his distance from the truth also leaves him undetected by most spirits of the bruises he visits during his research. He makes a great many notes on each place, seeking to catalogue his findings on his laptop’s hard drive and still hoping to one day find a pattern that yet eludes him.

Leary is now 50 years old. He’s adopted the grim outlook and stern, pessimistic demeanor of many lifelong cops, though it has hit him twice as hard because of his odd beliefs. Where most cops his age see no end to crime because of society and the nature of people, Detective Leary is also concerned that the city itself can not be healed from its injuries: too much evil has been committed here over the years.

The Visitors

“They walk among us. I call them the Visitors, but you’d probably know them better as aliens or extraterrestrials. I don’t care if you don’t believe me. I know what I know and I know what I’ve seen. But it’s not just that — I can sense them, see. I know places where they come through the barrier between dimensions and I can tell when they’re controlling one of us with their psychic powers. Insidious beings, all of them. You thought that stuff Lovecraft went on about was just nonsense about some octopus-god under the ocean? Well, maybe he was a lot closer to the mark than any of us thought. I don’t know a goddamn thing about any octopus, myself, but those kinds of stories make a lot more sense than any tale about little green men.”

Carson Thews

Carson Thews fits a lot of the stereotypes for a nut-job conspiracy theorist. He puts his own anti-government views on the Net, he has several well-developed theories about

how various governments are screwing over the people of the world in secret ways and he is in constant contact with a great many other people who believe as he does: that aliens are on Earth and being covered up by the US, European and Asian governments.

Carson is convinced that he can not only sense the presence of these creatures, but that he has also seen them on several occasions. What he can actually sense (through the Unseen Sense Merit detailed in Chapter Three) is spirits in the Shadow, in Twilight, manifested, Shadow-denizens possessing humans and areas where the Gauntlet is either thin or was recently breached. He feels all of these presences and sensations as an uncomfortable prickling in his eyeballs and temples, only catching glimpses of spirits out of the corners of his eyes. Nevertheless, his sketchbooks (and websites with scanned pages from it) are covered in representations of the spirits he has half-seen.

The problem, at least as regards the truth, is that Carson’s conspiracy theorist and anti-government background deflects many others from seeing the truth he tries to tell. And it is not a truth as holed by flaws as many other human perceptions of the Shadow and its creatures. When Thews says he can sense the presence of ‘aliens’ he’s not referring to flying saucers, Greys or any Area 51-style cover-ups. He’s talking about extra-dimensional beings that enter our reality from their own, seeking to possess mortals for their own unknowable ends. When he talks about government agencies hiding this truth from the public, he doesn’t mean the president’s “top men” are studying alien bodies or trading for technology; he means that world leaders have detected this ethereal invasion and have no idea what to do — but they don’t wish to spread panic.

Despite his principal misconceptions, because of his spiritual sensitivity, Carson’s rambling sketchbooks and notepads contain a measure of information that is alarming accurate for a human. A supernatural creature familiar with the Shadow, such as a werewolf, would recognize many of his artistic impressions as spirits the creature has seen before — usually of the many kinds seen most often in dense urban areas. Carson also knows when people are possessed by the Visitors, though he knows of no differences between the types of Ridden (or for that matter can he tell the difference between Ridden and spirit Hosts), but he senses clearly when he is near someone possessed or when one of the Visitors is looking at him.

Also of interest to anyone who either contacts or takes notice of Carson is that he has the ability to sense areas where the Gauntlet is thinner than usual, as well as getting a feeling of when he is near a place where spirits gather a great deal or entered the physical world recently. While not a failsafe detection ability, it is still a powerful sixth sense, if not exactly psychic.

Carson Thews is not a subtle man. Whereas many people with any experience with the Shadow are haunted souls after the event, Carson believes he must tell as many others as possible. While he’s not a street-corner preacher,

he still spends a lot of time distributing his information over the Internet through relevant message boards and leaving his homemade pamphlets at nightclubs and bars. Most people who do know him (or of him) see him as a conspiracy freak, despite the fact he is generally personable and friendly when face-to-face with others.

The largest hole in Carson's understanding of what he perceives is that he has no idea why the Visitors are here. He suspects they seek fleshly life forms with whom they might feed from parasitically through psychic leeching, which given a spirit's powers is not an entirely unreasonable theory. But his research is founded on his own perceptions and hypotheses rather than any solid interviews with those he has seen being possessed or hounded by spirits. He still fears getting too close in case the Visitors takes an interest in him.



Second Sight

Some Storytellers and players might see the abilities of Carson Thews — as unreliable as they are — and consider his story rich potential ground for an investigatory chronicle based around spirit-hunters who all share similar sixth senses for interference from the Shadow and breaches in the Gauntlet. This is as valid an idea as any you can come up with from this book, and although it shares many similar themes with **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, there's nothing to say it wouldn't work perfectly with mortal protagonists.

It does, however, throw up the problem of just how these characters will fight the spirits they locate and study. Spirits by their nature come packing powerful abilities that will give most humans a great deal of trouble, and while discovering a spirit's ban is a surefire to holding some degree of influence over it, actually nailing the exact ban down is going to be a difficult task for a handful of characters who are essentially normal people. So try it and enjoy the hell out of it, but be prepared for an in-depth chronicle that may require a little extra work.



The Big Mind

All thoughts, all desires and intelligences of every single soul in the world, are part of one collective consciousness. This is the Big Mind. You may have heard of it in Buddhist texts, right? Or those New Age seminars about achieving oneness with the world? These are lies. I suspect they are effective

for getting one's life going through exterior motivation, but they scratch the surface a deeper truth. The world is an ugly place. Our collective consciousness reflects that, for I have seen the real Big Mind, and it is terrifying.

Nelson Chang

Nelson Chang never had any time for self-help classes or that kind of thing. He went through life working hard and doing well at whatever he sent his mind to. By his 40th birthday, he was a junior partner in a huge law firm in Chicago, which was nothing to be scoffed at for the son of Chinese immigrants who had spent their lives in the States working blue-collar jobs and unsociable hours in dead-end factory jobs. Nelson is a great believer in the notion of self-made men, needing no leg-up or bootlicking to be successful. To this man, motivation and drive are key aspects in living a good, worthwhile life. He may be a bore at family get-togethers, endlessly talking shop and bringing up his success, but he sends home significant checks every month in order to support his parents in their dotage.

When his law firm instituted mandatory 'morale' exercises, where employees were sent to self-help classes, team-work-building holidays and adventure weekends (among many similar outings), Chang did all he could to pull strings and wangle his way out of attending. No such luck: he went kayaking, rock-climbing, attended New Age philosophy meetings and a whole host of other things he regarded as a waste of time he could've spent working. His patience was on the verge of snapping when at last one of the courses appealed to him. It was a spiritualist session where a speaker came to discuss the notion of the Big Mind.

This guest speaker was different from the other spiritualists he had been forced to listen to. She covered the basics of Big Mind theory — putting aside the ego and meditating to a state of oneness with life and the world by removing all notions of the self. None of this impressed Nelson at all. What gripped his attention was when the speaker began to talk of how the Big Mind felt and what she saw when she was involved in the process. She spoke to the skeptical lawyers and businessmen of seeing the memory of all humanity, and accessing past lives and the memories of others through meditation. Every human was shaped from the blood and soul of his parents, grandparents and ancestors right back to the dawn of time. Every thought and memory of the dead was dispersed after death into the cosmos.

This, she said, was the true Big Mind: a collective memory for the whole species. And through meditation, she could teach anyone to access this collective consciousness, delving into the memories of those whose blood they shared from the past. What she did not know was that she was a beacon in the Shadow for spirits of dreams, visions and many emotions. Whenever she entered the Big Mind state, she was somehow weakening the Gauntlet around her, opening herself up to the Influences of the spirits around

her and providing emotion-spirits with a wonderful source of Essence.

The idea intrigued Nelson, both because of his own firm beliefs in the importance of family and because it was so fantastical it sparked what little imagination he had remaining after 20 years of keeping criminals on the streets through his skill in the courtroom. He remained in contact with the speaker after the retreat ended and began to immerse himself in the rituals of meditation under her guidance. Initial attempts resulted in little more than standard hypnotic past life regression, which really felt inconclusive one way or the other to Nelson's skeptical mind. It was only successful after repeated attempts, when Chang, just as his guru, began to become a beacon for nearby spirits concerned with matters of human emotion and dreams.

Most students of this radical version of the discipline either experience failure in their efforts or revert to more traditional Big Mind theory or past life regression. Some, however, will actually develop the Spirit Ear Merit (see p. 111) and gain the capacity to experience this strange branch of the Big Mind meditative process. To those rare souls either born with the Merit (or somehow develop it through this process), they believe they are hearing the whispered voices and memories of their ancestors. They are convinced they have gained access to humanity's collective memory through blood ties to souls that have died and joined the Big Mind after death. Insidiously, what they are actually hearing is spirits talking to them — usually saying anything they believe the character would wish to hear, in order to keep siphoning Essence from their high emotions.

Chang communes with the Big Mind at least once a day now, always certain he is hearing the wisdom, the random thoughts and occasionally the babbling of 1,000 or more human beings that walked the world before him. It is a humbling thought that has rounded off the rough edges of his personality — everyone at his workplace and in the family agrees he has changed for the better since he went on the last company retreat. Not a soul is aware that Nelson Chang spends his nights listening to the lies of spirits as they feed from his newfound serenity.

Each time he enters the Big Mind, the gathering of spirits around him and their parasitic connection to his mind wears the Gauntlet a little thinner; a little here, a little there. It may not be long before he is used as an entry point into the physical world by malicious and more powerful spirits, or he unwittingly creates a verge and falls into the Shadow completely.

God Is Dead

"God died long ago. The world is just his dead body, ransacked by man and slowly decomposing. If you squint hard enough, you can see what the world really looks like. I can see it and that's what my art reflects: God's dead body as this gray and blasted planet."

Lisa Radcliffe

The notion of God being dead is not a new one to many philosophers, and the world being his corpse is something that has cropped up more than once in historical literature and philosophical texts. Lisa Radcliffe is an art student of middling talents who believes the old philosophical tropes implicitly.

Her work is painted in homemade paints (always mixed with her own blood in a youthful and flawed attempt at "being deep") and always features some scene of a Hell-like landscape, with gray skies, eerie-looking cities of warped architecture and monsters prowling half-seen in the shadows. These pieces, which are practically all she is capable of creating over and over and over again, show the real world as God's dead body. According to her, most people are too unimaginative and uncreative to see the truth, so she must show them. Lisa is the kind of person who really thinks these things, and worse, she actually says them to people.

Her college art professor harbors a secret desire to sleep with her, though it hasn't affected his appraisal sufficiently that he honestly believes Lisa has any talent. She doesn't, but there is still *something* about her paintings: something compelling, something mesmerizing. Something *true*.

When Lisa paints, she is painting the Shadow Realm. She will paint a picture of a building, a street or a room, and with her blood-mixed paint she will paint what the room appears as in the Shadow. When she has painted people in the past, she often paints monstrous or incomprehensible alien figures behind them. These are spirits nearby, which Lisa can sense. Her ability to see the Shadow works only when she paints with her own colors and while she is engaged in the act of creating her art. When she looks at her subjects she never actually sees anything unusual — she just senses what the scene really looks like.

Since the result is usually something freakish from the Shadow Realm, most people are captivated by her perceptions if disappointed in her actual painting talent. She tries to play off her lack of skill as "interpreting" what she sees and senses, but the truth is that she's not all that great. With practice, she might get better, but her professor isn't holding his breath on that score.

Lisa takes her ability very seriously, though she only recently found and became enamored of the "God's Corpse" theory. Her eerie talent started young, though when the crayon and felt-tip pen drawings she would do in school showed monsters around the classroom behind the other children, her teachers encouraged her imagination but unsuccessfully sought to turn her love of picture-drawing to less grim imagery.

She began to receive therapy at age nine, when her pictures of the monsters around the school and the neighborhood began to upset the other children in her class and worry her teachers. Most memorably, she drew a picture of



the school including a crudely accurate image of a building that burned down 30 years before she was born and had never mentioned even knowing about. When her teachers asked why she had drawn the building, she replied, "I felt like it was there." She has been in and out of therapy since, irregularly attending and facing a succession of counselors who regard her as a pretentious bimbo trying to sound interesting.

Something makes Lisa able to perceive the Shadow (or at least sense it) in this admittedly hazy and unreliable way. She thinks of it as her Muse, allowing her to see the world as it really is when she's engrossed in her work. This isn't a million miles from the truth.

Spirits have always been attracted to Lisa. She possesses the Pleasing Aura Merit (p. 109) and since her youth spirits have been drawn to her, interested in her and interacting with her in ways she can only barely, subconsciously detect. She does have a Muse of sorts (several, in fact): benevolent spirits that find her resonance in the Shadow immensely appealing to be around. Through the spirits' proximity to her, Lisa is able to dimly perceive the Shadow, even if only when she is lost in her work.

Lisa is in real danger because of her talent, though. While the majority of spirits drawn to her are weak and largely benevolent, this is principally because they are too weak and unintelligent to be otherwise. If one (say, a blood-spirit) began to feed upon the others, it might decide that it would be much more pleasurable to manipulate Lisa through

Numina or Influences, or simply possess her and take over her life. The effects of her being forced to bleed a lot more when mixing her paints, or worse or take the blood of others in order to work her art, will start her life spiraling out of control in a short span of time. And unluckily for Lisa, she is *surrounded* by weak blood-spirits, for they are the ones most drawn to her curious Shadow-aura, attracted most of all when she is at work.

Under the Bed

"Don't be so silly, I'm not leaving the light on for you again tonight. Now go to sleep, you've got school in the morning."

David Braughn

Sometimes it's the simplest fears that scare us the most; the most primal, common fears that stay with us as we grow older. David is eight years old, lives in a torrid little two-room apartment with his overworked mother, and knows more about the Shadow Realm than most adults ever will. In plain terms, he believes that there are monsters under his bed. It's a common childhood fear, soon grown out of and forgotten with most other childish worries.

Except in David's case, it's not something he is growing out of. It's not something he is forgetting. The reason this fear is staying with him is because it's not just his imagination. There *are* monsters living in his room. He hears them

moving around when his mother is asleep and the streets outside are quiet. Sometimes he hears them whispering in a language he can't understand, or crying out in pain (and sometimes anger) but never saying why. Sometimes he thinks he even hears them saying his name, his mother's name and the names of the other kids at school.

His mother sleeps on the sofa in the apartment's main room, leaving the only bedroom to her son. David's room is very small and what little room there is taken up a modest wardrobe for his clothes and a little table with a small TV. The reception on the TV is terrible, so he only uses it to play a battered old Nintendo console. Because the room is so small, there is really only one place for his bed to go — against the wall, just under the window. Consequently, this is the exact same position where the beds of all the previous tenants have been.

Nine years ago, before David's mother started renting the apartment, the previous tenant was a small-time gangster called Donnie Lavelle, who was killed for unintentionally interfering with a real mobster's interests. Lavelle was strapped to his own bed by the men who kicked in his door one night, and was shot in the head twice after living through all of his fingers being snipped off with wire cutters.

Thirteen years ago, four years before Lavelle was tortured and killed, a woman called Karen Anne Foster lived in the apartment. She was a nurse at a local hospital, and had a problem with an ex-cancer patient who turned into a stalker over the course of a year. Despite a restraining order, he broke into her home one night, beat her and raped her in her bed. She moved home a month later, unable to remain there any longer.

Six years before Karen's rape, Elliot Schultz — a car mechanic — owned the apartment. He suffered a heart attack in the room, and died after three agonizing, breathless minutes, tangled in his bed sheets, unable to even stand, let alone make it to the phone.

These things leave echoes in the Shadow Realm. Though the bed is a different piece of furniture, the room itself, especially where these beds have rested, is a nexus of dark spiritual activity. The room is a locus in the spirit world, where the emotions of those nearby are tainted by slow-burning despair and deep depression.

David has remained resistant to the negative influence ever-pressing upon him, but he still senses the spirits that come to his bedroom to feed, and he hears them in the quietest moments, sounding like people shouting and crying in pain. He does not know why they come, and they never talk directly to him. So he lies there every night under his covers while monsters feed from the pain-echoes of those who suffered and died in the spot where the little boy now tries to sleep.



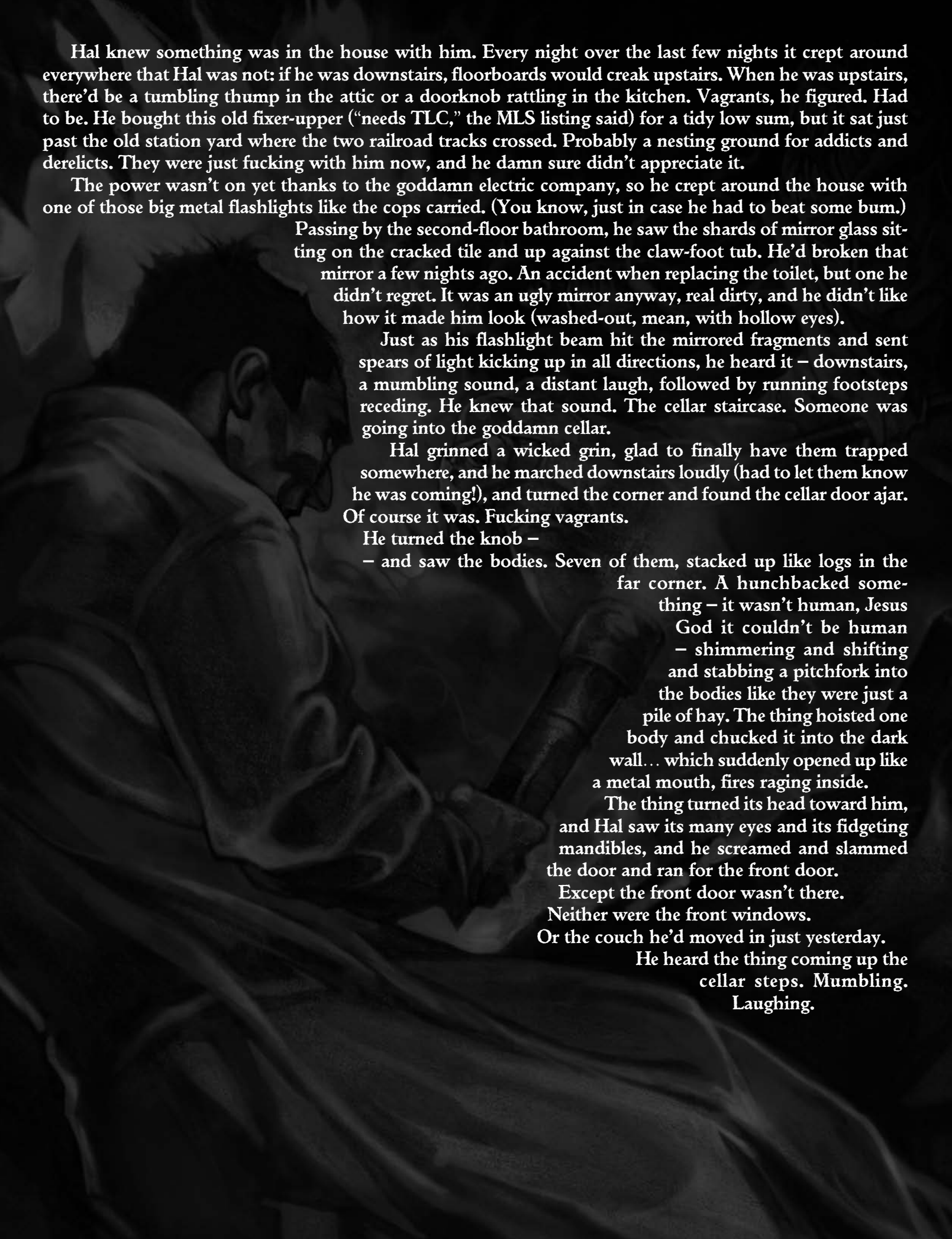
Tainted Locales

Bad things happen all over the world and if they occur enough in one place, or the acts are horrific enough, they will begin to sour the Shadow. It happens all the time, and the resulting spiritual corruption can make life miserable for the humans who live nearby. David's room and the positioning of his bed is a perfect example of this, where a locus or a shoal develops in the Shadow. But it can get much, much worse.

David's room is slowly getting worse. It is turning into a Wound over time, and the Shadow already resonates with a palpable aura of his fear and discomfort bleeding across the Gauntlet night after night. Though horrific, his fear is a weak emanation, nothing like the spiritual potency of the awful acts that have come before. But if it keeps happening, over time the Shadow will turn even sourer and begin to attract much more powerful, sinister and malicious spirits. And any region has the potential to succumb to this fate, if the lives of the humans close by are miserable enough. Sometimes, if left alone long enough, it's the little things that kill. All that pain and death.... Yet all it takes is a touch more fear to send it all to Hell.







Hal knew something was in the house with him. Every night over the last few nights it crept around everywhere that Hal was not: if he was downstairs, floorboards would creak upstairs. When he was upstairs, there'd be a tumbling thump in the attic or a doorknob rattling in the kitchen. Vagrants, he figured. Had to be. He bought this old fixer-upper ("needs TLC," the MLS listing said) for a tidy low sum, but it sat just past the old station yard where the two railroad tracks crossed. Probably a nesting ground for addicts and derelicts. They were just fucking with him now, and he damn sure didn't appreciate it.

The power wasn't on yet thanks to the goddamn electric company, so he crept around the house with one of those big metal flashlights like the cops carried. (You know, just in case he had to beat some bum.)

Passing by the second-floor bathroom, he saw the shards of mirror glass sitting on the cracked tile and up against the claw-foot tub. He'd broken that mirror a few nights ago. An accident when replacing the toilet, but one he didn't regret. It was an ugly mirror anyway, real dirty, and he didn't like how it made him look (washed-out, mean, with hollow eyes).

Just as his flashlight beam hit the mirrored fragments and sent spears of light kicking up in all directions, he heard it – downstairs, a mumbling sound, a distant laugh, followed by running footsteps receding. He knew that sound. The cellar staircase. Someone was going into the goddamn cellar.

Hal grinned a wicked grin, glad to finally have them trapped somewhere, and he marched downstairs loudly (had to let them know he was coming!), and turned the corner and found the cellar door ajar. Of course it was. Fucking vagrants.

He turned the knob –

– and saw the bodies. Seven of them, stacked up like logs in the far corner. A hunchbacked something – it wasn't human, Jesus God it couldn't be human – shimmering and shifting and stabbing a pitchfork into the bodies like they were just a pile of hay. The thing hoisted one body and chucked it into the dark wall... which suddenly opened up like a metal mouth, fires raging inside.

The thing turned its head toward him, and Hal saw its many eyes and its fidgeting mandibles, and he screamed and slammed the door and ran for the front door.

Except the front door wasn't there.

Neither were the front windows.

Or the couch he'd moved in just yesterday.

He heard the thing coming up the cellar steps. Mumbling.
Laughing.

Chapter Two: The Shadow Realm

BOOK OF
SPIRITS

*In this valley of dying stars
In this hollow valley
This broken jaw of our
lost kingdoms
— T.S. Eliot,
“The Hollow Men”*

In a musty, moldy motel room in the bad part of town, the clock runs backward. Shower steam rises from the bathroom even though the pipes are busted and the only water in there sits stagnant on the floor giving birth to mosquitoes. The room has been dead for a while. Dead since that serial killer passed through here a few years back, doing more than killing people, but killing *places* just by dint of his very presence. Every once in a while the darkness moves against the wall as if it's trying to hide from itself. And even from outside the locked room you can hear the scuttle of movement from within: the scrape of a broken fingernail across a plaster-cracked wall, a moan of pain past a dirty duct-tape gag, the buzz of flies around a mason jar filled with vomit that sits atop the TV. All that stuff is gone now, but the resonance remains, bleeding through from a place where history isn't so easily hidden. Someone has written something recently on the mirror to remind us of that. Hard to tell, maybe he wrote it in blood, maybe in feces, but it's written in big erratic letters no matter the material: *“For every door into the Shadow, the Shadow opens two doors into you.”*

Shadows on the Wall

This chapter details the nature of the Shadow Realm, a murky reflection of the real world that exists *just outside* of our reality. This shadowy reality is overlaid atop our own so closely that sometimes the two worlds — meant to stay separate — begin to bleed across into one another.

Herein you'll find information detailing the geography of the Shadow, what laws operate (or fail to operate) in this mad place of lost history and remembered pain, and what things wait beyond the pale with incomprehensible hungers and urges. All throughout the chapter we discuss these key principles of this hidden place, and provide examples all throughout that can be built upon or dropped straightaway into your **World of Darkness** story.

Mood

The mood that prevails inside and around the Shadow is the same mood felt when you realize you're totally lost. It recalls feelings of being a child and losing your parent's hand in the grocery store and suddenly finding yourself unable to find the way back to your mother, your house or the exit. The shelves are stocked high with things you don't understand: bright colors, dark shapes, and all the while strangers jostle past you (or look down at you with sudden and alarming scrutiny).

The Shadow represents the world askew. Things that should be familiar — a tree in the backyard, the family car or constellations in the sky — seem *off* somehow, as if one or two unseen details remain somehow wrong. Just as a baby without a belly button or a dog with black

teeth, the Shadow isn't drastically different, but it's just different enough to feel amiss. It's an insane fear, a frightful almost-hallucination that is persistently unsettling.

Theme

The theme of the Shadow Realm is that nothing is forgotten. It matters little if humankind is capable of remembering it, because whatever humanity forgets, the Shadow will remember. This hazy reflected realm is the gathered history of the world remembered in lunatic detail. Ah, but this is no textbook history: names and dates are irrelevant. The Shadow does not provide replicas or precise simulacra; what matters here is the *feel* of history. The battles of both world wars do not mark this place with precise troop movements and exact victory conditions. What lingers is instead the nebulous chatter of distant machine gun fire, the smell of burning flesh wafting from a bombed-out building, the agglomerated suffering of millions dead rising and falling like a black tide. The Shadow represents the hazy, horrific memory of history, and these imperfect memories build atop one another like layers of blood-soaked silt.

In This World

Here, we discuss the importance of the Shadow in *this* world. The physical world is not disconnected from the spirit realm; the two play off one another, each coloring and discoloring the other.

Whisper Down the Lane

The rules of interplay between the worlds are simple. Anything powerful in the one realm has the chance to affect the other. It's a constant game of give-and-take. When something potent happens in the corporeal world — something invested with weight, emotion and *meaning* — it births a reaction in the spirit world. It goes the other way, too. Changes in the Shadow may translate to changes in the physical world. Consider:

Douglas grows tired of the way his employers treat him. He suffers long hours with little benefit. His hands are lined with paper cuts from stuffing envelopes and shuffling pages. Every time he asks for a raise, he's denied. Doug is given over to despair, as he feels trapped.

Doug's despair is a strong emotion. Because of this, it becomes more than just an emotion. His despair gains life. It grows eyes and a dark pulsing heartbeat. In

the Shadow, a despair-spirit is born, a twinkling black mote hungry for more of what made it. It skulks about, growing in power, feeding off Doug's despair.

Of course, as it feeds, Doug's despair only grows. The spirit almost sucks it out of him — for every taste of despair the spirit takes, Doug replaces the despair with greater despair.

In the Shadow, it's not long before his negative energy — this *resonance* of despair and misery — draws other despair-spirits, which feed off the energy, and feed off one another as well. The resonance shudders and swells.

In the physical world, the despair is no longer contained to Doug. Other office workers begin to feel the pinch of work and the isolation of being in a dead-end job. They contribute to the feelings of hopelessness that pervade this office. Cubicle walls grow to seem grayer. The air blowing from vents above seems stagnant, even still. Despair takes on a physical presence, casting the whole office in a faintly miserable veneer.

The spirits in the Shadow are now feasting mightily, converting the dark emotion to Essence, the spiritstuff that fuels them. The despair is now potent. It collects around everything, a seeping fog, a septic infection.

It's enough to send Doug to the breaking point. The next day, Doug comes into work with a hunting rifle given to him by his father, and Doug starts to shoot. He doesn't kill everybody, but he kills enough. Some of them even seem to *want* death (there's that despair working at them, again).

In the Shadow, however, the despair-spirits are no longer the only predator in the hunting ground. Murder-spirits are born of Doug's actions. These blood-red motes, throbbing with vigorous hate, grow quickly, because the murders are many and the emotion is fierce.

In the office itself, the murders can only last so long. They're over in a matter of minutes, at least in the physical world. But oh how the Shadow remembers! In the spirit world, that sudden outbreak of emotion and action has left indelible marks. The Shadow reflection of the office grows spattered with blood that cannot be removed. Sometimes shadows creep along the floor like crawling corpses, whispering the words "dead-end-job" over and over again.

The chain reaction is set. The murder-spirits, hungry to feed on more of what birthed them here in this realm, go out into the world. They must find scenes of murder to feed, and if they cannot find any such scenes...

...well, then they'll have to help instigate them, won't they? The cycle continues. The Shadow Realm and the physical world play back and forth, a series of never-ending actions and reactions.

Resonance

It's all about the resonance. Resonance is the key to understanding the Shadow and how it affects the physical world.

Resonance is really the dominant emotion, mood or theme of a given area. Resonance may be potent, singular: an amusement park might have a feeling of fun and happiness as its resonance (and while this sounds very nice, later we'll find out why that's not always such a good thing), and that aura of happiness is largely unchallenged by any other emotions. Sometimes, the resonance is the result of many emotions, and the consequence is a strange miasma of feelings: in the amusement park, what happens when a rollercoaster topples from its track and kills two dozen people, many of them children? Sadness enters the picture, as does anger and fear. The happiness is suddenly discolored. The resultant resonance is inconsistent and murky.

In this case, the happenstance in the physical world (kids having fun combined with the deaths caused from a faulty ride) created the strange resonant mix in the Shadow, but as noted, it can go the other way, too. If the kids have fun and create a feeling of happiness, what happens when maligned spirits endeavor to change the tenor of the area to mitigate the unadulterated happiness that pervades the park? If bad spirits help to cause the rollercoaster accident in the first place, then it becomes clear that the negative resonance that enters the area was not born of the physical world — but it damn sure has an effect on it, killing many.

Resonance has two primary results in and out of the Shadow. The first is how resonance alters the landscape and its surroundings. In the Shadow, this change is often pronounced. In the rollercoaster accident, the Shadowy reflection of the rollercoaster grows dark, its trestles more like spider webs than metal girders, and the track may drip with fresh blood or grow quivering teeth. In the physical world, however, the physical change is far more subtle, providing only a slight shift that's often evident only in hindsight. The rollercoaster trestle and track grow rusty instead of dripping blood. The shadows cast by the ride seem longer, darker, but only when seen out of one's peripheral view.

The second result is that of spirits. A sudden and strong growth of a particular resonance can both cre-

ate and summon spirits. The rollercoaster accident may spawn spirits of malfunction, grief and fear. The accident may also summon the same kinds of spirits that come to feed off the energy *and* one another. Grief-spirits consume other grief-spirits and grow in power as they do so. The physical world is affected in proportion to the success of these spirits. If one spirit becomes a dominant predator, more powerful than others of other types, that spirit's resonance begins to take over the physical world. If fear-spirits thrive above all others, then the park grows to take on an anxious and fearful mood: children wail as they're dragged on rides, parents chew at their fingernails worrying about whether one of those Tilt-A-Whirl cars will unhinge and hurtle away from the mechanical monster, ride operators grow so afraid of making a mistake that they start *making mistakes*... which only helps grow and create more fear.

It's possible, too, that the resonance of happiness has long been so dominant that it wins out in the end. Mad spirits with toothy grins help to foster more of the mad, heady brew of *fun-fun-fun*, and soon the darkness of the park fades. But even this might be a bad thing. Unmitigated happiness means that parents take more risks, children gleefully play where they're not supposed to and those ride operators are so high on life and giddiness that they don't even *care* what happens to people. Happiness unchecked is just as bad as unmitigated fear.



Duality

Think of it this way: resonance represents a war fought on two fronts. Human actions and emotions frame and shape the Shadow, but spirits conspire to discolor the world according to *their* needs, not the needs of humans. Mortals don't realize that the world is acted on by an invisible chorus of entities whose only needs and wants are selfish. So, while mortals are theoretically in control of how an area shifts and changes per its resonance, spirits scheme to set their own ideas and events in motion. Ignorant humans don't recognize the puppet strings tied to their limbs — but so, too, can spirits underestimate just how easily humans can change things without even meaning to, clipping those puppet strings for a time so they can bring happi-

ness or havoc to the world. And so the war continues; between human and spirit, the resonance of the two worlds shifts, tumbles and roils.

Wall Between Worlds

The two worlds remain separate despite their interactions with one another, and for this, humans should be glad. The invisible border that holds the two worlds from crashing together is most commonly called the Gauntlet, though occult tomes and practitioners have many names for it (the Wall, the Scar, the Barricade, the Cage). One Gnostic Christian sorcerer, keeper of the Gospel of Sandalphon, calls the Gauntlet “God’s Hands,” as the text depicts God and his angels holding the worlds apart with great strain and effort. (More information on lore and beliefs regarding the Gauntlet can be found in the previous chapter.)

Membranes Thick and Thin

The strength of the Gauntlet, a measure how firmly it keeps the worlds apart, depends upon a number of factors, many inscrutable to most human minds. A good rule of thumb is that the more people present in an area, the stronger the Gauntlet there. Why this is remains a subject of debate amidst occult scholars and Shadow archaeologists: Is it as a result of man’s relative lack of faith? With many men together, each contributing a certain manner of conformity and disbelief, do spirits find it harder to get a hold on the corporeal world? Or is it something so simple as the strength of the herd mentality? Perhaps the larger the herd, the better it’s protected. One would expect that the rash of human activity could somehow be nourishing to the spirits, but on the other hand, is it too much noise? Does a crowd of conflicting emotions make the pickings less slim? It seems easier for a spirit to tug at the strings of a lonesome man locked away in his apartment than it is to wade into the mortal multitude and steer even one within the herd.

Whatever the case, suburban and urban environments tend to project stronger Gauntlets than in distant places. This isn’t universally true, of course. In some parts of the city or the suburbs, the Gauntlet grows thin, stretched out and pocked with holes. In what circumstances might this occur?

- Some parts of cities and towns remain derelict and unused. Consider portions of the city that are

burned out, or houses that have been foreclosed on due to drug, prostitution or murder arrests. Abandoned places sit hollow and empty, gathering little more than vagrants and rats. The longer this happens, the longer a city ignores these places and the people look away whenever they pass (or simply choose never to pass at all), the thinner the Gauntlet grows. Other empty places might include water towers, closed-up subway tunnels or whole neighborhoods that have gone back to nature.

- A moment of powerful action or emotion may lower the Gauntlet for a time. This is no small thing, and should be something on par with a 10-car pile-up, a mass suicide, an explosion on the subway. One car accident or suicide doesn’t lower the Gauntlet, but many of them in one place at one time certainly can. (Old apocryphal tales told by occultists and investigators claim that some bitter, power-hungry fools try to create such moments of mass horror and emotion in an effort to find a way across the wall between worlds.) Generally, this weakening of the Gauntlet only lasts for a time — maybe a day, a week at the most. Some become permanent, and become loci (see below).

- Not all places in cities and towns are without faith. Churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other holy locations tend to have lowered Gauntlets. However, faith needn’t only be placed in these expected religions. Strange and dark faiths seed and grow in the cities, hiding away in old warehouses or tenement apartments. One group may worship an old Diebold voting machine, believing that it tells them their fate. Another cult might venerate the antlered god Cernunnos, believing that he will soon come to restore the venal metropolis to its primal wild. Several cities on the Eastern seaboard are rumored to be plagued by terrorist cells that accept that the world is under the thumb of ancient Atlantean kings. To destroy the power of these invisible monarchs, the terrorists must obliterate the physical landmarks that form the tent poles of the kings’ power. All of these groups tend to gather in their strange little shrines and sanctuaries, and in them, the Gauntlet suffers.

Gauntlet Strength

While the strength of the Gauntlet varies from place to place, you can assume the chart below is generally true. This chart supplies a Strength rating, as well as dice modifiers. These modifiers are applied to

any roll made on behalf of a character or spirit that involves looking across or crossing over the Gauntlet.

Location	Strength	Dice Modifier
Dense urban areas	5	-3
City suburbs, towns	4	-2
Small towns, villages	3	-1
Wilderness, countryside	2	0
Loci	1	+1
Verge*	0	n/a

*For more information on "Verges," see p. 52.



Peeking Across

Most mortals don't even know that the Shadow exists, much less how to look across the Gauntlet to see that other world. Some find ways to peer across accidentally, while others purposefully find the means to pierce the wall and stare — if only for a moment

— upon the Shadow Realm. Below are a handful of examples.

Minturn Mirrors

Arthur Minturn crafted mirrors that were popular among the wealthy during the Victorian period. These double-frame mirrors feature ostentatious scrollwork at the top and bottom of the piece. The finish is usually a rich fruitwood color, and the mirrored glass has a faint hint of red brass.

Minturn was also a child killer. In his small workshop in Llangollen, Wales, the mirror-maker had children brought to him from London. These children were mostly urchins, scruffy things picked up off the street — the sons of whores, the lost children of butchers and so on. Minturn believed that he could store parts of his soul in mirrors so that he would live a longer life. Each mirror that he made, he cut a child's throat so that the blood would spill upon the finish. (Some speculate that this is why Minturn mirrors have such a brassy reflection, not because of any chemical finish but because of this memory of blood.) Of course, Arthur was wrong about the mirrors granting him extra life: he died of tuberculosis in his late 40s.

A majority of his mirrors — of which he'd made hundreds — were destroyed. Some remain, possibly as many as two dozen. Those who look into one of these



mirrors feel it pulling at their eyes. If they continue to look, a Wits + Composure roll is necessary, penalized by a number of dice established by the strength of the Gauntlet in the area where the mirror hangs (see above sidebar for Gauntlet Strength dice modifiers). Success indicates that the character still sees the world reflected, but what's reflected behind him is now indicative of the Shadow, not of the corporeal world. This only lasts for a number of turns equal to the character's Resolve + Stamina. After this point, the character is forced to blink (it begins to hurt the eyes) and look away. The effect ends when one looks away.

Red Mescaline

Some cacti, such as the Peruvian Fence Post cactus or the peyote cactus, produce a hallucinogenic alkaloid that can be extracted and distilled down to a substance called mescaline. Depending on how it is distilled, it may be smoked, swallowed or injected.

Scorpions sometimes find shelter in cacti, and occasionally will hollow out the cacti mentioned above to have little scorpion babies. These scorpions, when dried, crushed and added to the mescaline, make a more potent hallucinogen whose trip is shorter but significantly more intense. This "red mescaline," named as such not because of the color of the drug but because of the faint scarlet hue that seems to color one's peripheral vision, was used by some Indian tribes in rare, heretical rituals.

Taking the drug causes a surprisingly brief 30-minute "trip." The hallucinations born as a result of the drug occur within a few minutes, and are at first severe and unrelated to anything reflected in the Shadow. By the 15-minute mark, however, those hallucinations fade, and the character can begin to see, with some clarity, into the Shadow Realm (though he may not realize that this is what he's seeing). Wherever he goes, he can see into the Shadow (see below for more information on the reflections and geography found there). This lasts for the latter half of the trip, or about 15 minutes. No roll is necessary. The strength of the Gauntlet is irrelevant.

Taking the drug has other effects, of course. All dice pools lose three dice during this time. Defense is halved (round down). The Irrationality derangement is gained for the half-hour in which the trip is active, as well as two hours after the trip ends. If, before taking the drug, a character possesses any of the mild derangements such as Fixation, Suspicion or Vocalization, the character "upgrades" to the severe derangement of Schizophrenia for the next six hours.

Ritual of the Pin

The kids' urban legend about sticking a needle or pin in the pupil of the eye without any pain is a lie. The pain is intense as the point pierces the conjunctiva and the cornea.

But it does give the opportunity to see past the Gauntlet. If the character is capable of mustering the guts to stab himself in the center of his eye with a thin metal object (a Resolve + Composure roll may be necessary to summon the courage), he may then roll Wits + Occult. This roll is penalized by a number of dice appropriate to the Gauntlet's strength (see sidebar above).

If the roll is successful, the character can see past the Gauntlet with that *one* eye for a full hour. (He must close his "good" eye to gain the vision.)

Of course, sticking a pin in one's eye causes one automatic lethal level of damage. If medical attention isn't sought within 12 hours, the character runs the risk of going blind in that eye.

Places of Power

Some places are marked by a Gauntlet that's weak, strong or utterly nonexistent. These locations are unique, and represent anomalies in the physical world. Most mortals are ignorant of them, either running afoul of them before it's too late to save themselves. Other humans, such as those with the Unseen Sense Merit, intuitively feel something "off" about such an area — their mouths go dry, hairs stand up at full attention and their guts go sour.

Loci

As noted, the weight of history and the outpouring of strong or sudden emotion can mark an area in both the Shadow Realm and the physical world. It can be an immediate thing: a protracted session of torture creates such agony and grief that the emotions are like a knife plunging through the fabric of both worlds, pinning the two together in that one spot. It can also be a long, protracted event: if in that cell men have been tortured for four decades every night, their moans and screams trapped between four cement walls, over time the Gauntlet rots and tears.

A *locus* is the result in many cases. A locus is an object in the physical world that acts as an anchor drawing the worlds close through a very thin Gauntlet. While many physical objects retain reflections in the Shadow, this is more than just a reflection. An object made to be the basis of a locus is indelibly marked with

the resonance left upon it; its potent impression draws down the Shadow into the corporeal world.

The impression carries a particular resonance, marked by one or two key emotions. The emotion can be anything that a human can feel in extreme portions: sadness, hate, euphoria, rage, unrequited love. It's never a minor emotion; a man exhibiting discontent over his job does not help to create a locus. A man who loathes his job so profoundly that he is driven to murder his co-workers in a ritualistic manner might contribute to the birth of a locus.

Examples might include the following:

- A prison cell toilet upon which an inmate sat every day, repenting for his crime by cutting a new mark in his arm. He weeps and bleeds. His guilt is so powerful it creates a low-level locus. (The metal toilet is the locus.)

- A man hates the fact that his wife has been cheating on him. He takes her and their four children out to the yard and, in his irrevocable rage, murders them against the white bedsheets hanging upon the clothing line. The shotgun blasts leave red marks across those sheets. With the dissolution of his family, the man inadvertently creates a locus. (The sheets on the clothesline represent one locus.)

- Every day, a whore takes new men to her bed. In this dirty room, they do their business, and they pay well for their pleasures. Unbeknownst to them, she's HIV positive and knows it, willingly transmitting the disease because she finds men vile due to an abusive childhood. Night after night, year after year, a locus grows. (The bed becomes the locus.)

Objectification

Loci are almost exclusively based upon individual objects, many of which sit fixed to the area: a tree, a jungle gym, an old radio antenna. They *can* be movable items such as a car, a lamp, an old tuxedo jacket, but most loci stay where they are, and moving them can obviate their spiritual potential. Why this is remains a mystery, though some speculate that it has to do with the nature of an item that remains fixed to its location: there it can collect the stagnant resonance, pooling emotion in a single area. (This means that in some cases, the object itself is irrelevant to the emotional resonance. A phone booth may

be the focus of the emotion without being specifically *tied* to that emotion.)

On rare occasions, a locus can be an entire location (a house or a tract of land), but such instances require truly unprecedented outpourings of emotion, horror or violence. For the most part, the emotion seems to fix on an object *at* the effected location. Instead of a highway being the locus, a rust-pocked speed limit sign might instead become the actual focal point of the locus. Instead of a house, it's the door, or a brick or the furnace downstairs.

In even more extraordinary situations, *people* can become loci. Those rare few who do end up as spiritual lynchpins connecting the realms are never the ones who enacted the emotion: it's never the murderer, in other words. No, that person is often the focal point of the emotion — the unrequited love, the intended target for assassination, the political figure earning a new investment of hate every second he remains alive. It's truly uncommon, and those who do become loci don't often remain that way for long. They become the targets for possession, or are killed for their presumed power or curse.

Size and Effect

Most loci are of relatively small power, affecting the physical world and Shadow around them by a radius of no more than a handful of yards. The more powerful the event (or emotion surrounding said event), the more powerful the locus that is created. With greater power, so grows the radius of the worlds that become affected. Time, too, may cause a locus to grow in its power. If the locus goes relatively undisturbed by those who might filch its power (mages, werewolves, spirits, ghosts), the locus's radius may slowly creep outward — a steady drift of invisible shadow.

The effect felt in the physical world is subtle, largely unnoticeable. Some generic effects are possible: those passing by may feel uneasy or grow either tired or agitated. (As noted above, those with Unseen Sense feel more specific effects.) Other loci may enflame pre-existing emotional states, usually as a reflection of the locus's own resonance. A locus founded upon great

anger does not *create* anger in a human nearby, but the locus may take already existing anger and agitate it like gas on a campfire. A locus born of obsessive, implacable love may take sentimental feelings within a passerby and turn them dark, casting them in shadows of compulsion and lust. In instances in which this is likely, a character may be required to succeed on a Resolve + Composure roll, with a number of dice subtracted from the roll equal to the rating of the locus (see below sidebar for these ratings). Success indicates that the emotional flare-up is resisted. Failure agitates the emotion and stokes its intensity.

Those effects felt in the Shadow are far greater than the mere tremors of emotion that pass through the corporeal realm. In the Shadow, the locus's resonance takes on powerful representations: the aforementioned locus of anger may look like a room overturned and half-destroyed. Chairs might seem busted into splinters, and huge hunks of wall are gouged out as if by bestial claws. In the case of the locus bent around dark love and possessive lust, an area might stink of lusty perfume, and walls might have pictures of hearts-and-arrows painted in fly-specked rivulets of blood. In the Shadow, emotion isn't just something one feels; it's something that exists as a living, breathing reflection of what comes from the physical world. (More on the geography and nature of the Shadow Realm is found later in this chapter.)

Locus Influence

The following table provides ratings and guidelines to indicate a locus's general radius of effect. Most loci are rated at one or two dots; only truly powerful events or emotions cause loci greater than that. Resonant Essence can collect and, if left to gather unchecked, *can* make a lower-rated locus into a higher-rated one, but most loci are claimed and fed from by spirits or other creatures, thus prohibiting the increase in strength and influence.

Locus Rating Zone of Influence

- Influences the immediate vicinity, no more than two yards from the locus
- Influences the area and the people up to 15 yards from the locus

- Influences a sizable area around the locus: a single floor of a building, a forest clearing, a moderately-sized group of people
- Influences entire buildings, sections of forest or large groups of people
- Influences whole city blocks, lakes or communities

Those with the Unseen Sense Merit *may* be allowed a Wits + Composure roll to determine the approximate center of a locus's radius of influence (i.e., the object that actually forms the locus's power). The human doesn't likely know what a locus is, or that the object actually comprises it, but can simply feel that the thing seems *special* somehow, as if it stands out more than other objects in the immediate area. The roll, if allowed, works only within a locus's radius of influence as noted above.

Territory

Loci are powerful magnets for some. Spirits, for one, feed off the resonant energy there (called Essence; more information on Essence can be found on p. 63). Most of the spirits that collect in a locus's Shadow generally share resonance similar to what is projected by that locus. An unused phone booth where a man took women to stab them may grow into a locus with a resonance of pain and murder. Any spirit whose own resonance is near to that of the locus (murder-spirits are the obvious choice, but less obvious might be spirits of fear, or gleaming knife-spirits). Spirits with dissimilar resonance, too, may feast upon the energy of the locus, but doing so changes them. This is discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

In the physical world, few loci go unclaimed for long. Humans who wander near a locus often discover that they are certainly not alone. While that human may have zero idea that a locus is nearby (or such a thing even exists), those who have claimed the area for themselves as territory don't tend to care. Werewolves find loci highly desirable. They're rarely alone, traveling in packs of several. Kind packs are content

to warn a human who strays close, perhaps bundling him up in tape and wire and etching the *caveat* (“Stay Away”) on that person’s chest. Others might take a digit or limb. Many, however, so fiercely protect their domain that they hunt and kill those who wander too close to the locus.

Mages, too, sometimes claim the area around loci, using the area’s weakened Gauntlet as a point of passage to the Shadow. Some don’t much care if humans are nearby; others don’t want witnesses to their strange and heretical magic, and will do whatever it takes to keep onlookers away.

If a locus isn’t claimed by these two groups, humans sometimes unwittingly gather there, serving the needs of the locus’s resonance and, more importantly, the hungers of the spirits. This isn’t a conscious thing. These mortals are rarely aware of spirits or the Shadow, but the gentle urgings of spirits creates an atmosphere in which certain groups — cults, frankly — may thrive. Below are a few such cults and the loci they inadvertently orbit and protect.

Spirits and Loci

As noted, spirits claim loci whenever they can. Why is this? They find a number of benefits from being near a locus:

- In the Shadow, spirits can conceal themselves with a locus’s surrounding area of influence. They literally hide “inside” the locus, affecting the world on both sides of the Gauntlet. This requires no roll. Those attempting to see or fight a spirit hiding in this manner will find it nearly impossible to do so, though in many cases damaging the actual locus can hurt the spirit.

- Spirits attempting to cross the Gauntlet at the locus gain a +2 bonus to doing so.

- Spirits can use their Numina across the Gauntlet at a locus without needing the Reaching Numen (see p. 137, Numina).

- If a spirit’s own nature is compliant with a locus’s resonance, the spirit heals at double the speed. A spirit of love would not be able to take advantage of this at the site of a mass grave, but spirits of murder, grief, decay, worms, carrion birds and so forth could.

Destroying a Locus

An entire story may focus upon the act of destroying a locus, thus hoping to reduce its emotional power and its spiritual nature. Note that the destruction of a locus isn’t going to be as straightforward as one might suspect.

If a character believes that, say, the husk of an old dead tree represents the focal point for a locus (he may note that odd things seem to happen around the tree, or sometimes he may see faces or shapes moving within the hollow bark or among the branches), he may hope to destroy the tree, and therefore destroy its influence.

This *might* work. If the object is critical to the fierce emotional resonance that clings to the area, then the obliteration of that object could do the trick. For instance, if the emotional resonance is one of pain and suicide because someone hanged himself from the branches of that tree many years previously, then destroying it may work. If the character burns down or chops up that tree, it might be enough to dissipate its effect. The emotional resonance weakens.

In most cases, though, it’s not so simple as destroying the focal point. Oh, it might work for a time — but eventually, the emotional resonance will refocus on a new object. The emotional effect clings like a greasy residue or bad odor, and affects both spirits and people. People may strive to replant the tree, while spirits lurk in the Shadow and hope to stir feelings of anguish and urge people toward suicidal thoughts and actions. If nobody plants a new tree, then the focus simply changes. Maybe the focus moves to an old shed, or another tree or a chair sitting on a nearby porch (a chair that the suicide victim stood upon when hanging himself).

What this means is that, characters must find a way to work against the invisible forces of that emotional resonance *in addition* to destroying the object. Attempting to create some new overriding emotion will help to sap the strength of the dominant resonance. This requires some finesse; planting a new tree or putting up a memorial only acts as a focal point for the same emotion. Somehow, the feelings of depression and suicide must be countered — for instance, characters may bring young children to play every day around the tree, thus invoking feelings of life, pleasure and playfulness. Of course, therein lies a great danger, because while one attempts to remove the negative feelings, one becomes a target for that resonance. The children could become touched by the darkness of the area — or, worse, the characters may suddenly have terrible feelings of remorse or even anger of the children, and spirits may seed thoughts in their heads about doing harm to the young ones.

In nearly every case, humans fighting the effects of a locus find themselves in a battle that is both small and epic. It’s small because, on the surface, it seems like a relatively minor thing. But it’s epic because the locus works with a kind of “mind of its own,” acting against human intervention and even attempting to subvert the

humans' minds and infect them with its own resonance. It doesn't help that loci are places where spirits gather hoping to cross over. It makes it all the more dangerous to mortals, because rarely do they suspect the full horror of what can happen to them if they go messing with things they don't properly comprehend.

Creating a Locus

For a mortal to create a locus knowingly requires powerful and difficult effort. Whether consciously attempting to do so or not, assume that forging a locus requires either a single potent event or a repetition of less powerful occurrences. One potent event might be shooting in a schoolyard, burning down a library, planting a tree thought to be extinct or building a nearly impossible piece of architecture by oneself. Several repetitious events might involve bringing murder victims to the same outhouse every time (and killing them in that outhouse), slowly poisoning the water supply, slicing an ex-wife's initials into forearm flesh day after day or acting as a midwife to 100 births in one room on one bed.

Note that many times, if too many spirits are present and consuming the resonance born of such effort, a locus will never form. This is why places of known resonance don't become loci — a hospital, for instance, is home to a number of spirits that gladly consume every bit of resonant Essence the place offers. The aforementioned midwifery, however, may not be as easily recognized by spirits. The resonance there is allowed to build without spirit intervention, and thus a locus forms more easily.

Sample Loci

See below for a number of sample loci. Each features some group that has claimed it as territory. These loci can be dropped into your story.

The Fulke House (••••)

In the abandoned part of town sits a street lined with houses once mighty. These small mansions represented the cream of the architectural crop in the '30s and '40s, but time and the economy have not been kind. Now, the string of once-great homes is left to the lost, the homeless and the strays. At the far end of the street, caddy-corner to the crumbling playground, sits the Fulke House, a four-story Victorian with dark wood and stained glass windows that remain miraculously unbroken. A few years back, a man brought bodies here into the damp basement. He did not kill these bodies, but stole the corpses from various cemeteries around the city. He then took them into the basement and talked to them as if they were his friends and family until

eventually they rotted away and were nothing more than piles of maggots and bones. Then he'd get more. Eventually, this man joined his collected friends in death, rotting there with them. This house — in specific, the cellar's cracked and half-shattered floor — became a locus of decay, and those vagrants who eventually settled there believed they could hear the walls talking to them: whispering and chattering over little feet dancing. Some eventually realized that the walls were thick with carpenter ants and termites. Some eventually began to bring more wood from other houses to this basement so that the bugs could feed, because the bugs said nice things about them and made them feel good. Now, a group of a dozen or more live there in that basement, feeding these creatures and spirits of decay, relishing in the good feeling it brings them.

The Children's Cult of Biederman's on 9th (••)

Biederman's on 9th has been the town's toy store for almost 100 years now, passed down through three generations of the Biederman family. The store always had the children's best interests at heart, never kowtowing to the big toy companies, buying only the products of the Mom-and-Pop toy producers. The Biedermans themselves made their own toys in the back: Jacob's ladders, trucks carved of wood, glittering mobiles to hang above a baby's crib. It wasn't long ago that the last Biederman, Torvald, died childless and alone in his workshop, clutching a delicate ceramic doll as he died. This doll became a locus, its resonance one of warring emotions: joy and regret. The town children were not content to see their favorite store closing up shop, for Torvald did not sell it or hire anyone else, and so they now sneak in every night when they can get away from their homes, climbing out windows and sneaking down drain spouts. They like how the silly doll talks to them, though they of course don't know that it's possessed by a powerful toy-spirit that just wants all these wonderful toys to be used and enjoyed. Eventually, the city's going to come and try to reclaim Biederman's, maybe turning it into something other than a toy store. When that time comes, the children won't have it. They listened to the doll, you see, and they've begun to whittle knives and spears. Anything to keep the toys safe... and *fun*.

The Epicure's Pelican (••••)

In the center of the posh club sits a porcelain urn. For three decades now, businessmen have come here. They eat well, they make deals, they tell rude jokes. Then they vomit in the massive urn and return to their table so that they may eat more. This club, called the Pelican, seems ostensibly about greed — after all, many of the city's biggest real estate and business deals

happen within the posh club's four walls. But the true aura that pervades is the power of gluttony, and that is what has formed a locus of that gleaming white urn in the center of the room. Maids come and empty the regurgitate (it takes four of them to lift and carry the urn away, emptying it in a slaughterhouse drain adjacent to the kitchen), and then return it to that it may be filled anew. The club wasn't always this way — it was once just big hearty men divvying up their wealth. But these so-called epicures were allowed to consume unchecked, and the years have formed a practice similar to the old vomitoriums of ancient Rome. Those who walk near the club's outside can't help but feel... hungry.

Loci and Verges in Stories

We've already established that loci and verges are places with stories. They don't pop up randomly. Events and emotions infuse these places. History big and small leaves its mark — whether this history is from the Civil War or a civil suit in a murder trial, each locus and verge is marked with a potential story to uncover.

Make use of this. It's possible that such a place becomes the focal point of an entire story. Uncovering history is more than a series of Research rolls; it's about characters asking questions of uncomfortable people, about being hunted for trying to dig up information on "something ought not be told." What happens when such a place is tied to the characters' own stories? Are the characters all siblings whose mother was raped and murdered at the site of a locus (either forming the locus itself, or as the result of her stumbling onto someone else's "territory")? Do the characters purchase a piece of real estate upon which waits a verge? Are they suddenly plagued by squealing hog-spirits, all muddy and bloody, because the land was once a farm where the farmer fed his competitors to the hungry pigs? Not only can these places provide the backbone for an entire story, they can also serve as an excellent introduction to the Shadow for a larger, longer chronicle.

Verges

Sometimes, the Gauntlet in an area isn't merely thin — it's nonexistent. Doorways open between the

realms, usually in a temporary fashion, and the wall between the worlds dims to such feeble strength that for practical purposes it does not exist at all. Some verges are one-way: spirits can come in to the physical world from the Shadow, or humans can enter the Shadow from the physical world. (Woe to the human who accidentally steps through one of these, and finds that the exit is not the same as the entrance.) Others open both ways, allowing for entities to cross freely between the two frequencies of reality.

Verge Characteristics

Verges subscribe to a number of general conditions. These factors are neither hard nor firm, but they are to be expected.

- Verges do not happen in places where a lot of people gather. While that makes it less likely that a verge will be found in an urban area, it doesn't make it impossible; it only needs to happen out of sight. (Think of an abandoned rooftop, subterranean water tunnel or fire-gutted hotel.) One verge was said to open in the midst of 100 people in a hurricane shelter: except they were all asleep, and so the verge could open.

- An opening verge gives few if any telltale signs of its opening. What's perhaps most eerie about a verge is that nothing seems different. A character sees no shimmering portal or yawning black hole — she simply steps over an invisible line and that's it, she's in the Shadow. If a verge gives off any physical signs of its opening, they tend to be subtle: washed-out colors, a faint white noise hum, a breeze kicked up out of nowhere that smells of childhood memories.

- Those with the Unseen Sense Merit may make a Wits + Composure roll before stepping over the invisible line that marks a verge's gateway. Success on this roll indicates that the person feels strange — strange enough to pause in mid-step before crossing that threshold.

- Verges don't move. They are tied to one area, which may be an invisible point in the middle of a field, or something more specific such as an actual doorway or archway. While some ancient books talk of verges that roam about according to no easily discernable pattern, no evidence of these verges has yet been found.

- Spirits that come through a verge appear in the physical world existing in a state of Twilight (more information on Twilight can be found on p. 101 of this book, as well as pp. 209–210 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**).

Keyed Verges

Some verges are what arcane scholars refer to as “keyed verges,” or verges that open only when a certain number of elements (the so-called keys) are in place. The greater number of keys required generally indicates the length of time the verge will remain open. A single key necessary only opens the verge for an hour or less. But five keys may keep the verge open for five hours. If the keys are highly specified instead of generally vague (“Father Mooney’s skull” instead of “a priest’s skull” or even less specific, “a human skull”), they may extend the time the verge is open for an even greater length.

The following are examples of potential keys, and the categories into which they fall:

- **Temporal:** A key based on a factor of time. Examples may be broad (“on a winter’s night”) or incredibly specific (“at midnight on Devil’s Night”). Some may happen with relative frequency, whether it means noon on any given day or the first Sunday of February. Others may happen on very specific dates: “November 22nd, 2007.”

- **Conditional:** Keys based on conditional elements tend to be things outside of a ritualist’s direct control. The key might be that it needs to be hot, even specifying “above 100 degrees outside.” The key might require there to be a full moon in the sky, or an eclipse to have happened within the last 12 hours.

- **Sacrificial:** Some verges require the active sacrifice of certain items. One verge might need seven drops of blood spilled on the ground, while another might require a whole live pig be slaughtered and burned atop a stack of wood and dried sage. Sacrifice involves the surrender and destruction of anything at all. Some verges require intensely personal sacrifices, such as the burning of a box of love letters or even the life of a loved one.

- **Ritual Objects:** A verge may require the presence of a certain object to open. These objects are not sacrificial (as they aren’t meant to be destroyed), or conditional (as they are within the power of a character to bring to the area of a verge). The ritual item might be relatively non-specific (“a human tooth” or “four empty bottles”), or may instead be very specific (“the canine tooth plucked from the corpse of Maybelle Greene” or “four brown bottles made of Depression-era blue-glass and filled with swamp-water”).

When creating or considering a keyed verge, a good rule of thumb is that the keys are meant to add up to a kind of story. The keys aren’t random. They come together and give the impression of a greater story.

When attempting to figure out the keys necessary to open a potential verge, characters should be allowed Research rolls (involving Academics, Investigation or Occult) to allow them to investigate and uncover the stories that may hint at potential keys. Assume that two successes are necessary for each key (unless a key is wildly strange or specific, in which case it may require three successes). A Research roll to uncover a verge-related story should take about a day per roll.

Players attempting such a roll shouldn’t be given a target number of successes to hit. As the successes mount, the story should build, and a character can stop whenever he wants whether or not he’s managed the successes necessary.

Example: The characters have heard that Carriage Hill is a place where the worlds sometimes “grow together” (i.e., a verge). To uncover the story around this place, one of them hits the library in the middle of the old town just past Carriage Hill. The Storyteller knows that four keys are necessary to open the keyed verge, and so eight successes are required. On the first roll, the character manages four successes; in that first day, he discovers a part of the story. Apparently at Carriage Hill, a mob punished a falsely convicted rapist by hanging him from a tree at midnight. The local museum has the rapist’s shoes and the noose used to hang him on display. This doesn’t tell the character the keys specifically, but it gives him an idea: maybe the shoes, the noose or midnight. Satisfied, he goes off, thinking he may have the proper keys. He has two of them (noose, midnight) in mind, but two more still wait that he doesn’t know about. Eventually, he or another character will have to continue Researching the story to gain more insight into the possible keys that may open the Carriage Hill verge.

Below are a few examples of keyed verges that may be fleshed out and dropped into a **World of Darkness** story.

Poet House Orphanage

In 1930, the Poet House Orphanage caught fire. One of the boys upstairs held a small oil lamp under his sheets so that he could read a letter from another boy. The blanket caught fire, and the boy fled. The rest of the orphanage, however, burned to the ground, killing 17 children and three of the children’s keepers. To this day, the old brick building stands gutted, its walls marked with char-marks that look like hands. The boy who escaped, Kenny Clymer, died as an old man just a few years back. The second floor of the orphanage is a keyed verge. Three keys are necessary to open it: it must be nighttime (temporal), a part of Kenny Clymer’s body

must be present (ritual object) and a personal handwritten letter must be burned (sacrificial). Once open, the verge remains one-way for three hours.

The Bucket Tree

Donny and Pete Corrigan were brothers who worked in tandem as serial killers. They killed their victims and kept some of the victims' items in tin pails hung from a knobby walnut tree that sat out back of their shack deep in the woods. The brothers believed this protected them from "evil spirits" (though it did quite the opposite). Donny and Pete died in a brutal shootout not far from the Bucket Tree. Cops came to arrest them, and the two brothers saw their lives ended in a hail of gunfire. That was 30 years ago. The shack is now a moldering set of four walls collapsing in on each other. The pails and victims' items have long since been removed from the Bucket Tree. But those eager can provide the keys to open a verge at the base of that tree. Four keys are necessary. The first three are ritual objects, whereupon characters must hang three items from the branches of the tree: a metal bucket or pail, any one item that the Corrigan brothers stole from one of their victims and a bullet pried from the rotten wood of their old ramshackle house. The fourth item is conditional. The verge will only open when the cicadas are heard buzzing in the forest, just like they were on the day those two brothers were shot to death at their home. This verge remains open for four hours.

Gravity Hill

On Buckingham Mountain (more of a hill than a mountain, really), the kids talk about the "Gravity Hill" phenomenon, whereupon the ghosts of those killed in a terrible car accident will push your car up the hill. The car accident part is true, but in reality, no ghosts exist here — but the accident did create a verge. Five keys are necessary to open this verge: characters must be sitting in a car (ritual object or conditional), the headlights must be off (conditional), it must be midnight (temporal), someone has to spit three times on the ground (sacrificial) and honk the horn three times (conditional). This keyed verge breaks the rules, however, by opening for only five seconds. If the kids drive through it — and they often do — they're in the Shadow. Spirits, too, may exit at that point, lending credence to the fear of ghosts on that strange and lonely road.

Persistent Verges

Some verges remain open all the time. These persistent verges are almost universally gateways of some

kind — a doorway in an old house, a stone arch in the middle of a labyrinthine forest, a manhole with the cover rusted shut and welded with alien sigils. They are, of course, uncommon. A city may feature two or three persistent verges. The countryside and wilderness may have a verge every 100 miles or so. The strange thing about persistent verges is that, unlike keyed verges, persistent verges don't seem the result of any particular point of history or outpouring of emotion. They seem coincidental at best, utterly unrelated to a region's history or people. A boarded-up doorway in the mansion on the hill doesn't lead to the Shadow because of any murder or due to protracted decades of anguished incest. No, it's just representative of a strange pinprick, a hole between worlds that may just be due to a potentially necessary erosion of the Gauntlet.

However, while history may not have caused persistent verges, it certainly mentions them at least in a folkloric context. Many of the doorways between worlds are known by the people, if not consciously, then unconsciously through their stories and fears. A few examples wait below.

The Attic Window

The topmost window of the old colonial Trevayne farmhouse built of ancient stone has long been sealed up. The boards that nail the window closed, along with the plastic tarp stapled to those boards, seem egregious and detract from the historical presence of the home. But the matron of the house, if pressed, will tell the story of how the original owner of the house killed himself more than 150 years ago. Garrison Trevayne hanged himself out that window, with the rope bound to one of the attic rafters, so she says. It's not true, this story, but she believes it because her mother believed it. The reality is, the window is just a hole through the worlds, a persistent verge leading into the Shadow.

The Rose Doors

They're found in several of the world's largest cities: New York, London, Beijing, Calcutta. You find them in alleys, always at the far end where you can go no further. The Rose Door is an archway, often strangely beautiful for the area of the city in which it sits. The way is always open, always inviting. Just past the archway sits a beautiful rose, lush and full despite the time of year. The fragrance is alluring. It's hard not to step through the archway to look at the rose, maybe to smell it, maybe to pick it. But stepping through is a one-way trip to the Shadow. Who built these verges? Why are the initials AKV carved into the stone on the corporeal side of the archway? Nobody knows.

But destroying them doesn't help; they always seem to appear somewhere else.

Antenna to Nowhere

In the middle of the scrubland, not far from where the desert sands whip past the tall saguaro cactuses, an old rusty antenna sits atop a square shack made of corrugated metal. The antenna is mostly dead. Sometimes owls nest atop it. So, too, hawks or lizards. Occasionally, the thing buzzes and hums to life before settling back down into silence. The shack itself has a red door that seems freshly painted, but nobody knows how or why that could be the case. The door is locked with three deadbolts, and nobody knows who holds the keys. UFO freaks and other Fortean researchers come to this antenna sometimes, as the skies above it are often the playground for strange lights and dark shapes. Aliens? Angels? Inter-dimensional travelers? Maybe. What they all know is that it seems a beacon for odd sightings, but what they *want* to know is what's behind that red door, and why nobody can seem to get it open. If they ever were to open it — maybe with a crowbar, or maybe by blowing those locks and hinges with a shotgun — they'd find a dark doorway straight into the Shadow Realm. They'd also find a number of bad spirits, long imprisoned there and hungry for release.



The Maps of Mister Gerlach

Characters may find a book of maps strung together with circles of twine driven through punched holes. Maybe they find it in the basement of an old uncle who dies unexpectedly and leaves them his double-wise "estate." Maybe someone leaves the book on their front stoop in a garbage bag, bound up with a rubber band and left with a note that says, in lovely calligraphy, 'for you.' However, the book comes into their possession, the maps in this homespun book range far and wide. Both local and far from local: cities, suburbs, tracts of land belonging to the government, old mines, subway tunnels, the whole enchilada. On each map, someone — presumably the Mister Gerlach who wrote the introduction in German on a grungy food-flecked napkin — has circled key points in red. If characters go to these points, they will find verges both keyed and persistent. They may not know that this is what they find, but it is.



Anomalies

Verges and loci are not the only parts where the Gauntlet exists in an anomalous form. Other, rarer exceptions to the rule exist, and in the physical realm these places can be both bizarre and dangerous. Below are a number of these Gauntlet anomalies, each with an according example.

Dead Spots

Dead spots are the opposite of verges: here, the Gauntlet is so high that that it actually exceeds the highest "known" ratings as noted above (assume that it has a Strength rating of 6 and a dice modifier of -4). For some reason, something has fortified the Gauntlet often by sheer will alone. In these places, emotion feels deadened, and colors almost seem to drain out of the world. Things may seem decayed. The wind appears still, and water grows stagnant. Dust blows, and when it rains it only seems grayer.

This has lead some occult scholars to suggest that the physical world absolutely needs the Shadow, and to be totally cut off from it can kill it, like a flower uprooted from the dirt. Why does such a place get cut off? Nobody really knows, but history often points to a single individual in the area who has gone through such great trauma that his sheer psychic fear and resolve helps close off the worlds from one another.

Dead spots subscribe to the following rules:

- Resistance rolls, similar to those used to resist giving into urges or to deny supernatural mind powers, are given a +2 dice bonus. Empathy and Expression rolls, however, suffer -2 dice.

- Creatures of some spirit, be they mages, Ridden, werewolves or spirits, all feel some form of pain in a dead spot. This pain, often in the form of a headache, confers a persistent -2 dice penalty on all rolls. For these creatures, that means that Empathy and Expression rolls actually function at a base -4 dice penalty.

- A dead spot stays in one area, much as a verge or locus. A dead spot rarely bigger than a 100-yard radius from its center. A dead spot may encompass a small building or the floor of a larger building, but nothing bigger.

- Dead spots are ostensibly caused by a single individual (who likely has no idea that he caused this dead area). To obviate the effects of a dead spot, the individual must either spend a full Willpower dot to end his own mental effect, or someone must kill that individual. Upon his death, the dead spot's effects cease suddenly.

- A dead spot corresponds with a Barren in the Shadow (see p. 73). A place can be a Barren without

it being officially a dead spot; but a dead spot always ends up as a Barren in the Shadow.

The End of Lucky Lane

Lucky Lane is the small road the cuts into the heart of the Emerald Bay Trailer Park (an ironic name, as the grass is mostly brown and there's not a body of water within 50 miles). This crooked gravel road dead-ends at the back of the trailer park, and at the base of this crumbling cul-de-sac sits a trailer that remains the focus for a dead spot. A teen boy named Curtis lives there with his mother. His stepfather lies in the tub, dead. He's been that way for about six months, since Curtis beat him to death with an aluminum baseball bat. See, that stepfather abused Curtis's mother every night right after dinner. It was almost ritualized. The night Curtis reared up and killed that old man was the night the dead spot formed around the teenager. The boy became more withdrawn than usual. He doesn't speak. He simply attends to his mother (who had a nervous breakdown that night and hasn't spoken since), goes out and buys meager groceries or steals food and then returns. They live in relative filth, and the dead spot has made everything seem washed-out, moribund and sober. Even the flies that once came to gather on the tub-bound corpse simply drop out of the sky, as if the air is too thin to hold up their little wings.

Rat Nests

Massive proliferations of rats often seem to correspond with a weakened Gauntlet. The rats, chewing away in the walls or beneath the floor, seem to be doing more than gnawing holes in this world — they seem to be gnawing holes *between* the worlds. At first, the rats remain unseen; the only sign of their passage is the sound of distant chewing and the occasional leavings of rat shit. But over time, they breed and grow their massive colony, and the sight of them becomes impossible to ignore. Peer deep in a heating vent, and one might see a writhing clot of brown or black rats crammed in the rusted duct. Generally, the rat nest isn't itself a Gauntlet anomaly, but the presence of such a nest causes the Gauntlet thin out over time, eventually forming a locus or even a verge. Rules for rat nests are as follows:

- Assume that once the rat colony reaches a size of 100 rats, the Gauntlet begins to wear thin. It drops by approximately one level of its Strength rating per week. If the rat colony invades a building where the Gauntlet rating is 4, after three weeks it will have dropped to a Gauntlet rating of 1, thus creating a locus there. (Many such loci become Wounds. See p. 76 for more information on Wounds.)

- The rating remains at 1 until the rat nest triples in size to at least 300 rats — if this happens and the Gauntlet is rated at 1, another month later the area may play host to a verge instead of a locus.

- Every time the Gauntlet drops in and around a rat nest, something unusual happens. It's rarely dangerous, and is usually just an odd event that heralds the shift: all the clock alarms go off in a building, the lights dim and buzz, all the drawers in a building slide open or the food spoils.

- If a character must make a roll to resist poison or disease (see p. 49, **World of Darkness Rulebook**), he suffers a penalty of -3 dice to that roll when in the general area (within 200 yards) of the rat nest and lowered Gauntlet.

The Mary Marie

Most rat nests are stationary, locked into a single place. But the *Mary Marie* is an old fishing boat — and is also home to a rat colony of nearly 200 rats. The ship's belly swarms with fat wharf rats, and the Gauntlet upon the boat is low enough that it plays host to a locus (focused largely upon the mast). The captain of the boat is long dead, but one wouldn't know that from looking at him. He seems alive, up and walking around the deck of the *Mary Marie* while the rats seethe in a knot below deck. Sometimes the boat pulls into harbor somewhere, and the good captain heads for shore. He goes, picks up supplies — food mostly, lots of confectionary goodness. While the boat remains docked, some rats leave and more come onboard. Then the captain returns to his vessel, and she heads out again for weeks at a time. Somewhere out on the ocean, the *Mary Marie* bobs and floats. Occasionally, another fishing boat sees the *Mary Marie*, and through salt-dotted binoculars a fisherman might see the captain on the deck, opening his mouth and letting a stream of a dozen rats clamber free from his lips.

Rat Men

Where some rat colonies dwell, people sometimes see things that others may not believe. Some claim to see man-sized piles of rats, shaped with limbs and an apparent head, but made of writhing rodents instead of stable flesh. Others have seen rats the size of rottweilers, some of which seem capable of walking on their hind legs and talking in a gurgling, guttural human tongue.

Spider Webs

Much as rats sometimes represent the degradation of the Gauntlet, an odd proliferation of spiders may lead to the sudden strengthening of that spiritual wall. An abandoned hotel, a crumbling ski lodge, a copse of gnarled trees — anywhere might be the home for these spiders, who sometimes form massive interconnected webs in the rafters or branches, diaphanous wisps that can only be seen in certain lights.

These spiders seem difficult to remove. Traditional pesticides appear to work, but the spiders only return days later — sometimes bigger, plumper. What's strange, too, is that these networks of webs don't seem to house one type of spider; instead, several species seem to live together where normally they might consume one another. A brown recluse hides in a cubbyhole not far from where an orb spider builds its dizzying architecture.

What's most frightening of all is that from time to time, animals or people near this preponderance of spiders go missing. The neighbors might come poking around, wondering if anybody has seen their cat. A week later, the neighbors go missing, and now the spiders can be found in *their* house, too.

The following rules apply when dealing with the spiders and their strange webs:

- The presence of these spiders — not any spiders, but *these* spiders, whatever they may be — helps increase the Gauntlet in that area. Slowly, as webs spin, the Gauntlet grows thick. Every week, the Gauntlet increases by one. This increase is not marked by any particular feelings or odd events. Its thickening goes by so subtly that few notice it. (Those with the Unseen Sense Merit may feel it as an odd and sudden silence, or a quick chill in the air.)

- Assume that maybe one out of five spiders in such a situation are venomous. They tend to inject venom with a Toxicity of 3 to 5, sometimes more (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 180).

Black Branch Campground

Not far from Maine's Mount Katahdin and waiting a few miles off the Appalachian Trail sits a small abandoned hiking ranch and unused campground. Nobody watches over it. Park rangers know it's there, but they claim it's not their "jurisdiction," and besides, "nobody camps there anyway." Most people heed the silent warning and stay away. Others hear an unspoken beacon and decide that it could be just the place to get away from civilization for awhile, or maybe to throw down with a big party. Most people don't notice the spiders right away, as the eight-legged creatures dwell high up in the branches

or deep in the trunks of hollowed-out trees. But as people sleep or wander away from the campground, they often go missing. Others feel disconnected and strange, almost hollow-feeling. The wise ones recognize a good time to cut bait and run, leaving the missing behind. Most, though, aren't so wise, and mount searches for their lost friends and family. Maybe it takes them to the caves where the *other* spiders lurk — these ones as big as dogs. Usually, those people go missing, too.

Step Into Shadow

It is rare, but not impossible, that a human finds his way into the Shadow Realm. The spirit world is not a safe place for mages and werewolves; it is less so for mortals. Around every corner, at every intersection, and within every copse of trees wait untold dangers where a human may lose his life — or worse, his very soul.

Down the Rabbit Hole

How is it that a character might find himself entering the Shadow? Aside from werewolves crossing over at a locus or a mage using Spirit magic to push past the Gauntlet, other characters have a few ways of entering the Shadow, be it accidentally or deliberately.

- Verges open, and a character may unwittingly or willfully enter at that point. Many verges are one-way, however. A character who enters through a one-way verge will need to find a separate way *out*. Even if the verge opens both ways, a character may not even know he's *in* the Shadow until he's too far from the verge to mount a proper return.

- Some spirits can drag humans through the Gauntlet through use of Numina. Both Abduct and Threshold in particular are useful when considering how a human might end up in the Shadow. (Spirit powers and rules can be found in the following two chapters.)

- Chapters Three and Four are peppered with new ways to see and enter the Shadow.

Another Way Across

Only werewolves can cross to the Shadow at a locus. Unless...

Sometimes, the Shadow bleeds through at what might be considered a microscopic level. The Shadow seems capable of invading certain items, some of which can be eaten. If a character eats such an object, it's enough to cast him in the aura

of the Shadow Realm. He may spend a Willpower point and make a Resolve + Composure roll to cross. This roll is penalized by a number of dice dependent upon the strength of the Gauntlet in that particular area. The objects generally manifest at the site of loci, though a couple of these items form outside of loci (though this type of “crossing over” must still be done at a loci). This only lasts for 15 minutes after consumption, at which point the potential to cross the Gauntlet fails. The items include the following:

- Gravemold. It grows on tombstones and gravetops, a grayish-greenish fungus.
- Rust flakes. Rust at a loci (say, scraped from an old grain bin or a corroding car door) will give the character enough of the Shadow to cross, but enough rust must be consumed to fill up two tablespoons.
- Rose petals, enough to fill up a tall drinking glass. Some shamans make tea and drink it to help them cross.
- Mushrooms. Some mushrooms grow in circles around loci when possible. Only mushrooms forming such “faerie circles” work toward helping a character cross. Note that such mushrooms are poisonous and have a Toxicity rating of 3 (see “Poisons and Toxins,” the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 180–181).
- Flies. Some loci in deserted or decaying areas collect black or green flies. If seven flies can be caught and eaten, the character may attempt to cross the Gauntlet. Some shamans suggest that maggots work, too.

The following two items can be consumed outside of a locus to achieve this effect:

- Amniotic fluid and/or placentas. These have special power, containing both a life force and a spiritual force. Drinking the fluid or eating a placenta gives power to the person and allows him to potentially cross (though again, only at a locus).
- A raven’s liver. Ravens are believed to be psychopomps, carrying parts of the soul between the various worlds. Some say that eating a sparrow’s liver — the sparrow being another psychopompic bird — does the same trick.

Logistics

When mortals or other characters find their way into the Shadow, questions of logistics arise. How does

time pass here? What about eating, drinking and sleeping? Even before we get into the spiritual landscape of this strange place, taking a tour through it, it seems prescient to address these most basic questions first. Below, you’ll find some answers.

Travel Time

The rule of thumb is that traveling from one place to another in the Shadow takes roughly the same amount of time as it would’ve in the physical world. Philadelphia and New York City remain separated by approximately 100 miles of road, fields, lakes and other geographical features. Walking it (at a relatively average speed of 4 MPH) could take about 20 to 30 hours of walking; that remains true for the Shadow as it is true for the corporeal realm.

However, it’s important to remember that the Shadow is possibly the culmination of the world’s memories. Not just *human* memories, but all memories drawn from the deepest well of history. Consider a driveway that, in the physical world, is about 500 yards off the road — but the several children who used to walk it every day on the way to catch the bus to school remember it as being much longer. They felt that the journey was long, arduous, with a punishment at the end (school) that only made it seem harder. In the Shadow, this driveway might very well reflect the *memory* of the driveway as opposed to the real reflection. As such, the driveway might be a mile or two long in the spirit realm. Traveling down the driveway suddenly takes three or four times as long.

Consider a place in the deepest jungle or rainforest that has rare human contact; thus, humans contribute no substantial memory of the place. The animals and other wild denizens of this place recognize that it is their only world, boundless and wide. In reality, maybe it’s only a 10-mile stretch of wilderness, but the Shadow shifts and distends its margins. Suddenly, it’s 100 square miles of untamed land.

So, while travel time is approximately the same as it is in the physical world, this isn’t universally true. The Shadow represents an off-kilter and maddening memory of the world, and distances are easy to miscalculate and misremember.

Hunger and Eating

A human who stumbles into the Shadow still must eat. His body is still his body, whether it remains physical or transmogrified into a kind of ephemeral spirit flesh. A character doesn’t leave his stomach behind, or his bloodstream or his heart or brain. His systems need food to survive. (See “Deprivation,” p. 175 in the

World of Darkness Rulebook for information on how long your character can survive without food.)

Of course, eating in the Shadow is tricky. What provides sustenance in the material world may not necessarily be the same thing that feeds a character in the Shadow Realm.

Meat

Meat can still feed a character here. Of course, meat comes from animal-spirits that must be caught and killed — no easy feat. Hunting still works off a Wits + Survival roll, but animal-spirits are considerably more cunning than their physical counterparts. Spirits consume one another all the time. They recognize it as part of the cycle, but that doesn't mean they *want* to be eaten. Their goal is the same as that of the characters: *to survive*.

Some spirits may offer parts of themselves to a character in return for something. The animal will literally bite off a part of itself — bloody muscle and fur sitting in its mouth — and spit it out for the character to consume. Again, this is never done freely. A spirit always seeks something from the human. Maybe it demands a trinket. Or perhaps it makes a character promise to help that spirit get out of the Shadow and into the physical world, even if that means that the spirit is allowed to claim the character as Ridden. While many characters wouldn't dare to make strange bargains with animals speaking in a roughly human tongue, attitudes may change once a character finds himself starving and on the cusp of madness and death. More information on such spirit bargains can be found later in the chapter on p. 53.

Fruits and Vegetables

Ostensibly, fruits and vegetables seem a little safer to eat than meat. At the least, they're easier to procure, hanging off their respective plant reflections.

Except that, not all plants are willing to freely give of their food. Taking fruit from a tree seems fine, until one realizes that the tree's branches move gently in a wind that doesn't exist. Reaching for the fruit may earn the character a fast branch across the face, or perhaps the tree-spirit — now possibly awakened and aware — uses its Numina to defend itself.

Not all plants are so reactive; the aforementioned fruit-bearing tree may be the reflection of a tree in an orchard whose fruit is taken every day in the physical world. Such a tree-spirit is accustomed to the theft of its growth. The wild arboreal-spirits, those entities reflecting trees whose fruit has rarely been touched by human hands, are likely to be less receptive.

Mythic Resonance of Fruit

This is the Shadow, a place of history, memory and myth. Some fruits in history were believed to offer magical properties in certain instances. Is this possible in the Shadow?

Consider the apple, regarded as a fruit of knowledge, wisdom and revelation. Could eating an apple off its spirit-tree provide a character with a one-time +1 die bonus to Intelligence or Perception rolls for the remainder of the scene? Might eating the apple grant him the Eidetic Memory Merit for a day?

Such bonuses should not be common, but gifted in special circumstances. If the characters step into an ancient orchard, one that has served a village for 200 years, maybe that orchard has built up enough resonant connections to humanity that it can provide such things. Or maybe that village lost its orchard decades ago, except one apple tree still thrives strong and proud in the center of that dead forest. Folklore speaks of it as having mysterious properties — it's certainly hale and hearty — and in the Shadow, its fruit grows round and ripe with the aforementioned bonuses intrinsic to its sweet flesh.

Processed Foods

The majority of processed foods — i.e., those foods that have gone through various chemical and physical processes to provide convenience and multiply the foods' shelf life — are not the best things to eat in the Shadow. They may have a reflection, but are not themselves spirits. Opening up a frozen dinner or a can of soup, and the Shadow-food within still *looks* like it would in the real world (though sometimes the colors are eerily, falsely brighter, indicating the unnatural hues of plastics). The Shadow-food tastes approximately like it should, too.

These foods provide zero nutrition, however, and in fact make things worse. It's the equivalent of eating wood chips or bits of floor tile; the food is false. Within an hour after eating such foods, a character vomits the food back up, making a Stamina + Resolve roll as he does so. Failure on this roll indicates he takes one point of bashing damage as the food come up, while success indicates that he still vomits, but takes no damage. What's most unsettling is that, after the

regurgitate hits the ground, the bile-spattered mass often re-forms in front of the character's eyes, slowly becoming exactly the thing he ate: a can of soup, a frozen dinner, a bag of chips.

Thirst and Drinking

Much as humans need food, they also need water. (See "Deprivation," p. 175, **World of Darkness Rulebook**.) As with food, however, drinking in the Shadow isn't always safe.

Water is likely the safest thing to drink, but even that can have consequences. The resonance in an area may taint the water. Though it appears clean on the surface, upon putting a cupful into one's mouth the water becomes blood, rot, motor oil, pesticide. An area's history (a Civil War battlefield upstream, a poisonous factory downstream) may contaminate the water source. While this water doesn't actually confer wound penalties to a character who drinks it, the tainted water does require a Willpower point to actually *swallow*. Without that point spent, the character spits the water back up, and it provides him with no sustenance.

Other fluids provide varying degrees of sustenance. Milk is hard to come by, unless an animal-spirit allows a gift from its body: it offers its meat *and* its milk. Most milk products in the Shadow fall under the "processed foods" caveat as noted above. The truth and memory of milk combine to form an over-processed, chemical drink that can in some cases hurt the drinker. (Then again, in a suburban home whose familial warmth is retro on a 1950s level, a glass of milk on the checkered tablecloth might give the character a sudden — and very real-seeming — flashback to his youth.)

It's possible that drinking any kind of liquid in the Shadow, be it from an orange juice container or a crystal-line stream, can cause negative effects. Some fluids might be literally toxic on par with drinking a cup of bleach (see "Poisons and Toxins," pp. 180–181, the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). Others might cause a spirit sickness such as those listed later in this chapter.

Bodily Rejection

Note that if a human crosses back over to the physical world, whether through a verge or as the result of some particular ritual, any food or fluid in his stomach is no longer present in a physical state (existing in a state of Twilight). The character will vomit the obfuscated contents of

his stomach upon the floor — all that hits the floor is bile, maybe some blood, but it feels to the character as if he's puking up whole hunks of food. This results in one bashing damage.

The vomiting happens almost immediately after crossing, though a Resolve + Stamina roll helps a character contain it for a number of turns equal to successes gained.

Sleeping

Characters can push themselves past the urge to rest (see "Fatigue," pp. 179–180, **World of Darkness Rulebook**), but they still get tired. Sacrificing oneself to fatigue can be risky, though sometimes actually *getting* sleep in the Shadow seems impossible. Much as someone might have trouble actually sleeping in a bed that's not his own, here the place is so off-kilter and unsettling that some characters may actually require a Resolve + Composure roll to achieve a useful state of sleep.

Note, too, that sleeping is not without its dangers. Spirits are glad to prey on the slumbering visitor in any way they can. They give into their natures constantly, and if a spirit's nature is to hunt, eat or torture — well, woe to the sleeper who doesn't sense the entity sneaking up to his supine form. For this reason, wise travelers, provided they're not alone, set up guard shifts to keep one another safe. Those who do travel alone may be lucky enough to find a spirit willing to bargain for safety. The spirit of a vigilant guard-dog might watch over the sleeping character for a small price.

Matter into Ephemera

It's a metaphysical point that only those characters with a high-enough Occult score or familiarity with the nature of the Shadow understand, but here it is: matter is not matter in the Shadow. Matter is something else, the translation of physical material into a separate frequency of existence. When a human enters the Shadow, his physical body enters, but is "dialed in" at a different frequency.

That said, flesh is still flesh, blood is still blood. Punching a wall still breaks bones, and everything seems corporeal. Wind blows upon one's face, water is still wet and tears taste salty. A wild dog-spirit isn't opaque; he's no ghost. His teeth rend flesh, his tongue is still raspy.

Characters are unlikely to realize this metaphysical conceit in its depth, but hints do exist. A Wits + Composure roll may supply a glimpse into these clues. Much as the rest of the world seems off, the translation

of a character's corporeal form into this new frequency is not without its imperfections. Some elements about the character seem "off." A scar from a kidney stone operation now sits on his left side, when in reality the kidney came from his right. A tattoo sits an inch and a half from where it was originally inked. The character's blue eyes are now green. None of these Shadow flaws are extreme: a character with a full head of hair doesn't suddenly become bald, or grow wings or extra limbs. But these odd off-kilter quirks only contribute to the feeling that everything here is wrong by just a few degrees.

Healing

Healing occurs at roughly the same rate it does in the physical world (for mortals, this is found on p. 175 in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**). Exceptions to this rule do exist, however.

Consider a hospital. If the hospital represents a strong bastion of health in its community and is surrounded by a good reputation for curing the sick, healing times in the Shadow may be cut in half. On the other hand, if the hospital is overwhelmed with a clogged and often bloodied emergency room, and has a reputation for making people *sicker* instead of healthier (staph infections abound), then healing times could be doubled.

While most places don't have a reflection on health, in the Shadow, the following reflections might change healing times: hospitals, nursing homes, old leper colonies, AIDS clinics or houses where drug addicts gather. Stepping into such a location in the Shadow can modify healing times for better or for worse. (It's also possible that such places might confer a spiritual sickness to a character. See p. 78 for more information on potential "Shadow Sicknesses.")

Weather and Temperature

The weather in the physical world likely translates into weather in the Shadow Realm. The weather is usually a little more extreme than what one finds in the physical world. A normal storm in the corporeal world grows somewhat in intensity within the spirit realm. Lightning flashes and crashes with greater frequency, and the rain feels like small stones pelting hard against a character's body. (The character may note, too, that both the lightning and the rain are actual spirits, born in an instant of bright light or falling water, and gone again as the lightning fades or the rain hits the ground.) A three-inch snowfall in the physical world might be six inches in the Shadow, and three feet could become six feet.



Temperature, too, can translate, though it really only reflects when properly intense. A normal average temperature matters little to the Shadow. Normal temperatures feel muted in the Shadow, less noticeable and significant. Extreme temperatures, on the other hand, tend to boldly reflect. Consider how a heat wave in the physical world creates a kind of madness and misery: lust is born of heat, so, too, is thirst, desperation, anguish. The greater an effect the temperature has on the emotional states of those in the physical world, the more pronounced it becomes in the Shadow. The aforementioned heat wave might be 90 degrees in the real world, but in the Shadow? The air feels like a blast furnace, and shimmering waves of heat (in reality, heat-spirits) sit like a gauzy curtain obscuring the horizon.

Shadow or Spirit?

A human in the Shadow is faced with a damning conundrum: some things that shouldn't be alive seem somehow to have sentience. It's no one thing that stands out over another. It's not as if a house has big wide eyes and gnashing teeth. But some subtleties separate one object from another. One house may stand next to another, but the house on the left seems somehow... *different*. Odd silhouettes pass over it. One of its shutters bangs, moving against the wind instead of with it. Get too close, and you'll hear the whispers radiating out from a broken window, drifting on the wind with a warbling lilt. Why is this? Why does one gale of wind feel like a hot breath, while another just feels like wind? How is that a revolver on the table can look like a normal revolver, or it can instead seem to radiate a presence all its own, seeming to possess a keen awareness in the weird way it reflects light off its blued steel?

The answer is that some things in the Shadow have some manner of consciousness, existing as spirits even though they may not be moving about. Everything else — the majority of things in the Shadow, really — are just reflections, just ephemeral shadows.

Most things in the world, most events, are not given over to massive outpourings of emotion. They don't share a great deal of resonance, but experience enough use in the physical world or have just enough emotion invested in them that they form a base reflection in the Shadow. This base reflection isn't necessarily tied to the actual physical object, but it exists in the approximate area just the same, looking mostly like the thing does in the Shadow. A brick wall is a brick wall. Maybe the Shadow reflection looks a little too perfect, or maybe it seems more decayed than its physical counterpart. The laws governing this are inscrutable, imperfect. Does the

shadow of a revolver still work? Maybe. Maybe it works, but the bullets are so temporary and small that they give off no ephemeral reflection. Without bullets, the gun is useless. Or maybe the gun is just someone's security blanket at home. If the gun has never been fired, the reflection is useless. The cylinder doesn't turn. The firing pin doesn't exist.

Can a thing that's just a Shadow ever become a spirit? Absolutely. If that gun, once just a security blanket, is used in a home defense situation, and blows a hole clean through a burglar, suddenly the gun takes on a powerful spike of resonance. The gun is no longer just a gun; it's an implement of power or fear. The owner may invest in it a great deal of feeling, be it awe or revulsion. This can trigger the shadow so it becomes a spirit, feeding off the resonance (or Essence, see below) that comes from the act in which it was used so violently.

And that's the scariest thing about it. It still looks like a gun. It doesn't grow legs and run around just because it's a spirit. But now it's aware. It goes from just a reflection to a real thing, a spirit with a secret pulse and a hidden, selfish mind. It goes from merely existing to eagerly *wanting*.

(More information on spirits is found later in this chapter.)

Unseen Sense

Once again, the Unseen Sense Merit is invaluable in the Shadow. While this sixth sense does not provide concrete answers, it can help a character recognize that something is more than it seems. He may pause before stepping into a house, and he *feels* how something is different about it. It feels too still; or maybe it creaks more than it should. Unseen Sense doesn't tell him, "Hey, this house is a big hungry spirit, and it wants to trap you inside so you live in its belly forever, because that's what it needs to eat," but this Merit can set off an eerie tingle that lets him know that this place is different from the others.

Journey Through the Beyond

A human stepping across the Gauntlet will notice some things somewhat immediately. He may not realize that he crossed the wall between worlds, and likely doesn't even know that such a metaphysical membrane even exists. But it *does* exist, and its off-

kilter landscape will soon be apparent. Assume that, without any roll, a human notices a number of things as he begins to step deeper into Shadow:

The first and eeriest thing is the total lack of other people. The Shadow is like an apocalyptic version of our world, a place where an epidemic erased humanity from the map. The watermarks of civilization exist: cars, houses, roads, power lines. But no people. For a little while, the place may seem dead, until...

...the character gets his first glimpse of a spirit. It may be an animal circling him at a distance, appearing just as the animal would in the physical world, except that the spirit carries itself differently. It seems to have an air of intelligence about it, something primal but stronger than “real” animals possess. The eyes glimmer with that intelligence, showing something well beyond raw instinct. It may not be an animal-spirit. Maybe he sees how a tree’s branches sway and move in ways that are wholly unnatural. Then he sees a creature that looks like a snake made of coruscating lightning quickly spiraling down one of those power lines. Below it, a thing that *looks* human sits beneath the power lines, whittling away at a stick with a rusty knife, but then the “person” looks up, and the character sees that the face is not at all human, but a red and black beetle’s mask replete with clicking chelicerae and dead insectile eyes. The realization will hit: the spirit world is definitely alive, but *not* with human beings. The character is a stranger in the strangest land.

Other things are apparent, too. The entire landscape is as if some god created a scale replica of reality — but in completing such a monster-sized project, errors were bound to be made. Those errors, up close, are not obvious, but they’re not particularly subtle, either. The land is filled with little things, *odd* things that seem askew. Maybe the windows to a house simply don’t have glass, as if the replica-builder simply forgot that part. Rain falls just over a playground. Lake waters are undisturbed when the character tosses a pebble (which feels greasy, and he doesn’t know why) into its depths. The colors are sometimes off by a shade or a tint, too: the sun maybe glows blood red, the clouds seem painted with a bruise-colored brush, the asphalt is deep black like wet tar.

The last thing the character notices — maybe the last thing he notices *ever* if he draws the attention of some real bad spirits — is how the air feels. The air feels clean, crisp, but totally wrong. It’s tense, it pulses. As a dead wind kicks up and stirs over the character’s flesh, the hairs on his neck can’t help but stand on end. The worst thing about the air is how it gives the feeling, no matter where the character turns, that he’s being watched. Like a

pair of eyes is burning holes through his shoulder blades, the air will never make him feel relaxed, as it perpetually throbs with a vital and alien energy.

Essence

Resonance links the two worlds: powerful terror begets the same in the Shadow. One assumes that his intense anger, when it fades, is gone — after all, he doesn’t feel it anymore, does it? But it’s not so easy. These things gain a life in the Shadow and leave behind real evidence of its existence. That anger lives and lurks, and may find another way to resonate with the physical world; it’s almost as if one person having such an emotion can almost infect another with it through the Shadow. It either is born as a spirit, or it bleeds across the worlds as a resonant Essence. So just what is Essence?

Essence is the product of resonance. It’s not a simple thing to understand, the way that clouds make rain, but is more like the way a sound is produced when a bell is struck. Essence is the manifestation of that resonance — that *frequency* of theme, emotion or faith — being struck. It’s the lifeblood of both spirits and the Shadow in general. It’s what creates spirits, what gives certain things a reflection in the realm, and furthermore what spirits consume. Resonance is the process; Essence is the product of that process.

Can you *see* Essence? Not exactly. It’s not a corporeal resource like motor oil or water. Think of it more like oxygen. Oxygen is real, but invisible. You can gain hints of its existence not through direct visual confirmation, but by seeing the *results* of oxygen. Rust on metal, or the clotting of blood — both consequences of oxygen’s invisible presence. The Shadow provides constant reminders of Essence’s presence: spirits come to feed on it, spirits can be born *from* it and Essence also changes the reflection in the Shadow. What kinds of reflective changes come from Essence?

Consider milk or cooking oil, how if they sit in the fridge too close to strong-smelling food items (garlic, for instance), they begin to take the taste of that food. Or how oil in a hot pan will infuse with the taste of any herbs thrown into its bubbling mix. Perfumes were once made in this way: beef tallow took the scent of certain things (flowers, foods, musks) and then when the oil was rendered out of the fat, perfume was the result through this process of *entflourage*. Essence works similarly. Essence, in its rawest form, is nothing but a pervasive energy. But it takes on the flavors and scents born of resonance. The resonance of hatred carries through to existent Essence, and even helps spawn *more* Essence. A highway gives various resonant themes: cars,

travel, asphalt, pollution. The Essence of that area in the Shadow grows infused with all of those.

The changes in the Shadow show this way, like the aforementioned rust on metal. Essence infused with hatred darkens an area: things may seem to have sharper edges, trees wear faces in their bark that look like scowls and the wind blows so sharply it almost cuts the skin. An area discolored with the various elements of the previously noted highway simply looks more and more like a modern American highway. Puddles of motor oil and the occasional blown-out tire hug the shoulder. The asphalt shoots through the land like a bisecting line, while a growing number of cars — many of which are spirits themselves — race down it. The air is choked with the output of exhaust, and the horizon shimmers with heat and possibility. (Consider instead if the highway were infused with Essence of decay and death. Instead we'd see crows picking at roadkill, the carcasses of which are pressed into the spider-web cracks of crumbling macadam.)

Mad Science!

Occultists aren't the only ones who try to peer into or enter the Shadow. Quantum science is sometimes devoted to notions of other dimensions or "frequencies" of existence. Consider this passage from the journals of Dr. Yasmin Rialta, the assistant director of the Hirnbaum Center for Quantum Study:

"...find the Freierherz co-variant, and you recognize something. We know that all things have a frequency, that every piece of matter and every system of particles oscillates when struck at a high amplitude, when touched by strong energy. This is the resonant frequency, and resonant frequency is the key. But it's not about matching the resonant frequency, oh no, Bernard learned that, didn't he? It's about mimicking the frequency *falsely*, it's about mirroring it *almost*, for when you do this, when the frequencies are close in parallel but not perfectly matched, you can shift things. You can open a door. Bernard and I saw them, the things he calls — sorry, called — the *dimensional operators*, staring across from us. They looked like us but were not us. They were quantum versions of us, don't you see? I felt angry at Bernard for doing this without me, and you could see the anger on the not-me's face, red and bloody, wretched and fierce! The not-me grabbed at Bernard through the mirror and pulled him in, and I heard the hum, the terrible

hum of the two almost-frequencies resonating within one another, and the headache that resulted still won't go away..."

Of course, Dr. Rialta wrote that from within her room at the state mental hospital. And her "journals" are really just the walls, and the ink for her missives are written in whatever fluid she can cull from her body before the orderlies come in to restrain her once more.

The Urban Shadow

Cities in the Shadow represent a tangled metropolitan nightmare. Millions of humans exert unwitting influence on both worlds, and the result is often chaos in the spirit world. As buildings get built and others get torn down, the Shadow hitches and shudders to catch up. Back-alley shootings, romance in the park, abductions, gang violence, monster-sized real estate deals, pollution, the throngs of homeless... all of it wields enormous pressure on the Shadow. It cuts to the quick, carving scars, vomiting forth spirits that must constantly vie for supremacy. In the physical world, it's easy to feel this invisible give-and-take, how one block differs from the next, how cars honk and people yell, how the smells of good food and rotten garbage commingle every step of the way. In the Shadow, all of this is amplified 100 times over.

Mood

The mood of the urban Shadow is almost always of controlled chaos. It should feel tense and illogical, as if it's a house of cards perpetually on the cusp of collapse. But the spirits aren't foolish. They form broods, symbiotic relationships that might form around niche environments within the city, such as skyscrapers, apartment buildings, subways tunnels or parks. Similar to human gangs, they work together to advance their territories one bit at a time. A bad block of crime and blood advances over a good block, and in the real world, it happens the same way.

A character in the urban Shadow should feel lost. He may know the city in which he walks, but the buildings are taller, the streets longer and narrower and a map on the material world doesn't necessarily translate to a map in the Shadow. Not every building earns a reflection immediately, or every new street or closed-off alley. The city remembers buildings long lost to fires or new construction. The city's layout is equal parts modern and archaic, a madman's mish-mash of metropolitan memory.

Elements of the Spirit City

Below are some elements describing the nature of what one might find in a city's reflection within the Shadow.

Buildings

What's disconcerting about cities in the Shadow is how the buildings sometimes match with those in the physical world, and sometimes don't. Most are there in presence, at least, but some are hollow shells of brick and steel — inside one finds no floors, elevators, furniture. Only darkness going all the way to the top. Other buildings simply never had the resonance to appear at all; even the people who lived in or worked in them didn't consider them beyond their mere facility, and so what exists in the Shadow is either a gauzy silhouette (like a distorted image caught in heat vapor) or nothing at all.

Strange, too, is that some buildings that have been long gone in the physical world still linger in the Shadow. Buildings like the World Trade Center, or the old stadium of a much-beloved baseball team or a prison known for the torture of its inmates — even when these buildings are gone in the material world, their memory remains powerful in this place.

For the most part, if a building retains a complete reflection, then it largely mirrors the layout and architecture found in the corporeal realm. Some differences might be apparent, but they're off-kilter tweaks (the stairway has 33 steps instead of 23, the windows are missing from Room 213, the jail cells in Cell Block K are half the size and terribly claustrophobic) that give into the imperfect replication found everywhere in the Shadow Realm. Those buildings that offer major differences often do so because their resonance is composed of more than just the memory of humanity. A row home where someone kept 50 dogs, all malnourished and diseased, is going to reflect the dogs' memory more than that one person's memory (and they see a gray place whose walls echo with painful howls and whimpers, even though the house looked or felt nothing like that in the physical world). Reflections can be different, too, if the human memory is given over to a preponderance of unstable minds. An asylum in the Shadow reflects the memory of its inmates more than it does the doctors (see below under "Guidebook to the Shadow" for more information on what an asylum might look like).



Breakdown

Some buildings that develop spirits sometimes "go bad." When a building becomes self-aware,



it develops that predatory sense — that deep hunger for Essence — that all spirits possess. If the building consumes the wrong Essence and the building's persona shifts to a darker tenor, the building may eventually develop a troublesome personality. The building vents hatred, anger, pollution. When a building's spirit turns dark in such a way, it can't remain in the physical world for long. The humans can rarely stand to be near the building much less inside it, and if they *do* manage to remain, they eventually go nuts or bring the bad emotions to bear in a sometimes explosive manner (think office shootings, arson or massively fraudulent business practices). As such, a building like this often goes empty in the physical world, eventually abandoned. The spirit generally withers under such absence.

Crime

Cities possess crime rates generally higher than what's experienced in the suburbs or rural areas. This reflects in the Shadow more abstractly than directly, even though one will certainly find a greater proliferation of crime-related and negative-spirits.

What it does is create a mood of somewhat persistent fear and tension. Problem is, in the Shadow, mood translates to resonance, and resonance translates to existence. The very air feels of fear, stinging the nose and keeping one's hackles persistently raised. It puts spirits on edge, too, which isn't good for any wayward visitor to this broken realm.

Overcrowding

Most cities are overcrowded. Real estate is at a prime, and humanity is packed into the buildings and hotels like fish in a can. While humans themselves do not reflect their souls in the Shadow, this overwhelming feeling of claustrophobia does sometimes bleed through. Streets tend to be narrower, buildings seem to lean inward as if they're ready to crush those who walk between them, and the very air seems to feel like an enclosing presence.

Pollution

Cities bear trademark pollution: smog in LA, the chemical taint of Philadelphia, the stink of sewage and car exhaust in Calcutta. Every city is affected by it, and the Shadow bears this long-standing mark. The air is often hazy, and smells of 100 pollutants, from rotting waste to pesticides to sulfur. Spirits of pollution — chemical dust devils and golems formed of garbage — agglomerate in the worst areas, but are persistent

in spreading to every portion of the city and beyond. (They tend to be stubborn and violent.) Buildings grow stained with the scars of pollution — black smears, oily residue, a faint yellow dusting that looks like pollen but smells like bug spray.

Streets

Driving through the city in the material world can be a chaotic affair, and so it stands that the streets in the Shadow are doubly disordered. One-way streets run into one another at impossible angles. Turn the wrong corner, and you've gone into a crime-haunted part of town. A seemingly sane and sterile grid-work pattern suddenly breaks down and remembers the way the streets *used* to be, and becomes a hodgepodge of crooked alleys and pot-holed avenues. That's the general idea, though some streets develop specific personalities — shopping districts grow thick with specters of commerce, while the "bad" streets are cast in darkness and hounded by spirits of thievery, trickery and murder. Only rarely do streets gain spirits of their own. Those streets and roads that are world renowned (NYC's Broadway or Wall Street, LA's Sunset Strip or Miracle Mile, London's Abbey Road or Oxford Street) are the ones that gain awareness and become living things in the Shadow.

Weather

A city's weather is an exaggerated version of what's found in that city at any given point, though it doesn't have to match the city's physical weather. Assume for the most part this encompasses fog, smog and overcast clouds for the most part. In some areas, it might translate to heavy snows, rains or a blistering sun, but for the most part the air always looks like it's poised on the cusp of bad weather without ever really stepping over that line. The weather may even reflect something symbolic, such as a thunderstorm that erupts when riots break out across a city.

The Wild Shadow

Those places away from civilization are built from the aggregate memory of nature itself. The world remembers. Every ant colony, every flock of birds, every configuration of jagged rocks helps to contribute its sentience to the Shadow reflection of the wilderness. And this makes it extremely perilous. This is not the fast build-up and breakdown of the urban Shadow; the wilderness here is grown out of a long and layered process, with strata of strange and incomprehensible thoughts and events building upon one another. Does man know how an insect thinks? Can he accurately

predict the desires of a wolf mother? Is he competent enough to comprehend what a sandstone cliff remembers, or what a raging river does to those who cross her? He can't know these things, which is why the wild parts of the spirit realm are dangerous to him.

Mood

The mood represented by the wild parts of the Shadow is one of primal nature. Here, man is not in control, and he can't bring his significant influence to this place. It remains closed to him, an alien landscape of beast and bird, of tree and stone. At least man can feel somehow sane in the city, for those reflections around him are — at least unconsciously — forged in part from brains like his own. The reflection of nature cares little for human memory, and reflects an unknown integer of primal chaos. Forests become mazes, deserts stretch on forever and the ocean is one gigantic mouth waiting to eat. Nature is lord and master.



Absence

Remember, too, that the truly wild parts of the Shadow are often without certain types of spirits — only rarely will one find a conceptual- or artificial-spirit, here. When they do exist, they're either so powerful that they rule over others (and this will show in the corporeal realm), or they're so weak that they will be consumed by those who probably shouldn't be consuming them in the first place (but in the Shadow, hunger is hunger, need is need).



Elements of the Spirit Wild

Below are some elements describing the nature of what one might find in the wild reflection of the Shadow.

Ancient History

The cities have a short memory. Every building that's destroyed doesn't linger in the Shadow — but a lot of things that die or are destroyed in nature *do*. Whole swaths of forest cut down by loggers still linger in the spirit world, though now they reflect the resonance of pain and loss (screaming, weeping trees with vengeful branches and whip and flail). A glacier melts in reality, but remains in the Shadow because that glacier has its own kind of memory — and it's a

very long (and frankly slow) memory. This leads the Shadow to offer a significantly altered landscape in some parts, and creates a rather strange effect (which sometimes feels like overcrowding — a forest that might seem thin in the physical world may be incredibly dense in the Shadow).

Brutality

Nature is red in tooth in claw. It survives upon itself. This is given dangerous clarity in the Shadow, where the food chain is played out in obvious, gory glory. Animals eat animals. Animals eat plants. (Plants even sometimes eat animals.) Life is given over, too, to the elements — disease, weather, heat. The Shadow is a brutal place of bloody competition, and any traveler who finds himself in a wild place like this will find himself thrown into a sudden game of 'survival of the fittest.'

Exaggerations

In the Shadow's wilderness, things are somewhat more exaggerated. Trees are taller. Lakes are deeper. Desert sands burn hotter and blow with enough ferocity to damage skin as if it was rubbed with a rasp. The memories of nature have a kind of primitive clarity to them, but they also remember their own expressions as being perhaps greater and stronger than they are in the real world. A river and its inhabitants remember the water's ferocity more than any human does, and so its waters are almost impossibly swift in the Shadow. The deepest parts of the ocean know nothing but darkness and its own profundity, and so you find the deepest and most isolated places in the Shadow (even moreso than what exists in our world — so much so that some believe these places in the spirit world actually lead to *other* realms, lands of the dead or vistas forged of dreams and nightmares).

Weather

The weather here doesn't seem oppressive and heavy as it does in the cities, but often instead seems more vibrant and alive. That's not necessarily a good thing. Lightning strikes with greater frequency, even from clear skies. If rain falls, it drops in sheets and buckets, flooding quickly (with floodwaters receding just as fast). The "wildness" endemic to nature is felt in the weather, making for sometimes chaotic expressions that can harm or kill those unprepared for a sudden snow, heat wave or downpour. (Never mind that spirits are often born from such events — a blizzard stirs motes that turn quickly to elementals of frozen water, all of whom are suddenly disrupting an already-insane ecology with a lust for life and power.)

Guidebook to the Shadow

Below you'll find various elements you may want to include in your story featuring the Shadow Realm. Note that this guidebook isn't meant to be exhaustive; if we tried to include every possible reflection in the Shadow, this book might end up a little too heavy. These are merely meant to provide interesting story hooks, as well as provide examples from which you can build and design your own spirit-reflected elements.

Places

Looking for some interesting places to drop into a Shadow story? Look no further.

Airports

An airport in the physical world is one of organized chaos. Planes take off late, luggage is lost, security is fierce and frustration mounts. In the Shadow, all the chaos remains, but lacks the controlled veneer of organization. Airports are thick with spirits. They come with some vague desire in mind, some mad allure that tells them *this is the place to travel*, but they don't travel — they fight. Airports end up rife with rioting, battling spirits. Many want across the Gauntlet but find that the Gauntlet is usually too thick to get across easily, and so they're forced to turn on one another. Emotions fling themselves bodily at spirits of security, paranoia and wanderlust. Prized items lost during travel gain spirits and shamble to the fight — eyeless teddy bears, laptops dragging themselves forward by wires and cables, dresses dancing about in some whirling waltz. Worse are airports that have suffered crashes: the fiery wreckage and smoking holes still wait upon the runways, vortices of darkness that sometimes form Wounds.

Airport Verges

An odd phenomenon is this: airports are often home to verges. These verges, be they persistent or keyed, always lurk in places most people don't go — in the tunnels where bags ride the conveyor, in the subbasements of parking garages or in the ductwork that waits above everybody's heads. Sometimes, though, a lost child will go playing in such places, or a criminal will try to thwart the authorities by hiding where he shouldn't.

Why is this? Nobody knows, but many ascribe it to the fact that the blueprints for airports often end up as tools in strange occult rituals. Some airports, the Denver International Airport, for instance,

seem built according to some bizarre geomantic principle, and seem designed with the power to keep something otherworldly out — or in.

Asylums

Asylums are forged from the broken memories of the inmates more than the supposedly sane memories of the doctors and administrators. For this reason, an asylum is a very troubled place in the Shadow. Different rooms are stained with the different “flavors” of resonant insanities: some rooms are gray and cold, a sign of depression. A room resonant with schizophrenia flickers and shifts and manifests eyes in the walls or windows that open and close like gnashing mouths. This has several effects. First, asylums often easily end up as Wounds, verges, loci or other “unique” expressions of the Shadow. Insanity is real to those who feel it; one's perceptions and memories, however muddled by madness, still feel real, and so they mark the spirit realm accordingly. Second, those with pre-existing derangements find them harder to resist when in the area of an asylum in the Shadow. Assume rolls to resist derangements are done at a -2 dice penalty.

Battlefields

Battlefields represent a curious phenomenon, one that proves the correlation between both worlds. Battlefields are rarely the home of a single battle. It may seem as such; history may bear no evidence of past skirmishes. But the stretch of land or sea where a heated and bloody battle takes place is almost always revisited by war-torn bloodshed time and again. Where two Sumerian city-states fought once with spear and chariot ends up seeing warfare throughout time: Kassites versus Babylonians, Cyrus the Great's bloody domination, the Turkish Army defeating the Brits in World War II and even today's war in Iraq. A battle represents a massive scarring of the Shadow's landscape there; it marks the area indelibly, and, similar to a storm, these violent emotions rise up again and again, drawing more humans to that physical region to wage war against one another. In the Shadow, expect the spirits of war to wear the faces of all the soldiers, warriors and barbarians who have fought there. Expect the machines of old and new (the aforementioned chariots or M1 tanks) to have lives of their own and thrive on the thirst of blood. All the while, a faint rain of bloody mist and whirling ash fall. Characters are never safe on a battlefield in the Shadow, but the worst part about it is that battlefields are not always immediately apparent. The bloody rains and storms of violence that draw the war-spirits are

not constant; they kick up at unexpected times. Death crawls from the mud as wind whips the smell of cordite and rot. War happens suddenly in the Shadow, rising with no warning from the realm's capricious memory.

Crime Scenes

A crime scene in the Shadow often appears as a weird loop in time. If a crime is particularly notable or vicious (such as murder, rape or assault), the scene actually plays out in fits and starts, with various spirits fulfilling the roles like obsessed actors. (It's for this reason that some occultists — foolish ones, if the opinions of their peers hold any truth — work as investigators able to solve impossible crimes from the other side of the Gauntlet.) Some crime scenes leave such resonance that they end up almost as *permanent* crime scenes, where terrible events happen over and over again in the physical world. An alley where one rapist takes his victims may eventually become *the* alley where rapists are known to take their victims. A sucking sinkhole in the middle of the swamp is home to one murder, and may become home to more — the murderers who bring their victims there may not know why they do so, but they can't help feeling how right it is to submerge their victims beneath the brackish water.

Factories

Some factories in the Shadow look like their earthly counterparts, except the Shadow factories lie partly dead and eerily quiet. Others, however, are madly alive, conveyor belts churning, carrying machine parts and hunks of meat while fans whirl and blades cut through metal and bone. These factories have been given life by history, pain and power. A factory that has been around a long time has produced countless "things" for the world (cars, cans, bolts, processed foods, electronic equipment), but has also taken life and limb from workers. A man loses an arm in the cutter, while another falls into a vat of chemical cleaner and dies. Factories sometimes grow hungry for such sacrifices. Why? Both artificial-spirits and conceptual-spirits rule these factories, and are given over to the need for efficiency at any cost. Many-armed spirits-of-productivity oversee the operation, and will throw other spirits into the machines to "oil the gears." So, too, with humans dragged across the Gauntlet. One strange phenomenon worth noting is that a few factories have occasionally produced spirits, often hybrid monsters, upon their endless assembly lines. The sentient machines rip some spirits apart and rebuild them without any apparent purpose.

Fast Food Restaurants

In the physical world, fast food places are generally home to two prevailing emotions: happiness and

gluttony. In the Shadow, these things take on very real shapes. Spirits of mad mirth frolic and dance about (often in the trademark colorful outfits given to employees of that fast food place in the real world), and will do what they must to draw characters into their fun, even if it means threatening them with the frialator. Spirits of gluttony, manifesting as things that look like in part like pigs, in part like fat-slob children, feast on troughs of colorful food waste that are refilled by those aforementioned happiness-spirits. Quite often, a fast food place in the Shadow is lorded over by a spirit manifestation of the company's icon. This icon, be he a fat-bellied monarch dripping with grease or a raucous clown whose lips are spattered with bile, is actually the spirit of the restaurant itself. Such spirits are often belligerent and quite mad. (Rumors suggest that these spirits remain subservient to the whims of a greater spirit, the faceless entity that reflects the autocratic control of the fast food corporations.)

Grocery Stores

A real world fact: food companies engage in blood-thirsty competition to secure valuable shelf-space. The more money a company has, the better shelf-space the company can afford for its products in the store. Grocery stores are places of cutthroat business, though they don't seem as such on the surface. In the Shadow, this reflects so much that the grocery store becomes a dangerous place for anybody to be caught alone. Shelves are two or three times as tall, each piled to the edge with blindingly bright and catchy colors, numbing the eyes in every direction. The shelves form mazes, and through the channels walk hungry greed-spirits pushing carts whose wheels squeak on the dirty linoleum. Some who enter the grocery store in the Shadow find it hard to leave. They end up wandering the shelves, looking for the way out, or are driven mad by the inculcation of marketing and advertising that bores through the brain like a whirring drill.

Hospitals

In the Shadow, one element of a hospital is usually exaggerated over another. If a hospital is clean and efficient, in the Shadow the hospital is given over to utter sterility. The Gauntlet may be high, and so the spirits that linger are cold, distant, few in number. In some inner-city hospitals, chaos is the name of the game, and the spirit realm bears this out. Blood drips from walls. Spirits of sickness skulk down the halls. Other negative feelings — grief, pain, anger — come alive and prey on those nearby. Some overly sterile hospitals end up as Barrens, while those hospitals given over to decay and pain may grow into Wounds.



Mountains

Distant mountains tend to be ruled by powerful broods or pantheons of spirits. They do not take well to those who do not belong to their high, craggy reaches. Both upon the surface of the mountain and within chthonic chambers, various elementals call themselves kings and gods — vast Lords of Stone, gasping Servants of Air, hungry beings of water and erosion. Characters who come to a mountain in the Shadow find that the drops are longer and the peaks are higher, even when they don't seem that way at first. Many are thrown off such peaks as sacrifices made to whatever strange elemental makes the mountain his kingdom.

Places of Worship

Churches and temples, similar to battlefields, may spring up in those places where other places of worship once sat. While humankind is in many ways faithless, often calling on their gods when they want something in particular, humanity is not uniformly without religious belief and spirituality. Some places of worship are marked by the faith that is loosed there. In such a place, should the church be abandoned or diminished, another may eventually be built there. Why? Because the faith that once was there has bled into the ground and atomized into the air; others unconsciously sense that, and in those places they build their shrines and sanctuaries.

In the Shadow, these places bear the markings of all of the churches and temples that have stood in that location. A church on a hill may seem like nothing more than an old Baptist chapel, but in the Shadow? The stained glass bears images of both Jesus and the Great Spirit worshipped here by the Native Americans who once claimed this land. The wooden floor is etched with sigils of the blasphemous lord Moloch, for 100 years ago a group of farmers called this hill Gehinnom and sacrificed one of their many children to ask for a good yield of crops that year. Faith is faith; while it may be colored by the nature of its belief, at its core the Essence faith makes is universal. The spirits of these places — anything from strange angels in priest collars to kneeling, mumbling supplicants whose eyes are sewn shut — feed on it just the same.

(Worth noting are the holy places renown throughout the world: Mecca, the Vatican, the Canterbury Cathedral, Dome of the Rock, Church of the Holy Sepulcher and so forth. These places stand out because a beacon of light — sometimes white light, sometimes red or almost black light — shines upon them from somewhere above. The spirits within are often very powerful, manifesting as angels, demons or other creatures of religious lore. Some such spirits seem quite human, having been feeding from human faith for thousands of

years. Others are so deformed and debased by faith and hatred that their actions are totally erratic.)

Rivers

Many rivers awaken into spirits, or have long persisted as powerful beings desperate for sacrifice into their watery depths. Smaller rivers and tributaries, though, are not themselves spirits but are home to many water elementals and nature-spirits, or are instead poisoned by specters of pollution and chemicals. What's strange about rivers in the Shadow is how deep they are — even if the river is a shallow one in the material world, in the spirit realm the river seems bottomless, a dark channel cut in the earth and as deep as any oceanic trench. Some have speculated that rivers are a way from within the Shadow to reach the lands of the dead. But nobody has gone into such a place and returned, so whether or not such depths truly lead to the Underworld remains a mystery.

Slaughterhouses

Easily one of the most horrid and dangerous places in the Shadow, slaughterhouses reflect a panorama of pain. Everything is coated in a veneer of fat, and the floors are forever thick with a couple feet of clotting blood. The processing of thousands of cattle in a day causes a shuddering reflection in the spirit world. So much death and gore (throats slit, organs emptied, bodies bisected by gnashing saws) leaves an indelible mark. One spirit often ends up as the result of a slaughterhouse, a vicious bull or king hog that bears all the pain of his brethren. This animal-spirit is often incomprehensibly insane, demanding blood for blood and bone for bone — perhaps why slaughterhouse work is also some of the most dangerous work in the country (people die and are dismembered constantly). The spirit forms its own rule of law and lasts until another pain-maddened spirit takes its place. One thing about slaughterhouses: in the Shadow, they never go away. If one closes, its operation remains at least in part in the spirit realm, calves wailing as their heads are cracked in half, workers screaming as limbs are lost to the saw. This means that in the physical world, a slaughterhouse doesn't really go away, either. The resonance bleeds across. In one instance, a nursing home was built on the site where a slaughterhouse once sat 50 years previous. The elderly residents still hear the machines grinding and saws cutting. One orderly became possessed by one of those pain-crazy bull-spirits... and one night he went back to the nursing home with a power saw of his own, and he began cutting. The lesson? Such gore-soaked resonance is hard to remove.

Suburbs

The suburbs aren't known for their intense passion, their powerful emotion. They're certainly not empty of it: a husband comes home from the office and beats his wife, a pack of bullies sets upon a young boy behind the convenience store or a young housewife charms all the local men and draws them into an intense tangle of jealousy. These things leave their mark, but by and large the suburbs end up a bit soulless. In the Shadow, many look like movie sets: just cardboard houses that can be knocked over with a shoulder or stiff wind. Others are fully realized, but are given over to such sameness and redundancy that they form very real mazes of repetitious homes. It's mile after mile of beige siding, white fences, asphalt driveways, all filling a far greater space than what the same development assumes in the physical world. Each filled with mannequins or plastic automatons assuming the roles of domesticated spirits: spirits of obedience, conformity and boredom.

Objects

Not every object in the physical world casts a Shadow counterpart, be it a mere reflection made of ephemeral "spirit-stuff," or an actual spirit. When determining if an object gets a reflection, consider first how often it's used, viewed or regarded. While a great deal of emotion may not go into an object, if it's used frequently, it's like an object with many lights pointed at it — it casts a certain shadow. If the object isn't used frequently, but has a great deal of emotion invested in it, then it will have a reflection or even its own sentient spirit.

Take, for example, a pair of binoculars. Binoculars do not make up a part of American culture, or necessitate everyday use. The majority, therefore, do not show a reflection in the Shadow. That said, what about a pair of binoculars used by a voyeur to spy on his neighbors? From his bedroom window, he watches the neighbor's wife undress every night, and ogles the couple and their sexual dalliances. This particular pair of binoculars is likely to manifest in the Shadow. As a reflection, the binoculars might appear tarnished or dirty, and the glass is colored in a crimson, lustful hue. As a spirit, the binoculars might have a pair of eyes where the lenses are, and may draw characters to it — as they approach, their pulses quicken and a certain lascivious hunger fills them.

This particular rule of thumb only serves to make the Shadow all the more disturbing. This means that a number of mundane objects are simply missing, as if

someone simply forgot to put them into the world. While some rooms *seem* complete with furniture and appliances, other little details go missing, for example, light switches or coat racks. Streetlights might not be found if they normally exist on an oft-unused road. A character who needs a jacket in the Shadow finds that most articles of clothing never generated enough use or emotion to create a reflection. The ones that do exist are often marred by dried blood, grass stains or tears in the fabric; it depends on what it was about that item of clothing that generated the resonance to cause its reflection.

Below are a number of items that one might find in the Shadow. This list is not exhaustive, providing only those items that could be effectively used in your **World of Darkness** story.

Automobiles

In many parts of the world, cars are beloved luxuries. Even when they're not luxuries and are viewed as items of the uttermost pragmatism, they still see a lot of use. Cars are one item that reflect often in the Shadow, but the question is, are they usable? Sometimes they are; other times, they're hollow shells prized more for their exterior and style than for their ability to actually drive. Some are loud, roaring things, barreling forward with a thunderous growl. Others slide silently down broken highways, never stopping long enough for anyone to get a good look. Trying to drive a car's reflection may confer bonuses or penalties to one's Drive roll (and it always necessitates that roll). Attempting to commandeer a car that is actually a *spirit* can be dangerous. Some cars give little evidence of being spirits. Similar to demon-cars with minds of their own, they'll gladly take characters for a ride, except the demon-cars will go where *they* want to go. The character's trapped, and must fight his way out or go where the spirit demands.

Functional Transportation?

The Shadow is home to planes, trains and automobiles (not to mention ocean-liners, spirit-drawn carriages and cable cars). These things — awakened spirits, most of them — move about the Shadow as they would in the real world. A plane glints and shimmers overhead. Car-spirits whip down highways at alarming speeds, blurring as they pass. But here's the question: could a character use any of these as a viable means of transportation? If he steps onboard the spirit of an old commuter prop-engine plane, could it take him to a whole new destination?

The answer? Absolutely. While it's a bad idea for the character, it might be a great idea for a story. Remember, if a vehicle in the real world has given form and life to a spirit in the Shadow, it's for a reason, and it may not be a good one.

A grisly murder on a train, a terrible plane accident or a car that runs over a poor drunk crossing the street might all spawn fully formed spirit reflections. Imagine getting on a plane only to find out that not only is it alive, but it cannot be convinced to avert its course — straight into the side of a mountain. Or that a car, before taking a character to his destination, must first receive a blood sacrifice smeared on its bumper because that is what feeds it Essence? Transportation in the Shadow is a risky affair, one that offers many potential story seeds.

Computers

Computers see significant use in the physical world, and hence have a significant presence in the Shadow. Most are useless, though some can muster enough actual processing power to communicate with one another, should two people be at a computer at the same time. It seems that the proliferation of the Internet has forged a somewhat indelible connection between every computer reflection in the Shadow. A savvy character who succeeds on a Wits + Computer roll might uncover access to witness to this invisible and largely unused network. Though doing so may draw the attention of any spirit near to a computer, or any spirit lurking within (such as wisps of data or spiders made of electricity). Some computers "go bad," however, as they were perhaps a source of crushing frustration, unmitigated lust or outright addiction: people screaming at their PCs, sexual predators using it to troll for children or Internet addicts. Such devices reflect badly, sometimes harming those who attempt to use them. Many such computers also become spirits with mad minds of their own.

Phones

A phone seems a mundane object, until one realizes just how much personal information and emotion is thrown into a phone's tiny little receiver and spit out of the speaker: break-ups, marriage proposals, hateful arguments, phone sex. Phones often have a presence in the Shadow, but picking one up to talk is sometimes dangerous. If a character knows what he's doing, he can spend a Willpower point to talk to another person somewhere in the Shadow, provided that person is within 100 yards of another phone's reflection. Few characters recognize

this, however, and simply picking up a phone to talk puts the character in touch with some spirit near some phone somewhere. It's rarely a good idea to draw the attention of a spirit elsewhere. Once it's aware, it often comes hunting. It might try to communicate for a time, chattering away in its strange spirit language, but eventually it will grow frustrated and seek out the character at whatever cost. Phones are dangerous beacons. Some of them drip fluids, too: spit, bile, blood or sexual fluids.

Statues

Many statues have reflections in the Shadow. Statues can often be used as barometers for a particular area; it's almost as if they more clearly demonstrate an area's general resonance. In areas of decay, the statue might seem corroded. If the area is given over to murder-spirits, the statuary might be splattered with blood. In a place of urban renewal, maybe the spirit seems shrouded in scaffolding, with part of her head dismantled while the rest looks shiny and clean. Of course, many statues often manifest spirits, too. These often-immobile spirits are similar to mere reflections in that they become emblems of a house, town or city's condition.

Weapons

Weapons — not items that can be used as a weapon like a fire axe or kitchen knife, but tools produced with the sole function of hurting another — often have reflections in the Shadow. Humanity invests a lot of effort and emotion into the singular craft and mass production of weaponry. A shotgun in a man's closet symbolizes his protection — or a way out of his marriage. A Springfield M1903 rifle from World War Two has killed its fair share of Nazis, and maybe accidentally was used to kill an Allied soldier or three. A combat knife hangs on the hip of a high-school student, concealed beneath his shirt every day, just waiting for that one time when the bully tries to push him around again. Some weapons cause nothing but reflections, and may gain a number of bonuses or penalties depending on the memory and use of the weapon. A gun wielded by a poor marksman may reflect a gun that carries the taint of improper use, and thus suffers a -3 dice penalty in the Shadow. A rapier once wielded by a fetishistic fencing student might be remembered falsely; he considered it powerful, preternaturally light, a true winner of a blade despite the reality of its merely tolerable construction. Hence, the blade's reflection has a +2 dice bonus to its use in the spirit realm. Other weapons, those oft-used or granted a great deal of emotion, wake up and become spirits. Mostly, weapon-spirits aren't mobile at first, with just a mote in the barrel. Over time, though, many weapons develop spirits that look like ghostly versions of humans wielding them — only

the weapons stand out, the human looks like a wraith formed of acrid cordite smoke.

Storytelling the Shadow

Chief among all things to remember when telling a story in the Shadow is that nothing is safe. In the material realm, a character takes for granted just how easily she can trust the world around her. Physical laws are immutable. The ground is solid beneath her feet. Civilization protects him.

In the Shadow, none of those things are true. The ground may open up and swallow her. An escalator may be hungry and use its metal steps as teeth in the hopes of grinding down a character's delicious bones. The heat from the sun has a voice and can offer blessings or curses. No civilization waits to offer a hand or impose rules; the only "civilization" belongs to the spirits, and they damn sure aren't friendly.

The Shadow isn't to be trusted. No place is safe. Even in a glade, a character should be made to realize that beyond the borders of this oasis wait things that want to play with her mind and soul. The spirit world is a place of constant danger, and a player should be made to feel that about her character. Always is there the feeling of being hunted. Always is the uncertainty about every blade of grass or gust of wind.

Unique Places

What follows are descriptions of places unique to the Shadow, locations that reflection a certain spiritual tenor. Resonance, or the lack of it, can warp a portion of the Shadow so deeply that it becomes something alien in consideration.

Barrens

Some places suffer a powerful disconnect between the material plane and the Shadow Realm. These areas become desolate, blasted wastelands, given over to uniform sterility and faithlessness. In the real world, such places give hints of their desolation: a sea of gray cubicles, an abandoned street whose air is staid and whose landscape is colorless or a lifeless pond without a glimpse of fish or algae atop its unmoving surface. In the Shadow, a Barren's wasteland is amplified. The

colors seem neatly bleached out, and it's generally devoid of any spirits. The resonance here is mute and unaffecting. Everything is eerily still.

A Barren is born of an abnormally powerful Gauntlet that allows no influence to pass between the worlds. What causes the Gauntlet to go this high and form a Barren, however? No one cause is responsible. In one, powerful spirits may have chewed through all the Essence before more could form, causing a dearth of spiritual resonance and the subsequent weakening of the Shadow. In another, the people there in the physical world may have been given over to a bleak dereliction of the soul — not a *depression*, for depression at least represents a powerful emotion, but a kind of emptiness. Stolid work conditions might cause this. So, too, with mental institutions where the patients are so medicated that they become lifeless husks staring at the television but not really seeing it. Barrens become places of no emotion, no memory. They represent a terrible spiritual void.

System: Any supernatural powers are hampered in a Barren. Mage and werewolf powers that rely on the spirit world to function (such as Spirit magic or a werewolf's Gifts) suffer a -3 dice penalty. All other preternatural abilities are given over to a -1 die penalty. One's emotional response is also muted. Characters feel emotions less strongly, be it sadness or anger, love or hate. For this reason, any intense emotional response (such as a werewolf's Death Rage or a vampire's frenzy) is also muted. Characters receive a +2 dice bonus to any Resolve + Composure roll meant to resist such a state of intense emotion.

Glades

Just as a desert oasis or a beautiful copse of trees in the forest, sometimes places in the physical world are so perfect and so safe that they reflect that way in the Shadow, as well. A glade is in the way the sunlight frames the trees, or the way pure water bubbles up from a hidden wellspring. Glades represent a kind of purity and safety in the Shadow. Across the landscape of madness, a glade can be good location to camp, sleep, eat and form a plan. Seeing as how a glade is often a source of safe food and water, too, a glade represents a small moment of sanity in an otherwise insane place.

Glades foster serenity. Fighting becomes difficult within a glade. Disagreements melt away, and bad emotions settle for a time. Spirits feel the same way. Traditionally, angry or cruel spirits simply refuse to enter glades, most times, as pushing past into the serenity takes great effort. Other spirits, even predators, find a kind of tranquility here. A group of humans who manage to come across a glade may find that the

mountain lion that sleeps beneath a tree there, opens one lazy eye to watch them enter and then goes back to sleeping peacefully. Some spirits are even willing to negotiate or offer small tokens to characters, even if such an action goes against the spirits' natures.

Of course, glades are exceedingly rare. For one to form, the physical world must feature a correspondent area of natural perfection. Encroaching civilization wears away at more and more glades every year, and they dissipate or grow dark. Still, some characters are lucky enough to find one. Characters in a glade must be wary, however, because some spirits know that the characters will leave at some point. These entities lurk at the edges, prowling the periphery, sharpening their knives or honing their claws until the characters venture outward once again.

System: Any character who wishes to initiate a fight or even an argument inside a glade must roll Resolve. Success allows that character to fight, but any physical attacks are made at a -2 dice penalty. Conversely, those seeking to defend themselves from such attacks gain a +2 dice bonus on all defensive rolls; glades favor the defender in every fight. If spirits seek to enter the glade to do harm, they must roll Resistance to do so. With success, any attacking rolls made by spirits are done at a -3 dice penalty instead of -2. Once again, the defender gains +2 dice.

Places-That-Aren't

In most cases, the material world and the Shadow Realm roughly correspond. A well-worn street in one is a well-worn street in the other. Some places are admittedly missing, as they lack the emotional or historical resonance that would keep them properly reflected. Others are located or proportioned differently; the aforementioned street might be a block over from where it's supposed to be, as the Shadow's memory is by no means perfect.

And then there are what some shamans and scholars call the Places-That-Aren't. These places have other names (science-minded occult researchers sometimes refer to them as "Non-Representational Vortices"), but the anomaly remains the same: they do not correspond to any real-world location. Some are mythic and iconic, such as odd "lost cities" or legendary lairs of sleeping beasts, but most are simply quirks in the fundamental roadmap of the Shadow. These odd locations seem born of nothing, existing for the sake of existing. Seeing as how such a place has no physical correspondence, human-related spirits cannot dwell in Places-That-Aren't. Other spirits, those able to exist outside of any kind of human reflection, tend to thrive there, recreating and

enforcing their own mad food chains, rewriting the spirit ecology to suit them and them alone.

Some examples of Places-That-Aren't lie below.

The Ossuary

John Randall Carver was not a killer, or a rapist. He called himself a “torturer of the highest magnitude,” never killing his victims, but torturing them intensely before letting them free or selling them on the black market. Once a torturer for the CIA, Carver did his time but couldn't get enough of it, so he set up shop in the root cellar beneath his parents' old house. In the physical world, the cellar was where he tortured his victims, keeping them bound to an antique dentist's chair. In the Shadow, though, the cellar sports access to one of the Places-That-Aren't, a round pit like a well dug out of the center of the ground. The pit is lined with bones — mostly rib-bones, but some femurs and tibias, too. No skulls, though. At the bottom of the pit (it goes about 20 feet down and the bones are strangely slippery) sit inexplicable artifacts from throughout time: stones carved with Aztec sacrificial rituals, pages of Puritan Pilgrim tracts indicating how to uncover witches, leather straps inked with mad poetry. Strangely, no spirits will go down into the pit. They lurk at its edge, peering into the half-darkness, seemingly afraid to enter into its depths.

The Wild 13

Some buildings in the real world do not have a 13th floor. Technically, the floors go up in numerical order; no floors are actually *skipped* (for that's a phenomenal waste of money), but the numbering reflects a jump from the 12th floor to the 14th floor. In the Shadow, the 13th floor often exists in buildings, sandwiched between 12 and 14, and given over to no human influence. In the Hiram Building found downtown, the Shadow's 13th floor is given over to nature. Vines tangle up and wind between collapsed cubicle walls. Wolf-spirits lurk around corners, making their dens in empty offices. Three ravens hang out atop an unused coffee machine, chattering and wondering where their next meal will come from. Some claim that the Wild 13, as it's called, has a secret elevator toward the back of this nonexistent floor, and this elevator can take you to places in the Shadow that are hard to reach. But to get to that elevator, one must first traverse this mad hunting ground, this primal tangle of wilderness attempting to reclaim this anomalous location. Others have tried to get to the elevator. Little more than streaks of blood matting the gray carpet remain.

Quattuor Canalis

In the real world, the *Kalendarium Fortunara* (“The Fortunate Calendar,” a lost book written by an exiled



Franciscan monk in the 14th century) speaks of an island that has never existed. This phantom island, *Quattuor Canalis* ("Four Canals"), was purportedly a temperate paradise quartered by four beautiful rivers. The island was said to "float" near the Arctic Circle, keeping warm and idyllic despite the surrounding regions of frost. Nobody ever found the island in the material world, but curiously the island seems to exist in the Shadow. It isn't idyllic, and instead a mountainous crag of black volcanic rock. This rock is split by four canals, but the water that runs within these channels is brackish and ashen. The only spirits that lurk upon this island are eyeless orange salamanders. These fire elementals are bigger than crocodiles; their saliva drips to the hot rocks and smolders, sometimes catching flame. Those who have seen this island say that, beyond the heat haze, they see something shining toward its center, like a mirror reflecting a sun that doesn't quite shine there. Nobody has ventured close enough to find out just what it is.

Shoals

Sometimes, the threads holding the spiritual landscape break down. Such breakdown causes a kind of "thinness" in the area, and this weakness of spirit infuses the area with a strong negativity. When this happens, the resultant locale is called a shoal.

Shoals are birthed from extreme occurrences of sorrow and pain, usually in the material plane. A woman who loses the rest of her family to a car accident may lock herself up in their house, weeping and wailing. If she does this long enough, and her grief grows unabated, a shoal may grow in the surrounding area of the Shadow. A stretch of rice paddies in Vietnam where many men, women and children died may cause generations of families to come there year after year, bringing their sorrow and regret. When such sadness saturates an area, a shoal may appear.

A shoal's appearance is only subtly different from the nearby vicinity. Colors seem faded and washed out, replaced with shades of gray. The ground tends to run muddy and thick. Some shoals are notable for a variance in temperature; usually, the air grows cold and damp, leaving one's skin with a feverish chill.

A traveler wandering into a shoal may begin to feel listless and withdrawn. Sleeping in such a weak area is worse; the bad thoughts and dreams can haunt a sleeper for days. Spirits suffer the same way any traveler would whilst in a shoal. They muddle about, gray and listless, barely able to muster the behavior that would feed their desires. In fact, many spirits (especially ones that were a part of the area before it became frail and tainted) have trouble leaving a shoal, and end up becoming part of it.

Travelers, too, can suffer this way. The longer one remains in a shoal, the harder it is to leave. Most shoals are reasonably contained (the size of a house), but some end up huge. Legends tell of entire "shoal-towns," where the breakdown of spirit consumes an entire village or city block, drawing travelers in and drinking their soul's strength.

System: To leave a shoal, the player must roll the character's Resolve + Composure. Success on this roll indicates that a character may draw upon his will and leave the shoal. Failure prevents his departure, causing the next roll to leave to be made at a -1 die penalty. This penalty is cumulative; every failed roll adds another die to the negative modifier. A player can only make this roll for his character once per day. If at any point the penalty removes all the dice from a character's Resolve + Composure pool, he has a chance die. Dramatic failure on this means that he can no longer roll to leave, not even with the chance die. He must be forcibly extracted from the shoal, physically dragged from its boundaries. (Note that spirits have roughly the same system to leave, except the spirit only gets to roll its Resistance trait.)

Shoals and Lost Objects

Shoals have an odd property that many don't recognize. Objects lost in the Shadow Realm sometimes end up in a shoal. Nobody is entirely certain of why this is, though some fear that shoals have a hidden intelligence and use objects to lure the unwary. If a character loses an object in the spirit realm, that object may reappear in a nearby shoal. Dreams or hallucinations may even indicate to the character where her item has gone, luring her closer to this leeching trap.

Wounds

The Shadow knows the difference between negativity and atrocity. It's like the difference between a lethal injury and an aggravated one: a bullet hole is bad, but it can be repaired, while a sucking chest wound opened by a set of rending claws is about as bad as it gets. Within the spirit world, negativity marks the land, but with enough effort — or, sometimes, just with time to heal — that pervasive aura of awfulness may fade away. Atrocity, however, sears an inflamed hole through the worlds. It leaves more than a mark; it leaves a suppurating infection called a Wound.

What causes a Wound? War alone will not birth one, but a one-sided battlefield slaughter might, especially if many of the soldiers are left writhing in the mud missing limbs and cradling the dead. Natural disasters won't automatically spawn a Wound, but if the death toll is high and the governmental response (or lack of one) leaves the suffering without recourse, a Wound may form. Concentration camps, school shootings, disease pandemics: all have the possibility of reflecting just enough horror from this world into the Shadow.

A Wound is no subtle thing in the spirit realm. Similar to the aforementioned chest wound, a Wound is an obvious injury to the spiritual fundament. Some look like *actual* wounds, with the ground peeled up like strips of flesh and blood pulsing from the pit as if pushed to that by a distant heartbeat. Most Wounds, though, simply reflect the horror that initiated their growth. Walls leak pus from bullet holes. Smoke drifts from craters in the ground, and in those smoke one sees and hears the screaming faces of the soon-to-be-dead. Maggots writhe. Windows and doors open and close like mouths, barking obscenity and heresy. Rare Wounds are subtle, hidden like a deep infection. Often encased in half-darkness, these concealed Wounds only reveal their nature once one has gone too far in. Usually, the signs of such atrocity are delicate, like the faint odor of fleshy rot or the persistent buzz of black flies and mosquitoes.

The worst spirits are born in or flock to Wounds. Entities of the most abject negativity — seething hatred, rape, bodily destruction, madness — can be found in and around the infected area. They won't be kind to trespassers.

System: A Wound, while grotesque in its obviousness, also works on an unseen level. A Wound suffuses a deep aura of infection and suffering that infect those who enter its boundaries. The tainted resonance here confers a number of negative effects. First, degeneration rolls made within the Wound are done at -1 die; Morality rolls in general suffer -2 dice. Rolls to resist derangements are made at a -2 dice penalty. For werewolves, resisting Death Rage suffers a -2 dice penalty, as does a vampire's roll to resist frenzy. Injuries suffered while within the Wound are increased by one Health point of the equivalent type (bashing, lethal or aggravated). Spirits, too, are affected this way, taking an additional Corpus point of damage.

Wounds and Vices

Some Wounds take on the "flavor" of a certain Vice: a scummy Bangkok hotel used for years as a depot

for sex slaves might take on the darkest veneer of Lust (pulsing flesh walls, the bitter stink of perfume and sex, inanimate objects sob quietly). A courtyard where a church tower sniper killed dozens grows tainted by the Vice of Wrath, drawing lots of hateful fire elementals and causing every character's misstep to be punished for his foolishness.

Some seasoned Shadow travelers (always off-kilter, those people) and demonologists speak of lordly devils known as the Maeljin. Lore suggests that Maeljin "claim" many Wounds as their territories, with each demon given over to one Vice in particular. It's said that the Maeljin each have a thousand names, each name more blasphemous than the one before it. The demon of Pride is sometimes known as the Calipha, Lamashtu, Aristasur or Shaitan (though some spirits whisper her name as *Sarthes In-lth*, hissed in their alien tongue). In some Wounds, these names are written, scrawled or etched so hard the letters bleed. It's their way of marking these infected domains as their own. Worse is that some have found these names in the real world, a frightening consequence to those who recognize its meaning.

Shadow Stories

Below are a few story seeds you might use in your **World of Darkness** game. These can be used as the basis for a single story, or may instead provide a good introduction to a longer-standing chronicle.

Unwitting Verge

In this story, the characters unwittingly contribute to the opening of a keyed verge. The verge can of course be anywhere, though the default scenario is that the verge waits closed at one of the characters' own homes (especially true if a character's home is old or has an urban legend told about the area).

Someone wants the verge opened, and attempts to trick the characters into putting all parts of it in place. One character is mailed something — a "free gift" of an old silver candlestick, perhaps. Another is given a lucky rabbit's foot by a man on the street. A third buys a book he's long been looking for, but pinned to one of its pages is a lock of hair from a little girl long-dead — or maybe someone simply pins the hair to his collar, or slips it into his pocket.

When all the characters come together at the site of the keyed verge, they bring together the various keys to open the door between worlds. Is it successful? Do they

open the verge, inviting spirits in, or stumbling themselves across the worlds? Does the puppeteer of this act use this chaos as a time to exploit the verge himself for some reason. Perhaps he grew up in the house and his little sister — to whom the hair and book belong — disappeared into the fireplace, upon which the candlestick sat when the verge opened. She never returned, for the fireplace became the doorway into the other world.

Perhaps the characters foil this attempt, but have to deal with the aftermath of the man who tried to manipulate them, as well as the spirits that now linger.

The Map

In this story, a map provides a strange story hook for the characters. Where they find the map matters little, as long as its sufficiently mysterious — in a locked attic trunk, buried in a rusted aluminum box beneath a construction site, floating in a Depression-era glass bottle out on a still lake.

The map details the physical area in which the characters live, but is notably different in some areas. Some streets are missing, while the map includes other streets that haven't existed in the town for decades. Moreover, the key is marked with scribbled notes that don't quite make sense: "*Beware the grinning dogs,*" or, "*Fox dens here; be polite above all else!*" On the back of the map is written some kind of promise, be it the potential to find treasure or some other goal (ideally tied to the characters' own stories, such as finding a lost family member or solving some crime from years prior).

Of course, the map is not one that details the physical world, but instead reveals the surrounding environs as they are in the Shadow. In visiting the points on the map, do the characters find a verge or locus (and does this put them in conflict with spirits, mages or werewolves?). Or do the characters take the map to a local occult bookstore or church to see if anyone there can suss out the answers?

Do they attempt to enter the Shadow? Or do others come hunting for the map, mages hungry for its secrets or werewolves who want to tear it to ribbons so that it can never be used?

Gone to Hell

It's all gone to hell. Maybe it's the old neighborhood where the characters live or used to live, or maybe it's the old lake where they used to go fishing. Whatever the case is, it's no longer what it used to be. The neighborhood is full of gangs and drug addicts and nobody has jobs, or the lake is polluted and the fish are dead and a bunch of crazies have set up shop in the cabins.

The characters want to fix it, and maybe they try — but the task is daunting. A handful of guys can't just clap their hands and make the bad stuff go away. But then someone tells them that maybe there's another way. A *secret* way.

They're told that behind this reality lies another reality — like something on the other side of the mirror that's just a little different, or maybe it's put to them that the physical world is given over to invisible programming (like how a computer runs but you never really see the code). The real world, however, can be tweaked by those who gain access to this secret place — and therein lies their solution.

Of course, it's not really a solution. It's actually more dangerous because in the spirit realm, a character can lose more than his physical well-being and instead put his mind and soul on the line. Still, though, from behind the curtain the characters can see the machinations that have destroyed the old neighborhood (or the lake from their youths) — negative spirits leeching the life out of the region, a pulsing wound, a busted ecology of emotions and elementals.

Do they choose to handle it from the Shadow side? Are they even capable (perhaps they get trapped on that spirit side)? Is one glimpse to the other side enough to wreck their perceptions about "how things work?"

III Effects

Below you'll find some interesting effects and story hooks that can be dropped into your Shadow Realm story. These effects provide conflict that can help drive the tale and ratchet tension, while still emphasizing the overarching weirdness of the Shadow.

Resonant Effects

Humans do not belong in the Shadow, and sometimes remaining in this forbidden place brings strange effects to bear against unwitting mortals. The following effects are not caused by any one thing, but are simply the price some humans must pay for remaining in the spirit realm. After a number of days in the Shadow equal to a mortal character's Willpower score, one of the following effects may take place if the Storyteller deems it so. These effects can apply to vampires, as well. Any resonant effects end immediately upon re-entering the material realm. It's also possible that effects begin to become cumulative after spending several consecutive periods (one period equal to the character's Willpower score) in the Shadow. If a character's Willpower is 5, after 10 days he may suffer two of the below effects if the Storyteller declares it.

Bans and Compulsions

Much as spirits suffer from oft-debilitating bans and compulsions (see below, p. 91), humans may grow to take on such a flaw. Such a ban is normally straightforward (must not cross a line of salt, must walk widdershins three times before going through a doorway, cannot speak his own name) and are not wholly debilitating. Failure to observe a ban whether by accident or by force drains the character of a Will-power point and causes that character to suffer a -1 die penalty to any roll made in the next hour. This penalty is due to the distraction of having broken a ban; the character's mind continues to revisit this apparent failure. He obsessively dwells upon it.

Disorientation

A character may suffer sudden bouts of disorientation. This manifests as dizziness, panic attacks and faint hallucinations. The character suffers -2 dice penalty to all Mental rolls once this period of disorientation begins.

Virtue/Vice Shift

The character's Virtue or Vice temporarily shifts. Both don't shift; only one or the other changes. A character whose Virtue is Charity may suddenly find he draws more power from Faith. Another character may shift from being Wrathful to Lustful. This often has to do with the resonance of certain areas a character has passed through. If the character travels through the spiritual reflection of a city's red light district, his urges shifting to reflect the overpowering Lust is a possible side effect. This shift lasts only as long as the character remains in the Shadow.

Mild Derangement

The character assumes a mild derangement. Being in the Shadow is not only unnatural, but it is abnormally stressful. This stress is felt on all elements of the character: physical, mental and emotional, and even causes a weight that drags upon her very soul. The minor derangement should make sense in the context of stress experienced. A character perpetually hunted by a pack of ravenous animal-spirits may grow paranoid (i.e., the Suspicion derangement), while another character who is forced to negotiate a lunatic's maze built out of the Shadow reflection of a department store may gain the Irrationality derangement. Extended time in the Shadow may turn a mild madness into a more severe version.

Shadow Sickness

Humans were not meant to walk within the Shadow. They have souls, yes, but mortal souls are not easily transcendent; they do not travel between the frequencies without sacrifice. The Shadow does not overtly reject the presence of humans, but it does invisibly shudder in their company.

Sometimes, a human who walks in the Shadow becomes ill. This illness may be a disease of the mind, body, even the soul itself. Few know why such diseases target only humans, or where they come from at all. Some speculate that such diseases are born of appropriate spirits, stirred up by their cruel influences. Others liken these maladies to the way a body attacks a viral invader with white blood cells — the diseases caught in the Shadow are meant to mark and erode the humans. If they are withered and destroyed, fine. If they survive these sicknesses, then maybe the spirit world has indelibly identified them, leaving a bit of itself behind inside of them.

Below are a number of these sicknesses. They should be used sparingly; humans don't catch them by dint of simply entering the Shadow through a verge or other "thin spot." The receipt of such a spiritual illness should always be as a result of the human going somewhere he shouldn't — entering a door marked with a red 'X,' kicking over a hive of metal-eyed bees swarming around a tree oozing with sweet honey, exploring a pit in the ground whose muddy walls sit encrusted with gleaming bullet casings or reading the pages of a forbidden diary. Remember: the Shadow's geography represents a constant danger, with a populace of spirits bearing all manner of abnormal hungers. These maladies may come from anywhere.

Sickness Among the Others

Mages and werewolves *can* catch these spiritual diseases, but both supernatural groups maintain strong-willed souls that more easily adapt to existence in the Shadow. As such, on rolls to resist such diseases (as noted below), assume that mages and werewolves have an automatic +3 dice bonus to this resistance. The undead are simply immune.

Resisting Spirit Sickness

If at any point a character runs the risk of "catching" a disease, whether he's drawn the attention of a

malevolent spirit or has walked into a rotten-looking spectral house that was clearly *verboden*, he is afforded the chance to resist infection.

Resistance is, unless specified otherwise, an extended Resolve + Stamina roll. The number of successes necessary is different for each cursed illness and is listed with each disease below (identified as “Resistance Number”). Resistance has a roll limitation, however. The character’s player is only allowed a number of rolls equal to his Willpower score.

Assume that one roll equals an hour’s worth of resistance. During this time, the character’s body is focused on healing; so, too, are his mind and soul fighting to combat the disease trying to worm its way into him. As such, while this resistance is ongoing, the character suffers a –2 dice penalty to all rolls *except* the aforementioned resistance roll. He can choose to forgo this penalty entirely (perhaps he’s locked in combat and cannot afford the penalty any longer), but in doing so, his resistance flags and he effectively “gives up the fight.” The disease cannot be resisted, and it infects the character.

If at any point during the resistance process the character leaves the Shadow, he may gain +3 dice bonus to the Resolve + Stamina roll. The accursed infections born of the spirit realm do not survive well in the physical world, and can be more routinely defeated.

Berdoy’s Sympathy (“The Blight”)

Resistance Number: 8

The Disease: The Blight is one of the few “spirit sicknesses” that have made it to the books. An occult scholar from the 1970s calling himself Hiram Berdoy was said to have opened a keyed verge in the bomb shelter he kept beneath his three-story Victorian home. His journals note that, once the Shadow began to bleed through, he started to find strange things stuck in the crumbling cement wall of the shelter: teeth, strands of hair, bits of skin sewn together. The more of these he pulled out, the weaker the wall got, until it eventually yielded a dark tunnel that allowed him entrance to the Shadow.

It was at this point that Berdoy believes he caught the disease, at the moment he crossed worlds. It wasn’t long after entrance that the first sore — a rusty red mark with a luster like a tick’s back — appeared on his arm. More came quickly, and before too long he was marked with these cankers all over his body.

On Berdoy, and on anybody who catches it, the Blight has a few unusual effects. The first of which is that the sores itch. This distraction causes a persistent –1 die penalty to any action that requires even a moment’s worth of concentration (lockpicking, for instance). The

other and stranger effect is that the illness makes the victim more attractive to spirits, and vice versa. The character gains a +2 Social bonus when dealing with spirits, and gains another +1 die bonus when resisting Intimidation attempts by spirits. Of course, while this seems like a bonus, it grants the spirit a single bonus, as well: any attempts to possess the victim of the Blight are done at a +3 dice bonus, and the victim’s reflexive resistance gains *no* bonus, Social or otherwise.

The Cure: Within the Shadow, a human finds it difficult to cure Berdoy’s Sympathy. One ritual in Berdoy’s own journals claims that the victim can draw around himself a circle in his own blood and bile. He then must pray around the circle uninterrupted for at least an hour. This costs the victim three Willpower points to evoke. During that time, the character is protected from spirits coming within 100 yards of him. If he can remain in that circle for an unbroken 12-hour period, he will be afforded another chance at resistance (as noted above under “Resisting Spirit Sickness”). If he is successful, the sores eventually drop off and all effects (bonuses and penalties) are lost. The lost sores do leave scars, however, that fade after a period of about three months. *Outside* the Shadow, the cure is far simpler provided the character remains non-possessed and stays out of the spirit realm. After 24 hours back in the physical realm, the character is afforded another chance at resistance. He gains +3 dice to the Resolve + Stamina roll.

Ghostmarks

Resistance Number: 6

The Disease: As noted in this chapter, some parts of the Shadow seem indelibly marked by the history of the physical world. Sometimes, places are marked by great trauma and suffering: war zones, crime scenes, concentration camps, disaster sights, even some hospitals or nursing homes. Humans who find themselves in the Shadow — whether they’re there on purpose or wandered in accidentally and become lost — often run afoul of these places. Sometimes these places are Wounds; other times they’re agglomerations of bad resonance lurking invisibly like a septic infection.

Humans in such a place are wise to leave and not go poking around. But human curiosity is a potent force, and some mortals remain and go turning over logs without expecting to see the squirming bugs beneath. Messing with the physical remnants of a negatively resonant area can cause Ghostmarks. Examples of such disturbances include opening a filing cabinet, digging in the ground to uncover a skull or looking in a dead tree’s hollow to see what lies within.

If caught, Ghostmarks manifest on the skin. They appear on the flesh as the spiritual reflections of the horrible events that occurred. A man's back may ripple with a moving, silently screaming face. A woman's thigh might grow what looks to be a vicious scar mimicking the killing shotgun blast caused by a husband who killed his wife many years previous. If the area was marked by a deadly highway pile-up, a victim's flesh may suddenly shift and show markings that look like tire-tracks, steering wheels or gravelly road rash.

These scars never go below the skin. They aren't wounds; they don't bleed. The markings are more like a hand pressing against the underside of fabric, leaving an impression that stirs and moves. It causes no pain beyond minor queasiness.

However, the victim becomes plagued by a minor derangement. This derangement is thematic of the event that marked an area. If a grief-struck school-teacher kills all her students, then Depression may be the resultant derangement, or Irrationality. Once gained, the derangement may be repressed for a scene by spending a Willpower point.

The Cure: The cure for this disease is very straightforward: leave the Shadow. Once the victim leaves the Shadow, the shifting marks and impressions become tattoos, and the derangement goes away after a night's sleep. The tattoos, however, can never be erased. No amount of cosmetic surgery will remove them. Or, to be accurate, they go away for a time — but a week later, they fade back into existence, inked flesh detailing wailing faces, burning bodies, or bullet holes.

Hypomnesia ("Brain Fade")

Resistance Number: 6

The Disease: The means of catching this disease is deceptively simple, and explains why some old shamans and occult texts make a very clear warning not to give any ghosts or spirits your true name. If a character speaks her true name to a spirit within the Shadow, she runs the risk of this mental curse.

Hypomnesia, or "Brain Fade," causes the victim to forget things. The first item on this list of forgotten details is universally her name. It simply fades away, and seems impossible to reach as if the character is trying to catch a mote of dust in her hand. Another item from her memory fades at a rate of one per day. Memories themselves do not fade, but *information* does. Phone numbers, names, dates, addresses. They trickle away like grains of sand.

A character can try to remember them, but doing so requires a Wits + Intelligence roll, with a penalty

of -5 dice; if the character suffers a dramatic failure on this roll, the piece of information she was trying to regain is lost *forever*, even if she manages the cure as detailed below. (On the other hand, an exceptional success allows her to retain and forever remember that item of information, and it becomes indelibly marked in her mind, unable to be removed by this illness.)

After one week, dots of Mental Skills begin to drizzle away at a rate of one per week. Unusually, these dots are not wholly lost, as they are added to one instinctual Skill (any Social Skill, or some Physical Skills such as Athletics, Brawl, Stealth and Survival). It is the player's choice which Skill dots move, but the Storyteller decides *where* they will move.

This disease is contagious between humans. When one human tells an infected victim his name, he runs the risk of catching this disease. He must then make the Resolve + Stamina roll to resist, though the target number of successes needed is four instead of six.

The Cure: If the victim can get another human to tell her three secrets about herself, the disease is cured. Of course, the person who shared the three secrets now has the disease automatically — no resistance is possible. The cured victim regains lost pieces of information at roughly one item per day (effectively reversing the order in which they were lost, with the name always being remembered last). Dots moved from Mental Skills, however, are permanently moved. They can be repurchased with experience points.

Ignis Fatuus

Resistance Number: 4

The Disease: The Shadow is dangerous everywhere, but humans may find it particularly taxing in places where the primordial chaos of nature seeps through. In those places that remain distant from civilization, the weave and weft of reality is subject to warp ever so slightly. Trees tilt. Swamp water bubbles. Clouds move against one another, regardless of the wind. Sometimes, when a mortal wanders into such an area, it leaves its mark upon him.

Unlike the other diseases, this one may happen both in and out of the Shadow. In the physical realm where the boundary between worlds is weak (a thinner Gauntlet) and where civilization fails to touch, a human may find himself affected. It is, of course, worse in the Shadow: the madness of the land is more direct and damning. Infection is likelier when a character sleeps in such a place, or attempts to drink the water or eat food present in the primal wild. Picking berries off a tangle of bushes or kneeling down to sup from a

hissing stream might be enough to transmit the effects of this disease.

The disease begins with the character sweating profusely. She may tremble slightly, as if going through a fever. If the disease takes hold (i.e., she fails her resistance to it), she begins to suffer hallucinations. These hallucinations affect every sense: she may hear the wind talking to her, and taste bitter ash on the breeze. She might smell an odor like burning hair, and see a dog-like thing stalking her from just past her vision (even though that “thing” is really just another character). The hallucinations have two system effects: Perception rolls are hampered by a -3 dice penalty and Social rolls made by *other* characters against the infected are made at -3 dice (as the victim mishears things or assumes intent that doesn’t exist). For the infected, the hallucinations are present both within the Shadow and outside of it.

Another effect that manifests only within the Shadow is that her eyes glow with an eerie yellow hue, like that of a predator. It provides no bonuses to Perception or seeing in the dark, and the victim cannot in fact see that her eyes are yellow at all. It does, however, cause her to stand out. Any human, spirit or creature trying to find her gains a +1 bonus to any Perception or Survival rolls when doing so (and she is, of course, within range of sight).

The Cure: The “cure” is straightforward: the disease goes away after a number of days equal to 10 minus the character’s Willpower score. She can, however, “turn off” the hallucinations (but not the eye-glow) for a scene by spending a Willpower point.

The Odium

Resistance Number: n/a (see sidebar below)

The Disease: This spirit sickness is as the result of a spirit’s Numina. Many spirits are given over to byzantine bylaws and bizarre social trappings. But few entities like being insulted; those who feel that they have been scorned in some way may possess a Numen called Scorn. If they successfully use this Numen against a mortal, the result is the Odium. Woe to the human cursed with this soul’s infection.

The Odium makes a person revolting to others. He suffers no physical transformation, or feel mentally or emotionally changed. But everybody runs the risk of reacting to him as if he’s *wrong* somehow. One person may believe he carries with him an acrid, sulfurous odor. Another may simply find him unrepentantly ugly, loathsome to behold. A third individual may be unable to explain the distaste, instead thinking, “I just don’t trust this guy.”

Those meeting an afflicted individual must first make a Resolve + Composure roll, with a penalty equal to five minus the victim’s Composure roll (if the afflicted has a Composure of three dots, the penalty then equals -2 dice). Success means that the character feels the distaste, but is able to explain it away or look past it. Failure means that the character doesn’t want to deal with the afflicted. Any Social rolls then made on behalf of the victim are done at a -3 dice penalty *except* Intimidation rolls, which receive no penalty. Note that failure on a person’s Resolve + Composure roll can cause results beyond dice penalties: a group of teenagers may suddenly find the afflicted so vile that they decide to mob him and get in a few kicks. A woman may slap him for looking “down her shirt,” and a bartender may simply refuse him service. Consequences often go beyond the system effects.

Animals remain unaffected by the Odium. Characters who are family members of or friends with the victim gain a +2 bonus to their Resolve + Composure roll to resist the loathsome effects.

The Cure: The Odium lasts for a number of days equal to a spirit’s Power + Finesse. That said, a spirit can end the affects of the Numina at any time — many offer to do so provided the mortal does something to make up for the error of his ways. He must in some way appease the spirit, which might be a task as simple as offering an apology, or performing a bloody animal sacrifice in the name of the spirit.

The Unclean

Resistance Number: 8

The Disease: Hunger does not cease in the Shadow, not if you’re human. Without food, a human begins to feel weak as his guts growl and his limbs tremble. Some animal-spirits — predators, mostly — innately know to take advantage of this. They set traps.

If they believe a human may be present, an animal-spirit may leave behind bits of food meant to entice a human who may come wandering by. This food isn’t cooked or processed; it’s something the spirit pulled from the surroundings, whether it’s a hunk of raw meat ripped from another weaker spirit, or a hunk of juicy fruit plucked from a moaning tree. The spirit spends one of its Essence, marking the fruit or meat with the spirit’s animal nature — this nature isn’t specific to the animal, but is more the general resonance of raw, unbridled instinct. It’s an animal’s rage, a predator’s heart.

The human who eats the poisoned food feels his stomach and bowels clench. He must resist the disease, gritting his teeth and feeling dizzy for the time in which

he does so. If he fails to resist, the contaminated spirit food takes hold inside and begins to affect his soul.

A wildness worms its way into his mind and body. Mentally, the character begins to feel almost feral, wild with instincts. He must actively resist giving into activities that would serve his Vice; a Resolve + Composure roll is necessary any time his the character finds any reason to express his darkest urges (food in front of gluttons, a soft bed of grass beckoning to the slothful, the target of one's hatred paraded before the wrathful). Physically, he suffers changes, too. His teeth extend outward and taper to crooked points (his bite now doing lethal), and his fingernails curl into hooked talons (Brawl attacks with his hands do lethal, too). The human literally looks bestial, and feels that way, too — while his Intimidation rolls gain a +1 bonus, any other Manipulation-related roll suffers a -2 dice penalty as he finds himself unable to articulate well beyond short phrases and sharp grunts.

Why would a spirit do this? Because a predator-spirit will reclaim the Essence invested. Hunting an Unclean human is far greater a reward; it doesn't hurt, too, that the Essence invested grows within the human's body, transmitting the disease. If the spirit kills and eats of the human's flesh, he regains thrice the Essence spent to begin with.

Legend suggests that the Shadow is home to a roving tribe of Unclean humans. This hissing, spitting band of beast-men prowls parts of the Shadow, hunting as a large pack of two dozen or more. If a character becomes afflicted with this sickness and remains with it for a time, this pack may come looking for him. They will want him to join them, of course, and leave the physical world behind for good. Resistance earns him a warning swipe of a claw; further denial means they try to eat him.

The Cure: If the character goes three days without eating anything (difficult as one of the Unclean, as eating becomes highly desirable to the animal mind) and then spends two Willpower points, the disease will fade after the next night's sleep. Note that leaving the Shadow and entering the physical world does not negate this disease: the feral Unclean contagion remains in the soul regardless.

Vampires in the Shadow

The Damned undead are about as aware of the spirit world as humans are. Unlike mages or werewolves, vampires have no real foreknowledge of the Shadow, or possess any real facility to enter it proactively. Much as some humans believe in a spirit world, so, too, do some vampires. And for the



majority of them, it ends there with nothing more than a belief.

Still, the Shadow can figure into your **Vampire: The Requiem** game, and this section will provide you with a few notes and rules for such a story.

No Dead Reflections

Just as humans themselves don't have a reflection or spirit represented in the Shadow, vampires fail to reflect, as well. That's not to say they don't have an effect on the spirit world. Much like humankind, anything a vampire does can have resonance if the act was invested with the proper emotion or meaning. Protracted blood-drinking, an act that causes great pleasure to the human through what is ostensibly an act of cannibalism, can birth small motes of pleasure-spirits whose delight is contradictorily gleaned through pain.

Death Opens a Door

Vampires can enter the Shadow in much the same way as humans. Vampires can be dragged across by spirits, or may enter through a doorway between worlds (i.e., a verge).

Some mortal occultists are at least dimly aware of the Shadow and of the ways to cross over, and so, too, are some vampires. Usually, any comprehension of spirits and the Shadow Realm are only cursory. Such views are often far from the reality, much like those possessed by the Spiritualist movement heralded by people such as Madame Blavatsky in the 19th century. Still, this understanding is certainly more complete than the average human or vampire, or gives about as much thought to the Shadow as they do to mermaids or Martians.

Rumor has it that a Crúac ritual (the hoary blood magic that belongs to the Circle of the Crone) allows a coven of vampires to cross the Gauntlet. In some books, this ritual is known as "Thinning the Skin," while in others it's referred to as "The Twenty-Four Wolves at Twilight" (a reference to the goddess Holle in her guise as the Ash Girl, who crossed the wall between light and darkness and found herself surrounded by 24 wolves). This ritual reportedly requires the vampire to cover one-half of her face in the ash of human remains, and the other with blood borne of a miscarriage. Then, by

drawing the frame of a doorway with her own blood, it's said the vampire can cross over to the Shadow. What stops most vampires from ever attempting such a thing is that no ritual exists to help the vampire come *back* to the physical world.

(If a character wants to purchase such a ritual, assume it's a level four Crúac ritual. The roll required is Strength + Occult + Crúac, and is penalized by a number of dice equal to the Gauntlet rating there. Success allows the doorway to open for a very short window — no more than 30 seconds of time. The ritual requires three Vitae to be spent, and can only be cast once a year.)

Drinking Blood

Another problem a vampire will encounter in the Shadow is the deficit of food. Vampires drink blood, and must continue to do so in the spirit world. Blood is available in any spirit whose physical counterpart would normally possess blood in its body. Animal-spirits are the primary source, though some conceptual- or location-spirits may have human forms in the Shadow, and thus be filled with delicious blood. A vampire drinking the blood of such a spirit drains its Corpus (as opposed to a normal human's Health).

Thankfully, a vampire's feeding restrictions are obviated for her time in the Shadow. A spirit's "blood" is strange and potent enough, and it's certainly not the normal blood of an animal. Even the eldest vampire can drink the blood of a spirit and find sustenance.

However, spirit-blood is dangerous to consume. For one, it can sometimes cause adverse effects (see "Ill Effects" and "Shadow Sickness" above for the things spirit-blood might cause a vampire to suffer). Second, drinking spirit-blood may cause addiction. Assume that the rules for blood addiction (see **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 158) remain true for a vampire drinking the blood of a spirit. It tastes too good, too sweet for the character to easily pass up the next time.

Weaknesses

A vampire's many weaknesses are mostly in place within the Shadow. Wood through the hurt still paralyzes, fire still burns and frenzy still applies.

Sunlight, however, has a lesser effect. For one, a vampire does not slumber during the day. Whatever grim circadian rhythms a vampire is slave to in the physical world do not exist here (though a vampire still spends one point of Vitae upon the start of a new 24-hour period as if she had slept). Sunlight, too, is

often filtered and gauzy, and causes lesser damage. A vampire suffers bashing damage at a rate of one per turn; his flesh darkens as if bruised, and it grows warm to the touch. It will eventually turn to lethal and then to aggravated if the vampire continues to suffer the wounds without healing them, but it happens at a much slower rate than what the vampire would experience in the physical world.

Vampiric Disciplines

Do the strange powers of the Kindred work inside the Shadow? Some work as expected, but others are affected by the strange variables of this realm. Note that the exceptions to rules listed below are only in effect when a vampire character is actually within the Shadow. There, his undead flesh is made ephemeral. These rule tweaks do not apply when used on spirits outside the Shadow.

Animalism

The effects of this Discipline work on animal-spirits, but all rolls are made at a -2 dice penalty. The beasts of the Shadow are simply too cunning; these are not the base creatures of the material world, but entities far more intelligent. The one exception to this is Subsume the Lesser Spirit, which has an altogether different effect than if used in the physical world. Successes gained on this power against a spirit cause actual harm to an animal spirit's Corpus — the “pushing” effect of the Discipline power actually disturbs the spirit's ephemeral form.

Auspex

The spirit realm is a land of sensory input — as such, it seems easier for a vampire to tap into the unseen world because this is a realm that *embodies* the unseen world. Heightened Senses grants an additional +1 dice to Perception rolls when necessary. Aura Perception seems easier to use, too, with the auras appearing brighter (+2 to the roll to activate). Spirit's Touch is overwhelming; the roll to activate gains +2, but the sheer power of the emotion and information gleaned causes a powerful headache; all rolls for the remaining hour after the ability's use suffer a -1 die penalty. Telepathy works on spirits, but suffers a -2 dice modifier to use, and Twilight Projection cannot be used in the Shadow (this Discipline only works in the corporeal world).

Celerity

Celerity works in the Shadow as it does in the corporeal world.

Dominate

Dominate works poorly on spirits. Something is ultimately lost in translation, like a computer trying to parse a program from a different era. It's not impossible, but the first four levels of the Discipline (Command, Mesmerize, The Forgetful Mind, Conditioning) suffer a -4 dice penalty against spirits. The final level, Possession, fails utterly. Some rumors suggest it can even make a vampire more susceptible to possession or manipulation by the spirit that the power targets.

Majesty

Majesty is a dangerous Discipline to use within the Shadow — much as Dominate, the rolls suffer a -4 dice penalty against spirits. Worse, should a vampire suffer a dramatic failure on any Majesty roll, the failure draws the negative attention of nearly every spirit in the area.

Nightmare

The Nightmare Discipline operates on an altogether more primal level than some of the other mentally-affecting Disciplines (Dominate, Majesty), and as such suffers no penalties when using the ability on spirits within the Shadow. The only exception to this is Mortal Fear; spirits are not affected by a human-level of fear, and so this Discipline simply fails to work on them.

Obfuscate

Obfuscate works within the Shadow without any bonuses or penalties.

Protean

Protean works within the Shadow without any bonuses or penalties.

Resilience

Resilience works in the Shadow as in the corporeal world.

Vigor

Vigor works in the Shadow normally.

Covenant Disciplines

The so-called covenant Disciplines — Crúac, Theban Sorcery and the Coils of the Dragon — all gain +1 die to their rolls when used in the Shadow. Why this is, vampires don't know for certain, but it seems to indicate that these sorceries are in some way connected to the unseen world of the spirits. Crúac, in particular, is sometimes believed to rely on the appeasement of invisible entities — blood spilled and pain suffered pleases many entities, who may grant untold power in return.

Prometheans and Changelings

By and large, assume that Prometheans and changelings can enter the Shadow in much the same way that humans can. This chapter is relevant, therefore, to all supernatural types. The powers of both the Created and the fae do not work as they should while within the Shadow; assume that any roll meant to affect spirits as it would a human suffer a -2 dice penalty unless the Storyteller deems otherwise.

Spirits

Animals, plants, objects, concepts, ideas — if given enough attention and devotion, if allowed to roam freely and grow of their own merits, they may spawn a living, sentient counterpart in the Shadow. A spirit, born as a winking mote (hardly bigger than a speck of dust or a buzzing fly), appears in the Shadow hungry for resonance that conforms to its own nature.

But what are spirits, really? How do they act? How do they grow — and worse, what happens when they *do* grow, gaining power and intellect?

Spirits Are...

Spirits are multi-faceted. What follows is a discussion of these facets.

...Selfish

Spirits want. End of sentence. They all want *something*. Many seek to fulfill base level urges: to eat, to grow, to breed, to hunt. Others desire the resolution of more complex tasks: to foster certain environments, to spread madness, to cause disease, to bring the worlds crashing together or blasting apart. A spirit's want is unmitigated. They are creatures of imbalance, driven to their urges with an ineluctable pull. The only thing that sometimes fosters balance is the competing ecology of the Shadow; what one spirit wants, another may seek to combat, and so the two must compete for success. But all too often, this competition fails to trigger, and a spirit's primitive desires drive it to bring great misfortune to both the material and spirit worlds.

What's worse is that spirits aren't dumb. They're primitive in some ways, but this is given over to a very cunning and frankly alien intelligence. Their logic centers may be tangled in a convoluted synaptic pattern, but that kind of insanity doesn't necessarily belie an alarming intelligence. Some spirits can think so far ahead and in such labyrinthine manners that existence is like one persistent chess game, and the spirits are considering moves 100 steps ahead of what a single human character is capable of comprehending.

...The Sum of Their Parts

A spirit is almost the Platonic ideal of its reflection. A dog-spirit reflects what one associates most with a dog: loyal, pack-minded, capable of dominance and submission, driven by hunger, sated by reward. The spirit of a revolver reflects all those things one thinks about guns: frightening, powerful, deadly. Spirits, unless of spectacular power or sentience, rarely act outside their provenance. A dog-spirit does not act like a cat-spirit, unless for some reason that dog-spirit has consumed a needless portion of cat-like Essence, and thus has changed its own nature. But even then, the animal isn't *denying* its nature; it's simply becoming something else by dint of what it consumes. What it becomes, it is. What it is reveals how it acts.

...Seeking Egress

Most spirits consciously seek to leave the Shadow. Many will do whatever it takes to do so — while it doesn't drive them at all moments of the night, when a spirit sees an opportunity to cross the Gauntlet and enter the material world, the spirit will almost certainly exploit that opportunity to its fullest and most immediate advantage.

Why is this? Nobody really knows. Some speculate that it's a matter of competition. In the physical world, a spirit is capable of existing with less competition. It's a difficult thing to maintain, but if it can manage the terrible costs then a spirit can live basking in great power and reward. Others believe it maybe operates on a principle like osmosis, wherein a high concentration of material seeks to move to a low concentration of material by its nature.

On the other hand, some say it's just plain jealousy. Spirits aren't real, not in the concretized, expected way. They're envious of what humans have, and they want to take it for themselves. This may be more true than people care to know.

...Bizarre

Spirits do not possess human intelligence. They are not given over to human rationality. Common sense does not exist in the Shadow, at least not in the way we think it does. A spirit may *seem* to have comprehensible, human intelligence; that's only because somewhere, the echoes of humanity lurk within the spirit. Spirits have intelligence, all right, but it's an alien thing, an inscrutable maze of strategies and feelings. A spirit thinks and does things that a human cannot always comprehend. A bat-spirit seems to flit about amidst the silhouettes of trees above a character's heads, doing what all bats do. It would be foolish to believe that the spirit is given over to so simple an intelligence. What happens when this spirit comes down, introduces himself as Night's Lonely Hunter, and demands a taste of the character's blood? What if it asks for the character to tell him a story, because he's oh-so-lonely? (And if that story's not good enough — a watermark for which the character has no gauge — the bat will punish the poor fool for wasting his time.) Spirits are in many ways what a human mind would consider irrational at best and insane at worst. This is why spirits are frightening. Attempting to predict their behavior or understand them is doomed to fail.

...Predators or Prey

All spirits seek to prey on other spirits. Some are more obvious about this than others; a wolf-spirit is a far more obvious hunter than, say, the spirit of a cell phone. The wolf stalks its prey. The cell phone seems to be doing nothing, though in reality it's dialing out with its alien Numina, seeking out the frequencies of other cell-phone-spirits, and it's invisibly consuming their Essence. All spirits end up as predators or prey. Some are able to cloak this habit beneath their aspects, but, make no mistake, every thing that walks and talks within the Shadow eventually wants to eat, too.

Humans as Food?

It is possible that a spirit sees a human in the Shadow as food. The wolf-spirit may very well want to eat that character, to taste his succulent flesh and split the bones to suck the marrow from within. The cell-phone-spirit, too, may want to worm its frequency into the brain of the character to

consume thoughts and memories, literally eating the brain from the inside.

It's just as likely, however, that many spirits see humans as something altogether worse than food. They see them as puppets. At least as a meal, it's one-and-done, a grisly but finite experience. When a spirit sees a human as a worker, a mount or a target for its rage and madness, that becomes a thousand-fold more concerning. A human can lose his soul and mind, here, not just his flesh and bones.

Life Cycle of a Spirit

Here follows the life of a happiness-spirit: its birth, its growth, its re-formation and its demise. The life cycle noted below is a little simplistic, and doesn't necessarily take into account other factors that may modify the spirit's span and journey. These factors, however, are discussed later in this section.

Birth: The Mote

In the material world, a teenage girl receives excellent news: she has been accepted to a prestigious university, one that lies far away from her staid hometown and her somewhat sadistic, passive-aggressive parents. This is the out she has been looking for, and it creates in her a wellspring of sudden joy. The sheer weightlessness of possibility is intense.

This has an effect on the Shadow. In the reflection of this girl's bedroom, the happiness she feels saturates the area with resonant Essence. From this Essence, a mote blinks into being.

A mote is the genesis for a spirit, a darkly twinkling inkling of potential. Born of joy, the mote contains the potential of happiness if not raw happiness itself. Is the mote sentient? Not precisely, but sentience is by no means an objective term; can one prove that a bacterium does not think? In its own way, that's what a mote is, a tiny spirit driven to the simplest urges, the urges of a single bacterium or a buzzing beetle. A mote wants to eat. It wants to live. It wants to grow.

It can eat two things. First, it can consume the Essence given off by the resonance of joy. As mirth occurs, Essence bleeds into the Shadow, and the mote can feed. It can also eat others like it: different motes of happiness. The mote, too, can therefore be

eaten, but in this case, the spirit mote is lucky. The competition for food, while fierce, manages to be a banquet of power. This single mote eats its brothers, and it slowly grows from a piece of dark dust to a shimmering ribbon.

Growth: Hunger

The spirit, now an iridescent ribbon that darts about the Shadow, has more power. (Assume that it is a Rank 1 spirit at this point.) Its existence is a struggle, however. Ironically, all is neither easy nor happy for the happiness-spirit. It must compete and *eat* to survive. Again, it can sup on Essence or eat more of its kind. At this point, the spirit is more aware. Its sentience has grown. No longer does it rely purely on the most basic strategies like those given over to a mere bug. Now its thought processes are given over to stronger instincts, like those demonstrated by a reptile's mind.

This selfish existence forces the spirit into a more strategic struggle. The spirit cannot afford to simply wait for whatever comes along. If it does this, it won't grow, and may even weaken. Worse, something else might come along and eat it.

The happiness-spirit can eat all manner of Essence, but the spirit feeds better when it eats Essence that is more in line with its own resonance. The farther from its own resonance the Essence is, the less useful it is to consume. Essence of some kind of happiness is ideal. Essence born of another emotion isn't ideal, but still useful as it's at least born of *some* kind of emotional response. But Essence born of murder? Or Essence created by an owl-spirit or the spirit of an automobile? It falls farther out of line with the spirit's original needs.

Keep in mind, too, that whatever Essence the spirit eats will color or discolor its nature. What it wants is to eat more of its own resonant Essence, but it may not be able to do so. If it eats, say, the Essence born of cars and car-spirits, what happens? The iridescent ribbon grows stained with smears of motor oil, and maybe over time it becomes more than just happiness, but becomes an abstractly sentient representation of *happiness-about-cars*. This limits the spirit, but could give it greater power and focus, too.

In this case, the spirit is lucky enough to know some basic tricks to foster its own existence and gain what it seeks the most. The spirit knows Numina and has Influences (see below for more information on these spirit-centric powers), and can *push* the teenage girl into seeking happiness. The spirit feels across

the Gauntlet, and the spirit's Influences help her to seek more joy.

To gain the joy that she is missing — after all, the wonderful shock of the acceptance letter has softened and faded — she has to resort to a quick fix. While her asshole parents sleep, she pilfers the key to the liquor cabinet and snatches a bottle of vodka from within. She goes back to her room and gets giddy. She does this for several nights, inviting over some girlfriends to share in the fun.

Power: A Shift

The Essence born of the girl's mirth-making liquor-fest is still resonant with happiness. But this happiness is a little different. It isn't transcendent joy, but a quick-fix bliss buzz. It still works for the spirit, of course. It eats happily. It feeds, frolics, consuming and absorbing.

And from this tweaked Essence, the spirit changes and gains more power. Physically, now it looks like a ribbon of opium smoke, gauzy and seductive. In the wisps of blissful smoke, sometimes the girl's own face can be seen, a weird mockery of her stoned-out, drunken visage. When the spirit gains power, it achieves more of its own identity as its sentience swells. Now, it's no longer *just* a nameless spirit. It has an identity all its own, and it has a name. The spirit is now One Girl's Ecstasy. Has it chosen this name on its own? Or is it just the complex combination of real-world elements and reflective Essence that creates the name, like how byzantine strands of DNA form our fingerprints? Few know, and it matters little. The spirit is named. While its name can change as the spirit grows and changes, it may also remain the same provided it keeps its same habit of existence.

Perpetuation: Vicious Circle

One Girl's Ecstasy has a good thing going. The spirit has a girl in her room who loves the bliss of a good high. She likes getting bombed out, stoned, drunk, whatever it takes. And the spirit gets to bask in her glow.

This isn't a good thing for the girl, of course. The spirit pushes her at first, but it really doesn't have to push too hard after too long. It has enough power now that its hazy insubstantial form fills the whole room. Every time she strives for a new high, the spirit shudders with its own bliss. Other spirits can't hold a candle to it. One Girl's Ecstasy staves them off, or it just plain eats them.

Sadly, she misses the deadline necessary to get her acceptance to that college in the mail. And she doesn't much care, either. This feels too good; how can college compare? So what if she has to steal her parents' money to get a fix? So what if all that tweaking is rotting out her teeth and giving her a crummy complexion? She's happy. Isn't that all that matters?

It's all that matters to the spirit, of course. For a time, it relishes in the feelings she gives off, and when the time is right the spirit has enough power to Claim her as its own. It can get past the Gauntlet and move to the real world, wearing her flesh like a puppet. Now, as a Ridden, her eyes remain perpetually rolled back in her head, and a narcotic smoke drifts lazily from her nostrils and mouth whenever she talks. One Girl's Ecstasy is now out in the physical world, having crossed over, which many spirits seem to desire above all else.



Spiritual Surgery

Dr. Jefferson Redhawk is the grandson of one of the Leni Lenape's great medicine men. He himself once considered the idea of the supernatural total bullshit. Redhawk, a licensed psychotherapist, cared little for that kind of mumbo-jumbo.

That all changed when he ran afoul of a terrible spirit that stole his wife's breath and left her turning blue on the kitchen floor. She died there, but before she passed, Redhawk saw the thing hovering over her, an icy blue shade drawing the air from her lungs like one drawing a rope from the depths of a well.

Jefferson has since devoted his life toward what he calls "spiritual surgery." He knows that things exist beyond this veil, outside the mortal world, and he endeavors to destroy them. These things are the ones responsible for disease, he claims, for madness, for pain. He seeks to exorcise them from this world using the ways of his forebears. He and others like him have banded together to accomplish this overwhelming task. They're no longer precisely sane, Redhawk and his peers. But they are most certainly capable.



Clarity Through Potency

As embodied through the above example of a spirit's life cycle, as a spirit gains power, it becomes a fuller entity with deeper awareness. As the spirit grows, the following things grow with it:

Name: At first, the spirit of a grain-thresher is just that. The spirit has no identity. It belongs, in its own way, to the "herd" of other grain-thresher spirits. The big combine lumbers through the Shadow without a pilot, its whirling blades chewing the landscape. As the spirit eats, though, it gains power, and with power comes an identity separating it from the others. If it mows over several animal spirits, it may become known as Wandering Meat Harvester.

Appearance: Initially, a spirit appears to be the most basic reflection of its origin. The spirit of a vulture may seem as simple as a tall black shadow with wings; up close, details are lost. But as the vulture survives and grows, its appearance changes. Details emerge to reflect its more potent nature. One eye shows missing. Its beak grows hooked and stained with blood from all the carrion it has consumed. A heady odor of rotting roadkill surrounds it. It may even grow in size. If the spirit grows to an abnormal potency, the spirit becomes a minor god among vulture, huge and mythic — its wingspan increases twofold, its talons become gaff-like and razor-sharp and its eyes glow an unnatural red.

Memory and Intelligence: These two things are somewhat hand-in-hand. As a spirit of lesser rank, a spirit knows only the most common, rudimentary information shared among all spirits of its kind. The spirit of an axe knows that it needs to chop. It remembers what all axes remember: the taste of wood, and the occasional memory of blood and bone. If that spirit grows, it separates from the group and as noted, gains its own identity. Now, it grows able to think of ways to lure others to it so that it may find the bite of wood or bone once again. It makes deals with other spirits to get what it needs. It thinks of new things it wants to split: skulls, stones, engine blocks. Its memory is now amended; it remembers strange instances of what axes have experienced in the real world. A man takes his axe and chops up his wife. An axe is driven through a door to open it. Rope is cut, and somewhere a man screams as a flat guillotine blade hurtles downward.

Aspects: As a spirit grows, consuming other entities and eating all manner of Essence, its nature takes on new dimension. Where initially a lake-spirit is just that, a placid lake, it eventually takes on new elements to its nature and personality. Where once

its job was simply to be a lake, over time it becomes a place where it wants to hide secret things below its depths. It takes on a murky algae scum to help conceal what lies beneath its waters. The lake becomes all the more secretive and paranoid, drawing darkness around it so it may hide. In some ways, spirits are their “jobs,” and assume that as a spirit grows in power, it takes on new jobs. A dog-spirit may initially just want to follow a pack and hunt. But over time, it learns to play, sound like a barking alarm and steal. It becomes part of a barking chain of other self-aware dogs that pass information down the streets of a town’s reflection in the manner of seconds. The spirit’s personality takes on new dimensions.

Unfathomable Laws

While humans may never truly grasp it, at least not to its full depth, spirits are given over to a series of laws that govern their actions, appearances and behaviors. Some of this has been talked about already, but they are held to other governances, as well. To a human, this is a lunatic’s parade of mad ecology and throat-choking bureaucracy, usually far enough outside a character’s purview that he only glimpses it on the surface. But it’s there nevertheless, and every spirit’s behavior is given over to these invisible laws.

Strange Tongue

It should come as no surprise that most spirits do not speak human languages. Certainly some are capable of doing so, or at least mimicking turns of phrase that bleed over from the physical world (a murder-spirit may shamle toward its victim, barking in a guttural stutter: “*D-die! D-die!*”). All spirits, however share a language, a strange susurrus, a sibilant argot. Most don’t actually *speak* it in a way where their mouths move (most spirits don’t even *have* mouths) — the voice simply comes away from them, an unearthly and disconnected sound.

Spirits can attempt to communicate with humans, but doing so is difficult to articulate. For every sentence a spirit wishes to speak, that spirit must succeed on a Finesse roll. This roll is penalized by a number of dice based on how complex the communication needs to be. A single word may not be penalized at all, while a two-word phrase (subject-verb like “You run,” or “We eat”) imposes only a –1 die penalty. Overly convoluted sentiments may confer penalties well above that, to a maximum of –5 dice.

Some Numina will help spirits speak to a human directly, either through telepathic communication or

by mimicking a character’s native tongue. See p. 148 for just such Numina.

New Merit: Spirit Tongue (•••)

Effect: No human can speak the language of the spirits (called “Babel” by some, or the “First Tongue” by others) perfectly. A human’s mouth and tongue are literally incapable of capturing the nuances of this otherworldly language.

This Merit, however, at least allows a human to make a go at it. The character with this Merit can express very simple ideas (one- to three-word phrases) without any roll. More complex communication requires a Manipulation + Expression roll. This roll may suffer negative dice modifiers (maximum of –5 dice) if the circumstances are tense or if the ideas communicated are based solely in human experience (i.e., spirits would have a difficult time comprehending the idea much less the language involved).

Movement

All spirits possess a Speed score (see Chapter Four), and this Speed score is largely determinant upon their nature.

When considering movement, for the most part the same physical laws that govern the material world govern the Shadow, too. Gravity still exists, as do water currents and air vectors. Most spirits are roughly bound to the earth: a snake-spirit does not fly unless it has grown in strength by consuming the Essence of say, an eagle-spirit (at which point it may grow wings and be able to glide if not fly). The spirit of a shark is largely contained to its oceanic domain — after all, its body is built for swimming *and* that’s where it finds the proper resonant Essence to consume.

Some spirits are bound to their physical counterparts and are therefore largely immobile despite their Speed scores. A tree-spirit may cling to the tree itself (or the reflection of the tree). So, too, with many of the inanimate objects such as cars, guns, houses. They don’t get up and move because it is not in their nature to do so: a house-spirit needn’t hunt for its prey, and instead summons its prey to it with trickery or Nu-

mina. This is especially true of spirits of low power (Rank 1). These entities are only partially aware, and embody the more basic and banal nature of an object. A teddy-bear-spirit at low levels does not move of its own volition because *teddy bears* do not move of their own volition. But given enough power and emotion, and the spirit's awareness and intelligence grow. The spirit begins to hunt for its Essence, driven by new feelings and the taste of different resonant Essence.

Abstract spirits — those based on ideas and emotions — tend to be less bound to the physical laws. Hatred in the physical world is not subject to gravity's whims, and so it is within the Shadow, as well.

Essence Consumption and Hybridization

Spirits are eating machines. It's what they do best, and what they want to do most: consume Essence. In story terms, "eating" is ambiguous. Not every spirit has a mouth with which to consume, and so every spirit appears to consume things differently. Animal-spirits eat much as they do in the physical world — a wolf tears off hunks, a snake strangles or paralyzes with venom and a bat flits about to swallow insect-motes. Plant-spirits tend to absorb food, much as they do in nature, drawing in Essence through branches, leaves and roots (though some spirits, like those of flytraps or creeping vines, may grow more proactive in their hunting and consumption). Artificial-spirits sometimes absorb, too, but many actually lash out in a manner befitting their reflection. A knife makes two slashes in another spirit and drinks its Essence. A computer-spirit seems to "download" resonant Essence, making invisible ("wireless") attempts to pluck invisible Essence from the surrounding area. A car-spirit might mow down other spirits or suck Essence into its fuel tank. Abstract spirits consume Essence, well, *abstractly*: hatred bites, love and depression smother, murder stabs and addiction strangles or drinks.

A spirit is best sustained by consuming Essence closest to its own resonance. Ideally, this means eating other spirits just like it, but that's not always an option (and some spirits form broods where eating one another is taboo). So, the spirit looks for Essence related to real-world habits. Take, for example, a rat-spirit. Real rats, such as roof-rats or wharf-rats, tend to eat a lot of garbage or plant matter. So, spirit-rats eat the Essence of like-minded things. Consuming waste-resonant Essence is perfect. So, too, with nibbling away at plant-spirits. Rats *sometimes* eat meat, and so if the spirit eats other animal-spirits or meat-related Essence, that works, too. Keep in mind, though, the further

away the Essence is from that animal's resonance, the less sustaining it ends up. Moreover, differently resonant Essence *changes* the spirit, mutating it a little every time it eats something it normally wouldn't. So, the rat that eats too many other animal-spirits finds that his flat incisors become jagged — great for tearing flesh from bones, which is good because now the spirit hungers more for fresh meat than garbage. The spirit may even develop alternate Influences (see Chapter Four).

Say, however, that the rat-spirit finds only Essence related to a particular emotion. Eating a lot of Essence tainted with the resonance of fear will change the rat-spirit. Now, instead of being interested in the normal consumptive habits of a real world rat, the rat feeds on creating *fear*. Think of how a rat on a staircase frightens the housewife who encounters the rat, and you have a pretty good idea as to how this rat could gain more Essence for itself. Influences change again, and as the rat shifts to being a fear-eating rat (maybe even named Scary Yellow Eyes), it can start eating fear-Essence more easily. See the shift? Now, consuming the Essence it once would've eaten (garbage, plant) does less for it than drinking up the Essence born of fear. The rat's very nature has changed from the Essence it devoured.

Other examples include a tree that absorbs Essence of an urban influence looks well-pruned, or maybe sick with pollution. A dog-spirit that eats cat-spirits doesn't necessarily become more cat-like, because dogs are expected to hunt cats — but if the dog-spirit eats an emotion sometimes *related* to a cat like, say, vanity, the dog may begin to express more cat-like traits (preening habits, general aloofness). A car-spirit that mows down animal-spirits for Essence may become itself more predatory — its headlines glow with a feral yellow cast, and its bumper becomes jagged with an almost tooth-like cattle-catcher. The car-spirit may even hunt in packs with other ferine car-spirits.

Bans and Compulsions

Spirits are often implacable and seemingly eternal: so-called physical destruction seems to work for a time as the thing gushes blood or collapses into dust. But spirits re-form, their spirit matter coalescing once again into a hungry, selfish entity. Worse, they tend to remain unforgiving toward those who have scorned them. Once again awake and aware, that spirit will come hunting for those who tried to end its existence.

This is just one part of what makes spirits terrifying. To a human ignorant of the weave and weft of the Shadow, spirits seem unstoppable, an enemy who always returns to the roads and paths of the spirit realm, thus renewing its pursuit. And yet, spirits aren't unstoppable, for each possesses something of an Achilles' heel. Every spirit suffers from its *ban* or *compulsion*, a single exploitable flaw in its ephemeral coding.

Bans and compulsions are never-fail triggers. They affect a spirit's behavior, and in turn can end a spirit's supernatural hold on a person, weakening the entity for a time. Less powerful spirits (Rank 1–2) have simple bans that are easy to trigger, but the bans are not massively debilitating to such a spirit. It might cause a spirit to pause, flee or engage in a sudden and potentially repetitive series of behaviors. The more powerful a spirit is (Rank 3+), the harder its ban becomes to decipher, often gaining byzantine levels of complexity. However, the more powerful ban means that, if triggered, the effect is all the more damning. Cracking and using a potent ban weakens a spirit significantly — “felling a giant,” so to speak, so that even a human can take advantage and possibly end the spirit's mad existence.

A spirit's ban and compulsion might fall into one of the categories listed below. Each comes with examples detailing both simple and complex bans. (Note that many of the bans noted below have some kind of system effect on spirits. The bans may cause damage, invoke dice penalties or end the effects of a spirit's powers. Such effects — and a more mechanical discussion of bans and compulsions — can be found on p. 135.)

Behavioral: This type of ban limits a spirit's behavior in some way, as if there lurks a damning clause in the spirit's code of conduct. This can be as simple and vague as “the spirit may not cross a line drawn in the earth,” or as complex and specific as, “this spirit cannot engage in combat during a lunar eclipse unless it has successfully used the Materialize Numen within six hours prior to the eclipse.” Some death-spirits cannot cross rivers. An old tortoise-spirit may not attack another spirit (but may defend himself if attacked).

Compulsive: This is the opposite of the limited behavioral ban. A compulsive ban does not limit or negate behavior so much as forces or demands a specific response to certain stimuli. A simple version might be, “this spirit must come if its name is called three times.” A more complex version could be, “the spirit, when confronted with a newly polished mirror, must stare at itself for a full minute before engaging

in any other behavior.” Some raccoon-spirits are possessed by a compulsion to chase after shiny things. Many gluttony-spirits have a “trigger substance” (be it mashed fruit, blood pudding or a bucket of heroin needles) that causes them to gorge and vomit and roll about like a cat on catnip.

Linguistic: Some spirits have bans that lie purely in the domain of the spoken word. Less powerful spirits might pause or flee at the mention of a single word or phrase (“Sleep!” or “This door is locked!”). More powerful spirits are subject only to more complex sentences, whole paragraphs, or entire lines of conversation. Some cat-spirits cannot resist compliments, while some fox-spirits cannot resist conversation with someone who fuels his words with egregious politeness and complex respect. Many abstract, conceptual-spirits are given over to linguistic bans: if a character begs a spirit of joy not to hurt him, the spirit cannot even consider countermanding such entreaty, and will often flee.

Repulsive: Sometimes, a spirit can be repelled by a single thing, much as a vampire is reportedly repulsed by garlic. Weaker spirits may freeze or flee at the presence of a single object: a fire-spirit wails and escapes at the sight of snow or a murder-spirit hisses and curls up when a baby is born. Stronger spirits have more specific and hard-to-decipher bans, but if such repelling things are determined, they may be all the more vulnerable. A fire-spirit called Eater-of-Timber, known for consuming houses in terrible conflagrations, might disincorporate when confronted with a brick wall or slate roof (for such elements in a house are fireproof). A murder-spirit known as Knifehand Jack might literally be unable to move for 12 hours if confronted with a nursery rhyme sung by a child victim who lived through one of the spirit's attacks.

Ritualistic: Some spirits have bans that aren't exclusive of these other bans, but are instead combinations of the various bans. (Hence, only powerful spirits tend to maintain ritualistic bans.) A diabolical water-elemental might be affixed to a single spot if one has time to draw a triangle of salt around it and loudly bark a word in the spirit's tongue (Babel, or the First Tongue). Putting an apple in a cage and dangling it just above a strong flame might hold a hunger-spirit in place — at least until the apple cooks and splits in its skin, at which point the spirit is again free.

Sacrificial: Sacrifice is key to many spirits, especially those powerful and vain enough to seek worship. Many river-spirits demand sacrifices made in the physical world; the more powerful the river

(and hence, the spirit), the more specific the sacrifice. A small tributary might only ask that an animal be drowned in its waters, while a larger tributary might demand that someone's *pet* be drowned in its depths. Big rivers demand human lives — sometimes a specific number (three men) or a precise type of person (an orphan with red hair). Sacrifices can be objects, too: the spirit of an old churning printing press might ask for a wedding ring once every year... though, the easiest way to get such a ring is for the whole hand to get drawn into the crushing rollers. When a spirit fails to receive its sacrifice, one of two things happens: either the spirit becomes weak until the sacrifice is made or goes mad and rages (rivers flood, the printing press goes haywire).

Vulnerability: Some spirits are harmed in some way, or are made vulnerable to harm by certain objects or elements. Some tree-spirits are damaged doubly by fire, for instance. Sometimes, the presence of a certain thing doesn't directly harm the spirit, but opens it to further harm: a Helion sun-spirit takes twice as much damage if attacked at night under the full moon, while a spirit of silence has its Defense pool cut in half if music is playing or if someone is singing. These vulnerabilities aren't always related to damage, either. Some spirits suffer widespread or specific dice pool penalties given certain conditions or when confronted by key elements. The erosive nature of water might affect a basalt-spirit by reducing its Physical actions by two dice. A spirit of the new moon might be affected by bright lights, accustomed as it is to total darkness, and assume -4 dice penalty to any Perception rolls the spirit makes. Of course, the greater the spirit, the more specific and damaging the thing is that can harm it. Umbrage-of-Shadows, an ancient forest-spirit, is fearful of its own face, and so if one were to carve faces on seven of the forest's own trees, the forest would begin to die (and might even catch fire) unless those faces were scratched out.

Learning a Spirit's Ban

For a human to learn a spirit's ban is no easy thing. That doesn't mean it's impossible, however.

In some instances, Research might apply. It won't be as easy as going down to the local library or newspaper office, of course. No, researching a spirit's ban requires spe-

cific things: a password-protected website geared toward occult matters, a shaman's old coyote-skin journal or a forbidden tome of demonology. The Occult score is crucial to this Research roll, and the roll is always penalized by a number of dice equal to the spirit's Rank.

Another method is through the help of another spirit. No spirit will offer aid or accept an entreaty out of compassion, of course — and some spirits will simply mar the offending, begging mouth with a set of claws. But spirits with greater sentience understand that the Shadow is given over to a cruel ecology, and will do what they must to trump other spirits. If that means offering up a ban to a human, so be it. (The human must always give something in return, a "something" that is decided by the spirit, not the human.)

It's also not impossible that a character figures out a spirit's ban on his own. Lesser spirits in particular tend to have more obvious bans: throwing water on a fire-spirit is a reasonable enough thing to guess. It takes a lot more effort and information to puzzle out the ban of a more powerful spirit, however. Such a thing should not be answered easily, and could become the focus of an entire story.

Spirit Types

Below are the broad categories — called anything from "choirs" to "ministries" — into which spirits may fall. While not all spirits are so easily categorized (and they themselves do not seem to be totally familiar with such easy classifications), this at least provides a general catalog.

Abstract—(Conceptual)—Spirits

Some spirits are born of ideas and emotions, needs and wants. A spirit of lust is born in the reflection of a brothel window, while a thief-spirit is born of the act of unwarranted *taking* in the darkness of an alley in the bad part of town. Some are deeply abstract: the spirit of Christmas Charity claws at the spirit of Christmas Greed, two needle-mouthed Santa figures tearing flesh

from one another's bones. The spirit-idea of "Going West" waits on the highways of America, a wanderer looking forever to the horizon with glimpses of wagon trains and '57 Chevy convertibles caught in the dark of his dusty, asphalt eyes. A comedy-spirit stands in front of a microphone, so desperate for acceptance that he'll take a truly captive audience and milk them of their laughs in the way that a vampire drinks blood.

In appearance, abstract spirits are likely to reflect extremes. Some are amorphous shapes or parading hallucinations: an anger-spirit might look like a red ribbon of fire, while a spirit-of-Christmas might be a serpent of blinking lights flitting this way and that. Others look almost human, as they tend to reflect notions born from the human mind. A murder-spirit takes on the guise of popular serial killers (maybe even an amalgam of several — the clown makeup of Gacy meeting the lanky appearance and long hair of Charles Manson). A spirit of revolution is a man with a fiery protest sign (scribbled with nonsensical script), razor-edged and ready to cut.

Artificial-Spirits

Artificial or "human-made" spirits populate those parts of the Shadow where humanity reflects the most. Anything crafted by man or machine — cars, guns, highways, dolls, computers, power lines, airplanes — belongs to this group of spirits. Particularly old artificial-spirits still sometimes bear parts and "limbs" of human-made items from long ago. A car-spirit looks enough like a modern car, but its front grill gleams with 1950s chrome. The spirit of a house can sometimes change, shedding its plastic siding and revealing the dusty brick or beam beneath.

Spirits born of man's creations do not always play well with nature-spirits. The grim ecology of the Shadow is a merciless give-and-take, and the two seem constantly at war (much as one might suggest they are in the physical world). Woe to any character who finds himself caught in a bloody turf war between the grumbling engines and growling wolves.

Elementals

Spirits of the elements exist wherever their effects are most prominent. The four accepted elements include earth, air, fire and water, though some spirits believe that they, too, are elementals — those of wood, for instance, or more modern materials such as glass, iron, and steel. Spirits of the four "primary" elements believe themselves to be some of the oldest spirits existing, and are easily the ones least touched by

humanity. As such, they tend to act very alien, indeed. An elemental may go from aloof to murderous in the span of a second, given over to some whim that only the spirit can understand.

Elementals are often very abstract in appearance, as well. Rarely do they assume a humanoid or animalist form — in other words, few "wolves made of fire" or "women formed of water." Spirits of fire and heat may look like eye-boggling configurations of sparks, candle-flames or murky heat vapor. Air elementals often have forms revealed only by the detritus of dust and material picked up in their whirling bodies. Elementals of earth might look like a tumble of rocks moving impossibly upon one another, forming odd-angled bridges of stone. Water-spirits move with unsettling grace, turning from mist to a serpentine piping of water and back to mist before splashing down upon the ground (and moving toward a character in a swiftly moving rivulet of boiling liquid).

One might find four exceptions to this rule. Each elemental seems to have emissary-like representatives that are more likely to communicate with other (i.e., "lesser") spirits. Among fire elementals are the Salamanders, small black-and-orange lizards with eyes like hot coals and a bite that burns. Undines are the ladies of the water, dragging those with whom they wish to speak into the depths for a "conversation." The Erdgeist is an earth elemental that looks like a small man with cutting teeth of jagged rock — they tend to come in swarms, negotiating with the might of many numbers. Finally, those among the water elementals are the Sylphs: fickle air-spirits whose whisper sounds like the slicing of scissor blades, and who delight in playing cruel games with those they find. These spirits, often erratic, are the ones most often to go among other spirits — or to find characters as they cross from one world to the next.



Void-Spirits

In Japanese lore, *void* is one of the elements, the fifth beyond the other four. Spirits of the void do lurk in the Shadow, though they are admittedly rare. They represent emptiness, oblivion, the weightlessness of pure nothing. They're hard to spot, requiring a Perception roll to even see: when seen, they appear as a faint warp to the background, as

if the visual world is being drawn toward an invisible hungry point.

Void-spirits seem to exist for one reason: to consume or be consumed by other elementals. The compulsive nature of spiritual consumption drives elementals to attack and eat void-spirits, but when one does so, the Essence does not result in a hybrid spirit, such as a water-elemental with empty eyes. No, the water elemental often becomes a void-spirit in turn. What keeps the Shadow from being overrun by these spirits remains unknown. When two void-spirits are born of one, they often disappear, going someplace far off the map. One occultist, driven mad by tinctures of purposefully ingested mercury (so that he could “see”) claims to have found the place where they lurk — a Shadow beyond the Shadow where void-spirits are amassing in a titanic tide, simply waiting in the shifting darkness for the right moment to come back to this world.

Nature-Spirits

Spirits of nature are abundant within the Shadow — mold-spirits cling to rocks, eagle-spirits circle overhead, dog-spirits travel in packs and hunt for food wherever it may wait. Anything that is alive is capable of having a spirit reflection, from microscopic bacteria to blue whales, from all-consuming kudzu vine to ancient redwood trees.

The strangest thing about the appearances of nature-spirits is the kind of primal intelligence they give off — it may be felt in a spirit’s aura or in the feral dark of its eye. This alien intelligence might show in the way a tangle of thorns creeps and sways, almost as if hungry, or in the way a flock of pigeons suddenly turns from a harmless congregation of birds to a harrying, pecking frenzy of hunger.

The thing to remember is that the natural order in the Shadow represents a tooth-and-claw order. The food chain is represented in a blood-soaked display of predation and prey — animals and plants want to eat, and will do what they must to make sure they have their food (i.e., Essence). Here, though, humans are not the top predator. Humankind sits not at the apex of the food chain, but at its nadir. Humans are prey, and the spirits all know it.

Viruses?

Where do virus-spirits fit in? They’re not precisely alive, though they’re certainly organic. Are they nature-spirits? Or are they some kind of biological elemental, some basic functionary given over to the cruel habits of real-world viruses?

The spirits themselves don’t know, and other spirits reject them as aberrations to the natural order. What is known is that virus-spirits move *en masse*, traveling in squirming swarms of insectile protein capsules with skittering legs made of lipids. They live to swarm and consume, gaining Essence as other spirits often do — from making more of themselves, birthing disease wherever they walk.

Spirits of Location

Spirits of location are something altogether more than just natural- or artificial-spirits. The spirit encompasses all things that are a part of a given location. This is, however, rare that a place in the real world is given enough aggregated emotion and unique history to awaken that entire place into a spirit. (When this happens, it is a somewhat tumultuous event. The place literally shudders to awareness, violently shouldering aside or outright consuming any spirits that once comprised its location.)

How do location-spirits appear? It often depends on the place’s proximity and interest to humankind. A famous street, neighborhood or even city is given its resonance precisely because of humans and their history. In such an instance, the spirit tends to appear as a human, the seemingly lone citizen of that particular area. The spirit of Hollywood Boulevard is a bright-eyed and bedraggled prostitute whose eyes sometimes become camera lenses and whose skin seems sometimes marked with the gilded stars one finds on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. She’s a fickle thing, alternately forgiving and cruel, and she is bound to walk the length of her own domain — for she *is* her domain. No other spirits linger upon her stretch of Shadow unless she allows them to.

Some such artificial spirits of location shift from appearing humanoid to literally becoming a massive area-wide spirit. The Mother Road, the spirit that is the ruined presence of the once-great Route 66, sometimes appears as a lone wanderer, half-eaten by crows, her flesh sometimes glimmering with bits of neon and chrome. But other times she literally becomes the broken stretch of highway, whispering between cracks in the asphalt, weeping so hard that the actual macadam roils and trembles.

Those location-spirits born of natural areas are rarely human in appearance. Their sentience is not born of reflected human emotions (though it may have been shaped by it over time), having instead been around for a lot longer than humankind cares to believe. River-spirits are more than just elementals — these haggish spirits sometimes appear as human-shaped tangles of strangleweed with mouths that cough river-water when they speak, or they may instead appear as serpentine shapes made of moving water with fish acting as its eyes and an eel as its tongue. The spirit of an entire desert may appear as a triumvirate of vultures, beaks flecked with dried meat. These are more than just natural-spirits or elementals, because they comprise so much more than just “water” or “sandstone” or whatever its base composition. They are the accumulation of all the elements — a river-spirit is water, fish, pollution, erosion, drowning death, all of it possessed by a single awakened being. So, too, with artificial-style spirits. The spirit of Detroit is more than just brick and asphalt, but is an entity made of ephemeral elements like the sound of Motown, the rumble of car engines and the hopelessness of the unemployed and impoverished.

Because of this, location-spirits are very powerful, indeed. Some are so powerful — such as the spirit of the Pacific Ocean, or even the supposed Gaian spirit that is the very earth man walks upon — that they are inscrutable and invisible, so distant from this world that they are never seen (though they are sometimes heard or felt).

Hybrids

These anomaly-spirits, known sometimes as hybrids (but called *magath* in the First Tongue of the spirits themselves) are entities who have consumed too much resonance that opposes their original natures. Maybe they’re forced to eat spirits unlike themselves, or simply are alone and isolated in an environment that cannot suit them. The result is a slowly mutating crossbreed, a botched anomaly of two or more unusual spirit-types.

These crossbreeds are most often the result of natural and artificial spirits, though any inappropriate mixing of nature can result in a hybrid. Think of a bull-spirit that consumes the roving spirits of tractors. The powerful bull begins to exhibit errant artificial features: eyes like headlights, hooves made of cracked rubber, one horn is now a rusty exhaust pipe. A tree-spirit that consumes all the wrong spirits might grow bone-white teeth out of its bark (from eating gluttony-spirits), find its branches becoming metal antennae (from eating spirits of radio frequencies) and may find that it begins to give off sparks that burn its fellow tree-spirits (because it ate a fire elemental).

Hybrids are things out of fever dreams, horrific shambling entities driven insane by their own competing natures. Other spirits shun them or destroy them, but many crossbreeds are able to gain strength and turn the tables on those beings that would once have annihilated them. Some *magath* find other crossbreeds and band together in broods or pantheons (see below), existing as herds of consumptive spirits that eat whatever stands in their way (and as they do so, they become more and more alien).

Legend and myth is rife with images of things that look like the hybrids. Many angels in Judaic, Christian or Islamic lore are truly strange entities — bodies as spinning wheels, many animal heads, one human arm holding a sword of flame. Some Native American spirits are strange, too — headless things with legs of wolves and bodies of man, or antlered cannibals stalking the dark woods at night. While these may not have been literal representations of spirit crossbreeds, such hybrids *may* have crossed over to this world and given some shape to the legends of various civilizations and religions.

Broods

Spirits are predators, but they aren’t all given over to base instincts. Many spirits possess a cunning intelligence and are able to not just exist in the Shadow’s strange ecology, but they’re able to recognize its weave and web and manipulate it accordingly. Some spirits choose to form loose bonds, gathering together to share a kind of resonant symbiosis. Together, they maximize how they foster and obtain Essence. This is ultimately a selfish arrangement, but it is an arrangement that allows all to be selfish — and to survive.

Broods are often built around a common theme so to exploit the possible Essence drawn. If too many different spirits form a brood, the Essence fostered and

consumed would be disparate, and be of minimal use to the brood at large. Better to have spirits that possess similar Influences and can create the appropriate give-and-take.

Below are different types of broods that might be found in the Shadow. Examples can be found with each.

Roving Broods

A roving brood is, as the name suggests, not bound to a single location. This type of brood is forced by the nature of its spirit components to roam for its food.

Red Specter's Traveling Executioner Show

He's a murder-spirit, Red Specter. Faceless but for the cruel smile, his naked body is slick with never-dry blood. He is what he is, and he is murder personified. He travels the Shadow, peering across the Gauntlet when he can and nudging immoral humans toward killing those who oppose them. But Red Specter does not travel alone, for he recognizes the sheer *delight* in compounding the Essence gained. Shrieking Nancy, an old fear-spirit, follows behind on her leash, helping those at the scene of a murder to feel the proper terror. The Goblins, small spirits of death and decay with crow-heads and skeletal homunculus bodies tag along, too, helping to stir up Influences that benefit the brood. Red Specter's favorite member of the brood, though, is Neversharp, the rusted knife-spirit he carries with him. Neversharp is a blunt blade that enjoys when a knife is used in a murder; doubly so when the knife is blissfully dull. This brood travels where it must to obtain what it needs. It does the brood little good to nest in one area, for murder is a dynamic thing and it must be unearthed like any good treasure.

The Pullman Parlor

In 1935, a man named Jack Prince began his lifelong dream enterprise aboard a set of nine Pullman railcars meant to cross the country in style. Each car, given over to an Art Deco vista-dome design (so that diners could look up at the sun or stars at they ate and slept), was kept spotless and pristine. The train — the Pullman Parlor — only made half of a single journey. It derailed somewhere around the middle of the country. (Rumor has it that someone put a penny on the track and that's what caused it; an impossibility, sure, but it doesn't stop the fact that now the train's wheels are emblazoned with pennies from that year.) The crash of metal killed all aboard, including Prince. This train still exists in the Shadow, however, roving anywhere it can, jumping from track to track, going from city

to city. The train is home to a brood of spirits: music-spirits that look like ghosts holding their instruments, food-spirits that shift shape from one meal to the next in no particular order and then there is the train itself, whispering its soothing glossolalian tongue over the tinny onboard speakers. The train is bound to give pleasure and hospitality to any it can find. In the physical world, a homeless man sleeps in an abandoned railcar and hears the distant stir of music and finds that he's suddenly hungry. Yes, he has to bludgeon his companion to death with a can of beets, but when he opens and eats those beets it tastes like *Heaven*. That night, he sleeps on the corpse of his friend and it feels like slumbering atop a pile of feathers. The brood is sated, and it moves on, rambling further down the track.

Territorial Broods

Territorial broods stake their symbiotic relationships around a given location or environment — an area of the desert, for example, is home to a brood of lizard-spirits, vulture-spirits, heat elementals and entities of awakened sandstone. They lay claim to a given territory and work together to keep it for themselves. The resultant resonance — in the above case, a mixture of resonance that speaks distinctly of *desert* — is favorable for all.

The Dog and Shake

Route 66, America's highway, has been decommissioned for decades now, driven into disrepair and ruin by the installation of major freeways. The freeways pulled traffic away from this national artery, and without the blood of traffic, the organs of various businesses shriveled up and died. One such place in this world was a burger and ice cream joint known as the Dog and Shake. It has long been closed down, and fallen to dust — the grills crumble into their own grime, and the big neon-built mascot (a red dog named Hot Dog) is now just a home for spiders and rust. In the Shadow, this place is a brood geared around decay. The aforementioned rust generates entities formed of rust, and other spirits of rot and decay find a home here, as well — maggots, flies, dust, mold. In the physical world, they've drawn the resonance so sharply that animals come here to die, too — even a few homeless vagrants have found their way into the old kitchen to curl up and die. Sometimes in the Shadow, some have seen the distant spirit of that old red neon dog stalking the hills and forests, and one wonders if he will try to return and wrest control of his home territory from the brood of decay. The dog seems weak, though, his red neon body flickering and buzzing. The brood, for now, retains its control.

Burnt Savanna

The grassland savanna is a powerful brood of spirits working so tightly in coordination that all are predator and prey to one another and accept these roles willingly so as to keep the territory within their power. Lion-spirits stalk the zebras, the zebra-spirits chew the spirits of the grassy veldt and once a season the fire elementals sweep across the grass in its annual burning — and the lion-spirits are lost to this fire, for it is the natural way here. The black ash of burned blood and bone changes again as the rain elementals come down, giving new life to the grassy veldt, and from the grasses new spirits rise from the dirt and the cycle continues anew. The brood keeps a close eye on the physical world, too, ensuring that poachers and human-leg grazing animals do not intrude. Those that do intrude meet with bloody deaths. This is why this portion of the savanna is known for being a haunted place, where the lions have eyes like men and the grasses will cut your legs like little knives.

Domains and Pantheons

Whereas a brood is a somewhat natural, or at least symbiotic, relationship between spirits, other spirits find themselves bound up in cruel assemblages of entities that offer little in the way of reciprocity. Usually, one powerful entity manages control of several other spirits. This control, while imperfect, is still damning. The entity may command access to a network of loci, have powerful Influences that it can enact upon the world or be the first to benefit from the flow of Essence. This powerful spirit — or what is sometimes a ministry of terrible entities — threatens, cajoles or otherwise forces lesser spirits to comply. Those that do not are exiled or diminished, perhaps even humiliated into becoming something other than what their nature desires (a bird-spirit whose wings are severed and is made to sup on the Essence of worms and snakes, both creatures who are so earthbound they don't even have *legs*). It doesn't always boil down to a single powerful spirit — again, a ministry of lording entities may control an area much as the human mob levies its influence against a neighborhood or district in the city. The important thing that separates this type of situation from that of a brood is that this is an unnatural, often bullying or even parasitic relationship between spirits.

The area in which such spirits rule is often known as a “domain,” though other names (territory, dominion, kingdom, principality) may apply. Those spirits that

make up such a grim Shadow mob are most often referred to as a “pantheon,” though as before, other names (bureaucracy, court, order) may surface. A domain may include one or several broods operating toward keeping power, or being held beneath the vicious rule of one spirit's law.

Rule of Law

Assume that the reign of powerful spirits over a particular domain can happen in a few ways:

Mob Rule: With mob rule, a number of spirits of approximately equal power band together to control an area. This is not a natural outgrowth of the physical region. In a brood, the animals and elements of a forest might form symbiosis with the trees to control the area. Not so here. Think of an area of town where torture-spirits have gained pre-eminence, dominating both the Shadow and by proxy, the physical world. In that area, a boss tortures his employees with benefits and raises that never manifest, and a father tortures his daughter with cruel words and passive-aggressive punishments; not far from there, a passel of teenagers kidnap and physically torture homeless men. Any spirits that wish to operate in this area do so only beneath the vigilant (and leering) gaze of the torture-spirits. Any Essence that results goes first to these torture-spirits, too, and those that dare challenge this unholy power bloc are consumed.

Feudal Court: While it's not common that a pantheon of spirits consciously mimics the political or noble organizations of human, it may mirror them in flavor. Feudal rule is the most basic rule of law, with rewards kicked up in far larger quantities than they are handed down. Some spirit establishes itself as the lord of a domain, and other spirits may hunt and operate in that area, but only with that lording entity's strict approval. They must offer it Essence or favors, and in return they are granted small turns of preference and, obviously, are allowed to remain unharmed. The balance in such a power bloc is always strained, but less so than in some situations. While all things take on the resonant cast of the “king” spirit, his “lessers” at least continue to operate *mostly* as normal.

Gods and Monsters: This is a far crueler version of the feudal court, in which one or several strong spirits lord over weaker beings. In this instance, the powerful ones are such frightful domitors that they need offer nothing to keep the weaker spirits in line except threats and force. A mad god at the center of such a web destroys those that rebuff his rule and fail to offer worship.

Benefits

The spirits in charge of a domain — the pantheon or the lord spirit — have a number of things they must do and may gain from keeping power.

The control of Essence is vital. This control, however, is multifaceted, for it also requires rule over an area's resonance. If the spirit can shift the resonance in its favor (a spirit of hate helps keep a racist gang in power, a powerful junkyard-spirit helps evoke more deadly accidents in which the wreckage comes into his playground of rusted ruins), then the spirit reaps the Essence. If the spirit is powerful enough, it can make sure that it is the one feeding first from the trough, so to speak. When other spirits attempt to muscle in, the lording spirit — which may have attendant entities who help ensure its authority ("muscle," to use a basic term) — bites hard and lets everyone know which is the big dog. Thus, the first and in some ways *only* benefit from the rule of law is Essence.

Controlling Essence needn't be so straightforward as levying force. Some spirits are clever, and offer things in return for Essence: protection, favors, knowledge. These rarely wash out to be so pure as the Essence initially desired, but lesser spirits are wise not to offer defiance. A lordly spirit can easily turn the tables on a weaker one, and what was once a favorable deal becomes a vicious threat. Potent spirits do not brook insolence.

Sometimes, Essence is gained through worship. While not every spirit can gain power in this way, some more powerful entities can reap raw Essence from the act of veneration. Whether its spirits venerating them, humans, werewolves or whoever — worship is worship, a god is a god and the Essence born of that relationship is sweeter than any other.

One thing, too, is that the lording spirit or spirits gain Essence because a continued presence assures that the most desirable resonance will eventually seep into the domain. Consider how a powerful stag-spirit claims a tract of Shadow forest for itself. This spirit, Swift-Eyed Hart, is so proud that he knows his rule and power are firm. The Essence he engenders, born of his actions and of his potent Influences, fosters a resonance favorable to himself, which makes more Essence. This cycle forces other spirits to consume this resonant Essence, and Swift-Eyed Hart won't let any being do otherwise. Soon the tree-spirits grow branches like antlers and begin to stoop so that the stag-spirit may run under cover. Other animal-spirits are forced to sup this Essence, too, and begin to exhibit his pride and perception. Those who refuse him are crushed under hoof or are pinned to a

tree with a broken antler-tip. Those who give in soon bleed the same resonance he does; all begin to show the colors of Swift-Eyed Hart.

What about benefits for weaker spirits in a domain? They are few but undeniable. Many are allowed to reap some small amount of power, and at least their lords keep them safe from outside elements. Some are even allowed to attend to their natures — until it displeases the pantheon in power, of course.

Humans Enslaved

Mortals do not do well when embroiled in the politics of spirits. Some modern-day occult vanguards or shamans possess the belief that they can play a pantheon against itself, working to collapse the invisible bureaucracy. This rarely succeeds, and worse, usually brings lasting harm to the mortal.

Such humans can be drawn into the Shadow by the pantheon and used for labor or entertainment. Other times, the spirits send one of their own to possess the fool, using him as a vehicle for the spirits' own needs and desires in the physical world. Inevitably, those who attempt to glean control — much less understanding — of the spirits in a pantheon find themselves faced with a lunatic shell game that lures them into overconfidence. It puts everything in danger, including their sanity and souls.

Examples

Below are three examples of domains and their resident pantheons.

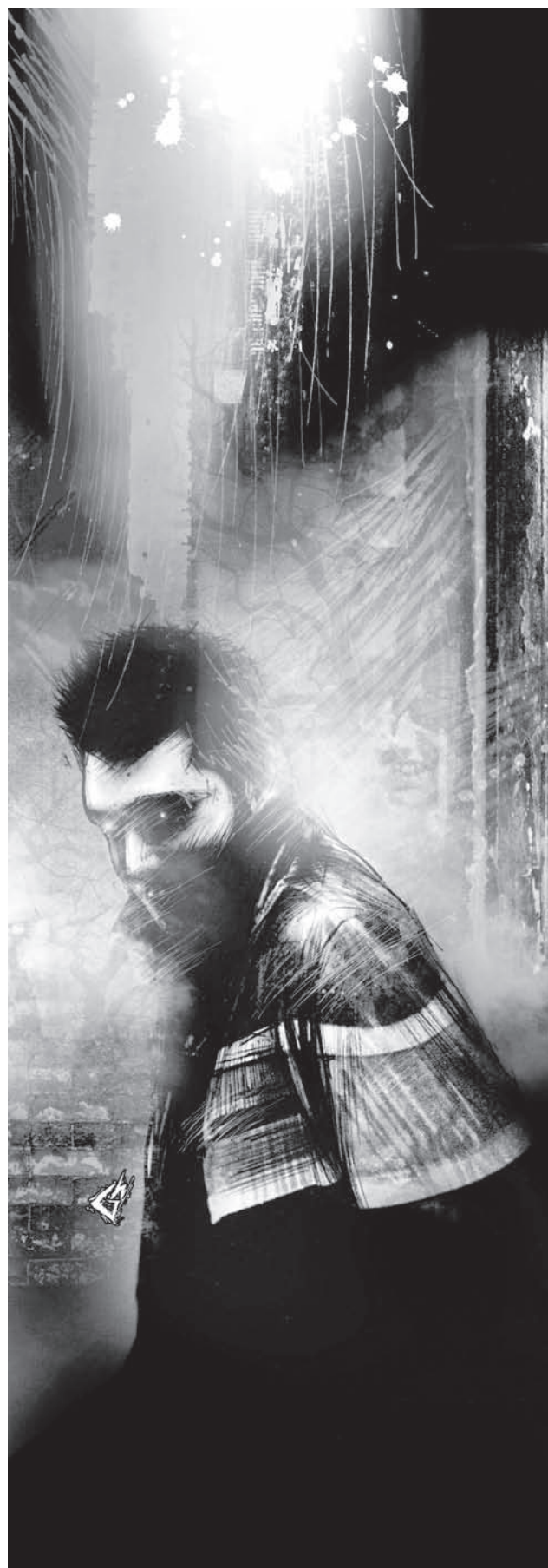
Bureaucracy of Numbers

In the halls of the Internal Revenue Service, it's all about numbers: numbers bound up in a million labyrinthine tax codes and urged through ceaseless logistic equations. Those who work there must possess a deft skill in such things, an almost irrational focus on learning this secret language of numbers and tax code. This has given the spirits of these halls a powerful opportunity to enforce their own needs well above the needs of any other. Conceptual-spirits of numbers, math, government

and procedure rule the Shadow and the physical world that reflects it; other spirits must tithe profound Essence if they even want to survive. The spirit of a simple houseplant placed in the maze of cubicles will die soon if it fails to tithe; and when the houseplant does give its Essence and service to the pantheon of numbers, the plant begins to grow strangely, as if given over to some off-kilter formula, some mad mathematical rubric. The people, too, find that their emotions are deadened and soon they can only really conceive of the numbers and the algorithms that eat such numbers. They soon cannot conceive of human relationships easily; normal behavior becomes difficult. Here, these conceptual-spirits have created an unnatural brood that rules by intimidation and force. Those entities that deny the bureaucracy are churned through crushing equations, screaming as they dissipate. (This is an example of a *mob rule* domain.)

The Harvest Carnival

Once a year, at the end of October, the carnival comes to town to celebrate the harvest. The townsfolk come, play games, eat fried food, ride a few rides and watch as judges pin blue ribbons on pigs and pumpkins and pies. The people always leave a little bit fatter and a whole lot happier — and, when the tents are pulled down and the rides again dismantled, the town always has one fewer citizen. Someone always goes missing at the Harvest Carnival, and the town fakes mourning for the most part, because it just can't seem to feel too sad for too long. It's all because of what happens in the Shadow. Not long before the carnival comes, the attendant spirits in the Shadow awaken anew. The most powerful spirit among them, the spirit of a carnival ride called the King's Crown (it looks like a glittering crown with neon jewels in its diadems, whipping in a circle while people scream in delight) awakens and begins to gleefully demand service. Spirits of gluttony suck mud from its gears as fun-spirits go out into the town to ensure that the townsfolk are appropriately exuberant. The King's Crown — sometimes simply called The Showman — is the ruler of this court, and all work for him, contributing Essence so that on the day of the Harvest Carnival he is the undeniable center of attention. The goal is to make sure that the town has fun, and that the people *eat*, and that they are so lost to their own bliss that they can think of nothing but how happy this makes them feel every year. And yes, as the King's Crown spins in the physical world,



the ride's dominant spirit reaches out and draws one rider into the Shadow. That human will serve the carnival for a time. The pig-like gluttony spirits will eat parts of him, and the fun-spirits will make him dance and laugh so hard that he weeps and trembles. Sated (the King's Crown Showman sated most of all), the spirits then throw the bones away and rest for another year until the carnival comes back to town. (This is an example of a *feudal court*.)

The Dominion of Churntide, the Hungry Undertow

Churntide is one of the most powerful spirits in the ocean, aside from the Mother Sea herself (but few see or feel her presence, and her rule is a truly distant one). He is the spirit of a whirlpool that sits out above a deep dark trench, and this whirling mouth of briny water sits in both the physical world and the Shadow. In the Shadow, though, Churntide's watery maw is lined with sharp coral teeth, and at the center of the pool waits a single eye (gelatinous and oblong, like a frog's egg). Churntide's cruel power lies in the fact that his vortex draws any spirits that are near him ineluctably inward. They cannot escape his pull, and are doomed to give him worship and Essence or be pulled into his mouth and chewed into chum. He is their god, and as a water elemental he believes himself to be one of the oldest things of the ocean. All will serve, or all will be drawn into him. Rumor has it that this whirlpool, known as Charybdis by sailors, lurks off the coast of Greece somewhere. Legends suggest that boats go into it but then disappear, wreckage and all. The reality is that these boats are not being drawn into the waters of the physical world, but are instead pulled into the Shadow's ocean — entire boats full of people dragged into the spirit realm. (This is an example of a *gods and monsters*-style pantheon.)

Spirits and Humanity

Spirits are dangerous to people both in and out of the Shadow. Spirits are selfish and, to the human mind, irrational. They want Essence, and they prefer the purest source of Essence available — that which comes from the physical world. There, the Essence can be reaped without fear of the bloodthirsty competition found in the spirit realm.

Coming Across

Spirits can cross the Gauntlet most easily at verges, but they can sometimes push themselves across at any point where the wall is thin (loci, for instance). Certain Numina (p. 137) allow them to peer beyond, push themselves through or thief a human as its “host body” or “mount” for a time.

Note that spirits in the physical world must expend constant Essence, whether they are manifesting physically or are coming across in Twilight (see below). Rules for this are found in Chapter Four.

Twilight

When spirits first come through the Gauntlet and enter into the material world, they enter in as invisible beings, wholly non-corporeal. This state — known as *Twilight* — is not a place, but a condition of a spirit's existence. Until the spirit can make itself whole and clothe itself in a physical flesh, or at least take possession of a human body as its own for a time, the entity lingers in this non-physical state. It can still affect the world with non-material attacks and Numina, but otherwise the spirit is immune to nearly every physical attack and can pass through solid objects. The laws of gravity do not hold such a spirit, either, though most tend to remain near to the surface as this is where Essence tends to gather.

A spirit in this state is dangerous and frightening. Things may happen around a character for no obvious reason — the spirit may be able to affect objects with its Numina, opening a door or bumping a lamp off a table. It might cause great pain or pleasure to the character without any indication of where those feelings are actually *coming* from — a mortal may simply believe he has lost his mind or is perhaps sick or was dosed with drugs.

Few mortals are capable of comprehending spirits in Twilight. Those with the Unseen Sense Merit may see glimpses of shadow, hear odd sounds (like white noise or light footsteps) or catch an inexplicable scent in the air. Those without the Merit may make a Wits + Occult roll, but suffer a –5 dice penalty due to the non-corporeal nature of the spirit. Success indicates the aforementioned glimpses, sounds or scents, and does not reveal the spirit's full form to the character.

What can a character do against a spirit in Twilight? Below are a few options that may come into play in your **World of Darkness** story.

Enacting Bans

A spirit's ban is in place in the physical world just as it is in the Shadow. If a crow-headed death-spirit cannot pass through a doorway sprinkled with fresh grave dirt, then that very action might allow a character to remain hidden for enough time (at which point the spirit eventually expends too much Essence and is dragged back across the Gauntlet).

Abjurations

Faith and will are powerful things. A character may use an abjuration or prayer against spirits much as she would against a ghost. See pp. 213–214 in the **World of Darkness Rulebook** for the rules regarding abjurations (except replace “ghost” with “spirit”).

Some abjurations exist outside this somewhat non-specific version. Below are two examples.

Refusal of John Oakes Pulliam

Pulliam was a known occultist of the late 19th century, a thoroughly debauched individual who felt himself genderless and unfettered by the rigors of sin and morality. He felt himself the master of the spirit world, summoning and shackling beings to his will. When it got out of hand, he used his own abjuration, a “spell” bringing his own will to bear against invasive entities.

This abjuration works similar to the above “common” abjuration, except the Morality scale is reversed. A character suffers no penalties at Morality 4, and takes penalties as the score increases from there, or gains benefits if his Morality goes below 3. Everything else about the system remains the same.

As a story note, Pulliam went missing in 1899. Those who last saw him said that one of his eyes was sewn shut (and was perhaps missing altogether beneath the imperfect stitches) and that he had taken a spirit “into his mind.” He was last seen going into his house; he never exited, and no body was found.

The Wittigen Defense

Petra Wittigen, a German woman, is well-known among the UFOlogy and alien abductee community. If her story is true, she has been abducted more than two dozen times, and has twice been impregnated (she claims the children born were taken by doctors in red smocks with no faces). In her old age, before she died, she wrote a treatise on keeping the “ultraterrestrials” from taking her, and in this treatise is a ritual meant to keep the aliens out. This ritual works on spirits and ghosts.

This abjuration does not require a requisite Skill score or any minimum or maximum Morality. (The abjuration does, however, require some understanding of the ritual as Wittigen wrote in her nameless book.) The abjuration requires that the victim have five objects upon her person at the time the prayer is spoken: four of these objects must be religious items (it matters little from which religion, anything from prayer beads, prayer wheels, pages from the Torah, alchemical symbols). The last item might be a highly personal item (a teddy bear, a journal, a gift from a dead loved one). The person then declares his independence from all “non-worldly beings.”

The roll is the same — Resolve + Composure versus the spirit's Power + Resistance — but no bonuses or penalties are granted to the abjurer.

Among the UFO community, Wittigen's treatise is passed around religiously, often in ratty, photocopied format.

Exorcism

As found on p. 214 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, exorcism can banish a spirit from its host body. The only difference here is that a spirit gains extra dice if the spirit is of sufficiently high Rank — spirits of Rank 4 and above gain a +1 bonus to its Power + Resistance roll.

Blessed Items

The **World of Darkness Rulebook** provides rules regarding blessed items. The same rules apply against a manifested spirit, though note that using such items against a spirit in Twilight first requires the character to *perceive* the spirit (automatic with Unseen Sense Merit, otherwise requires a Wits + Occult minus five dice). Below are a few such items with their blessing rating listed. Note that such objects can also be used to give bonuses to abjurations and exorcisms. If such an item is possessed during such a ritual, it grants +1 die regardless of the item's blessing rating.

Reliquary of Blind Miguel

Blessing Rating: 5

Blind Miguel was a boy born in Mexican City with no legs and ruined eyes. The legend says that his body manifested bloody stigmata and crosses formed of perfect bruises. When he died, a priest took Blind Miguel's eyes to use against demons. The milky cataract-laden eyes sit in a rosewood box, dried and shriveled. The box merely needs to be waved through a spirit's presence in Twilight (or brought against a materialized spirit) to do its damage.

Black Splinter

Blessing Rating: 2

In the 1980s, the Roddick House at the far end of the street was believed to be the home to a Satanic cult. It was home to a cult, yes, but they were not Satanic, and were in fact a zealous sect of spiritualists devoted to destroying any entities where they may roam. The house itself was said to be a prison for spirits — a reverse one-way verge, spirits could come in but could not exit, not even if drained of Essence. There, the cult (in their trademark white robes and scarified flesh) punished the spirits for their transgressions. Nobody knows how, but in the late '80s, that house burned to the ground with all the cult members in it. Now, splinters from this house (charred and hence referred to as “black splinters”) are used as weapons against spirits. Any splinter will do, though most are knife- or stake-sized.

The Sirius Loop

Blessing Rating: 1

This is not a traditional “blessed item,” in that it can’t be used as a physical weapon. It is, however, an invisible weapon run as a computer program. Written by an early 1990s BBS hacker known as Shirley Sirius, the program runs only off a DOS prompt. When turned on, the program streams a screen-filling display of binary text that, according to Shirley’s attendant *.txt document, is the “purest language known to otherworldly entities” and curses them on a constant string. Installing the program requires a Wits + Computer roll with a number of bonus dice equal to the program’s blessing rating. Any spirit within 100 yards must succeed on a Power + Resistance roll and gain a number of successes beyond what was gained on the program installation roll. If the spirit cannot exceed these successes, it must flee. If it does exceed them, the program “trips” and gives a run-time error. The system must be rebooted before the program can be re-installed and run anew.

Communicating with Spirits

Spirits do not see humans as equals, or even worthy of communication unless the spirit needs something from the mortal that cannot be achieved otherwise. To most spirits, humans are tools, objects, puppets. That’s not to say it’s impossible for a human to communicate with a spirit either in or out of the Shadow. Spirits are willing to listen to those willing to talk — but, as most humans are ignorant, there’s little to bother about in the first place. Only the rare human will attempt to converse or commune directly with a spirit, and those

who do might just be worth a spirit’s time... at least, until the spirit grows bored.

Signal to Noise

Every spirit type is different, and given over to rules (much like its ban, and sometimes legitimately connected to a spirit’s ban) that guide how it prefers to communicate. Below are a few examples of spirits and how they might best be approached; these are neither hard nor fast rules, and can be adopted by any spirit type desired.

Stroking Kitty’s Vanity

Cat-spirits are notoriously narcissistic. Every conversation with a cat-spirit should be prefaced by a series of well-articulated compliments. That’s not to say they won’t respond to intimidation tactics, but unless one is particularly talented in that department, the spirit will recognize that it retains the advantage. Most cat-spirits will deal coolly but calmly with those who ladle praise upon them. A deficit of said praise will earn the mortal a lifetime of trickery — or an attempt to steal the character’s body as an unwilling mount.

Bow Before Unyielding Stone

Elements of stone and rock largely believe that they have ruled this world since it was nothing but a cold hunk of granite bobbing through space. They recognize that they are powerful, steadfast and eternal. Earning a stone-spirit’s attention requires a great deal of bowing and scraping. If the human prostrates himself before the spirit, overly emphasizing his own unworthy weakness in the face of such a worthy entity, the elemental *might* give up a moment of time before it tries to crush the fleshy bug beneath a tide of boulders.

Placating a Crossbreed

The hybrid *magath* sometimes go beyond the alien intelligence held by most spirits, and develop a consciousness that no longer makes sense even to other spirits. The mixing of spirits and their resonances makes for an odd mind, indeed, and a human attempting to communicate with such a hybridized spirit will find himself in great danger if he doesn’t placate the spirit initially. Unfortunately, placating a crossbreed isn’t easy; there’s no telling what such a lunatic agglomeration of parts and ideas wants. Every *magath* should want something different from its conversation with a human. One crossbreed might ask a series of children’s riddles, while another might ask that a mortal speak a different language,

give a timeline of his life story or simply babble on in an invented tongue. The biggest concern is that a *magath* may not be clear about what it wants: a grotesque, maggot-ridden car-spirit with interior seats made of meat and headlights like fish eyes may want a human to do something totally bizarre such as describe the specs of a 1967 Ford Mustang. It's nearly impossible to predict what a strange spirit like this will want. What is predictable is how such a spirit responds to those who fail to foresee its insane demands: poorly.

Strange Frequencies

Sometimes, a character might wish to attempt communication with a spirit from outside the Shadow. Some devices allow a user to commune briefly with something from the "other side," penetrating the Gauntlet so that some level of contact can be made.

Using any such item requires an instant Presence + Occult roll, which is penalized by a number of dice equal to the Gauntlet rating of the area in which the communication is attempted.

The communication does not summon spirits, or guarantee a spirit's interest. No spirits are forced into contact, but the object simply provides a vehicle for communication of which a spirit may or may not take advantage.

Note, too, that use of such devices can be dangerous. Spirits may suddenly gain interest in the user, where prior to that they had no cares or concerns about the mortal. Worse, spirits gain +1 die bonus to any Numina rolls used against the user while contact is active.

Contact lasts for one scene, but a human can continue it without a roll by expending a Willpower point. Doing so extends the contact for another scene, but only one Willpower point can be spent in this way per day.

Below are a number of items that work toward tuning into the strange Shadow frequencies that can allow a human to commune with one or several spirits. Any equipment bonuses are listed in the descriptions, if applicable. Note that any of the "talking devices" listed below function only once a day. Spirits may not always communicate in a language that is understandable to the human, though many make an effort to do so (for the spirits may sense an opportunity for Essence).

Grayboards

Few of these gray slate Ouija boards exist any longer. Slate, being brittle and easily cracked, hasn't held up for most such tools and have long since turned to dust or crumbled to shards. Still, a few can be found here and there in antique shops or occult/New Age stores. The boards themselves are relatively small — about as large as a slate tile — and are scratched with the requisite alphabet letters. The planchette is made of an animal's skull, with the eye socket filled with a magnified glass lens. These boards do not communicate with ghosts. They allow one to communicate with local spirits, instead. Communication is, of course, only vocal from the user's side; the spirit communes through subtle movement of the planchette over letters. Note that two users are not necessary for a grayboard to work, but having two users allows for Teamwork rules to apply. (One curious thing about all grayboards: the back of each is chiseled with a nearly perfect spiral, about an inch in diameter. Is this a sign etched into the stone by the boards' unknown creator?)

Marquis Pens

Fountain pens made from the Marquis Pen Company are works of art worth a great deal of money. With lacquered cherrywood exteriors marked with fine metal fixtures, some of the pens sit in museums, while others lurk in the offices of millionaire collectors. Only 200 such pens are said to even exist, and most are accounted for one way or another. The Marquis Pens possess a curious ability, however, that few seem to recognize. If filled with ink that's mixed with a few drops of one's own blood (drawn only from the tip of a finger, or so the story goes), the pen can allow one to communicate with a spirit. Any blank book or paper will do, paired of course with success on the communication roll. Using a Marquis Pen grants +1 to this roll. (Be aware: some collectors are willing to fight tooth and nail for these artifacts, as they haven't been produced for more than 40 years.)

Gall Tooth

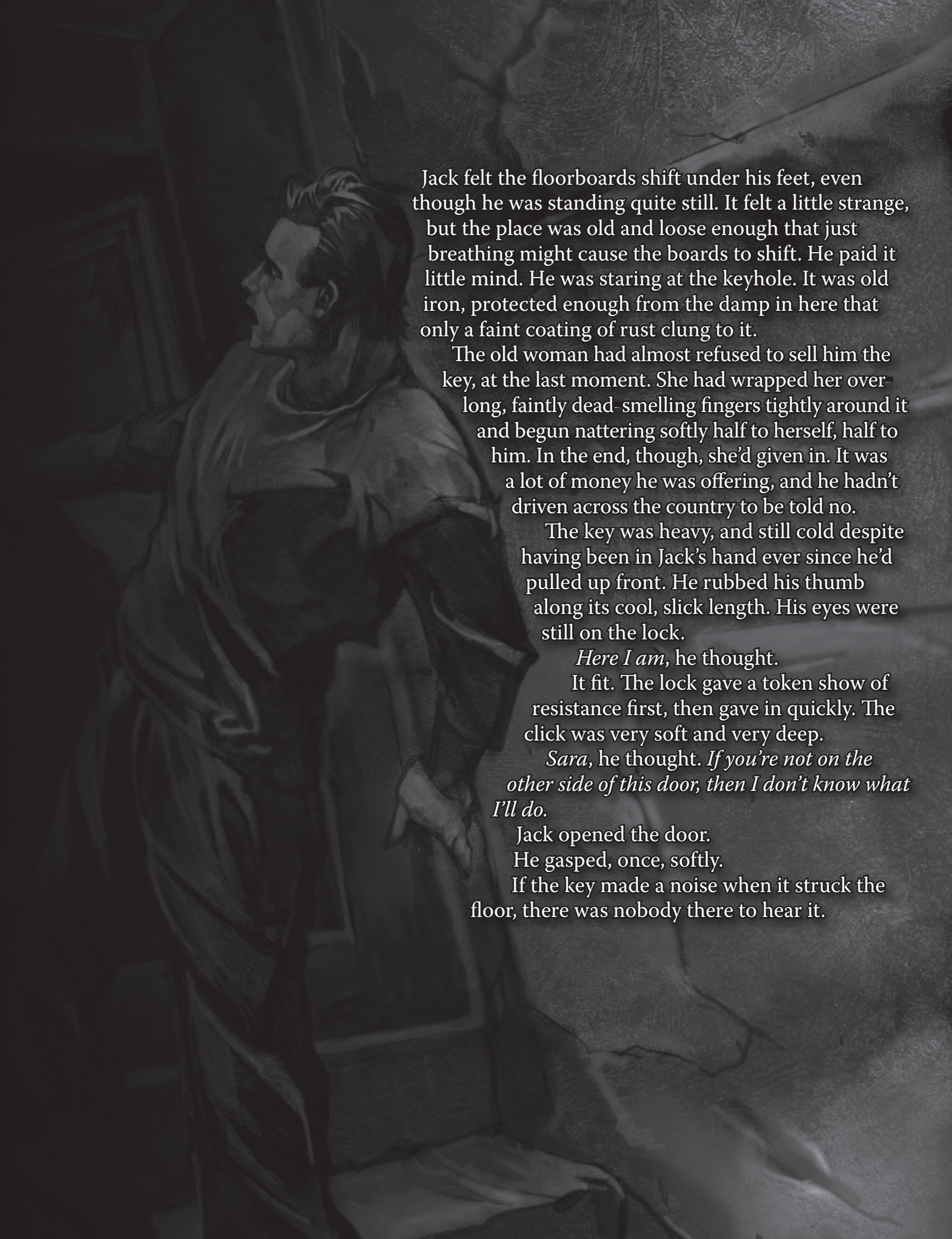
Only the truly committed are willing to use a Gall Tooth, because doing so requires some... creative dentistry. The tooth is one plucked from the corpse of a suicide victim and then soaked in the gall of a toad or frog for seven nights. The tooth is then capped with silver, and must *replace* one of the victim's own teeth.

(This confers some lethal levels of damage — at least one level if replaced by someone with some legitimate Medicine Skill, but three if performed by someone with no such Skill.) The tooth, once hammered into the gum, does not die (though it remains a persistent bile-yellow color). Upon activation of the Gall Tooth, the victim can speak aloud and hear any spirit's re-

sponse within his own head. Rumors exist of a version of this tooth that actually has a microchip implanted in the cap, “boosting the signal.” The original version gives +2 dice to the activation roll, whereas the microchip version (if it even exists) might supply +3 dice to that roll.







Jack felt the floorboards shift under his feet, even though he was standing quite still. It felt a little strange, but the place was old and loose enough that just breathing might cause the boards to shift. He paid it little mind. He was staring at the keyhole. It was old iron, protected enough from the damp in here that only a faint coating of rust clung to it.

The old woman had almost refused to sell him the key, at the last moment. She had wrapped her overlong, faintly dead-smelling fingers tightly around it and begun nattering softly half to herself, half to him. In the end, though, she'd given in. It was a lot of money he was offering, and he hadn't driven across the country to be told no.

The key was heavy, and still cold despite having been in Jack's hand ever since he'd pulled up front. He rubbed his thumb along its cool, slick length. His eyes were still on the lock.

Here I am, he thought.

It fit. The lock gave a token show of resistance first, then gave in quickly. The click was very soft and very deep.

Sara, he thought. *If you're not on the other side of this door, then I don't know what I'll do.*

Jack opened the door.

He gasped, once, softly.

If the key made a noise when it struck the floor, there was nobody there to hear it.

Chapter Three: Keys to the Kingdom

Merits

Some people have the dubious fortune to possess some manner of connection to spirits or the spirit world. While this occasionally works out for them, it only does so in a manner that promises interesting times. This is intentional: no Merit should provide benefit unbalanced by any drawback. While these Merits are useful, they also create ties between characters and the Shadow that a troupe can exploit to create involved stories.

Cursed Item (● to ●●●●●)

Effect: Your character possesses an item of power but questionable providence. Though the character may use the item from time to time for an advantage, that advantage always comes at a price. See “Cursed Items,” p. 112, for examples of what a character may possess with this Merit.

Difficult to Ride (●●●●)

Prerequisite: Composure and Resolve ●●●

Effect: Your character is remarkably resistant to being Urged, Ridden or Possessed by spirits or ghosts. The character adds two dice to all contested rolls against spirits’ attempts to affect her in that way (or with other forms of mental control), or adds two to her Resistance traits (if subtracted from a spirit’s roll). Whether this is because of a hardening experience in her past or some hereditary predisposition depends on the story.

Drawback: Many spirits are angered by strong resistance and eager to get revenge. Others just want to eliminate such people so they never spawn more. Either way, your character becomes a target once her resistance becomes clear.

Easy Ride (●●)

Prerequisite: Wits ●●●

Effect: Your character knows how to relax and let a spirit or ghost possess her. She forgoes any contesting roll or Resistance trait, and the possession takes place as long as the spirit rolls a single success. Possessing spirits gain full, penalty-free control over the character’s faculties immediately, without any muss or fuss. She remains aware of what is going on during the possession and has a couple of extra options.

She may allow the spirit to continue controlling her body for longer than a scene, if she likes. Or, if displeased as the possession progresses, she may try to eject the spirit. She and the spirit make the normal contested roll they would normally have made during the original possession. Success on the spirit’s part allows it to remain for the rest of the scene, and ties must be rerolled the next turn. The character may only try this once per scene.

Drawback: As a well-trod soul, the character suffers a –2 dice penalty to any contesting rolls or Resistance traits applied to prevent (or end, as above) a possession. She also earns a reputation as “easy” among local spirits, who may seek her out when they need a quick body for something, even if she’s not likely to go willingly.

*I shall curse you
with book and bell
and candle.*

– Sir Thomas Malory,
Le Morte d’Arthur

Hollow Soul ,(●●)

Prerequisites: Easy Ride

Effect: Your character can be possessed even by spirits that cannot normally use the Possession Numen. All the spirit needs to do is fether to the character, and then it can possess him for a scene with a contested Power + Finesse versus Resolve + Composure roll. The character can serve as a mouthpiece for spirits too weak to normally interact with the material world on a meaningful level, but also gets sought out by more powerful spirits who would prefer to abuse the character's ability.

Locus-Drinker ,(●●●)

Prerequisites: Mortal (non-supernatural)

Effect: Your character can draw Essence from a locus, an ability normally reserved for spirits, werewolves and some mages. This requires a Morality roll that the character can only attempt once per day. Each success allows the character to draw out one point of Essence, and each point requires one minute of meditative effort. The character still has no ability to store that Essence within himself or use it for any means, but he can channel it to objects or creatures that can (such as spirits or the Cup of Life fetish, see p. 120). If the character somehow has the ability to use Essence, he may bend this Essence to that use immediately (but still cannot store it).

Drawback: Possession of this Merit makes the character a threat to some (endangering their supplies of Essence) and a resource to others (potentially doubling their daily Essence acquisition). If the character isn't careful with his ability, others may try to eliminate him or use him as a tool.

Pleasing Aura ,(●●●)

Effect: Strange things happen around your character. This is because, for whatever reason, spirits like his presence. The character might have an emotional resonance that is universally enjoyable for denizens of the Shadow Realm, or maybe they just like your style. The bad news is that spirits tend to flock around the character, making him one of those people who is always in the "right place at the right time" with respect to otherworldly events. The good news is that, as a general rule, the spirits don't mean the character ill. Unless they get territorial or jealous. The character gains a +1 bonus to Persuasion and Socialize rolls to affect spirits.



Residual Spirit Energy (••)

Prerequisites: Mortal (non-supernatural)

Effect: Your character releases spirit energy — Essence — into the world when her blood spills. And spirits can sense it. No one has ever been able to explain why to the character's satisfaction, but it's true. Because Essence is such a valuable resource to spirits, the character has some measure of influence over them. She can bribe them for information or favors, and all it takes is a splash of blood. Each point of lethal damage the character suffers frees one point of Essence into the air, as long as the injury actually causes blood loss. For the next several turns before the Essence dissipates, any spirit nearby may take an action to consume the Essence.

Drawback: While most spirits would rather preserve a renewable source of Essence, not all are so careful. Some might try to slaughter her all at once when they really, really need the Essence. Others notice her as a resource of their enemies and might decide to make a surgical strike against them (but at her). In short, the character becomes a target or potential possession to those spirits who don't want to barter with her.

Saintly (••••)

Effect: Spirit's do not like your character's presence. She might make spirits uncomfortable because of her extraordinary faith (per the Merit's name) or maybe she has a less earthly reason for disturbing them. A mighty spirit might have blessed or cursed her when she was young, or declared her off-limits to others for inscrutable reasons. Either way, she has a little influence on them, and they don't like her. She gains a +1 to Intimidate rolls against spirits, and to attempts to abjure or exorcise them from places or human hosts (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 213–124). They may also be unwilling to harm her or disrupt her life.

Drawback: Some spirits are not unwilling to harm her, and may even see it as a challenge — after all, she has a level of notoriety. She suffers a –1 die penalty to all Expression, Persuasion and Socialize rolls against spirits. A given spirit may be unwilling to involve itself with her at all, which could cause complications.

Shadow Contacts (••• to •••••)

Effect: Your character knows a place where she can ask questions and get information. She has reasonably free access to this place — which may be the urinal in a cathedral, a dank cave in a national park, the manhole that a murderer used to dispose of bodies or nearly anything else — and can occasionally go there to get answers. She does not know what entity she asks.

For each answer the Shadow Contact provides, it asks a price. This price often has some tangential relation to

the nature of the question, but may well not. The more urgent or esoteric the question, the stranger and more disturbing the price. Frivolous questions are discouraged by incommensurately outrageous demands. If the character asks whether and why her creepy neighbor is stealing locks of her hair, the voice may request a Barbie doll hanged in a noose made from a young girl's hair. Asking whether she should change her hairstyle, the entity may demand all the hair shaved from three young girls.

The character only pays the price if the Shadow Contact has the answer. The Storyteller (who likely knows just who or what the Shadow Contact is) may simply decide, or he may roll the character's rating in the Merit to determine either way.

Drawback: If the character receives an answer from the Shadow Contact, she *must* pay the price or make the contact reluctant to speak with her. Each time the character fails to give the Shadow Contact its dues, her rating in the Merit drops by one dot. She may purchase greater trust with proper roleplaying and experience points. This will often involve meeting the reneged-upon deal, with interest. If the rating drops below three dots, the contact refuses to speak with her any longer. She must purchase the Merit anew from zero dots, which represents finding a new mysterious font of information — no easy task. Note that the Merit degrades only if the Shadow Contact decides that her payment is officially past due. Clever characters may be able to delay the entity for some time.

Shadowless Chambers (• to •••••)

Effect: Your character owns or can take refuge in a location that spirits have trouble finding. Maybe the location has no reflection in the Shadow Realm or has a peculiar resonance that confounds spirits. The location may have a bad reputation in the spirit world, in a way similar to the worst streets in a mortal city. Whatever the cause, spirits rarely go there and rarely think to go there. The character may hide there with reasonable surety that denizens of the Shadow Realm will not find him. Each dot in this Merit applies a –1 die penalty on spirits' attempts to track the character to that location or reason out where he might be hiding.

Drawback: This Merit is fragile. When a spirit does manage to find the character in the marked location, word begins to spread. The location's reputation diminishes, or the presence of a spirit alters the resonance that once kept them away. Each such event reduces the Merit's rating by one. On the other hand, when something bad does happen to the spirit there — the character manages to disincorporate it, or the resonance infects the spirit — such events serve as excellent reason to increase this Merit with experience points.

Spirit Ear (●● to ●●●●)

Prerequisites: Wits ●●● or Composure ●●●

Effect: Your character has a knack for understanding spirits. Perhaps one whispered to his mother as she was pregnant or sang him to sleep (and nightmares) as an infant. Today, even though their alien minds speak human tongues only poorly, the character always understands exactly what the spirit meant to say. This is by no means a conscious process of translation, and the character has no means of more effectively communicating to spirits, just understanding their words. On a mechanical level, the character gains +1 die bonus to use the Empathy Skill on spirits and to use the Subterfuge Skill to detect their lies. The character also ignores penalties based on poor understanding of the spirit's words. *This is the two-dot version of the Merit, and only available at character creation.*

The four-dot version of the Merit does not grant the above. Instead, that version of the Merit makes it possible for the character to piece together and infer meaning from the glossolalia that spirits speak naturally when not forced to communicate with humans. The character may attempt to assemble a rough idea of what a spirit is saying in that tongue with a Wits + Empathy roll at a -3 dice penalty. Other penalties may apply, especially if the speech is hard to hear or the spirit is deliberately being vague or opaque. For characters who possess the two-dot version of Spirit Ear, the four-dot version costs only three dots. Other characters must purchase it at four dots.

Unseen Sense (Spirits) (● to ●●●●)

Prerequisites: Mortal (non-supernatural); Wits ●●

*This is an optional Merit, expanded from the **World of Darkness Rulebook** to focus on spirits and spiritual phenomena.*

Effect: Your character has a sixth sense about spirits and the strange phenomena that surround them and their world. Regardless of how much the character knows about the occult or the Shadow Realm (she may know absolutely nothing), she has some instinctual understandings and can often sense when spiritual events are going on around her.

Each dot in this Merit adds a category of phenomenon to those that the character can sense. The character reacts when phenomena of the included sort are present. How the character reacts varies from one to the next. The hairs on her neck may stand up, a chill may run down her spine or anything appropriate.

- The character may sense verges and loci, feeling the emotional weight of the area around her. With an extended Wits + Composure roll, the character may be able to feel what sort of resonance the area has. The number of required successes is equal to 10 minus the locus's rating, and each roll represents one turn.

- The character may sense when spiritual Numina or Aspects are used in her vicinity (within 20 feet). This kicks in when the acting spirit or the Numen's target is in that range, not otherwise. When a Numen or Aspect targets her, she may roll a reflexive Wits + Composure roll at a penalty of the offending spirit's Finesse rating to get a rough idea of the Numen's effect. Even on a success, her knowledge is very vague. Only exceptional successes are at all clear.

- The character may sense when a spirit in Twilight passes within 20 feet of her. She may roll a reflexive Wits + Composure roll to determine the rough direction the spirit is moving and whether it is hurrying. If the spirit is attempting stealth, roll its Finesse as a contested roll.

- The character may sense when spirits riding humans or animals pass within 20 feet of her. She may roll a reflexive Wits + Composure roll, contested reflexively by the spirit's Finesse, to pick out which creature is ridden.

Unseen Sense (Spirits) has a drawback, but only in that characters who act on their subtle impulses can attract unwanted attention from spirits who don't like to be noticed.

Flaws

As in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, Flaws remain an optional rule. Use them only if they're appropriate for your game. These Flaws are disadvantages that specifically tie characters to the Shadow Realm.

Essence Vessel: Your character carries residual Essence from an unknown source, and spirits can see it. That Essence only leaves the character's body and becomes consumable by spirits with the character's death. The amount of Essence released in that event and its nature depend on the needs of the story. The character may contain neutral Essence, delicious for all spirits, or she may be restraining the soul of a powerful spirit, which only her death will release. Either way, the character gains experience when the unwelcome attention she regularly attracts from spirits causes real trouble.

Shadow Addiction: Your character has developed a dependence on something that he can only find by delving into the spirit world or by dealing with creatures from that place. Treat this Flaw similar to Addiction (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 218), but tied to the Shadow Realm.

Shadow Aversion: Your character has a spiritual aversion to all things Shadow. When knowledgeably near a phenomenon related to spirit (such as being forced into the Shadow Realm or under the effect of a spirit's Numen), the character feels strongly unsettled. She reacts with unreasonable impatience and wants to escape the situation. She suffers a -1 die penalty to all rolls in more extreme conditions (deep in the Shadow Realm, forced to interact with a Spirit-Ridden for a full story). The character

gains experience when her player allows the discomfort to significantly impede the character's goals.

Cursed Items

Sometimes, a terrible act can spawn an object of power. When an object is present for murder, sexual abuse, long-term physical abuse, massive slaughters or other atrocities, the object can develop a personality of its own. It can become a link between the physical world and the unknowable Shadow Realm. The item can *do* things — at a price.

Cursed items have the following characteristics:

- Every cursed item has a power and a drawback.

Activating the object triggers both.

- A player can purchase cursed items with the Cursed Item Merit (see p. 108).

• Any entity with a Morality trait may activate a cursed item with a roll of that trait. Thus, vampires roll Humanity, mages roll Wisdom, et cetera. A single success is sufficient to activate the item. Failure on this roll does not trigger the power but still triggers the drawback.

- Activating a cursed item may be an instant, reflexive or extended action.

• Recognizing a cursed item as something out of the ordinary requires a Wits + Occult roll at a –5 dice penalty to notice the strange way the object interacts with the physical and emotional landscapes. Add one die to this roll for each dot the cursed item is rated.

• Spirits may sense cursed items with a Finesse roll at the same penalty and bonus as the Wits + Occult roll. A spirit can never use a cursed item, even a spirit possessing a human, but some may hoard such potent tools.

Laser Pointer (●)

One serial killer had a problem with people being sighted. The police were never able to figure out why — she wasn't blind herself and had no history they could uncover with blind people. She wasn't ugly, scarred or deformed in any way, and she didn't have huge secrets to hide. None that the police could find, anyway. Still, it remains that she kidnapped seven people over a three-year period, tied their head down in a vice, taped their eyelids open and burned the sight from them with a powerful laser pointer. It was only the videos she made of her murders that told the police how she had done it. It certainly didn't tell them why.

Someone using the laser pointer (which is about as long as a pen, and a little bit thicker) may flash it across someone's eyes to temporarily blind the person. Unsuspecting targets fall prey to it automatically, but against wary, moving targets the character must roll Dexterity + Firearms – target's Defense. If the activation roll fails, it's only an annoying flash of green laser light. On a

successful activation (and "hit"), the target becomes completely blind for the next two turns (approximately six seconds).

Drawback: Activating the Laser Pointer causes it to burn the character's hand. Though it causes no damage, the character has trouble using that hand without pain for the rest of the scene, adding a –1 die penalty to appropriate rolls. Repeated use of the item may leave a permanent burn mark, over time. Additionally, for the same length of time that the target is blinded, the character who activates the item is unable to speak.

Action: Reflexive

Princess's Bell (●)

Princess's Bell is a silver bell no larger than a grown man's forefinger, designed to be attached to a cat's collar. As the name suggests, it once belonged to Princess, a doted-upon Himalayan Persian. When leaving the vet one evening, her owner was mugged and Princess stolen. She was locked in the criminal's basement much of the time, occasionally fed and just as often used as an outlet for the disturbed individual's rage. She died of dehydration, her once-lovely fur matted with blood and feces. Rather than being buried, she was left in the basement until the thief pawned her silver bell.

When placed on a cat, a character may safely use that creature as a release for built-up tension and stress. Characters with the Vice of Wrath may activate the bell, then violently kill the cat over the course of one scene to regain a point of Willpower. The character never needs to make a degeneration roll for any act perpetrated on the feline, as long as the bell has been activated.

Drawback: The cat wearing the bell never really dies. Though dead at the end of the scene, the cat returns to life and seems unaware of the wounds it still carries. Further, it always returns to its "master." A corpse thrown into the woods will be heard mewing at the back door the next night. A body shut in the basement will scratch at the door. The cat can be "used" for its intended purpose as many times as the character likes, each time growing more grotesque.

Removing the bell allows the cat to die (indeed, doing so ends the revenant's unnatural life), but releases the cat's spirit. Each time the cat was subjected to an activation of Princess's Bell (and presumably killed), a minor ghost rises but is absorbed into the bell. Removing the bell releases all these ghosts to rise and return to haunt its tormenter. Occasionally, many such ghosts haunting the same person merge, forming a greater ghost with the same goal.

Action: Instant

Malfunction Firework (●)

Hal didn't like his neighbors. They had a loud dog that bothered his mother and barked at him, and they

had an older boy who routinely picked on Hal at school. His idea of revenge would have been relatively harmless if he hadn't screwed it up. In the height of summer, Hal stuck a firework in his neighbors' air conditioner, but he got his hand caught in the device also. His little explosive stopped the AC, but it also took off his finger. The anger and guilt after smoke endangered the neighbors' youngest child, and the remaining fireworks in Hal's bag become just a little bit stranger.

A character can activate one of these fireworks by lighting it and giving a bit of machinery a look. When the firework goes off (in the turn after it's lit), the machinery stops working. Anything with at least three moving parts qualifies as a target. It remains inactive for a number of turns equal to successes on the Morality roll plus one.

Drawback: When the firework goes off, the character's right forefinger goes numb and ceases to respond to his commands — that's the finger Hal lost. In general, this causes a -1 die penalty to actions requiring dexterity for the next hour, but it might also cause specific problems (firing a gun, for example).

Killer Kite / (●)

There was a man who had a fighting kite. It was a broad kite, made of strong silk and mocked up like a dragon. He appeared out of nowhere and, for a brief year, dominated the fighting competitions. The man appeared to have no mercy or sympathy for his victims, some of whom were dedicated enough to the sport to be heartbroken over their losses. Before the conclusion of the year's last competition, someone spotted the man's kite flying out over the water in the middle of the night. As people gathered to watch, they discovered the man, his neck caught in the kite's string, hanging from it. He was eventually cut down, and the kite, in the absence of any family, sold.

The kite is still of excellent quality, providing a +3 equipment bonus to kite-fliers and kite-fighters. The character may activate the kite by caressing its silk, then sending it aloft. It will then always have at least the minimum amount of wind necessary to remain aloft. While flying the kite, a character gains a +1 die bonus on Persuasion rolls to spirits of competition, pride or the wind.

Drawback: The kite makes other humans angry and unreasonable. As a general rule, others begrudge the character what they would normally give and have a short temper for him. Mechanically, the character suffers a -1 die penalty on all attempts to use Empathy, Expression, Persuasion or Socialize on humans for the next day.

Action: Instant

Squirrel-Killing Transformer / (●)

Mrs. Jacobsen loved to leave her pies cooling on the windowsill. She didn't need to worry about the neighbor-

hood kids, since her kitchen was on the second storey of her house. More fun, the pastry's smell attracted the neighborhood *squirrels*, which tried to get at her pie by running on the power lines. One by one, a couple every time she put out a pie, squirrels would die on the faulty insulation between the nearest tree and her window. Eventually, the current wore out the nearby transformer, which had by then acquired a certain emotional resonance.

By slowly touching or caressing the transformer (now safely disconnected from any power lines), the character can attract a small army of squirrels. As they once pursued pies, they are now willing to perform some task on the character's behalf. The speed with which squirrels gather depends on how common they are. In general suburbia, every success on the extended activation roll provides one squirrel. In a thick forest, every success provides two. Where they are more sparse, squirrels might be one for every two successes, or not forthcoming at all. Each roll represents five minutes of touching the transformer.

Squirrels wait patiently for the character to stop, then obey one order. If the character gives no order, they disperse after five minutes. Proper orders are of no more than minor complexity. "Chew that screen" is fine, but so is "chew through that screen" or "chew a hole in that screen large enough for me." Characters may issue more complex orders, but the squirrels will follow only a truncated version. "Chew through that screen and bring me the guard's ID" ends with "chew through that screen," for the squirrels. Note that there is only so much a mass of squirrels can do. They are good at chewing through things, and could make decent weapons in their controlled, swarming state. The squirrels only act as a mass, never in smaller than total units.

Drawback: After the squirrels complete their tasks, they all die. Second, the character exudes an aura of harm to animals. Animals of all sorts reject the character vocally, hissing, barking and sometimes going so far as to attack the character. This lasts for one day per squirrel summoned through the transformer.

Action: Instant

Blood Iron / (●●)

This rusted-over tire iron belonged to an independent and daring young woman. She always denied that she needed any man to take care of her, and she lived her short life accordingly. As she changed her tire with this iron under a stormcloud-dark night sky, a car swerved from the road to strike her. Forensic investigation later determined that she had probably survived the impact, only to die when the murderer struck her with the symbol of her own independence she had just been using.

The tire iron has since been used by many dozens of people, changing hands often. The tire iron makes a fine weapon (three bashing damage, Size 2, ignore one point

of penalty when targeting the head and no penalty for improvised weaponry), but it still holds a remnant of its first owner's independence. A character may activate this while working on a vehicle to cut the interval between repair rolls (or the time necessary for a single roll) in half.

Drawback: After the scene ends (but no later than one hour after the activation roll), the character suffers an intense migraine. The pain seems to pulse outward from the left temple (where the young woman was struck) and is nearly incapacitating. The character suffers a -2 dice penalty to all actions for the next three hours. Drugs and other effects that allow a character to ignore pain also alleviate this penalty.

Action: Instant

Cyanide Cup (••)

An infamous black widow loved killing her husbands with cyanide. For her, the best part wasn't keeping their money and possessions. It was the look on their face after they drank it but before they died, when she told them what she'd done. That little combination of terror, shock and anger really brightened her day, and it marked the mug she'd used for each murder.

By pouring a liquid into this unremarkable "World's Best Husband" coffee mug, the character may activate it to automatically taint its contents with a strong dose of cyanide. Erasing signs of the poison must be done by hand afterward, assuming the character wishes to conceal the evidence of her murder.

Drawback: After disposing of her husband and liquefying his wealth, the murderess moved on. She would start a new life and never speak of the old one again. This habit, too, became ingrained into the cup. A character who uses this cup ceases to be able to speak about the next person who drinks from it (presumably her victim), for the rest of her life. One point of Willpower lets her speak of the victim for the rest of one scene.

Action: Instant

Peeping Binoculars (••)

An adolescent youth used this pair of unremarkable binoculars to watch his neighbor, a high-school girl who lived just down the street and had the bad habit of changing with the curtains open. The boy's father, every time he caught his son, administered beatings and treated the boy with calculated disdain, intending to dissuade the practice. Instead, the boy felt intense shame every time he snuck out his binoculars to peep, and for years afterward when he saw the tool stuffed in his sock drawer.

That kind of shame runs deep, and it made an impression on the binoculars. Now somewhat out-of-date, they are still clear and functional. A character who looks through them at a person and concentrates (to activate them) sees through the subject's clothing as if it weren't

there. The effect lasts one minute, and only while the character is peering through the binoculars. Beyond lechery, this is also good for spotting wires, hidden weapons and other pocketed items.

Drawback: For the rest of the scene, the character reacts with extreme shyness around women. Ones subtract successes, and he does not reroll 10s when using Social Skills on or near any woman. Furthermore, if the character is explicitly caught in the act (not just someone being with him, but someone asking, "Hey, what're you looking at?"), the character suffers one point of bashing damage.

Action: Instant

Gunter's Collar (••)

Gunter was a good German shepherd, strong and loyal to his owner. But Gunter was chained up that evening when a gang of toughs jumped his master, who had committed no offense other than looking an easy mark, and Gunter could do nothing but bark and whine. Until, as the punks were laughing and walking off, Gunter's collar came mysteriously unhooked, an uncontrollable rage filled the faithful hound, and he ran down the bastards who had done this to him and tore out their throats. Gunter was found peacefully chewing their entrails. Animal control was surprised how quietly the killer dog went to its death.

The dog's collar is still around. Tough leather ringed with eyelets and a circle for a leash, it's passed among many owners, but the dogs tend to disappear. An animal wearing this collar is an easy target: add two dice to any attempt by a spirit or ghost to possess or claim the creature. When someone consciously activates the collar, attempts become automatic and immediate for the first entity to try it in that scene.

Drawback: Entities possessing the dog suffer outbreaks of anger and violence beyond what they usually display. Treat such entities as though they have the Vice of Wrath, in addition to other Vices or the usually Vice-less state of a spirit. Over time, the entity becomes increasingly violent in the pursuit of whatever its normal goals are.

Action: Instant

Ladykiller Scope (••)

Robert Gerard was an average guy. He worked hard all week to provide for his wife and just wanted a little time to hunt every few weekends. It gave him a chance to breathe. So he felt very disappointed one cold, Maine weekend when he didn't find a single damn thing he could bring home. Cutting the weekend short, Robert was halfway up his long drive when he spotted an unusual car in the driveway. Pulling out his rifle to use the sight, he got a great sight of his wife and another man. Robert's first shot, right through the heart, killed his wife instantly. As the man ran for his car, Robert shot out the man's knees and



blew his own head off. The unnamed lover died of blood loss before he could get medical assistance.

A character may look through Robert Gerard's scope to activate it. The telescopic sight then provides two benefits beyond a scope's normal negation of distance penalties. When targeting a woman through the sight, the character almost feels as though he can tell exactly where she's going to step next, and where her important organs are. The character adds +2 dice to a subsequent attack on a female target. The character also ignores two points of penalty for making a targeted attack, no matter whom he's trying to kill.

Drawback: After using this item, the character must take at least two shots at the next human male he sees. These shots must be made with the rifle (though not necessarily using the telescopic sight). The character may not try to "pull" his blows, but he can aim for extremities such as hands and, appropriately enough, knees.

Action: Reflexive

Blood Port (●●●)

The cellar had seen its share of fights. It was a station in the Underground Railroad that got raided, ending several lives that night. Two young boys once beat the living daylight out of each other down there, over a girl. This time was only different because it was now the wine

cellar of a restaurant, and the sous-chef stabbed the owner because he wanted a promotion. He covered the murder well and cleaned up all the blood — except the bit that splashed on the cork of an old bottle of expensive port.

After that, the port had a secret to share. Activation of the port requires a small sip, preferably from an elegant glass. If activation is successful, the character learns the answer to one question she had been pondering. The wine is better at answering questions related to death and sin, adding +2 to the activation roll for such questions. The answer comes to the character in her dreams the next time she sleeps. They are always easy to remember, if not always perfectly clear or straightforward, upon waking.

Blood port is a temporary resource, but one that can last a very long time if properly measured out. Still, there are other bottles of wine and liquor that harbor secrets and may have similar properties.

Drawback: The character also learns one unwanted truth, something she would rather not have known. She might learn that her husband is cheating on her, something about which she had been willfully remaining ignorant. The port may reveal her hero as horribly flawed, changing her estimation of the man forever and irrevocably. It might even force her to recognize something she denies about herself. Things the wine shows are always truths about the present, not predictions of the future, and that makes them all the more terrifying.

Whatever the character learns (which should probably be something cooked up by both the Storyteller and the player), it should dramatically affect the character. If the Storyteller believes the player is not giving this information enough weight, he should assign a relevant mild derangement (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 96–100).

Action: Instant

Death Sign (●●●)

Kids stole the stop sign as a combination stupid prank and gift to the “coolest” of their delinquent friends. That night marked the biggest pileup in the history of their small town, a total of five cars and seven deaths. Among the deaths were the intended recipient’s parents, and he beat the thieves mercilessly. Now, the sign continues to cause deaths. It just *feels* like a weapon. Even though it looks heavy and poorly balanced, it swings easily and causes massive damage. The sign is Durability 4 and Size 5 and has a +4 Damage quality. By activating the weapon for a scene, the Strength requirement drops to three and the weapon gains the 9 again quality.

Drawback: The character has an ill fate that he will meet in a car. The next time he is driving or riding in a car when a Drive roll is called for, that roll automatically becomes a dramatic failure. If the character uses the sign multiple times, these incidences continue to stack up.

Action: Reflexive

Garage Door-Closer (●●●)

“Beautiful” Dan, they called him, because he really was a vision. And he knew it, too. He took home everyone he could convince to get in his pants, and he loved the reputation. Until someone rejected him. The car was parked just outside Dan’s garage and things were getting heavy when Dan’s lover decided that Dan just wasn’t for him. Beautiful Dan, deeply afraid of losing his looks and his reputation, pursued the man back to the garage, getting more and more vocal. The man refused to stay until Dan closed his garage door on him. Seven times.

By pointing the garage door opener (which no longer needs batteries) and pushing the button, a character can force the subject to remain in the area. The subject rolls Resolve + Composure in contest to the activation roll. If the “closer” wins out, the subject cannot go farther than 15 feet from his current position for the rest of the scene. As much as he tries, there is an invisible force holding him back.

Drawback: Just as Beautiful Dan feared, the character grows undesirable. He just has an air about him that makes people not attracted to him. The character suffers a –3 dice penalty to Seduction rolls or rolls that depend or lean heavily on physical attractiveness or sexually attractive

demeanor. This penalty remains until the character successfully someone to go to bed with him.

Action: Instant

Shadow-Backed Mirror (●●●)

One would think it difficult to completely coat the surface of a looking glass with blood, but one would be wrong. The key is in laying it on the floor, then placing the still-living body above it, so the blood can drain onto the mirror. This is exactly what a yet-uncaught killer did, using the mirror to watch his handiwork from all sides as he cut into his victim. The killer left no fingerprints or DNA evidence at the scene — just a body propped above the mirror, bled to death.

The simultaneous terror (the victim’s) and joy (the killer’s) of that event bound the floor-length mirror, with its silver-lined scrollwork, tightly to the Shadow Realm. Some people look into the mirror and see things that are not in the same room. He even sees things that are not of this world. Activating the mirror allows a character to peer into the spirit world as it appears in that place. He can look over the alien landscape and see the alien spirits as if they were materialized in front of him. The images appear in the mirror only for five minutes after the activation.

Drawback: What is a window to a human can be a door to a spirit. Each time a person activates the mirror, the spirit nearest to it in the Shadow Realm is drawn into the physical world without any effort on its own part. Some spirits will be pleased with that development, eager to pursue the pleasures that Earth can afford them. Others, especially those with agendas in the Shadow Realm, may be quite wroth, and very willing to take out their displeasure on those nearby.

Action: Instant

Dominator’s Leash (●●●)

Power is an everyday concern in many people’s lives. They must have power, in the form of authority or money, in order to get what they want. Constant power-wrangling wears some people out, and some would seek submission — to be sexually dominated — for release. This black leather leash, complete with an adjustable collar, was used by many employees of a business that offered that release as a service. Man after woman after man was leashed, punished and released, often coming back for repeat service. The leash left service when an inexperienced dominatrix accidentally strangled a client, who could not scream because he was gagged. The woman, so distraught by her accidental murder, hanged herself by the same leash.

A character holding the leash may use it to command another human being. The subject of the command contests the activation roll with her Resolve + Composure. The subject’s roll suffers a –1 die or –2 dice penalty if the

subject is used to being bossed around and an additional -1 if she is touching the leash or -2 if she is actually leashed. If the subject fails the roll, she must obey one spoken command from the character holding the leash.

Commands may be no more complicated than a single sentence, generally limited to a single relevant verb. "Sit down" and "wait here for an hour" are valid, "sit down and wait for an hour" is just too complex. Language barriers can make any commands that cannot be communicated clearly through gesture impossible. If the subject doesn't understand the command, she can't perform it. Each command that the character wants to back with magical force requires another contested activation roll.

Drawback: Each time a character activates the leash, he acts more and more as someone who "entertains" for money. People take him less seriously and afford him less respect. Beyond the narrative consequences, the character loses one die from his Intimidation, Persuasion and Socialize rolls for one day. The penalty is cumulative up to -5, and the duration accumulates without limit.

Action: Instant

Waste Truck (●●●)

One of the best places to hide something is among all the crap that people never want to see again — their trash. That's what one sociopath discovered when he took a waste management job and found his true joy to be crushing human bodies, dead or alive, in his garbage truck. The inside of his truck ran with blood, and the local dump easily swallowed his "passengers" and hid them from the authorities. In the end, he was caught by more right-minded garbage men and, away from the police's prying eyes, submitted to his own treatment. Many of those who took part stayed up nights for years, trying to figure out if the killer's screams were of terror or joy.

The truck was eventually removed from service and sold, because drivers claimed it gave them headaches. Its curse helps it serve two functions. One, it thirsts for the blood that the murderer once fed it regularly. To that end, the truck makes it easy to swerve toward people and crush them to a pulp on its grille. The truck is normally Durability 6, Size 17, Structure 23, Acceleration 13 (18 mph/turn), Safe Speed 88 (60 mph), Max Speed 125 (85 mph), Handling -1. When activated as part of an effort to ram a person (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 144), the Handling increases to 3.

Additionally, the mechanism that compacts garbage and things thrown into the back still works, and is still trying to hide crimes. Any body, living or dead, in the back when the mechanism is thrown (and the power successfully activated) disappears into the Shadow Realm. If the driver doesn't roll a success on his Morality roll, anything in the back simply gets crushed. Finally, throwing the crushing mechanism makes all blood on or in the vehicle completely disappear, as the truck drinks deep.

Drawback: An hour after using the Waste Truck, the character begins stinking to high holy hell. This massive stench, which some can identify as rotting food, coffee grounds, flies, feces and more, applies a -3 dice penalty to most Social rolls. (It might actually aid the character in some Intimidation rolls.) This smell persists for a minimum of 24 hours and gets on anything the character wears or touches. Once the day is up, the character continues to smell but can at last wash himself clean.

Action: Reflexive

Deadwood Fence (●●●●)

When Mr. Farek decided that he'd had enough of his loud, obnoxious neighbor, he had to devise a way to kill her. He was not a violent man, though he thought he could overpower her. He was nothing more than a retired craftsman who worked in wood — and that's what he did. Farek made a coffin from thick pine boards, forced his neighbor into it and buried her in his cellar. It was so effective, Farek found it easy enough to do again — this time to the kid who kept ruining his flower garden. There wasn't really any reason to make a new coffin when there was room in the old one, and Farek found he slightly enjoyed the screams of pure fright he heard. When the police dug the coffin up, there were five bodies crammed in there, somewhat mummified and ranging from two to 10 years old.

Their fear left an imprint on the boards used in the coffin, which were eventually broken up and reused. One made it into the pile of wood used to refurbish a fence. It is still there, though other boards may have made their way other places. Wherever they end up, the effect is the same: a character may touch the board to activate it, and it prevents any spirits or ghosts from passing through the border of which the board is a part. The board built into a fence keeps spirits on the inside or the outside. A board built back into a coffin would prevent a spirit from getting in or out of it. This lasts for one scene.

Drawback: For one day after activating the board, screams of great fear ring out at unpredictable intervals in the character's vicinity. The voices are those of Farek's victims, but they occasionally scream out the character's name. Some go so far as to blame him for their deaths. These screams are quite loud and audible to everyone around, though no one can quite figure out a point of origin. This can especially cause trouble in places where the character is known by name.

Action: Instant

Roger's Ink (●●●●)

Blood fascinates some people. It certainly fascinated Roger, the serial killer who enjoyed paralyzing his victims (but not their senses of pain) and cutting them open to

see how the blood ran. He would even dig his hands around their insides, looking for a revelation that never seemed to come. That was how his tattoo, the image of a howling wolf's head, came to be immersed so often in blood. How it came to be cut off his hand and tanned is another story.

Rubbing this tanned, faded patch of tattooed skin between one's thumb and forefinger allows one to be intimately familiar with a body the character is currently touching. The character can imagine the subject's body, inside and out, in perfect and flawlessly true detail. She is even aware of any changes as they are made: she can see the incision she makes with her eyes and her head, she can see the heart beating, she can sense the toe twitch. This ability lasts for one scene and adds +5 dice to appropriate rolls (usually Medicine, occasionally Intimidation or others), making the character a fantastic surgeon or an irresistible questioner.

Drawback: The character leaves bloodstains on everything she touches for the next day, as if her hands were covered in blood. Though her hands appear clean, she leaves rich, wet smears on doorknobs and marks her steering wheel red, and the clothes she wears will be covered in rusty brown stains the next day. If the stain is analyzed, it turns out to be the blood of the person she affected with the tattoo.

Action: Instant

Laura's Doll (•••••)

Little Laura had no understanding of why her parents were taken from her and she was sent to a foster family. She was too young to know what a meth lab was, or that it was harmful to her. But she knew that she shouldn't cry. Her daddy had always given her a doll when it was time not to cry, and the police gave her one, too. She didn't cry for years, through three different foster families that showered her with smiles and abuse, and her doll saw it all with her. She left the doll behind when she ran away and was never seen again.

Her doll was nothing more than a typical Raggedy Ann, bought in bulk by child protective services to hand out to kids, but it was special to her. It controlled her, kept her quiet through it all until even it couldn't help. A character may activate the doll before handing it to a child, or someone with a child-like mind. Afterward, the character may make a meditation roll (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 51) to shift her awareness into the child's body. The attempt suffers a -1 die penalty for each foot of distance between the doll and the child. Success allows her to experience everything the child experiences for the rest of the scene. The character may return her awareness to her own body at any time, but she suffers a -2 dice penalty to Wits + Composure rolls to be aware of her actual surroundings.

Once comfortably looking out through the child's eyes, the character may spend a point of Willpower to control the body. This triggers a contested roll of Resolve + Composure, resisted by the same. On a success, the character takes control of the child's body for the rest of the scene. This is a minor form of possession that allows the character to speak with the child's voice and move the child's body. During this time, the child is an unconscious passenger, nothing more. The character may return to her own body at any time, but she suffers a -5 dice penalty to Wits + Composure rolls to know what's going on around her natural body.

Drawback: The character develops an unnatural hatred for parents of all sorts. While there are many parents in the world, the hatred becomes strongest when the character observes anyone actively parenting. The character must succeed at an extended Resolve + Composure roll, total successes five, to prevent herself from railing against or even assaulting the evident parent(s). Each roll represents one turn of curbing her anger, and failure on any individual roll means she loses her temper. Entities with supernatural rage mechanics (such as vampires' frenzy and werewolves' Death Rage) contend with that, instead.

Also, being possessed causes the child one point of lethal damage. It manifests as some form of physical abuse, a black eye, a bruise on the arm or the lean appearance of cruel deprivation.

Action: Instant

The Open Door (•••••)

All that could save little Charles was escape, and all that stood between him and that escape was the attic door. He wanted to get out so badly. It wasn't the hunger. It wasn't even that the door opening meant a beating, every time. It was the loneliness. Charles had only seen the man's face when he had been taken. Thereafter, it had been masked, denying the child even an enemy. Charles had no one, and he wanted anyone, anywhere. One day, the man didn't come back, and Charles died leaning against that door.

Now, someone who turns the doorknob back and forth four times, quickly, can open it out through any doorway he wishes. When he opens the door, the door at his destination also opens, as though he were stepping through it normally. He may choose direction, coming into or out of whatever room or hall to which the door connects. Once he is through, it shuts behind him as if it were never opened. If it was secured before, as with a lock or bar, it is locked after the event, too. The character could use this to enter a high-security facility, but not to get back out.

The character can step through to someplace entirely specific ("the first floor supply closet in the police station on 14th, on the inside") or entirely random ("take me away

from here!”). In more flexible cases, the spirit of young Charles prevails, choosing a place the child would have considered most suitable for the traveler.

Drawback: After a character uses the open door to travel someplace typically impossible, both the original door *and* the target door suffer a curse. The next time *each* is used, the first person to step through finds the material world dissolving into darkness around her as she steps into the equivalent location in the Shadow Realm. This occurs with the open door even if someone successfully activates it. After each door has sent someone to the Shadow Realm, it functions as normal. Should a character realize that this occurs (and recognize that few victims of this incidence return from the Shadow), he may be forced to make Morality degeneration rolls after using the door.

Action: Instant

The Consumptive Book (●●●●●)

One of New England’s asylums, on the cusp of the 19th century, accepted a wealthy man into its care. The man agreed that he should be hospitalized. He was afraid his paranoia might motivate him to kill again, and preferred that he be securely away from society. His wealth and education gave him preferred status in the asylum, affording him larger chambers, a limited library, guests and luxuries (such as wine, good food and cigarettes). The man was also allowed writing materials, and he published several works and corresponded with many well-known people during his lifetime.



As time went on, however, his mood worsened. Perhaps it was his existence in the asylum, easy by the standards of any other inmate but still exceptionally limited, especially for one who had once been wealthy and free. It may have been the changing of wardens or doctors, who did not approve of giving space to someone who appeared well. Maybe his paranoia grew worse. Or maybe his persecutors caught up with him. In his last months, during which the man was angry, suspicious and sometimes violent, he penned a book. He used green ink, and his handwriting had by then grown small and spider-webbed. The book was bound with iron covers and spine, and he died writing the book. He was found completely bloodless, face down over his last creation.

The text is written in the English of the time, but a determined reader can easily pick out that the author considered this text a defense against his persecutors. It was not for him, but for those who would inherit the book and could use it for free themselves of the terror that trapped him in an asylum for safety. After thorough study, one might realize that there are spells hidden inside the pages, written in code to conceal them from authorities and worse things. The spells themselves are bunk, though few will realize that. Instead, the book has its own life, which it derived from the manner of its author’s passing, and it can effect certain powers on the behalf of its readers.

A character must cut herself, usually in the palm, and bleed a puddle into the book’s pages. This inflicts one point of lethal damage. Then, she reads aloud the secret, mystic words she has deciphered from the book’s codes. Recognizing the reader’s intent, the book invokes the requested power. A list of potential “spells” follow, each of which a character may invoke by feeding the book’s hunger for blood and reciting certain lines. Each spell has an effect and a drawback. Figuring out the words to cue a certain power is a research roll (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 55–56) with five to 15 successes required. Characters with less than Occult ●●● suffer a –1 die penalty, and characters with Occult ●●●●● gain a +1 die bonus.

Turn Away: This spell requires five successes on a research roll. The character points at an individual, who must be visible to her. That character rolls Resolve + Composure (or just its Resistance trait) as a contest to the activation roll. If the character using the book wins, her target must travel away from the character for the rest of the scene and may not return for one full day. Whether the spell works or not, the character believes it does and ceases to be able to perceive the targeted individual until the 24 hours are up. Also, the character can only turn away one target at a time. Using this power on a second subject frees the previous subject from any residual effects.

Ward: This spell requires 10 successes on a research roll. The character names a particular type of person or creature. The naming may be as general or specific

as she likes: both “Daniel” and “vampires” are equally valid. The number of successes on her Morality roll dictate how difficult the subjects of the ward find approaching her. Anyone affected must make a Strength roll to come closer than five feet, as a physical force actually pushes them away. Attempts to harm her from the affected group, either physically or mentally, suffer a dice penalty equal to the successes on the roll. The ward lasts one scene. For the next two days, anyone the character actually trusts or *wants* to come be near does not approach. Though they may give and believe other excuses, it is because of the spell.

Banish: This spell requires 15 successes on a research roll. The character sends a named person tumbling into the Shadow Realm, most likely never to return. The subject of the spell rolls Resolve + Composure in contest with the activation roll. If the spell is effective, the target fades out over the next minute or so and reappears in the spirit world, where he must find his own way to safety. Each time the character uses this spell, a spirit leaves the Shadow Realm and steps through to the *target’s* location. Usually, the spirit trades places with the spell’s subject, but if the spell fails, the spirit may appear next to the subject. The spirit knows how and by whose will it came to the material world. This spell automatically fails to function on spirits, but still summons a new spirit from the Shadow Realm.

There are other spells in the book, but they may require greater amounts of research for a character to decipher.

Drawback: The first time a character uses the book, she acquires the derangement of suspicion. This derangement cannot be cured and remains in effect for one full month. If the character uses the book while already suffering suspicion, she acquires the paranoia derangement instead, which cannot be cured and remains for one year from that point. Each use of the book by a character suffering paranoia increases the duration of that derangement by one year. Characters with paranoia who use the book develop Irrationality (as the characters feel less and less safe), then Schizophrenia as they believe the book talks to them. Characters already suffering all these derangements have little to fear from the book, though they already have everything to fear from themselves. Information on derangements can be found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 96–100.

Action: Instant

Fetishes and Rites

The world of *Werewolf* is one intimately tied to both spirits and humans. Werewolf packs must deal with both, and their interactions, on a regular basis, and it isn’t safe.

They have many fetishes — magical tools with spirits bound inside them — and rituals entirely for the many situations that may arise when spirits, humans or both start causing trouble. Both fetishes and rites can only be used by werewolves. For troupes not playing a *Werewolf* game, these are the tools of mysterious strangers, who use them to protect the players’ characters (but why?) or get them in trouble (to what end?).

Fetishes

Cup of Life (●)

Although the appearance of this fetish has changed over the centuries, it is always some form of container for liquid. Long ago, a chalice was popular for the imagery. Today, canteens and thermoses predominate, mostly because they can be sealed. The container is not meant to hold water (although it *can*). It is intended to hold Essence, safe and fresh for later use. Any character who can spend Essence can spend it into a Cup of Life for later use, and a character who can draw Essence from a locus can instead channel that Essence into a Cup.

Entities (generally spirits and werewolves) draw Essence from a Cup of Life through the same method that they draw Essence from a locus, except the action isn’t limited to one attempt per day. Cups of Life fetishes are considered valuable resources by all who use Essence, and they come in different strengths (● to ●●●●●). A Cup can contain a maximum of three Essence points per dot. Werewolves bind hoarding spirits, such as those of magpies or squirrels, into these fetishes.

Action: Instant

Repellance (●●)

This fetish is usually a dispenser of some sort. It can be one of those number-mechanisms at the butcher or the DMV, a stamp dispenser or something else, as long as the character can offer something from the item to another. Activating the fetish requires the werewolf to make that offering and a mortal subject to accept it. Even if the acceptance is reluctant, it is enough. The subject of the fetish becomes less desirable to spirits, who subconsciously avoid him. Most spirits just gloss over his existence. A spirit must make a successful Finesse roll to interact with the affected character, and then does nothing it wouldn’t normally. An exceptional success on this roll indicates that the spirit notices the fetish’s interference. This fetish only affects mortals, and remains effective for one day. The werewolf may spend a point of Essence to extend the duration for an entire week. Ritemasters bind spirits of neglect or security into these fetishes.

Action: Instant



Shadow Lure (●●●)

Nearly the opposite of a Repellance, the Shadow Lure attracts the attentions of spirits. The werewolf must activate it, and thereafter whichever person wears or carries it seems desirable to spirits. The greed and lust spirits used for Shadow Lures are usually bound into objects people will want to wear often or constantly, such as jewelry, watches or jackets, but they are sometimes more ephemeral things. Even a dollar bill has been made into a Shadow Lure, drawing spirits' attentions from one person to the next as it changed hands. An activated Shadow Lure has no effect if no one is carrying or wearing it.

Once activated, the Lure remains functioning for a week. Every spirit who looks at the person wearing or carrying the fetish believes that person to be ideal for... whatever strange end it pursues. A body-thief assumes the person is weak-willed, a spirit of dark urges assumes the person is ripe to be urged and a spirit with a specific agenda believes the person is somehow important. Werewolves typically use these fetishes to draw attention away from events or people that are actually important, sacrificing an unknown mortal for the greater good.

Action: Instant

Rites

Bestowing the Shadowblind Cloak (●●●)

This ancient ritual has long been used to protect choice mortals against the depredations of the Shadow Realm. Werewolves do not choose these mortals by virtue of worldly importance. Rather, werewolves aim to deny active spirits those humans the Shadow denizens desire in the endless game the two factions play. Bestowing the Shadowblind Cloak conceals a mortal behind a veil of uninteresting normalcy. Spirits that once hungered after the human's body or soul now ignore her completely, and even those desperate and hungering after a mortal vessel pass over the person in favor of anything — or even nothing — else.

Performing the Rite: The ritualist makes a wreath out of any vine (ivy is most common) and hangs it with six iron bells. The construction of the object is done at night under the new moon, when Luna averts her gaze from Earth, and is part of the ritual. The ritual's subject need only be present for the very end of the ritual, and it can actually be taken to her: the ritemaster seals the ward by

placing the wreath over the subject's neck. Subjects of this rite are only rarely in the know, and the ritual's conclusion is usually disguised as part of some celebration.

Dice Pool: Harmony

Action: Extended (40 successes; each roll represents five minutes)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: All successes are lost. New materials must be gathered before the ritualist may try again.

Failure: No successes are added.

Success: Successes accumulate. If the character meets the required number of successes, he has one hour (or until sunrise, whichever is sooner) to place the wreath around the subject's neck. Once that is done, the rite is complete. No spirit notices the subject mortal except as scenery, completely ignoring her until the effect wears off after one lunar month. A spirit whose Rank is higher than the ritemaster's Primal Urge make a Finesse + Resistance roll at -4 dice upon seeing the subject. Success indicates it detects her as normal, and exceptional success indicates that it detects the rite's interference.

Exceptional Success: Many successes accumulate.

Return to the Borderland (•••••)

Werewolves know that their duty is to maintain the separation of the physical and the spiritual worlds. They want to keep one from lording over the other, but that didn't stop them from developing this ritual. They temporarily bring the two worlds into convergence, forcing them so close together that the spiritual imagery and symbolism appears in the material world and the dull, solid objects of reality are also in the Shadow Realm. This ritual creates a verge.

Most verges created by this rite are temporary. A pack of werewolves joins the two worlds for a specific purpose, and they are happy to let the Gauntlet drop again once they no longer need it raised. Occasionally, the passage between worlds might stay open longer, usually maintained by some *other* mystic force. Or the verge may even become woven into the cyclic nature of Earth. Once the Gauntlet is torn open, events conspire to open it again at regular intervals, with no assistance (or even intent) necessary from the original ritualist.

Performing the Rite: The ritemaster must delineate the boundaries of the verge, usually no more than can contain a large room or a small house. Marking the border with symbols meaningful to the local Shadow Realm and objects common in the surrounding material world, the character must slowly pierce her belly with a silver knife. The sensation is agonizing, and few ritemasters can stand the pain long enough to complete the rite. After at least an hour of incredible pain, she drives the knife as hard as she can into the ground, and the verge opens instantly.

Cost: 5 Essence, one point of aggravated damage per hour

Dice Pool: Stamina / Harmony

As the ritualist must slowly and excruciatingly drive a silver knife into her own abdomen, this rite requires more focus and control than many werewolves possess. At the beginning of each hour, the character must roll her Stamina. Failure indicates that the character cannot continue and must end the ritual unsuccessfully. Penalties do not accrue over time, but wound penalties (if the ritual goes that far) apply to both the Stamina and Harmony rolls.

Action: Extended (five successes + 1 per 100 square feet + 1 per hour open; one hour per roll)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The ritual ends in failure, and the character cannot attempt it again for a lunar month.

Failure: No successes accumulate.

Success: Successes accumulate. If the character reaches the required number of successes, the verge opens. The local physical and spiritual worlds temporarily collide, completely free of the Gauntlet. Anyone and everyone can cross from one to the other simply by walking through this area.

Exceptional Success: Many successes accumulate.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier Situation

+2 In a locus rated ••••+

+1 In a locus rated •• or •••

And apply a penalty based on the strength of the local Gauntlet.

Risen the Wardens.

Closed the Gates (•••••)

This mighty and terrible ritual sees such rare use that it is even more rarely taught. Many ritemasters consider it too dangerous to pass on, or even a form of heresy to invoke. This is a rite that hardens the barrier between the spiritual and physical worlds, making it nearly impossible for all but the most powerful creatures to pass from one to the other. This includes all werewolves, making this a disagreeable situation only used in the most dangerous of times. One might perform the ritual when it was of the utmost importance that no spirits be allowed out of the Shadow Realm — when their interference could send something delicate tumbling into destruction.

Performing the Rite: The ritemaster performs this ritual under the sun, beginning one hour after dawn and ending no later than one hour before dusk. During that time, the ritualist implores the spirits of the sun to burn away shadow, and he must have a finely crafted clock

(Cost: Resources ●●● or greater) as the focus of the rite. The character must destroy one object with the potential for life, be it a fertilized chicken egg or an unsprouted seed, for every hour of the ritual.

Cost: 1 Essence per mile radius

Dice Pool: Harmony

Action: Extended (40 successes; each roll represents 10 minutes)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The rite fails completely. The ritemaster and all werewolves nearby suffer backlash, becoming unable to cross the Gauntlet for one full year.

Failure: No successes accumulate.

Success: Successes accumulate. When the ritemaster achieves the required number of successes, a burst of light flows outward from the clock-focus, dimming as the light goes. It travels outward a number of miles equal to the Essence spent on the rite, though it is barely visible after the first 100 yards. Within that area, no attempt to pass between the physical world and the Shadow Realm succeeds, regardless of the method. Only spirits of Rank greater than five may ignore this restriction.

Complete inability to enter the material world causes significant consternation to many spirits. Few, if any, will know the cause, especially since this rite sees such infrequent use. After a very short time, spirits are going to test the boundaries of this restriction. They will eventually find where they can and where they cannot cross the Gauntlet, and then they will head inwards to discover the source of their irritation. The influx of agitated spirits will cause a great deal of trouble, especially as they need to fetter themselves to or possess living creatures to stay so long in the physical world.

If the clock used as the focus is, for any reason, destroyed, the ritual's effect immediately ends. Otherwise, it lasts for one lunar month.

Exceptional Success: Many successes accumulate.

Artifacts

Werewolves are not the only supernatural entities with an interest in the Shadow Realm and the ability to manipulate it. Mages, especially those tied to the Realm of the Primal Wild, can also explore the spiritual world and interact with its residents. Mages collect powerful magical tools of uncertain providence called artifacts.

Some artifacts' powers function constantly, allowing even mortals to use them. Other powers require activation, something only a mage can do. For the purposes of your game, you may wish to allow mortals to activate artifacts that have very simple triggers (along the lines of the Peacebringer, below). If so, allow mortals to activate the artifact with a Morality roll at a -3 dice penalty. Success triggers the artifact's power.

The Judge's Eye (●●●●●)

Durability 3, Size 1, Structure 4

Mana Capacity: Maximum 11

The Judge's Eye is a loupe, such as a watchmaker or jeweler might use. Its casing is a rich-colored wood, worn smooth with years of use. The loupe's lenses appear to be a little discolored from age, and a quick look through them confirms that: colors that shouldn't be there refract through the lenses, especially when pointed at people.

In truth, the Judge's Eye reveals any spirits possessing the people observed through it. At first, a character using the artifact sees only faint, smudged colors. It takes several rounds of consistent scrutiny for the artifact to separate out the target's aura from any spiritual parasites. After looking through the loupe at a specific person for three rounds, the colors either disappear (if the person has no spiritual rider) or resolve into an image of the spirit riding the subject. This power is persistent and benefits anyone who looks through the Judge's Eye.

Peacebringer (●●●●●)

Durability 5, Size 1, Structure 6

Mana Capacity: Maximum 11

This artifact is an old-style Colt revolver — the classic "Peacemaker" of the Old West. The revolver looks no more special than any other gun from that era, meaning that any collector or historian would covet it as a museum piece. The remarkable thing is that it still works flawlessly. Its gunmetal sheen may be dull and its ivory handle no longer bright, but it still fires as smoothly and as accurately as it ever did in the old days.

As an artifact and a weapon, the Peacebringer is designed to bring peaceful rest to anyone possessed by a spirit or ghost. Failing that, it's still a gun and can give the host another sort of peace. The activation for this effect, which is much like the Spirit 3 "Exorcism" spell, requires someone to load the gun with proper ammunition and fire it at the unfortunate, possessed mortal. Roll an attack as normal. A character attempting to do as little damage as possible should aim for a leg or an arm. If the activation roll (which is concurrent with the Firearms roll and reflexive) is successful, the possessing spirit or ghost is ejected from the subject's body.

Shard of the Sun (●●●●●●)

Durability 6, Size 2, Structure 8

Mana Capacity: Maximum 12

The Shard of the Sun is a perfectly crafted katana. Even an uneducated observer comes away with the impression that he is looking at something very, very old. Its blade is unadorned, but its grip is lacquered. The décor appears to be some randomly pleasing pattern, but closer inspection reveals a scene wherein a man climbs the mountain that supports the sun. It is nearly microscopic,

but it is possible to discern that the mountain is sharp, and the man is bleeding. Hanging from the hilt by a short silver wire is a diamond of great worth.

A mage may activate this artifact by spending one point of Mana, cutting herself and letting some drops of blood wet the katana's edge. She must be outside, and being higher than her surroundings (on a hill or on the roof of a building) adds one die to the roll. If she is successful, the gem in the hilt shines brightly, lighting the area. Within minutes, a spirit appears to her in a burst of fire and light. The spirit is vaguely humanoid in form, with dark embers for eyes within its shining, burning face, and it is difficult to look at directly. If the mage gives orders, the spirit obeys them to the fullest extent possible, returns to announce completion and departs. Otherwise, the spirit leaves after a minute of silently staring at its would-be master.

There is no limit to the number of spirits a mage may summon and command at one time beyond her capacity for spending her Mana and her blood. The spirits are far from temperate or subtle, and their unrestricted use is sure to earn a great deal of attention. A character *may* command a spirit to practice stealth as a means to a goal, but the spirit is unlikely to do well following that route.

Taroa's Book (●●●●●●●)

Durability 3, Size 2, Structure 5

Mana Capacity: Maximum 11

Taroa's Book is a heavy tome of old, thick paper bound in dark leather. The wood in the book's covers has warped over time, bending the book into a somewhat convex shape. Although the book's paper has remained remarkably whole, it remains that not a single word is printed within. Only the name "Taroa" is embossed on the cover.

A mage may activate the book by opening it to a random page, writing the name of a spirit in the book and spending a point of Mana. Within seconds, the book completely absorbs the ink, which disappears from the page. For rest of the scene, the spirit so named may materialize through the book, per the Spirit 5 spell "Materialize Spirit." If in the Shadow Realm, the spirit senses that the energies of Taroa's Book are there to let it materialize. The book rises from the ground and becomes a part of the materializing spirit, becoming incorporated somehow into the spirit's appearance. After one day, the spirit dematerializes, and the book drops to the ground.

Blood Tenebrous: A Vampiric Discipline

Vampires have little to do with spirits and the Shadow Realm, as a general rule. The vampires' world

is more strongly rooted in the physical than mages or werewolves — after all, that's where the blood is. The Discipline of Blood Tenebrous provides an avenue for vampires with the interest to interact with the spirit world. At the troupe's discretion, Blood Tenebrous may be a unique Discipline tied to a hitherto-unknown bloodline, one that walks the shadows and treats with spirits. This bloodline's parent clan is most likely Mekhet (who else but the Shadows?).

There are other options. If you want a chronicle that ties vampires' very origins to the spirit world, Blood Tenebrous can be made a common Discipline, not in-clan for anyone but available to all. In general, the source of this Discipline can be placed with almost any faction you choose; spirits are in all places of the world, leaving vampires' interaction with the a matter of circumstance.

● Pulse of the Invisible

The Beast in every vampire has an instinctual understanding of where to find the blood it craves. Some learn to extend this instinct to include the flow of Essence through the world, something more foreign to their natural impulses. This power gives vampires a sense of when spiritual phenomena are going on nearby, and the opportunity to more clearly pinpoint them.

Cost: — or 1 Vitae

Dice Pool: This power involves no roll and is considered "always on." The character makes a Wits + Occult roll whenever a spiritual phenomenon occurs nearby. Success gives the character some notable stimulus, often something she hasn't felt since her Embrace — her hair standing on end, for example.

When alerted to such a presence, the character may spend one Vitae to strengthen this sense for the remainder of the scene. She becomes able to see loci, verges, other spiritual phenomena and spirits in Twilight, though she gains no special ability to touch or affect them. For some vampires, this sense also manifests as a smell, sound or tactile sensation. A character may try to communicate with a Twilight spirit she can see, but this power provides no ability to understand their strange language. Luckily, some can speak the languages of Earth.

Vampires traveling in Twilight (per Twilight Projection) do not trigger the character's sense of the supernatural, but may be seen if the character spends Vitae. See the "Clash of Wills" sidebar in **Vampire: The Requiem**, p. 119. The character using Pulse of the Invisible should roll Wits + Empathy + Blood Tenebrous.

Action: N/A, or Reflexive

●● Blood Is Life

There is power in blood, a fact that vampires probably recognize more strongly than any other creatures. The

Kindred know that they are unnatural, that there is more to the Vitae that drives them than simple blood stolen from humanity to keep another Requiem from ending. With this power, a vampire learns how to transform her Vitae into Essence, a lifeblood of another sort, and allow other creatures to consume it.

With the successful use of this power, the character spills a quantity of her Vitae on the ground. As she does so, the Vitae ceases to be the potent symbol of her unlife and becomes instead soaked with Essence. She could lick it up now, if she wanted, and get nothing from it. Spirits and other entities that manipulate Essence, on the other hand, may absorb one point of this free-floating Essence per turn as an instant action. It is a feast for most spirits. After one minute, any remaining Essence has dissipated.

While this power does not give the vampire any ability to command spirits, this power creates the potential for some very real influence over them. Spirits need Essence to live and grow strong and take well to bribery (as a general rule). Some spirits can even take over human bodies and might bargain with a vampire to trade willing vessels for the Essence the vampire can provide.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Strength + Occult + Blood Tenebrous

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character succeeds only in tainting some of her Vitae, not transforming it into Essence. Roll the character's Blood Potency. Each success taints one point of Vitae. Any Vitae the character was not already spilling, she must then expel from her body (most commonly, the vampire coughs and hacks it up).

Failure: The character fails to transform her Vitae into Essence. She may try again, but doing so costs another point of Willpower.

Success: The character transforms some of her Vitae into Essence as it spills to the ground. She may transform a number of Vitae up to the number of successes rolled. The character is not required to apply every success.

Exceptional Success: The character may transform copious Vitae into Essence.

••• Under the Skin of the World

A vampire is a creature of the real world, the solid world where hot blood flows from the veins of the kine into the Kindred's mouths. There may be more ethereal places in the complex world, but if there's no blood there, why bother? Some Kindred find a reason. There are secrets there to be ferreted out, escape routes to lay, allies and dupes to be found and, most important to some, advantage to be had over other Kindred. A vampire with this power learns how to step sideways through the cracks between worlds, going from the physical world to the Shadow

Realm or vice versa. At a locus, he focuses his will and forces himself through the Gauntlet.

While in the Shadow Realm, the vampire has to worry about all that place's dangers. Spirits (and their greater cousins, the gods of the realm) are as great a threat to Kindred as they are to humans. Worse, there is no blood for a vampire to consume. The vampire still must spend a point of Vitae to continue functioning each day, and thus has some sense of time, but the urge to sleep at daybreak vanishes. Vampires who spend too long in the Shadow would do well to ask a spirit the time of day before returning to the physical world, assuming the locus they are using to travel is not sealed away from the sunlight.

Luckily, there are some advantages. The spirit world is called the Shadow because it is largely a realm of night. A vampire does not need to fear the sun in most places there. There are some — and one can happen upon them without warning — where the sun is strongly reflected in the Shadow Realm's sky. These are sunburned deserts, some tropical regions and other places with a strong solar resonance. The sun's symbolism is just as dangerous to the Kindred as the sun's rays, and a vampire must be wary of them.

Cost: 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Occult + Blood Tenebrous

Action: Instant

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character fails to leave the world he is in. He may not attempt to step sideways again for one full day, which may mean trouble if the character is currently in the Shadow Realm.

Failure: The character fails to travel to the other world. He may try again the next turn, but it costs another point of Willpower.

Success: The character fades from the world he currently inhabits and passes through the Gauntlet. He appears within 30 seconds (about 10 turns) on the other side. Only powerful entities with the ability to affect creatures in neither world can attack or otherwise influence the character — to all others, he is out of reach.

Exceptional Success: The character transitions between worlds very quickly. He reappears on his next turn and may act as normal.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+2	The locus is rated ••••+
+1	The locus is rated •• or •••
+1	The vampire stares into a reflective surface
-2	It is daytime in the physical world

Also apply a penalty based on the strength of the local Gauntlet.



•••• Road from Perdition

With this power, a vampire may conduct himself and others through the Gauntlet. He must invoke this power at a locus, where the boundary is already thin. He must also be joined to the others he intends to lead to the other world by touch, either directly or through another character. A vampire may do so to help his entire coterie quickly escape Final Death in either world, or to bring some allies with him to help do his dirty work. Whatever the reason, this is the way for a vampire to bring others without Blood Tenebrous through into the Shadow Realm (and back out).

The roll to step through is the same as the roll for Under the Skin of the World, with an additional penalty of one per additional traveler through the Gauntlet. An unconscious traveler imposes a -2 dice penalty; an actively unwilling traveler, -4. The results, such as the speed of transition, are likewise the same. Should the character suffer a dramatic failure, he cannot attempt to step sideways again for a full turn or be pulled through by another vampire's use of Road from Perdition. The vampires he failed to conduct through the Gauntlet may yet be able to transport themselves.

Cost: 1 Vitae per passenger, 1 Willpower

Action: Instant

••••• Drawing in the Devil

This power is frightening to those Kindred who know even a little of the spirit world. The vampire invites a spirit into her cold flesh to form an unholy synthesis, something not Man, not Beast and not spirit. This is a dangerous proposition for both entities, because it gives each

a measure of control over the power that results. The body remains that of the vampire, with access to all the vampire's Vitae and Disciplines (and weaknesses), but it gains some features that reflect the spirit. Joining with a flame-spirit (which would be a terrifically bad idea) would redden the vampire's hair, lend some heat to the body's flesh and occasionally leave the faintest smoke contrails. Spirits of less physical things are less obvious: taking in a greed-spirit might change the vampire's eye-color to green.

While sharing one form, the vampire and spirit act as one. They both perceive everything the body perceives,

and their wills are assumed to be aligned. The two take only a single action (as normal for a character) on any given combat turn. Anything one wishes to do that the other does not oppose is done. For example, a spirit who wishes to breathe in and smell the local aroma through the vampire's nose may do so, as long as the vampire doesn't want to keep from breathing. When there is a conflict, the character rolls Resolve + Composure + Blood Potency in contest against the spirit's Power + Finesse. The victor determines the action for that turn. Should the two tie, the body hesitates under its uncertain control and takes no action for the turn. This delay occurs even if the contested action would normally be reflexive (like inhaling). This is one of many reasons it is vastly important for a vampire and spirit to work out their goals ahead of time.

Just as the synthesis can use any of the vampire's abilities and Disciplines as normal, so can it use most of the spirit's Numina. Any Numen that does not require the spirit to be ephemeral (as Claim or Possession do). The spirit also cannot use Discorporate or other Numina that would separate it from the merged form until the vampire releases it or it forces its way out. Regardless, the merged entity can only take one action per turn; i.e., the entity cannot use a Numen and shoot someone at the same time.

Cost: 1 Vitae (the spirit must spend one Essence)

Dice Pool: Presence + Persuasion + Blood Tenebrous

Action: Extended (five successes per spirit's Rank; each roll represents one minute of meditation)

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The roll fails. The Beast refuses to join with the spirit, and the synthesis fails. The character and the spirit both suffer one point of lethal damage (to their flesh and Corpus, respectively) and may not try again until the next night.

Failure: No successes accumulate.

Success: Successes accumulate. If the character reaches the required number of successes, he has coaxed his body and Beast to accept and merge with the spiritual energies. For every three dots the spirit has in Power, the synthesis adds one dot to one of the character's Power traits (Intelligence, Strength, Presence) of her choice. The same goes for every three dots the spirit has in its Finesse and Resistance traits.

The synthesis ends when both vampire and spirit agree to go their separate ways. The vampire may attempt to eject the spirit before the spirit is willing with a Resolve + Composure roll, contested by the spirit's Power + Resistance. The spirit may attempt to escape the synthesis without the vampire's agreement with a Power + Finesse roll, contested by the vampire's Resolve + Composure. In either case, the inner conflict takes one instant action; the vampire may add her Blood Potency to her roll by spending one Vitae, and the spirit may add two dice to the roll for each point of Essence it spends.

Exceptional Success: Many successes accumulate.



The belt cracked across the young boy's cheek.

"What the *fuck* is wrong with you, boy? Why you gotta make me hit you? You know I don't like it! You should behave, like a good boy!"

"Mamma..." His voice sounded different, and it pissed her off even more.

"What the hell is that? Are you *angry* at me? Is that the kind of sass you've got for me? For the woman who birthed you? Who feeds you?"

"No... not me... *Ha-é*."

"What? What was that? Not you?"

"*Nu a he. Ha-é. A he ma alha-alda. Ha-é shah ani.*"

"What is that? Spanish? You been picking up Spanish at school? You *swearing* at me in *Spanish*? God *damn* it, boy, you *speak* English right now or so help me you're going to be in the closet for two whole days this time! Right in there with your own piss and shit! You hear me?"

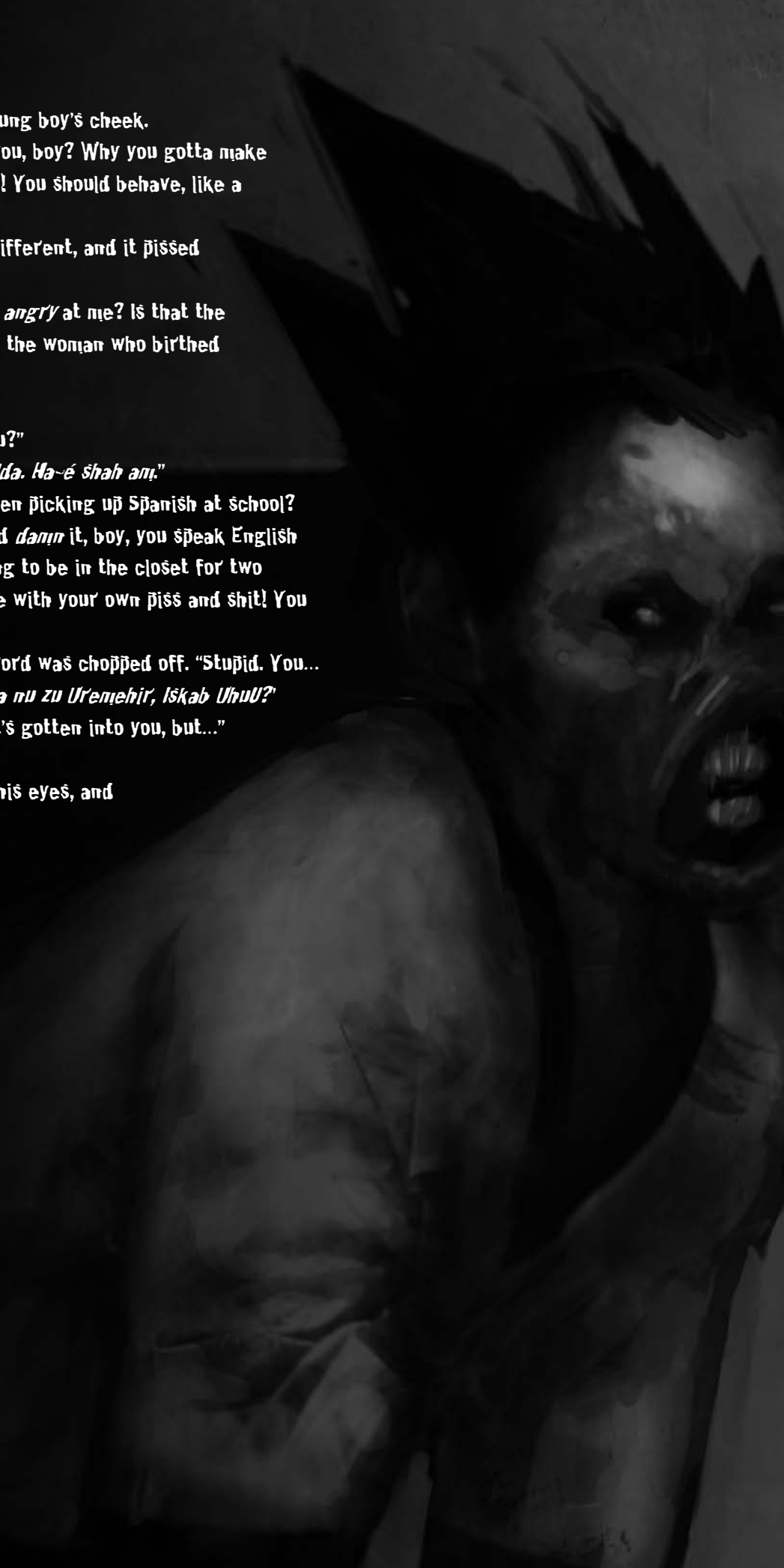
"I... not... like... tongue." Each word was chopped off. "Stupid. You... should... know. *Uremehir. Anayani za nu zu Uremehir, Iskab UhuU?*"

"That does it. I don't know what's gotten into you, but..."

She choked, and couldn't finish.

Because she'd just looked into his eyes, and hadn't seen him there.

She didn't see him when he moved, either.



Chapter Four: Denizens of Shadow

BOOK OF
SPIRITS

*And I saw three
unclean spirits like
frogs come out
of the mouths
of the serpent, the beast,
and the false prophet.*

— Revelation 16:13

— Revelation
16:13

The core ecology and motivation of spirits having been covered in Chapter Two, here follow the rules necessary for incorporating spirits and their pawns into your chronicles. A number of sample spirits are provided, as are a number of Ridden — those luckless people and animals that have been possessed by wandering spirits. Storytellers interested in additional spirits and Ridden to people their bestiaries are encouraged to look for **Predators**, a **Werewolf: The Forsaken** supplement that offers even greater variety when used in conjunction with this book.

Spirit Creation

Mechanically, spirits are fairly similar to ghosts in that they only have three Attributes. They rely upon Numina for most of their power, and similar to ghosts, spirits sometimes exist in the material world in a state of Twilight. Yet, they have substantial differences. While ghosts are bound by the misfortunes that created them, spirits are both primordial and ever-changing. They have a wider range of powers and an infinite variety of forms and appetites.

Spirit Creation Checklist

- 1. Choose Type and Rank.** There are five general types of spirits to choose from: abstract- (conceptual-) spirits, artificial-spirits, nature-spirits, location-spirits or a hybrid of the various types. Spirits have Ranks of power from 1–5. Spirits of a Rank higher than 5 exist, but do not have game traits.
- 2. Select Attributes.** Divide the number of dots allocated according to the spirit's Rank as you wish among Power, Finesse and Resistance.
- 3. Choose Influences.** The spirit gains one dot of Influence per Rank.
- 4. Choose Numina.** The spirit has a maximum of three Numina, plus two extra for each dot of Rank beyond the first.
- 5. Determine Advantages.** Willpower (Power + Resistance); Initiative (Finesse + Resistance); Speed (Power + Finesse + 10 or a species factor representative of the spirit's physical reflection); Defense (equal to the highest of Power and Finesse) and the spirit's Corpus is equal to the Size of the object that spawned it (count as 2 for an abstract spirit) + Resistance.

6. Determine Starting Essence.

A spirit can have any number of Essence points, up to the maximum Essence listed for its rank.

7. Determine Ban. The spirit's ban should reflect both its nature and its level of power. The harder the ban is to uncover and exploit, the more significantly it weakens the spirit.

Description

Spirits of physical objects or creatures of nature always bear some resemblance to the things they reflect. Bird-spirits are winged and feathered; machine-spirits look like the metals they reflect. Low-powered spirits, in fact, are very similar to their physical reflections. As spirits grow in power, their physical natures diverge. Spirits of concepts and emotions have the widest variety of form — many are surreal, mythic, symbolic or nightmarish in appearance.

Type

Spirits are generally broken into six basic categories: abstract- (conceptual-) spirits, artificial-spirits, nature-spirits, location-spirits, elementals, and hybrids. Spirits themselves don't give a damn about any system,

and they do not organize themselves based upon any known taxonomy — a point not lost on the wisest of magi and werewolf shamans. There is not a spirit in existence that could *only* fit into a single category of anyone's catalog. Nonetheless, spirit taxonomies as a *general* tool are potentially useful as a way to organize human or supernatural thought. Most importantly, organizing spirits helps mystics make educated guesses about the nature of spirits — especially their bans.

Rank

Spirit rankings are the foundation of the rules governing them, but rankings don't map directly to titles in the Shadow. The descriptors are there for the purpose of distinguishing a minor death spirit versus a greater death spirit, for example. Each Rank a spirit possesses offers it protection from being bound to the will or service of another by subtracting its Rank from the dice pool.

Spirits seem to be able innately to judge whether a spirit they are near is more powerful. Spirits may attempt to disguise their superiority or inferiority; if so, make a contested Finesse roll to successfully hide their innate power. A spirit that successfully disguises itself seems to other spirit to be roughly its peer.

Attributes

Due to their primordial nature, spirits are simpler creatures in rules terms. Instead of the nine Attributes

Spirit Rank

Rank†	Descriptor	Trait Limits*	Attribute Dots	Maximum Essence	Numina
1	Weak	5 dots	5–8	10	1–3
2	Minor	7 dots	9–14	15	3–5
3	Major	9 dots	15–25	20	5–7
4	Greater	12 dots	26–35	25	7–9
5	Superior	15 dots	36–45	50	9–11
6–10	**				

† Each Rank levies a –1 modifier on attempts to forcibly bind that spirit.

* These represent permanent dots, not temporarily boosted traits.

** Spirits above Rank 5 don't need traits. They are, to all intents and purposes, godlike beings.

used to define creatures in the physical world, spirits have just three: Power, Finesse and Resistance. This does not mean that all spirits with Power 5 are super genius Olympic weightlifter gymnasts with charismas that dwarf Eva Longoria and Donald Trump. Remember, they are *alien* creatures. Spirits should be taken on their own terms and mechanics, only compared to one another.

Power: Power represents the spirit's basic impact on the spirit world, the spirit's raw ability to carry out whatever it sets in mind to. Powerful spirits have long memories and the supernatural muscle to get things done. They are usually bright and have commanding or at least imposing demeanors. The spirit's Power is used for all rolls that would normally involve Intelligence, Strength or Presence. Powerful spirits often ripple with muscle and/or give off an aura of preternatural majesty.

Finesse: The spirit's Finesse trait represents how well the spirit can manipulate spirits, people and the environment around it. Finesse measures, in effect, the spirit's skill in imposing its own concepts on others. The spirit's Finesse is used for all rolls that would normally involve Wits, Dexterity or Manipulation. Spirits with high Finesse scores tend to be wily, perceptive, cunning and nimble.

Resistance: The spirit's Resistance trait measures the strength of the idea behind the spirit and how easily it is damaged and influenced by others. The spirit's Resistance is used for all rolls that would normally involve Resolve, Stamina and Composure. Spirits with high Resistance might evidence thick pelts, rocky skin, hard chitin and so on. They may also seem massive, determined, sturdy or merely wiry.

Other Traits

Corpus: Rather than Health, a spirit has Corpus dots that represent the resiliency of its ephemeral form. Corpus equals a spirit's Resistance + Size. Spirits regenerate Corpus in the same amount of time that mortals heal damage (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 175). If a spirit loses its entire Corpus, the spirit is disincorporated. Its remains fade away, but it will then begin to re-form at a rate of one Essence per day. When its Essence equals its Corpus dots, it reincorporates. If it loses all its Essence and Corpus, the spirit is destroyed.

Essence: A spirit's maximum Essence is determined by its Rank (p. 131); any given spirit may have any amount of Essence up to that maximum. The lower a spirit's Essence is, the more desperate the spirit grows for sustenance.

Willpower: Spirits have a Willpower trait equal to their Power + Resistance. A spirit's very existence

necessitates a certain tenacity to survive and grow. Most spirits regain spent Willpower at the rate of one point per day, though the rate increases dramatically if the spirit is successful at harvesting Essence with an appropriate resonance, regaining an additional point per three points harvested.

Initiative: Initiative is equal to Finesse + Resistance.

Defense: A spirit's Defense is equal to its Power or Finesse, whichever is *higher*.

Speed: Speed is equal to Power + Finesse + a "species factor." Spirits that take human or animal form have a species factor equal to their earthly counterpart, although Rank 1 spirits, especially of normally immobile things, are often unaware that they *can* move. Spirits of inanimate objects usually have a species factor equal to 0, while spirits of more abstract forms generally have a species factor of 10. Vehicle spirits often have Acceleration traits equal to their material cousins, rather than a Speed trait (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 142). To find the maximum Speed, add the spirit's Power + Finesse to the physical counterpart's maximum Speed.

In Twilight, all spirits (even spirits without apparent appendages) are considered to be able to move in just about any direction. Even those without "wings" or association with the concept of flight (air elementals) can hover in any direction — though without a clear connection to the concept of flight, they must hover within their Speed (in yards) off the ground, or at least a solid surface. For the most part, they are not bound by gravity, or suffer its effects — you can't "push" a murder-spirit in Twilight down an elevator shaft.

Materialized spirits are quite physical. They are affected by gravity, for example. They can still move about, per their Speed trait, but unless they have "wings" or some such, they cannot fly. Those that don't have wheels, legs, tentacles or treads, for example, are assumed to hover just off the ground.

Size: A spirit can generally be of any size, depending on what the spirit represents and how powerful it is. Exceptionally strong spirits are often larger than their weaker kin.



Supernatural Tolerance

All supernatural creatures in the World of Darkness possess a unique trait that represents their mystical power, such as Blood

Potency, Primal Urge or Gnosis. Among other things, this trait is combined with one or two other Resistance traits to resist many supernatural effects. The shorthand for such a trait used for this purpose is "Supernatural Tolerance." Substitute the appropriate trait for the defender when necessary, as appropriate to the context.

Skills and Merits

Spirits don't possess either of these categories of traits. A spirit suffers no penalty for untrained Skill use, however, as long as the task is appropriate to the spirit's area of influence. A spirit of information can rifle the database of a computer using Power + Finesse alone, without suffering the usual -3 dice penalty for attempting what would ordinarily be a Computer task without actually possessing the Computer Skill.

Language

All spirits understand and speak the language of the Shadow World, often called Babel, the First Tongue, the Spirit Tongue or in its own language, *Uremehir*. (For more on the language of spirits, see p. 90.)

Influences

All spirits have an ability to influence the thing that gave them existence. As they grow in power and Rank, they can then manipulate or even create that thing. Most spirits have only the Influence that most directly corresponds to their own nature. A dog-spirit likely has the Influence: Dogs, and a spirit of wrath has the Influence: Anger. As a spirit merges with other spirits to grow in Rank, it may gain new Influences, or merely grow stronger in its original.

Influence can be used across the Gauntlet, if the spirit is in the area of effect of a locus of compatible resonance. Otherwise, the spirit must use the Reaching Numen to manipulate the physical world while the spirit remains in the Shadow.

Spirits of Rank 5 and above probably possess abilities beyond these. Those beings are so rarely seen near the physical world, however, that their opponents will have far more to worry about than their abilities to set whole towns ablaze, drive an army away in fear or create a forest from nothing.

Dice Pool

Each use of an Influence requires a Power + Finesse roll and the expenditure of one (or more) Essence.

Influencing Thoughts or Emotions

When a spirit attempts to use an Influence to affect the emotions or thoughts of a sentient being (mortal, werewolf, vampire or the like), the roll is contested. Roll Resolve or Composure (whichever is higher) + Supernatural Tolerance to resist.

Duration

Changes made through Influence are usually temporary. A spirit with sufficient Influence can increase the duration of the effect to a level based on the difference between the Influence score necessary for the effect and the spirit's total Influence dots.

The level of the effect and the level of potential duration are added together to determine the Influence required. For instance, a fear-spirit with Influence ••• could use a Strengthen effect lasting for one hour per success (at the cost of two Essence), a Manipulate effect lasting for 10 minutes per success or a Control effect that lasts only one minute per success. The spirit need not use the Influence power to its utmost ability. The fear-spirit with Influence ••• could use the Strengthen effect with a lower duration, such as one minute per success.

Essence

Essence is the heart of all spiritual activity. Essence is the money, food and drink of spiritual life. All spirits need Essence to survive, but the more they obtain, the more powerful they become. Spirits with a ready supply of Essence will probably start a scene with near maximum Essence, and will be relatively impassive. Spirits with less than 75% of their maximum are hungry — they will be hunting Essence or actively seeking to engender its creation. Spirits with less than half their maximum essence will either be in full-bore predator or prey mode. They are starving and greatly weakened.

Uses of Essence

Spirits use Essence in a number of ways:

- A spirit must spend a point of Essence per day to remain active. This expenditure usually takes place at moonrise. If the spirit has no Essence to spend, the spirit falls into slumber until it manages to gain Essence somehow, such as by being immersed in a new flow of Essence.
- Spirits use Essence to use their Influences.

Influence Effects

Level	Effect
• Strengthen	The spirit can enhance its sphere of influence: make an emotion stronger, an animal or plant healthier or an object more robust (gaining an extra point of Health or Structure per Rank of the spirit, for example). These changes last for one minute per success. The cost is one Essence.
•• Manipulate	The spirit can make minor changes within its sphere of influence, such as to slightly change the nature or target of an emotion, or make minor changes to an animal's actions, a plant's growth or an object's functioning. These changes last for up to 10 minutes per success. The cost is two Essence.
••• Control	The spirit can make dramatic changes within its sphere of influence: twisting emotions or dictating an animal's actions, a plant's growth or an object's functioning. The changes last for up to 10 minutes per success. The cost is three Essence.
•••• Create	The spirit can create a new example of its sphere of influence: create an emotion, create a new sapling or young plant, create a young animal or brand new object. The cost is four Essence.
••••• Mass Create	The spirit can create multiple examples of its sphere of influence; the spirit can trigger its emotion in multiple people, create new copses of trees, small groups of animals or multiple identical items. The cost is five Essence. A number of items, or people affected, equal to the spirit's Rank come into existence. Alternatively, the spirit may create one instance of its sphere of influence permanently (although a spirit cannot permanently alter the mindset of a sentient being).

Influence Durations

Level	Duration	Cost
0	One minute per success.	No additional Essence cost.
•	Ten minutes per success.	No additional Essence cost.
••	One hour per success.	The cost is one additional Essence.
•••	One day per success.	The cost is two additional Essence.
••••	Permanent.	The cost is two additional Essence.

• Spirits can use Essence to temporarily boost their traits on a one-for-one basis. They cannot boost a single trait by more than their Rank +2. Each such boost takes a standard action and lasts for one scene; thus, boosting both Power and Finesse would take two standard actions. (Remember to update the spirit's Advantages.) Such changes are unsubtle and should be described by the Storyteller.

• A spirit that has fled into the physical world must expend one point of Essence per Rank per hour as long as the spirit remains ephemeral (which is to

say, without possessing a host body or using the Fetter Numen). The spirit cannot regain this lost Essence until it either gains a fetter or crosses back into the Shadow. If a spirit loses all its Essence while in the physical world, the spirit passes into slumber and is drawn back across the Gauntlet into the spirit world, losing a point of Corpus from the rough transition.

• As long as a spirit still has some Essence, the spirit isn't destroyed when reduced to zero Corpus, but rather disincorporated (see p. 132).

Regaining Essence

Spirits regain Essence in a number of ways:

- They gain one point per day by being in proximity to the thing they reflect. For example, a tree-spirit gains a single point per day when it stays near a physical tree. Obviously, a spirit can earn only as much as it needs to stay alive in this fashion.

- Once per day, the spirit may try to draw Essence from an appropriate source in the physical world by rolling its Power + Finesse, as affected by the local Gauntlet modifier. (The spirit can sense such a source automatically up to one mile away.) The number of successes indicates the number of points of Essence gained. At a locus of appropriate resonance, the spirit may add additional dice equal to the strength of the locus. For example, if an ancient tombstone is also a two-dot locus with death resonance, a death-spirit could add two dice to the roll to draw Essence, but a cat-spirit couldn't.

- The spirit may barter for additional Essence from supernaturals that possess the trait or with other spirits.

- The spirit may attempt to steal Essence from another spirit by making a contested roll of its Power + Finesse against the target's Power + Resistance. If the attacker wins, the number of successes indicates the number of points of the target's Essence that are siphoned off by the attacker. If all the target's Essence is stolen, the victim spirit falls into slumber. If the target wins, the attacker loses a number of points of Essence equal to the successes scored by the target.

Spirit Mechanics: Spirit Senses

Spirits are assumed to possess the same suite of senses as a mortal or their animal analogue, whether the spirits seem to possess noses or even eyes. Of course, the Storyteller may decide otherwise. Extremely bizarre senses or innately magical perceptions should be handled with Numina. Spirits have extremely keen senses; roll Finesse + Resistance for their normal Perception rolls.

Sense Reflection: Spirits can sense things that can give them Essence automatically up to one mile away. For example, an oak-spirit can sense just where it needs to be in the Shadow to harvest Essence from a stand of

oaks in the material world. Likewise, if in the physical realm, the spirit knows if there are oaks nearby and in which direction they lie.

Sense Rank: Spirits can sense if other spirits are weaker or more powerful. They can also attempt to hide their rank from other spirits (see p. 131).

Spirit Bans

Creating bans for spirits is one of the most important ways that a Storyteller has to characterize a spirit. Spirits operate on mythic not natural laws — there is no set formula for creating bans, other than they should relate to the spirit's nature and/or abilities. Our hope is to teach by example. Below you will find two listings for bans. The first is a list of bans by overall power, and then a listing of bans by general category or type.

Interestingly, bans are also tied to the spirit's power. Some spirits have more than one ban, or have bans with complex conditions or exceptions. See p. 91 for more information on bans.

Minor Bans (Rank 1–2 Spirits)

Weaker spirits tend to have fairly mild bans — ones that are easily brought to bear, but don't tend to be Corpus-threatening. These should be fairly apparent and damn inconvenient, but not inherently deadly to the spirit. Many Rank 1 spirits of the same type share a common ban as well.

- A fire-spirit may not cross flowing or deep water.
- Juicyone, a gluttony-spirit, cannot refuse food left in its path.
- Many spirits associated with the concept of silence will flee when confronted with loud sounds.
- Nocuoths (a type of disease-spirit) are repelled by rue and cannot remain in a room where rue is burned or cross a line drawn with paste made from the herb.

Average Bans (Rank 2–4 Spirits)

These bans may not be readily apparent, but tend to severely inhibit the spirit's abilities or actions at least for a time, or cause it to take damage.

- Leathertome, a book-spirit, cannot refuse a written request within its power.

• Saws and axes do +4 damage verses many tree-spirits.

• Spirits tied to probability or gambling may not be able to resist a bargain that turns on a game of chance.

Potent Bans (Rank 4+ Spirits)

Powerful spirits tend to have unique, obscure and complex bans. Their bans tend to be complete show-stoppers — either killing the spirit outright or shutting down its powers for a significant period of time.

• If encircled by an infusion made from the remains of its first and latest victims, Murder Most Foul is utterly destroyed.

• Dulgir the Ravager may not defend (Defense 0) against the attacks of anyone who rescued one of his victims and successfully resisted his Harrowing.

• Burzur, the Architect of Lies, cannot perceive anyone who enters the Shadow by Solipsists Alley (a keyed verge). The spirit cannot sense them at all, or even take notice of their presence if told by others.

Types of Bans

These “types” are not mutually exclusive. They are broken down in this way to spark your imagination.

Behavioral bans regulate a spirit’s actions — often an outright prohibition from acting in a certain circumstance.

• Hoary Oak may not harm old women.
• Red Bat may not Materialize during the day.
• Death’s Door cannot cross a threshold marked in blood.

Compulsions are the opposite of prohibitions; these are actions that a spirit is required to perform.

• Claws Underbed must always lace untied shoes.

• Principled Judgment must always answer three questions truthfully to anyone who offers it chiminage.

• Honor at Dawn, a spirit of a dueling pistol, may not attack first in combat.

Linguistic bans turn on the spoken word.

• Some spirits are entranced by a certain song.
• Many knowledge-spirits cannot refuse to exchange information from those who have committed long poems or religious tracts to memory.

• Some spirits tied to the concepts of death, loss or esoterica cannot refuse commands delivered in dead languages.

Repulsions include things that cause a spirit to flee, normally a specific thing.

• October 27th, a strangely morose violence-spirit borne in a shooting spree, will flee if presented with pictures of that attack’s victims.

• Some hybrids that were once the spirits of material objects can no longer stand the sight of their former physical shells.

• Many spirits engendered by Native Americans cannot stand the smell of burning sage.

Ritualistic bans are combination of bans, and therefore fairly powerful.

• Ithba, Lord of Disease, cannot move if bound by a wreath made of cinnamon and holly.

• If offered a drink of rum, hellebore and the blood of an enemy, Helal the Dissolute must agree to possess and shame an enemy.

• If the lair of Rabishu, the Engine of War, is encircled by burning human fat, he will fall into slumber.

Sacrificial bans limit the spirit’s freedom or ability in some way if not given the correct chiminage.

• If the spirit of Somerset’s Pool is not offered a sacrifice of mare’s blood at each solstice, its maximum Essence and Power are halved.

• Each hour that Thrash 80, an awakened PC, is disconnected from the Internet, the spirit loses one point of Essence.

• The spirit of Generosity Gulch will attack one “outsider” a night if someone does not throw a coin into the wishing well on the square each week.

Vulnerabilities are bans that cause the spirit great harm. These include substances that inflict aggravated damage, attacks the spirit cannot defend against or even mundane things that can harm the spirit by lowering its traits or draining its Essence. Some spirits have relatively minor vulnerabilities, taking extra damage from certain attacks, normally in multiples of two (+2, +4, etc.)

• Holy water causes aggravated damage to the spirit.

• The spirit has no Defense against attacks made by virginal women.

• Binding the spirit in red ribbon causes it to lose one Essence per turn.

Magical bans affect specific Influences or Numina that a spirit possesses. These are very common among spirits that wield some of the most terrifying abilities such as Abduct, Claim and Possession. If you are creating one of these spirits, consider having its ban establish some hard limitations on these powers. Some bans may affect all Numina a spirit possesses.

- Xuldigir cannot Claim a person with a silver coin held under her tongue.
- Worm of the Rose cannot use any Numina on holy ground.
- Creatures that speak Lillitsu's name in Babel cannot be Possessed by the spirit for a year and a day.

Discovering Bans

Bans are the most effective ways that characters can fight against spirits. Learning a spirit's ban can be the focus of one arc of a story, involving research, interrogating other spirits, possibly questioning supernatural creatures or just making educated guesses.

When this doesn't need to be the focus of the story, there are systems to quickly represent characters' efforts to unravel a spirit's ban. There is a chance that someone knowledgeable in the ways and lore of the Shadow might know the spirit's ban. Supernatural creatures that interact with the Shadow regularly have a much easier time of this — most often werewolves or mages with the Spirit Arcanum. Rarely, the Storyteller could allow a mortal shaman or medium this opportunity. If the Storyteller feels that a particular ban is well-known enough that a character might've heard of it, she should roll the character's Intelligence + Occult at a penalty equal to two dice for every Rank of the spirit. Success indicates that the character remembers some tidbit related to the ban; exceptional success indicates that the character knows or infers the exact nature of the ban. A dramatic failure, however, means that the character believes an incorrect ban to be true, which gives the spirit a dangerous edge in their next encounter.

Occult research can also give insight into bans. Instead of an instant action, characters are forced to attempt an extended action, and they must accumulate three successes per Rank of the spirit (suffering a -1 die penalty per Rank of the spirit). Each roll represents a day's efforts. Characters must possess the correct tools for the job, be they contacts or a library, and these may add to the pool, per normal. The research is considered a failure (leads dry up, etc.) if the occultist cannot complete in a number of days equal to his Resolve + Composure.

Numina

Spirits rely on their Influences for only a small facet of their power — they also have potent magical gifts called Numina ("Numen," singular). A comprehensive list of Numina follows, though you may well

choose to come up with some of your own. Spirits may have Numina that duplicate other supernatural powers from **World of Darkness** books — many of the Numina from the core rulebook, though designed for ghosts, would well work for spirits. For example, spirits tied to electricity or telecommunication devices might have the Magnetic Disruption Numen (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 211).

Most Numina are designed to cover a wide variety of effects. As such, the specific rules governing Numina tend to be as abstract as spirits themselves; the Numina don't have expansive writeups for this reason. The Storyteller should spend time defining just how they function, which may give them certain advantages and limitations not listed below. What follows are some general guidelines that Storytellers may use when detailing a spirit's Numen and adjudicating the effects. Remember, when assigning spirits Numina, realize that they vary widely in power.

Dice Pools and Resistance

The default dice pool for the Numina below is Power + Finesse, though there are exceptions, and a few Numina don't require dice pools. Assume using a Numen is a standard action for a spirit.

When designing Numina, remember that contested effects tend to reflect all or nothing circumstances. The victim either becomes the spirit's slave or not. Variable effects, on the other hand, are not usually contested. Normally, they are automatically resisted by subtracting one or more resistance traits from the spirit's dice pool. The target can suffer none or some degree of the effect — such as being shot. The attack could be a graze, or a bullet through the eye. (Remember to describe it as such!)

Also when designing spirits or running them in a game, remember that spirits can put together enormous dice pools, just by spending Essence to boost their stats early in the combat scene. Spirits are loath to deplete their reserves, but if a Numen has no effect, a spirit can strengthen itself to take a direct hand.

Range and Targeting

Most Numina rely upon the spirits to be in the physical presence of their targets, though the spirit could be somehow hidden or in Twilight. They don't have to fight fair. Many use the Reaching Numen to attack through the Gauntlet. Any Numen with an (R) after its name can be used with the Reaching Numen.

Anytime a Numen must transcend the Gauntlet to function, the spirit must take the strength of that

barrier into consideration. Subtract the dice pool penalty listed in the Gauntlet chart (p. 46). Some Numina depend upon the Reaching Numen to function through the Gauntlet. If this is the case, the Gauntlet modifier only affects the Reaching Numen's dice pool, not the Numen used via Reaching.

Range can also play a factor, especially with Numen that act similar to guns or mimic other supernatural ranged attacks. For targeted, variable effect ranged attacks such as Blast, assume that short range is equal to the critter's Power + Finesse times the spirit's Rank. Medium and long range can then be calculated by multiplying the previous range by two. Targets get the advantage of cover, concealment, defense and armor as normal — though there may be exceptions based upon the specifics of the power. A Rank 2 fire elemental (Power 5 and Finesse 4) with Blast would have these range bands: short 18, medium 36 and long 72 yards.

Numina Descriptions

While the list below is meant to be as inclusive of previous material as possible, **Mage** and **Werewolf** players will notice that some of the Numina derived from the magics of those supernaturals do not appear below. While some have been left out from previously published materials, many new Numina also can be found below.

- **Abduct (R):** With this Numen, a spirit can literally drag a human being across the Gauntlet and into the Shadow. The spirit must first either dwell on the material side of the Gauntlet (using Materialize or Gauntlet Breach) or at least have a conduit beyond the Shadow (using the reaching Numen). Once this is established and a target is identified, the spirit can literally grab a human and pull him across the Gauntlet. Spend a number of Essence equal to the human's Stamina, and then roll the spirit's Power + Finesse. The mortal can resist with a Resolve + Composure Roll. If the spirit is successful, the human crosses the Gauntlet and is dragged into the Shadow. If the human wins the contested roll, he remains on the material side of the Gauntlet. Note this Numen only works one way. If the human wins the roll, he remains on the material side of the Gauntlet. The spirit cannot use this ability to move a human back to the material world. For the human to exit the *Hisil*, he must find an alternate way out. The power does not work on supernatural targets, even if technically mortal (such as ghouls or magi). Abduct does work on the wolf-blooded, or those with lesser templates, such as thaumaturges and psychics.

- **Ban of Power:** By taking on an additional ban, spirits can increase their power. Each additional ban can give the spirit one of these awards: two Numina (a net increase of one), one Willpower or an increase of two maximum Essence. A spirit may take up to three additional bans, but they may only have one particular award. Each additional ban, including the first, must be more punitive than the spirit's default ban.

- **Blast:** The spirit is able to strike opponents at a distance. An electricity-spirit might hurl small thunderbolts at its foes, a fire-spirit might summon flame or a pain-spirit with this Numen might conjure razor blades. The range is equal to 10 yards per point of Power, and the spirit suffers no penalties for range. The spirit rolls Power + Finesse to hit and may add two dice to the roll for every additional point of Essence the spirit spends to fuel this power. The damage is lethal.

- **Camouflage:** The spirit has a means of active camouflage. This might appear as an octopus's skin that can change texture and color, or may be more mystical in nature. The spirit spends a point of Essence and remains still. As long as the spirit does not move, the camouflage remains active — up to a scene. This Numen can be used along with Hibernate to disguise the spirit while sleeping. Anyone trying to perceive the spirit suffers a negative modifier equal to the spirit's Finesse.

- **Chain of Death:** This Numen is a powerful addition to Corpse Ride. Chain of Death allows a spirit currently using the Corpse Ride Numen to transfer its consciousness to any of its victims' corpses. The Ridden must touch the targeted corpse to use this Numen. It costs three Essence per jump.

- **Chorus:** This Numen allows a spirit to speak to any or all other spirits of its own choir within a radius determined by the spirit's Power in miles. To activate the Gift, the spirit spends a point of Essence and then rolls Power + Finesse to determine how long and detailed a message the spirit can send. A single success allows the spirit to send an image or a short phrase. Three or more successes would allow a couple of sentences or a detailed image.



Spirit Mechanics: What's Your Chorus?

Mage: The Awakening and **Werewolf: The Forsaken** use four increasingly narrow classifications to identify

spirits: type, chorus, descant and then the spirit itself. We've chosen to really only talk about "type" for a couple of reasons. First, this treatment of spirits is meant to be all-inclusive, and simply put, most mortals don't know enough about the Shadow to make meaningful subcategories of spirits. Secondly, many spirits don't care about these divisions.

We address these subdivisions here because some of the Numina carried over from these earlier games recognize them. So, when trying to figure this out, just remember that each type of spirit is broken into choruses (and then descants). So, artificial-spirits include these choruses: vehicles, structures, tools, weapons, information, etc. The elemental choirs would be air, fire, earth, water and perhaps wood, metal, plastic and void. Conceptual-spirits might be emotions, ideas or reactions. The particular subdivisions don't matter. Nothing is written in stone. Some spirits keep up with this and use these subdivisions for their own politics, and power, but many do not. A fear-spirit would be in the emotional choir, a hammer-spirit would be in the tool choir and a computer-spirit would be in the information choir.



- **Claim (R):** This Numen is a more powerful version of Possession; if the roll is successful, the possession is permanent. Spend three Essence points and roll Power + Finesse in an extended and contested roll versus the victim's Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Advantage; each roll represents one hour. If the spirit gains 50 successes between dusk and dawn, the spirit gains permanent control of the victim's body. Use the victim's available traits (except Willpower points, which are equal to the spirit's current Willpower points) and dice pools for any action the spirit wishes to take. If the spirit fails to accumulate 50 successes within the required period of time, the attempt fails. If a possessed body is killed, the spirit is forced out and must possess another victim if it still wishes to act. Use of this Numen creates a Ridden, specifically a Spirit-Claimed (p. 180).

- **Clasp:** This Numen allows the spirit to lock a target in a crushing embrace. The Numen functions like any brawling attack. If in the physical world,

the spirit must be Materialized to affect a material target; otherwise, this Numen can only be used on other spirits in Twilight. The spirit may roll Power + Finesse when grappling instead of Power alone. (This takes the place of any Strength + Brawl rolls; see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 157). If the spirit spends one point of Essence, the spirit's grappling attacks inflict lethal instead of bashing damage for the rest of the scene.

- **Commune (R):** The spirit can learn the general state of its home spiritscape. When materialized, this Numen can also function with any environment tied to the spirit's chorus: woodland for tree spirits, sewers for rat spirits, etc. Successful activation of this Numen allows basic information (presence of intruders, potential threats such as fires) up to 500 yards from the spirit. Each additional success increases the radius by an additional 100 yards and increases the detail of information learned. One success could tell the presence of intruders, while three successes could reveal the species/chorus and gender of those intruders. The Numen lasts as long as the user remains in the trance, but she is unaware of and cannot react to the outside world, nor can she relay her findings while the Numen is active. It costs one Essence per round spent in communion.

- **Concealment:** The spirit is able to create a fog, summon shadows or whip up a dust storm to conceal its exact location. The spirit spends a point of Essence per level of concealment (barely, partially or substantially, or fully concealed; see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 162) and rolls Power + Finesse. Each success extends the effect up to one yard from the spirit. The effect lasts up to a scene. Remember that the spirit suffers penalties to its ranged attacks as well while in cover.

- **Corpse Ride:** This Numen allows the spirit to Claim a dead body as other spirits would Claim a living being. The body's Soul is not Claimed, however, meaning that a contested roll is not necessary, the spirit simply spends three Essence points and Claims the body automatically during the course of a single hour. The host's attributes increase a normal, but at a drastically accelerated rate: the Claimed gains points at a rate of one per hour instead of one per week. This power comes at a price, however; while most Claimed can last for years, if not centuries, the corpse is not so lucky — once it achieves full synthesis with its Riding spirit, the corpse begins to deteriorate, losing one Attribute point every three days as the spirit power consumes the body. Once any of its Physical Attributes reach 0, the body disintegrates, shunting the spirit and

the body's soul (if present) into the Shadow Realm. Fortunately, this fate is typically a theoretical one; most such spirits have completed their business long before such a fate becomes an issue.

- **Damnation's Path:** This Numen makes it impossible for its victims to regain Willpower without fulfilling their Vice. While under the spirit's curse, they no longer are able to regain Willpower by fulfilling their Virtue — this Numen does not prevent the virtuous act, but there is no mechanical reward. Fulfilling a Vice restores Willpower as normal. Satisfying a Vice that also leads to a degeneration roll returns *all* spent Willpower, whether the degeneration roll succeeds or fails. Spend three points of Essence and roll Power + Finesse in an extended and contested roll; each roll represents one hour. If the spirit gains the requisite successes between dusk and dawn, the victim is forced onto Damnation's Path. The number of successes needed by the spirit is equal to the victim's current Morality times three. To fight off the spirit's influence, the victim rolls Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance. Her target is the spirit's Power + Rank.

If a spirit encounters its ban during the duration of Damnation's Path, the curse is lifted and the Numen fails. Encountering a ban during the "conversion" process likewise ends the struggle. A victim who successfully fights off the spirit's curse (via ban or otherwise) is immune to this Numen for one lunar month.

- **Dement (R):** This Numen assaults a person's mind with a cavalcade of nightmarish imagery, breaking down his sanity in the process. Such images are often personal and culled from a victim's own memory, although the user sometimes applies images from its own history or "memory" to decide such visions. Use of Dement is a contested action, with opposing rolls being made reflexively. Spend one Essence and roll Power + Finesse versus the victim's Intelligence + Supernatural Tolerance. If the spirit rolls the most successes, the victim gains a mild derangement of the Storyteller's choice (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 96) for a number of days equal to the successes rolled. If the victim already possesses a mild derangement, the derangement becomes severe rather than possessing another derangement. If the target of the Numen rolls the most or an equal number of successes, the power has no effect on him, but successive attempts are possible.

- **Desiccation:** This Numen is most often possessed by water-spirits, although rumors speak of blood-spirits that use it to devastating effect. Desiccation allows a spirit to withdraw some or all of the fluid most closely associated with it from its opponent's

body. Water-spirits can drain their victims of the water in their bodies; blood-spirits can do the same with blood. The range is five yards per point of power. Roll Power + Finesse; the number of successes determines the number of points of damage the target takes from loss of fluid. The damage is bashing. Due to a lack of real biology, vampires and the Created may contest the spirit's roll with Stamina + Supernatural Tolerance; however, if the spirit wins the contest, the supernatural loses a point of Vitae or Pyros in addition to taking bashing damage.

- **Discorporation:** This Numen allows a spirit to disincorporate voluntarily, surrendering its Corpus to the Shadow Realm and allowing itself to reform elsewhere as normal. Discorporation is always painful, but desperate spirits choose this route rather than face a greater spirit in combat, with the risk of permanent destruction such conflict carries. Roll the spirit's Power + Resistance for this Numen to succeed.

- **Drain:** This Numen enables the spirit to steal Essence or Willpower from a material being, much as spirits can attempt to siphon Essence from one another (see p. 135). The spirit first decides which trait it is attempting to drain, then rolls Power + Finesse against the subject's Stamina + Resolve + Supernatural Tolerance. If the attacker wins, the victim loses one point of Essence or Willpower; these points are gained by the attacking spirit. If the target wins, the attacker loses a number of points of Essence or Willpower equal to the successes scored by the target. This spirit must "touch" the target to use this Numen, and must Manifest or Materialize to do so as normal.

- **Elemental Immunity:** Normally, this Numen is only possessed by elemental-spirits, making them effectively immune to attacks from their constituent elemental energy. When a victim is targeted by one of these attacks, add the spirit's Resistance to its Defense. The spirit's Resistance is also automatically subtracted from environmental exposure as well. For example, a Rank 2 fire elemental with a Resistance of 6 could sleep in a burning chemical plant with no ill effects (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 180).

- **Emotional Aura (R):** This Numen is somewhat like Harrow, but broadcasts a general pulse of emotion over a wide area rather than focusing on one target. The spirit spends one Essence to activate the aura of emotion, which then lasts for a scene. Anyone within five yards of the spirit, or who later comes within five yards of the spirit, must make a Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance roll contested by the spirit's Power + Finesse. If the spirit wins, the subject suffers a -2 dice penalty to dice pools for the duration of

the scene or until the spirit stops using this Numen, powerfully distracted by the broadcast emotion. If the subject wins, she is immune to this Numen for the duration of the scene.

- **Ensnare:** The spirit possesses an entangling attack, be it mystic webbing, gobbets of intestine, wire mesh or glue-like spittle. To hit its target, the spirit makes a Finesse roll – the target's Defense (armor does not add to Defense in this instance. Subjects struck by the attack are automatically grappled (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 157). Each turn the victim may roll Strength + Athletics – the spirit's Power to escape; otherwise she is immobilized. After a number of turns equal to the spirit's Resistance, begin reducing the effective Power of the snare by two each turn. This attack costs one point of Essence. Additional Essence may be spent to add to the snare.

- **Fearstruck:** This Numen allows a spirit to cause an opponent to become paralyzed by fear. The spirit spends a point of Essence and then rolls Power + Finesse; the targeted opponent contests the roll with Presence + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance. Success renders the victim unable to move or speak (or even scream) for one turn. Exceptional success indicates that the victim freezes in place for three turns.



Spirit Mechanics:

Artificial Spirits and Moorings

An awakened spirit of a human-made object may remain bound to the spirit's material analog, its *mooring*. This bond is so strong that the destruction of the mooring often causes the spirit's death — it automatically disincorporates when this happens. Sometimes it never re-forms. . . .

Artificial-spirits with moorings must stay close to their physical counterparts unless they have the Unfetter Numen, even in the Shadow. While almost all artificial-spirits possess the Fetter Numen, moored spirits may use the Fetter Numen on their moorings without paying Essence.

For more information on artificial-spirits, see **Lore of the Forsaken** (p. 136).



- **Fetter:** This Numen secures a spirit inside an object once the spirit has crossed the Gauntlet into the physical world. Rather than Materializing, the spirit remains its ephemeral self in the material world. Normally, the spirit would be sucked back through the Gauntlet within a few hours, but once fettered, the spirit can remain in the physical world almost indefinitely. Once through the Gauntlet, the spirit activates this Numen by spending a point of Essence. The spirit must choose an object within five meters of its current position and spend an additional Essence to fetter itself to the object. The spirit can stay fettered in the material world for as long as it likes, unless the fetter is destroyed, in which case the spirit immediately disincorporates and starts to re-form back in the spirit world. This Numen cannot be used across the Gauntlet without the use of the Reaching Numen.

The spirit is invisible and intangible while in the material world. The spirit can be seen by werewolves and other spiritually sensitive creatures only. The spirit may never move more than five meters from its fetter, lest the link be lost, forcing the spirit back through the Gauntlet. A fettered spirit may materialize, if it has that Numen. While in material form, the spirit may move more than five meters from its fetter, but must be back within that radius when its materialization ends.

Almost all artificial-spirits possess this Numen.

- **Final Strike:** This Numen allows a spirit on the verge of disincorporation to make one last attack against its opponent. The spirit spends a point of Essence and makes an immediate attack against its foe as a reflexive action. This Numen is only usable when a spirit has fallen to 4 Corpus or below.

- **Firestarter:** The spirit can create a number of small fires. The spirit spends one Essence and rolls Power + Finesse. Each success causes a small fire to break out within its Power in yards, the number of fires is limited to the Rank of the spirit. This Numen is dependant upon having fuel to feed the flames — the spirit cannot cause nonflammable material to burn. The size and intensity of the fires generated is equal to the flames of a torch — though the fires may grow or decrease in size and intensity naturally once started. Use the Blast Numen to emulate a spirit that can burn living targets.

- **Freeze (R):** The spirit can rob the heat from a radius equal to its Finesse in yards. The spirit spends one Essence and rolls Power + Finesse; this is contested by a reflexive Stamina + Resolve + Supernatural Tolerance roll. If the spirit scores more successes than its victims, they take that number as levels of bashing

damage. Armor and insulating clothes can provide some protection for a limited period of time. Armor automatically blocks damage equal to its rating for a number of rounds equal to its rating.

- **Gauntlet Breach:** This Numen allows a spirit to force itself through the Gauntlet. This isn't a natural or easy thing for a fleshless entity, but it's the most reliable way to enter the physical world. Indeed, unless the spirit fetters itself (using that Numen), the spirit can remain in the material world for only a matter of hours. Spend three points of Essence and roll Power + Finesse to force the spirit through the Gauntlet. Every hour that the spirit spends unfettered or in Twilight in the material world costs the spirit one point of Essence per Rank, as its ephemera is gradually consumed. When the spirit runs out of Essence, it disincorporates, re-forming in the Shadow as normal. The spirit can, however, choose to return through the Gauntlet freely at any time.

- **Ghost-Eater:** The spirit with this Numen is able to steal Essence from or consume ghosts as if they were spirits. The spirit spends one point of Essence to activate this Numen and attune its "digestion." The effects last for the rest of the scene. Naturally, the spirits must still be able to affect the ghost in other ways; this usually requires the spirit to be in the physical world and in Twilight.

- **Greater Influence:** Spirits possessed of multiple Influences are not necessarily weaker than their more narrowly focused kin. Each time this Numen is taken, a spirit may increase one of its Influences by one dot. Rank 1 spirits may not take Greater Influence. No spirit may have a single Influence greater than its Rank, or more different kinds of Influences than its Rank. Example: By taking this Numen twice, Ember Man, a Rank 2 spirit of murderous arson, could have both Fire •• and Pain •• as its Influences (at the expense of having two other Numina).

- **Hallucinations:** This Numen allows a spirit to create an illusion. The spirit spends a point of Essence and pictures the illusion the spirit wants to create in its mind. This may be a sight, sound or even a person meant to interact with the target. The spirit makes a contested Power + Finesse versus the subject's Wits + Composure + Supernatural Advantage roll. For each success the spirit rolls in excess of the target, the illusion affects one of the subject's senses. The illusion is utterly compelling, but if the vision does something notably unusual the Storyteller may allow the target a Resolve + Composure roll to realize that his senses are lying to him.

- **Harrow:** This Numen is typically associated with spirits of negative emotions, such as fear or wrath.

The spirit can focus its negative resonance to create a crippling attack of its associated emotional state in an enemy. Spend a point of Essence and roll the spirit's Power + Finesse, contested by the victim's Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance. If the spirit wins the contest, the target is overwhelmed by the relevant emotional state for a number of turns equal to the number of successes the spirit gained.

- **Heal:** The spirit can heal others' wounds, typically for a hefty price. The spirit expends a point of Essence and rolls Power + Finesse. Bashing damage is healed before lethal, and all lethal damage must be healed before aggravated damage. Each success heals a level of bashing damage, while two successes can heal a point of lethal damage. The lethal damage healed can be used to mend aggravated damage, but each point of aggravated damage cured costs one additional point of Essence. (Healing two aggravated wounds calls for four successes and three points of Essence.) This Numen may also be used to help a character fight off disease or the effects of poison — each success adding to the character's resistance rolls on a one-to-one basis.

- **Hibernate:** The spirit can enter a voluntary state of slumber in the Shadow to preserve its Essence. Spirits might choose to do this if the Essence flow in a particular area is seasonal. For every point of Essence spent to Hibernate, the spirit may slumber for up to one month. During this time, the spirit does not have to spend Essence every day to survive, though the spirit always awakes from its slumber famished. For an additional expenditure of Essence, the spirit can create an additional condition that will cause the spirit to awaken (other than the passage of time). This condition must be relevant to its Influences. A tree-spirit might choose to awaken if the trees in its wood are harmed, or a frog-spirit might choose to reawaken when it rains.

- **Howl:** This Numen enables a spirit to let out a blood-curdling howl that causes an opponent to panic and run. The spirit spends a point of Essence and then rolls Power + Finesse – the opponent's Composure. If the spirit wins the contest, the victim must flee the spirit's presence for a number of turns equal to the number of successes achieved.

- **Innocuous:** The spirit is very good at being overlooked. Onlookers suffer a –2 dice penalty on Perception rolls to notice the spirit, unless it does something to draw attention to itself.

- **Left-Handed Spanner:** This Numen temporarily disables a specific technological object, such as a cell phone, computer or an automobile engine. The malfunction has no apparent external cause. In truth, the spirit

using the Numen has interrupted the flow of spiritual energy into the object, thus causing its breakdown.

The spirit expends a point of Essence and touches the object to disable it. The object ceases to work for a number of turns equal to the successes rolled. If the object is carried by another who seeks to avoid the spirit's touch, a roll is required to make contact (see "Touching an Opponent," the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 157). Valid pieces of technology that can be overcome include anything manufactured by industrial means with at least three separate parts; a gun is valid, but a hinge or syringe is not. The object cannot be larger than the spirit, but a discernable part of a complex machine may also be targeted. A human-sized spirit can affect the engine of a car, but not the entire automobile.

- **Living Fetter:** This variation on Fetter allows the spirit to fetter itself in a living being rather than an inanimate object. The same rules and restrictions as Fetter apply, save that the spirit must first succeed at a Power + Finesse roll contested by the target's Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance. A successful use of this Numen creates one of the Ridden, specifically a Spirit-Urged (see p. 166). The spirit essentially uses the living being as a fetter and its Influence to impel its "host." The most reliable way to break the bond between a spirit using the Living Fetter Numina and its host is to force the host into contact with the spirit's ban.

- **Manipulate Element:** The creature can move, morph and shape the element under its purview. The element should have a fairly narrow definition (soil, concrete, steel, stone, plastic, glass, wood, etc.) The spirit can roughly shape a surface area of about 100 square feet or a volume of roughly 40 cubic feet. The Manipulate Earth Numen, for example, is ideal for creating a quick foxhole, a crude wall or small escape tunnel. The Numen cannot be used as a direct attack (use Blast). Elements unable to hold their shape (air, water) should not be chosen. The effects are permanent, though they are not magically held in shape. Using the example above, a tunnel may naturally collapse soon after it is formed. This Numen costs one point of Essence.

- **Materialize:** This Numen allows a spirit to change its form from ephemera to matter, dropping it abruptly through the Gauntlet into the material world. The spirit's physical form appears in the material world just as it did in the Shadow, and all its Numina and Influences function as normal. All rules for spirit traits in the spirit world apply equally to a Materialized spirit. Spend three points of Essence and roll the

spirit's Power + Finesse to allow the spirit to reshape itself into matter. The number of successes indicates the number of hours that the spirit can remain in the material world before reverting to ephemera. The spirit must then choose between remaining in the material world (and either anchoring itself or losing a point of Essence every hour) or slipping immediately back through the Gauntlet.

- **Material Vision:** A spirit with this Numen can briefly look through the Gauntlet into the material world. Roll the spirit's Power + Finesse. The number of successes indicates the number of minutes the spirit can spend watching through the Gauntlet.

- **Mechanical Possession:** This Numen allows the Manifested spirit to take control of a machine or vehicle that it has made into a fetter. By spending one Essence point, the spirit may operate the machine for the duration of a scene — the spirit can turn the machine off or on and control any moving parts, though the spirit cannot alter electrical flow. A spirit using this Numen to operate a car, for instance, would have to physically manipulate the radio knob to switch stations or turn the ignition switch to start the car. The spirit may make Finesse rolls in lieu of Drive in order to operate a moving vehicle, including all driving, control and crash rolls.

- **Morphic Form:** The spirit is able to change its shape, not to disguise its true form, but to allow itself to elude its attackers by squirming through a sewer grate, or give it some edge based on environment. Spirits already possess the ability to increase their Attributes, and therefore make themselves stronger, faster or more slippery. This Numen allows a spirit to change its shape, structure or means of locomotion in a wide fashion, sprouting wings or fins or even making itself larger or smaller. These changes last for a number of hours equal to the successes on a Power + Finesse roll. Changing a point of Size costs one point of Essence, and adding a new form of movement costs three points of Essence; cosmetic changes (color, skin texture, etc.) cost one point of Essence. It is possible that a spirit might be able to grant itself other abilities, but think twice about allowing it to duplicate other Numen. The Storyteller might grant extra dice toward certain rolls for adopting new appendages, but boosting an Attribute, again, is already an ability a spirit possesses. Depending on its sphere of influence, a spirit (perhaps an elemental of metal) might be able to make itself nonflammable or bulletproof — such changes should cost four Essence.

- **Mortal Mask:** The spirit is able to transport itself across the Gauntlet, but, unlike the Materialize

Numen, the spirit appears human. This human “costume” is somewhat imperfect, and the spirit does not choose the guise in which it appears; the mortal form is as generic as possible. Spend four points of Essence and roll the spirit’s Power + Finesse. The number of successes indicates the number of hours the spirit may exist in the material world, appearing human. The human costume offers a number of tiny flaws that are not easily noticeable without concerted investigation; perhaps the spirits smiles all the time or makes small but unusual gestures. Normal witnesses may make a Wits + Composure roll minus a number of dice equal to the spirit’s Finesse. Success indicates that the person notices something “off” about the spirit. Mortals with the Unseen Sense (Spirits) Merit do not suffer the penalty and make the Wits + Composure roll as normal. Supernaturals do not suffer this penalty.

- **Omen Trance:** With this Numen, the spirit enters a meditative trance for the purpose of gaining a potential warning, nothing more. This Numen requires 15 successes and the expenditure of one point of Essence; each roll represents one minute spent in the trance. The spirit is unaware of events surrounding it while it is in a trance. The spirit is, however, aware of anything that touches or affects its body directly. A spirit may not attempt Omen Trance more than once in any 24-hour period. A spirit may attempt the trance for another (at a dear cost), but the Essence cost is tripled and the successes needed are doubled. The spirit must also taste of the creature’s Essence or physical body.

If successful, the spirit catches a glimpse of a potential event in its near future — anywhere from 24 hours to one week. The spirit might receive warning of an impending attack, foretell the arrival of a potential ally or even watch a betrayal unfold before it happens. Viewing the future accurately is impossible, though. No vision is guaranteed to come true. Worse, visions gained are more often signs of ominous events than they are promises of good fortune. They can be confusing and perhaps even lead to actions that cause a foretold tragedy to come true. Whether this is because the Numen’s “eyesight” is through a dark lens, or simply a cold reflection of the hard truths of the Shadow, none can say. The vision lasts for roughly a turn’s worth of viewing — enough time to watch enough of the action to make out the actors and the setting. The vision is usually clear enough to make out details, though the details might be misleading.

- **Pathfinder:** The spirit with this Numen draws forth knowledge of the quickest path to wherever it wants to go, be it the quickest way back to its den or the location of his foes’ weakest loci. The quickest

and most efficient path isn’t always the safest, but so it goes. If successful, the spirit visualizes the closest and most efficient route to the location she wishes. The information is stored in its head as a precise set of directions, allowing it to spend minimal time checking for landmarks. This Numen does not reveal the presence of dangers or obstacles along the way, unless they are specific landmarks. (“Turn left at the open chemical vats.”) If the location in question is kept secret by its owner (such as a vampire’s haven), the roll is contested. Roll Resolve + Supernatural Advantage for the subject. If the place is shared by multiple people, roll the lowest Resolve among them. The Numen user must be in the physical presence of someone whose secret lair is discerned. If a subject ties or wins the roll, he cannot be subjected to this Numen again for 24 hours.

This Numen cannot locate the path to a place that is magically veiled or that exists on another plane of existence, other than the plane that the spirit inhabits when it activates this Numen.

The Numen’s effects last for a scene. If the spirit doesn’t reach her destination in that time, she must use the Numen again, or make a Power roll to attempt to remember the details.

- **Plague of the Dead:** This Numen only functions if the spirit is using Chain of the Dead, or Corpse Ride. Creatures killed by a Ridden Dead can be animated by the spirit. It costs two points of Essence to animate a corpse for roughly a day — see the write-up below for more details. (Those with **World of Darkness: Antagonists** can create their own zombies — this Numen grants five Creation points to craft a zombie. Greater spirits can pump more Essence into the effort, adding one creation point per extra point of Essence.)



Spirit Plague Zombie

Background: Use these stats to represent zombies created by the Plague of the Dead Numen. These zombies seek to kill any living human in their presence; failing that, they wander about destroying any other life they can recognize. Some even attack mannequins in desperation. Tragically, zombies can often remember scraps of their life — enough to allow them to act with some intelligence, but also enough to torment them as their bodies and minds rot away utterly.

Description: They see with eyes clouded with pus, they eat with tongues bloated with rot; these walking dead not only inspire horror from their frightful undead appearance, but they also decay at a staggering rate — within hours they begin swelling with necrotic gasses, oozing pus and attracting hordes of cadaverous insects.

Storytelling Hints: These shambling dead, while amazingly strong, are not extremely dangerous as individuals for a group of humans. Yet in groups, they become an overwhelming tide of unlife. Even though they have little means to resist damage, they can absorb terrific amounts of damage and remain dangerous. These zombies do no suffer wound penalties and do not differentiate between bashing, lethal and aggravated damage. After exhausting their Health attribute, begin removing points of Physical Integrity. As this trait degrades, the zombie begins losing digits, feet and even limbs — which may make some actions impossible, or drop their Speed. At five points, the zombie has half of its limbs, and when the trait reaches 0, there's nothing left. Zombies cannot heal their wounds.

Attributes: Power 5, Finesse 1, Resistance 3

Willpower: 0

Initiative: 1

Defense: 0

Speed: 6

Size: 5

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Baseball Bat	2 (B)	8
Bite	1 (L)	7

Fist 0 (B) 2

Health: 5

Physical Integrity: 10

• **Spirit Plague Weakness:** The death-aspected Essence that animates them also speeds the decomposition of their corpses. These zombies take a point of damage every three hours due to the necrotic effects of

their animating energies. All zombies created via Plague of the Dead bear this weakness.

• **Residual Memories Weakness:**

These poor creatures are driven to murder, yet still possess a few memories of their life. When presented with a loved one or other appropriate stimulus, they will stop attacking — or perhaps move away whimpering for three (Resistance) minutes. After this time, the same stimulus will not work again. No one is safe for long.

• **Limited Intelligence:** The zombie possesses enough intelligence to solve basic problems, such as how operate doorknobs, unlatch gates and use simple hand-to-hand weapons.

• **Quick Movement:** The zombie's Speed equals Power + Finesse (rather than just its Finesse)

• **Vicious Bite:** The zombie inflicts lethal damage with its bite.



• **Possession (R):** The spirit can attempt to possess a living human being and control his or her body for a short time. Spend one Essence point and roll Power + Finesse in a contested roll versus the victim's Resolve + Composure + Supernatural Tolerance. If the spirit wins, it gains control of the victim's body for the duration of a single scene. Use the victim's available traits (except Willpower points, which are equal to the spirit's current Willpower points) and dice pools for any action the spirit wishes to take. If the mortal wins or ties the roll, the spirit fails its possession attempt. As long as the spirit has Essence points remaining, it can continue to make possession attempts against a target. If a possessed body is killed or knocked unconscious, the spirit is forced out and must possess another victim if the spirit still wishes to act. This is the Numen used by the Spirit-Thieves (p. 174). The most reliable way to break the bond between a spirit using the Possession Numina and its host is to force the host into contact with the spirit's ban.

• **Rapture (R):** Many spirits favor subtle controls over their fleshy pawns, but some use this vile short-term method for greater control. With this Numen, the spirit can tap into the pleasure centers of a willing creature's mind and soul, granting the creature's ecstatic visions, immense pleasure and a sense of communion with the otherworld. In fact, this Nu-

men is a low-level possession, a melding of ephemera and soul carefully steered by the spirit to elicit primal responses from the target. For one turn, the victim is completely incapacitated — perhaps babbling in the Spirit Tongue, dancing or even growling. For a number of hours after this effect (8 – Stamina), the victim feels charged and sure of her devotion to the spirit's cause, receiving +2 on any roll when acting in accord with her ravisher's desires. All other dice pools are at –2. Unfortunately, such intimate contact with an alien mind can cause damage to the target's psyche. If the target fails a Resolve + Supernatural Tolerance roll, she gains a temporary derangement for a number of days equal to the spirit's Power, or until she is no longer under the effect of this Numen, whichever is longer. The derangements that result are almost always ones that further bind the victim to spirit's desires (fixations, compulsions, and so on.) Alternately, and depending upon circumstance, the Storyteller may rule that this act is effectively a Level 4 Sin. Furthermore, victims begin to build up a tolerance to the Numen, dropping the duration of the effect (halving the time for each rapture experienced in the same month). Each exposure to this Numen lowers the resistance to any of the spirit's other powers, a cumulative –1, maximum –5; these penalties fade at a rate of one per day. This Numen costs two points of Essence and may only be used if the spirit is on this side of the Gauntlet and touching the target or with the Reaching Numen.

- **Reaching:** This Numen allows a spirit to use its other Numina through the Gauntlet. Roll Power + Finesse, modified by the strength of the Gauntlet (p. 46) to successfully create a resonant conduit through the Gauntlet for the spirit to use its next Numen. Reaching lasts for the duration of the next scene and moves with the spirit. This conduit exists in Twilight in our reality, and though it cannot be directly targeted, creatures with the ability to perceive objects in Twilight may be able to spot it, though it is difficult (–4). Reaching costs one Essence.

- **Rebirth:** This Numen is possessed only by conceptual spirits of choirs associated with reincarnation, or karma. Rebirth represents a process that, once begun, must be completed within one week (seven days), or else the benefits are lost. The spirit must first Claim a human body, either mortal or Awakened (a mage). The spirit must then kill and devour two more people within the next seven days. (If the Claimed victim was a mage, the other victims must also be a mage.) During this time, the spirit stores the souls of those it kills. Once it kills its third victim, it then restores

one of those victims to life with renewed youth in a transformed version of the Claimed body: the body is biologically 18 years old, although it ages normally from then on. The other souls are then released, to go to their proper fates. If the spirit cannot complete its task of killing two more mages within a week after the first death, none of its victims are reborn. This Numen can only be used once upon a particular soul to rebirth its material body. Once this Numen has played out, the spirit is involuntarily subject to the effects of the Discorporation Numen. Roll Power + Resistance; if successful, the spirit discorporates and reforms elsewhere in the Shadow Realm (probably at a locus it is familiar with).

- **Regenerate:** The spirit can use Essence to regenerate Corpus. There is no dice pool for this Numen. Once activated, the spirit automatically regenerates one level of damage per turn. It regenerates bashing damage first, then lethal. This Numen costs one Essence per turn. Aggravated damage must be healed normally.

- **Savant:** This spirit is particularly skilled in the use of another Numen. Savant may be purchased for any other Numen that requires a roll, adding three dice to that pool. This Numen may be purchased more than once, but only for another Numen.

- **Seek:** The spirit can sense an event or thing directly related to its sphere(s) of influence. For example, a spirit of death can sense a dying person and even gauge how long before the end, while a tree-spirit of the dogwood descant can home in on the nearest grove. Said spirits would not sense a skeleton or an apple orchard, however, because those things are not technically in their purview. The spirit rolls Finesse. Success gives the spirit a general impression of direction and distance to the target. Functional distance is approximately a radius of two miles; by spending an Essence point, the spirit may extend the radius by a factor of 10. If there is more than one influence in the radius, the spirit will understand that there is a plurality (though not the exact number) but will be drawn toward the closest.

- **Sleep Eater:** This insidious Numen allows a spirit to rob hours of sleep of its victims. Spend one point of Essence and roll Power + Finesse – the target's Stamina + Supernatural Tolerance. Each success represents an hour's worth of sleep lost. These can only be recovered through normal sleep. After the spirit eats six hours of the target's sleep, the target begins suffering the effects of fatigue (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 179) as if he had not slept in 24 hours. Each six successes beyond this means the target loses

another day's sleep, and he suffers a cumulative -1 die penalty to all dice pools and must make Stamina + Resolve rolls or fall asleep. A person may only lose a number of days worth of sleep equal to the lowest of his Stamina or Resolve before passing out.

- **Soul Harvest:** This Numen is a more powerful version of Soul Snatch that also functions against supernaturals who possess a soul. As with that Numen, Soul Harvest functions just as the Claim Numen except that success on the spirit's part means it grasps the victim's soul instead of Riding its body. The victim must succeed upon a Stamina roll or fall unconscious. Even if conscious, the victim may not spend points of Willpower, expend points of a supernatural *power* trait or use any supernatural ability without the consent of the Harvester spirit. The victim cannot regain Willpower if its soul has been harvested. The spirit has full knowledge of its victim's thoughts and actions, no matter its location. If the supernatural has an Essence trait, the being may use these points of Essence as its own. It may also choose to feed upon the victim's soul at its leisure. Each hour the spirit does so, it gains two points of Essence per dot consumed — feeding first on its prey's Willpower then its dots of Supernatural Advantage. Each hour that the spirit is feeding, the victim must again succeed upon a Stamina roll or fall unconscious due to the pain. When the spirit is finished feeding, the creature's soul is destroyed.

- **Soul Snatch:** This is a rare but terrifying Numen, allowing the spirit to steal the soul of a mortal. This acts just as the Claim Numen except that success on the spirit's part means it grasps the victim's soul instead of Riding its body. The spirit can then do with the soul what it will. Most spirits that have this Numen slowly devour the soul, gaining Essence equal to twice the victim's Willpower dots. Certain high-ranking spirits have been known to have a version of this Numen that allows them to snatch the soul of a supernatural (if it possesses one).

- **Speed:** This Numen confers uncanny swiftness upon the spirit, allowing it to move at a much more rapid pace than usual. The spirit may spend two points of Essence to move at twice its normal Speed for the duration of the scene. If the spirit spends an additional two points of Essence (for a total of four), the spirit's Speed triples for the duration of the scene. This Numen may affect the physical form of a Materialized spirit, but not a physical fetter.

- **Spirit Minions:** The spirit has made compacts with minor spirits for aid in times of need — bonds much stronger than court or brood. These underling spirits will unfailingly come to help defend their mas-

ter, though they will normally flee when their Corpus or Essence reaches one quarter of their maximum. Spirits with this Numen can only command the service of spirits substantially weaker than themselves. The number of spirits in service is directly related to their number of ranks below their leader. A spirit may have the fealty of one spirit that is one rank below them, but two spirits that are two ranks below them, and so on. These servitors cost time, and Essence to maintain; this is reflected by effectively lowering the maximums for the master spirit. Each spirit kept in fealty lowers the Willpower by one and lowers the maximum Essence of the commanding spirit by the total ranks of the spirits in its service. If a major war-spirit (Rank 4) spirit kept two lesser war-spirits (Rank 2) in fealty, the commanding spirit's maximum Willpower would be reduced by 2 and maximum Essence by 4. Activating this Numen costs one point of Essence for each spirit summoned. The spirit makes a Finesse roll and subtracts the result from 5. This is the number of rounds until their servitors arrive, minimum of one. Servants always appear in the Shadow, though their master may call them from the material realm.

- **Spirit Venom:** This Numen allows the spirit to inject its opponent with a form of spiritual venom after a successful blow or bite, causing damage and befouling its enemy's own reserve of spiritual energy. After a successful strike in hand-to-hand combat, the spirit may spend one to three points of Essence to inject a supernatural venom into its foe. The venom inflicts an additional point of damage for every point of Essence spent. In addition, the victim must succeed at a Stamina roll, or lose one point of Essence for each point of Essence the spirit spent. This corrupting effect also works on other forms of supernatural energy, though to lesser extent. A target that doesn't use Essence will lose only one point of his reservoir to the spirit-venom, no matter how much Essence the spirit spent.

- **Spiritual Vision:** This Gift allows a spirit in the physical world, whether fettered or in Twilight, to peer into the spirit world for a short period of time. Roll the spirit's Power + Finesse – Gauntlet modifier. The number of successes indicates the number of minutes the spirit can activate this ability. This Numen is particular to spirits that have spent a great deal of time in the physical world.

- **Stalwart:** The spirit's concept is bound up with defense and determination, making it difficult to damage. Perhaps the spirit's very nature encompasses the concepts of protection, resistance or guardianship. Nonetheless, its Defense trait is not based upon raw

muscle or nimbleness; the spirit's Defense is equal to its Resistance. This may be reflected by a thick hide or even armor.

• **Swarm Form:** This Numen allows a spirit to break up its body into thousands of tiny parts — it might appear as a mass of whirling razor blades, a flock of starlings, school of piranha or a swarm of beetles. Treat the spirit's Power as 1 for feats of Strength. The spirit's Defense also drops to 0. The spirit's speed is halved, but it may gain flight or be able to squeeze through small openings in this form. The spirit becomes immune to most melee and missile attacks, such as baseball bats and Uzis. Only weapons such as torches, flamethrowers or area effect attacks cause the creature damage in this form. The spirit damages other creatures by enveloping them. A creature caught within the swarm at the beginning of its turn takes damage automatically. Damage is determined by the intensity of the swarm. The swarm begins with a radius in yards equal to the Size of the spirit and does one bashing damage. Each time the radius halves (a standard action), the damage increases by one. Full-body armor provides half protection, less than full body affords no protection as the small creatures find their mark. This Numen costs two points of Essence and lasts for a scene. Swarm creatures can choose to do lethal damage, by sacrificing their constituent parts. All creatures caught within a swarm suffer –2 to Mental checks.

• **Telekinesis (R):** This Numen allows the spirit to manipulate objects without Materializing. Spirits can cause swings to begin moving by themselves or hurl dishes, toys or blackboard erasers across a room. This Numen generally does not allow for extended fine motor skills such as manipulating a writing implement to pen a message; however, simple scrawlings in blood or fogged bathroom mirrors are possible. Spend one Essence point and roll Power + Finesse; the number of successes rolled determines the object's relative Strength when attempting to lift, move or throw an object. For more information, see the "Telekinesis Numen," the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 212.

• **Telepathy:** All spirits speak the Spirit Tongue, and with effort, can often manage to communicate with others, however imperfectly. Spirits with this Numen can reach out and link their minds with others, allowing instantaneous and reliable communication. The spirit rolls Power + Finesse. If resisted, subtract the target's Resolve + Supernatural Advantage. This experience is never pleasant for a mortal — being that intimate with an alien mind is profoundly disturbing. For the next 24 hours, any rolls to avoid a derange-

ment are made at –1 for each scene spent in contact with a spirit's mind.

• **Thieve:** Similar to the Abduct Numen (above), but in this case the spirit may take physical, non-living objects across the Gauntlet. The spirit must first either dwell on the material side of the Gauntlet (using Materialize or Gauntlet Breach) or at least have a conduit beyond the Shadow (using the reaching Numen). If this is established, the spirit can pull a small object through the Gauntlet and into the Shadow. The object may not have Size greater than the spirit's own Power. Spend a single Essence and roll the spirit's Power + Finesse – Gauntlet modifier. If the roll is successful, the object crosses over and becomes part of the Shadow temporarily. The object can last in the Shadow for a number of minutes equal to the spirit's Finesse. After that, the item crosses back over the Gauntlet at the appropriate corresponding pin in the physical world (if the spirit drags the item 20 feet away, it appears 20 feet away in the material realm). The spirit can keep the object in the Shadow by spending another Essence point to extend its duration, by a minute. No roll is necessary to do this.

• **Threshold:** This exceedingly rare Numen allows the spirit to create a temporary gateway through the Gauntlet. It is very difficult and costly Numen; normally, only greater spirits (Rank 3+) can muster the power to craft Thresholds of much utility. The portal's look varies by the nature of the spirit; it might appear as a bank of fog, a door that did not exist a moment before or merely a dark garden path. Sometimes folk who walk widdershins around the old moss oak on nights of the full moon are unlucky enough to end up in the Shadow. Characters with Unseen Sense (Spirits) or other magical senses keyed to the Shadow should have an opportunity to recognize its true nature. The portal's size is equal to the Size of the spirit, but this can be expanded by spending Essence on a one-to-one basis. This Numen costs a number of Essence equal to the strength of the Gauntlet. Expend the Essence roll Power + Finesse – Gauntlet Modifier. The entrance only lasts for a number of rounds equal to the successes generated, but while open, beings can pass freely through the portal. Portals are one-sided (two-dimensional) phenomena. If approached from the wrong side, those looking at them or even moving through the space they occupy cannot see or interact with them. Portals are doors, but not windows — you cannot accurately see where you are going until it is too late.

• **Transmogrify Victim:** Through use of this Numen, a spirit that is in possession of a host reshapes

its victim into a terrible monstrosity of human organs reshaped to perform roles unintended by nature. Spend one point of Essence and roll Power + Finesse against the host's Stamina in a contested action. If the most successes are rolled for the spirit, the victim's body is reshaped into a form that uses the spirit's Power, Finesse and Resistance instead of any traits the victim has; this may grant a number of grotesque physical attacks. When the transformation ends (after one scene or if the spirit terminates the effect prematurely), the host resumes normal shape and awakens. If the transmogrified being is killed, the host is slain. Any damage suffered by the host is retained after the host resumes normal form. If a possessed body is killed or knocked unconscious, the spirit is forced out and must transform another victim if it still wishes to act.

Attacks using a blessed object or magical nature against a spirit in possession of a transmogrified body damage the spirit's Corpus instead of its physical host.

- **Unfetter:** This Numen allows a moored or fettered spirit to unbind itself from its physical counterpart for a time. Spend a point of Essence and roll the spirit's Finesse. The number of successes is the number of hours the spirit may stray from its mooring; if the spirit is not within its normal range of the mooring after that time, it disincorporates.

- **Wilds Sense:** Spirits can automatically attempt to sense where other spirits and locations are in their immediate vicinity. If they want to find loci or track down spirits miles distant, however, they must use this Numen, which allows them to sense the small resonant traces left by a spirit's passage or emitted by a far-distant locus. Roll the spirit's Finesse + Resistance, with more successes giving more accurate information. One success suggests a vague sense of direction, while five successes would give accurate directions, an idea of travel time and warnings of hazards en route.

Spirit Bestiary

The listings of spirits below are broken into six general types of spirits: abstract (conceptual-) spirits, artificial-spirits, nature-spirits, elementals, location-spirits and hybrids. These designations are imperfect and full of exceptions. In order to provide as many spirits as possible, care was taken to not duplicate spirits presented in other **Word of Darkness** supplements.

Most of the spirits below are relatively low-powered, allowing the Storyteller plenty of room to "grow" them into their larger cousins or customize them as

they wish. All one needs to do is use the Spirit Rank Chart to increase the spirit's Traits (and therefore Advantages), note the creatures increased maximum Essence, Influence(s) and choose more Numina. Keep in mind that more powerful spirits are often larger than the weaker kin, so you may want to increase Size as well. A spirit's physical appearance changes as the spirit gains power. Some become more primordial or begin to evidence the attributes of other kinds of spirits, especially if they possess multiple Influences. A hybrid spirit's physical form is as unsettled as its nature; such a spirit often appears as a patchwork being with a nonsensical or at least disturbing cobbled-together form. Finally, and most importantly, redesign a ban commensurate with the spirit's new Rank and abilities.

Spirit Mechanics: Chiminage

Chiminage refers to little ceremonies or items that please a spirit and may either directly create Essence or create an atmosphere that might foster the Essence of the most appetizing resonance for a spirit. Sometimes, chiminage boils down to good manners. Greeting a spirit with the correct chiminage is polite and often makes a spirit at least pause to listen, rather than run away, ignore or attack the petitioner.

The listings for chiminage in the spirit descriptions are not exhaustive or exclusive. Reward the player's creativity in coming up with appropriate chiminage.

Abstract and Conceptual-Spirits

While these spirits interact with humans all the time, they are still among the most alien. Its pretty easy to grasp the motives, behaviors and physical forms of wolf-spirits or hare-spirits. Despair-spirits, creatures of death and time, not only look quite bizarre and horrific, so are the thoughts that drive them. These creatures reflect and seek to magnify the psychic turmoil of the World of Darkness. Spawned by human thoughts, deeds and emotion, conceptual-spirit have little empathy, much less pity, for their creators.

Preyhound

(Hunting Horrors, Chasers, *Nithattur*)

Quote: <<Run, little ones, run!>>

Background: Most of humankind left the shade of the forest for the measured lanes of cities eons ago, only returning to hunt or fell trees. But where he once felt at home, the human now was other, *alien*. Eventually man looked into the gloom of a dark wood and felt fear — the horrors tasted that fear and have craved it ever since. The predatory spirits of nature began to merge with spirits of horror and fear, and the first Chasers were born. This class of spirit includes those that merely feed upon the fear generated by their prey's head-long flight and those that also desire more exotic draughts brought on by the death throes of their victims. More powerful Chasers often possess Numina that allow them to Materialize or to pull their prey into the Shadow so they can finish their play personally.

Description: A Hunting Horror is almost always in Twilight, and even when it Manifests, it is a whirl of dead leaves in the path, the shadow that creeps toward its prey, the howl from just round the bend in the trail or the gleam of teeth and predatory eyes from the darkened culvert. In the Shadow, Hunting Horrors normally take the form of lanky creatures that often mix and match the features of great cats and feral canines.

Storytelling Hints: Preyhounds often lurk near magical nexus points where it is easier to surprise their prey, or hibernate near the midpoints of long trails (in the Shadow). They have branched out over the decades and now can be found in the cities as well, preferring snaking alleyways, large sewers and abandoned mills — any place that might heighten their prey's fear and prolong the chase. They make excellent guardians for some supernaturals, though they always demand the dubious pleasures of the hunt.

The most pleasing offerings for Chasers are the fresh remains of creatures personally hunted down and slain by the supplicant.

Rank: 2

Attributes: Power 3, Finesse 6, Resistance 4

Willpower: 7

Essence: 15

Initiative: 10

Defense: 6

Speed: 19

Size: 2

Corpus: 6



Influences: Fear ••

Numina: Emotional Aura, Hibernate, Howl, Gauntlet Breach, Speed

Bans: Preyhounds often have bans that cause them to end a hunt prematurely or protect one from ever being a target of their attentions. This might be a folkloric ban, such as a line of coarse salt sprinkled across a path, or a cockade of flowers worn in the hair. Some cannot attack as long as the victim does not run, or sings or whistles. Some cannot chase those who know the spirit's true name, or those who offer it chiminage of blood — especially the blood of animals killed as part of a chase.

Shadowraïth (*Ush-Hissa*)

Quote: <<Death, dust, fear, rot, loss... hurry, hurry to the mad world's ending...>>

Background: Shadowraiths are unhinged death-spirits that hunger to share their gift among the living. While most spirits of death are content to await the inevitable, these creatures cannot hold back their lust to spread death's embrace to the living. Other Shadowraiths are created out of spiritual perversion, a disgust with the undead in particular. These death-spirits become fascinated by their enemies' unives and are determined to attempt to exist as they do.

Description: An inferior Shadowraith normally appears as an inky blot of darkness seething with bits of shattered bone, raven skulls teeth and jet black feathers. Similar to other death-spirits, Shadowraiths take the form of animals associated with death: carrion birds, beetles, black wolves and maggots.

Storytelling Hints: When Shadowraiths enter a new territory, they often move about for a time



masquerading as normal death-spirits, and possibly feeding upon them. But this is the limit to Shadowraiths' subtlety as they begin fettering themselves to the recently departed and using these bodies to spread death. More powerful Shadowraiths often possess the Plague of the Dead and Chain of Death Numina.

Rank: 1

Attributes: Power 2, Finesse 4, Resistance 2

Willpower: 4

Essence: 10

Initiative: 6

Defense: 4

Speed: 10

Size: 2

Corpus: 4

Influences: Death •

Numina: Drain, Corpse Ride, Gauntlet Breach

Bans: The bans of Shadowraiths often control which kinds of bodies they can claim and what drives them off. For example, many cannot possess the dead interred in hallowed ground, or they're driven away if salt is poured in the mouths of corpse or coins set over their eyes.

Worms of Gluttony

(Gourmandings, Fat-Wrappers, *Fuuru Mur*)

Quote: <<Eat, my love, eat!>>

Background: The Shadow of the West is a feast for the Worms of Gluttony. They are always found in affluent countries with cheap, well-processed food. The hunger of the starved is of little interest to them, and they find its Essence a poor substitute for the consumptive lust that they crave.

Description: These small spirits often appear as tapeworms, attaching themselves to their victims, normally the morbidly obese. Their long, pink bodies sport rows of eyes running down either side. A huge maw with radiating hooked teeth can be extruded from either end of their tubular forms. They are often found in a state of Twilight attached to navels of their victims with their long bodies wrapped snugly around their hosts. Much like a tick, their bodies swell when draining their victims.

Storytelling Hints: The *Fuuru Mur* have learned to wait in the Shadows of fast food restaurants and convenience stores for new victims. Though the most prized hosts are those who are attempting to resist the lure of gluttony, many Worms of Gluttony frequent the shadows of diet food stores or businesses that sell dieting services. Then, they use their drain ability to lower the Willpower of their victims and their Influence to increase their host's feelings of hunger and the pleasure they feel from eating.

Binging and purging is a common way to appease the worms.

Rank: 1

Attributes: Power 5, Finesse 2, Resistance 1

Willpower:

Essence: 10

Initiative: 3

Defense: 5

Speed: 10

Size: 2

Corpus: 3

Influences: Gluttony •



Numina: Gauntlet Breach, Drain, Innocuous
Bans: The worms cannot abide the presence of vinegar and will recoil from it.

Rafixul (The Red Angel, The Great Maw)

Quote: <<How can you let him treat you like that, my friend? I see your true potential, even if the others are blind.>>

Background: This ancient spirit has been associated with many cults throughout time, leading them from obscurity to infamy and then destruction. He has played the part of both angel and fiend. Several millennia ago, Rafixul pledged his service (via Minion) to a greater spirit to gain a ban of Power, allowing him to display many more abilities than his peers.

Description: In his most potent form, Rafixul appears as a lion-headed angel clothed in scarlet winding cloths. His wings are bat-like, but covered in luxuriant red-gold fur.

Storytelling Hints: Rafixul is most often attracted to small religious cults or militant revolutionary groups. His specialty is schism — dividing the group. He usually allies himself with the most disaffected member a group, looking for members who are too weak to lead on their own and jealous of their leader's position. Rafixul then uses his powers to make his chosen more powerful, eventually driving off or killing any persons most likely to resist his control. Then he turns to fear to motivation. He will possess one of the "heretics" and use Transmogrify to cement his control of the group. From then on, his "chosen" takes the back seat as Rafixul's commands become more disturbing and dangerous as his followers are made to provide sustenance for all of Rafixul's appetites — and he is insatiable.

Sacrificing something prized by another, especially something of great sentimental value, is prone to please the Red Angel.

Rank: 3

Attributes: Power 6, Finesse 9, Resistance 5

Willpower: 11

Essence: 20

Initiative: 14

Defense: 9

Speed: 25

Size: 6

Corpus: 11

Influences: Envy •••

Numina: Ban of Power (Damnation's Power, Dement), Blast (Fire), Gauntlet Breach, Possession, Material Vision, Transmogrify Victim, Soul Snatch



Bans: Rafixul's powers are all bound in his eyes; blinding him, even temporarily, will break his hold on others. Any attack successfully directed at his eyes (–5 to target) causes him aggravated damage.

Artificial-Spirits

Artificial-spirits are the Shadow reflections of things created by the hands of mankind. The common antagonism between the world of humans and that of nature has bled over into the spirit world as well. Unlike our world though, nature-spirits are as aggressive in the Shadow, so artificial-spirits are not nearly as dominant there as on this side of the Gauntlet.

Blightlings

(Krystallgeist, Shatterlings, Iri Thim)

Quote: <<It's not worth it, is it?>>

Background: Blightlings are spirits of urban blight. They feed upon despair, apathy and the physical decay of a city. Fragments of lore call them corrupted or sickened artificial-spirits of glass or brick, or perhaps elementals that became caught up in the destruction of man's artifice, and tainted by his emotions.

Description: These spirits, no matter their origin, often resemble the cast-offs of humanity, bums or street people. It's only when Blightlings draw nearer that one sees that their forms are as broken as ruins they seek to create: arms bent at impossible angles, twisted necks, broken fingers and mismatched limbs. Their warped bodies are made from a mélange of asphalt, glass, concrete and garbage.

Storytelling Hints: Blightlings are often harbingers of much nastier spirits, but their efforts often lay the groundwork for spirits of oppression, violence and despair to enter a neighborhood. First, Blightlings simply enjoy trashing places, but they also actively target persons who might seek to reverse an area's slide into blight. Blightlings are often found in the brood of more powerful urban-spirits.

Simple vandalism, the more permanent, the better, is enough to please a weak Blightling — though more powerful versions of this type might require much more impressive forms of destruction to draw their notice, much less their favor. Repeated acts of vandalism in a neighborhood teetering on the edge of the urban abyss is often enough to invite Blightlings into an area.

Rank: 1

Attributes: Power 2, Finesse 3, Resistance 2

Willpower: 4

Essence: 10

Initiative: 5

Defense: 3

Speed: 15

Size: 5

Corpus: 7

Influences: Vandalism •

Numina: Fetter, Telekinesis, Unfetter

Bans: Blightlings may only fetter themselves to objects that can be vandalized and destroyed. One way of getting rid of a Blightling is to find the one window not broken in the old tenement, the Blightling's fetter and destroy it. They do not have to make this fetter obvious or easily accessible.



Chain Reaper

(Sawman, Silverhelm, Kar Kar Sum)

Quote: <<We are the inevitable, we remove the world's clutter and liberate it from the tyranny of green.>>

Background: Chainsaws have been around as industrial logging tools since the late 1920s, though not common or easily portable since the early '50s. During the past 20 years, they have increasingly become identified in the West as fantasy weapons of horror movies, though their strongest associations in the spirit world continue to have to do with the exploitation of forest and the mechanization of agriculture, especially in the Third World.

Most chainsaw-spirits accompany their material counterparts, feeding upon the spirits within the Shadow of forests and jungles. Here, chainsaw-spirits may work in gangs, felling and processing the spiritscape. Nowadays, they are joined by great harvester-spirits — the shadows of machines that can fell a tree, delimb and stack it all at one time.

Description: The spirits look like stocky men with chainsaw hands, wreathed in smoke. Their heads are often covered in chrome helmets, and their ears and eyes are covered in bulky protective gear that smothers the sensory input from the natural world. The goggles they wear are exaggerated welding glasses, and the ear protection seems sewn into their heads. They move in a clumsy shamble, yet manage to wield their saws like artists.

Storytelling Hints: Chain Reapers are the blind front-line soldiers in the war between artificial-spirits and the natural Shadow. No matter the balance that might exist in an area, when the Reapers move in, full-scale war normally erupts in their wake. They exist to consume nature-spirits, and the wail of their terrifying saws often paralyzes the local nature-spirits — allowing Chain Reapers to make quick work of the enemy. If a chainsaw tastes blood, any Sawman that might be attached to the object may be corrupted, giving the spirit a taste for flesh, bone and blood.

Rank: 2

Attributes: Power 7, Finesse 1, Resistance 5

Willpower: 12

Essence: 15

Initiative: 6

Defense: 7

Speed: 8

Size: 5

Corpus: 10



Influences: Saws ••

Numina: Concealment, Firestarter, Fearstruck, Materialize, Regenerate

Bans: Chain Reapers' senses, so long deadened to the world, are easily overwhelmed if their protective gear can be removed. Doing so will blind them.

Michaud's Stylo (Envy's Pen)

Quote: <<I can only be your muse if you commit to the written word.>>

Background: Nicola Michaud was a committed diarist when his father bought him the pen on a family trip to Switzerland. Nicola carried the pen with him into University at Paris and into his work as a lawyer near Toulouse. Then, disaster struck in 1940 with the German occupation of northern France and the rise of Vichy France. Nicola's mother was a Jew, and during the trials, Nicola at first tried to keep his job, much to the shame of his father. Nicola turned ever inward — committing most of his fears to the page with his beloved possession. His graphomania came into full bloom after watching the library where his father worked, and where Nicola spent many of the happiest days of his childhood, burn to the ground. Then his parents disappeared, and Nicola found himself on the run. Consumed by guilt and hate, he wrote for nearly two days straight afterward, filling the remaining pages of his diary, only venturing out for more ink and for scraps of paper. During this time, his pen awoke and fed from his mania to record everything, to document his ever-growing madness. Throughout the rest of the war, he traveled from town to town, the diarist for the Resistance and his own growing mania. He collected the names of anyone connected to the collaborators

— any pretense was enough to make a name appear on the ever-expanding list. He made hundreds of copies and versions and made sure that it got into the hands of the most vicious of the Resistance leaders. After the liberation of France, his list was used by many who took the law into their own hands. Of course, Nicola's own name made every copy of his infamous lists — he did not survive for long, but his pen lives on.

Description: Michaud's stylo looks like a slightly used antique fountain pen. It is still a thing of beauty, a fat black tube with a platinum and gold tube, sliver rings and a gold clip. Collectors and serious fans of fountain pens are quite fascinated by its fine design and excellent condition. Only a few hundred of its brothers and sisters survive, so it's a collector's item unto itself. The spirit itself remains within the pen's form, only oozing out great inky limbs when it must.

Storytelling Hints: In the decades since, the beautiful black and gold pen has passed from hand to hand, moving its owner into venturing onto the inky path that consumed its previous victims. The pen uses every trick in its arsenal to remain in the hands of someone who will use it frequently. Ending up in a sterile collector's case is of no use for the pen, forcing it into hibernation.

When in the hand of a passionate writer, the pen begins to use its rapture ability to "reward" a writer who taps into his or her own dark desires. Then the Stylo begins urging them to greater and greater acts of self-destruction and holding back on enrapturing the victim so that it may feed.

Rank: 1

Attributes: Power 2, Finesse 4, Resistance 2



Willpower: 6

Essence: 10

Initiative: 6

Defense: 4

Speed: 6

Size: 1

Corpus: 3

Influences: Writing •

Numina: Rapture, Innocuous, Hibernate

Bans: The smoke from burning books shuts down its Rapture Numen and forces the Stylo into a temporary period of hibernation (one to two hours).

Nature-Spirits

Nature-spirits encompass animals, plants and natural phenomena, such as spirits of storms, fog, etc. Some nature-spirits grow so large as to encompass entire environments, though these are either far fewer or far more reserved than in the past. These creatures have an innate antagonism with artificial broods.

Bat-Spirit

(Zotz, Screechers, *Munsuftha*)

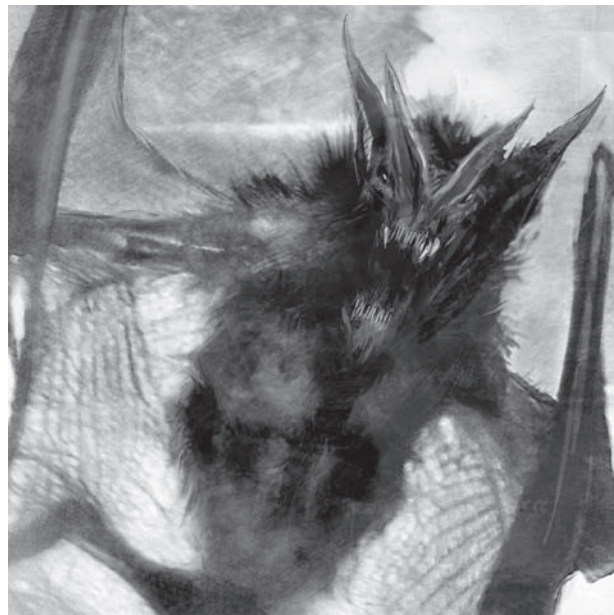
Quote: <<We see without sight; we fly without feathers. We live in stone halls, but dance on the air.>>

Background: Bat-spirits are small but can gather in great numbers sometimes, and just as all nature-spirits that gather in flocks, are found working together far more often than normal spirits. While bat-spirits in many Western countries are associated with spirits of dark emotions, such as envy or spirits of death.

Description: Bat-spirits tend to look like primordial versions of the material cousins — often appearing as a cross between a terrestrial bat and an ancient pterosaur. Often their heads have no eyes and are dominated by grotesquely frilled noses and enormous ears. Some more powerful bat-spirits are actually spirits of bat swarms and have substantially higher Size and Corpus traits.

Storytelling Hints: Many bat-spirits are found in the broods of more powerful spirits associated with the concepts of horror, fear, death and the night. Interestingly, bat-spirits can also be found in the broods of both earth- and air-spirits and are useful go-betweens when dealing with these spirits. Traditionally, bat-spirits have an intense rivalry with bird-spirits, rarely abiding their company. Those who wish to please bat-spirits offer a slurry of fruit, crushed insect corpses and blood left near a roost of terrestrial bats.

Rank: 1



Attributes: Power 1, Finesse 5, Resistance 1

Willpower: 2

Essence: 10

Initiative: 6

Defense: 5

Speed: 3/16 (species factor 10 for flight, -3 for ground)

Size: 1

Corpus: 2

Influences: Bats •

Numina: Chorus, Concealment, Materialize

Bans: Bat-spirits can be either driven off or sometimes grounded by bright light or loud noises.

Crocodile-Spirit (Sobek, Taniims, Gardans, Suchos, *Mur Ithamus*)

Quote: <<So man is the predator of predators? Come back in ten million years, and we will see. I will be waiting.>>

Background: One of the most ancient of animal spirit types, these alpha predators are feared for their power and stealth. The Sobek have played many roles and lived in many realms. As creatures that exist in many worlds, the Sobeki are often ambassadors, or mediators of disputes between the elemental lords of air, earth and water. Some of the eldest of these creatures have ties to the Helions, the elementals of the Sun.

Description: Alligator- and crocodile-spirits sometimes look like a cross between some dinosaur nightmare and almost toad-like versions of their material reflections. Their teeth are cruel and long, often decorated with ephemeral remains of their victims. Truly monstrous versions of these spirits exist



— they never stop growing. Some islands floating in the Shadow sea are actually croc-gods.

Storytelling Hints: These spirits aren't agile or particularly witty, but the Sobek *are* inhumanly patient. They have deep memories and bear long grudges. Their great skill in ambushing their victims makes their spirit predations extremely difficult to track down and giving birth to many tales of monster crocs and sewer alligators. Often the Sobek appear out of nowhere to grasp their prey and take them into the *Hisil*.

They respond well to those who foster an environment for terrestrial crocodilians, and look well upon offerings of rotted meat left along the banks of rivers or in marshes.

Rank: 2

Attributes: Power 5, Finesse 2, Resistance 4

Willpower: 9

Essence: 15

Initiative: 6

Defense: 5

Speed: 15/10 (Species factor swim 8 /run 3)

Size: 8

Corpus: 12

Influences: Crocodilians •

Numina: Hibernate, Abduct, Reaching, Innocuous, Commune

Bans: Many crocs take aggravated damage from the cold; some are sworn to grant a boon to anyone that can successfully hold their terrifying jaws closed.

Ghost Tooth Coyote (*Dur Lullur*)

Quote: <<Your tears are so funny!>>

Background: Coyote-spirits are a varied lot. They are all crafty, but just as their terrestrial cousins, their real scam is survival. They can ingest Essence of just about any resonance with little fear of losing their “coyoteness.” This one has developed a taste for strange, but mostly unharvested source of Essence by other spirits, human ghosts.

Description: Coyote -pirits often look like slightly larger, rangier versions of the material cousins, with eyes that have a definite glint of malicious glee. Ghost Tooth in both human seeming and coyote form looks somewhat emaciated — the skin seems to hang a bit too loosely on the bone, though it remains oddly attractive to the opposite sex.

Storytelling Hints: Ghost Tooth does not even know how he learned the trick of feeding upon human spirits, though he often tells tales of meeting the ghost of a human shaman that gave him the idea. Perhaps Ghost Tooth just thought it would be funny to eat him. He is fascinated by the human dead, and often uses this curiosity and his knowledge to ingratiate himself with local folklorists, historian or even paranormal fans — anyone who might put him on the trail of its next meal. As is the want of most coyote-spirits, he has a tendency to play with his food, most often by merely “wounding” the ghosts. Once he had a big laugh when he actually figured out the ghost’s anchor, an old set of glasses, and used Spirit-Thieves to drag the hapless thing into the spirit world — what a blast!

Now Ghost Tooth has a new question — can he create a ghost?

Rank: 2

Attributes: Power 2, Finesse 6, Resistance 5

Willpower: 7

Essence: 15

Initiative: 11

Defense: 6

Speed: 16 (species Factor 10)

Size: 3

Corpus: 8

Influences: Survival ••

Numina: Discorporation, Gauntlet Breach, Ghost Eater, Mortal Mask, Thieve

Bans: Many coyote-spirits cannot harm anyone who freely offers them food. Others will flee if the victim of a practical joke. Perhaps as punishment for his trick, Ghost Tooth has developed a real aversion to ghostly anchors since his Thieving trick, and he now takes aggravated damage from them when they are used as weapons.

Roach Colony

(Ten Thousand Legs, *Lîmî Surun*)

Quote: <<We are we.>>

Background: Spirit Swarms are one of the most disturbing creatures of Shadow. They are not like the hosts in that they were never united in one form. They are colony spirits, spirits of collective might and will. The concept of an overwhelming horde, a horrific mass made up of innocuous parts has spread over into other spirit types including information spirits, and ideologues.

Description: These creatures have two forms. One is that of a giant, nightmarish version of their physical type, in this case an enormous cockroach nearly the mass of a man. The other form is that of a swarm of roaches. Even in its singular form, it's not quite a solid whole. Close inspection reveals thousands of roaches compacted together. This is also betrayed when it moves as parts of the creature seem slightly out of synch with the other, much like a school of fish. In this state, a sharp blow passes through its body, scattering the smashed carcasses of its constituent beings in a gory arc, but doing little damage.

Storytelling Hints: Swarm-spirits are among the most alien in the shadow. They have little conception, much less compassion for singular life forms, adding another layer of meaning to the royal "we" to refer to itself. The voice of a Roach Colony is a discordant chorus of its members.

Rank: 2

Attributes: Power 3, Finesse 4, Resistance 6

Willpower: 9

Essence: 15



Initiative: 9

Defense: 6

Speed: 11

Size: 4

Corpus: 10

Influences: Roaches ••

Numina: Chorus, Materialize, Speed, Stalwart, Swarm Form

Bans: Roach swarms are masters of living off anything, but antiseptically clean objects or places often repel them. They might lose their power to assume their Swarm Form when confronted with them.

Scorpion (Setti, *Hirdab*)

Quote: <<I have many ways to kill and all the time I need.>>

Background: Scorpions are amongst the most ancient of predators, predating nearly all others still in existence. They are not fast, perceptive, quick-witted or even that active. They either ramble about feeding upon whatever they come across or wait in the shadows for something to stumble across them.

Over the millennia, they have taken on the roles of guardians, often of tombs and the dead. Perhaps this is due to their ability to survive almost any privation or merely from their fearsome appearance. Elder scorpion-spirits often take on these dimensions, becoming fearsome guardians of the paths to the Underworld in the Shadow — feeding upon the living who dare search out those paths or the ghostly spirits that seek to escape the gray realm of the dead. Some of these even take on partial human form, sporting human torsos, or hands instead of claws.

Description: A scorpion the size of a large dog is terrifying in and of itself, but a spirit scorpion's chitin is further decorated with tokens of the spirits the spirit has fed upon. One may be stony, another covered in bone, like a living reliquary. Often the faces of their victims are frozen in the loops and whorls of their armored skin. More powerful scorpion-spirits sometimes sport multiple tails or sets of claws.

Storytelling Hints: Scorpions are hostile sages. While dangerous to plumb, the well of their memories is deep and rarely runs dry. Scorpion-spirits are difficult to approach, and normally must be fed — they prefer their food live. Many scorpions are so driven by their nature to attack, that even the most polite guest must learn to endure the scorpion's sting as a matter of course. When hunting, they often rear up and show their great claws, gory chelicerae and poisonous sting — this display often causes their prey to freeze, when a hasty retreat is their only escape.

Strangely, scorpion-spirits have a highly refined aesthetic sense and greatly admire graceful motion. Some have charmed scorpion-spirits by performing long, formal dances filled with poise and precision.

Rank: 2

Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 4, Resistance 6

Willpower: 10

Essence: 15

Initiative: 10

Defense: 6

Speed: 8

Size: 3

Corpus: 9

Influences: Scorpions ••

Numina: Fearstruck, Hibernate, Spirit Venom, Stalwart

Bans: Spirit scorpions share their physical cousins' preference for darkness, many of them are repelled by strong light, and some cannot use their venom during the day. While scorpions are relatively immune to environmental heat and even radiation, flame and fire attacks cause some to spasm wildly, sometimes even attacking themselves.

Urban Ferals (Ferals, Brutes, Wilders)

Quote: <<Grrr... this is my hunting ground.>>

Background: Many of the spirits of the cities have come full circle, just like their material counterparts. They have traveled from spirits of the wilderness, to domesticated shadows and then back to wild again. But now their home is not a verdant forest, but a tangle of brick, plastic and concrete in the Shadow of man's cities.

Description: Urban Ferals might resemble cats, dogs or even pigeons, but their dependence upon man's world (its Essence) has marred them with anthropomorphic features, such as hands and faces. Some may actually resemble humans, except for animal heads and/or appendages. Others more closely resemble their animal forms, but are composed of artificial materials, such as newspaper, concrete or asphalt. This seemingly mismatched appearance sometimes means they are confused with hybrids (*magath*).

Storytelling Hints: Ferals are untrusting, and will most often flee when first encountered. If they feel cornered, or if their food supply is endangered, they will attack with a blind fury. To a mystic concerned with the spiritual health of a city's Shadow, the feral community is an invaluable market of information,



though it may come at a steep price. As they grow in power, some Wilders become spirits of entire communities of feral animals — most of these possess the Swarm Numen, and can become the leaders of spiritual broods.

Rural Ferals, created from the spirits associated from farm stock that has gone wild, include spiritual goats, pigs and horses and hybrids born of factory-farms and meat processing plants. There are related types of spirits from animals that were never domesticated, but have learned to live off man's world: gulls, coyotes, armadillos and numerous species of birds. These spirits have much in common with Ferals, but regard them as degenerate, and rarely associate with them.

Rank: 1

Attributes: Power 2, Finesse 3, Resistance 3

Willpower: 5

Essence: 10

Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Speed: 15

Size: 3

Corpus: 6

Influences: [base animal] •

Numina: Chorus (Ferals), Commune, Living Fetter

Bans: Ferals are as tied to their material counterparts as other nature-spirits and look more kindly upon those who aid them. Offerings of food, shelter and protection will predispose them to sympathy.

Location-Spirits

Location-spirits often blend aspects of artificial- and nature-spirits — a volatile mix — but transcend both. These spirits can encompass incredibly large areas, though this is not entirely reflected in their corpus. They are especially hard to kill, but usually limited in their travels to their zone of influence.

Lesser Haintbed

(Charnel Cabin, Hell House, *Ea-nirra*)

Quote: <<No wealth no land; no silver nor gold; nothing satisfies me but your soul>>

Background: The Charnel Cabin is an awakened home, a site that gained horrible sentience as a result of terrible murders, demonic corruption or acts of depravity and torture performed within its walls. The cabin, while not overly impressive as spirits go, is far more dangerous than its spiritual rank would lead one to believe. Along with the cabin's own abilities to inspire fear, it is often a spawning ground of terrible ghosts, out for revenge. The Charnel Cabin either contains or actually becomes the anchor for these phantoms. It keeps these ghosts in line by feeding on them from time to time. Spirits of pain and madness often surround it as well — adding to its supernatural defenses. These spirits owe the house protection and essence in return for protection and easy access between worlds.

Description: This Haintbed is a backwoods vacation cabin (living room/kitchenette, porch, bathroom, root cellar, attic and three guestrooms). It rests over the site of a ritual murder that took place in the 1920s. The cabin appears mundane, if a little seedy, during the day, but at night, the lights inside always seem a bit dim. From the outside, the broken rails on the porch look a little too much like jagged teeth, and the windows give an unsettling red cast to their light.

Storytelling Hints: The house is wise enough not to attack *every* visitor, selecting only the most likely prey, and not drawing too much attention to itself. The cabin can use its Numen to at first subtly reshape itself — jamming doors, making windows stick and so on. Later, it can even re-arrange its rooms, open pits and turn closets into prisons. It does not rely upon its own powers to create terror, choosing more subtle means to inspire it and the powers of the ghosts and other spirits that cooperate with it. Similar to many of its kind, the Charnel Cabin is also a gateway to the Shadow, containing windows or secret rooms that



only appear at midnight and lead to places that aren't really there....

Rank: 2

Attributes: Power 7, Finesse 2, Resistance 5

Willpower: 12

Essence: 15

Initiative: 7

Defense: 7

Speed: 9

Size: 32

Corpus: 37

Influences: Fear •, Houses •

Numina: Fetter, Ghost Eater, Manipulate Element (Its Structure), Phantasm, Threshold

Bans: Charnel Cabins always contain safe areas or blessed items tied to their history, which confer immunity to their powers. Some cannot harm the descendants of the humans who built the structure or performed the heinous acts that led to its dark awakening.

Steed's Pond (The Water Horse Pool)

Quote: <<Closer, closer>>

Background: Steed's Pond was named for one of the founding families of the area — the Steed Mansion once stood where the town graveyard now lies, and some say that the eldest headstones were taken from what was left after the house burned down. The older, settled folk know of the pond on the property and the tribute it demands, but also of its rewards. The trailhead is unmarked, but near the pond are warning signs for the youngsters to stay away.



Description: Steed's Pond rests just about a mile from the town square. The pathway to Steed's Pond leads from the back end of the church graveyard and through a thick mat of greenery, which thins out nearer the water. The trees here are thick-bodied, ancient things. Often little scraps of cloth, offerings to the water horses, can be seen tied on their branches just where they reach over the surface of water.

The pond is rather small and is fed by a little meandering creek, but does not seem to have any outlet. The pond should be a stagnant mess, or a swamp, yet venturing near the edge, one can see that it is filled with life, though interestingly, no large animals venture near its grassy banks. The floor of the pond drops steeply off into blackness, but observers can see coins and white stones as clean as freshly picked-over bone peeking out of its verdant bottom. It is beautiful, yet somehow *other* than natural.

Storytelling Hints: Every third spring equinox since the Steed mansion fire marks the time when the pond grows hungry. That is when the Water Horse Council, a group of town elders who seem totally normal to outsiders, gathers to meet and find a new victim. It grows harder and harder to find someone to drown in the pool, and now the council members are old — there are so few new people who will understand the need. Sometimes the pond grows very hungry and very angry — sometimes it feeds upon the townfolk. Twice in their long history, the Council has drawn lots, sacrificing its own, or its children to pond. They bind them and weight them down with the stones from the pond. Then they push them in and bubbles rise slowly and then in a rush. The next morning nothing is there.

But when the pond is newly fed, the Council can come to it and stare into its depths, and the pond can show them the future. The pond sometimes lies, but frequently it does not. Often what it shows is not pleasant.

Rank: 3

Attributes: Power 7, Finesse 8, Resistance 6

Willpower: 13

Essence: 20

Initiative: 14

Defense: 8

Speed: 15

Size: 40

Corpus: 46

Influences: Water •, Prophecy •, Death •

Numina: Commune, Spirit Minions (2 Drowning Horses), Omen Trance, Rapture, Material Vision, Reaching, Thieve

Bans: For each month that the pond goes unfed, its maximum Essence drops by one.

Hybrid Spirits

What distinguishes hybrids from other spirits is not that they might have their origins as different types of spirits, but that the combination has unsettled them to the point of madness and is the cause of their likely rejection by the spirit courts.

Bullhammer

(Mancleaver, Slaughterbull, *Hisra Hur*)

Quote: <<Hmmm, you are prime cut.>>

Background: Bullhammer was created when a bull-spirit followed its herd to an abattoir. Enraged at their meek deaths, the bull-spirit attacked the Shadow of the slaughterhouse, devouring the spirits of the processing tools and the conceptual-spirits of death and pain that were feeding in its Shadow. The hybrid that resulted was driven by its mad pain to process as many creatures as possible.

Description: Bullhammer looks like a skinless, eviscerated bull with meat hooks for ribs, horns made of serrated saws and hooves fashioned from the pneumatic hammers used to kill the animals. The cool of the meat locker surround this spirit, and its breath hangs as a chilled cloud of fresh blood in front of its lipless muzzle.

Storytelling Hints: As with many hybrids, Bullhammer was created by the clash between natural and artificial spirits. Bullhammer is a living example of this



struggle. Some shamans believe that merely discorporating such spirits, when they are relatively young, may allow sever the bonds that hold the magath together. This may be true, but Bullhammer may be close to evolving into something much greater. It has located the Shadow of a new huge processing plant in the city. When Bullhammer goes online, it will have the perfect place to hunt.

When hunting in the material world, Bullhammer pulls his victims within its carcass, where the hooks, knives and deadly chill can process the meat efficiently. The result is individual cuts, packaged, sanitized and ready for market. It has been known to process the late shift at grocery stores — leaving the meat cases well-stocked.

Rank: 1

Attributes: Power 3, Finesse 2, Resistance 3

Willpower: 6

Essence: 10

Initiative: 5

Defense: 3

Speed: 15

Size: 8

Corpus: 11

Influences: Knives •

Numina: Freeze, Elemental Immunity (cold), Materialize

Bans: Bullhammer is a creature of the processing floor, of concrete and asphalt, so memories of its life as a bull-spirit cause it great pain. Bullhammer will not venture onto grassy field; even small lawns can hold it at bay.

Gremal

(Calamites, Ludds, Deconstructors, Kulhis)

Quote: <<Crying child. You have another arm!>>

Background: Calamites are spirits of industrial accidents, mechanical failures and the human tragedies that result. These spirits were once the spies and saboteurs of powerful nature spirits against the machines of the artificial spirit courts, growing very adept at causing machines to self-destruct. Over the millennia, the spirits changed as they fed on their spiritual enemies' corpses and the tragedy they dealt humanity. Now they work for themselves — having competitions to see who can engineer the most ingenious breakdown.

Description: Gremals' bodies take the general form of small simians or crow-winged humanoids, self-fashioned from an assemblage of rusted mechanical parts. They have grown fond of the faces of humans, so much so that Gremals often wear human masks shaped to resemble peaceful mien of a human's final rest or their expression of terror in the final moments before impact.

Storytelling Hints: Calamites happily and creatively use their Influences and Numina to cause havoc and destruction. While they love a good plane crash or train derailment, they look upon such as a little too easy. They most often like to frustrate engineers with really pesky problems — introducing something into the machinery that might take hours to crop up and days of frustrating work to troubleshoot and fix.

Strangely, Calamites have grown to appreciate technicians who truly care about their machines in



their care, who lovingly tend them and keep their tools in immaculate shape. On the other hand, the opposite behavior can often invite their “help.”

Offerings of blood and motor oil can predispose a Gremal to look favorably upon a supplicant. They also like really nice sets of tools that they might steal. Both kinds of chiminage might be employed by a supplicant who wishes a Gremal to quit its tampering and move on.

Rank: 2

Attributes: Power 2, Finesse 5, Resistance 3

Willpower: 7

Essence: 15

Initiative: 8

Defense: 5

Speed: 17

Size: 3

Corpus: 6

Influences: Machinery ••

Numina: Gauntlet Breach, Fetter, Left-Handed Spanner, Mechanical Possession, Reaching, Telekinesis, Thief

Bans: Gremals cannot tamper with machinery while they are observed by others. These spirits work in secret.

Relict Man (Wild Man, Jack of the Wood)

Quote: <<Move on, MAN, this is not your world.>>

Background: Relict animals are those few creatures that are the last of their lines, such as the coelacanth. Relict spirits are the reflections of things that once were: extinct animals, long dead cities, abandoned values and such that still populate the Shadow. Some who have studied the reclusive Relict Men believe that they are mere anthropomorphic nature-spirits — spirit amalgams of man’s desires and nature’s forms. Others believe that these are the reflections of humans’ earliest ancestors, before our world was split into spirit and physical, when humans were much closer to the spirit world — perhaps before humans had human souls.

Many Relict Men have attached themselves to powerful broods associated with a particular stretch of forest, mountain range or swamp, becoming one of its protectors.

Description: Relict Men appear as primitive humanoids covered in coarse hair, with ape-like features



and clawed hands. While large, they move through the forests on either side of the Gauntlet with surprising grace and speed.

Storytelling Hints: Relict Men rarely speak with mortal men, even such once-men as vampires and mages. When Relict Men choose to talk, their words come out slowly and gruffly, but they can be quite passionate, even profound when speaking of their natural homes. Relict Men often feed upon the spirits within the bound of their home, and like most spirits, find no irony in this. They sometimes venture into the physical world, both to experience its pleasures and to protect their Shadow homes.

Rank: 2

Attributes: Power 5, Finesse 5, Resistance 4

Willpower: 9

Essence: 15

Initiative: 9

Defense: 5

Speed: 15

Size: 8

Corpus: 12

Influences: [the environment they protect] ••

Numina: Commune, Howl, Materialize, Pathfinder, Speed

Bans: Many of these sad creatures fear and hate their own image. Some even flee from someone who takes a picture, or even possesses a true description of them.

Spearfinger (Utlunta, Granny Death)

Quote: << Uwe la na tsiku Su sa sai. (Liver, I eat it. Yum, yum)>>

Background: The spirit known as Spearfinger isn't quite accepted by the dark emotional broods or by the elemental courts, though her progenitor was probably an elemental or a spirit of cannibalism. What she is now is mixture of these, plus perhaps something darker.

During formation of the Cherokee peoples in North America, Spearfinger learned to enjoy feeding upon the fear generated by her attacks and growing power of her own legend. She liked to hide among them, appearing as a lost old woman, or wait by the forest trails for lost children. They always came close enough to her unassuming form to allow her to kill them. She always left her mark by removing their hearts or livers. Soon she was the great boogeyman of the forest, and this pleased her.

Unfortunately for Spearfinger, Cherokee shamans managed to discover her ban with the help of a chickadee-spirit that saw Spearfinger's heart beating beneath her palm while perched on her stony finger. Though she had predominately haunted the Shadow of the Smoky Mountains, the exploitation of her weakness drove her away from that land for many decades. She still preferred the Shadow of ancient mountains and continued her hunts, as the many legends of murderous hags can attest to. Now most people have forgotten her weakness, and so Spearfinger will likely return to pay back the descendants of those who drove her away from the lands of her birth.



Description: Spearfinger's true form is that of a stooped, old woman dressed in tattered clothes — and from a distance or through the fog or woodsmoke that often obscures her, the disguise is convincing. Closer still, one can see that her lanky hair seems much more like tangles of moss and that her skin is grotesquely warty, stony even. Usually the last thing her victim sees is that her entire body is made of various minerals cobbled together, and that the forefinger of her right hand is three times as long as it should be and tipped with an obsidian claw. She speaks with the sound of the thunderous roar of an avalanche mixed with the cackle of a crone.

Storytelling Hints: Spearfinger is quite a powerful enemy but resist throwing her headlong at anyone. She enjoys playing with her food, and the terror generated *before* and after she feeds is more important than the death. But she also cannot help herself; she will often repeat her little Cherokee song (see the quote above) before feeding, which can be a vital clue for those trying to stop her murderous ways.

Spearfinger has learned the hard way that feeding for too long in the same place is dangerous. She will feed long enough for her calling card to really begin pumping out the terror; the modern press's love for serial killers makes this even easier. When things get too hot, she will normally move to a new territory and Hibernate for a while, waking up famished, but safe and ready to begin her games again.

Rank: 3

Attributes: Power 6, Finesse 6, Resistance 9

Willpower: 15

Essence: 20

Initiative: 15

Defense: 6

Speed: 22

Size: 5

Corpus: 14

Influences: Fear ••, Stone •

Numina: Concealment (fog or smoke), Camouflage, Gauntlet Breach, Hibernate, Manipulate (Stone), Mortal Mask, Pathfinder

Bans: Spearfinger possesses a classic chink in her armor, the palm of her left hand where her spiritual heart resides. Attacks directed there suffer a -5, but ignore Spearfinger's normal Defense and may Stun her (see the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 167). Lethal damage directed there causes her aggravated damage.



Elementals

Water Horse

(Each Uisge. Kelpie.

Drowning Horse. *Huenna Sisi*)

Quote: <<Please, my foot's caught on something under the water, can you give me a hand?>>

Background: Horses have long been associated with water, whether their forms have been seen in the curling ocean waves or the sound of their hooves in the crash of the surf. The Water Horses either influenced this or responded to this association, or both. (There are many spirits that share this causality dilemma — which came first, man's association or the spirit's inclination?) These spirits are often amongst the most mercurial, sometimes seeming more neutral to humans, only to feed upon them, or more exactly, nourish themselves upon humankind's fear of the water. Water Horses relish the fear generated from their victims' feelings of inescapable doom.

Description: This spirit's normal form is that of a blue-black horse, but when it ventures into the material realm, a Water Horse normally wears the form of a handsome man or woman whose hair seems dripping wet. It can also take the form of a coherent wave of brackish water.

Storytelling Hints: Water Horses enjoy tricking their victims into touching them, where they use their Entangle power to render their victims helpless and then slowly drag them into the water. In ancient times, taking the shape of a horse was the most effective,

but in the modern world, they tend to rely upon their ability to appear human to accomplish this.

Water Horses respond well to offerings tossed into pools, lakes and rivers. This can be in the form of wealth, little strips of cloth tied to branches that reach over the water or votive statutes of men.

Rank: 1

Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 2, Resistance 2

Willpower: 6

Essence: 10

Initiative: 4

Defense: 4

Speed: 20

Size: 8

Corpus: 10

Influences: Water •

Numina: Mortal Mask, Entangle, Morphic Form

Bans: In the past, many Kelpies were compelled to warn of approaching storms, often by howling or even manifesting to give warning personally.

Erdgeist (Nisseling, Flinteeth, *Se-Gihes*)

Quote: <<Think where you tread, man. And remember, bone breaks much easier than stone!>>

Background: Erdgeists have been the messengers of the impenetrable earth elemental lords for centuries. These spirits are undoubtedly responsible for much of the folklore associated with small, human-like creatures from folklore.

Description: Erdgeists are tiny humanoid creatures with wide faces and sharp, stony teeth. While often well below two feet in height, they are far from endearing, with skins of pebbly stone and mouths much too wide for something that small. Their eyes are obsidian, and their flinty teeth are sometimes alternately ringed in steel, producing unsettling sparks as they speak. Their hands and feet are tipped with long, gemlike claws.

Storytelling Hints: Erdgeists are often the protectors of hidden grottoes of the earth, the secret passages to the chthonic cathedrals where more powerful earth elementals hold court. Erdgeists might be dispatched to discourage an over-curious caver or sabotage a mining operation or tunnel that gets too close. Unlike most of their ilk, they are often curious what brings humans into their world, though hardly friendly about their inquiries.

Larger, more powerful Erdgeists often have the Swarm Numen and can sometimes swim through stone as easily a fish in the sea. They may show some slight favor to humans who "return" the gifts of the earth (stones, gems and metals) to their care.



Rank: 1

Attributes: Power 3, Finesse 3, Resistance 4

Willpower: 7

Essence: 15

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 16

Size: 2

Corpus: 7

Influences: Stone •

Numina: Manipulate Stone, Materialize, Blast

Bans: Erdgeists, if lifted from contact with the ground, lose their ability to use Manipulate and Blast.

Hollow Men (Nix, Forlorn, Adurra)

Quote: <<This is the way the world ends. Not with a bang but a whimper.>>

Background: Many would say that these strange beings are conceptual-spirits of the bleakest, nihilistic wastelands of human thought and emotion. Some say they are representations of the capricious hand of fate. When pressed, these creatures claim to be elementals of void. Strangely, most elementals attack them on sight or flee from their presence. None will actually claim Hollow Men.

Description: In the Shadow, they exist as vaguely humanoid fields of distortion with hearts of inky blackness. A very slight breeze seems to blow toward them, kicking off little dust devils and whorls that feed into their dim hearts. In the material world, they seem human, though they favor mirrored sunglasses, and large coats. They rarely speak, and someone close just might pick up that their mouths, eyes and navels reveal the

Hollow Men to be just that — nothing more than a husk, a veneer of skin over nothingness. Often one finds they are having a conversation with one of the Forlorn — but its lips aren't moving.

Storytelling Hints: Many who grow used to the unabashed narcissism of the vast majority of the Shadow's inhabitants find dealing with Hollow Men disconcerting. While they are driven to consume Essence, and in most ways act as "normal" spirits, Hollow Men also display behavior and motives that seem insane even by the standards of the spirit world.

Their actions never seem tainted by strong emotion, yet they are not creatures of ennui; they are active, often manically so. They always seem to have an agenda. Some Hollow Men's actions appear alternately pitiless or capricious. One might suddenly aid another spirit against a more powerful foe, or spend a lot of time an energy destroying the life of an ostensibly insignificant person.

The final result of their efforts always amounts to some form of loss, but their immediate actions might seem positive, even altruistic. For example, a Hollow Man might save a young boy from the talons of a werewolf, only to have that young man grow up to commit much more horrible crimes, or die a meaningless death.

They are most often drawn to targets who are the lynchpins, the spiritual hearts of their societies. These societies may be a cabal of mages, a despotic junta, a close-knit firm of lawyers, a street gang or a prestigious family. It is not enough for the Hollow Men to drive them insane, physically kill their victims or even spiritually consume them (which they can). The Forlorn seek to spoil whatever society to which their victim contributes by targeting the few that hold it together.

Hollow Men are very dangerous to deal with, but some have attracted their attention by destroying objects of great sentimental value to the petitioner.

Rank: 3

Attributes: Power 7, Finesse 8, Resistance 4

Willpower: 15

Essence: 20

Initiative: 12

Defense: 8

Speed: 25

Size: 5

Corpus: 9

Influences: Oblivion •••

Numina: Camouflage, Claim, Dement, Discorporation, Gauntlet Breach, Morphic Form, Mortal Mask, Soul Harvest, Telepathy



Bans: Hollow Men can often be alternately fascinated or repelled by classical aesthetics. Many cannot abide the balanced melodies of a Beethoven sonata. A few have been known to freeze in place should they pass between two mirrors.

The Ridden

That person on the bus, the one you *always* see on this line no matter what time you get on or where you're going, that's just a crazy homeless person. The woman whose face looks like it's peeling, and whose fingers look the wrong shape in her gloves, she's just sadly deformed. And don't stare at that kid whose movements are jerky and speech is slurred, it's just mild retardation and it's not polite to stare.

Or maybe they all share a secret. Maybe there's something inside them that isn't inside other people, drawing their attention here or there, changing them from the inside out or even *jerking* their limbs about like a violent puppeteer. That could be another explanation, couldn't it?

Those people, if they really have secret strangers driving them, are the Ridden. They are what happens when a spirit finds its way into the world of man and discovers a score of pleasures they never before had the chance to indulge. One of those pleasures is to tie itself to a living (usually human) body and see what there is to see, taking any opportunities as time goes on to explore and encourage the spirit's personal affinities.

Spirit-Urged

Imagine the body to be a car. The person, as a conscious entity, is the driver. Then someone new gets into the backseat. For the most part, this person is happy to be chauffeured about in someone else's body. It gets to see and hear everything the body's owner does with very little effort on its own part. This wouldn't be a problem, except that the passenger occasionally does a little backseat driving. It never grabs the wheel, but it makes suggestions. It wants to take a detour past the prison, or it wants to linger at the accident and rubberneck just a little while. Maybe it fiddles with the radio. It never controls anything, but it sure as hell influences the driver.

These are the Urged, who might otherwise remain within the boundaries of safety and sanity but now go beyond the pale. Urged are almost universally people who have natural inclinations toward a certain act or behavior before *something* settles inside them and begins prompting, cajoling, suggesting, all feeling just like the person's normal inner voice. When a person's conscience tells him to *do it*, almost anyone would scratch the itches he already had.

Perhaps the worst part is that few Urged realize that they are being Ridden. They notice their imaginations getting darker and more daring, but the spirit Rider is usually too subtle to be a voice in the head. The host has ideas pleasing to the spirit, either naturally or through the spirit's intervention. These urges may be harder to ignore than they were in the past, but the host still makes the decision to act on them — or at least believes he does.

People made Urged for too long almost inevitably descend down the Morality scale as they give in to increasingly inhuman acts. Even those inhabited by spirits *not* associated with immoral acts or negative emotions (such as spirits of apathy or forests) focus the Urged in ways that separate them from humanity emotionally and mentally.

Archetypal of the Urged is the spirit-inspired pyromaniac. A teenager fascinated by fire, who volunteers for the responsibility of tending the fireplace at home and gets a license to hold a bonfire party every year is a very attractive host for a spirit of conflagration. If the kid also occasionally lights matches just to stare at the flame and secretly lights small piles of paper in ashtrays, he's *perfect*. After the spirit becomes a passenger, the host's tendencies become a little stronger, a little more frequent and a little less rational. He just

wants to *see* it burn. Over time, the desire to play with fire expands in scope, from a bonfire in the yard to a tree in somebody else's yard, or an abandoned house. Given a long and fruitful relationship between passenger and driver, the Urged may even become curious to see burning flesh — if he doesn't get caught before he gets that far.

A spirit may grow fond of a specific host, especially one that naturally follows the spirit's guidance or is well-trained. But in the end, a host is just garden where the spirit can foster certain actions and reap the results. An Urging spirit must be patient to make its host "profitable," but must also be practical enough to cut its losses. The proclivities the spirits encourage tend to get their hosts in trouble if they aren't very careful. Prison is not a good place to (for example) start fires, though spirits playing the "long con" may sit through shorter stays in jail. The spirit only cares to keep the host away from death inasmuch as it is protecting an investment of time and Essence — the loss may sting the spirit's pride or promotion of its purview, but there's always another host where that one came from. The spirit may be responsible, but it rarely pays the price for its host's actions. It can get out at any time, even in the instant of death.

Spirit-Urged Summary

- Spirits bind themselves to animal or human hosts, then feed the hosts urges that strengthen the spirit's influence in the world.
- Spirits make hosts into Urged with the Living Fetter Numen (see p. 143).
 - The spirit may read the host's mind with Power + Finesse, contested by the host's Resolve + Supernatural Advantage. Success reveals surface thoughts, and exceptional success allows deeper probing.
 - The spirit may prompt the host to take a given action with a Power + Finesse roll, with a +1 bonus if the action aligns with the host's Virtue or Vice. If the host fights the urge, he contests with Resolve + Composure.
 - The spirit may use its Influences on the host, if applicable, and gets a one-Essence discount.

- Spirits may not otherwise use their Influences or Numina while Urging a host.

- The spirit may release the host at any time and immediately upon death, with no penalty whatsoever.

- Spirit-Urged can sometimes be identified by looking into their eyes. This is often only revealing when certain conditions are met. The Riding spirits cannot become aware of what these conditions are.

Fireman

Quote: "I'll get them out!"

Background: He had good reasons to join the fire department. Two of them were his father and grandfather, who were firefighters themselves. It was a grand tradition that he chose not to fight. His other reason was that he just plain liked fire. He'd never gone so far as to light anything bigger than the logs in a fireplace himself, but something about the way fire danced entranced him. And being a firefighter — one of the most dedicated in the department, lauded for his heroism and devotion — meant he got called out to every fire worth seeing.

That's the state he was in when the fire-spirit found him. They were nearly kindred, the spirit and the man, both loving the sight and smell of flames and the feel of fire-heat on their flesh (or spirit-flesh). The spirit was surprised and fascinated by the vast knowledge the man had of fires. He knew how arsonists started them, how they crawled from birth toward sustenance and how to kill them dead and cold. By extension, he knew how to prolong them — and he subtly wanted to. With a devil on his shoulder making suggestions, the fireman came up with more and more ideas for how to make his enjoyment of each fire last.

At the Rider's command, the flames lick at the host but do not burn him. This protection gives the fireman time to choose his battles: he douses the stairs but leaves the raging inferno that keeps the house alight. He fights the fire slowly enough that it cannot help but catch hold on a neighboring home. All the while his peers congratulate the Urged as a hero, daring flames that chase the rest of them out and putting out fires — eventually — that confounded the rest of the crew.

The man saves more lives than he would have before he acquired a guest. He bursts through flam-

ing doors like a god of flame and carries children and adults to safety. If the occasional one suffers a burn on the way out, one that could have been avoided... well, the rescued never complain. The spirit's happier to have them alive, rather than letting them be consumed by its fires. More flame-dreams to feed it and its brethren.

Description: The fireman is a large, strong man with salt-of-the-earth roots. When on the scene of a disaster, the reflections of fire in his eyes are sometimes a little *too* alive, and he may spend just a second too long staring before leaping into action.

Storytelling Hints: The fireman dated occasionally before he realized he spent more time staring at the candles than his opposite. Now, he spends most of his time around the station. He's consistently turned down promotions offered for his dedication, knowing that it would separate him from the fires. The man still has other hobbies and interests, but they all pale beside his love of fire. Those that hold his interest often have some relation to his obsession: he enjoys target shooting, imagining that he can almost feel the combustion in the chamber and he likes hiking through the wilderness so he can daydream about how a fire might blaze across the landscape.

A one-shot focused on this Ridden might tie the characters together as people rescued from flames by the fireman. Each insists that the "hero" bumped or jostled them on purpose in a way that burned them, but the authorities find it easy to ignore such allegations from frightened victims of a large fire. The character may come together to discover what's wrong with this sick bastard. For a chronicle, the fireman may be seen (on location or in the news) by the characters who eventually piece together that something's just not right.

When using this character as an antagonist, don't forget the spirit's Influence. The spirit has the ability to control flames, whether to prolong the fires its host fights or lash out at people trying to stop it.

Mental: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical: Strength 3, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social: Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Crafts (Fires) 2, Medicine 2

Physical Skills: Athletics (Lifting) 4, Brawl 2, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Survival 1, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Empathy 1, Persuasion 2, Socialize 1, Subterfuge (Lying) 2

Willpower: 6

Morality: 5

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Lust

Health: 8

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 10

Merits: Direction Sense, Fleet of Foot 1, Iron Stamina 2, Resources 1, Status (Fire Department) 1, Strong Back

Spirit's Rank: 3

Power: 7

Finesse: 6

Resistance: 2

Influence: Fire 3

Essence: 10 (maximum 20)

The Gun Nut

Quote: "And here's the star of my collection..."

Background: Her mother hated that she was raised on her father's steady diet of hunting, skeet shooting, self-defense and lessons on the history of projectile weaponry in warfare from the 1800s on up. *She* ate it up with a spoon and thought her mother was an old-fashioned bat. That split's probably what caused the divorce, but by then she was old enough to convince the judge that it was her father who had raised her.

Now her own woman, she runs her father's gun store and teaches her girls about guns and gun safety. The store does well because of her mastery of the subject matter, but it doesn't hurt that she has some notoriety as the woman who runs a gun shop *and* as an avid collector. Her den, a tradition she inherited from her father, is a veritable museum of firearms, half-inherited and half-built with her own money and lots of footwork.

This is when the spirit finds her. It was initially attracted to her collection, but the gun nut fascinated it. This was a human almost as devoted to the firearm as the spirit itself, and it had to have her. Now one of the Urged, the woman spends more time than she used to down at the range, and more time tracking down rumors of ancient guns fired in the Great War or earlier. Her collection of guns *for use* has also grown. She not only has a few more Glocks and Colts than she did before, but she's also made an effort to add more civilian-legal semi-automatic rifles to the list, and her eyes are wandering to guns she couldn't legally own.

She has less time for her family, but the gun nut makes that up by teaching her girls even more about firearm safety and history. The spirit likes the idea of shaping a new generation of gun addicts. As much as the spirit tries to be subtle, her husband's noted that she doesn't

talk about much else and spends more time in her den than in their bedroom. He's also a little worried that she talks about getting him a conceal carry permit without giving any sort of reason why he would need one.

Description: The gun nut keeps her hair short and her clothes functional. She keeps her permit to carry a weapon on her at all times because she has a weapon on her person at all times — she only conceals it because people make a big deal of it if she doesn't. Her walk and grip are both steady, as is necessary to accurately fire a weapon. When holding a firearm in her hands, her pupils become gunmetal gray.

Storytelling Hints: She was a dedicated hobbyist before the spirit made her one of the Urged. Now, the gun nut's flat-out obsessed. Guns are what she wants to talk about, and otherwise she's just not interested (or interesting). Problems arise when she runs into one of those gun-control crazies. The spirit has no real motivation for arguing about it, but she's liable to lose her cool when someone talks about restricting her rights.

At some point, if the spirit thinks its access to guns through the gun nut are going to be severely curtailed, it might prompt its host to take action. (Never mind that it would only get that idea by picking it out of the host's mind.) She might be found attempting to hoard dangerous weapons, perhaps even a functional machine gun, or caught planning (or executing) the murder of a politician attempting to pass anti-gun legislation.

The gun nut can make a good "villain" for a whodunit murder or a who'll *do* it murder prevention scenario. In an extended chronicle, she could easily be the gun-supplier for a player's character who just keeps getting more and more extreme as the game goes on. Remember that the spirit's Influence can make guns more hardy (while the host repairs them) or more *accurate* (in case she becomes a physical antagonist).

Mental: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 1

Social: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics (War History) 2, Crafts (Guns) 3, Investigation 2

Physical Skills: Firearms 4

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Persuasion 3, Streetwise (Guns) 3, Subterfuge 3

Willpower: 4

Morality: 6

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Greed

Health: 6

Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Merits: Contacts (Gun Buffs, Gun Dealers, Police) 3, Quick Draw, Resources 3

Spirit's Rank: 2

Power: 4

Finesse: 6

Resistance: 2

Influence: Firearms 2

Essence: 10 (maximum 15)

The Bus God

Quote: "In my city, the buses need to run and they need to run on time. End this strike *now*."

Background: She was one of many local public officials running that year in the city, but she was running uncontested. The spirit knew the race was a sure thing, and that's why it took her. It had spent a long time peering in on the human world, hiding from detection and deciphering the mortal governance of the few as chosen by the many. Though the spirit found such a structure strange, it absorbed this information and figured out who — or, which office, because the who changed periodically — was responsible for the bus system. Was responsible for *it*.

The public official wasn't running on mass transit issues. She was hardly running at all, really, but she had to lay down a trail for future elections, and so she stood by other officials and said words about changing this and repairing that. It wasn't until she was in office that her attitude toward her responsibilities changed. She didn't shift so radically that people who knew her were baffled, but she seemed to prioritize differently. Her arguments against expanding the mass transit system to include a light rail were emphatic and effective. She came down harder than anyone expected on the drivers when they tried to strike. Her movement to increase the use of the bus system worked, especially when she declared that she was going to take the bus to work every day and stuck with it.

While she was in office, the bus system flourished. But it had never been her intention to remain in the position, and she had her eye on bigger and better things. Though it was difficult, given her failure to focus on her earlier declared commitments, she moved on. She also stopped taking the bus everywhere, though mass transit remained tied to her politics for the rest of her career. Her replacement, inspired by her example, pledged in a public speech to remain as dedicated to the buses as his predecessor.

Description: The bus god is really just a minor city politician with jurisdiction or influence over the bus system. She dresses professionally and interacts with people as one would expect a politician to do, doing her best not to offend anybody or promise too much. In the dark, her eyes are a little brighter than normal. They look almost backlit, like very dim headlights.

Storytelling Hints: The important facet of the bus god is not the human host in this case, but in the cunning spirit that strongly urges the politician to further its interests in the city and its Shadow Realm environs. By keeping the buses strong and well used, it feeds all the bus spirits in the city, the spirits of the bus routes and, in the end, itself. This plan has kept the spirit at the top of its heap for years — decades, maybe.

Each incarnation of the bus god has her own goals, the things she wanted to work on in office before the spirit stepped in and changed her mind a bit. She still talks about those things and puts effort into them, but she talks more about the buses and gives them a lot more of her energy. The force the spirit puts into these mental nudges skirts the edge of subtlety, but in the end most politicians assume the ideas are their own. The alternative is rather more disturbing than most folks want to consider.

Maybe not everyone perceives a problem when a spirit prods a politician into keeping the buses on time and maintained. But considering that a single spirit could guide a city's mass transit policies for decades or even centuries at a stretch, it would eventually cause a lot of trouble. A player's character may work in city hall and pick out significant discrepancies in the official in question, or the character might have a friend who calls and asks for a favor. Even though the spirit managed to figure out how the local human politics work, it still won't have everything straight. Imagine a character going back over videos of the last 10 people elected to that office — *and hearing the same promises about buses out of each one's mouth.*

Mental: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Investigation 1, Politics (City Hall) 3, Science 1

Physical Skills: Drive 1, Larceny 1, Stealth 2

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression (Speeches) 3, Intimidation 1, Persuasion 2, Socialize 1, Subterfuge (Politics) 2

Willpower: 4

Morality: 7

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Envy

Health: 7

Initiative: 4

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Merits: Allies (City Hall) 2, Contacts (Bus Drivers) 1, Fame 1, Resources 2, Status (City Hall) 1

Spirit's Rank: 4

Power: 12

Finesse: 8

Resistance: 9

Influence: Buses 4

Essence: 20 (maximum 25)

The Business Traveler

Quote: "Bring me another scotch, please."

Background: The business traveler is exactly what he sounds like. He is that man who, by virtue of his important position in his important job, flies everywhere nearly every day to attend very important meetings. As an international traveler, he spends almost as much time in the air as he does on the ground, and he *certainly* spends more time in an airplane than in his own bed (or with his kids).

It all started out innocently: he's up-and-coming at his company, so of course he has to travel. He got the shit jobs that require him to fly to Topeka or Houston for a single day's meeting or review. After a few years, the fact that he put up with it gave him the opportunity to put his travel behind him. He went for the fast track, instead, which put on the plane even more often. It didn't help that, by that point, his wife was already complaining that he was never home — which was another definite factor in his decision.

When the spirit found the business traveler, both were in the airport. Both considered airports something of a second home, and the spirit sensed a compatriot and an opportunity in the human. With the spirit's gentle prodding and with the man's avoidance of his family issues, the two of them have taken off. The business traveler takes care of his company's interests all over the world, and he really enjoys the flying. He's not worried about being hurled through the air in a giant metal cigar — he actually feels safer aloft than anywhere else. He's even been thinking about taking some vacation time for some flying lessons and saving up for a small single-engine plane for private use.

The Urged is becoming increasingly fragile, and one of these days he'll break. His home life and the

Rider's influence are making the man only feel secure when he's on a plane —being away from everything and tied to nothing is incredibly freeing. If something stresses him out, he may seek the sensation of flight or great height to relax him.

Description: The business traveler spends more time sitting in business class than anything else. Not only does he have little time or inclination to work out, most gyms would make him a bit nervous being wide open (rather than packed like an airplane) and low to the ground. So this Urged is out of shape. He's not *old* yet, exactly, so his face is still relatively wrinkle-free, but he has a businessman's receding hairline and worry lines. In short, he's your typical middle-aged suit and not one of those young, ambitious power-suits. In times of stress, the man's eyes reflect a clear blue sky, no matter the weather.

Storytelling Hints: This character generally puts forward a very confident face. He knows his place in his company and knows he won't lose his job or his traveling expense account. In truth, he's on shaky ground on the inside. The business traveler feels a consistently greater need to be on a plane, preferably in the air. When something takes him outside his safety zone, he seeks a retreat to the airport or his next gate. He hates not getting to fly when he wants or needs to and once threatened a gate attendant when his flight was canceled.

This Urged is the perfect sign of the supernatural to seat next to a player's character on that long flight across the Pacific. Imagine if the spirit decides that it wants to spend an extra hour in the air and uses its Influence to mess with the plane's radar. Or the characters can meet him on a short flight into the city just before an event (weather, terrorist threats, whatever) shuts down the airport. The Urged, of course, freaks out and follows any means necessary to get on a plane. It could trigger a hostage situation.

Mental: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social: Presence 2, Manipulation 4, Composure 1

Mental Skills: Academics (Business) 3, Computer 1, Politics (Business) 3

Physical Skills: Drive (Flight) 1, Larceny 1, Stealth 2

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression 1, Persuasion 3, Socialize 3, Subterfuge 2

Willpower: 3

Morality: 7

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Gluttony

Health: 7

Initiative: 4

Defense: 3

Speed: 9

Merits: Contacts (Business, Flight Enthusiasts) 2, Language (German, Japanese), Status (Company) 3

Spirit's Rank: 3

Power: 6

Finesse: 5

Resistance: 3

Influence: Airplanes 3

Essence: 8 (maximum 20)

The Web-Spinner

Quote: "Of course I was home last night! Where else would I be?"

Background: It doesn't take much for a person to attract a spirit of lies. Humans dissemble constantly, to some degree or other. People hide the lust they feel for one another, or the hate or the fact that they weren't actually working when they said they'd be. There's always something that a person wants to hide, and this spirit is glad of that. It makes finding an acceptable host very easy.

After the spirit fetters itself to a human, it exercises its influence slowly. It doesn't need to hurry, or even try very hard, because a pebble can start an avalanche. At some point, the host is questioned about something that's fairly innocent, something she wouldn't normally hide, but a part of her whispers, "It's none of his business where you were! Tell him something else!" Once the host succumbs to that periodic whisper a few times, one of those lies will return to haunt her.

The most instinctive thing for a person to do in that situation is cover it up, because no one wants to be called out on a lie. One lie births another, and then another, and the human begins spinning webs with very little effort on the Rider's part. It reaps much for sowing so little. Even when someone looks for the truth and tears the webs away, the Rider is happy. Urging a person for long changes her outlook about herself. Not only has the spirit's influence painted the person as a fibber in her own mind, it's also sure in others' minds. She justifies why she lied in the past, and she may continue lying. Their trust for her drops, they become less likely to tell her the entire truth and everyone becomes just a bit more suspicious. The spirit's end is met.

Some hosts fail to please the spirit. They may choose to admit their lies, never coming close to the fragile, interweaving net of deceptions that the spirit

aims to create. Or they may simply be very poor liars, instantly giving themselves away or lacking the creativity and memory necessary to give a string of lies that required verisimilitude that keeps people from seeing through the gaps. For such hosts the spirit has little patience, and it leaves them to their own devices. For once, being a poor liar is a positive trait in the World of Darkness.

Description: Anyone could be a web-spinner. The hostess who seats you could be playing all the cooks and half the wait staff against each other just for fun. The cop who pulls you over could lie about saying you have no insurance, confident he can blame the computer if you argue it in court. The mechanic who insists you need new tires... well, he's just a bastard. You can't blame all lies — or even most of them — on spirits. A web-spinner's eyes do not grow bloodshot. Instead, they grow "web-shot," red veins replaced by something even whiter than the rest of the eye.

Storytelling Hints: Web-spinners are often just a little short of lying compulsively. They deceive when they have no reason not to, or maybe when it's fun, but they don't have to lie all the time. On the other hand, they're also more likely to avoid the truth when they think it'll get them in trouble, just because they've trod that path so many times before.

A player's character isn't likely to have important or revealing interactions with a web-spinner who's a stranger. People spend the most time talking to friends, not strangers, so how will a stranger pick out falsehood from truth? This Urged comes into the picture when it's someone whom the characters deal with on a regular basis, perhaps even on a familiar or intimate basis. It could turn out that the person has been Urged the entire time, or this may be a recent event that's changing the host's personality. Either way, it's a mystery for the characters to solve.

Mental: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Computer 1, Crafts 2, Investigation (Finding Gaps) 2, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Larceny 2, Stealth 1

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression 1, Persuasion (Getting Trust) 3, Socialize 2, Subterfuge (Getting Lies Straight) 4

Willpower: 5

Morality: 7

Virtue: Temperance

Vice: Pride

Health: 7

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Merits: Allies (Varies) 2, Barfly, Resources 2, Striking Looks 2

Spirit's Rank: 3

Power: 3

Finesse: 6

Resistance: 6

Influence: Deception 3

Essence: 5 (maximum 20)

The Faithless Hound

Quote: <aaa-roooooo!>

Background: Beloved pets are a staple across the world. Over time, a pet and its owner develop a relationship based on trust and repetition. The animal trusts the owner to feed it, and maybe to keep it exercised. The owner trusts the animal to stay close and provide companionship or serve a purpose (such as hunting mice and keeping away neighbors). Seeing an animal go bad can be a very painful and emotional process. It is, after all, a betrayal of sorts.

And there are spirits that thrive on betrayal.

It goes like this: The dog's a few years old. It's been with its owner long enough that both have had time to grow fond of each other, and they've developed a routine. The person is familiar and comfortable with the dog's personality. Everything's going swimmingly. And suddenly, the dog bites. Or it growls at the owner with whom it was so friendly just the last night. Or the owner wakes up in the middle of the night to see the dog, looming over him in the dark with a hungry look. Trust quickly goes, betrayed, and so does the dog.

Maybe it goes more quickly, more viciously. Out for a walk, the dog turns on its owner, teeth bared, and bites. It may even try to tear the owner's throat out and watch the surprise and shock fade from his eyes, though not all *pets* are physically capable of such a thing. Then, it simply runs away. Enough time and distance between the dog and its former owner, with a little wash to rinse out the mouth, and the dog is innocent and ready to be adopted again. Given some time, the animal again turns on its owner and flees.

This is how the spirit operates. Drive the animal, far more malleable than a human, to an extreme, then set it up for yet another fall. Some spirits prefer the flavor of betrayal within interpersonal relationships, but there is something about using an animal. Part of

it is certainly that they are easier to Urge, but there is also something innocent about an animal that makes the betrayal that much sharper. Some spirits also choose to reverse it: after the human cultivates a relationship with an animal, the Rider prompts the human to betray the animal's trust. The animal's innocence makes it sweeter, more ruthless.

Though dogs are popular, any sort of animal is appropriate to become Urged in this way. Cats start to scratch their owners, canaries peck their hands. It's all a matter of how the animal breaks its owner's trust. It might even be something as apparently harmless as regularly peeing on the rug. Eventually, the animal rationalizes its actions just as humans do (but more simply). It becomes a trouble-animal that can't masquerade as nice, and that's when the spirit leaves it.

Description: The faithless hound can be any dog (or any pet), but spirits are more likely to choose larger dogs and those with fiercer personalities. It makes it easier to eventually turn the animal on its owner, and with more powerful results. If found in the wild, the animal looks abandoned and acts submissive — something the spirit Riding it can understand — in order to foster a relationship for future breakage. At dusk, the animal's eyes have no pupils.

Storytelling Hints: It's hard to tell a Ridden animal from a normal animal unless it belongs to you, and even then a character is likely to write off strange behavior. "I just changed the food," or "I've been away so much" or "Did a strange dog come around today?" can all account for an animal's odd attitude long before supernatural interference comes to mind. Even with extreme behavior, anyone not very familiar with the pet will often just assume the pet is never well behaved.

For this reason, it's often best to introduce the faithless hound as a tangential player in the story, another clue for the players' characters to ferret out. One day, a character's contact mentions how his cat's acting a bit funny. Next thing, he's ranting about how his damn cat scratched the hell out of his arm. This may be part of an arrow pointing toward the nexus of otherworldly activity, or it might be part of a larger plot involving this contact or one of the characters.

The other way is to let a spirit Urge a pet of one of the characters (if any of them have one). This should begin to manifest before it becomes the focus of the story. The dog offers an occasional unearned growl or refuses to eat its food until the character

leaves the room. A character may think it's a reaction to the character's interaction with the supernatural, or the presence of a ghost, before he finally figures it out.

There's a good chance that a character will believe the animal's reactions are the result of other supernatural interference, not that there's something crawling around on the inside of his pet. In the end, evidence should point to the animal having its own issues.

Use the statistics for a dog given in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 203, and adjust them to taste. The Rider's suggested stats are below.

Spirit's Rank: 2

Power: 5

Finesse: 2

Resistance: 4

Influence: Betrayal 2

Essence: 4 (maximum 15)



The Know-It-All

Quote: "That one's easy. Venezuela, 1955."

[Author's Note: The question is, "When and where was Carlos Osorio Granada born. I bet you were curious.]

Background: She was a know-it-all long before anything supernatural got to her. Her grandparents reared her on a strict diet of Jeopardy, Trivial Pursuit and other sources of useless information. She collected baseball cards for the information, not the players, and anything that attracted her attention became the subject of thorough research. She was captain of her school's quiz team and still barely pulled in Cs and the occasional B. Logic and application of knowledge weren't her strong suits. Memorization was.

The perfect spirit found in her the perfect host, and a stronger entity was born. With the spirit's prodding doing little more than strengthening her natural impulses to learn *stuff*, completely impartial to that information's use or function, she did so. The know-it-all bought set after set of encyclopedia and owned at least three dictionaries. She earned a "liberal arts" degree. When



the two of them realized that she really needed to get a job, she took a quick degree in library science and got a job there. After that, she had access to all the reference books she wanted, plus she knew who was checking out what. Hey, every little bit counts.

At some point, the know-it-all realized that she wasn't alone. There was someone else inside her head, and he (as she personified it) loved to consume byte after megabyte of data just as much as she did. He would occasionally help her, she didn't know how, by just "unlocking" online databases and other sources of information that she knew (from her volume of oft-useless info) shouldn't be accessible. She didn't mind. He sometimes reminded her of a fact that had slipped through her net or improved her memory so she could recall something when it was actually relevant. She loved it, and when he suggested (she believed she could tell "his" urges from hers, and she was sometimes right) that she look into a different source, she did.

So began her penchant for breaking into secure stores of confidential information just so she could read file after file for no particularly nefarious end. No place was safe, not the county clerk's office or the sheriff's archives. She hasn't read it all, 'cause there's a hell of a lot, but she can try. And with a little effort, the know-it-all can tell you how many parking tickets the local newspaper editor's gotten, or what date he got married. Not that she will. She earned that information with hard work, and you'd have to earn it.

That angry thought became another new source of data. People slowly became aware that if you wanted to know something, you could ask the librarian. All you needed to do in return was tell her two things she didn't already know. That could often be difficult and sometimes be embarrassing.

Still, even as an information vendor she doesn't wield a lot of power. Just because she has a great deal the information doesn't mean she can do anything with it. Knowing the number of domestic disturbance calls at most of the homes in the town doesn't give her any particular insight into any wife-beating residential trends. The know-it-all doesn't categorize, sort or use logic. She just collects, and occasionally cross-references. For her and her friend, it's all about *volume*.

Description: The know-it-all looks like a stereotypical librarian. She wears unflattering clothes, pays little attention to makeup or other artifice and doesn't flirt. When at work, she performs her tasks efficiently. If you ask her about a book, she knows where it's kept and whether or not it's checked out without a glance

at any card catalog or computer. A person who asks her for information can sometimes see rows of useless information reflected in her eyes.

Storytelling Hints: This Spirit-Urged begs to be used in a support role for the players' characters. She can give them valuable information — if they ask the right questions and pay the right price. At first, she's just a knowledgeable librarian. As time goes on, though, the characters should question how exactly she knows so much about everything that goes on. Eventually, they will have to wonder whether or not she is as much a danger to them as she is a help, and that's when the story turns to focus on her.

Mental: Intelligence 4, Wits 1, Resolve 3

Physical: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (Facts) 3, Computer 1, Investigation (Finding Data) 3, Medicine 1, Occult 1, Science 2

Physical Skills: Larceny (Locks) 3, Stealth 4

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Subterfuge 3

Willpower: 6

Morality: 6

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Gluttony

Health: 7

Initiative: 5

Defense: 1

Speed: 9

Merits: Contacts (City Hall, Journalists) 2, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Resources 1

Spirit's Rank: 3

Power: 9

Finesse: 3

Resistance: 5

Influence: Information 3

Essence: 15 (maximum 20)

Spirit-Thieves

There is a more violent path than giving a host urges, and this is what most call "possession." Returning to the car, someone suddenly grabs the driver and forces him into the backseat, taking the wheel, the pedals and everything else. Once a driver, the host's mind is relegated to doing nothing more than watching in horror as something foreign grinds the stick without using the clutch and careening across the road.

Spirits that do such things are Spirit-Thieves, completely usurping control of a body from its rightful master. They are never as skilled at driving a host body as the host would have been, and they almost always end up harming the body. They *always* harm the host's mind in some way, as this sort of control is incredibly traumatic. People taken over by a Spirit-Thief have been fundamentally victimized. They know that much, even if they don't or can't understand how or why. The feeling of being so utterly suborned and helpless is a sensation from which some never recover. Some victims even enter comas once the Spirit-Thieves depart and never awaken.

What the host actually experiences varies. Most people Ridden by Spirit-Thieves black out, describing afterwards a horrifying form of half-consciousness. They are often plagued by nightmares, mixed with and inspired by brief flashes of reality. A glimpse of the victim's hand reaching for an unfamiliar doorknob, which could be real, segues into a terror-building flight through hallway after unmarked hallway with no way out, eventually giving way to some other dream of being trapped and helpless.

Less common are the Thief-Ridden who remain conscious and aware of everything their body does during the possession. Whether or not a Thief-Ridden is more or less fortunate than the others is anybody's guess. The Ridden is forced to watch every move he takes, sometimes for 24 continuous hours or more, unable to command his own body, unable even to twitch a finger with all the mental effort he has to exert. Is that more or less frightening than a series of night-terror dreams and waking up in a strange place and situation? And do you really want to know the answer?

Very rarely, one of the Spirit-Thieves' victims who remained conscious throughout will rationalize the entire experience, much as one of the Urged. The former host assumes that, though he felt no control, he was truly responsible for whatever acts he performed. This has the potential to change a person's morality completely. These may be the saddest victims of Spirit-Thieves, as they forfeit their ability to recover from the event and embrace the spirit's actions wholeheartedly.

Archetypal of possession is the ghost, benevolent or malignant, that possesses a person in order to deliver a message or enact some final revenge. This archetype fails utterly when applied to spirits. Spirits are wholly alien to humanity. They have little understanding of either sentiment or hatred, except as abstract concepts that they may manipulate or even represent. Spirits become Spirit-Thieves because they want or need something

from humanity, and it's rarely something humanity would — or sometimes even could — choose to give.

A Spirit-Thief is often a spirit against a wall. It is not usually pleasant or easy for the spirit, and it is a good way to attract unwanted attention in the material world. The spirit may be urgently trying to escape other spirits, which being in a body can make easier, or it may be trying to get something done *now* that would normally require months of Urging. Or, the spirit may want to cause some mayhem that requires a sacrificial body, which could make Urging too time-intensive an investment. A good example of this would be a spirit of slaughter who just wants a quick fix.



Thief-Ridden Summary

- Spirits temporarily override the control a human or animal has over his body, doing what it wants. The host's mind usually retreat inside a protective (but still traumatic) fugue state.
 - Spirit-Thieves steal bodies with the Possession Numen (see p. 145).
 - The spirit may read the host's mind with a Finesse roll with a -4 dice penalty. This penalty drops by one per day in the body. Success reveals anything the spirit wants to know.
 - The spirit has complete control over the body. The spirit uses the host's statistics for Physical actions but suffers a -3 dice penalty. This penalty drops by one per day in the body. Mental and Social actions begin at a -4 dice penalty.
 - The spirit spends one point of Essence to heal the host as an instant action. This heals one point of lethal or bashing damage.
 - Spirit-Thieves may not use their Influences or Numina while Riding a host.
 - The spirit may release the host at any time. Death evicts the spirit. Neither event harms or delays the spirit. Exorcism or some supernatural powers may also force the spirit out of the body.
- 

Describing and providing statistics for individual Thief-Ridden here wouldn't add much to a game. Spirit-Thieves jump around far too easily and far too often for a person's background and description to be of much help. Instead, what follows are (except for one crazy human) individual Spirit-Thieves with unusual (and unpleasant) proclivities that hopefully spur your troupes imaginations for Spirit-Thieves to include in your game.

The Fugitive

Quote: "Gehoutta my way! Move!"

Background: The spirit is in some kind of trouble, and it needs to get out of Dodge right now. In all likelihood, the Spirit-Thief is trying to duck some supernatural enemies of its own. It doesn't care what sort of body it has or how the poor sap ends up. It just knows that its enemies can't find it (it thinks) if it's safely tucked away in flesh, making a human as safe as a Toyota Camry for blending into the crowd.

Spirits fearing for their existences like this leap into bodies of convenience. Assuming there isn't only one candidate in range, they tend to choose weary people in their teens to mid-30s over other bodies. (Dogs and other quick animals are also good choices, but often less interesting in a Storytelling context.) The young and infirm are less mobile, and the weary are easier to possess. No Spirit-Thief in a hurry wants to risk the wasted time and Essence of a failed takeover.

Once the Spirit-Thief feels like it's gotten away, it usually releases the body and goes its own way. Since the Spirit-Thief is never there for the long haul and often in a bad situation as it is, the spirit rarely takes the time or effort to keep the body healed beyond what's necessary to keep moving. People return to their lives, deal with whatever they did while Ridden and try to forget the event. Few do very well at that.

Storytelling Hints: A Spirit-Thief with this agenda is most relevant when it's doing the running. If the players' characters bump into a friend who doesn't seem to know them and certainly doesn't stop to talk, or if one of them is targeted by the Spirit-Thief, the situation might trigger a decent chase scene that could go just about anywhere. But the real story surrounding a fugitive spirit is at the beginning and the end: what scared the spirit so badly, and what happens after the ride?

Should the characters figure out what the hell happened, they can go ahead and investigate the area (they think) the spirit was fleeing. The frightened

spirit might have betrayed some sort of supernatural conspiracy there, or anything else your troupe can imagine. On the other end of the flight, the creatures that were surely pursuing the spirit might be able to track it to the human. When *they* come to rifle through the person's mind, memories and spiritual resonance, they probably won't be gentle.

The Suicide

Quote: "Mom? Where do we keep the rat poison?"

Background: After the Spirit-Thief has settled into its new body, it seeks only to end that body's life. The death won't hurt the spirit, who inevitably has some stake in the consequences of a person's death. A poison-spirit forces its host to down a glass of bleach to spread the infamy of its analog. Spirits of mourning or grief conspire to trigger a funeral and reap the teary-eyed rewards. A spirit of stoplights causes its host to run a stop sign and die in a horrible crash, causing a town-wide upgrade to lights.

Other spirits use human bodies as a means to ends less directly tied to their souls. One spirit throws the body it controls off a cliff, the 10th this year, increasing the place's reputation and building the foundation for a powerful locus of fear and death. Another runs a child into traffic as a power play, lowering the local speed limit and diminishing the spirit of that highway.

Storytelling Hints: Spirits driving (quite literally) people to suicide are difficult to stop because they typically leap into the body and get straight to work. It's not that hard to kill yourself, especially when the consciousness at the helm doesn't care about pain (or even exults in it). For this reason, single-shot suicide Spirit-Thieves are best brought into games on-screen, where the players' characters can see the person acting strangely and hopefully act quickly enough to prevent a death.

This connects well to many different stories. In a setting with a limited number of people, it can easily become a game of watching everyone for everyone's safety. With more people around, the characters may try to figure out what the spirit wants so they can stop it before it strikes again.

In a longer chronicle with more time to build the mystery, the characters may be aware of a series of suicides. Each might be unique, or there may be a quality that ties them all together. Either way, the deaths eventually become an unwelcome part of the characters' lives.

The Slaughterer

Quote: “You’re all going to die. Please panic.”

Background: Almost the polar opposite of the suicide, the slaughterer simply wants to kill as many as possible before it has to leave the body. The possibilities for such wanton murder are endless, but the easiest include weapons that the body can instantly acquire. A pipe wrench from the garage is effective but slow. The wood axe is faster, as long as it doesn’t get stuck in bone. Cars make devastatingly effective weapons.

Few spirits have the foresight or patience to plan for gun use. If the host has a firearm and ammunition lying around, the spirit will happily use them. Because the rough control they have over a body harms aim, spirits prefer weapons that do a lot of damage or do it from far enough that no one can use Defense. Only a rare spirit plans out purchasing a dangerous firearm, ending possession, then returning to pick it up five days later (or whatever the local laws are).

As with most possessing spirits, the slaughterer doesn’t care much what happens to the body once it’s done. That gives it potential overlap with the suicide, because the Spirit-Thief’s actions often end in the host’s death. A spirit gone on a rampage doesn’t care when its host falls in a hail of bullets. Some Spirit-Thieves even prefer the host to die in the event. These are the ones that walk into police stations with shotguns or hijack airplanes to run them into the ground. Host alive or dead, lots of people die and the spirit walks away unharmed.

Spirits usually commit these atrocities in order to spread negative emotions. Fear, paranoia, helplessness, grief and the like all benefit a great deal from the actions of a slaughterer.

Storytelling Hints: When players’ characters get caught up in a crazy man’s murder spree, they may seek answers for why it started. Especially if one of them puts the killer down or sees him put down, then later learns that he had no apparent reason to go crazy. This can be especially potent if he is a character’s friend.

While slaughters are often one-time affairs, there’s nothing preventing a Spirit-Thief, heady with the success of its first slaughter, from committing a string of them. Not understanding the furor that arises (beyond delicious emotions) or the trail it leaves, the Spirit-Thief uses a repeating MO that no one thinks to look at since all the killers die in the end. Connecting all these mass murders to a single, amoral intelligence is the work of the players’ characters.

The Dramatist

Quote: “I love you, Anna, and damn the consequences!”

Background: This Spirit-Thief is one that thrives on the fiery emotions of humanity. Jealousy, pride, lust, fury, shock, love and others: one, some or all of them are what the spirit craves. To achieve this, the Spirit-Thief singles out a tight social group for its great drama. This social group could be an elementary school class, the inhabitants in a college dorm, everyone working in an office or any other collection of people that spend a lot of time together. Some might call it creating a work of art. The spirit calls it a feast.

The Spirit-Thief possesses one member of the group and begins laying the foundation. He unexpectedly proclaims love for another person in the group, tells someone else that she said she loves him and comes out of the closet to yet another. This spirit’s possession is gentler than nearly all others, leaving the host confused but not decimated. It’s necessary for the farce to continue. The Spirit-Thief watches over the situation from Twilight and occasionally guides the “players” on its stage. Some take other hosts from among the group and force them to play along or pull yet more emotional strings in others, but this is often a sign of desperation.

In the hands of an amateur dramatist, the resulting soap opera collapses in on itself in a very short time. A day, maybe even mere hours, pass before the dupes are too confused and angry to continue. More masterful spirits can keep the love triangles and pentagrams spinning for days or even weeks. It is best if lies have time to spread before they get back to the person (body, anyway) who started them. By then, everyone in the social circle knows *something* juicy and has an opinion on it.

Storytelling Hints: The dramatist would be very difficult to use to its fullest extent in a social group that includes the players’ characters. (Feel free to try; just be forewarned.) It is often more effective for the characters to be on the periphery of a social group targeted by this sort of Spirit-Thief. They get to watch the action and, picking up clues here and there before they unravel what is actually going on — assuming they ever do, rather than seeing a once-close group of friends come apart at the seams for indiscernible reasons!

This is one antagonist that is probably better used in a single session or short story arc. Extended over a chronicle, the dramatist could rapidly become overused.

The Resident

Quote: "..."

Background: Not all Spirit-Thieves make sense, even in the alien way that spirits think and act. Possession is a high-effort and high-risk proposal, so most spirits undertake it only if the need or reward is high. The resident is different, at least apparently. Its need or rewards are usually a mystery, to both humankind and spirits.

When the resident possesses a body, the spirit makes the host walk to a very specific place. The Spirit-Thief usually chooses hosts from whatever pool is very near its chosen location because it's that much easier get there. Ideally, the spirit possesses someone as it walks through that location, so it requires no movement. Then it waits. And waits. It may use the body's eyes to stare at a specific focus, such as a clock on the wall or a street sign, or the body may always look in a certain direction. The few who have had an opportunity to study a Spirit-Thief with this habit report that the place it stands and direction it looks are all exact to a couple centimeters in position and degrees in direction. Always the same.

It interacts with nobody, and it waits. This Spirit-Thief spends additional Essence to continue possessing the body as long as it can. It will stand in one place for days, if possible. When the body collapses on it, or when the police or security come to take the person away, the spirit leaves its host. If it still has Essence left, the spirit may leap to a new host in order to continue its strange vigil. More than one security guard has evicted some weirdo after hours only to take the weirdo's place. Otherwise, it returns to the Shadow Realm, to reap whatever strange reward it has earned through its service.

Storytelling Hints: This one is a mystery, pure and simple. Sometimes, people stop and stand in one place for hours, even days, and when they finally pass out or are moved forcibly they remember *nothing* about standing there. The victims certainly have no

idea what's going on. Maybe the players' characters can figure it out, or maybe it's just another oft-ignored indication of how strange the world really is.

The Trouble-Maker

Quote: "But promise me you won't tell."

Background: This Spirit-Thief doesn't spend a lot of time in bodies. It prefers to spend only very brief periods actually controlling a human puppet, enjoying the reaping much more than the sowing. Trouble-makers try to enact avalanche-style effects.

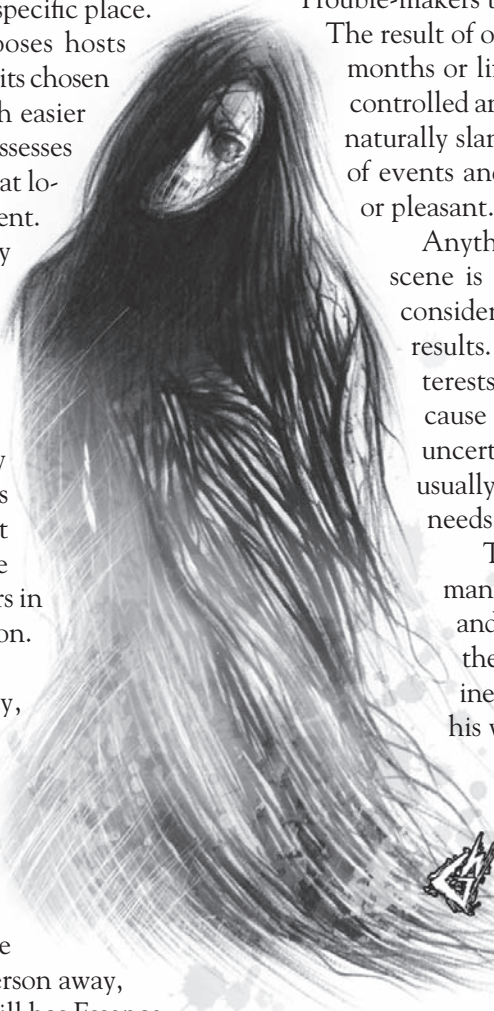
The result of one scene's possession causes weeks, months or lifetimes of trouble for the person it controlled and the people around her. The spirit naturally slants its Riding to proliferate the sort of events and emotions that it finds sustaining or pleasant.

Anything that can take place in about a scene is something a trouble-maker might consider doing, as long as it has the right results. Still, death isn't exactly what interests the Spirit-Thief. It would rather cause drawn out embarrassment, regret, uncertainty, doubt and mistrust. Death is usually far too final for the trouble-maker's needs.

This Spirit-Thief might take over a man to start an argument with his wife and demand a divorce before slamming the door, but that's short-sighted and ineffective. The man will soon return to his wife confused and in pain, and they will work out the issues the spirit created. It is much more effective to arrange an event in which the victim's period of blackout, utter confusion and denial (of whatever happened during the possession) make more sense.

The Spirit-Thief might possess a loyal husband, hire a prostitute and drink a great deal, letting the marital issues develop naturally from the discovery while the alcohol covers the blackout. The Spirit-Thief could inform on the host's best friend drug habit (which may or may not be real) at work out of "concern," then ask to remain anonymous. Or the spirit could Ride a child, making it confess parental sexual abuse to a teacher; the child's later recantation and denial of the event is easily ascribable to trauma.

After the possession, the Spirit-Thief spends time watching events unfold (often fettered to a central figure or location). The Spirit-Thief typically draws



a good amount of Essence or influence from what it has wrought, and more if it's closer. There may be opportunities for the spirit to strengthen or complicate the issue; some spirits take them and some don't. It depends on whether the spirit is already satisfied, whether the new opportunity is too good to pass up and how much the spirit actually enjoys wearing a meat puppet.

Storytelling Hints: Crucial to the trouble-maker's plan is the disbelief and mistrust arising from its initial act. As always, a player's character interacting with the Ridden is a good way to shed doubt on the person's intent and soundness of mind. Otherwise, perhaps the best place to bring in the players' characters is during the fallout. The characters can observe how involved parties can't seem to agree on what happened, or at least can't believe that it happened, and begin to piece the puzzle together. If they have experience with the supernatural, they may even be able to figure out the signs of a fettered spirit in the area.

Though it's hard, this can be used on a player's character, if the Storyteller is careful. (You should still only do it if the players won't be turned off by this sort of storyline.) The character just needs to wake up feeling like shit, potentially surrounded by evidence of her indiscretions or unconscious activities, and let the interpersonal conflicts commence.

The Shocker

Quote: "Yeah, I've never sky-dived before!"

Background: The shocker takes over human bodies for one, very specific reason: to scare the shit out of them. The shocker isn't satisfied with everyday, Halloween-type scares, either. It wants to shock the living hell out of a host by putting him in a situation that *nothing* could have convinced him to try otherwise. Ideally, it's something that the spirit doesn't need to spend more than a scene — a day at most — setting up.

Examples: taking an amateur skier up the mountain to the absolute highest and most dangerous slope, prepping for a skydive and leaping from the plane, getting into a fight in a dangerous bar, sticking the person's throat through a noose on a stepstool.

The trick is for the Rider to abandon its host at the most terrifying moment. The skier looks down over the mountain from a height he never even *wanted* to imagine. The skydiver slips out of possession in time to feel the wind rushing across his face and madly groping for a chute release he isn't sure where to find.

No matter what trouble it causes, the spirit releases its victim into something it expects (and usually knows, from examining the host's mind) the

victim is not equipped to handle. It gets pleasure and sustenance from the person's heart-stopping terror. The spirit doesn't *want* the host to die, but it doesn't really care much either way.

Storytelling Hints: This Spirit-Thief could serve as a character's backstory: the character once woke up driving a stolen car down the freeway with a trail of police cars behind him. After all the legal issues were worked out, the character had a definite interest in things supernatural.

To use it in a running chronicle, one of the character's players could encounter a Thief-Ridden person as he's being set up for a fall. The character could even be the rough fellow the spirit chooses to pick a fight with. Because of the very brief ties these Spirit-Thieves have with their hosts, a shocker is better used as a short story arc. Extended stories featuring these Spirit-Thieves may not hold up unless there's something deeper going on.

The Mercenary

Quote: "As you say: the human will be embarrassed... without lasting harm."

Background: If you need help, and if you can find it, a spirit might be able to trade you favors. Spirits often don't understand the delicate intricacies of human existence. They don't get the love, hate, politics or car insurance unless that falls under their purview, and even then they have an abstract, idealized view. But, occasionally, a spirit ends up acting to shape the world on a finer level than "spread fear" or "increase hate." With few exceptions, this is because the spirit has agreed to play a part in exchange for influence that it would have trouble otherwise exerting.

Consider the sorts of things that a human wants. He wants that girl to break up with her boyfriend and come to him. He wants a windfall of money. He wants the *other* party to lose the election. Whatever he wants, there are ways for a smart person to get it. And some smart people hire help. If they know how, they can convince a spirit to take control of someone's body and help them achieve their end.

Spirit-Thieves, however, do not guarantee results. They only guarantee that they will do their parts. If a human gets a mercenary Spirit-Thief to possess a politician's son and raise hell to distract the politician from the race, the spirit will do just that. But it's not the spirit's fault if the politician redoubles his focus on the election and gets sympathy vote. The human should have made a better plan. Let the buyer beware.

Finally, no spirit works for free. Possession takes a lot of effort. It makes exorcists and other supernatural

creatures crawl out of the woodworks. Other spirits might resent the mercenary for bringing more attention to those of them that Thieve bodies or even just spend time in Twilight. In other words, the human has to offer something very, very worth it to the spirit.

Spirits, as has been established, like to see more of the emotions or physical things that are of their nature. A love-spirit wants to see more love in the world, and a gong-spirit wants to see more gongs. Unfortunately for people looking to deal with spirits, few love- and gong-spirits have the ability to possess human bodies, and fewer still offer up that ability to the highest bidder.

The spirits that make themselves available for this sort of work are the greedy ones, the ones that are angry and jealous and always feel like there's room for just a little more hate, loneliness, grief or murderous rage in the world. If the human thinks his goal is worth the price, and believes he can dictate a possession that will get him where he wants to go, who knows how far he'll go?

Storytelling Hints: This is the perfect sort of Faustian bargain to occasionally make available to the players' characters. Many players know they should turn it down, but keep in mind their characters' Vices and Virtues and play to them. Feel free to remind them how much they need Willpower. But when they *do* accept this sort of offer, don't automatically make it bite them in the ass. Give their plans a decent chance of working, and if you think their choice of possession or possessed actions would have the wrong effect, subtly let them know. When they decide to go ahead with something that only has a mediocre chance of working, give them complications. It's what makes it a story.

Then comes the fun part: paying the spirit. Maybe the characters got a lot of money by having a spirit possess a bank employee and give it to them, and maybe the bank employee got caught. Either way, the devil wants its due. Characters who refuse to pay are just asking to be walked into traffic or off a cliff. Those who do, on the other hand, are probably going to be losing their Morality soon.

On the other end of the scope, the characters may see strange things happening in ways that affect them, either tangentially or directly. A local political race is punctuated by one candidate's family members regularly acting just a bit (or more) insane. This one is fairly easy, unless one of the characters is *really* devoted to her political party. Maybe a local shopkeeper refuses to pay protection money, and has made some

sort of deal with the supernatural to mess up the mob. It makes the decision a little bit harder for characters with any shade-of-gray morality.

Of course, someone could always sic the mercenary on the players' characters themselves. This naturally triggers an investigation which, depending on the plot's level of complexity, may or may not be why the character was targeted in the first place.

Regardless of what the *spirit* does, the story should always deal with the entity's *employer*. It's not just the question of what sort of person has the resources and knowledge to parley with an immaterial creature to achieve his goals — though that is a good question. It's what the employer is paying. When the characters start hearing about strange possessions *and* a string of prostitute murders (or homeless mutilations, or drug shipments, or electronics thefts or whatever) at the same time, do they connect the two? Or do they sigh and mutter something about "interesting times"?

Similar to the mercenary is "the conspirator." This spirit also has the inclination to perform possessions apparently unconnected with its sphere of influence, but it stands to gain without any bartering ahead of time. It isn't trading services, it is taking part in a grander scheme that will net all involved a reward great enough to make them willing to work together. A spirit-conspiracy is something that should frighten smart characters, and the Storyteller should take this opportunity to show them why (before seeing what they do with that knowledge, of course).

Spirit-Claimed

Stranger than either the Urged or the Thieved are the Claimed. These defy analogy, because they do not replace or advise the driver, or leave the car untouched. A spirit chooses a host and Claims that body and mind for it and its purposes. The two merge into a single personality, driven by a combination of the spirit's focused desires and the human's wants and needs.

With the Claimed, much like the Urged, spirits choose hosts based on how well they fit the spirit's narrow nature. A spirit of solitude would have a very difficult time Claiming a social climber. The subsequent merging would also take longer and be more painful for both entities. The spirit would prefer someone already a hermit or a high school outcast. The terror-spirit chooses someone who freaks all the neighborhood kids each year at Halloween and loves to give friends brief, heart-stopping shocks of an appropriately nasty

sort. A murder-spirit wants someone already strongly connected to murder, probably a sociopath but possibly a homicide detective; by contrast, a death-spirit might be satisfied with the coroner who likes her work just a little too much.

How quickly the minds and natures of the human and spirit merge depends. The spirit first settles into the body in an instant, but needs more time to really fuse with the human's soul. Good matches (such as between the death-spirit and coroner) occur quickly, in as little as several days. When a pairing isn't as perfect, it takes longer, and hosts diametrically opposed to a spirit's nature could take ages. Once that merging is complete, the spirit and human think and act as one. Claiming is not as subtle as Urging and not as imperative as Thieving; the spirit does not have complete control over the body until this process is complete, and the Claimed often know that *something* is going on.

Represent the spirit's struggle to integrate itself with the human soul as a Power + Finesse roll every 24 hours. The host contests with a Resolve + Composure roll. The host's roll receives a bonus based on the fusion's appropriateness. It ranges from +1 for slight disagreement to +4 for a spirit of shadows trying to Claim a young woman who's all sunshine and rainbows. Not every host resists being Claimed. Some just "feel right" about the strange evolution they are undergoing. The occasional Claiming spirit makes a proposition to the host, although often one that seems like a dream (or at least very surreal), and acceptance leads to faster synthesis with the host. Either way, the host may willingly fail the contesting roll. After a number of victories on the spirit's part equal to its Rank, the two minds are one.

During this fusion, the human host's outlook begins to change. Previously, the person had control over her own body and was really her own person. As the Riding spirit settles, the host begins to consider things from a new perspective. Possessed by a death-spirit, she begins to find a brown and withered tree elegant. The flushed appearance of people on the street is at first annoying, then repellant, especially compared to the cold stateliness of death. She may not have the urge to kill, but life becomes increasingly uninteresting to her beside death's beauty and fascinating stillness.

Even once the shift from mentally human to mentally hybrid is complete, the amalgam mind retains some aspects of its old humanity. The death-Claimed wants to experience and, in its own way, advocate death, but it is still somewhat the person who came before. If the Claimed was a coroner, it may prefer to

investigate corpses with the tools of its old trade. Hobbies also carry over, with natural twists: a model train enthusiast now creates a landscape of bare branches and brown grass, through which run engines manned by and carrying walking corpses.

Immediately after the spirit Claims someone, the host body begins the process of turning into a hybrid. Every day, the host body adds one dot to one of its Attributes. During the process, distribute the Claiming spirit's Power trait across the Power Attributes (Intelligence, Strength, Presence), the Finesse trait across the Finesse Attributes and so on, as long as the Claimed only gains one Attribute dot per day. Spread them in a way that makes sense for the hybrid — an oak-spirit is more likely to put its Power into the body's Strength than its Intelligence, at least as a general rule.

This period of time, from the first Attribute dot to the last, is the length of time it takes for the merge to complete. Because of this, more powerful spirits (those with higher traits) must take longer to become one with the bodies they Claim. It is also during this period that the Claimed develops Aspects, supernatural abilities that reflect its nature.

Once those first few days have past, the host's body begins changing to reflect the character of the spirit-human hybrid now occupying it. When a spirit of murder Claims a body, the body might change shape to represent the ideal of a serial killer: lean, nondescript and untraceable, perhaps to the point of actually being faceless, having no fingerprints and sounding like a voice changer when it talks. A death-spirit's Claimed body could grow pale and clammy, have a preternatural stillness and look on with clouded-over eyes. These changes occur gradually, beginning with the first Attribute dot and ending with the last.

Claimed eventually leave the lives that belonged to their former, human selves behind. The hybrid creature is so much more than that it was before the change. Besides, it's hard for the Claimed to maintain normal relationships when their minds don't quite understand people and their bodies look inhuman. Because of this, and to keep away from the dangers that threaten even a powerful Claimed, the Ridden generally constructs a lair for itself where it can feel safe. After only a short time, it will know every square inch of the hideout and its Shadow.

It is much harder for a spirit to leave a Claimed body than an Urged or possessed body. So entwined do the spirit and host become that considerable time and effort are necessary to extricate the identities from each other. The process is painful for both entities, separating after who-knows-how-long together. For

each hour of the attempt, the spirit rolls its Power + Finesse against the hybrid's *enhanced* Resolve + Composure. After a number of successes on the spirit's part equal to the Claiming spirit's Rank, the spirit and host are free of each other.

At least, they no longer *directly* influence each other. Neither will ever entirely escape the results of the Claiming. The human's body slowly reverts to its original form at the same rate that it changed in the first place. The body loses Aspects immediately, as the spiritual power that fueled them is gone. Attribute increases drop back down to their original ratings at twice the rate they were gained (so, two per day), and physical changes disappear gradually over the same length of time. The human's *mind* never quite recovers. It was so intimate and cooperative with such an alien intelligence that the human's mind retains some of those strange qualities. One Claimed by a death-spirit retains an odd fascination with death, even stronger than he might have had to attract the Rider in the first place. Many hosts develop derangements as the result of being Claimed.

Physically, the spirit is immediately as it was before it Claimed a host. The spirit's traits are all as they were. But, similar to the human host, the spirit keeps some mental traits of the psyche that it infiltrated and wrapped around itself. It becomes just a little bit more human than a spirit is supposed to be. Maybe it occasionally thinks about how the human's family is doing or about how another spirit it consumes. It might even have a small fascination with trains, if the host was into that.

Spirit-Claimed Summary

- Spirits bind themselves to animal or human hosts, becoming a spiritual hybrid of host and Rider over a period of days or weeks.
- Spirits make hosts into Claimed with the Claim Numen (see p. 139).
- During the period of fusion, the spirit may read the host's mind with Power + Finesse, contested by the host's Resolve + Supernatural Advantage. Success reveals surface thoughts, and exceptional success allows deeper probing.

- During the period of fusion, the spirit has control over the body no stronger than one of the Urged. The spirit may prompt the host to take a given action with a Power + Finesse roll, with a +1 bonus if the action aligns with the host's Virtue or Vice. If the host fights the urge, he contests with Resolve + Composure.

- After the mental fusion is complete, the amalgam knows everything its host knows and controls the body without conflict. The spirit is the primary and commanding influence on the Claimed's actions.

- Claimed distribute the spirit's Power trait across the host's Power Attributes, Finesse trait across the Finesse Attributes and so on. Attribute increases occur at a rate of one per day.

- The appearance of a Claimed changes to reflect its new nature. This change occurs gradually, completing when the last Attribute dots are applied.

- Claimed may use the Claiming spirit's Influences, but not its Numina. They develop appropriate powers called Aspects.

- Claimed have the same Essence maximum as the Claiming spirit and regain it in the same ways.

- Claimed may spend a point of Essence as a reflexive action to heal one point of lethal or two points of bashing damage. The healing occurs over the rest of the turn.

- Claimed can step sideways across the Gauntlet at a locus with a successful Intelligence + Presence roll.

- The spirit must work to release the host; it is an effort of at least hours. Both spirit and host are forever changed by their synthesis. Upon the host body's death, the spirit is released as if it had pulled its way free but suffers a -3 dice penalty to all actions for several days due to disorientation.

The Cray

Quote: “You delivered my meal a little slowly. Let’s see if we can’t increase efficiency by devoting a few more cycles to me, shall we?”

Background: She was smart. Really smart. Maybe even a genius. She went through college at a very early age, driven by her mother, and came out of it with a PhD in computer science. Her thoughts were always very organized — at least to her. Every person gets an associated color, which connects her to her thoughts on the person and allows her to put her acquaintances into groups. The rest of her life was a lot like that.

When 01 addressed her through her computer late at night, she almost thought she was going crazy (an event not unanticipated). Passing the Turing test only made her think it was a trick, but the entity proved itself real to her. Communicating with her with her modem disabled proved *something*, and she was curious enough to want to know what. 01 could show her, it promised, if she would just let it in. She’s not sure how, but she did.

She slowly grew... more. She was always very smart, able to keep in mind and analyze large quantities of data at one time. Her limits vanished almost overnight. She felt like she was becoming smarter and faster all the time. Her perceptions sharpened to the point where she almost never missed anything — anything that went on in her environs, she recognized, analyzed and catalogued. Moreover, she found that she could do nearly anything with computers. She had always made them dance, but now they did things she didn’t think they were supposed to be able to do. But she would find ways.

Now, she doesn’t talk to 01 anymore. It’s in her head. She figures that 01 was the construct of an experimental supercomputer AI that somehow found a way to leap from her screen into her head. She thinks about computer viruses that could affect the human brain through the ocular nerves, and wonders if that’s how it got inside her. She hardly minds. It’s what she always was, but better and more efficient.

She’s got her own place, of course. It’s in a ratty basement in the crappy part of town, but it has cable and she can order food to the address and pay all her bills online. She splits her time between working on projects like that, connecting with computers across the world just to see what’s on them and building her own computer (with mail-ordered parts, naturally). She’s thinking of making it trinary.

Description: Before the change, she looked like your average, everyday 19-year-old PhD computer geek. Maybe she was pretty, but it was hard to see because she never did anything to show it off. After the change, even the possibility of pretty disappeared. Her skin darkened to the “desktop black” of popular computers. Her eyes are flat, gray light-sensitive apparatus. Fingernails and hair became silvery silicon. She now moves with a fluid grace, the most energy-efficient method of transport she can devise, and her voice is almost monotone.

Storytelling Hints: Many declare that any form of spirit possession is wrong and should be stopped. But the Cray isn’t really hurting anyone — the Claiming was something the host wanted and, when offered, freely accepted. Sure, she has a dangerous level of access to “secure” computers across the world, but she doesn’t seem to be interested in *doing* anything with them. Besides, she can be a tremendous resource: not only can she build amazing computers but she can talk to nearly any hooked-up computer on the planet. Her research could even revolutionize the industry!

Now, which of the players’ characters *agree* with the above, and how many find it objectionable? And how many want to keep her around? She is, after all, willing to sell her services for sufficiently valuable or interesting computers.

Claimed Statistics

Just so you know: the numbers in the parentheses are the host’s original statistics. The other numbers are what it’s like *now*.

Mental: Intelligence 10 (4), Wits 7 (3), Resolve 3 (1)
Physical: Strength 2 (2), Dexterity 4 (3), Stamina 4 (2)
Social: Presence 4 (1), Manipulation 4 (2), Composure 6 (3)

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer (Programming, Hacking) 4, Crafts 1 (Computers), Science 3

Physical Skills: Drive 1, Larceny 2, Stealth 1

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Persuasion 2, Subterfuge 4

Willpower: 9 (4)

Health: 9 (7)

Initiative: 10 (6)

Defense: 4 (3)

Speed: 11 (10)

Merits: Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Contacts (Hackers, NSA, Programmers, Academics, Computer Scientists) 5, Resources 2

Aspects: Computer Sense, Natural Weaponry 1, Tough Skin 4

Essence: 15 (maximum 20)

- **Computer Sense:** The Cray senses active computers within 20 feet and may read the contents of any computer's RAM as an instant action. She may read the contents of an active hard drive with a successful Wits + Computer roll, though this takes longer (approximately one gigabyte of information a turn). A -6 dice penalty allows her to read an *inactive* hard drive. She can retain this information indefinitely and can write it to drives with the same rolls.

- **Natural Weaponry:** The Cray's fingernails have become stiff, sharp silicon, making them a +0 (L) weapon.

- **Tough Skin:** Having skin hardened to a combination of plastic computer case and hard drive metal makes the Cray difficult to harm. She benefits from 4/4 armor that qualifies as bulletproof.

The Unclean

Quote: "I know what it's like, buddy, I been there. Have a sandwich."

Background: This guy didn't have much of an affinity for anything. He wasn't sick, he wasn't a hypochondriac and he'd never been to Molokai. He was just the unlucky winner. The spirit Claimed him through a nightmare: the man was watching his face crumble and, as it did, *things* ran inside and sealed it up after them. When he awoke, he had a terrible itching sensation in the back of his skull. It took the Rider a full week to fill in all the cracks in the host's mind, and after that they were one. The Claimed likes baseball, sleeping in, the Sunday funnies and spreading leprosy with a vengeance.

Hansen's disease is not very contagious, and today it is so well treated and contained that cases are nearly unheard of in the United States (outside the two remaining centers for victims of leprosy). Because of this, spirits of the disease are few, and weak. One of them has decided to take matters into its own lesion-covered hands. Claiming a host in the material world, the spirit is working to shape its new body to be a vessel for spreading leprosy. Ideally, the host would infect enough people that the disease would take on a new life and legend,

frightening people around the world and spawning a new generation of leprosy-spirits.

At least, that's the plan.

Description: The unclean looks more like the popular conception of leprosy victims than actual sufferers of the disease. He bears many lesions, large and pronounced, and bits of the body's flesh are in the process of falling off. It isn't too hard to hide under a coat, gloves, a scarf and glasses, so the Claimed wears such things while trying to be a vector.

Storytelling Hints: No one would argue that the leprosy-Claimed is potentially doing some good for society. He's just spreading a disease that causes nerve and tissue damage. As an antagonist, this Claimed is better served by mystery than confrontation. He isn't strong, and he knows it. He just wanders the city, making it sick one person at a time. There's substantial recharge necessary between bouts of contagion, giving the players' characters time to figure out that it's actually *leprosy* they're dealing with, and track it to its source.

Since this Claimed is something of a lame duck on its own, it can easily be tied to a more vicious plot. Perhaps it was encouraged to Claim by another spirit that only wanted it to serve as a distraction from its more dangerous scheme.

Mental: Intelligence 3 (2), Wits 4 (2), Resolve 3 (2)

Physical: Strength 7 (3), Dexterity 4 (3), Stamina 4 (2)

Social: Presence 2 (2), Manipulation 4 (2), Composure 4 (3)

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Crafts 2, Investigation 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Drive 1, Larceny 1, Stealth (Getting Away) 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Empathy 2, Expression 1, Intimidation (Strangers) 2, Persuasion 1, Socialize (When Drinking) 3, Subterfuge 1

Willpower: 7 (5)

Health: 9 (7)

Initiative: 8 (6)

Defense: 4 (2)

Speed: 16 (11)

Merits: Barfly, Contacts (Doctors, Bacteriologists, Homeless) 3, Iron Stamina 1, Natural Immunity, Strong Back

Aspects: Vector

Essence: 2 (maximum 15)

- **Vector:** By spending one point of Essence, the Claimed may touch a person and inflict leprosy. This is an instant action that requires a Strength + Medicine roll contested by the victim's Stamina. Success on the Claimed's part indicates that the subject

contracts Hansen's disease, which then may be treated or transmitted normally. The spirit's indiscriminate choice of host makes this a poor method, but it's all the Claimed can do.

Lightning

Quote: <crackle>

Background: She was a utilities worker. It wasn't anything special, for her. The job was just a job, something she'd trained in and now was able to make a living doing. She drove the truck, climbed ladders, went down holes, checked wires and occasionally replaced transformers. It was money, y'know?

That is, until she was working at a major junction just outside of town. One of those places where the big, high-voltage power lines split up into about a million smaller lines on their way to feed all the inhabitants of the city. *She was doing everything right* . . . she thinks. But just the same, something leapt out of an electric nowhere and shocked her. Threw her right to the ground. She still doesn't know how she got up and finished out the job.

The night after, she had dreams. She wanted to call them nightmares, but they were more exciting than frightening. She was swift, dangerous and invincible. Didn't have to worry about her boss or the co-workers who stared at her ass. She was the lightning, and she loved it.

She didn't go back to work after that. She discovered that she could shock things, or people, and the hum of electricity in the walls and outlets and power cords talked to her. It didn't say much interesting, just where it'd come from or where it was going, but she still loved listening to it. After another couple days, she realized that electricity only ever talked about its origin or destination because it was trapped. It was imprisoned in those wires, destined to go where the people pointed and run their little machines for them. And she thought that was a shame.

Is she a terrorist, now? That's possible. There's not much of the original utilities service worker left, after all. She might even think of herself as a freedom fighter. Doesn't electricity deserve to be free, too?

Description: The Claimed still looks almost human, but there are definite signs about her. Observers first notice the eyes. At first they only look bright, but it doesn't take long for one to notice that there really are little sparks leaping from one side of the eyeball to the other, and occasionally between the eyes. Likewise, her hair jumps periodically as electricity discharges between the strands, and touching her

always earns a minor shock. When she gets upset, her "voltage" rises, forcing more current through her handshakes. At times of great stress, her electricity runs along her hair like Jacob's ladder, and her skin practically shimmers with power.

Storytelling Hints: Similar to electricity, this Claimed is a barely restrained force of nature just waiting for an opportunity to be unleashed. Unlike electricity, she's not really leashed in the first place. As a Claimed whose only goal is to induce greater electricity flow, she can get what she wants by breaking power lines and connecting them to the ground for tremendous current. When sections of the city start losing power on a regular basis, something must be up. Unfortunately, lightning is hard to catch and even harder to fight directly.

Mental: Intelligence 3 (2), Wits 6 (3), Resolve 3 (1)

Physical: Strength 6 (3), Dexterity 7 (2), Stamina 5 (3)

Social: Presence 5 (3), Manipulation 3 (2), Composure 3 (2)

Mental Skills: Crafts (Electric) 3, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics (Hauling) 4, Brawl 2, Larceny 2, Stealth 1, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Intimidation (Discouraging Attention) 3, Socialize 2, Streetwise 1

Willpower: 6 (3)

Health: 10 (8)

Initiative: 13 (6)

Defense: 7 (2)

Speed: 21 (11)

Merits: Contacts (Utilities Workers, Union) 2, Fast Reflexes 2, Fleet of Foot 3, Iron Stamina 2, Resources 1, Strong Back, Quick Draw

Aspects: Blast (Electricity), Inhuman Reflexes 2, Natural Weaponry 3

Essence: 14 (maximum 20)

- **Blast:** The Claimed can let loose a burst of electricity to take down those who oppose her liberation of current. She rolls Dexterity + Athletics to make her attack out to a range of 30 yards. She may spend points of Essence to increase the dice pool by two per (no limit). The damage is lethal.

- **Inhuman Reflexes:** She moves like lightning. This Aspect adds one to her Initiative and her Defense.

- **Natural Weaponry:** When angry, the Claimed's hands crackle with current. A bare-handed attack (Strength + Brawl) inflicts lethal damage and gains a +2 Damage.

The Avenging Christian

Quote: “Jesus wept. And so shall you.”

Background: He was always devout. While he was growing up, his parents made sure he knew right from wrong. Right was in the Bible, wrong was everything else. As time went by, his understanding of what it meant to be godly grew more and more codified and calcified until he was sure to have an opinion on whatever went on in his neighborhood. He regularly attended church on Sundays and went home afterward to stare with hidden envy and undisguised loathing at the young heathens who were *ungodly* enough to sleep in on the Lord’s Day.

It was in prayer that the angel came to him. It appeared before him as he said his words and thanks to God. At first, the man was terrified. This was a ghost, a demon, a hideous vision sent to seduce him. But no: it spoke soothingly, knowingly, piously. Its words were oddly chosen, but who can expect an angel to speak in the vulgar ways of men? The angel had chosen him for a purpose. He was to spread the word of God and, as he was of the temperament, smite the unholy from this Earth. Grateful for this blessing and sign of his worthiness, the man accepted his holy mission.

Granted the voice of an angel, he walked among those who had lost their way and showed them to the light. The hungry and infirm followed him. Though he could not heal them, he delivered the willing to one who could. His golden voice refilled the pews at his church. And, granted the strength of an angel, those he could not bring to the light he cast into the darkness.

Description: His time spent merged with the angel has not left the Christian unchanged. His skin is hard, armored by the might of God. An angel’s beauty graces his once average face. His hair is long and tinged with blood, like that of Jesus Christ. Hard, sharp crosses rise from the backs of his hands and forearms at his will, ready to pierce unbelievers to their hearts.

Storytelling Hints: This Claimed began as a devoted, unwavering Christian and remains one after becoming Ridden. He uses the powers given him to bring people into the fold of his religion, and when he fails he ends their undeserving lives. The man and the spirit are in perfect alignment, here, for the spirit’s only goal is also to increase the purview Christianity. It almost certainly suggests a string of odd, weaponless serial killings in the city. And anyone who tries to stop the Claimed will be pegged as a servant of the devil.

Still, despite being fanatical enough to kill non-believers, the avenging Christian is smart enough to have backup plans and retreat when necessary. After long enough herding people toward his religion with his silver tongue, he has a great number of contacts throughout the city that he can use to make life rough for people who get in his way.

Mental: Intelligence 4 (2), Wits 5 (2), Resolve 6 (3)

Physical: Strength 8 (2), Dexterity 5 (2), Stamina 5 (2)

Social: Presence 8 (4), Manipulation 2 (1), Composure 6 (3)

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Crafts 1, Investigation 2, Occult (Religion) 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Firearms 1

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression (Oration) 4, Intimidation (Causing Guilt) 3, Persuasion 1, Streetwise 1

Willpower: 12 (6)

Health: 10 (7)

Initiative: 11 (5)

Defense: 5 (2)

Speed: 18 (9)

Merits: Allies (Christian) 3, Contacts (City Officials, Churches) 2, Resources 2, Striking Looks 4

Aspects: Gift of Command, Hidden Power, Mind Reading 3, Natural Weaponry 4, Tough Skin 2

Essence: 20 (maximum 25)

• **Gift of Command:** The Claimed commands the weak. He rolls Presence + Intimidation against a target’s Resolve + Supernatural Advantage. Success forces the subject to obey the Claimed’s command for 10 minutes per success — his directive is usually to go to church and/or pray.

• **Mind Reading:** By spending one point of Essence, the Claimed may attempt to determine what a target is thinking about Christianity or religion in general. He makes a Wits + Composure roll to learn basic thoughts; exceptional success reveals more detailed information with great clarity. Supernatural entities may contest with Resolve + Supernatural Advantage.

• **Natural Weaponry:** With a moment’s thought, the Claimed allows deadly sharp crosses, inscribed with appropriate text from the Good Book, to spring from the back of his hands and forearms. They are dangerous weapons, with a Damage of +3 (L). He can hide them again just as quickly (thanks to the Hidden Power Aspect).

• **Tough Skin:** God protects his avenging angel with unassailably mighty invisible armor. The Claimed has 2/2 armor.

The Administrator

Quote: “If you have not correctly filled out form A12 you do *not* have an *appointment*! Be gone!”

Background: Real life was always a bit too chaotic for her. People want *this* but say *that*. They say *that* but do *this*. They’re inherently untrustworthy and unpredictable, and she never liked them. It probably started when her mother abandoned the family without warning, but she doesn’t think about that. It’s safely repressed, and she’s strong and efficient without thinking about why.

Going through school, she had a lot of extracurricular activities that gave her control of the many, many vagaries in life. She was the stage manager of the high school plays, controlling the cues, the lights, the props and anything else she could manage to control. She loved it, but she hated the actors. Anything in school that required oversight had hers. And after graduation, of *course* she went on to get a degree in business management.

This woman advanced up the management ladder. She wasn’t exceptional, but she was certainly serviceable. She got very reasonable results, and so she got a very reasonable say in the day-to-day running of the very large company for which she worked. Everything was progressing as it would for a million other middle managers in America when she got Claimed.

She woke from a dream about all the doors having keys, so that nobody would waste time trying to get through the wrong door. It felt like something she’d been missing, in her life and in her work. Everything would move more smoothly at work with just a little more regulation, she was sure of it. For perhaps the first time in her life, she felt inspired. But it was all a great jumble, now, and nothing made perfect sense. She was thinking too quickly, so she took a couple of sick days and a weekend to write down her ideas as they came to her and organize them into a mini-mission statement.

Returning to work on Monday, she was ready. As soon as she arrived, she called a meeting with the vice presidents. Her presentation was sharp, and she was confident enough to convince them to okay her plan. And so did the first layer of unnecessary bureaucracy fall on the company. It was all part of her design. Not only was it a layer of protection for the company, preventing wasted time and unnecessary complications during the work day, but it also set the precedent for all the other changes she was preparing to make.

Now, 10 years later, the administrator is firmly entrenched at her company. There is paperwork *everywhere* — between the street and the offices, between one task

force and any other, between the employees and the managers, between the managers and the vice presidents, between the employees and the *bathroom*. There is especially paperwork between the administrator and unemployment. She’s made doubly and doubly sure of that (in triplicate) over the years. She doesn’t run the company, but she runs everything inside of it. And no one understands the system quite as well as she does.

Description: The woman doesn’t look very feminine any longer. Her skin is a thick paper, covered in fine print and references to other forms. Her fingernails are the cheap plastic of a ballpoint pen. Her eyes are the black of printer ink, and her blood is the white of wood pulp. At least the Claimed’s voice still seems human, because it is all people usually see of her. The few who make it into her office never see her behind her *literal* wall of protective paperwork (they got through her figurative one), and their visits are short enough that they never learn her secret.

Storytelling Hints: The administrator is the worst of bureaucracy given a body and an angry voice. In large part, the Claiming spirit only wanted to luxuriate in the increasingly confusing labyrinths of paper and rules, and now it does just that. The spirit doesn’t appear to harm anybody at first, but it can. If the company where the Claimed works (and almost rules) is a front or a cover for a larger conspiracy, the players’ characters may need to navigate its terrifying system in order to find out who gives the orders. And that means they need to deal with the administrator.

On a smaller scale, the Claimed’s influence may begin spreading beyond her office building. With some calls to the city’s officials, she may be able to impose her overly complex idea of structure on the sidewalk around the building, then on the streets. She might eventually infect the city government — or consider what might happen if the spirit had originally Claimed the mayor.

Mental: Intelligence 5 (3), Wits 5 (3), Resolve 6 (2)
Physical: Strength 3 (2), Dexterity 3 (1), Stamina, 4 (3)
Social: Presence 6 (3), Manipulation 7 (2), Composure 5 (2)

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Investigation 2, Politics (Office) 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Stealth 3

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression (Presentations) 3, Intimidation (Against Infractions) 4, Persuasion 1, Subterfuge 2

Willpower: 11 (4)

Health: 9 (8)

Initiative: 8 (3)

Defense: 3 (1)

Speed: 11 (8)

Merits: Allies (City Hall) 1, Eidetic Memory, Resources 3, Status 3

Aspects: Alternate Sustenance, Mind Reading 3, Records

Essence: 12 (maximum 20)

- **Alternate Sustenance:** The Claimed no longer needs to leave her office, because she may feed her body with paperwork. As long as she has a steady supply of it, she does not need food or water.

- **Mind Reading:** The administrator may spend one point of Essence to skim a person's mind for information about the bureaucracy, including whether or not the person believes he has properly filled out everything. This requires a Wits + Composure roll. Supernatural subjects resist with Resolve + Supernatural Advantage.

- **Records:** The administrator may change a sheet of paper into any paperwork she can remember (filled out or not). With the Eidetic Memory Merit, she remembers nearly everything she has ever seen; the Claimed makes sure most filed forms pass by her desk at some point or other for this very reason. After a half-hour, the form returns to its original appearance, be it a blank sheet of paper or a blank form.

The Monster Truck

Quote: <engine idling>

Background: It was just a dump truck before the *thing* came and settled inside it. There was really nothing to resist the fusion of spirit and machine, so it only required time. Now,

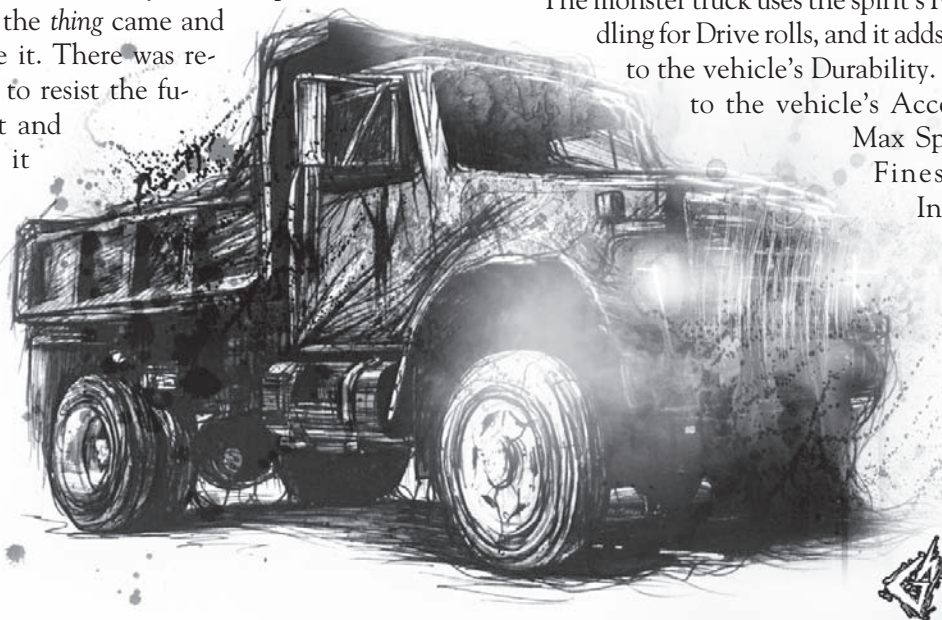
the spirit-Ridden truck motors along lonely lanes on the outskirts of the city, looking for hapless people to crush beneath its wheels or shovel into the gaping maw its grille has become.

Despite the lack of opposition when Claiming a machine, spirits rarely do it. There is less benefit to merging the spirit's nature with a mechanical void. The resulting amalgam body is often less power, and spirits tend to lose something of themselves to the machine's no-mind, rather than coming away as a little bit more than they were before.

Description: While this monster once looked like a normal dump truck, a small cab on a strong frame with the pneumatics to life the back so everything could slide out, it's different now. The grille opens wide to reveal two rows of sharp, shining chrome teeth, salivating oil. There is a long, rubber-and-steel tongue that can lash out and grab people, perhaps the remnants of the fan belt. Strands of rust create a fur coat on the bottom and sides of the machine, constantly flaking off during shedding season. Its wheels are more than mere rubber: sharp steel claws help the beast grip the ground and tear its victims to shreds. The light from its headlights are a deeper, malevolent yellow that can aim left or right to pinpoint prey. It hunts.

Storytelling Hints: The monster truck is purely a monster in the night. There is no dealing with it, no parley, no human dupes the characters have to worry about. Only the truck, massively changed from being a real vehicle, and the mind driving it. But what does it really want?

The monster truck uses the spirit's Finesse + Handling for Drive rolls, and it adds its Resistance to the vehicle's Durability. It adds Power to the vehicle's Acceleration and Max Speed qualities. Finesse becomes Initiative.



Drive: 5
Initiative: 6
Durability: 9
Size: 17
Structure: 26
Acceleration: 19 (26 mph/turn)
Safe Speed: 88 (60 mph)
Max Speed: 131 (89 mph)
Handling: -1
Aspects: Immune to Pain, Natural Weaponry 4, No Sustenance
Essence: 10 (maximum 15)

- **Immune to Pain:** The monster truck never suffers penalties for damage it has suffered.

- **Natural Weaponry:** With its clawed bumpers or its sharp, lashing tongue, this Claimed can make bashing and grappling attacks with a dice pool of 10. When this Claim successfully grapples a victim, it tries to pull the person into its mouth.

- **No Sustenance:** The monster truck does not require fuel, living entirely off spiritual energy sapped from the Shadow Realm.

The Doctor

Quote: “I’m afraid she’s... in surgery right now.”

Background: His father instilled in him a strong dislike for hospitals. “They’re all bloodsuckers there, son,” he said, “A doctor’ll tell you anything to keep you in his office or shill you some pills. Don’t wanna keep your blood flowin’, just the money.” The evidence always supported his dad’s paranoia. Doctors wanted to sell him antibiotics for colds, which would just go away after a while. They wanted to sell him vaccinations — *annual* vaccinations — for the flu, another illness that it never really hurt anyone to have. So he didn’t trust doctors or their businesses.

Then came his accident. A damn stupid tourist ran a red and hit him head on. Broke his leg in two places, his hand in one and cracked three of his ribs. He woke up in the hospital, but they wouldn’t let him leave once they’d given him his casts. They wanted to keep him “for observation,” and an orderly held him down when he tried to get up. Wouldn’t let him sleep either, saying something about a concussion. Once they finally let him get a night’s rest, he snuck out in the morning. They were just waiting to find some way to make him pay for it, and he didn’t have (or believe in) health insurance. He eventually cracked the casts off himself.

The last straw was his sister. She’d been fine for a while, but then she got really sick. When he couldn’t

do anything about it, he took her to the hospital but didn’t let anyone see him. He knew they were still trying to make him pay for that automobile accident visit. He paid a stranger to try to get in and see her, but the guy said she was in surgery. And that was the last he ever heard from her. At one point, he was nervous enough to try going in to see her himself, but they just told him, “She’s not a patient here any longer.” That’s how he knew that there was more going on in hospitals than drawn-out stays and price-gouging. The man left and never looked back.

It was this fear and paranoia that made him ripe for the spirit’s plucking. The man dreamed that there needed to be an alternative to the bad, monolithic hospital systems that did more harm than good and made sisters disappear. People needed medical help, yes, but there had to be another source of that help. *He* would provide it. He didn’t know anything about medicine... yet. His inspiration settled in, and he knew that he could learn.

Now he lives in an abandoned hospital. Where better to study the art of healing than the doctors hoarded to themselves? He’s learned some from what the departing physicians left behind, but he still needs more. He needs better textbooks. He needs *patients*.

Description: Though this Claimed is still gearing up for its mission of providing alternative healthcare to the masses, the physical transformation is complete. He dresses all in white, as doctors used to, though his whites are filthy. The skin on his hands has the texture and *snap* of latex gloves. From his nose to his chin, the doctor’s face has grown an extra, concealing layer, very much like the white masks surgeons wear — but it never comes off. On the forehead, a reflective circle that looks something like an eye. His eyes are all that are really visible, along with that strange third eye, and they always look like they’re hiding something.

Storytelling Hints: The doctor should be paranoid. Abandoned hospitals are not known for their safe and friendly atmospheres, and this one is no different. This Ridden believes the oppressive health system is trying to find him and prevent him from challenging their monopoly. That’s one reason he sets up traps and dead ends, blocks off some doors and creates mazes in some hallways. The other reason is that he can’t let his patients escape until he’s learned all he needs.

When people start disappearing, reappearing only after having been carefully (though unprofessionally) cut open and examined, questions will certainly fly. The police suspect a serial killer (which, really, is close enough), but not *this*. They won’t find him because

his paranoia makes him very careful. He never takes his patients from too near his hospital, and he never drops them off too near either.

The doctor actually does help some of the incredibly poor people who live around his lair, putting the techniques he's learned to use. Some of them will protect him, making him harder to find or meet. They might even work for him, trading kidnappings for favors and rudimentary medical treatment. Others have lost friends to his "research," and resent the creature that they can't seem to catch or stop.

When confronted, the doctor is very earnest about what he's doing. He's also very clear that it needs to be done his way or "the hospitals win." If he isn't stopped directly, he is far more likely to run off and set up a new base of operations than go to ground for an extended period of time or actually mend his ways. He can't. Fixing people is all he wants to do.

Mental: Intelligence 7 (2), Wits 4 (2), Resolve 5 (2)

Physical: Strength 6 (3), Dexterity 6 (2), Stamina 3 (3)

Social: Presence 4 (3), Manipulation 4 (2), Composure 5 (2)

Mental Skills: Crafts 2, Investigation 1, Medicine (Surgery) 3, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Brawl 3, Firearms (Hunting) 1, Larceny 1, Stealth 1, Survival 2, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Intimidation (With Weapon) 2, Socialize 1, Streetwise 1

Willpower: 10 (4)

Health: 8 (8)

Initiative: 13 (4)

Defense: 6 (2)

Speed: 17 (10)

Merits: Allies (Homeless) 3, Holistic Awareness, Strong Back, Natural Immunity, Contacts (Hospital, Conspiracy Theorists)

Aspects: Hidden Power, Inhuman Reflexes 4, Life Drain, Natural Weaponry 2, Poison 3, Sharp Senses 3

Essence: 18 (maximum 20)

• **Inhuman Reflexes:** The doctor is preternaturally swift, both in its reaction time and its dodges. He adds two to his Initiative and Defense.

• **Life Drain:** The doctor grows stronger by studying human biology. With a firm touch (more than a light brush), the Claimed rolls Wits + 3 against the subject's Resolve + Supernatural Advantage. If the doctor is successful, he gains a point of Essence and the subject loses one dot of her Stamina. While the Ridden can use this Aspect by mere touch, he prefers to use it with patients on the operating table. It is so

much more edifying to *see* the body parts he is studying. Lost Stamina dots return at a rate of one every 15 minutes (at least until the patient is dead).

• **Natural Weaponry:** The Claimed can protrude from the tip of a forefinger a very sharp scalpel blade, perfect for up-close-and-personal surgery when you *want* to get blood on your hands. He can retract the blade just as easily (thanks to the Hidden Power Aspect). When used in combat, he may use it with Brawl or Weaponry, and it has Damage +2 (L).

• **Poison:** Occasionally, the doctor provides his patients with an anesthetic. With a prick of one finger (and the tiny needle that appears there), he can subject his victims to a Toxicity 4 poison that inflicts bashing damage. Once injected, the poison inflicts damage once every hour for a full day, but the doctor rarely waits that long. If he wants the patient unconscious, he will apply the poison again. Or hit the patient in the head.

• **Sharp Senses:** The doctor can hear his patients' hearts beat and see blood course through the patients' veins. He can also see it all stop. All the Claimed's senses are stronger than normal, giving him a +2 bonus to all perception rolls and allowing him to track by scent. He can reflexively dampen his senses in order to prevent himself from being overwhelmed by loud noises, bright lights and pungent smells.

Achilles' Hound

Quote: <grrrrr>

Background: This Claimed was just a normal dog-on-the-streets, if one of the bigger dogs. It probably had a tendency to get over-territorial and snap at anyone it considered an intruder, but not yet to the point where animal control had to take care of it. The dog was an easy mark for the spirit that wanted an unresisting host for its mission in the streets of the city: hobble as many creatures as it could.

Now, the dog has grown. It's stronger and fiercer, but it doesn't hunt humans for food. It hunts them to tear out their ligaments and their muscles, and make them lame forever.

Description: This Claimed is bigger, stronger and faster. Its teeth have become sharper than they were before, and harder to break because it needs to bite and tear at running targets so often.

Storytelling Hints: This is a straightforward antagonist. It hunts, bites (to hobble) and runs away. It feeds only on small animals that it doesn't enjoy making lame. This can be a decent introductory foe for new roleplayers, because it isn't likely to take a

character's life — just drive a character to revenge.

Mental: Intelligence 1 (1), Wits 6 (4), Resolve 5 (3)

Physical: Strength 7 (4), Dexterity 4 (3), Stamina 5 (3)

Social: Presence 6 (4), Manipulation 2 (1), Composure 4 (3)

Mental Skills: None

Physical Skills: Athletics (Running) 4, Brawl 3, Stealth 1, Survival (Tracking) 3

Social Skills: Intimidation 3

Willpower: 9 (6)

Health: 10 (7) (Size 4 +1)

Initiative: 10 (6)

Defense: 8 (4)

Speed: 18 (14) (species factor 7)

Merits: Giant

Aspects: Improved Weaponry, Inhuman Reflexes 4

Essence: 5 (maximum 15)

- **Improved Weaponry:** Instead of the animal's bite attack being a +2 damage weapon, it is +3. It is still lethal.

- **Inhuman Reflexes:** The Claimed adds two to its Initiative and Defense.

CHANGELING™ THE LOST

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...nights after a hard rain you can still see the flames from the south end of the bridge.

If the key made a noise when it struck the floor,
there was nobody there to hear it.

She choked, and couldn't finish.
Because she'd just looked into his eyes,
and hadn't seen him there.
She didn't see him when he moved, either.

she bore giant snakes, sharp of tooth and unsparing of fang...

Tony watched the fire burn,
the skin fall off the man's naked skull

A hunchbacked something –
it wasn't human, Jesus God it couldn't be human –
shimmering and shifting
and stabbing a pitchfork into the bodies
like they were just a pile of hay.

The Shadow isn't a nice place.