

CHANGELING

THE LOST™



A Storytelling Game of Beautiful Madness

*Y*ou remember your home.

*You remember what it was like,
before They took you.
The sound of your family's voices,
the smell of your home,
the colors of your neighborhood.*

*Even after the blinding glories
and pitiless dark wastes of Faerie,
you remember.*

*Your memories were a beacon.
Without them, you would never have found your way back
through the twisting maze of the Thorns,
to collapse torn and exhausted on the cool earth
of the world you were born in once more —
to find that your home was no longer yours,
that an impostor had taken over your life,
that you had been changed.
Yours is beauty and grotesquerie,
illusion and iron,
insight and madness.*

*Where will you go now that you are Lost?
Who will you love, who will you war against,
who will you make of yourself?
How will your tale end?*

For use with the
World of Darkness Rulebook



www.worldofdarkness.com

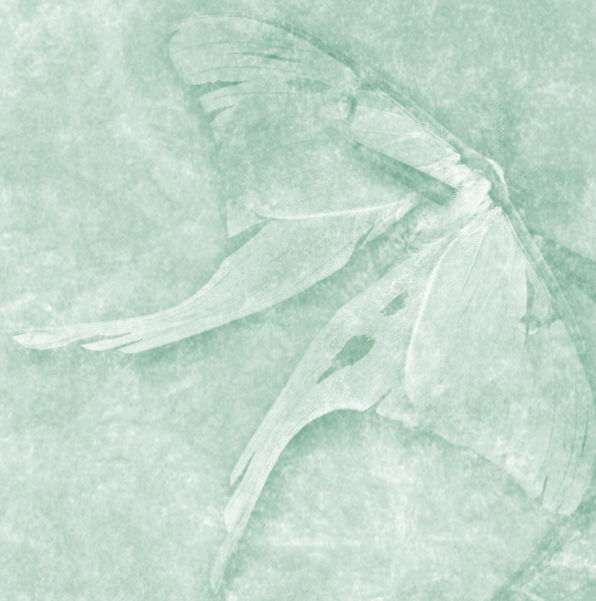
CHANGELING
THE LOST

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A Storytelling Game of Beautiful Madness



What Alec Bourbon Said



They called the guy Alec Bourbon because he loved to drink, but aside from that, he had a strange way about him. It made some people nervous and it made some people laugh, but Alec never left anyone around him untouched. Whenever he and the regulars who hung around his shithole local heard that Van Morrison song on the jukebox, "Jackie Wilson Said," Alec would change that line to "Alec Bourbon Said," and then he'd follow it up with any bit of doggerel that came to mind and howl it to the bar at top volume. Even weirder was that people played along — if he said, "Alec Bourbon said thumb your nose," every (other) rummy and souse in the joint would thumb his nose and laugh like it was the greatest joke in the world. They'd pound the heavy oak tables in that old bar, and for a brief moment, the air wasn't so heavy with stale smoke or the smell of losers.

The bar was named after some almost-forgotten church, a haunted ruin where witches danced as the drunken protagonist stumbled home in an old poem. This wasn't a place where ironic hipsters or slumming socialites went to drink beer from cans. This was a place where men who had witnessed hard lives went to die slowly, poisoning themselves along the way. It was always winter inside, the end of something, cold and melancholy but for the few brief moments when something comic happened. Even then, though, that mirth was momentary, like the time Old Dom slipped in a pool of spilled beer and fell on his face, shoving his glasses into his baggy eyes. The whole place guffawed at Dom's goggled peepers! The surgery left him entirely blind in one eye and mostly blind in the other, though. Old Dom owed Alec \$20. Alec Bourbon liked it cold and dark inside the bar.

Our man had a face like the bole of a tree and hands like a tree's gnarled roots. His hair, when he didn't wear that greasy New York Jets cap, looked like a crow's nest of thatch and twigs. Even Alec's disposition could grow as dark as the wooden surfaces of the bar on occasion, especially when women were involved. They hated him, and he hated them. Butch, behind the bar, said that Alec Bourbon had been married years ago, but that she was a beer woman, so he eventually had to kill her. Alec said Butch had a shit sense of humor, to shut the fuck up and that puns were the lowest form of language. Butch told Alec to pay his tab and that was the only time in 37 years that Alec didn't offer a returning remark. It was Alec's bar anyway, even if he didn't own it or work there. He was there more than anyone else.

So it was that the mumblesome old regulars who shared Alec's bar were surprised one night when in walked a pretty young woman looking at least a

century Alec's junior and asked for him. She wore a bright green dress. Her eyes were wide and dewy, her legs long and strong, and more than a few coarse words passed among those hoary men when she arrived.

"Alec's in the shitter," Butch said.

"I will wait," she replied. Not "I'll wait," but "I will wait." And so she waited.

When Alec returned from the bathroom, he carried his glass with him. "Thirsty work!" he called to no one in particular, and all those no ones in particular laughed, just like they always did, before returning to their own drinks. This time, though, they kept their eyes on him.

He walked back to his bar and sat on his high, wooden stool. The woman, her hands clasped before her, approached him. "You are Alec Bourbon."

He replied by looking at her, eye-to-eye, and downing his drink in a long gulp.

"I am Anne —"

"I know who you are, rabbit," he cut her off, "and if you want what you want, you have to have a drink with me."

"I do not drink," she protested. Short, quiet laughs and vague comments about femininity floated through the air from patrons seated at the oak and mahogany recesses of the bar's tables.

"You do if you wan' talk to me." This much was true. Alec rarely received guests at the bar, but when he did, they always drank with him, some more willingly than others. Several loud young men from Boston once drank with him eagerly. An enormous steelworker who came to see him drank reluctantly. "You drink with me, I do as you ask," Alec said.

"You do not know what I shall ask," the woman continued, though she took a seat next to him (even though he never stood for her or offered it to her, the cad).

"I didn't get to be the man I am today by hiding my head in the bushes!" Alec bellowed, slapping his hand on the bar with a sound like a cudgel.

The woman skittishly agreed. "I assume we drink bourbon?"

"Bully for you, honey."



After that, no one heard what they said to each other for the rest of the night. The woman left, but no one could tell you when, or how many drinks she had or her apparent mood when she left. Everyone at the bar just nodded and looked the other way. Butch swore he put the woman's only drink on Alec's tab. Butch vaguely remembered her saying something about a year and a day.



Muttering to himself, Alec rode the downtown train. "Promises, promises," he snarled at the world, or maybe to anyone who had the power to do anything about them. That was his life, promises and dreams. He imagined that in anyone else's life, a world of promises and dreams would be a beautiful thing. Not so for him. He kept promises because he had to. For the same reason, he kept so many dreams at bay.

At the second stop after the transfer line, the woman with the dewy eyes and long legs got on the train. She wore a dour gray dress and a raincoat almost the same color as the dress, only a little more blue.

Alec noticed her but paid her no mind. She saw him, but her eyes betrayed no hint of recognition.

Other people boarded the train, too: teenagers going home late from friends' houses, short-order cooks coming off the mid-shift, lawyers who put in long hours. Alec didn't know any of them. A man in a suit on a cell phone bumped his knee and said, "Sorry, old man." Alec offered a half-hearted reply, "Promises, promises." The man in the suit gave Alec a curious look that expressed a lack of comprehension, but then turned away and returned to his cell phone conversation. Alec was obviously senile. Just another nut on the train.

Alec sat in the same seat for the whole trip, his left hand wrapped around the railing like a tree branch that had grown around an intruding fence post. He kept his right hand in his pocket, except for the dozen times he brought it out to raise his flask to his lips.

At the south eight stop, the woman with the dewy eyes and long legs got off the train. Alec left the train, too. She went down the stairs and onto the street. Alec followed, 99 steps behind her, sipping from his flask. She turned left on Third, left again on Alder and then right on Sixth. Alec had gone left on Fifth, left again on Holly and then left onto Sixth.

Alec wanted her to have enough time.

When he turned onto Sixth, no one was there. It was too cold to be out long this time of year, but that was the way Alec liked it. The bourbon in his flask kept him warm, and he smoked a cigarette, clutching it between his fingers, feeling its heat through his cutoff gloves. That was probably long enough, he reasoned, and took a few steps down the block.

The brownstone he lingered in front of was lit up with cold light, only a few of the windows displaying any hint of the season's coming holidays. Presently, a couple dressed in running gear came out the front door, walking a pale-eyed Weimaraner. Alec grabbed the doorknob before the door closed and pushed his way inside. He found the foyer damnably warm.

D7. Fourth floor. Alec took the stairs.

As he came to the landing on the fourth floor, Alec checked his jacket. There, inside, he felt the length of polished flying rowan he carried with him. It had always done the trick in these circumstances. He squinted his eyes and pursed his lips, as if the thought pained him; the club always helped him fulfill his promises.

Alec Bourbon knocked on the door of D7.

The dewy-eyed woman answered, though the door was chained. She had changed from her workaday dress into a slouchy sweatshirt and jeans. Blue light emanated from the room behind her, the television spilling its content, unheeded, awaiting her return.

For a moment, the woman's face looked confused. Then a look of recognition washed over her features. "Uncle Roy?" she asked.

"That's right, my dear," Alec Bourbon replied. "I've brought your birthday present."

The woman smiled, elated. She closed the door, and Alec heard the rattle of the chain on the other side. Then she opened it again, her arms wide to embrace him. He didn't, but she didn't act snubbed.

Wretched apartment. He was doing her a favor. The TV, he saw, was tuned to the Mets game (the *Mets*, of all games!). A cat hunched over its food and water dishes in the kitchenette. Alec could hear the hum of the microwave, could smell the reek of frozen food sluggishly thawing and cooking in its heavy sauces.

"Do you want a beer, Uncle Roy?" the woman asked.

Alec gritted his bark-textured teeth. "No, dear, I've brought my own." He took out his flask and took a deep swig, glancing at her out of the corner of his eye. Then he put his flask away, without bothering to offer her any.

She smiled anyway and took a bottle of diet ginger ale out of the refrigerator. Pouring herself a juice glass full of the stuff, she went over to the couch, the television grabbing her attention again. "What's this about a birthday present?" she called over her shoulder. "I don't see anything wrapped."

"You have three guesses, dearest. If you can guess what it is, I won't give it to you."

The woman took her eyes away from the TV again and looked at him. "That's a strange gift to give. You *won't* give it to me if I guess what it is?"

"That's right. Now what's your first guess?"

"That doesn't make any sense," she said, intrigued by the weird, unconventional nature of the present. She hadn't even planned on celebrating her birthday. No one at the office knew today was the day, and she was tired anyway. Maybe she and some of the girls could get together this weekend.

"Just indulge your Uncle Roy, sweetheart."

"Is it Mets tickets?" She came over to stand with him in the kitchenette, hoping to gain a clue, to see if he held something that might give away some of the surprise.

Alec Bourbon rolled his eyes. "No, it's not Mets tickets."

"Is it a CD?"

"No, it's not a CD. I wouldn't know what music to get you. All your music sounds like racket to me anyway."

She laughed as the microwave beep-beep-beeped that it was done. "Is it a collar for Robespierre?"

Robespierre? What the hell kind of name is that for a cat? Alec wondered. "No, it's not that. So now I have to give it to you" He sighed heavily as he drew the length of wood from inside his jacket.

She made a confused face — just as all the women always did — and he swung the club at her face with such ferocity that it burst her nose and mouth at once. A spatter of blood showered across the linoleum floor and the countertops.

The confused look remained on her face, but her eyes bulged with pain and welled with tears.

Alec Bourbon struck her again, and she fell. And then again. And again and again and again. She didn't move, slumping awkwardly against the lower cabinets, her legs splayed out at a painful angle and her sweatshirt sopping up some of the spilled blood.

Alec Bourbon locked the door, chained it and sat down on the threadbare loveseat, his head in his hands, unmoving, his tears oozing slowly like sap from a tree's severed limb. "Robespierre, clean up some of that goddamn mess in there, would you?" The cat licked its paw twice, then went into the bedroom and curled up on the hamper.

By the time the game had wound down, Alec Bourbon was drunk as a lord, but he still had work to do. He pulled himself up from the loveseat with a suppressed sob and returned to the small kitchen to clean up the remains.

The blood on the floor was gone, but the blood that soaked into the sweatshirt still stained it, a crimson blemish. The woman's body had vanished. In its place sat a rudely made corn dolly. In place of the doll's head, a severed rabbit's head had been tacked to the poppet. The rabbit's face wore a hideous rictus, and one of its eyes was clouded over. Everything smelled of wax and lacquer.

Alec Bourbon gathered these as quickly as his clumsy stupor would let him and stuffed them into a trash bag. Then he put an additional scoop of cat food in Robespierre's bowl. Taking up the bag, he climbed out of the window and clattered gracelessly down the fire escape into the alley.



"I had a promise to keep, if it's any of your business, you mop-headed young fuckface," Alec Bourbon told Butch, behind the bar. "I need a constitutional. I'll have a beer and a shot on the side."

Everyone at the bar roared. Alec drinking beer! It happened only once or twice a year, and he always made a face like an old woman birthing a live snake. He never told anybody why he ordered beer once or twice a year, so they respected that, but they teased him about it insofar as he'd let them. Old Dom said, "Don't treat him special. Pour him that same piss you pour everyone else."

They laughed and sang and somebody played "Jackie Wilson Said," whereupon Alec called out, "Alec Bourbon said, tug your tongue!" and everyone tugged their tongues and laughed some more. The bar might have been cold, but everyone's minds and blood were warm.

"Whatsinna bag?" some loutish young ratso from down the street asked Alec, seeing the trash bag at his feet as he sat at his rugged stool.

"Losing lottery tickets. You want to buy some?" Alec ribbed the kid right back.

"Naw way, old man," the kid replied.

"Good on you," Alec said.

Just then, the door opened, and a dewy-eyed woman with long, strong legs walked in. She wore a royal blue dress and a bright green wool coat to fend off the outside cold. A chill wind blew in through the open door, and everyone in the place wanted to say, "Shut that goddamn door!" but everyone also knew not to say anything.

The woman walked to the bar where Alec sat. He downed his beer and waved Butch away.

"Seeing you does my heart good, Alec Bourbon. I trust everything came off without a hitch?"

"It did indeed, Anne Timothy." Despite the woman's salubrious tone, Alec's face wore no smile.

"You have my many thanks," she said, and motioned to Butch to come back over.

Alec was surprised. None of the people not from the bar ever drank with him if they didn't have to. Even those rowdy Boston boys pleaded that they had to get back on the road. "You're going to take a drink with me?" he asked.

"Certainly, I cannot. But I know you gave your word, and a promise fulfilled is a burden eased. Even if only temporarily." Her eyes went to the bag and then to the bartender. "Mr. Bourbon will have his namesake," she called to Butch. "A token of my appreciation."

By the time Butch returned with the shot, Alec had knocked back the one that still stood before him. If he was still surprised, he didn't show it. He didn't want her to see what made him work. She knew one of his promises. He didn't want her to guess any more. "I suppose you'll want this, then." He reached down to the floor and offered her the trash bag. It still smelled faintly of wax and lacquer.

"Yes, that is part of the promise, too, I believe." She smiled. Alec shrugged.

She got up and walked out of the bar without a backward glance. The cold wind blew in again, but the door banged shut quickly.

Butch was the first to break the silence. "Shot down, Prince Charming?" Everyone else half-laughed nervously.

"Stop your braying, you gap-toothed jackass," Alec said. "Here, take this bourbon and put it above the lintel there. Don't spill a drop, and leave it there until I ask for it."

Butch furrowed his brow but complied. "Just leave it here?"

"Just leave it there," Alec Bourbon confirmed. He wasn't the only one who had made promises. Now he could hold Anne Timothy to one of hers.



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This game's for all of you out there who love those old stories that change a little bit each time a new storyteller picks them up. We love them, too. Enjoy.



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CHANGELING™

THE LOST

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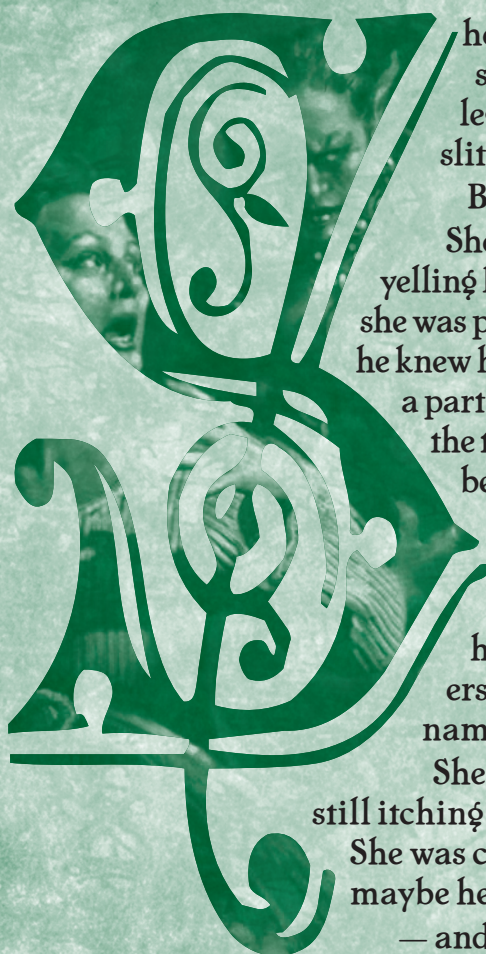
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he rubbed her hand. It had stopped bleeding, but it still ached. More like itched. The scratches on her legs were swelling, too, and every step made her toes slither together.

Blood was collecting in her sneakers.

She'd been calling out to him for hours. She'd been yelling his name. She'd followed him into the garden, and she was planning on really giving him the business because he knew he wasn't to be out after dark. But now here she was in a part of the woods she'd never seen before, all cut up from the thorns. She'd lost the path an hour ago, and she'd been calling out his name ever since, calling out...

...his name. What was his name?

She stopped and shook her head. His name was *there*, in her brain, and she knew it. She knew her cat's name (Penguin) and she knew her employers' names (Brian and Stella) and she knew *their* cat's name (Fusi) but what the hell was the kid's name?

She kept walking, toes still wet from blood, hand still itching from the scratch. She was walking slower now. She was confused, having trouble catching her breath or maybe her thoughts —

— and when the face appeared, she nearly screamed.

"Go back!" The face had a head behind it and a body under it, and it looked rather familiar, kind of like the girl who'd drowned last year.

"Aren't you dead?" she asked.

The girl-thing — it didn't really look like the girl, just from a certain angle — shook its head violently. "No time! Go back! The path's behind you just a few steps!"

"But I have to find... him."

The girl-thing shut its eyes tight, as though trying to block out pain. It was silent for a long moment. And then it said, "He's back at home already."

She started to protest, but then found she didn't have the energy. She walked a few paces back. Found the path. Went back to the house.

Later, her employers would ask her why she left Danny — *that* was his name! — alone for so long. Why she'd gone walking through the rose bushes (because where else had those scratches come from?). But all she could think of was the girl-thing, and how sad and scared it looked, and why it had been wearing a dog's collar.

And why Danny seemed *taller* now than he had that morning, and why he didn't know his cat's name.

INTRODUCTION

*"Be easy," answered the nix, "I will make thee richer
and happier than thou has ever been before, only
thou must promise to give me the young thing
which has just been born in thy house."*

— "THE NIXIE OF THE MILL-POND,"
AS RECORDED BY JACOB
AND WILHELM GRIMM

We all grow up on fairy tales. Our first exposure to them these days is often in a somewhat light-hearted, "child-friendly" form. The good fairies bless the heroes so they can overcome their challenges, and the wicked fairies' curses ultimately come to naught. Everyone lives happily ever after.

But as we start to find the older fairy tales in their original form, things turn out differently. Blood and sex creep into the tales. People come to bad ends. These stories were told to children not to comfort them as they fell asleep, but as cautionary tales. Warnings not to stray too far from home. Not to go into the dark woods. Not to wander down the road at night. Stay at home, be good, mind your manners... or something bad will happen to you. The Good Folk might come and take you away.

Changeling: The Lost is a game about what happens when these old stories prove true. The Others do come and take people away, keeping them as slaves in a fairyland that's as much nightmare as dream. Severed from the mortal world, these abducted humans gradually become more and more like their captors, losing themselves in their new lives. But some of these captives remember who they are, and try to escape back to the place they were born. Changed in form and feature, scarred by their durance, some of them even make it back.

A GAME OF BEAUTIFUL MADNESS

The protagonists of this modern fairy tale are the changelings, or as they often call themselves, the Lost. Stolen away from their human lives as children or adults, they spent what seemed like years or even centuries in Faerie, chattel to beautiful but inhuman lords and ladies. Fed on faerie food and drink, they gradually became more fae themselves, their bodies shifting slightly to reflect their

roles. Some, however, managed to escape. Holding on to their memories of home, they found their way through the winding thorns of the Hedge, the barrier between the mortal world and time-twisted Faerie.

Their return, however, was all too bittersweet. Some came back 20 years after they'd first vanished, even though it had never seemed that long to them in Faerie. Others who had reached adulthood in Arcadia found that they returned only a few hours after their abduction. And almost all found, horribly enough, that they weren't missed. The Fae had been thorough. Left in the stead of each abducted changeling was a replica, a simulacrum, a *thing* that looked like him or her — but wasn't. Now, with inhuman strangers living their lives and nowhere to go, the Lost must find their own way in the world that was stolen from them.

Changeling deals with the struggles and dreams of people who are no longer what they were, their mortal flesh interwoven with fae magic. An illusion called the Mask obscures their remade physical bodies, allowing them to pass for humans — a word that doesn't apply to them any more. The contrast between the reality of the mortal world and the unreality of Faerie colors their stories, in ways that often express as beauty, madness or both.

The beauty referred to almost goes without saying. Faerie is beautiful. It isn't kindly, or nurturing or benevolent, but it is wondrously beautiful. The same is true for its children, both those who were born of its unreal matter and those mortals who were abducted and nursed on its magic. Even a hideous Ogre may have some strangely sketched artistry to its asymmetrical features, and even a Darkling of disturbing mien may have an elegantly hypnotic grace or cold, frank sexuality. But as the Lost move among the mortal world, trying to recover their old lives or draw enough Glamour to sustain themselves, they become aware of the beautiful things that mortals often take for granted. To a

changeling, there is beauty in the grief hanging over the funeral of a good man, or in the awkward way a young girl twists her hands at a school dance. They see things nobody else does — not simply because they can, but because they try.

The madness inherent to a changeling's existence is also twofold. Part is external. Changelings too often cross paths with things of Faerie and the Hedge — strange, creeping things that should not *be*, that defy human rationality. The Others themselves can only be described as “mad,” for surely they subscribe to no mortal definition of sanity. But an equally great threat comes from within. The threshold between dream and reality, between Faerie and mortality, is easily crossed... and a changeling doesn't always know which side of the threshold she stands on.

THEME

The prevailing theme of **Changeling** is the quest to find one's way home. For some, this may mean reclaiming the mortal lives they were stolen away from as best they can. For others, it means finding a new home among the freeholds and Courts of the Lost. Some hope to be fortunate and determined enough to achieve both, finding one foothold in the mortal world and another among their fae kin. Even the tangled skeins of intrigue and ambition that grip many a freehold trace their roots back to changelings who are determined to find their way to a place they'd be willing to call “home.” It's no simple journey, and the stories of each chronicle unfold around the challenges of this road. Who can you trust? What is your heart's desire, your ideal home? What is the price you will have to pay to achieve it?

The secondary theme of the game reflects the nature of the fae. A common hallmark to legends that feature things we think of as “fae,” in fact the characteristic that may define a supernatural entity as “fae” or not, is a certain theme of deception or dishonesty. In some stories, the fae are the ones who trick mortals, appearing to be things they aren't, substituting their own young for human children or leading wanderers astray. In others, humans are the ones who break some form of social contract with the fae, although often while unaware that the contract is in place, and are punished severely by the fae for their “disloyalty.” The themes of deception and mistrust run through many **Changeling** stories, as the Lost must hide themselves away from friends and family in order to keep from drawing their enemies' eyes. Promises and pledges are the mortar that holds fae changelings together, the only way the Lost can tell who to trust and who to avoid. Changelings are at their most powerful when they can finesse their way into some sort of advantageous position over their enemies, and most constrained when they must give their word. In that, they are very like the fae of legend, and the “faerie tales” of their lives have a hauntingly familiar refrain.

MOOD

The mood of a **Changeling** chronicle can shift many times, reflecting the mercurial nature of the fae. The prevailing mood, however, is bittersweet. The Lost walk through an unseen world of wonder tinged with danger and deceit. The beauty of the fae is often sinister. The Hedge is alluring, and offers both succor and danger. The magic that changelings work is wondrous stuff, but has its strange catches and costs. And yet, for all the fear of the Others, the suspicion of betrayal and the hurt of necessary lies, the Lost still feel the glory of intense emotion and see the vivid colors of fae magic. Both bitterness and sweetness are essential to this world. Without bitterness, the fae are toothless things, as weak and watered-down as the Victorian fables meant to shelter children from anything that might hint that the world was less than perfect. Without sweetness, the setting is a withered and valueless place, more akin to a sulky nihilist's view of the universe than the place it actually is. For all the horror, there is also wonder. For all the beauty, there is also madness.

BETWEEN WORLDS

The Lost have the potential to be almost anything. Their human roots are strong enough to show them the way home from Faerie, and some changelings make themselves as much a part of the mortal world upon their return as possible. For some, the possibility of reclaiming their former lives or bonding once more with their loved ones is the greatest aspiration. Others give up on their former identities and forge entirely new mortal lives for themselves in the areas where they can prosper without too much scrutiny. They may become art dealers, club owners, crime lords. And the Lost can use their fae gifts to protect those important to these new lives, making the best of their transformation.

But changelings are indubitably not what they were, and many embrace that change as best they can. They wear the marks of their captivity with pride, strengthen the power of their Wyrds and focus on their identities as citizens of Lost society. For these proud survivors, the human world is where they play at mortality and gather strength. They are most comfortable among the freeholds and Courts, and swear pacts of deepest friendship and love to their changeling kin.

Neither life is superior to the other. In order to keep an unclouded perspective between mortal solidity and dreamlike fae madness, the Lost must acknowledge both sides of their nature. Motleys gather out of friendship and pledge to aid one another in rebuilding their mortal lives, just as they promise to stand beside one another and achieve standing, power and safety among the changeling courts. The hows and whys of their journeys, the lives they will forge or reforge for themselves — these are the stories that will unfold in **Changeling: The Lost**.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

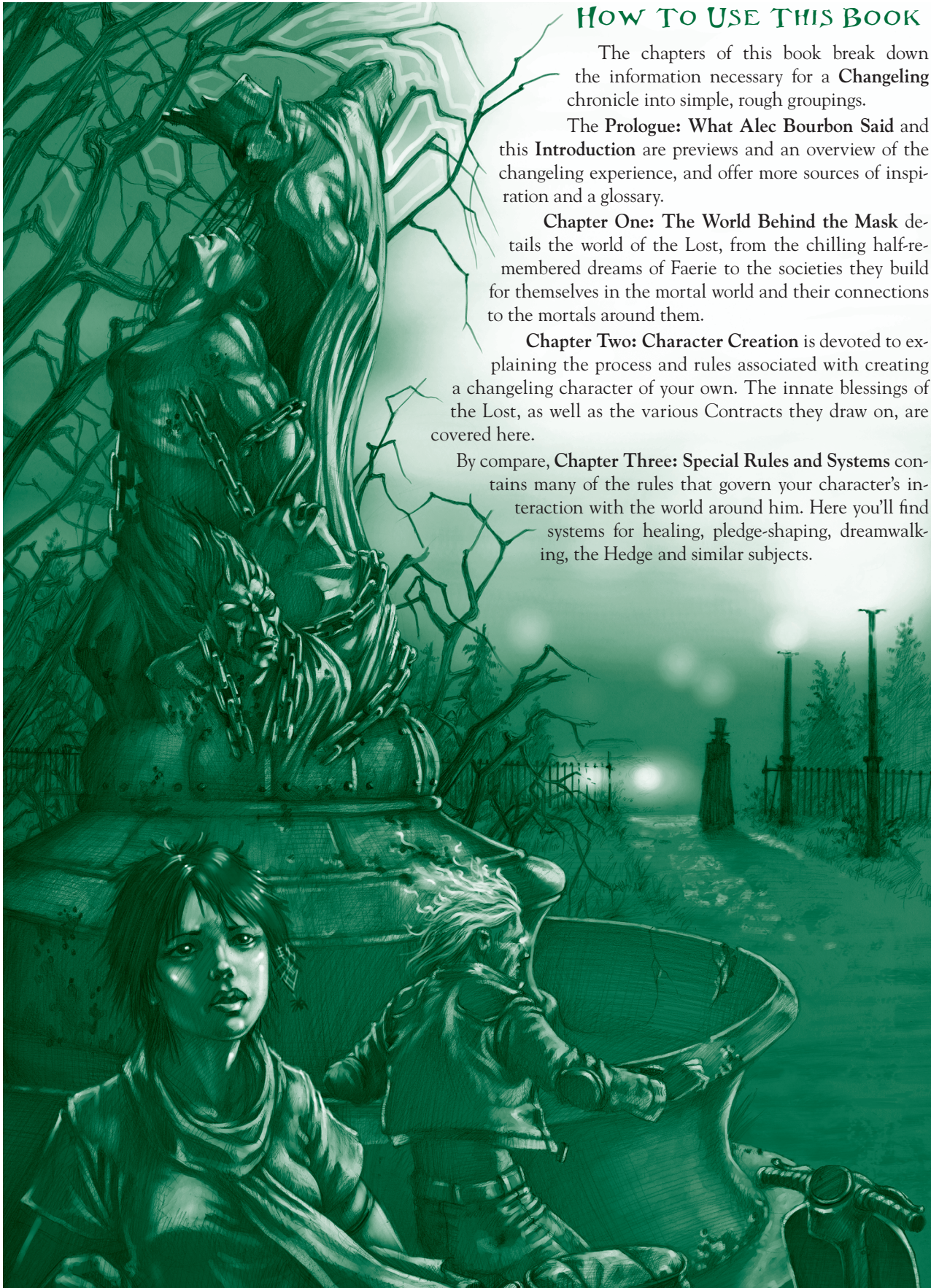
The chapters of this book break down the information necessary for a **Changeling** chronicle into simple, rough groupings.

The **Prologue: What Alec Bourbon Said** and this **Introduction** are previews and an overview of the changeling experience, and offer more sources of inspiration and a glossary.

Chapter One: The World Behind the Mask details the world of the Lost, from the chilling half-remembered dreams of Faerie to the societies they build for themselves in the mortal world and their connections to the mortals around them.

Chapter Two: Character Creation is devoted to explaining the process and rules associated with creating a changeling character of your own. The innate blessings of the Lost, as well as the various Contracts they draw on, are covered here.

By compare, **Chapter Three: Special Rules and Systems** contains many of the rules that govern your character's interaction with the world around him. Here you'll find systems for healing, pledge-shaping, dreamwalking, the Hedge and similar subjects.



Chapter Four: Storytelling is about the art of running Changeling, from a brief one-shot to an extended chronicle. Many of the game's themes see full exploration in this chapter, and a number of sample antagonists provide a cross-section of the Lost's many enemies.

Appendix One: Entitlements concerns the cryptic noble orders and secret societies that have sprung up among the Lost, titles that convey supernatural power and often sinister ambitions.

Finally, **Appendix Two: The Freehold of Miami** presents a sample setting for use in a chronicle, or even as simple inspiration for the politics and threats surrounding a freehold in a different area. The freehold in Miami is seeing difficult times as the seasons refuse to change, which provides a strong motivation for the right characters to make a difference.

SOURCES AND INSPIRATION

The potential source material for a **Changeling** chronicle is nothing short of an embarrassment of riches. Every fairy tale has a potential idea for a token, kith or pledge somewhere within it, and there are countless volumes of fairy tales to choose from. This entire Introduction could be nothing but a list of potential sources, and still many fine works would be omitted.

While it might seem incongruous to list children's books or movies as potential sources, many still deal with very adult issues (such as the fear of abduction). Seen through the slightly clouded lens of the World of Darkness, these stories easily become rich fodder for **Changeling** tales.

NON-FICTION

There's a copious amount of scholarly works on faerie myth and folklore, which are excellent for pointing out underlying parallels, always useful for exploring maximum diversity with a few basic archetypes. For good idea-to-page ratio, of course, it's hard to beat anthologies and art books.

The Great Encyclopedia of Faeries and *The Complete Encyclopedia of Elves, Goblins, and Other Little Creatures* by Pierre Dubois, illustrated by Claudine and Roland Sabatier. Surprisingly comprehensive "bestiaries" that cover fae from around the world.

Faeries by Brian Froud and Alan Lee. Many other Froud books are also good (and increasingly whimsical, particularly when he teams with Terry Jones, as in *The Goblin Companion*), but this is one of the most influential art books on the subject.

Grimm's Fairy Tales. The more complete the version, the better. Some compilations (such as *Grimm's Grimmest*) focus on the ugly aspects of these fairy tales that are often omitted from more "child-friendly" versions, but nothing's quite as good as the whole picture.

Andrew Lang's *The Red Fairy Book*, *The Green Fairy Book*, et al. A good compilation of fairy tales that goes well beyond Grimm in scope.

The Mabinogion contains a few key episodes of a human's interaction with the otherworld, specifically in the tales of Pwyll and Manawydan.

Spectrum: The Best In Contemporary Fantastic Art. These collections of fantasy and science fiction artwork often feature startling, beautiful and surreal pieces that serve as excellent visual inspiration.

FICTION

The fae are ridiculously popular subjects for modern fantasists. The following list only scratches the surface, picking works that are exceptionally thematic for **Changeling: The Lost**; a comprehensive list of works that deal with the fae is beyond our poor page count's scope.

Something Wicked This Way Comes by Ray Bradbury. An American classic, equal parts wonder and horror. The Autumn People are particularly notable as examples of how fae archetypes can easily wear modern trapping.

Jonathan Strange & Mr. Norrell, by Susannah Clarke, depicts a world where much of magic is owed to the fae. The depiction of the fae themselves is of exceptional inspiration.

The Stolen Child by Keith Donohue. Elegantly fey, with a compelling take on the classic changeling abduction myth and the issues of stolen and lost identity.

The King of Elfland's Daughter by Lord Dunsany. The patriarch of modern faerie fantasy, and still worth reading for sheer enjoyment.

Neverwhere, *American Gods*, *Anansi Boys*, *Stardust* and other works by Neil Gaiman. The author frequently addresses the theme of hidden worlds that mortals are usually incapable of seeing, and the troubles that come when people find their way from one to the other.

Gormenghast and *Titus Groan* by Mervyn Peake. The highly eccentric, bizarre characters of Gormenghast, including the character of Gormenghast itself, makes an excellent model for similarly skewed faerie courts. The BBC adaptation is also recommended.

Fables by Bill Willingham, Mark Buckingham and Steve Leialoha. Depicts the current lives of the literal protagonists of fairy tales such as Snow White. A fusion of modernity and traditional fable, with no small amount of darkness as well as whimsy.

POETRY

The world of the fae is by default poetic. Christina Rossetti's "Goblin Market," William Butler Yeats's "The Stolen Child" and the traditional "Tam Lin" are classics of the subject matter, but to be honest, almost any good poem can suggest potent imagery for a story idea. Take a poetry

collection, read a poem at random and there's the seed for a Hedge encounter or story hook. T. S. Eliot's "The Hollow Men" might provide the inspiration for a Scarecrow Ministry plot, for instance, while Baudelaire's *Fleurs du Mal* is a virtual litany of decadence suitable for a softly decaying court to whom the only sin is boredom. From Edgar Allan Poe and Shakespeare's sonnets to Wilfred Owen's "Dulce et Decorum Est," the possibilities are more than any one chronicle could ever exhaust.

MOVIES

American Beauty, directed by Sam Mendes. Notable source material for the theme of beauty in strange places (such as suburbia), as well as the question of what happens when a person changes his entire life.

Labyrinth, directed by Jim Henson. A classic faerie fable, with plenty of well-crafted imagery for all things fae.

MirrorMask, directed by Dave McKean. Notable both for the struggle to exchange lives, and for a particularly surreal otherworld that mixes modern and archaic imagery.

Pan's Labyrinth, directed by Guillermo del Toro. Powerful fae imagery and a genuinely mature storyline. Heady stuff.

LEXICON

Arcadia: The domain of the True Fae and once-prison to all changelings. Also *Faerie*.

aspects: The "building blocks" that make up pledges. These aspects are: *task*, *boon*, *sanction* and *duration*. Aspects have three categories of power: lesser, medial and greater.

Autumn Court: The Court tied to Autumn, fear and mysticism.

banded: The slang term for someone bound into a pledge; see *oathbound*. Originates from the black bands that appear around the aura of someone bound into a pledge.

boon: The aspect of a pledge that governs the rewards for those who adhere to the pledge.

changeling: A human who has been gradually changed by her durance in Arcadia, becoming partly fae herself.

Contract: A mystical pact struck between the fae and a living embodiment of natural force, allowing the fae to call on supernatural powers.

Court, Great Court: A large social organization dedicated to mutual aid and self-defense, bound together by pledges of loyalty. The Courts of North America and Europe tend to be organized in a group of four seasonal Courts.

dream phial: An object that holds a changeling's created dream; going to sleep with a dream phial releases the dream into the sleeper's mind as he slumbers. Created through *dreamweaving*.

dream riding: The oneiromantic art of entering a *dreamscape* and altering it slightly as the dream progresses, allowing the dream to unfold mostly normally, with only slight changes according to the desires of the *oneiropomp*.

dreamscape: The wholeness of a dream, made up of the environment, creatures and occurrences within the dream; everything in a dream except the dreamer or visiting *oneiropomps*. The art of creating a whole dreamscape is called *dreamscaping*.

dream warping: The strange and unholy manipulations of mortal dreams capable only by the True Fae, capable of turning mortals into sleepwalking slaves, sources of Glamour and Willpower and other terrible feats.

dreamweaving: The craft of creating dreams out of Glamour, instilling them into dream phials.

Echoes: The powers manifested by a *fetch*.

ensorcelled: Those humans who have entered into pledges with the fae; specifically those who are by means of a pledge able to see through the Mask.

entitlement: An exclusive order of changelings, one part noble title and one part mystical brotherhood.

fae: A blanket term for creatures and things imbued with the power of Faerie or the Hedge.

Fae, True Fae: The immortal, mighty and remorseless inhabitants of Faerie; the creatures that abduct humans and gradually transform them into changelings.

Faerie: *Arcadia*, or more rarely, the inhabitants of *Arcadia*.

fetch: A Fae-constructed replica of a human being, left behind to take an abductee's place.

forswearing: Breaking a pledge. The one who forswears is referred to as forsworn or an *oath-breaker*.

forsworn: One who has broken a pledge. This title may rightly be used for as long as the oath's penalties are in place, and for a year and a day after. Often used as an insult if the breaking of the pledge is publicly known.

frailty: A supernatural prohibition or weakness that comes with high Wyrd.

freehold: A local society of changelings, usually overseen by a seasonal ruler and offering support to their fellow changelings.

Gentry: A changeling euphemism for the True Fae.

Glamour: The raw supernatural energy that feeds the fae. It is tied to the strong emotions of the human heart.

goblin: A general term for fae creatures and things of dubious or no loyalties; often applied to hobgoblins and unaffiliated changelings.

Goblin Contract: An illicit Contract, typically easy to learn but with unpleasant side effects.

goblin fruit: The many types of fae consumables harvested from the Hedge that have some supernatural effect on the user.

Goblin Market: A fae black market, often moving location, in which changelings and sometimes other fae barter for illicit goods and services.

Hedge, the: The thorny otherworld that lies between the mortal realm and Faerie.

hobgoblins: The fae creatures and denizens of the Hedge.

Hollow: A safe haven within the Hedge.

Keeper: The Fae who kept a changeling in Arcadia, and whose influence is usually felt in that changeling's seeming.

kith: A sub-category of seeming, representing more specific affinities such as the various elements or animals.

Lost: A euphemism for "changeling" or "changelings." Often used by changelings who refuse to think of themselves as no longer human.

Mask: The illusion that conceals the presence of the fae from mortal eyes.

mien, fae mien: A changeling or other fae's true form, concealed by the Mask.

motley: A small group of changelings, sometimes bound in a pledge of friendship.

oathbound: One of the parties in a pledge. May also be used to describe some secret protected by an oath; "that information is oathbound, friend."

oathbreaker: As *forsworn*.

oathsworn: As *oathbound*.

oneiromachy: Dream combat. Only those capable of wielding *oneiromancy* may engage in oneiromachy.

oneiromancy: The practice of lucid dreaming. Changelings and other creatures of the Wyrd are capable of applying these techniques to the dreams of others, however.

oneiropomp: A changeling or other creature that enters the dreams of another.

oneirovores: Creatures native to the Hedge or Faerie that consume the dreams or dream-selves of mortals.

Others: Another euphemism for the True Fae.

pledge: A vow tied into the strands of Wyrd, enforcing it with the very nature of the fae and fate itself.

sanction: The aspect of a pledge that governs the punishment for those who violate the pledge.

seeming: A changeling's physical aspect, which reflects the role he played in Faerie.

Spring Court: The Court bound to Spring, desire and beauty.

Summer Court: The Court bound to Summer, wrath and military strength.

task: The aspect of a pledge that governs what is expected of the *oathbound*.

token: An object infused with a measure of fae power.

trod: A path cut through the Hedge, from one mortal site to another or to Faerie. Also used to refer to the physical location that corresponds with the entrance to such a path.

Winter Court: The Court bound to Winter, sorrow and intrigue.

Wyrd: The power of Faerie.







fucking hate the telephone.

Funny thing to hate, right? But I do. Ever since I got back, I've hated it. I always think it's going to be *him*, my Keeper or whatever you want to call him.

But I always answer it, because if he comes back, I want to know about it. So tonight, the phone rings, and the guy on the other end of the line says, "Look out your window."

What is this, a Craven flick? OK, I look. Nothing. Moonlight on the snow. If anyone had been in my yard, the motion sensor would have kicked on the light above my garage door. "OK, what?"

"See the snow?"

"Who the fuck is this?"

"You're going back."

I hang up. I stand there a minute shaking. I was out in that snow for *twenty fucking years*. That bastard gave me nothing but a few skins to keep me warm while I kept his ice-gardens looking pretty. No fire, no sunlight, nothing for heat but thought and desire. Try keeping *that* warm for —

"Twenty years, asshole."

I hadn't even realized the phone was ringing, much less that I'd answered it. I walk to my room and dig my gun out of my closet. "Who is this?"

"Give you a hint. I'm like you, except when I got back, I wasn't stupid enough to stand by a window while I'm backlit."

"What the fu —"

Next thing I know, I'm in a goddamn snowdrift. The guy standing over me looks a lot like me. I remember him. He was one of the other tenders for that bastard's garden, but he didn't keep himself warm enough. He's standing in the snow, and I can't tell where it begins and his legs end.

"Told you," he says. He's got this weird thing in his hands. It's a tool that the Prince gave him. Strange that I didn't recognize it right away.

He raises it over his head, and god *damn* if the phone doesn't start ringing right then. Figures.

CHAPTER I

The World Behind the Mask

*She ran and ran
As if she feared some goblin man
Dogged her with gibe or curse
Or something worse:*

— CHRISTINA ROSSETTI, “GOBLIN MARKET”

ARCADIA — THE PERPETUAL TWILIGHT

There are three places that are called Arcadia. One is the mortal Arcadia, a Greek prefecture on the Peloponnese. One is the mythical utopia, a land of incomparable natural beauty where all manners of joy and pleasure might be found. Unspoiled by man, that Arcadia is the home of supernatural beings that exist without conceit or greed, filling their days with idyllic pursuits among the verdant forests and meadows of plenty.

And then there is the domain of the Fae.

This Arcadia is indeed breathtaking, but its beauty also terrifies. It is a land of deathless joy in gnarled gardens, and of mountains built of half-gnawed bone. In Faerie (for so it is also called), forests, dark and primeval, writhe alongside concrete jungles thick with artfully bent metal and delicate snowflakes of broken glass. Almost Victorian estates squat along shorelines that are crowded thick with the carcasses of a thousand sailing ships, all of this bordered thickly by the Hedge’s labyrinthine mazes. Arcadia is all of those things, or perhaps it is none of them. Perhaps everything that is “known” about Arcadia is merely the fevered visions of those who have lost the ability to discern reality from fantasy and truth from dream.

Because of the nature of Faerie, even firsthand accounts of the land are inherently skewed. Those who have journeyed there, and escaped to tell the tale, find themselves deeply changed by their experiences. Many seem no longer certain of the reality of the world around them, let alone of the alien one they just left. Some, perhaps the fortunate ones, remember little to nothing of the time spent

in Arcadia, even if decades passed in their absence. Traveling through the thorny Hedge that surrounds Arcadia tears away at both the body and the sanity of any but the native inhabitants, who are themselves rumored to be nothing more than manifestations of the land itself — immune to, or perhaps merely symptoms of, its reality-shredding power. They are Faerie, and the land is Faerie.

What little is known of Faerie comes from the accounts of those who have visited there and escaped with some measure of their sanity intact. Because of this, it is uncertain whether the contradictions they report are a matter of slanted perception or whether reality, in fact, blatantly contradicts itself within the fae realm. Any fact reported about Faerie or those who dwell within its borders is suspect, at best. Even if it’s utter truth in the time and place it was witnessed, it may be complete falsehood at any other time and place.

Among the accounts told by those who have been unfortunate enough to visit Arcadia (and fortunate enough to return) are the following:

Faerie is the nightmare from which there is no waking. Reality, at least as humanity knows it, does not exist there. Faerie’s “natural” laws are not those of science, of spirit or even of magic as mortals can comprehend it, but a complexly woven tapestry of agreements and loopholes with no rhyme or reason intelligible to the human mind. The inhabitants thereof are bound, and bind themselves, in constantly shifting strata of power and manipulation that not only determines social structure and hierarchy within

the sentient population but shifts the very nature of truth as well.

Faerie is filled with supernatural denizens who each possess almost unrestricted power within its own demesne — or so they profess. Certainly their abilities are far beyond those witnessed in the mortal realm, leaving no wonder why they were thought to be gods or the most powerful of spirits by humanity's earliest civilizations. These creatures' ability to enforce their own will on the world around them is manifested in the form of oathsworn Contracts — some ancient, some newly uttered — with which they can change the very nature of reality, binding time and fate to their whim. The oldest of these Contracts are thought to date back to the beginning of time, and through them the Fae maintain absolute dominion over their homeland — and those humans unfortunate enough to journey there.

The only physical way for a human to enter Faerie proper is to be taken there by the True Fae. While other supernatural means may afford humans entry into the Hedge, Arcadia is the domain of the Fae, and entrance there is solely at their behest. Rumors exist of those who have, through one means or another, found the winding road to Faerie; however, not even legends speak of anyone ever returning, save those who were taken into the Fae realm by the Gentry themselves. Perhaps it is a simple impossibility, and the road to Faerie is not traversable by any save those welcomed by the Fae. Perhaps there is a key to entering Arcadia that no mortal can wield. Or perhaps the Fair Folk simply do not appreciate unsolicited guests and make their lethal displeasure known upon those who come uninvited.

If even a small part of the accounts of those who have traveled there are to be believed, the realm, just as those who make their home there, is a place of unknowable extremes and possibilities. Within the Hedge-hemmed borders lies the potential for both utopian wonder and brimstone torment. The human mind, however, seems intrinsically incapable of comprehending the vast paradoxical nature of the place, just as the human mind is unable to truly understand the wholly alien nature of those who make their home there.

THE TRUE FAE

The denizens of Arcadia have worn many names throughout the centuries, as humankind, chilled by its encounter with their alien otherness, attempts to fight the fear of the unknown with the power of naming. While their names are legion, those who have dwelled within their halls and dungeons, who have served in their kitchens and courtrooms and boudoirs, call them “the Gentry” or simply “the Fae.”

The word “fairy” has been sanitized in recent years. The idea behind it has been so far separated from the original meaning as to be wholly unrelated, just as the innocent images of miniscule, winged women is almost wholly disparate from the reality of the True Fae. Originally, the word “fae”

came from *fatum*, a vulgar Latin name for the Goddesses of Fate — forces capable of drawing out or cutting short a human life with the smallest of efforts. The Fates were all-powerful and unknowable to mortal minds. And, indeed, to those unfortunate mortals who cross their path, the Fae embody the term just as well. They can snatch a child from her former life as neatly as shears cut a tapestry cord, leaving only unraveling threads in their wake. And even to those who have spent decades as their servants, slaves, lovers or pets, the True Fae are beyond understanding. Though a Fae might be by turns warm or cold, bright or dark, even kind or cruel, each one is marred by the same flaw — they have no sense of compassion or empathy, no ability to comprehend or relate to a human being's pain. Even their “kindnesses” can draw blood, and their favor is like an elegant and chill prison.

The term “fae” has been applied to witches and demons, spirits and monsters, ghosts and goblins. Some associate it with the tall, elegant humanoids that the Celts called the *sidhe*. To others, fae may be miniature creatures with delicate wings, or watery horses with hooves of steel or keening ghosts that foretell death by their presence. All of these creatures may have been inspired by the True Fae, while none of them catch a significant portion of the truth. In their home realm, they are as powerful and incomprehensible as gods, or so say the changelings who were forced to serve them. Even when the Fae walk in the mortal world, any brief sighting captures but a single facet in a terrible and beautiful Fae jewel. Those who catch only a glimpse of them are awestruck by the beauty, cruelty, might and the alienness that surround them. And those who dare to venture nearer find that the more they seek to know the Fae, the more their minds, spirits and souls are warped by the very presence they seek to understand.

To the changelings who have been abducted by the Fae, those who served beneath them and those fortunate few who have escaped their clutches, there is no doubt, however, as to the True Fae's identity. They are demons, monsters and fiends, no matter how fair the form they may wear.

Fae vs. True Fae

The “True Fae” are the native denizens of Arcadia, which bears the name “Faerie” by virtue of being their home. When the term “the Fae” is capitalized, it refers only to the True Fae, while “the fae” also may include changelings, hobgoblins, fetches and other supernatural citizens of Faerie or the Hedge. The term “fae” as an adjective may refer to any person, creature, place or object related in some way to Faerie culture, either through connection to the True Fae or other fae beings.

THE ABDUCTION

From the Russian Babay to the Mexican El Cucuy, the bogeyman lives under the proverbial beds and in the metaphorical closets of almost every human society. Throughout history and almost without exception, each culture has had at least one version of monstrous beings that haunt the shadows of their moonless nights, waiting for the opportunity to snatch misbehaving children or lure unsuspecting travelers to their deaths — or worse.

Modern scholars profess that these “kidnapper” legends all have a common root: humanity’s need for cautionary tales, that each of these creatures was invented by parents or society elders to proscribe harmful behaviors through the use of a menacing and mysterious enforcer. Children who misbehave may be threatened with the *homem do saco* (“Bag Man”) in Portugal or *le croquet-mitaine* (“the mitten-biter”) in France, but the sentiment is the same: “If you don’t behave as we want you to, we won’t be able to protect you and something will come and get you.” Likewise, young girls who stray from their parents’ watchful supervision or young men prone to sneaking out for adventure pose an inherent threat to the social hierarchy of their individual cultures. Creatures such as Nanny Rutt, an English well-dweller who disappears with those who venture too near her home, or the Peruvian Econdato who take the form of dolphins and lure travelers into their river-world, serve as external reinforcements of the safety of home and the importance of remaining there. While the details of each legendary creature may be very different, at their core they are the same. Since the desire to encourage conformation to acceptable behavior standards is universal, it is understandable that each society developed mythological figures that punish those who behave inappropriately. Similarly, since certain human experiences (death, slavery, separation from one’s friends and family) are almost unequivocally seen as the most severe retributions possible, it is not surprising that the creators of these myths used them as the punishments inflicted by the kidnappers for misbehavior. By foisting the responsibility for punishment off on some mysterious outside force, those in control both circumvented rebellion against their own authority and removed themselves from the position of enforcer. The identity of the “kidnapper” might vary, but the message remains the same: conform and be safe, deviate and be removed from the game by something beyond our control.

But the tales don’t stop with the “bad ones” being taken. Innocent children are taken from the safety of their beds, hardworking farmers are swallowed up in their fields and pious clergy are stolen from sacred ground. In this case, to Occam’s credit, the simplest explanation is the correct one.

For centuries, perhaps since the dawn of human existence, the Fae have preyed upon humanity. Every year, in every corner of the world, thousands of individuals go missing without explanation. Stolen from their homes, taken

while traveling or snatched from their cradles, countless men, women and children simply disappear without a trace. For some, mundane explanations exist. Runaways return, murder victims are discovered, fugitives are apprehended. For others, the explanations are much less clear.

In some cases, the lost people are never found again, and no clue ever leads to their whereabouts. No bodies are discovered, and they never again raise so much as a blip on the radar of human society. Investigations lead to dead ends, leaving their families and friends befuddled as to their fate. It is as if they had completely disappeared from the Earth, leaving no trace behind. And many who vanish are never missed at all, not until it’s far too late.

In other cases, the disappearance is not permanent. The missing individuals may not remember anything about the time they were gone, even if they were missing for years. Other times, they may claim to remember, but their tales are befuddled, at best. They may claim to have been taken by ghosts, spirits, aliens or fairies, mysterious individuals of impossible descriptions, and spent hours, or days or decades in a world not our own. Some allege to have been held prisoner in the lands of the dead, be it Heaven or Hell. Yet others claim to have been imprisoned in a nightmare realm, where the rules of the mortal world do not apply. Their tales are muddled, as full of gaps as they are contradictions. Many cannot remember how they came to return. Perhaps they earned their freedom, or escaped through stealth or guile. Some even claim to have slain their captors, although often the least lucid are the ones who make these claims.

In both permanent disappearances and those in which the victims eventually return, the simplest explanations are again the correct ones. Their stories, if they live to tell them, are rooted in truth, no matter how fantastic they may seem.

Of course, not all who vanish are stolen by the Fae. However, not all who are stolen by the Fae vanish. The majority of changelings are never missed at all, their lives replaced by an impostor created by their captors. They fight their way back only to discover that they were never missed, and that they have no lives to return to. Unable to live as they once did, the Lost must find a new road to walk.

STOLEN CHILD

Many of the classic human legends speak of children stolen from their beds, or even their cradles, by their Fae abductors. And, in truth, this legend is rooted in fact. Many Fae do prefer to kidnap their new “wards” at a very early age, and the abductions of babies certainly form a large part of those abductions that were historically identified as the work of the Gentry. After all, snatching a sleeping child from a cradle is far easier than abducting a strapping youth who is more capable of self-defense. Also, should the abduction of a youngster be thwarted by circumstance, a child’s babblings — if they are even comprehended — are far more likely to be ignored or downplayed than those of an adult. As well,

although time in Faerie often lengthens a human's lifespan considerably, compared to the True Fae, a human lifetime is an infinitesimally short period. By taking their charges as early as possible, the Fae ensure that by the time the children are of an age to be of use to their abductors, the children have already transitioned into accepting whatever passes for reality in Faerie as "normal." Their Keepers will thus have as long a period as possible of use from their wards.

However, the majority of changelings encountered as adults weren't taken as babies. While many humans are stolen from the cradle, their mortality rate is very high due to the fragile nature of human infants, the inherent dangers of Arcadia and the unreliable attention they are likely to receive in Faerie. In fact, no human taken to Faerie as a babe has returned to the mortal world on his own cognizance. Their memories of the human world are simply not strong enough to afford them passage through the Hedge and back into the land of their birth. Those who do manage to escape their Keeper's care and set out for a world they never really saw are doomed to wander endlessly through the Hedge, before either finding another Fae Keeper or possibly ending in a much more dire fate. However, in rare circumstances, those stolen from their human kin at a very early age can be rescued by other changelings and brought back into the mortal world. These individuals may well develop severe emotional disorders at later ages, and may also be prone to wandering back into Faerie, intentionally or not. Their connection with the Faelands is as strong, if not stronger, than their connection to the lands of their birth.

THE HUNT

Once the humans are capable of wandering unsupervised, perhaps as young as five or six, they provide both more challenges and more benefit to their Fae abductors. The humans are more prone to putting up a fight against the entity who attempts to take them by force, and perhaps of raising the attention of others, if not stopping the attack on their own. On the other hand, they also possess greater fortitude for enduring the trials and tribulations of life in Faerie, and by having a firmer human identity, may serve their Keeper's purposes better than an individual who was taken as a swaddling child. For some True Fae, taking a human captive is a sporting challenge — a game of cunning and skill, not unlike how humans see small game hunting. These individuals may avoid taking children as captives altogether, and intentionally seek out not only adults but those adults who will most strongly try the Fae's skill. Athletes, outdoorsmen, even hunters themselves, provide these Fae sportsmen with the challenge they seek, and once they have overcome their human quarry, they take great sadistic pleasure in using their new wards as hunting stock to flush out future prey in Arcadia.

THE DANCE

Not all changelings are abducted by force. Some are seduced across the border between the mortal world and

Faerie, cajoled into the Hedge by entities far older and more practiced in the social arts than any human ever will be. Like lambs to slaughter, the changelings follow their would-be captors to a fate the humans cannot comprehend, and could not avoid even if they understood it. Legends speak of villagers following ghostly lights or will-o-wisps into the depths of the wilderness and never emerging. These amorphous globes of phosphorescent illumination may appear similar to the natural phenomenon of swamp gas, but it is no naturally occurring bioluminescence that craftily lures its followers into the depths of the Hedge. Other Fae are more direct. Playing upon a human's sympathy, they may appear as a lost child or an injured animal, and lead the Good Samaritan who seeks to aid them into Faerie, proving that no good deed goes unpunished. Lust is also a powerful motivator, and many humans are literally seduced across the border and through the Hedge into Arcadia. And, of course, many of the legends of the Devil making a deal with someone over his soul have their roots in a cocky Fae's openly offered bargain with an equally arrogant human. Unfortunately for humanity, the outcome is much more rarely in the human's favor than the folktales report.

LUCK — FAIR OR FOUL

Despite the Gentry's greed for human servants, not all changelings are originally the product of Fae efforts. While it is almost impossible for a human to enter the Hedge without some sort of supernatural aid, that aid (wanted or not) is not always from the Fae. Certain circumstances can open doorways into the fae world, and it is not unheard of for an ill-fated person to slip through them and find themselves in the thorny maze of the Hedge. Unfortunately, once they've entered and wandered away from the doorway, it's far more difficult to return, and Fae will often patrol the Hedge on the look out for those who have become lost in the Thorns (but not yet succumbed to the dangers thereof). Presenting themselves as protectors and benefactors, these Fae may actually have an easy time of convincing their new wards to pledge loyalty to them. Tragically, the outcome is just as debilitating to the new changeling as if he'd been taken by force.

THE DURANCE

While it is impossible for the human (or changeling) mind to fully understand the alien and convoluted whims of one of the True Fae, there seem to be several common motivations for the Fae to take human "wards." Though Keepers may not have any single motivation for what they do, the Lost have pulled from their mutual disjointed memories what they believe to be several primary roles that changelings are "encouraged" to play.

Many folktales speak of the Fae's inability to have children of their own, and a resulting fascination with human babes. These stories, however, are more likely than not the wishful thinking of parents who believe their children have been taken; thinking that they have been stolen be-

cause of the parental longings of their new “family” is far more reassuring than believing them killed, neglected or treated as slaves. Unfortunately for changelings, the truth is less comforting. While some have vague memories of being treated roughly akin to a member of a fae family, the reality was far more “red-haired stepchild” than “beloved heir to all you survey.”

Likewise, while romantic tales have been spun of the Fae falling in love with mortals and sweeping them off to serve as consorts, the realities of such tales are far from idyllic. Some changelings, especially those who were seduced across the Hedge, may have been concubines to their Keepers, but the role was scarcely more romantic than that of an abducted sex slave to a mortal master. The Fae are fickle beings with no real ability to empathize with a lover's wants or needs. They might have played at being attentive and “considerate” from time to time, but only for as long as it seemed fashionable or amusing.

Other changelings, especially those who were taken later in life, seem to have been chosen to continue their mortal roles for their new Fae patron. Child prodigies, cunning inventors and philosophers have been snatched to serve in the laboratories, naves and libraries of Faerie, while writers, poets, singers and musicians are abducted for their Keepers' entertainment. Cooks and craftsmen, those with a knack for working with metal or plants or taming wild animals have all found their services come to the attention of the True Fae, and found themselves stolen away for their use.

Perhaps most confusing, at least for the victims, are those who seem to have been taken for no particular reason whatsoever. They may be pressed into service in their Keepers' guardian forces, or set to scrubbing their floors — tasks that certainly could have been filled as easily (and certainly more efficiently) by fae underlings or through the use of Fae magics. Whether these individuals were truly chosen at random, or whether their Keepers had some greater plan that was beyond human kenning, is uncertain.

CHANCES

When humans enter the Hedge, the Thorns do more than tear at their flesh — the Thorns rip away at their souls as well. While some lucky individuals may quickly return to the relative safety of the human world and escape relatively unscathed, those who venture deeper, further and longer into the Hedge find that the separation from the human world affects them in strange ways. Their senses may begin to play tricks on them. Not only sight and sound, but their sense of what is right and wrong as well can become skewed, and they may find themselves reacting to situations or contemplating actions that they would have considered loathsome before entering the Hedge.

While the human soul is not quantifiable, there is a certain something which makes humanity humanity,

and it is this same unique characteristic that begins to unravel like a mis-knit sweater, the deeper one travels into Fae lands. This undoing is disconcerting, to say the least, for those who notice it. Far too often, however, those who are thrust into the madlands do not have sufficient touchstones with reality to realize that they themselves are changing, or the tools to deal with the damage should they recognize it. Still, assuming that they are able to escape back to the human world within a reasonable period, most will find themselves able to heal the damage to their spirit. Some, however, travel too long or too far in the Hedge and become lost to the human world altogether. Rumors exist of the fate that may befall humans when bereft of their souls: they become monsters that haunt the Thorns, seeking to steal from others that which they no longer possess themselves. Far more likely, however, is the chance that those who travel deep enough into the Hedge to lose their souls entirely are, as they near Faerie proper, found by the True Fae and “enlisted” in one fashion or another into their service. While the border of Faerie may permit humans to dash in and escape relatively unscathed, entering Arcadia proper is another matter entirely.

AN OFFER YOU CANNOT REFUSE

Whether taken by force, or as part of some ill-struck bargain, humans who enter a Fae's demesne are never the same afterwards. A human cannot exist for long in this alien realm without Fae aid. Everything in Arcadia exists and interacts as a result of Contracts and oaths with those around it, and without access to those oaths, humans will find no sustenance, no shelter, no rest and no healing. Even the simplest acts such as quenching one's thirst or warming one's self at a campfire are safely completed only at the behest of ancient Contracts between the elements of water and fire and the fae denizens of the realm. Without entering into a bargain with their Keepers to be included in these Contracts by proxy, humans can receive no benefit from them. No amount of water will quench their thirst and even standing within a fire will not warm them (although it may certainly cause them harm). The laws of physics and science do not hold sway in Faerie. All reality is based on these inordinately powerful Contracts and oaths, and without a Fae mentor to include a human in them, a human's fate in Arcadia is sealed.

In truth, however, a human's fate is forever changed no matter whether she chooses to bargain with the Fae or to die by refusing. Those who have accepted a Contract with the True Fae (and through them, to Faerie itself) are changed by the process — they become changelings. This bargain, once struck, can never be entirely undone. Although they may return to the mortal world eventually, and in time reclaim their human souls, changelings will never be wholly human again. Their spirit will always be at least partially fae, and those who attempt to deny their fae nature for long

pay a heavy price for it. Their emotions are more powerful, and the emotions of others are almost like nourishment to them; the Lost feel joy and sorrow, love and hate with maddening intensity. In some ways, changelings can be seen as having grown beyond their human selves. Their fae side allows them access to the ancient oaths of their Keepers, and through the knowledge of them, to the ability to strike pledges and promises with each other and the world around them. These agreements grant changelings abilities far beyond those of humanity, and their fae senses allow them to see the world possibilities in the world around them that they were blind to as normal humans. However, no power comes without a price.

Perhaps the greatest ongoing cost of the changeling state is the foes accrued. While the Gentry prey upon humanity, the Lost are by their very nature of particular interest to the Fae. Likewise, other fae creatures may pay them special note when hunting, an attention that rarely ends well. Other hazards of changeling existence are less adversarial, but no less potentially lethal. Just as humans, changelings must have food, water and shelter to exist, but their basic needs do not end there. Should they attempt to reject their fae nature by eschewing the company of other changelings, avoiding the use of Contracts, pledges and Glamour, and avoiding the Hedge entirely, they will begin to suffer physically and emotionally for such denial.

THE ESCAPE

While changelings' roles during their captivity in Faerie may vary wildly, each changeling has at least one common experience. At some point, they have made their

escape and returned to the mortal world. Some escape literally, using some means to break away from their captivity against their Keepers' will (or without their knowledge). Some use stealth, slipping away when their Keepers' attention is elsewhere. Others may use guile, tricking their Keepers or one of its minions into allowing them passage back to the mortal world. A few use strength, breaking out of their chains (literally or figuratively) or overpowering their captors by force. These escapes are not always successful, and many changelings speak of multiple attempts that failed before they finally won their freedom. Being dragged back in chains and undergoing whatever punishments their Keeper found entertaining might deter some from future attempts, meaning that those changelings who do win

their way back are often the strongest, most cunning or determined of their kind.

Other changelings report that they did not escape, but were freed. Some, such as the legends of True Thomas, claim to have agreements of a limited-time Contract with their Keeper, and were released at the end of their sentence. Others won contests, riddles, challenges or duels with their



captor (or serving as their Keeper's champion) and demanded their freedom as their prize. Perhaps the most confusing are those few whose Keepers simply released them with no apparent reason. While these individuals are, of course, grateful for their freedom, they are often left with a sense of unfinished business, and the completely valid concern of what service they are performing for their master now as free fae that was more valuable to their Keepers than continuing to serve in Faerie.

In many cases, a number of changelings may find their way to freedom as a group rather than singly. Though they may separate at the last, drawn by memories of differing homesteads, they were able to overcome obstacles as a group that would have stopped any one. Each motley of Lost that makes their communal way out of the Thorns is an object lesson in mutual strength. In a few instances, multiple groups of changelings find their way back home at the same time, their jumbled memories suggesting a largely failed uprising. Over the last decade or so, a larger number of changelings seem to have been finding their way home. Some suggest that it was the heightened emotional turmoil of the millennium's end that drew these stragglers home, even if some of them arrived late thanks to the time-twisting nature of Faerie. A few older Lost mention a similar exodus that seemed to arrive during the 19th century's *fin de siècle*, and wonder if there isn't a larger pattern at work.

PLAYER OR PAWN

In the back of the mind of each changeling who escapes the madlands of Faerie, a nagging question eventually arises. No matter how stealthy, cunning, strong or deadly the escapee considers himself to be, getting the best of the True Fae in their own realm is the stuff of folklore, more than reality. Thus, regardless of how the changelings escaped from their Keepers, they almost inevitably come to ask themselves whether they really "got one over" on the Fae. Was she really sleeping when the changeling snuck the key out from under her pillow, or was she only pretending not to wake? Did she truly leave the door ajar at just the right time for the changeling to slip away, or did she intend for him to go? Did he truly win the contest, overcome the given challenges or defeat the enemy and thus earn his freedom or was it all staged? Was that really the Fae the changeling slew, or some artificial simulacrum designed to make him believe his Keeper was dead? Was the escape truly an escape, or was it all, just as everything else in Faerie, something other than what it seemed?

No changeling, of course, can ever truly know. And for some, the possibility that their escape was anything but what it seemed takes a long, long time to surface. But for those who have any inkling of the complex and manipulative nature of the True Fae, the question does eventually arise, adding one more layer of doubt and fear to their existence in the mortal world.

HOME AGAIN, HOME AGAIN

Returning to the mortal world is often at least as jarring for changelings as finding themselves in Faerie was. How difficult their transition back is depends on several factors, any one of which may be enough to drive a changeling mad with frustration, fear or confusion. Each individual, of course, experiences the return in different ways depending upon the nature of his human life before abduction, the circumstances of his time in Faerie and the price of his escape. There are, however, certain challenges that most, if not all, changelings must deal with upon their return to the "real" world.

STRANGER IN A STRANGE LAND

Perhaps the singular most difficult challenge to returning to the mortal world is the fact that they are no longer mortal themselves. For all that they may appear unchanged to mortal eyes, changelings have experienced things that no "normal" human has, and are aware of an aspect of reality that, at best, would have them labeled slightly eccentric. At worst, publicly professing that you'd been abducted by supernatural creatures from another realm who transformed you to be no longer human could easily lead to commitment to a mental institution. However, even if a changeling keeps his differences to himself, he still knows that he is no longer what he was. He is no longer the same as his parents, his former friends, the people he grew up around. Even if they were to accept his return (no small feat in and of itself), he is walking between the world of the fae and the human world, and is no longer truly a part of either.

Changeling society is based, at least in part, on this principle. In order to thrive as changelings, each individual must maintain somewhat of a balance between his human side and his fae self. To ignore his human side is devastating to a changeling's Clarity. He begins to lose any sense of what is real and what is merely the discontented grumblings and terrified shrieks of his wounded soul. Delusions, hallucinations, depression, compulsions, phobias and psychosomatic ailments all wait down that road, greedily anticipating the arrival of a changeling who eschews the mortal world too greatly. Considering the dangers that await those who have immersed themselves solely in fae matters, the logical reaction would seem to be to err in the other direction. The other extreme, however, is, if anything, more dangerous. While low-Clarity changelings are in danger of losing their sanity, those who eschew the fae world entirely put themselves in danger of withdrawal-like symptoms as their fae-side slowly starves.

SEEMINGS AND KITHS

Faerie's effect on changelings goes all the way to the soul, but the changes are not entirely esoteric. The Fae

nature of his Keeper is translated down to the changeling through the Contracts between them, warping the changing both in body and spirit. This change divides the Lost up into strange affinities that they refer to as seemings. A changeling whose Keeper was crafted of living shadow, for example, might himself become of the Darkling seeming, taking on shadow-related characteristics as well. He might well develop an aversion to light, or his coloring might become monochrome. If his Keeper preferred an underground demesne, the changeling might develop the same tastes, adapting — whether he liked it or not — to survive in the fae environment he found himself bound to. Not all changelings, however, follow directly in their Keepers' footsteps. Take, for example, the human performer who was kidnapped by a Fae troll to entertain him with her song. She may, based on the role her Keeper places her in, develop a Fairest seeming, while the strapping young man who was stolen to guard his lair might become an Ogre himself.

Within Faerie, the True Fae's will seems to permeate all aspects of his dealings, imposing itself on those around him. Humans (and the changelings they develop into) seem particularly vulnerable to the forces of this fae will. The manifestations of this Fae taint, however, are almost limitless. Even within the same seeming, two changelings may develop very differently. These further specialized affinities, called kiths, exist within each seeming. An Elemental seeming, for example, may manifest general qualities of all elemental forces: stone, air, earth and water. Or she may be very specifically a Fireheart, carrying the living flame within her. Likewise, a Wizeden seeming might be a general wise woman, the epitome of a fairy tale witch, or she might be a Chirurgeon who's mastered disturbing surgeries, an Oracle with an innate eye for Fate and the future or even a Smith of magical weapons and armor, putting her innate understanding of how things work to very practical and yet still supernatural use. Each of these kiths might have very different miens, reflecting physically different aspects while belonging to the same overarching seeming.

A changeling's mien almost never changes so far from the changeling's original form to make him unrecognizable. He may grow or shrink a few inches, but he is very unlikely to gain or lose a foot or more in height. Hair and eye color may change, and facial features may subtly shift, but the appearance of the stolen human is never completely overwritten. It's said that it's possible to change completely, but that those who do never find their way home, having lost the ability to recognize their mortal selves. The changes are physical, but do not appear to be genetic; DNA analysis cannot determine a "goblin genome," for instance. It also seems impossible for a changeling to pass on his fae qualities to any offspring — not that the Lost have much by way of fertility after the change, that is. Exposure to Faerie seems to negatively affect a human's ability to sire or bear children, making it impossible for most by the time they have become changelings proper. Therefore, the Others are

obliged to steal new servants every year, rather than simply breeding the stock they already own.

Upon returning to the mortal world, changelings may be relieved to find that the physical manifestations of their fae mien do not reveal themselves to humans. Changelings are protected by an enchantment that hangs over all things fae, concealing them from mortal eyes. This Mask, as they call it, may seem a small boon compared to the myriad other challenges they face in the mortal world, but it is a boon none the less. Their miens, however, have not disappeared or faded upon leaving Faerie. Other Lost will see changelings quite clearly — as will the True Fae, should they come across the changeling. Likewise, should the changeling venture into the Hedge or Arcadia proper, he will find that everyone, including humans, sees his fae mien and not his human guise.

TIME AND TIES

Faerie is a land of mutable reality. Science and logic hold no power there, unless this is the particular interest of the Fae who rules the area in question. Natural laws may or may not apply as they do in the mortal world, depending on whether or not the land is bound by Fae Contracts that simply replicate the effects of these laws. Time is no exception to this phenomenon. A changeling may find return from what seemed to be a week of time in Faerie, only to find seven years have passed in the mortal world in his absence. Conversely, a changeling may serve for decades and return to find that mere moments have passed while he was gone. This may make reclaiming one's former life impossible. Imagine trying to explain to your parents that, although their son only disappeared a few days ago, the person before them who claims to be their child is actually in his 50s, having experienced decades of slavery at the hands of his inhuman captors. Just as difficult is the fate of the woman who returns to find her children grown and married with children of their own, when it seems to her that only a week has passed in Faerie.

FETCHES

While time fluctuation between Faerie and the mortal world may lead to seemingly impossible complications for those who try to return to their "normal" life, they are nothing when compared to those who return to find that, at least according to their friends and family, they have never left. The True Fae are masters of manipulation, and many replace the individual they've taken from the mortal world with a simulacrum. This mock-up, called a fetch, steps in where the changeling disappeared, continuing his life as if he had never gone. And, considering the travails that changelings undergo in Faerie, the chance is high that they, rather than the fetch, will be seen as the imposters should they return and attempt to confront their families with the simulacrum's existence.

These fae creatures appear in all aspects to be the abducted changelings. Their faces, bodies and voices are all



identical to the people they are replacing, and through some fae spell, they seem to know as much about the changelings' lives as the changelings themselves. For all that they appear human, however, they are not. When killed, a fetch degenerates back into the stuff it was made from: bits and pieces of bizarre junk, held together with a shard of the abductee's own shadow. The reversion can take anywhere from a few weeks to a few minutes; a fetch's corpse may last long enough to pass an autopsy and be interred, or be nothing more than bits of wood, string and bone bobbing in the water.

Destroying a fetch may be an important step toward a changeling reclaiming her former life. Science-fiction mirror world fantasies aside, however, the act of killing something that appears to be oneself is a task for which many changelings find they have no stomach. After years spent in Faerie, many changelings find themselves in a very conflicted state while looking at the creatures that look just like them, act just like them and have been living beside their friends and loving and supporting their families. Some changelings wonder if they are doing their loved ones a disservice by attempting to destroy the substitutes. Other changelings, especially those with low Clarity, may find themselves wondering if they are the originals at all, or simply poor deluded fae creations that have been cursed with others' memories of earlier lives.

MEMORY AND CLARITY

The human mind sees patterns everywhere. We learn by them, teach by them and when they do not exist, we invent them, seeking to understand even random events through imagined structure. An object dropped will fall to the ground. Time moves forward; people are born, age and then die. It is more than a casual expectation. The basis of human views on reality is built around them to the extent that insanity is sometimes described as expecting different outcomes from identical situations. However, none of those logical scientific explanations can predict the mad pavannes of Faerie. From the moment humans cross the Hedge, they are stepping out of their world physically, philosophically and even theoretically. All previous assumptions are potentially invalid, and the corresponding grip on "reality" that came with a firm set of rules begins slipping away.

For changelings who have survived a durance in Arcadia and returned to the mortal world, the rules have changed not once, but twice. Their time in Faerie swept away the certainty of the "real" world, and upon returning they must learn how to balance the human and fae realities, hopefully without losing themselves in the process. This balance, called Clarity, is one of the most important factors in a changeling's life. Too much Clarity, and he is in danger of losing touch with his fae self. Too little, and he risks insanity and finds himself uncertain of the reality of the world around him.

Just as waking reality is often easier to remember than even the strongest experiences encountered in a dream, the

bizarre experiences a changeling undergoes in Faerie are muddled upon a changeling's return to the mortal world. This confusion is unavoidable. The human part of the changeling simply cannot cling too tightly to the utterly Fae environment it was thrust into, leaving a changeling doubting, questioning or simply not remembering the majority of his durance in Arcadia. Often this is seen as a mixed blessing. While it is a relief to not be constantly assaulted by the cruelty and terror that is part and parcel of dealing with the True Fae, foggy and incomplete memories often leave changelings wondering as to what truly happened to them. If they are barely able to contend with those memories they possess, what greater horrors did they undergo that lie suppressed below the surface?

FIRST CONTACT

One of the most significant events any changeling will undergo is his first contact with others of his kind upon escaping Faerie. While many changelings will have known other fae-abducted humans, the changeling experience really begins anew upon returning to the mortal world, and only others who have suffered in Arcadia and lived to tell about it can truly understand what it is to be changeling. Because of this camaraderie, many changelings gather in groups called freeholds, ostensibly to protect themselves and each other from the dangers of fae existence. In a large part, however, freeholds provide a sense of the familiar to those who have had their realities stripped away not once, but twice.

In freeholds, the Lost find a sense of belonging that they likely have not been able to reclaim upon returning to the mortal worlds: their friends, family and loved ones may have already finished mourning the missing individuals, or a fetch may have filled the gap entirely, leaving no room for the returning changeling. While it is not impossible for a changeling to take up his former place in human society, it is challenging and he will never again fit there as well as he did before his time in Faerie. In a freehold, however, everyone understands the things he's endured and the challenges that he faces every day. A freehold offers a sense of community and a level of acceptance he will not find elsewhere in the mortal world. Most freeholds are dominated by the Great Courts, whose cyclical intrigues add another layer of texture to changeling politics. However, the basic structure of the freehold relies on a Court, but not the Courts. The one does not necessitate the other, though the power of each Great Court's support network has come to mean that few freeholds do not feel their influence.

Freeholds also fill another need, although it is less openly spoken about than the need for pseudo-human contact. Changelings are not solely human any longer, and although they may have suffered torturous cruelty in Faerie, their eyes were also opened to an entirely new plane of wonder than is possible to experience in the mortal world. Arcadia is the land of dreams as well as nightmares, and even at its most

horrific, it is a place of miracles and magic. Few changelings are willing to admit that there are aspects of Faerie that sparked flame in their spirit and wonder in their existence in a way nothing human can. But it is a need, a longing that cannot be quenched by even the most vibrant of human art or the most passionate of human lovers. In a freehold, there is safety to experience somewhat of that fae marvel without much of the danger inherent in actually traveling into the Hedge, let alone Faerie. Contact with other changelings, individually or through the elaborate courts and noble orders that are reflections of those encountered in Arcadia, feeds that fae hunger in a way nothing else can.

NEW STARTS OR RECLAIMING THE OLD

Simply stepping back into their old lives is rarely an option for the Lost. Many challenges prevent them from picking up where they left off before their abduction. If a changeling hasn't been replaced by a fetch, his first challenge is attempting to explain where he's been. Telling the truth will only backfire upon him. The inherently tricky and cunning nature of fae magic ensure that revealing the reality of their existence to humans saps away at the changeling's own grip on reality. The changeling's Clarity slips away with each "reveal," leaving him less and less reliable as proof of his own assertions, the more stridently he attempts to demonstrate them. Humans are more likely to believe they are being made fools of, tricked or are the object of a con game than they are to believe that a few special effects really prove the existence of another level of reality. And yet, some explanation for what can be decades of absence must be made, if the changeling hopes to regain any aspect of his former life. Some changelings

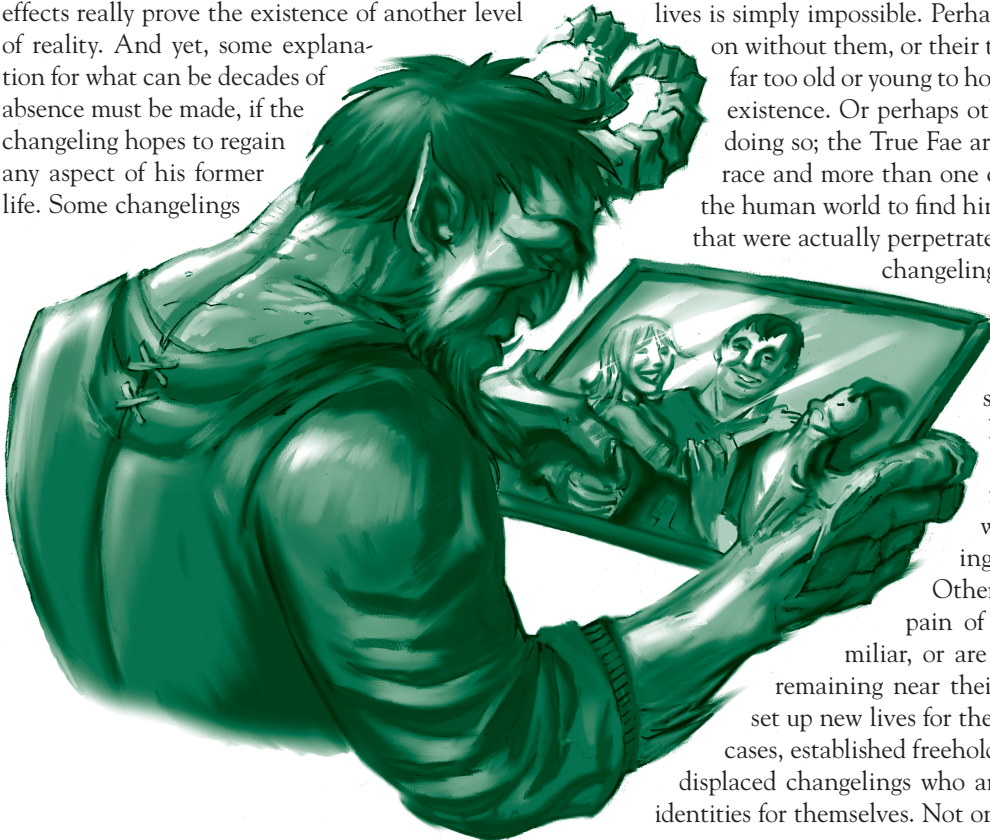
create elaborate tales of kidnappings, weaving stories of being held for years at the hands of some unknown assailant. While these stories can't be proved, they are more likely to be believed (and less likely to end up with the changeling being treated for psychosis) than the truth. These explanations, of course, only get more complicated if time has passed differently between the two worlds. Absences may be difficult to explain, but convincing someone of your identity when you are decades older or younger than you should be is nigh on impossible.

Equally difficult is returning to a gap that does not exist. Changelings who have been replaced by fetches are faced with a particularly thorny challenge. Directly attempting to take one's place back from the creature that has lived with one's family for years is rarely successful. The fetch has, for all extents and purposes, been the family member while the changeling has not, and nothing short of killing the fetch and revealing it to be nothing but constructs of flotsam and shadow is likely to prove the changeling's claims. Attempting to slaughter one member of the family in front of the rest, of course, is equally likely to end in disaster. Those who wish to attempt to replace their replacements must use subtlety both in dispatching them and in stepping into their place, a role that the fetch now knows far better than the original occupant. Even if the fetch has died during the changeling's absence, the problems remain. It's difficult to explain to your wife how you've returned to her when she attended your memorial service four years ago.

Some changelings find that reclaiming their former lives is simply impossible. Perhaps their families have gone on without them, or their time in Faerie has left them far too old or young to hope to recover their previous existence. Or perhaps other factors stop them from doing so; the True Fae are a cruel and manipulative race and more than one changeling has returned to the human world to find himself accused of vile crimes that were actually perpetrated by his Keeper during the changeling's abduction. For these

changelings, there is little choice save for creating new lives for themselves. Some stay near their hometowns, riding the bittersweet line between monitoring their families' well-being and not revealing their own true identities.

Others are unable to bear the pain of such proximity to the familiar, or are in too great of danger by remaining near their former homes, and must set up new lives for themselves elsewhere. In both cases, established freeholds often provide support for displaced changelings who are attempting to craft new identities for themselves. Not only do many have resources



for creating the paper trails required to be acknowledged by human society, but they also may act as a surrogate family, offering the changeling the acceptance and inclusion that he has been unable to reclaim on his own.

THE HEDGE

The thorny maze that surrounds Faerie holds many mysteries to the Lost. Certain aspects of the Hedge are well-known, but much like modern technology, even those who use them regularly do not necessarily understand the “how” of them, and almost no one is certain exactly of the “why.” Those who remember being abducted by the Fae almost always have memories of being dragged painfully through the Hedge’s Thorns on their way back to their would-be Keeper’s demesne. No matter how clear the path seems to be, none but the True Fae pass uninjured into Faerie. And those who remember their return recall an equally painful departure, as if the Thorns were unwilling to free them before exacting a suitable toll. Because of this, if nothing else is known for certain about the Hedge, it is generally held to act as a boundary between the mortal world and that of the Fae. This is, however, one of the only (mostly) certain facts about it. Most other aspects are mutable, as well suits a place whose entire reason for being seems to be to obstruct and confuse.

The Hedge can as easily manifest as immaculately landscaped Victorian hedgerows as it can ghastly stinking bogs where passage is marked (or hidden) by treacherous stretches of murky water. Thick primeval forests where undergrowth snatches at the clothing and flesh of those who would pass through is as much a part of the Hedge as impassable jungle tangles rife with venomous-looking sucker-vines and carnivorous vegetation. Perhaps more confusing than the many possibilities of flora and fauna within the Thorns, however, is the Hedge’s mutable nature. There seems to be a psychoactive element to the Hedge, an effect that is heightened by those with powerful fae magic. Around those with a high Wyrð, the Hedge conforms intrinsically to their nature, manifesting cold winds and ice around winter-aspected changelings, or deeper shadows around those who prefer to remain in the dark. It is as if the fae borderlands inherently sense the strength of the changelings who travel there, and echo back elements of the strongest fae spirits in a physical form.

Certain aspects remain true, despite the mutability of the landscape, however. Paths and roads traverse the Hedge, some leading solely to other entry and exit points to the mortal world and some — most often the clearest — stretching deeper into the fae landscape. While human instinct often dictates that the broad road is the safe one, in Faerie such idioms are rarely true. Those roads that are the clearest are often those that are maintained by the magic and will of the True Fae. Such roads may provide swift passage, but the destinations are often ones from which no human returns.

ENTRY AND EGRESS

The Fae lands are nearly impossible for humans to reach from their native lands without supernatural intervention, either direct or incidental. The Hedge’s boundaries, similar to many places of legend, are not merely physical but also mystical, so while it is theoretically accessible from locations across the globe, actually entering the Hedge from the human world is never a sure thing. Certain locations are more likely to allow egress than others, as are certain situations. Doorways into the Hedge have been opened across the world, and once opened, they may fall dormant but never truly close. Humans, through supernatural efforts or by foul luck, sometimes can pass through those portals into the Hedge, but once within the Thorns, they are likely to quickly rue the actions that led them there. Leaving again is a not overly difficult, as long as they have not wandered away from the doorway. However, once the human world has fallen from their sight, it is no simple matter to return there. The Hedge is almost limitless in its labyrinthine vastness, and within its confounding expanse are countless dangers, including that of simply remaining lost forever.

The Lost, however, are both blessed and cursed by their association with the True Fae. This affords the Lost far more reliable access to the Hedge than they had as humans, at the same time as it makes them of far greater interest to the denizens of Faerie. Although the Lost can pass into the Hedge far easier than humans, once there they are a veritable beacon of Glamour, signaling their presence to those creatures who prefer to prey upon fae flesh, magic or emotions.

TRODS

While every entry into the fae world is inherently supernatural in nature, some are more potent than others. Certain locations, called trods, are so imbued with power that they not only act as doorways into the Hedge and the Fae realm that lies beyond it, but they actually generate the stuff of fae magics. This fae essence, called Glamour, can be reaped by those with the skill to do so, and then be used to strengthen themselves or fuel their supernatural powers. Some places rumored in human legend to be attuned to the fairies may in fact be trods of sufficiently high power to have come to the attention even of the mundane humans in the vicinity. Other trods, although equally powerful, have remained sequestered away from mortal notice, guarded carefully to protect them from those who might intentionally or accidentally taint or weaken them.

Trods, while providing a vital benefit to those able to harvest their Glamour, are intrinsically dangerous as well. Changelings are not the only creatures who find Glamour to be of use, and the possibility of a True Fae being drawn to one, especially one that is being actively used, is high enough to make trods a guarded risk to those who would prefer to avoid the Fae’s attention.

HOLLOWS

Likewise, the Hollows that exist throughout the Hedge enjoy a reputation of mixed blessing. These clearings may appear as anything from small animal burrows to expansive clearings built up with elaborate lodges, but just as other aspects of faerie, Hollows are rarely exactly what they seem to be. Changelings may carve these niches into the Hedge, outfitting them as suits their seeming, and use them as a form of sanctuary, bound by the protections of the ancient oaths of hospitality. There, held in place by the changeling's will and whatever oaths and pledges he inflicts upon the area, he may retreat from the human world and immerse himself in the wonder of fae possibilities in relative safety. Enterprising individuals may even attempt to cultivate what normally only grows wild in the Hedge: goblin fruits that can provide healing or other benefits, semi-sentient servants to cater to the changeling's whims and needs or animated treasures the likes of which humankind only knows about in fairy tales. But despite the obvious advantages of such locations, they are dangerous as well. Time spent in the Hedge, especially in relative safety, can become addictive to the fae spirit, and some find that they are loath to leave their hidey-holes for the harsh realities of the human world. However extensive time spent in the Hedge, just as with any prolonged exposure to powerful fae-stuff gnaws away at a changeling's Clarity, leaving him less and less able to discern what is truth and what is fantasy.

CHANGELING LIFE

From the first moment that the Lost pass back through the Hedge and into the mortal world, they are outsiders. They have changed, and the mortal world has continued on, often completely oblivious to their absence. Despite the danger that one of their kind may betray them to the Fae, and the paranoia engendered by their captivity, most changelings seek out others like them, both for the simple companionship of people who understand their unique state and because the advice and aid of changelings who have spent longer in the mortal world can prove invaluable.

Although it's far from a tradition, many changelings escape together and emerge from the Hedge in small groups. While memories of the Fae lands are exceptionally sketchy, the members of these groups often recall having helped one another escape or finding their way through the Hedge. This experience can form a powerful bond between the escapees, who frequently remain together long after they have learned to adjust to life in the mortal world. This shared escape forms the basis for many changeling motleys. However, when the Lost return to the mortal world, they are usually forced to look beyond their own motley.

Many changelings welcome and sometimes desperately require help learning to live in a world that may be many decades later than they last remember. Also, in most cases, the changelings' legal identities are either held by their

fetches or the changelings are considered deceased, possibly for many years. Most changelings require assistance in obtaining or regaining some form of legal identity, which is typically a fake ID of some sort. The worst off are the Lost boys and girls who left the mortal world when they were children or adolescents and grew up with the Fae. Few are equipped to deal with the mortal world as teenagers or young adults. Likewise, changelings who have been away 20 or more years face a world transformed by computers, and have difficulty learning to work almost any job or even using a public library. Even those lucky changelings who were abducted as adults and have been gone only a few years are now out of step with both world events and the lives of their families and may ask awkward questions about the World Trade Center when they first see the New York skyline.

Becoming part of changeling society is generally a simple matter. The paths through the Hedge are far easier in some places than others, which means that most changelings arrive in certain areas that usually retain a high changeling population. Because they can see each other's fae miens, the process of one changeling identifying another is often as easy as noticing that one of the fellow passengers on the subway has antlers or is seven feet tall, with crimson skin and a huge horn in the middle of her forehead. Some newly escaped Lost can flee or attack during these first run-ins, fearing they have encountered one of their Fae masters. Other Lost beg forgiveness for escaping and plead not to be punished. Some understand that they have simply encountered another escapee like themselves.

Of course, the revelation works both ways. The other changeling is likewise greeted by the sight of a young man with hair of phantom fire or a woman with long silver claws and night-black skin. The more experienced changeling now faces the difficult task of dealing with someone who may have no understanding of the realities of life in the mortal world as one of the fae. No matter where the encounter may lead, the first meeting with another of their kind is typically both terrifying and wonderful for changelings who escaped from the Gentry alone and had previously wondered if they were either delusional or the only one ever to escape Arcadia. This meeting is often an equally powerful experience for a group of changelings who escaped together and who are struggling to find their way in a world that is no longer the comfortable home they left years before.

HISTORY AND MODERNIZATION

Changelings are somewhat longer lived than ordinary mortals. Those who were abducted anywhere from two to six decades ago can still escape back into the mortal world, often little older than when they left. As a result, changeling society is considerably more conservative than mortal society, in part simply because many changelings were born 50 or more years ago. Also, the nature of Faerie has changed

little over the millennia and the fact that all Lost have spent years or decades there also provides a further, often unwanted sense of continuity. Some changelings take pride in holding offices or practicing traditions that they say trace back to "True" Thomas of Erceldoune or Urashima Taro, both figures of legend whom the Lost claim as their own.

The modern era and, especially, the Internet have provided a new, tentative outlet for changeling society. Before the late 1980s, most changelings in a single city or town had a few reliable tricks for finding one another, particularly those who knew where the local trods were and where refugees might find their way through. During this era, learning about changelings from other cities or other nations relied greatly on reports from wandering changelings, who occasionally lied, exaggerated or simply forgot important details. As a result, individual freeholds were largely on their own. The Courts were often the keepers of tradition, and the most reliable communication came between members of the same Court.

Freehold rules and structures share many similarities, but also often profound differences, especially in the degree of obedience and allegiance the members of a freehold owe to their leaders. In some places, changelings were expected to swear oaths of total fealty to their sovereigns and offer them a variety of goods and services free of charge, while other freeholds were significantly more egalitarian. Many Lost accepted life in oppressive or ill-managed freeholds because their only options were either to live without the support of other changelings or to move to a new and unknown city, find a way to contact the local freehold (if indeed the city had one at all) and hope that conditions there were better — all while running the risk of crossing paths with privateers, loyalists, the Fae or other threats. Some Lost took the risks, for better or worse. Many didn't.

The growing facility to contact other Lost elsewhere via the Internet has made communication and potential migration easier, to a point. Some changelings have mastered the complexities of this new medium, though given the time-lost nature of Arcadia, not to as significant a ratio as their human counterparts. Only a small number of changelings regularly use Internet traffic, and they are quite cautious about giving away too much of themselves in electronic format. But now and again, a connection is made. A few dedicated and Net-savvy changelings seek out newsgroups, mailing lists and websites devoted to alien abductions, kidnapping or similar unexplained mysteries in an attempt to understand more about both themselves and the Fae.

A little more than a decade ago, a handful of Lost in different cities across the world began to make tentative contacts with one another through hints, suggestions or simply half-remembered descriptions of Arcadia loosely disguised as fiction. Although a few changelings unknowingly contacted privateers, loyalists or Fae-ensorcelled mortals, the others were, for the first time, able to exchange infor-

mation with their distant fellow changelings. By the end of the 1990s, there was a loose network of several scores of changelings across the world who had managed to get in contact with one another. These sparse online contacts have allowed some changelings to travel to different cities and even different nations with some idea of how to make contact with a local freehold. Although it's still a mysterious and dangerous journey, those who wish to travel now know somewhat more about the lives of changelings in other portions of the world than they did several decades ago.

Most of the few changelings who use the Internet fear that agents of the Fae will locate them if they post too many hints about themselves or their activities on any but the most private online forums... and a cunning privateer could still infiltrate those. As a result, many of the net-savvy Lost are lurkers more than anything, keeping a close eye out for any newly returned changelings who might not know the dangers of an online cry for help. First-time contacts of this nature are still extraordinarily rare. Only changelings who previously experienced online communications in the late 1990s or later will be able to easily navigate the modern Internet shortly after their return. But their numbers may only increase, and it may become increasingly important to watch for these first tentative distress calls. After all, an increasing number of enemies may find their way online as well.

SAFETY

One of the characteristics that almost all changelings share is that they have great difficulty feeling safe. Abducted without warning and enslaved by almost incomprehensible beings, in the back of every changeling's mind is the fear that someday, something else will suddenly turn his world back into a living nightmare. Changelings fear they will be recaptured by the Fae or become the victims of some as yet unknown horror, and this fear is a central issue in many of their lives.

This fear is greatest in those recently returned from Faerie, and often gradually dissipates among those who manage to make relatively stable lives for themselves in the mortal world. Even then, most Lost never fully get over occasional panic attacks, a tendency to violently startle or the periodic recurrence of horrifically terrifying nightmares. As a result, the derangements Suspicion and Paranoia are particularly common reactions to severe mental stress. Even among changelings who remain fully sane, fear and the perceived lack of safety are responsible for much of the structure of changeling society.

Their desire to feel safe and to avoid any situation that could result in their recapture means that some changelings seek to learn as much as they can about the Fae and the other various other potential supernatural dangers found in the World of Darkness. Most changelings limit the focus of their interests solely to the Fae and attempt to learn all they

can, both from legends and myths and from perilous ventures into the Hedge. The most determined sometimes go as far as going on undercover missions among loyalists and occasionally even privateers, where the undercover changelings attempt to learn these groups' secrets and the secrets of their masters. Paradoxically, fear and a desire for safety leads some especially obsessed changelings into exceptional dangers as they attempt the difficult task of truly knowing their enemy.

Others worry that there might be other completely unknown supernatural threats waiting to take both changelings and mortals completely unawares. As a result, some Lost seek to learn all they can about all of the many supernatural threats and mysteries found in the World of Darkness. A few become serious occultists, studying the legends and mystical traditions of many lands and eras, while others end up as obsessive, but often disturbingly well-informed, conspiracy theorists who find evidence of supernatural involvement in all manner of events, including a few times and places when it was actually present.

Their natural suspicion and desire for safety is the primary reason that changelings remain so mysterious to most other supernatural beings. Changeling occultists recognize the fear that vampires, mages and werewolves might all have some secret connection to or alliance with the Fae. As a result, the Lost are no more inclined to reveal themselves to a mage or a vampire than they are to a mortal. No matter how much interest the Lost might have in other supernatural beings, changelings have trouble trusting their own kind and trusting outsiders is even more difficult, especially if these outsiders are as secretive as the other supernatural inhabitants of the World of Darkness.

Few deny the benefits of high Clarity. However, changelings who are intensely focused on learning about the Gentry or other supernatural beings can conflict with those who attempt to retain their perspective by avoiding fae contact as much as possible. Changelings decry the latter as willfully blind individuals who choose to ignore the many terrible and immediate dangers that surround them. Many freeholds contain one or more changelings who have made an intense study of various supernatural or Fae-related topics. Although these individuals are often of dubious lucidity, the information they know can be of vital importance. In addition to causing some Lost to develop a keen and sometimes obsessive interest in various supernatural threats or oddities, the desire for safety is also responsible for the three major focuses of changeling life: trust, hospitality and secrecy.

TRUST

Trust is one of the most difficult things for changelings to relearn. Although the Fae are bound by their word, they are masters of following only the most exact wording of any agreement they make and have great expertise at both lying and deception. After living for a year or more as slaves to

such beings, changelings naturally have difficulty trusting others. Their reluctance to trust is made even more problematic by the nature of their existence back in the mortal world. To avoid being labeled as lunatics and perhaps even being found by the Fae, the Lost must continually lie about themselves and their experiences. Very few find any mortals they can trust. As a result, trusting another changeling or making a mutual pledge of friendship or alliance is an profound act that changelings do not take lightly.

However, similar to many others who have experienced various forms of extreme mental or physical trauma, changelings who decide to trust someone often give their trust absolutely and with an almost terrifying intensity. This dichotomy between emotional distance and absolute trust frequently troubles mortals changelings interact with, who often rightly understand it to be a clear sign of both significant emotional problems and serious abuse.

As difficult as it often is, the ability to put aside their fears and doubts and unreservedly trust someone is essential for most changelings' well-being. Isolated changelings who lack anyone they can trust usually become increasingly withdrawn. Some lose themselves in madness or violence. Others become sufficiently careless that they soon end up either dead or back in the hands of their former masters.

Because of the difficulty most Lost have trusting others, pledges form a central part of changeling society. Pledging mutual friendship and loyalty with the members of a changeling's motley is one of the central features of changeling society, just as the basic pledge of alliance with the changeling's freehold forms the basis of her relationship with the freehold. Within this system of pledges, changelings can feel relatively safe, and the power of these pledges allows them to more fully trust their allies and colleagues.

Over time, most changelings learn to trust more fully. Eventually the length of time a changeling has belonged to a motley and the degree to which she knows the other members become more important than their mutual pledges in maintaining her trust. However, the habit of using pledges to insure trust runs deep in changeling society and allows the Lost to make agreements and alliances with those members of the freehold who never learn to fully trust others without such mystically enforced guarantees.

Because changelings can only keep a limited number of pledges at one time, every changeling must occasionally make agreements that are not sealed with pledges. Such deals and promises are often quite stressful, and changeling gossip and urban legends are filled with tales of unpledged Contracts resulting in betrayal or disaster. To relieve this stress, some changelings attempt to keep close track of how well others are upholding their end of the Contract. Others do their best to convince themselves that the other party or parties are entirely trustworthy, even in the face of strong evidence to the contrary. Some deal with this stress by deciding to break such Contracts in ways that gains them ad-

vantage as soon as they begin to worry that the other party might betray them. They reason that if the deal is going to be broken, they rather do so first, so they can be the victor and not the victim. A few Lost seek out unpledged Contracts, with both mortals and other fae, for the express purpose of planning to break them — doing so gives the changelings a feeling of power and control that they desperately need.

The most common method of ensuring that Contracts made without pledges are kept is learning as much as possible about the others involved in the agreement. Because changeling communities are relatively small and insular, almost every changeling is relatively well-known to her neighbors. As a result, reputation becomes of vital importance. Known oathbreakers are never tolerated. Those who are merely known for skirting the edges of oathbreaking and bending any non-pledged Contracts to their own advantage are not excluded from changeling society, but they soon find that no one is willing to make any deals with them that are not backed by pledges.

One infrequent but well-known punishment is forcing someone to swear a pledge if he wishes to avoid being thrown out of his freehold. While doing this is regarded as an extreme step, it is also widely accepted as the best solution for changelings who are dishonorable or otherwise highly problematic to deal with. Such forced pledges allow the other members of a freehold to trust a changeling who has otherwise proven unworthy of this trust.

HOSPITALITY

One of the major reasons that most changelings support their local freehold or Court, or at least are willing to work with them, is the promise of a safe space wherein they can deal with their fellow changelings. Between trust issues and the fact that changelings cannot afford to be too profligate with pledges, those who wish to or need to interact with others of their kind must accept the risks of interaction sooner or later. To help minimize both the risk and the fear involved in these interactions, both freeholds and Courts strictly maintain the rules of hospitality in their gathering places. When changelings come to either, they can expect a safe space where the leaders will enforce polite conduct. Duels are acceptable, but using Contracts or violence on another changeling without either prior agreement or extreme provocation is most definitely not. Thus, the Lost can be assured that they are safe from sneak attacks, abduction or other similar fearful events that often loom large in their psyches.

In response to the policies of the changeling freeholds and Courts, some changelings also enact similar rules of hospitality in their homes and common meeting places. In almost every city, some sign or sigil marks a place as subject to the rules of hospitality. In some places, this mark takes the form of a unique and carefully sprayed bit of graffiti tagging, often done in some unusual color of paint such as emerald green or purple. In Glendale, California, the particular tag is a stylized cat head in blue paint, with a wavy gray line on either side. In more upscale areas, the sign can be



anything from a small handmade pottery glazed plaque inscribed with a stylized image of a house to a trio of window stickers for various causes or charities arranged in a particular pattern. In Waltham, Massachusetts, the hospitality symbol is a pair of stickers for two conservation charities placed next to one another, with a sticker representing a popular local band placed above and between them, forming a triangle.

The rules of hospitality themselves are both relatively simple and extremely widespread. Inside places marked as being under the rules of hospitality, changelings must honor all of their promises and refrain from any unprovoked attacks, including attacks with Contracts and with physical violence. In addition, changelings who have not broken the rules of hospitality and who are in need may claim sanctuary at any such place for at least one full day. At the end of this time, they can be asked to leave, but for this duration, they are safe from both harm and eviction.

Changelings who mark a place as being covered by the rules of hospitality are expected to indicate their identities beside the mark. Extending the rules of hospitality over a location means that the changeling or changelings who do so are swearing an oath to defend these rules with force and possibly with their lives. In some communities, changelings simply verbally state their support of this hospitality to the rest of the freehold. However, in most freeholds, they add their mark next to the mark indicating hospitality. These "signatures" can include small individual graffiti tags, arcane-looking personal sigils drawn in magic marker or occasionally even thumb-sized photos taped into a window next to the hospitality sign.

Making such declarations requires both courage and determination and is almost never done lightly. However, protecting such areas is in the interest of almost all Lost. Therefore, when the local mistress of hospitality is forced to step forward and defend someone in her space, most other changelings currently partaking of her hospitality typically stand beside her against anyone who threatens the peace and safety of this location.

Some changelings who are especially brave or powerful (as well as those who merely wish to appear as either) declare their homes to be protected by the rules of hospitality. Most are unwilling to do so because they wish to reserve the right to take pre-emptive action against anyone who might be a potential threat. The most commonly protected spaces are cafes, bars, restaurants, pubs, private offices, public meeting halls, hotels or, for the wealthy, separate guesthouses near their actual houses. In these locations, changelings from all over the city can show up and, depending upon the exact rules governing the space, either walk in or ask for permission to enter. Once inside, they meet their fellow changelings, transact business or exchange information and gossip, secure in the knowledge that their most paranoid fears and worries are unlikely to happen here.

SECRECY

For changelings, the act of living in the mortal world involves keeping secrets. Revealing their true nature to mortals can result in madness, disbelief and, possibly, calls for the changeling's commitment. Very few mortals are willing to accept stories about lengthy abductions to a magical world by inhuman beings. Unable to perceive fae miens or accept the hidden truths, mortals are only comfortable when the changeling answers their questions with carefully constructed lies.

While some bitter and hardened Lost care little for the madness and confusion that revealing themselves to mortals might produce, all are aware of the dangers that such revelations can bring on both themselves and other changelings. Attempting to reveal the truth of their existence naturally provokes disbelief among almost any mortal, especially family members who have spent years either in the company of the changeling's fetch or mourning the fetch's death. Accusations that the fetch is a monstrous creation win more disbelief or fear than sympathy.

Mortals fear or dismiss what they cannot understand. Either response can be dangerous, especially if the mortals talk widely about the strange tales some relative or stranger has been relating — privateers and loyalists are always eager to listen to such stories and do their best to track down the source. Changelings whose mortal families hold extreme religious beliefs sometimes find themselves subjected to violent and sometimes dangerous attempts at exorcism, as their families attempt to force the "demons" out of them. Attempted revelations about the changeling's fetch go over especially poorly and can result in restraining orders, charges of conspiracy to commit murder and similar problems.

A few changelings wonder about the necessity of secrecy, particularly those whose seemings might be viewed as beautiful and magnetic. However, because mortals cannot perceive the changelings' fae miens, at best changelings appear to be magically powerful humans with strange and disturbing delusions about their pasts. And despite not being ravening predators or members of the walking dead, changelings are nonetheless strange and somewhat inhuman beings. Those few who manage to convince unensorcelled mortals that they are not simply insane instead inspire the typical mortal fear of the uncanny and the unknown.

Attempts to tell others in order to gain allies against the Fae are futile. The unfortunate truth is that unensorcelled mortals cannot aid the changelings against the Others, because mortals cannot perceive the Hedge or any other fae manifestations. Most mortals also cannot perceive changelings as anything other than deluded or foolish humans claiming to be strange and inhuman beings. The range of reactions to a changeling's claims runs from mockery, ridicule and accusations of insanity to possible confinement in institutions or even violence.



But the most important reason for secrecy is the constant fear that revealing or even being insufficiently careful about hiding their existence can result in their being found and recaptured by the Fae. While the Others recapture very few changelings, none who have been recaptured are ever seen again. Most Lost recognize that the Gentry aren't constantly stalking the Lost across the mortal world; many believe that they are only in danger during their journeys into the Hedge or when encountering privateers. However, the nagging fear that they may one day fall asleep and wake up back among the Fae, or that they will be captured some night when walking down a deserted street, is not a groundless fear. The possibility is real.

Some changelings become sufficiently paranoid that they constantly vary their routines to avoid allowing anyone or anything to lay a trap. A few refuse to let even their closest comrades know where they live. Most lack this devotion to secrecy, but still experience a slight hesitation when someone asks where they live or a stranger knocks on their door. The most obvious result of this tendency to secrecy is that the Lost usually do what they can to appear normal and unremarkable.

Even newly escaped changelings rapidly recognize that ordinary people cannot perceive the changelings' fae miens or most of their other oddities. However, many changelings fear that being seen as too eccentric will cause rumors and gossip that may find its way to the Fae, either through listening privateers or in the dreams of mortals. As a result, changelings do their best to not do anything that will mark them as changelings. Unfortunately, even the Lost who spent many decades in Faerie do not understand how the Fae think or what they might look for. As a result, no changelings have any clue as to what, beyond open statements about their nature or history, might provide dangerous hints to the Fae.

In the past few decades, some changelings have gained acceptance among small groups of eccentric mortals interested in alien abductions and similar phenomena. However, many of these mortals are unstable, and membership in such fringe communities opens the changeling to ridicule and suspicions of insanity by most outsiders. Nevertheless, some changelings cherish the ability to more openly talk about their experiences with mortals. However, among such groups, tales of changelings being kidnapped by "the grays" held for years, and then escaping only after being permanently changed can result in requests to see the "flying saucer" the changeling escaped in or questions about the nature of the aliens' technology. Also, only those changelings who wandered into the Hedge on their own or otherwise did not have a fetch find easy acceptance in such communities. Someone who disappeared under mysterious circumstances and reappeared equally mysteriously years later gains much credibility among people interested in the strange and the mysterious. However, stories of magical replacements that must be brutally slain often make even the most accepting and eccentric mortals rather uncomfortable.

Changelings who have slain and replaced their fetches sometimes gain acceptance with mortals who belong to these groups by claiming that their minds or spirits were captured by aliens and replaced by some sort of "alien mind-duplicate." Most changelings who become involved in groups of supposed UFO abductees or in similar fringe communities soon discover that gaining acceptance depends largely upon altering the truth of their experiences so that it better fits with the beliefs of the community. The process is often little different from gaining the same degree of acceptance from the social mainstream. In all cases, the Lost must lie to everyone except their own kind and the most trusted of the mortals they have ensorcelled. It's a difficult demand, but some find it gets easier as time goes on... almost instinctive, really.

TERRITORIALITY

The trods that changelings require to re-enter the mortal world aren't found everywhere. Gateways into the World of Darkness are far more common and easier to traverse in certain cities and towns. As a result, changelings naturally tend to cluster in such places. Certain cities have comparatively large changeling populations, while others may have none at all. Naturally, not all Lost remain in the city where they first emerged from the Hedge, but many of those who have no compelling reason to live elsewhere do because these cities usually contain large freeholds.

The Lost usually return to the mortal world close to the homes they knew, guided by their memories. Sometimes, though, their loved ones have moved away. Most changelings who move elsewhere do so because they long to regain contact with their mortal friends and families. Because changelings were once forcibly removed from these people, most Lost are compelled to remain near their loved ones even if forced only to watch over them from a distance. Also, the trauma produced by a changeling's abduction and escape expresses itself in a multitude of ways, but for many, it results in an attention to safety and routine that makes travel to unfamiliar locations more than a little stressful.

Many changelings' half-conscious thoughts of unfamiliar towns and neighborhoods are filled with fears of the Fae, rapacious privateers and similar dangers lurking around every corner. Once changelings have found someplace relatively safe and secure, most are reluctant to move from either their dwelling or their city. The well-remembered location that called the changeling back through the Hedge also exerts an exceptionally powerful hold for almost every changeling, and most wish to be able to regularly spend time in or near this location. It was the beacon that brought them back home once; should the worst happen, it might be able to bring them home again.

Over time, this reluctance to travel sometimes fades, as changelings go from having nightmares of being recaptured several times a week to experiencing them only in times of

extreme stress. Also, some Lost find safety and security in being difficult to find and deliberately seek careers or ways of life that involve either frequent travel or life on the road. With jobs ranging from long-haul truckers to airline stewards or traveling salespeople, these changelings regard their mobility as their greatest protection from such threats as their former masters.

Although some changelings are solitary by nature and seek out their own kind only when facing troubles they cannot manage on their own, most establish at least loose ties with a Court or a freehold. Those who are naturally inclined to travel occasionally serve as emissaries or messengers when such are required. A few Lost, especially those who find mortal jobs that involve frequent travel, manage to gain significant status and power through their work as emissaries and intermediaries. Owing allegiance to no Court or freehold, but having close ties with several, these fae have friends and allies even among freeholds or Courts that are frequently at odds with one another. Because most changelings find the safety and security they seek by making a stable life in a single place, these traveling heralds often gain impressive reputations for bravery and daring.

FREEHOLDS

Although changelings may not always like or even respect one another, the majority of changelings recognize their common bond of slavery and escape. Except for the few twisted wretches who work for the Gentry, the one of the few goals all changelings can agree upon is maintaining their freedom from the Fae. As a result, changelings naturally band together for mutual defense and support, to prevent any of their number from being dragged back to Arcadia or enslaved in the mortal world.

Local changeling communities are called *freeholds*, a name that reflects their focus on self-determination and mutual aid. Changelings who have recently escaped from Faerie are always offered the hospitality of the local freehold. These refugees are treated as guests for as much as a month, or perhaps even longer if they suffered mental or physical harm during their escape. After this initial period of open hospitality, changelings are usually offered a chance to join the freehold.

The decision to join a freehold can naturally be changed later, but is nonetheless of vital import, because membership in a freehold helps determine both a changeling's loyalties and the contacts she will gain in the changeling community. Although some freeholds that are overcrowded or in turmoil may be reluctant to accept new members, joining the majority of freeholds is a simple act for any changeling not suspected of dangerous insanity, aiding the Fae or similar dire problems or crimes. The prospective member need only swear a pledge to give her services to protect and defend the freehold and its members from the Fae and their allies and to never knowingly give aid or comfort to these enemies.

Almost all freeholds include this clause in their pledges. Many freeholds also include other more extensive clauses. Some expect all who join to agree to aid and defend the members and the freehold as a whole against any external threat, including ones having nothing to do with the Fae. While most freeholds also have a clause that removes this protection if a changeling brings down the force of mortal law against himself, a few freeholds lack this clause and agree to shield changelings from even the full force of the police and courts. Naturally, most freeholds include provisions for expelling Lost who knowingly or sometimes even carelessly bring serious harm or threat of harm to the freehold. Almost all of the older and most traditional freeholds also require members to swear to obey the freehold's official code of laws and the most authoritarian also require changelings to pledge to obey all of the leaders' official pronouncements and edicts.

Freehold Names

Every freehold has a name, but these titles are as diverse and varied as the freeholds themselves. Some, such as "the Waltham Brethren," are centuries-old names that may sound archaic to modern ears. Others, like Tucson's "the Martinez Lodge," are named after their founder. However, the Lost have a penchant for the colorful, especially among freeholds where children of a single seeming predominate. Such names can range from fanciful titles such as "Wolfhaven" or "The Gathering of Elements" to cryptic titles such as "The Nest." Changelings tend to avoid giving freeholds too-obvious names derived from myth, ever since the disaster that befell the 17th-century legendary freehold of New Lyonesse.

Various Midwestern freeholds use a very similar pledge. The one sworn in the Chicago freehold "Arlene's Gather" is typical of the rest: "On my freedom and my honor, I swear to obey the written laws of this freehold and to aid my fellows against the Gentry." Meanwhile, in the Waltham Brethren, a recent revision of the centuries-old oath now reads, "Before others who have shared my captivity and who are now my brothers and sisters in freedom, I swear to obey the laws of the Brethren and the directives of its appointed leader. I further pledge to protect my brothers' and sisters' freedom and to forever defend them from the True Fae and their agents."

Changelings who desire to attain power and status in their freehold or to hold some office usually must supplant their basic pledge of membership with more extensive oaths of office, but this original pledge defines membership in the freehold. Even the most isolated and reclusive changelings

are expected to work with the other members of their freehold when the Wild Hunt comes seeking one of their number. Many freeholds are bound to one another by pacts of mutual aid, but a changeling's loyalty is first and foremost to his motley and the freehold they all belong to.

This focus on mutual aid and defense has forged two stereotypes for changelings who choose to have little to do with their freehold. Some have little contact with their freehold and do their best to avoid contact when calls for aid go out, but come asking for aid of their own if the Wild Hunt or privateers come seeking them. Despite any and all previous times they failed to aid their fellow changelings, unless they are known to be traitors or otherwise forsworn, the rest of the freehold aids them, but usually asks them to leave the freehold immediately afterwards. In contrast, some isolated changelings rarely or never seek out their own kind for companionship or for any other non-essential purpose, but always make certain they are easy to contact and arrive swiftly if called upon to aid the freehold or its members. These stoic and isolated knights and ronin are widely regarded as eccentric, but command no small amount of respect.

POWER STRUCTURES

No two freeholds govern themselves in precisely the same fashion. In areas such as Europe and North America where the seasonal Great Courts hold sway, a freehold seems to run smoothest when governed by a rotating seasonal king or queen. A Summer King or Queen holds on to power until an agreed-upon sign of autumn arrives, at which point the ruler relinquishes power to a new Autumn King or Queen.

Sometimes the same four changelings hold the office in turn; sometimes a number of candidates vie for rulership with each change of the seasons.

The Lost have a penchant for favoring elaborate power structures in a freehold's Court. Many freeholds have a number of secondary positions and honorifics to assist the ruler. In some places, the number is small: a sheriff

or lord-marshal who oversees security affairs and law enforcement, a minister or seneschal to

look after many of the administrative demands of the freehold or perhaps a small council of advisors. In many more, the

potential offices a changeling might hold are many, and even transition with the season. While the Spring Queen of

Montréal holds court, she appoints several changelings to her Council

of Graces to oversee celebrations, collect tribute in the form of art and diplomatically smooth out

many feuds and rivalries within the freehold. When she

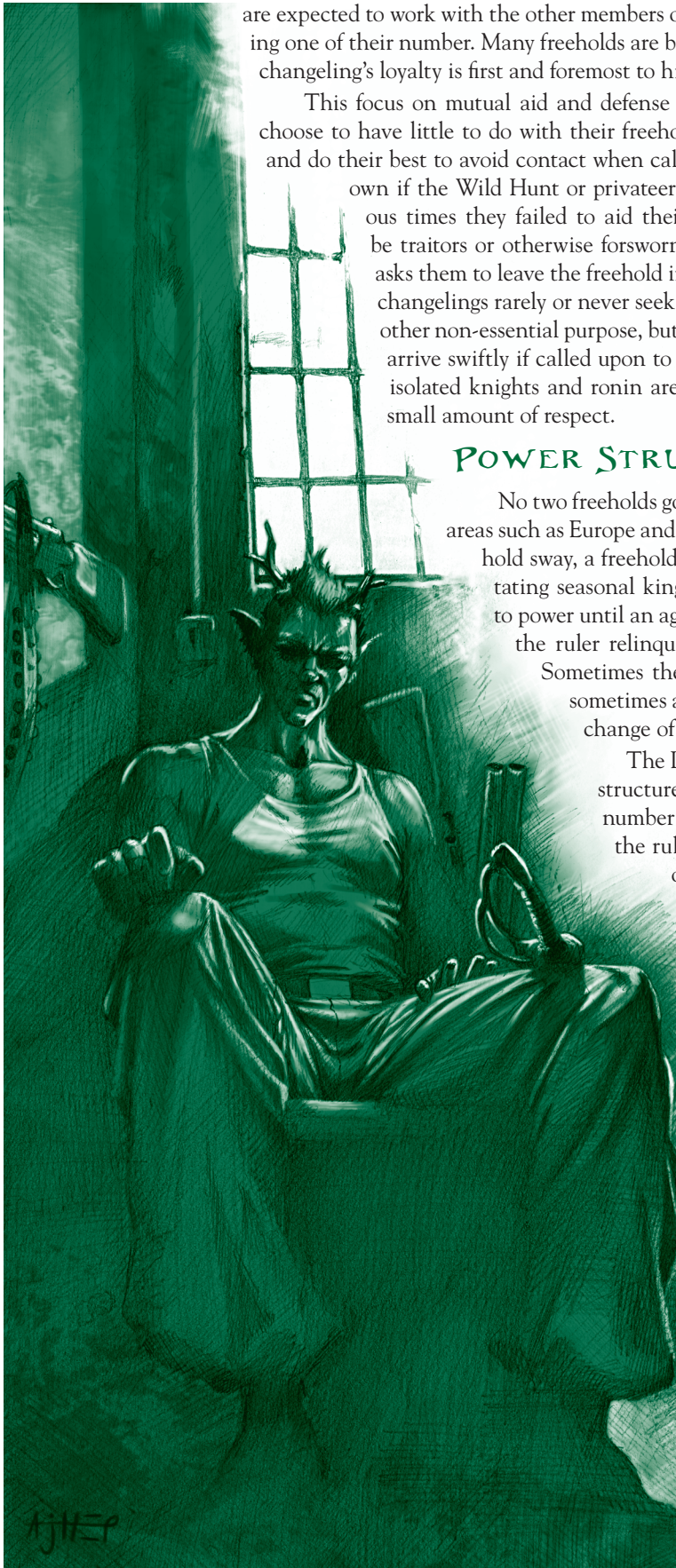
cedes the throne to the Summer King, the Council

of Graces steps down with her. For his part,

the Summer King then organizes a

cadre of Knight-Defenders, Knight-

Hospitalers and Knight-Champions



to carry out the tasks needed for a Summer-held freehold. Some freeholds find it advisable to have certain offices that remain unchanged through all four seasons, with the same Minister of Doors serving year-round. Others accept certain cabinet offices that remain constant, but the appointee changes with the ruler.

The result is frequently Byzantine, but strangely many changelings feel quite at home with the situation. The many offices provide a welcome motivation for the Lost. By chasing one's ambition toward a ministry, knighthood or even the freehold's throne — and by serving that office once acquired — a changeling finds a new potential place in the world. Even the most paranoid Lost find courtly intrigue comforting in a way, as there's something honest about the politicking for a commonly desired privilege. After all, you know your rival is working against you, but at least you know why. As a result, the intrigues and offices of a freehold are first and foremost in many a changeling's struggles to find a new place to call home.

TOLERANCE AND MADNESS

One of the most distinctive features of almost every freehold is the tolerance for both eccentricity and dysfunction. Although it's a sensitive subject, all changelings know that their lives have been horrific and strange beyond even their own ability to describe or remember. As a result, many relate to each other and often to the world around them somewhat strangely. Various mild derangements are unfortunately widespread, as well as significant to occasionally extremely profound gaps in social skills. Some changelings spent the adolescent years when most humans learn to relate to one another in bondage to the Fae, while others spent decades as slaves and have forgotten most of the ways they used to deal with the rest of humanity.

Especially among those who have only recently escaped, there is no shortage of changelings who jump at another's touch, even when this touch is both casual and fleeting, or stare off at nothing for long periods of time. While most learn to suppress this behavior when among mortals, another of the functions of a freehold is to be a place where such behaviors are accepted and acknowledged. In most freeholds, reproving someone for some bit of eccentricity that is neither harmful nor disruptive is considered rude and heartless.

Some freeholds are less tolerant, and for practical reasons. For one, they argue that such practices encourage troubled changelings to wallow in their problems rather than solving them. More troublesome is the tendency to permit unacceptable and disruptive behavior under the guise of tolerating emotional problems. A changeling who attempts to disrupt a freehold under the pretense of dementia may quickly find that her fellow changelings have experience in discerning feigned mental illness from the real thing, and no sympathy for the former. Worse, a changeling who cannot distinguish between the real and

unreal is like a beacon to any minions of the Gentry who hunt the rogue Lost.

Ultimately, the average freehold is a place where changelings have more freedom to be their eccentric selves, and even a place where those who suffer from mild mental illness can find greater solace and assistance than they would in the outside world. The Lost still remember when mortals imprisoned the insane like convicts a century ago, or when mortal doctors "treated" them with electroshock and lobotomies. Today, mortals in many nations leave many of the mentally ill to fend for themselves, and most of the rest are given treatments that occasionally help, so freeholds are now usually willing to arrange to obtain mortal medical treatment for some of their most severely deranged members. In some of the most organized and compassionate freeholds, the leaders make certain that especially reliable members obtain official paperwork allowing them to make decisions for the less mentally stable changelings.

This tolerance can also have a darker side. In some freeholds, the dividing line between accepting and ignoring insanity becomes very blurred, leading to troubled changelings being allowed to commit suicide, flee into the Hedge seeking the Fae or attack mortals or members of the freehold, all because no one noticed exactly how serious the changeling's problems were becoming or because no one cared enough to intervene.

The relatively small and intimate nature of freeholds also means that changelings who wish to manipulate their fellow changelings for their own advantage often know how to use a carefully crafted rumor or well-told lie to set off one or more of the more paranoid or otherwise unstable members of the freehold in a manner that is useful to their cause. One of the most significant tensions in the changeling community is between the idyllic and fully accepting image that most freeholds attempt to cultivate and the fact that, just as all small insular communities, freeholds are prone to vicious gossip, petty rivalries and lingering grudges. When combined with the exotic and stressful nature of life as a changeling, betrayals and attempts to seek advantage can easily result in truly horrific things happening to anyone getting in the way of a particular ambitious, skilled and amoral changeling.

On rare occasions, a loyalist, privateer or a changeling who simply wishes to use a particularly accepting freehold to her advantage, feigns serious mental illness and uses the freedom and acceptance granted her to learn the details of the lives of the members of the freehold, and if possible to work her way into their houses and hearts. Blackmail, identity theft or some other form of betrayal is then the traitor's payment for the freehold's compassion. While such events are uncommon, there are regularly rumors of such events occurring in some distant or not-so-distant freehold.

But there is always some hope. The prodigal who is teetering on the brink of madness may yet find some sol-

ace in the company of others like him. There he is among those who see many of the things he does, the beautiful and frightening faces hidden away from mortal view. He isn't hallucinating. He sees what is real behind the Mask. Among his own kind, he may at last be able to heal.

ACCEPTANCE AND MEMBERSHIP

When members of a freehold first encounter changelings recently arrived from Faerie, most members simply introduce themselves, let the new arrivals know where to contact members of the freehold and then allow the newly returned Lost to make the first move. This first meeting can be dramatic; sometimes the newcomer hadn't even known that she was the only one to make it back. She might even mistake the freehold member for one of the Gentry.

Experienced changelings have learned that those newly escaped from Arcadia commonly develop one of two goals. Some feel utterly lost in the mortal world and seek out others of their kind for aid, advice or simple company. Some wish to have nothing to do with other changelings, changeling society or any other reminders of the Fae and want to resume their previous lives as swiftly as possible. Unfortunately, because of such daunting obstacles as the length of their absence and the likely presence of their fetches, these attempts prove either difficult or impossible. However, most changelings who seek mortal lives first prefer to test these problems for themselves and then come to their local freehold seeking advice later. The stark necessity of interacting with other changelings frequently banishes the resentment many feel at having to deal with people whose appearance and very existence reminds them of their half-remembered years of slavery.

The most basic service every freehold offers to newly escaped changelings is an explanation of the realities of their existence, including the past or present existence of their fetches, the specific dangers the changelings might face and the inability of most mortals to notice anything unusual about them. Most freeholds can provide newcomers a place to stay for a few days and often a small amount of money to help them start to make their way in the world again. To obtain more than these minimal services, changelings are expected to join the freehold.

The larger and most well-organized freeholds can frequently provide moderately good fake IDs, some of which even come with at least a limited credit and employment history. Other freeholds contain changelings who specialize in discreet research and detective work. These changelings are skilled at learning the current state of a changeling's friends and family and determining whether the changeling's fetch is still around and what it is doing.

Finally, some freeholds offer another, darker service. Many changelings either want to attempt some sort of accommodation with their fetches or do not wish to try to

regain their old lives and so have no reason to slay their fetches. Other changelings wish to destroy their fetches themselves. However, a fair number of changelings who wish to reclaim their lives from their fetches either have difficulty with the idea of what is, in one sense, cold-blooded murder or lack the skills to accomplish this deed in a discreet manner. As a result, a few larger freeholds employ a "Jack Ketch," someone who specializes in the swift and careful disposal of fetches. Few changelings are willing to become hired killers, even of fetches. However, those who do can command high prices for their services.

Membership in a freehold gains a changeling access to such services, but taking advantage of the more extensive or difficult services, such as obtaining larger sums of money or asking for the disposal of a fetch, incurs obligations to either the freehold as a whole or (more commonly) to an individual member. These debts range from loans, which must be repaid, to more nebulous obligations to other members of the freehold. Such services are naturally available to all members, and not just the newly escaped. In this way, a freehold serves as a social and financial safety net for changelings, where a badly injured changeling can obtain goblin fruit, a changeling who has incurred some trouble can obtain a loan or even a new ID and all members can find allies to defend themselves against recapture.

Payment for most such services is typically made in kind rather than in money. Every changeling is expected to be able to provide, or at least help with, some sort of service useful to other changelings. These services can range from something as simple as free food or a spare room, but every changeling who asks for a significant service is expected to contribute something in return. This arrangement is the cornerstone of changeling society, and those who favor the courtly intrigue of a freehold often sit at the center of a web of favors, promises and allegiances. The most basic and central service freeholds offer is dealing with threats from the Fae and their allies. Victims of attacks by privateers or Fae are expected to recompense the members of the freehold who aid them, just as all members of the freehold are expected to help out when the Fae threatens a member or one of their mortal loved ones.

Unfortunately, the Fae and their agents are well aware of these pacts of mutual aid and often attempt to isolate a member of a freehold from her fellow changelings before attempting to go after her or her family. Occasionally, privateers or Fae arrange for a changeling or even an entire motley to look as if they have been shirking their responsibilities to their freehold, or perhaps even betrayed their freehold, causing aid to be cut off until the situation is sorted out.

Other attackers go with the far simpler solutions of either coming after the changeling when the freehold is busy with some other more critical problem (perhaps arranged by the attackers in advance) or attacking when the changeling

is alone and far from help. All too often, all the members of the freehold can do is attempt to comfort the survivors or attempt to retrieve any captives from the Fae.

Freeholds differ significantly on how acceptable money is as repayment for other services. Traditionally, changelings were expected to repay all services in kind, and the oldest changelings, who remember the independent and relatively isolated days of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, consider monetary payment for anything except loans and other purely monetary services to be completely against the spirit of changeling society. However, some of the less traditional freeholds have become as heavily monetized as mortal society, and a few have set rates for providing fake IDs, research, long-term shelter in another changeling's home and even killing a fetch. Most freeholds and most changelings fall somewhere between these extremes and accept payment in both money and services.

In addition to the obvious advantages of safety in numbers and mutual aid, convincing a newly arrived changeling to join the local freehold is also considered to be a good idea because it allows other Lost to better keep track of her actions and, if necessary, to place limits on her behavior. Once a changeling has grown used to the advantages offered by life in a freehold, the threat of limiting these benefits can easily be used to help restrain unacceptable behavior.

One of the difficulties in changeling society is the problem of what to do with changelings who refuse to follow the rules. Privateers and others who pose an immediate and deliberate threat to the lives of the Lost as a whole are the worst sort of enemy. Killing them is widely considered to be the most pragmatic solution. However, many problematic changelings are not so obviously villainous. Some simply have hair-trigger tempers and are prone to violence when some person or situation inadvertently reminds them of their captivity with the Fae. Others may be completely non-violent but are pathological liars, petty thieves or simply completely self-centered and amoral. All such changelings can be exceedingly difficult to deal with. The situation is naturally made worse by the fact that many Lost are willing to ignore serious eccentricities in their fellow changelings. This dismissal means that problems only tend to be raised once they have become so severe that no one can ignore them anymore.

Not all criminally inclined changelings confine their attacks to other Lost. Some strictly avoid harming other changelings or their loved ones, and instead rob or assault mortals. Many such criminals then come to their freehold for protection when mortal justice takes notice of their actions. Because they have avoided any direct offense against the members of their freehold, these changelings make appeals similar to those made by or for insane changelings who wish to avoid asylums or involuntary medical treatment. Many freeholds are exceedingly reluctant to turn over one of their own to mortal justice, especially if this

changeling either displays stark terror at the idea of imprisonment or hints that he may end up revealing some of the secrets of the freehold if he is brought to justice. This situation becomes even more complex if, as is very common, the members of the freehold have previously sheltered this changeling from the consequences of more minor legal infractions.

The options for dealing with Lost criminals are relatively limited and without easy answers. Ultimately, each freehold must come up with its own solutions. At the one extreme is execution, which is typically meted out only for mass murderers, privateers and other changelings who have performed truly heinous acts. In such cases, the leaders of the freehold almost always decide that the only solution is to slay the changeling. While rare, such executions are also far from unknown.

Traditionally, these executions are carried out in the mortal world, using a cold (wrought) iron implement. These weapons range from rare and archaic choices, such as beheading the offender with an axe, to the more common option of specially made wrought-iron bullets or shot. To avoid mortal attention, the body is then almost always hastily buried in the Hedge or, for privateers and other particularly heinous criminals, the body is sold at a Goblin Market and the proceeds given to either the freehold or the victims.

Most other punishments are purely social in the sense that they involve exclusion or at least the threat of exclusion from the freehold and possibly from the changeling community as a whole. Fines (in either money or services) and forcing changelings to swear pledges are the most common penalties for minor to moderate infractions. When dealing with all but the most serious crimes against mortals, the most common answer is for various members of the freehold to use various Contracts to deflect suspicion from the criminal and then use other Contracts and forced pledges to force this changeling to cease committing such acts. Also, some compassionate Lost attempt to use either their money or their Contracts to redress some of the criminal's wrongs.

Both fines and enforced pledges are backed by the threat that changelings who do not comply will be temporarily or permanently banished from the freehold. These banishments are always widely announced, so other freeholds will be unlikely to allow this changeling to join. Similarly, the ultimate punishment, short of execution, for changelings is banishment from their freeholds. Centuries ago, changeling outcasts used to be thrown out of their freeholds after being branded on their faces or hands to clearly show all changelings that these outcasts were not to be trusted. Today, branding has been replaced by messages about the banishment passed to all nearby freeholds. Sometimes, this banishment is for a few years or even a decade; most often, banishment is for life. Banishment is most commonly reserved for oathbreakers and for changelings who have com-

mitted exceedingly serious crimes such as treason, but who have not aided the Fae or their allies. In a few rare cases, banishment is also used on heinous criminals who have powerful allies that shield them from the threat of death.

Banishment is widely acknowledged as an exceptionally severe punishment. Being excluded from a freehold means that either the changeling must travel to a distant location and hope that no one there knows of her disgrace, or she must resign herself to a life completely isolated from the changeling community. Sometimes even privateers and loyalists refuse to accept a changeling who has been thrown out of her freehold, although both groups are more than happy to turn such individuals over to the Fae. In most cases, the members of the freehold the changeling is banished from are all required to swear that they will have no further contact with this changeling, and, in almost all cases, they readily comply.

Three punishments are all but completely absent from changeling society: imprisonment, enslavement and return to the Fae. All of these options are considered to be far too close to changelings' captivity by the Fae, and only the most debased and draconian freeholds use any of these punishments. Execution is considered both more acceptable and ultimately more humane than any of these sentences. This distaste for incarceration is why many freeholds prefer to shield changeling criminals from mortal justice and deal with them under the laws of the freehold. However, although almost no freeholds actually imprison changelings, many Lost have far less difficulty with turning the guilty over for imprisonment by mortals.

MORTAL SOCIETY

Almost by definition, the Lost who manage to return to the mortal world have close ties here, usually ties of family or dear friends. A changeling abducted as a teen usually thinks often of her parents while she was held captive by the Fae, while those captured as adults often leave beloved spouses or children beyond. Upon returning, the first thing almost every changeling attempts to do is contact the people she left behind.

Obviously, the existence of either a living or a dead fetch greatly complicates this problem. Depending upon how the fetch died, an appearance back from the dead might occasionally be possible, especially in cases when the body was at all difficult to identify, such as in an airline crash, but few changelings are this lucky. The problem of dealing with a living fetch can be even more difficult, unless the changeling kills it or arranges for its murder.

Murdering a fetch allows a changeling to attempt to resume her old life. However, differences in apparent age and the lack of several years or possibly even several decades of memories can make this process exceptionally difficult. For those unable or unwilling to slay their fetches, dealing with loved ones becomes even more difficult and painful. Many

changelings used memories of their loved ones as something that both helped them survive their captivity and as an important motivation for helping them return to the mortal world. As a result, few are willing to simply turn their backs on these people simply because they cannot resume their old lives. The alternatives that changelings choose are many and varied. Some, especially those belonging to the Winter Court are content to stalk their families — watching them from afar, but never making contact beyond an occasional anonymous phone call or a brief conversation during a carefully arranged “chance” encounter that takes place when the changeling is wearing a disguise.

Changelings who learn to use the Internet can often make contact with their loved ones online, getting to know them again under an assumed identity. Although often a lengthy, difficult and frustrating process, this method is also one of the most successful. A few lucky Lost manage to regain friends, and sometimes even parents, spouses or children in the guise of a stranger who slowly finds a place in their lives.

Both online and in person, changelings who have not yet managed to regain ties with their loved ones often go to one another for help. They share stories of the various fleeting contacts they have had with their families and exchange ideas on how to proceed with watching them or making further contact. In addition, changelings frequently help each other construct scenarios in which they attempt to meet and get to know their families as a stranger, or occasionally to break into their homes and take an intimate look at their families' lives while they are out. Those who were parents before their abduction feel this desire most keenly, as they cannot have more children of their own — they can only attempt to become closer to those children they've lost.

GOING STEALTH

A few lucky changelings manage to integrate themselves back into their old lives. Some kill their fetches and manage to replace them. Other changelings either never had one or find that their fetches died under mysterious circumstances and fabricate stories about how they were presumed dead while they were either held captive or had temporarily lost their memories. Regardless, armed with their correct fingerprints and knowledge of their lives before their abductions, these changelings attempt to resume their old lives.

Most begin this process filled with the naïve but fervent hope that they will soon be able to forget about the horrors of their ordeal in Arcadia and that life will again become normal and ordinary. These Lost may cut themselves off completely from contact with their freeholds and fellow changelings for fear that their odd companions will alarm their old friends and families and that dealing with other changelings will keep them from fully resuming their mortal lives.

Unfortunately, changelings' time with the Fae changed their minds and bodies. The mundanities of mortal life are

no longer completely natural to someone who can hear the call of the Hedge and constantly feels the scales or antlers that the mortal eye can't see. Attempting to return to a life of school or office work, television and the other details of everyday life demands that changelings ignore who they now are and constantly deny much of what they see and feel. Few are willing to make that compromise, particularly those who join a Court. The marks of Faerie are the badges of survival, something that can engender a strange pride.

Worse yet, very few changelings are lucky enough to find their fetches dead in some fashion that allows them to resume their lives and find some excuse for their lack of memories of recent events. Most must kill their fetches and then do their best to impersonate them, forever hoping that no one will notice that they no longer know the many details of their lives that died with the fetches. Faking a sudden physical or mental illness can help, but these changelings often find the lines between truth and lies blurring as they must pretend to be themselves and lie about a multitude of intimate memories in order to be whom their families or colleagues want and expect them to be.

The pressures of such an existence can become extreme. Mistakes in which the changeling reveals a lack of knowledge become increasingly awkward as her family begins to doubt the evidence of their senses and wonder if they have a lunatic or an imposter living with them. Often, friends and families either plead or berate the changeling to try to find a way to be like she once was, making clear that they preferred the fetch to whom the changeling is now. To avoid both confusion and arguments, many Lost find themselves increasingly relying upon their Contracts to bend the minds and the perceptions of their friends and family.

Relying upon fae power to keep loved ones from suspecting the truth is a slippery slope. Some Lost end up transforming their families into their thralls. A changeling may turn to her fellow changeling for help in trying to find some way out of the tottering series of lies and magics that she has built up between herself and her family. Such attempts can be quite difficult if the changeling previously spurned contact with her freehold.

While many changelings know someone who has "gone stealth" by attempting to live as a mortal with his mortal family, almost as many have seen these efforts end in failure. Such failures have results ranging from the changeling abandoning his family in horror and remorse at how he treated them to efforts to find a more equitable, or at least a more practical, solution. One common result is a changeling understanding that denying his nature is simply not possible. At this point, most begin sneaking out to spend time with other Lost for companionship and for mutual aid. A particularly pointed spur is an incident in which the Fae, privateers or some other supernatural threat approaches the changeling and his family. The illusion of normality rarely survives.

OTHER SOLUTIONS

Balancing family and other ties from before his abduction with life as a changeling is one of any changeling's most difficult challenges. The ways in which this effort can skew to the dysfunctional are many, one of the most common being a changeling stalking his family and possibly acting as their protector while never actually contacting them. Successful solutions are few, and most rely upon either a degree of honesty and trust rarely found in changelings or a skill at secrecy and subterfuge that is unusual even in these subtle beings.

The first option requires a changeling to reveal the truth to his family. Given their inevitable disbelief, the only solution is to use pledges to ensorcell them and allow them to see the truth about the changeling and his new world. Few families are willing to accept this, and even fewer Lost are in a position to let them. This option works far better if there never was a fetch or if it died before the changeling returned — admitting to murdering a fetch (or perhaps even murdering the fetch in front of them) is too much for all but a very few mortals to accept, even after they see the fetch's true nature.

When it works, this solution is nearly ideal. The changeling now has the support and possibly even the aid of her family. Of course, now her family can also see and will likely have to deal with the oddities that the changeling calls her friends and companions in the local freehold. Having to regularly interact with a variety of physically changed and mentally damaged changelings can try the patience and even the sanity of most mortals. Changelings who take this approach are regularly beset with doubts about how long their families will be able to accept them and their inhuman lives, especially because many have heard heart-rending stories of mortals who can no longer deal with knowing the truth about the Fae and their actions and beg to have their fae sight revoked.

Because of these difficulties, some changelings take the opposite solution — they find or make a place for themselves among their loved ones and then lead double lives, in which they pretend to be perfectly normal and regularly sneak out to spend time with other Lost. This approach avoids both the internal stresses of "going stealth" and the difficulties of admitting the truth, but the slightest mistake or even a simple bit of bad luck can reveal to the changeling's family that he is not in fact spending time late at the office or going to his therapist or martial arts class. While often easier than constantly denying the truth about her existence and her perceptions, the constant lying necessary to make this solution work often ends up distancing the changeling from her family and mortal friends.

A very few unusually eccentric or traumatized Lost discover a strange, but sometimes disturbingly functional, solution by developing two entirely separate personalities, one that

knows that it is a changeling and another “human” personality that is completely unaware of its true nature and that functions perfectly in the changeling’s mortal life. In some extreme and problematic cases, neither personality knows about the other. However, most often the changeling personality knows about the mortal personality and can occasionally listen in on what is occurring when that personality is in charge. In such cases, the changeling personality is often able to take control easily and with minimal trouble when the mortal personality is forced to deal with something outside of its experience.

Functional Multiple Personalities

As a reaction to a combination of the horrors the character experienced in Faerie and the shock of returning changed to the mortal world, some changelings develop multiple personalities to help them deal with their experiences. These changelings typically have two personalities, one personality that knows it is a changeling and another that thinks it is human and has no knowledge of the body’s experiences as a changeling. This second personality always has some plausible story about who it is and what happened when the changeling was abducted. If neither personality knows about the other, then this is a typical example of the Multiple Personality derangement. However, a few Lost have managed to resolve most of the psychological issues involved without reintegrating their two personalities. This odd but less extreme condition counts as a Flaw, but is only a mild derangement.

Such characters present a challenging but fascinating role-playing experience. In such cases, the changeling personality knows about the mortal personality and can at will observe and offer subtle hints of advice that come across to the human personality as unconscious thoughts and urgings. The human personality knows nothing of the character’s life as a changeling, but definitely knows that something is odd in its life and that there is someone else in its head who deals with all the “weird stuff.” In most cases, the two personalities can actually communicate in a limited fashion, although the human personality rejects and rapidly forgets any suggestion that it is anything other than a normal human being who is forced to deal with a variety of unusual situations. Each personality can call on the other to take over if needed, but usually does so only when confronted with something outside of the personality’s experience. In the case of the human personality, this includes changelings, the Fae and other supernatural oddities. For the

changeling personality, this usually includes the changeling’s family, close mortal friends and the changeling’s mortal job.

These personalities are always different from one another. Their emotions, tastes and desires all differ, although not necessarily radically. With the approval of the Storyteller, the player can also purchase a special one-dot Merit only available to such functional multiple personalities. This Merit, called Shared Sleep, means the character needs only four hours of sleep a night to feel fully rested, as long as she spends at least six hours a day in each of her two personalities. In effect, one personality sleeps while the other is awake, significantly reducing the amount of sleep the character’s body requires. This Merit should only be available to characters that are played such that each personality is a recognizable individual.

MORTAL PROTECTORS

Few who know the Fae credit them with caring sufficiently about mortals to attempt to protect them from harm. Nevertheless, there are countless tales of families and individuals having fae protectors, ranging from the Scottish banshees that delivered warnings of impending death to Japanese Baku who protect mortals by devouring nightmares and the evil creatures that cause them. Most changelings rightly assume that these legends refer to their own kind. Whether changelings are watching their friends and families from a distance or attempting to live as ordinary mortals in their midst, changelings live in a world that is broader, stranger and full of far more obvious dangers than that of ordinary mortals.

Unfortunately, while these dangers remain invisible to the vast majority of mortals, they are no less real. The Fae attempt to kidnap mortals or their children, drive them mad for sport or send the beasts of the Wild Hunt after them. Similarly, ghosts and various other monsters possess ordinary mortals or otherwise threaten their sanity or their lives. By virtue of their nature, changelings have a far easier time noticing and protecting themselves and others against many of these dangers. Every changeling tries to protect his loved ones from being taken or harmed by the Fae, and some Lost attempt extend their protection to every mortal they know. Preventing one abduction or returning someone recently abducted by the Fae to the mortal world means that the changeling has saved someone from a fate as terrible as his own, which can be a great comfort, especially when the changeling is troubled by memories of the years he spent in Arcadia. There’s historical precedent to avoid isolationism, too. Those Lost who say they’re better off ignoring the mortals

and remaining exclusively among their own kind are told of the last days of New Lyonesse, where the once-great freehold's ignorance of the humans around them proved a fatal blindness.

Changelings who care to notice are periodically presented with a variety of unusual problems, from looking in a passing baby carriage and seeing a newly formed fetch waving its cornhusk legs and twig fingers to sensing that a house that she walks by is haunted by some sort of malevolent spirit. Although most Lost do not seek out such problems, many cannot help but notice them.

For some, especially members of the Summer Court, protecting mortals from supernatural threats and especially from the Fae and their allies becomes an all-consuming passion. Unfortunately, doing this often involves spending large amounts of time away from mortals, either in the Hedge or skulking alone. Those changelings who pursue this path too strenuously almost always end up becoming increasingly isolated from humanity even as they strive to protect it. Also, protecting mortals from the Fae is not without risk. The Fae do not react kindly to anyone attempting to deprive them of mortal slaves or prey. Any changeling who does this too often will find the Wild Hunt, ensorcelled mortals or perhaps a motley of privateers or loyalists attempting to hunt them down and turn them over to the Fae.

COURTS

The Great Courts are common social structures on a greater scale than motleys. Great Courts serve much the same purpose — safety from the Fae — but on a larger scale and with more organization. Each of the four Courts has its own unique affiliations with one of the seasons and a dominant emotion, bound to the Court through oaths its founders exacted from the seasons many, many years ago. Changeling legend holds that the Western Great Courts were first founded shortly before the Dark Ages, and while their presence has waxed and waned over the years, it has always been strong enough to survive. The names of the founders are often modernized, but it's commonly held that they lived at least at the time of the Roman Empire.



Changelings bound their Courts to the seasons for the strength it would give them against their one-time captors. Any pact provides power in the form of

Contracts, but the founders explicitly chose to align their Courts with an aspect of the world that the Gentry couldn't understand. A Fae lord may tyrannize a realm of endless winter, but he would never forsake his power and allow another to warm his land to spring. Tying their resistance to the voluntary progression of the seasons gives the changelings a stronger connection to Earth and a basis for defense that the Others are — so far — unable to undermine.

These pacts serve changelings around the world, but they are most common (near ubiquitous, really) in North America and Europe. There are regions where the changeling Courts have developed to the point where they no longer relate to the seasons, and they no longer benefit as much from the pact. Changeling society in such places is often weaker and more susceptible to the Fae. Other Courts relate themselves to different earthly phenomena, and their founders may have forged other pacts. As long as the Courts maintain meaning and symbolism that can be used against the Fae, the Courts can still have some power. The directional Courts in China, the sun Courts (dawn, noon, dusk and night) and Courts tied to the Buddhist cycles of reincarnation serve as examples.

Joining a Court involves a pledge on the part of the changeling, and the changeling's Wyrd supports that pledge. The Wyrd ties strongly to the seasons' interactions with time and the emotional affiliations that each Court assumes. In return for the pledge, the character's seeming gains the Court's Mantle, a supernatural addition to the changeling's mien that reflects the Court's season and dominant emotion.

Spring

(the Antler Crown, the Emerald Court, the Court of Desire)

There's only one reason to get away from Faerie, miss, and you know it. We come back to Earth to leave the dreams behind. Feels good to finally wake up, doesn't it? Thing is, there's no point in getting back to Earth if we don't get back to *real* life. Too many of us get all tied up in just being away and not getting caught that we don't think about what we're gonna do now. We have to move forward, and we have to enjoy ourselves — there's no other way to escape all that misery we all share.

But it doesn't have to be one or the other, fun or safety. With us, the Spring Court, leaving the past behind is our defense. No offense, but I've seen you dance, miss, and I think you know it. You're not just enjoying yourself and making friends. You're keeping them away.

Bare branches will again bear fruit. This belief is the common element in members of the Spring Court. Just as all changelings, these Court members have had their lives ripped from them by their onetime Keepers. The Spring Court exists for changelings who refuse that loss, choosing to replace it with something new. They deny despair in preference of hope, and together they keep that hope alive where alone it would falter. Their lives are not over, and they intend to prove it — to the Fae, and to themselves.

Mother Susan is the alleged founder of the Antler Crown. After returning to Earth from Faerie, her dreams of motherhood were shattered by infertility. Contracts she forged with other entities enabled her to have a child again, but she would not keep it. Many believe that Mother Susan gave up her infant to Spring in order to seal the pact that founded the Court. They honor her as one who sacrificed her spring so that others might have theirs, though many question what

could have driven her to such an extreme. Some say it was guilt, and they wonder what she might have done to first have her child.

This is how the members of the Spring Court defend themselves against the Fae. These Court members will not be silent, pain-wracked victims of their tormentors. These Lost choose to exult in the now and guiltlessly retie themselves to the human

world around them. They surround themselves with the beauty their time in Arcadia showed them, proving that their joy is not trapped in that other place forever. Far from a denial of the situation, this is a deliberate attack on the Fae. Changelings of the Emerald Court fulfill their own desires, and do it with style, out of spite and pride, to diminish the power the Gentry hold over them.

If it were easy, every changeling would do it. Instead, there is an entire Court devoted to the idea. The Court of Desire serves as a support group for its members as much as a governing body. For every refugee who truly embraces the concept of living well in order to live at all, there are two who play the game and hide their shame. Being among others struggling the same way strengthens all of them, helps them go on. The reinforcement the Court provides is the reason it and many of its members have survived so long.

So, what members of the Spring Court do, they do with style. They must enjoy life and steal Faerie's thunder, which they do by making their existences beautiful as well as enjoyable. Changelings of this Court seek the most poetic aspect of any effort, from poignant stanzas and cleverly appropriate bargains to something as simple as walking gracefully to the bus.

Bearers of the Emerald Mantle practice equal elegance in their interactions with others. Their wit and



eloquence naturally attract allies and acquaintances whom, in a pinch, they can call upon or manipulate when necessary. This quickly became and remains another of the Court's tools in its effort to remain free.

The results are subtle, but effective. One motley spends its evenings in a nightclub, drinking in the thirst and lust and the slaking of each. It can also rouse the clubbers to riot to conceal their escape. Others sneak into office parties across their city, riding the white-collar workers' one night of release, but they always have friends to hide them. From this, changelings of the Spring Court camouflage themselves against these backgrounds. Hunting Fae cannot find changelings as easily when the prey doesn't have that feeling of loss that most changelings cannot shake off.

And when True Fae grow close, the Court gathers. The monarch arranges soirees to delay or deflect the wrath of the Fae. There is a metaphysical power in unbridled joy that turns away captors seeking their slaves. There is such strength in being able to honestly laugh in the face of terror that it slows or stops the hunting Gentry, who wonder if these are their quarry after all.

COURTIERS

Changelings in a Spring Court pursue their every action with elegant grace, and they refuse to neglect their own pleasures. Many of them are very serious about seeing their own desires met, to the point where people might call them narcissistic egoists. Few admit that a Spring courtier has a very good reason to pursue his own interests, and that that pursuit requires an iron will and a self-control to rival any recovering addict.

The ideal of beautifully living for today is very attractive, especially to escapees from the courts of Faerie. But few changelings have the right personality to live in the moments of their own creation — so much of what they are is in the past, decided for them by minds decidedly unconcerned with fulfilling the changeling's desires. They still have not escaped the Arcadian prison, though they walk free on Earth. Such people do not belong in the Spring Court.

The Court seeks those who want to deny the consequences of the past. Rather than hide from it or stand against it, they choose to leave their troubles behind them and forge something new and distinctly *theirs* in the "new" world of Earth. They are pioneers and explorers on the experiential landscape, always seeking a new pleasure because moving any more slowly means the Fae will find them.

A proper member of the Spring Court is devoted to meeting her own desires and doing so elegantly, but also to helping other members meet *their* desires. A changeling who can not just emulate Spring's rebirth but help carry it to others is one who has the Court's respect. A courtly Knight proclaims his love for the maiden in every artfully careless step and revels in it, but it is better if his proclamation gives the maiden the opportunity to gently swoon and become ravished just as she desires. A changeling scientist constructs her lab such that every Bunsen burner and bubbling flask speaks volumes about the sanity she delights in pretending is lost, but it is better if her research assistant has the opportunity to thematically rail against her madness before storming out the door in secret joy.

Anyone is welcome to join the Spring Court, but members are judgmental. A changeling without the same affectation for beauty as the others is quickly made to feel as if she doesn't fit in. Unless (or until) she shows some special poetry in either her work or play, she will be only on the periphery of the Court and unable to advance.

Some changelings of this Court suffer strong feelings of guilt. What gives them the right to see to their own wants while others suffer? No mere human may have endured as much as one of the changelings, but there are other fae who have. This question is most common among members whose hearts are changing, and will soon lead them away from the Spring Court.

RITUALS

Some observances are common among many, if not most, Spring Courts. Best known is the Spring Revel, a region-wide party the Court commands each time power transfers to the Spring Court from the Winter Court. Changelings of all Courts look forward to these celebrations, as the Court of Desire arranges locations where the fae can be private and makes a special effort to see that at least one desire of every attendee, changeling, human guest or other, is met. The best monarchs use the opportunity to demonstrate the intended themes of their reigns without being so gauche as to state them. Members of the Spring Court, at least, believe that the Revel deters Fae incursion.

Spring courtiers constantly compete to make the most subtly eloquent and audaciously beautiful statement in their individual bailiwicks. This is no poetry slam or lyrical comparison. It is a competition practiced in all media across a Court's jurisdiction, and a composition's worth is measured by the response among humans. The Spring King or Queen usually

judges. She determines which member of the Court performed best (taking into account gamesmanship and honor, the wild cards) and bestows a simple honor or prize once each year, usually during the Spring Revel. Arranging a building's skeletal structure to look like a rose growing into full bloom as it is built is an example of one victorious entry.

Every year, many Spring Courts hold a Homecoming. Some members of the Court (or other Courts) try to rename the party to something not used by academic institutions for their sporting events, but the attempts always fail. The name is too perfect. The Homecoming usually takes place on the date of the Spring monarch's escape from Faerie, but it is occasionally rescheduled to honor a particular changeling. Everyone is invited, and they are all expected to "let loose." Surprisingly, most of the guests actually do.



HERALDRY

The Antler Crown displays itself extravagantly, holding little back. The Court's colors are the vibrant blues and greens of its season — the green of new growth and the pale, infinite blue of an unclouded sky. Courtiers occasionally make use of the lighter tints of winter to signify the transition. Symbols common in Spring Court heraldry include an antlered crown (naturally), dawn, spring flowers or buds, the eastern direction, ribbons, a rapier and main gauche, a lance, the imagery of wings, a fox or rabbit, a robin or sparrow, a well-maintained phonograph or vinyl record, a lace handkerchief and a needle, among others.

MANTLE

The Mantle of a Spring courtier reflects the growth of life and hope within her. Mantle • to ••• manifests in a character's seeming as something fresh and rejuvenated. Fragrant drafts of spring air are common, and images of slowly growing plants are far from unknown. Mantle ••••+ affects the character's surroundings with the fecundity of her seeming. Flowers grow up where she steps and things appear more lively.

A member of the Spring Court with Mantle •+ is socially smooth and adds one die to Socialize rolls.

A character with Mantle •••+ easily rejuvenates those connections she once lost and purchases Allies and Contacts at reduced experience cost. She pays one-half the normal cost for those Merits. A character with Mantle ••••• rarely makes *faux pas*; when meeting someone for the first time or otherwise making a first impression, the character's player may re-roll her relevant Social dice pool if she desires. She must keep the second roll.

DESIRE

Lust. Hunger. Greed. These and more fall under the broad blanket of "desire." The Spring Court claims the greatest connection to this emotion by right of the Court's pact, and few deny that the courtiers make it a part of themselves.

A member of the Court of Desire luxuriates in her signature emotion any

place she can find it: the child in the supermarket who can't have a cookie. The dog on the street, staring hungrily at its owner's pastrami. The older man walking with his grandchildren and longing for a rest. Some Lost relieve these desires, slipping the kid a snack or bumping the sandwich onto the ground. If doing so creates a greater story or meets more wants — the mother is upset at the well-meaning stranger usurping her authority, so she forgets herself and allows her other child to have some bubblegum — so much the better.

Many changelings find positions in human communities that provide close views of human desires. One owns a strip club, while the friends in her motley serve as bartender, waitresses and janitor. A changeling organizes and leads a two-week summer camp, knowing the sort of drama that runs rampant there. Members of the Spring Court are quick to organize celebrations, from block parties to gallery openings. Some become purveyors of alcohol or marijuana (occasionally to minors), letting the relaxed inhibitions help people reach for what they want.

Spring courtiers are careful to recognize their own desires. To do otherwise would be a failure, because a pleasure unknown is a pleasure unfulfilled. Members also try to be aware of what others want, especially their comrades-in-arms. Allowing a fellow refugee to suffer despair is as much a failure as despairing yourself. A few changelings take it further, considering it their duty to ensure their companions meet their desires.

Some members of the Court spend their time seeking new pleasures in an attempt to experience everything and deny themselves nothing; their less frenetic comrades often stick with the few pleasures they prefer, though often only after a period of searching for what those pleasures are. There are those who consider the continued search for fulfillment just another part of the escape that began with a furious, fearful race through the Hedge. Others think of it as their reward for making it this far.

STEREOTYPES

Summer Court: They're strong, and I suppose that makes them safe. But by protecting their lives, they don't really *live*.

Autumn Court: They spend too much time remembering. They should really get out more — out of doors, and out of the past.

Winter Court: I'm this far from being one of them. If I'd shut my doors instead of throwing them open, I'd be there.



Summer

(THE IRON SPEAR, THE CRIMSON COURT, THE COURT OF WRATH)

No, I don't worry about Them at all, and you don't need to either. Okay, well, that's an exaggeration. They're always out there, and we're Their prey, but we have sharper teeth than we did the first time Their hounds took us down. This time, we're ready to fight back.

And that's really what you want to do, isn't it? You'd have to be damned stupid to pretend they're not coming, and you don't look like a hider to me. No, when they come back, you want to be there with a gun and a sword in your hands. I don't know about you — I have a guess, but I don't know — but I want to make them bleed when they come for me. And you look like someone I'd want at my back.

The buck has horns. This is what members of the Summer Court want the Fae to realize the next time they come a-hunting. Changelings break free of Faerie and escape to Earth, and they are going to fight tooth and claw not to be uprooted again. In Arcadia, they were alone and helpless. Back on Earth, they stand strong together. The Summer Court welcomes any changeling willing to fight to the last drop of blood for her — and for others' — safety.

The Court's founder was Sam Noblood, whose mien always dripped with red during a fight. Legend has it that Sam topped an old branch with a bundle of autumn leaves to make a spear, and hunted down Summer. The pursuit was long, but Sam Noblood cornered Summer and extracted a promise: in exchange for peace, the season would support Sam's Court.

That legend embodies the Crimson Court way to success in life: through strength. What is worth keeping is worth fighting to keep, and a fight only ends in your favor if you make it. To members of the Summer Court, everything is something they must learn to endure and overcome. But not alone. A changeling's

family, friends and kinship with humanity have been stolen from him, but the Court offers a new family. Enemies of the changelings are to be faced and defeated, together, doing what no refugee could do before he escaped and found companions. Otherwise, there was no point in fighting free of Faerie in the first place.

Not all members of the Court are strong, but all of them see strength as the best means to achieving their security on Earth.

Strength is an ideal for them, the ability to weather what the world forces on them and the power to shape events to the changeling's best interests. Courtiers who do not wield such strength pursue it, and the Court supports its members in their pursuits.

The ideal manifests in many ways, from the simple brute who can take a punch (or a dozen) and dish it all out to the political fixer with the backup to stay connected and the clout to direct policy. For some, breadth of ability is another measure of strength. No changeling has the freedom to fight in only a single arena, so being capable in more than one is considered another expression of strength.

The Iron Spear's dedication drives it to lend aid to any Lost who need help fighting off the Fae. It's an ultimate measure of their power: if the Court can fight on behalf of all changelings and *win*, it is successfully earning its safety through its creed. The Court's need to test itself causes them to champion fae society in other causes as well, often without being asked. Members of the Summer Court stand between the Courts and other supernatural threats, such as vampires or mages, and they act to stop human institutions that would do the fae harm, for example, investigative reporters and paranormal conspiracies.



COURTIERS

Changelings who join the Summer Court are usually the more direct, conflict-minded refugees from Arcadia. When they see an assault, their solution is to fight back. To such a person's eyes, webs of intrigue and plotting nearly beg to be torn down around their weavers. Their instinct after their escape is to pick up what pieces there are, suffer what they must and spit the Fae's hospitality right back in Their faces. The Gentry are masters at finessing around or through such direct challenges to their slippery power, but the Summer Courts don't care — and that's part of what makes their survival such a big deal.

Besides that directness of manner, members of the Court of Wrath have the will to use it. For many, it's the smoldering fury they hold for the Fae that stole their lives and didn't even let their families mourn. If you don't intend to let enemies live long enough to play games with them, why pretend? Others return to Earth with the patience burned out of them, or a steel-hard dedication instilled that they have trouble questioning. Some just like lording over the weak, and they fall into this category, too.

Some fae see those who join the Summer Court as leftovers from the other Courts. They aren't elegant enough for Spring, inquisitive enough for Fall or crafty enough for Winter, so they end up in Summer. These are stereotypes too often applied and only partially correct. A changeling who is none of those things and also not a fighter remains Courtless. And all too often, the other Courts recognize the Summer Court as a changeling's destination before any Summer courtier meets her. The fae has the strength and will to fight, yes, but also seeks a foundation for her wrath. She needs a knightly brotherhood sworn to defend the refugees and destroy their enemies, because that is exactly what she burns to do.

Nearly all members of the Summer Court appreciate the direct application of force for its usefulness and elegance. Few restrict their study of direct conflict to brute-on-brute fights, though, and none of them ignore that most of their enemies use less straightforward tactics. One courtier knows exactly how to read the intricacies of politics, and exactly when to cut through them with truth like a knife. Another undermines others in arguments, unsubtly but very effectively, and can sway crowds to her whim. The strategist sees where the enemy commanders must move their troops, and stations her soldiers in the perfect place to stop them.

Pledging to the Summer Court is an uncomplicated affair, just as the rest of the Court's activities. The Court runs a potential member through a gamut of arduous physical challenges, from fistfights and rock-climbing to staying alive in the woods at night. (Basically, all the Physical Skills.) The intent is to see if the changeling can keep going through it all and to determine which (if any) skills are the individuals' forte. Some don't make the grade. (In game terms, most characters in the Summer Court have ●●● in at least one Physical Skill. Some manage to join the Court with less, with liberal Willpower expenditure and a bit of luck.)

RITUALS

Compared to the other Courts, the Court of Wrath's rituals are abundant and unsubtle. Very common are contests of physical skill. The Court is full of changelings who place great value on sheer force or ability, and it pleases them to know who is best at any given thing. Wrestling matches or mock combats are common, as are footraces, free running and climbing competitions, martial arts contests, tests of archery and marksmanship and many other competitive endeavors. Most courtiers have running scorecards in their head that tell them who has beaten whom and how many times, creating an approximate pecking order that differs for each category.

One recent tradition that has caught on among many Summer Courts is to arrange official contests during their periods ruling the freehold. Each of the three contests tests a quality at which another Court is, ostentatiously, the best. Each Court chooses a champion for each contest, and the best fae brings honor and prizes to her Court. Unsurprisingly, the Autumn Court usually wins the contests of invention and magic, the Winter Court usually wins the contests of stealth and subterfuge, etc.

Most changelings see the contests as an opportunity for the Summer Court to challenge other Courts in their bailiwicks, trying to show them up. Few realize that the contests were designed to spread goodwill, as members of the other Courts reinforce their pride as the most eloquent poets or craftiest forgers. In this way, the Summer Court builds social awareness of the Courts' individual strengths and weaknesses, shoring up areas that the Fae might try to exploit.

Some Crimson courtiers also try to take part in human competitions. Different Courts take different stances on such activity. While excelling at a craft is very much in line with the Court's nature, doing so

can also attract unwanted attention. Some Summer Courts discourage it, suggesting that the competitors instead hone their skills to fight the Fae. Other Courts support the idea as a way to draw out the True Fae for ambush. Problematically, truly national competitions take changelings far afield, where they don't know the lay of the land and must interact with strange (and probably untrusting) fae in order to take basic safety precautions. The other Courts look down on such grandstanding in human society, believing that it can only cause trouble.

HERALDRY

The Court of Wrath displays itself proudly, daring its enemies to approach. The Court's colors are the rich greens of forests and open fields of grass, a spread of reds, from the succulent strawberry red of full summer to the red of hot metal and forest fires and the bright yellows and oranges of the sun at its zenith. Symbols common in their heraldry include an assortment of weapons (the spear, sword and mace are all common, sometimes all together), a shield, sunflowers, summer berries, a bright sun or a full moon, flames or fire, a mushroom cloud, a boar, a badger, an eagle, gold (the color or the substance), iron, a bloody pen or quill and a fist, among others.



MANTLE

The Summer Court's Mantle carries the sensation of its pure, unrelenting strength. Characters with Mantle • to ••• demonstrate aspects of heat in their seemings. Heat distortions and the sensation of a dry, warm wind are common. Mantle ••••+ is even stronger — people able to detect the seeming can feel a physical heat rising from it and sometimes feel dried out.

Mantle • gives the Crimson courtier an instinct about how to use his Strength to its best ability. Characters with that rating add four dice instead of three when they spend a point of Willpower on a Strength-based roll. Mantle ••• provides protection against the dangers of the world, acting as one point of armor at all times and against all dangers. Characters with Mantle •••• have a hidden reserve of strength to help them carry on: one extra health level.

WRATH

There is a righteous wrath in the heart of nearly every member of every Summer Court. Somewhere deep, they want their tormentors to feel as helpless as the changelings once did. It is something that they must deal with — the sheer anger at how they have been abused, the rage at those who took what can never be returned. The courtiers of Wrath know how angry they are in their hearts. They try very hard to spend their wrath on something, anything, so that they do not lose their control. Strength without aim is too dangerous for the Court to favor it.

There is wrath in every competitor at a contest. Wrath lurks behind the desire to be victorious, disguises itself as competitive nature, but really wants the others to fail and you to win. A competitor wants the others to *go down*. This is the other reason the Summer Court holds so many informal competitions. In addition to honing their strengths, the contests burn their anger. The members work to keep their fires banked, so the flames will burn hot when the fae need them to but not before.

Members of the Court of Wrath do burn out occasionally. Having lost their driving anger, they often become Courtless. Recognizing the phenomenon, the Court makes an effort to provide its members appropriate fuel for their rages without letting it burn too brightly. One of the Court's core purposes is to prevent its members' wrath from consuming them, or from dying out and leaving changelings undefended.

In the pursuit of wrath, courtiers frequent sporting events. They let the competitive urges wash over them, flavored by the angers of clashing or disappointed fans. Changelings may become coaches or even influential teammates, working to fan the competitive rage that drives athletes. Humans are prone to anger, and the fae can usually create it with ease. One can pretend his car is broken in the middle of rush hour to anger hundreds, or one could order with infuriating sloth at the popular coffee shop to piss off a couple dozen. On a smaller scale, some changelings enjoy pretending to be telemarketers or evangelists and calling upon families at dinnertime. It's small scale, but more personal.

Not every member of the Crimson Court considers petty anger appropriately wrathful, and some seek out deeper furies. Some visit prisons to get a

sense of the prisoners, or correspond with murderers on death row. These can provide tastes of wrath current and wrath past, both of which are valuable to the Summer Court. Daring changelings may join or assist local criminal organizations, hoping to be near gun battles and dramatic betrayals, but others seek out positions in Hollywood or politics where such things are more common.

STEREOTYPES

Spring Court: They're too busy playing Fae to fight them.

Autumn Court: These guys have the right idea, but the fire they're playing with is hotter than ours and harder to control.

Winter Court: If I wanted to hide from real life, I'd've stayed in Faerie.



Autumn

(THE LEADEN MIRROR, THE ASHEN COURT, THE COURT OF FEAR)

The Fae gave us the weapons to fight them when they took our lives away. They just don't know it. See, they think our memories fail us when we escape to Earth. For the most part, they're right. But I remember some of what I saw there. A lot of what I remember... don't get me wrong, it was Hell. But even Hell has its miracles.

In between all the things I never want to see again are the little wonders. Dropping a leaf from the ground upward to a tree. Food appearing on a table. Paths turning inward on each other so you never find your way out — well, that one's a mixed blessing. I hated it, and still do, but I love the magic. Look at yourself. You have the same light in your eyes I did when I realized that I'd stolen from Faerie as much as they stole from me.

The curse is a gift. Not one member of the Autumn Court is glad of her abduction and enslavement. But since they were taken, they were changed and they can't go back, they can damn well take advantage of those changes. They know that the gramarye of the Fae doesn't have to be terrifyingly beautiful and gloriously torturous. It can be simply wondrous, too. Though all changelings use magic, the Leaden Mirror walks on the cutting edge of Wyrd.

Clay Ariel founded the Court of Fear. She had natural hands before she was taken, but when she returned, they were artificial. Only soft clay, she had to be careful not to damage them. Ariel took this as a lesson, and her toys and weapons of clay were well-known. None living today know what influence Clay Ariel exerted on the season of Autumn, but legend states that she went off without any armament but a wry smile. She ruled as the first Autumn Queen for long years after forging her Court's pact.

The Autumn Court survives by turning the weapons of the Fae against them. These weapons are the pacts and Contracts made between Faerie and the various aspects of Earth. Many Court members also justify their experiences as slaves by bringing magic to Earth. This is the opportunity to enrich their world with breathtaking wonder, and they've already paid the monstrous cost. Autumn courtiers are the most likely to seek out trods and other places of power, because that is where there is more to learn.

Every Contract is another sword to wield, another shield between her and the Fae and another rainbow cast by the otherwise lonely rain.

This Court encourages subtler solutions to problems that face fae society. Clay Ariel didn't charge off to wrestle the season for her pact, and Autumn Court members rarely try to match their enemies eye to eye and fist to fist.

One would much rather lead a foe into a trap or trick an opponent into attacking the wrong target — minimum force for the maximum result. To a degree, it's just efficiency. It lets the changeling spend as little effort as possible and get back to other things. But it's also common sense, honed by fear: when you're fighting with your enemies' weapons and don't know exactly how they work, you use them as little as possible.

So the Court tracks down and investigates any potential source of Wyrd knowledge. A member of this Court is much more likely than most to ask other changelings about what they remember of Faerie. When that fails, they ransack their own memories for new revelations, sometimes resorting to hypnotism or thiopental sodium. Autumn courtiers also travel more than most changelings, exploring places of fae significance. Every little bit helps.



Autumn Court members often explore the Hedge, seeking a glimpse of Arcadia's wonder. Others explore the limits of known pacts and their interactions with each other — some take a very scientific approach to such things, while others refuse to explain magic with reason. Daring Ashen courtiers try to effect new pacts, expanding the breadth of changeling magic and developing Contracts that the Fae could not match. (The occasional assertion that all Court founders would have been members of the Autumn Court today is always laughed down.)

Not every source of power the Lost try to use is Wyrd. There is more to the supernatural than just the Fae, and the Autumn Court knows that better than most. Its members explore — carefully, cautiously, with great (and very reasonable) reservation — the worlds of werewolves, mages and other supernatural creatures. One never knows where one might find an ally. Or a new weapon.

COURTIERS

Every member of the Ashen Court has a little voice that misses magical Arcadia and desperately wants to go back. Maybe that voice was placed by the Fae, maybe it's natural, but it's there either way. This is just one reason of many a changeling may join the Autumn Court, and it's often not the greatest. Many changelings quite simply want to hurt their captors and see their magical capabilities as the best way of doing so. Others become enamored with the irony of fighting the Fae with the magic of Faerie.

The best prospective members of the Court are creative and inquisitive, but in the end, they are also in love with magic. There are creative ways to make war without magic, and there are questions one can ask that only concern earthly subjects. Changelings join this Court because they want to change the world obliquely by pushing through dimensions of trust and poetry that most people ignore. All eventually deal with the conflict of surrounding themselves with what the strove so long to escape, but it often takes some time.

Courtiers of Autumn seek alternative solutions to surmount their obstacles. A member would rather sweep the legs out from an opponent than push him over, and luring him onto a patch of ice is more attractive than either. One might spread a rumor to draw out the Fae instead of planting real bait to attract them. Either way, changelings attracted to this Court generally lean away from the most direct path. Unless, of course, it's the best.

Though all members of the Court involve themselves with magic, many specialize in certain fields and expand their mastery of other disciplines. Even those who relegate the study of magic to secondary importance apply the Autumn Court's method of problem-solving to the rest of their lives. The businessman who outsourced before outsourcing became "cool," the scientist who gives outlandish theories a chance and the teacher who neatly sidesteps the principal's wrath are all people who could join the Autumn Court.

Most Autumn Courts require a potential member to share some secret of Wyrd lore that they do not already know. Acceptable secrets are often just foggy tidbits that a changeling remembers from her time in Faerie. Some fae make such things up, but a secret that does not ring true is quickly weeded out. On the other hand, the ability to falsify tales of Fae magic and fool others is a valuable creativity, and may be respected. Other changelings demonstrate Contracts not commonly known in the area or to the Court.

But magic has a price. Changelings who practice too carelessly find themselves growing apart from Earth again. Worse, some of them don't realize how much of their humanity they are giving up for their gramarye. The wise among them accept the costs they cannot avoid, and the Court serves to help the Lost without that strength. Others simply don't care or don't think of it, exulting in magic for magic's sake and damning the (or ignoring) consequences.

RITUALS

The rituals of the Autumn Court are not as colorful or outlandish as some of the other Courts'. The annual Fallen Fair is common in many regions. Each year, members of the Court and esteemed guests from other Courts gather to show off their discoveries in the realm of the supernatural. Changelings demonstrate their advanced aptitudes with well-known Contracts, display newfound tokens and share their unique pacts (if any). There is a full docket of lectures on all manner of magical topics. The Fallen Fair is also an unofficial opportunity to barter magical tools and services.

Many Autumn Courts sponsor a hunt, called the Hunt of Leaves, the Ash Run and other names. This is a lethal hunt that welcomes all interested changelings, in which the fae ride (or run, or drive) down and kill their enemies. Topping this list are the True Fae, but the hunt also targets loyalist changelings, leftover dream-things and sometimes fetches. The Court bears

the expense and effort, arranging necessary weapons or concealments from human society. All the other Courts need to provide are warm, willing bodies. Of course, the Autumn Court has the first claim on bounty, especially magical, from the hunt.

The hunt gets most of its participants from the Autumn and Summer Courts, but a healthy smattering of the other changelings (including Courtless) always participate. Whatever their reasons, most relish an opportunity to make the enemy run scared, if only for an evening or two.

Some Courts mimic the scientific community's approach to magic to a larger degree. They fund lectures by members of *other* Autumn Courts, arranging travel and accommodations and occasionally provid-

ing an honorarium. Some also publish journals containing their members' monographs. Such a work is generally on the scope of an indie 'zine (and is taken as such by mortals who happen upon one).

HERALDRY

The Leaden Mirror is oblique in its symbolism. The colors of the Court are those of Autumn: the red, yellow and orange of dying leaves, mixed with the gray of a overcast sky or the brown of a bare tree. Symbols commonly used with the Autumn Court include fallen leaves and branches, wilting grass, falling raindrops, lightning, rising smoke, sheaves of wheat, bushels of harvested fruit, an owl, a raven and crow, a vulture, a blowfish, a snake, a spider, a bed, a vintage automobile, an eyeglass, looking glass or a magnifying glass, a book, a rowan wand and a candle burning down, among others.

MANTLE

The Mantle of the Autumn Court is more overtly sorcerous than the others. It has mystical overtones — sparkles of light, occult characters, queer musical tones or other indicators — in addition to the normal seasonal nature. At Mantle • to •••, a character's seeming displays the occasional dead leaf on the wind (moreso during the height of the season), lit candles or the vines of harvest-time plants. At Mantle ••••+, the seeming shows those with more frequency and occasionally appears to kill nearby plants with frost, or at least make them wither. People who can perceive the seeming also feel occasional chills, not usually associated with temperature.

Members of the Ashen Court have an affinity for the magic of the fae.

Mantle • provides a character two bonus dice on any Contract activation roll that uses Occult. As the character ties herself more strongly to the Court, she develops an affinity for the Fae. At Mantle •••, she adds one die to Empathy and Investigation rolls dealing with True Fae or Faerie. The greatest members of the Court benefit from an instinctive understanding of magic. At Mantle •••••, they may re-roll any failed Occult roll dealing with magic (but not activating a power, such as a Contract or pledge). The results of the second roll stand.

FEAR

Autumn Court members deal with fear on two basic levels. They evoke the emotion in oth-



ers, and they explore their own fear. Cultivating fear in communities is easy, but not always desirable, moral or safe. A changeling may spread word in a neighborhood about the sex offender who moved in next door, but if the rumor leads back to him (assuming it's false), there will be consequences. Likewise, one can lower the perceived safety of people who live in the area by staging muggings or calling the police with lies about drug deals or shootings. This can also backfire, as such "prophecies" tend to be self-fulfilling. The cold war was a good time for the Autumn Court, as the threat of nuclear war loomed large, and some skeptically note that fear will always be good business for human society as well as the Leaden Mirror.

Children are a valuable source of fear for Autumn courtiers. Children are less skeptical than adults, and emotionally more pure, so many members of the Court hone the skill of telling scary stories or arranging frightening performances. Spreading local legends about "that house" or "old man Withers" is common. Some *create* the yard where kids never venture to get a lost ball. Creating truly frightening haunted houses during Halloween is a tradition few pass up.

On the surface, members of the Court know why they're afraid. Their period of forced servitude in Faerie is still terrifying to them. What's important is how they relate to that fear. An Ashen courtier tries to be aware of her fears, whether a frightening moment (an

imminent car crash) or an abiding terror (the Others, naturally, but also more mundane things like spiders or losing an honored position).

Knowledge of the emotion and of the fae's self is the key; Court of Fear members put little stock on conquering their fears, which they consider an unhelpful goal, and more on learning how to *use* those fears. They try to wisely excuse themselves from projects in which they will be nervous and unhelpful, and they examine when to work with their fright to surpass their normal limits.

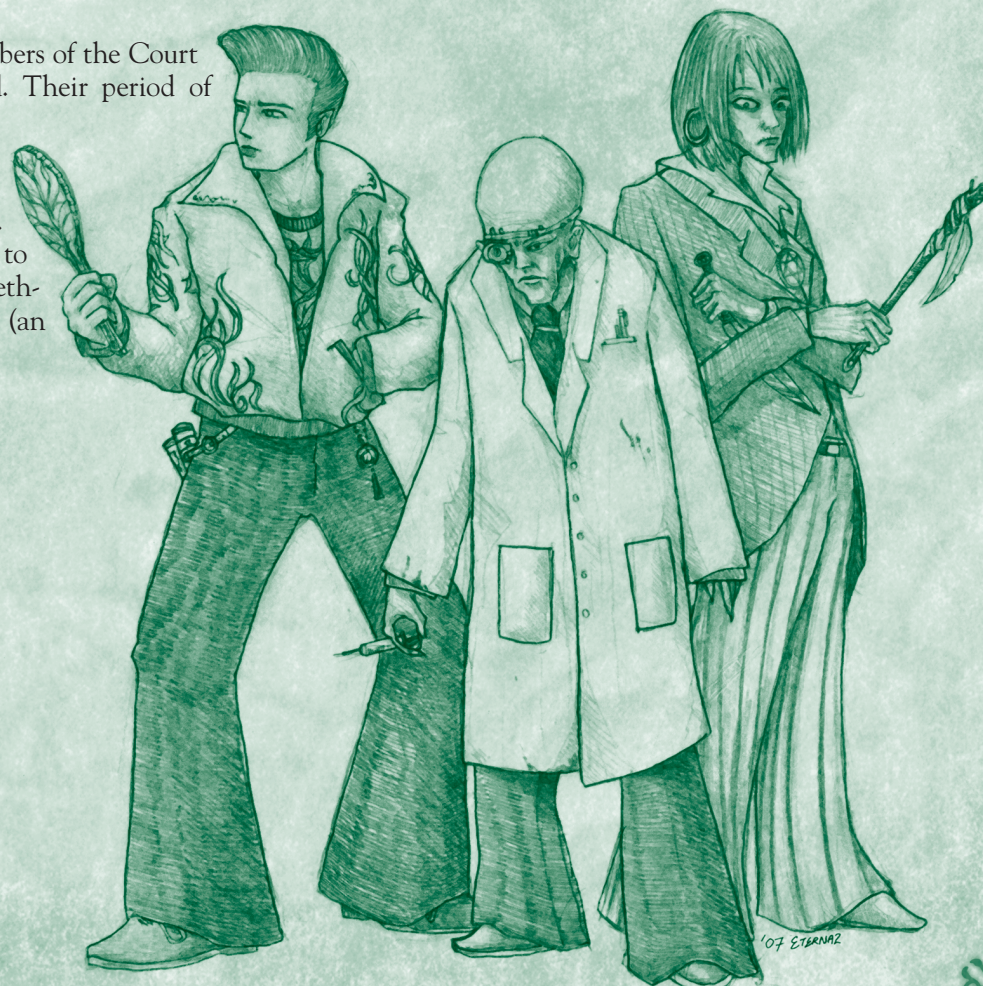
Members of this Court are also known for their ability to understand *other's* fears, and their aptitude for wielding that knowledge with great efficacy.

STEREOTYPES

Spring Court: They may understand the nature of Wyrd, but they sure don't do anything about it.

Summer Court: There's so much potential, but they waste it all on brute force.

Winter Court: If they ever came out of their shells, they could do something. As it is, they just hide.



Winter

(THE SILENT ARROW, THE ONYX COURT, THE COURT OF SORROW)

Jesus, will you shut. Up? There's a war on out there, and if you're too loud you'll end up in somebody's sights. Better to stay down in a foxhole. Down here, you're hard to see, which is good because the war's nearly invisible. But it's there, it's deadly, and it's much, much better to be out of the way where we are right now. Can't see you, can't shoot you, right?

See, you may have forgotten most of Faerie, but Faerie hasn't forgotten you. It wants you back. And the world may look normal to you, but you, you stick out like sore thumb. Gotta learn how to hide that, the mien. Put it away where they can't find you, and you'll be fine. Some of us go ahead and fight back, killing in the dark like, but I prefer to stay out of it. I'm gonna live forever.

The hunt ends when the fox goes to ground. If the True Fae can't find you, the Winter Court reasons, they can't hunt you down and drag you back to Faerie. In the Winter, all the glory of the seasons fades to nothing, nowhere to be seen, and snow hides the ground. But there is life, waiting beneath the earth where it can't be disturbed. The Silent Arrow knows this.

The founder of the Court was a changeling called Snowflake John. Per his moniker, he was nearly impossible to tell apart from any of the other people on the street at any time. In a crowd, he could blend in seamlessly. When the other Court founders were challenging their seasons, he did the same: by not showing up. Legend has it that John declared publicly his intent to earn a pact from Winter, but the challenge never materialized. After two years, when Winter had circled the globe fully twice, Snowflake John reappeared and asserted that Winter's inability to find him had earned him the right to make a pact. Many changelings claim that there was something else to the bargain, but none

agree on what it is. The fact remains that the Winter Court has its pact.

When the Fae come, the Winter Court is gone. And when the cat is away, the mouse plays on. The Court itself takes up whatever unoccupied location is convenient and attractive, and abandons that place just as easily when danger or discovery threatens. Members all know the short list of those

places, giving them a place to look, but even they are never sure where the Court will surface until someone finds it and passes the word. It's a security measure, ensuring that their enemies have a very hard time tracking them down and ambushing them.

Members of the Court practice speaking in code, the better to conceal their intentions from their oppressors. They leave messages for each other in ways that outsiders cannot distinguish or intercept (using Contracts for this purpose is ideal; a combination of drop boxes and codes is second-best and usually sufficient). Many of them keep multiple homes and make a practice of avoiding regular paths to avoid ambushes. Changelings regularly invest in security systems (mundane, magical or both) and secret rooms. Some Courts arrange "safehouses" for their members, in the event that they need a place to hide from unwanted attention (whether Fae or human). The cold war was a defining time for the Winter Court; while the Autumn Court profited greatly from the fear of nuclear annihilation, the Winter Court learned to fuse many of the mortal innovations in espionage and deceit with their own fae talents for trickery.

The Onyx Court isn't all paranoia and secrecy, though that element is certainly present. Members try to be subtle in their daily lives. They avoid attention



from their neighbors by being “just another guy.” In the suburbs, where homeowners drive off every day and have landscapers by once a month, you don’t want to be the car left in the driveway. Even the fae who don’t have regular jobs (many, but not all) drive off and find someplace to spend their “workday.” Winter changelings make unremarkable employees, doing adequate but unremarkable jobs and trying not to get in trouble. Only those who can maintain an unnoticeable record while dealing with the weird things from Faerie stick with employment.

Members of the Court fit in wherever they go. City life is very attractive because, amidst all those people, it’s easy to be just another anonymous neighbor. At a coffee shop, a Winter Court member makes an effort to be kinda hip and kinda pretentious. On the street at night, he’s just another fellow in a windbreaker with a baseball cap. Even in situations where nobody quite fits in — a diversity rally, for example, or an event where punk rockers mingle with the upper class — the changeling may not fit in, but he fits in more than *that* guy. The changeling’s not the stuffiest rich guy, or he’s not the most-tattooed, most-pierced punk, and he gets glossed over.

This is all part of the Court’s effort to go unnoticed by the Fae. Not fitting into human society is a dead giveaway, so the Winter Court makes a point of fitting in seamlessly. Even the other humans barely notice Winter Court members, but not to the point of ignoring them. That would also reveal the hiding changelings.

COURTIERS

Other changelings occasionally call Winter courtiers cowards, but they know that’s not true. Members of this Court aren’t just trying to conceal themselves from the Fae, they’re also trying to live their own lives. To have a life, they have to draw a curtain between themselves and the fae world. There’s a degree of denial to it that some members of the Court recognize. To truly hide from Faerie and all that is, a changeling must also hide from himself.

Besides, divorcing themselves from Faerie and the Wyrd isn’t common in the Court. Only the most extreme members manage it. Others create the image of humanity, enough to delay the Fae and provide a cover for the courtiers’ other activities. They are subtle, sneaky, crafty and dislike having their true motives known, even by their allies. Their allies, after all, are less adept at concealing the truth. The Court spies on Goblin Markets, exiled Fae and

even the True Fae when they ride on Earth. Winter courtiers also sometimes kill. The Silent Arrow is not just a poetic moniker.

The Court certainly accepts those changelings who only want to run and hide, but with the knowledge that most will find themselves unable to live a normal life. Eventually, even the most timid refugees develop a need to interact with the world of which they are now a part. They end up helping, becoming the spymasters or fixers or assassins of the changelings world.

Changelings of this Court evade problems rather than solve them. It’s a sort-of solution — whatever the trouble, it can’t hurt *them*, now, so it’s okay. This callous attitude doesn’t mean they don’t help. Winter courtiers lend a hand getting other changelings out of the way, and they sometimes walk *into* trouble, trusting their skills to get them out of it again safe and well.

Onyx courtiers manifest their callings in different ways. The commander manages to distract the enemy but never actually get caught in battle. Nobody notices the Winter socialite, but he’s there soaking up information just the same. They make excellent silent partners in businesses. And not all of them avoid notice — but even those that don’t influence others’ perceptions of who or what they are. A popular emcee may look harmless, but he’s shaping the thoughts of hundreds, thousands or more fans.

Many changelings join the Winter Court when they’re fresh out of Faerie, but a more proportionate number remain a part of it. To run and hide is a very natural instinct immediately after one’s escape, making the Winter Court a very attractive option. Few Winter monarchs choose to turn away the new refugees. Instead, the Courts try to aid as many scared changelings as they can. Only after several months’ interaction between the Court’s members and the potential inductees does the Court accept them or turn them away. In the latter case, the Court can usually suggest a more appropriate Court. Few fae take the rejection poorly enough to instead become Courtless.

RITUALS

Most famous of the Winter Court’s rituals is the Winter Market, a gathering most Courts sponsor two or three times in the season. At the market, changelings of all Courts (and Courtless) are free to set up stalls or booths, buy, sell, run games and trade services or information. The Winter Market is less focused

than the Autumn Court's Fallen Fair and much more open to non-magical bartering.

In most Courts, the Winter Market serves two purposes. The first is to be a clearinghouse for the Onyx Court's information, "confiscated" goods and services, of which there are many. Winter courtiers make up the majority of purveyors at the Winter Market, if not by too much. The second is to counter the illicit draw and influence of the Goblin Market. The Winter Market provides an opportunity for the same sort of deals and networking without forcing any changelings to expose themselves to hobgoblins, exiled Fae and loyalists who are just as likely to sell information back to Faerie as they are sell Contracts to the free fae.

Some Courts use the Winter Market to achieve a third goal. The confluence of changeling Courts gives the Silent Arrow an opportunity to judge the other Courts' capabilities and natures. It's also a chance for the Court to infiltrate their peers' societies. Many Winter Courts feel no need for this measure, but quite a few do.

Winter Courts also often hold the Winter Formal once each year. Some wiseass named the event after typical high school or university dances, and the name stuck. The Winter Formal is a masquerade where concealing one's identity is mandatory, and an opportunity for free-for-all, guiltless socializing. The

Court procures tokens that conceal the seeming, or makes a pact with certain entities of Faerie to make identities unknowable for the evening. In this way, even typical enemies of the changeling Courts can attend and mingle, while the changelings still feel safely hidden.

Radio Free Fae is a modern tradition spreading through Winter Courts. As masters of subterfuge, the Onyx courtiers are also usually at the heart of any underground movement. Radio Free Fae is a method of disseminating information that all Lost should know without divulging the location of either the sender or the receiver. The broadcast "station" can be tracked down, but it moves regularly. Surprisingly, not all Winter Courts support Radio Free Fae, and it is sometimes upheld by an underground movement within the Winter Court itself.

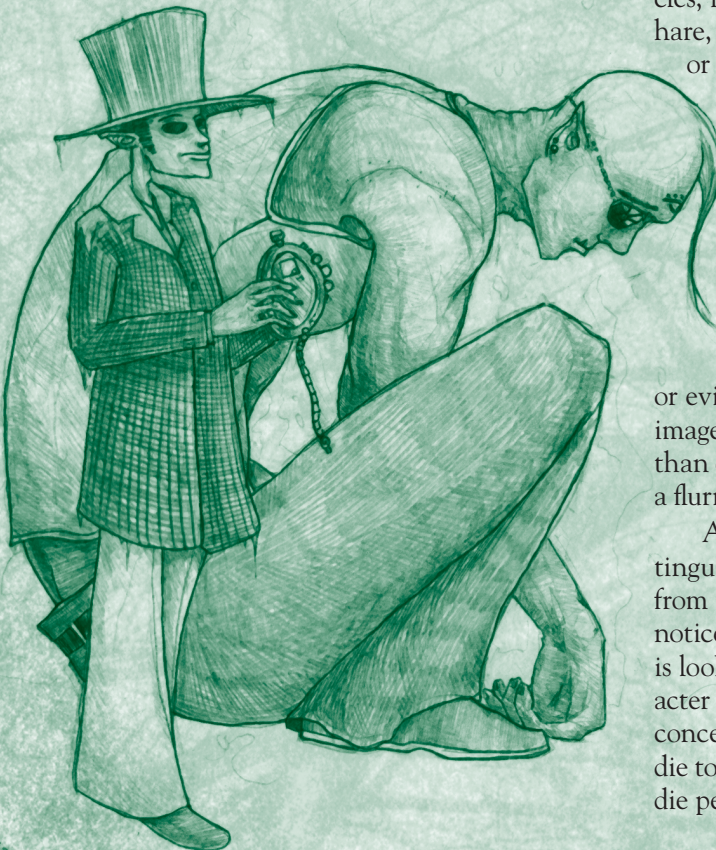
HERALDRY

The Winter Court rarely advertises its presence. Even when the Court must, such as at official functions, its heraldic colors and symbols are small in number. The Court's colors are white and black. The Court occasionally mixes in a gray, but the colors are almost always highly contrasted. Some symbols commonly used by the Court are an arrow, a stiletto, icicles, holly leaves, a silenced pistol, a wolf, a mouse, a hare, a mole, a stark tree, a gray mist or fog, an eclipse or a waning moon, a bearded man and others.

MANTLE

The Winter Court's Mantle is more subtle than the other Courts', often to the point where a member may be confused with one of the Courtless. The Mantle is most evident in its absence: at Mantle • to •••, the seeming simply looks *stark*, as if it were clearer or easier to see than others. When invoking a Contract or evident magic, snowflakes may whisk through the image. At Mantle ••••+, a seeming looks more plain than ever, though actively using magic may fill it with a flurry of snow.

At Mantle •, a character becomes more indistinguishable from his surroundings. Subtract one die from all Wits + Composure or Wits + (Skill) rolls to notice the character. This does not apply if someone is looking specifically for the character, and the character may subdue this aura for a scene with a little concentration. At Mantle •••, a character adds one die to all Subterfuge rolls. At Mantle •••••, the one-die penalty increases to a three-dice penalty.



SORROW

Members of the Court of Sorrow deal with their signature emotion much as they deal with the rest of their lives: they hide from it. They all know it's there, hovering on the edge of their consciousness, but they deal with it by avoiding it. In most cases, this is the healthiest thing to do. There's no way to face the sorrow of losing Faerie's wonders when one never intends to go back, and what good is sorrow at one's stolen life when there's no way to go back?

Bringing their emotion to others is rarely a matter of cruelty. Often, it is a kindness. It is a way of offering the release to others that the courtiers cannot — or are afraid to — experience. A changeling may attend a funeral and discuss the deceased with those who miss him, and some go so far as to become touching eulogists. They bring the sorrow of others' to mind so that others can deal with it. Natural disasters such as hurricanes and typhoons are seen as times of plenty for the Winter Court — though, of course, it's best not to be visibly seen indulging. That would be a bit crass.

Guilt and regret are other high-yield sources of sorrow. Fae of this Court may spend time near a Catholic confessional, or even inside it, listening to the repentant ask forgiveness. Others visit prisons to discuss the cause or results of inmates' incarcerations, or they may participate in or run group therapy sessions. There are less moral changelings who cause tragedies in order to benefit from the sorrow they cause, but these acts are usually discouraged, sometimes violently, by the Court.

STEREOTYPES

Spring Court: I think they may be hiding from themselves the same way we are... just louder.

Summer Court: Sometimes I think, if the Summer guys would just stop pounding their chests and howling, *They* might lose track of us.

Autumn Court: If they took fewer risks, they'd be a great help. As it is, they're more likely to cause trouble than prevent it.



COURTLESS

Not every changeling joins one of the Courts. Reasons vary, but most of them have some connection to the fact that each Court has its own specific method of avoiding recapture by the Fae and a special connection to a specific emotion. Not all changelings can associate themselves with a *modus operandi* the way they perceive the Courts as demanding. Or maybe they don't feel a real tie to any of the four emotions supported by the Courts. Sometimes the worst conflicts come when a refugee fits in with one Court's methods but another's ruling emotion — individuals who can't reconcile the two may bounce from one Court to the other a couple times before ending up Courtless.

Some changelings who eschew the Courts do so not because they wouldn't fit, but because something about the Courts is distasteful to them. Maybe the concept is too near a Faerie Court for a new refugee to contemplate (though she may join a Court after several years). A changeling might be politically or philosophically opposed to governing bodies in general. He simply does not get along with people telling him what to do and how to do it, or social groups have always meant trouble for him. Maybe the Courts look too disingenuous or too internecine.

Normally, one out of every six or seven changelings refuses to join any Court. In regions where the Courts are strong and recruit often, or where the Others are more aggressive, Courtless are far less frequent. Regions with weak Courts, or Courts that are very corrupt or fractured, have a higher incidence of Courtless fae. Particularly charismatic leaders on either side also skew the numbers, either toward the Courts (as is more likely) or toward independence, when that's what the leader believes. Even with good reasons to avoid the Courts, the promise of a support structure and the power from a Court's pact convinces many.

The Courtless are not, in general, a political faction. They're defined by a desire to remain free of the Great Courts, but that doesn't imply an organized goal of promoting the interests of changelings outside the Courts. But in some areas, the Courtless rally. They may be a group of individually motivated Lost held together by a single charismatic leader who insists on giving them a voice in the freehold. They may conduct themselves as a union, openly recruiting other changelings to a life free of Court meddling. The effectiveness of these gatherings varies widely, but in some places a Courtless leader holds political influence and ability as great as any Court noble. Even if a Courtless leader cannot sit upon a season's throne, he can hold power behind it.

THREATS

A changeling who finds the Courts has a lot on his plate. It's easy to get caught up in the politics of an underground group of survivors. A world away from her captors, the escaped prisoner of the faeries can forget that they are

there, and can forget how dangerous they are. Likewise, not all changelings have really adjusted to the human world. Some have gone mad. Some left their souls behind in Faerie. And some are working for the enemy.

A changeling's fetch, on the other hand, is a constant reminder of what the changeling is. The existence of the fetch more or less forces the changeling to come to terms with herself, with what she's been through and what she is. It's the changeling's destiny to face a reckoning with the Faerie replacement that stole her life, but what that might be — reconciliation or murder — it's impossible to say.

THE FETCH

Your baby is beautiful. He's a bright, smiling, round-faced adorable child who loves you and holds you tight before you put him to bed at night, who babbles sweet little sounds that sound like "mama" or "daddy." So where did this red, wrinkled, wailing thing come from, this thing that wriggles and kicks and grizzles, this runny-nosed thing that turns its head from you when you smile, that throws its toys across the room, that coughs and spits and hates you? This is not your baby. Someone came and took your beautiful baby away, and left this ugly whining thing in his place.

Your brother is caring and honest and wise, and he loves you dearly. He's always been there to keep you safe from bigger, scarier kids, and he's told you jokes and sometimes he's given you sweets and smuggled comic books into your room when Mum and Dad aren't looking. But who is this, who doesn't want to talk to you anymore, who doesn't want you to walk by him on the street, who sits in his room and wears black and listens to loud, angry music and swears at Mum and Dad? This is not your brother. Someone came and took him away, and left this dour, sarcastic stranger in his place.

Your mother is all warmth and welcome and wonderful cooking, but one day you grow up and you think: who is this old woman, this sour-faced hag who can't even cook anymore? Why is she so rigid, so self-righteous? This is not your mother. She went away, and this miserable, stretched-out woman was left here in her place.

It feels like that for a lot of people. Nearly every parent looks at her baby and thinks, *Are you really my child?* As relationships change and people grow up, children see their siblings in a different way, and as they get older, people begin to see flaws in their parents that they never notice anymore. Once, it was reasonable to believe that your baby, your brother, your father, your wife, had been exchanged for a changeling.

In 1895, a young Tipperary woman named Bridget Cleary grew ill, and became bedridden over the space of weeks. Her husband Michael knew what had happened. She had been exchanged. So for days, he touched her over and over with a red-hot poker, and got the men of his village to hold her down while he pissed on her and although she begged, he held blazing wood to her lips and when she

couldn't say her name three times, he threw paraffin on her and burnt her alive. And then he went up to the ruined fort where he spent days waiting for the Fair Folk to bring his wife back. They never came.

Stories like this don't happen anymore, at least not in the developed West. Nowadays, people know for a fact that this is just a psychological artifact, a state of mind people enter. It's perfectly normal. People get over it, and when they don't, there's a recognized pathology behind it. Parents shake their heads and feel guilty. Children get over it, although their relationships with their siblings never really recover. And atrocities like the death of Bridget Cleary don't happen any more.

And the real fetches go unnoticed.

They're more subtle than their victims are led to believe, and don't always know what they are. They're nearly perfect, but not quite perfect, imperfect enough to rouse mild suspicions that quickly allayed by people of sense.

And they live the lives of the people they replace. Meanwhile, their counterparts trapped in Arcadia change, become imbued with the stuff of Faerie until they are quite different. The longer a changeling stays in Faerie, the more different he becomes and the more chance his fetch has to live his life for him.

And, by the time the changeling gets back, the fetch, who might even think himself human, has lived a life that the changeling hasn't, and the fetch has become that person, forging relationships, making and breaking friendships, working and living and taking part in a life that the changeling hasn't live. Like the silent movie star who, so the story goes, came third in his own look-alike contest, the changeling finds an impostor in his home who is better at being him than he is himself.

A fetch knows when the changeling he replaced is coming back. He knows when his counterpart is near. He can see the changeling's fae seeming. If the fetch knows what he is, or if he suddenly remembers, having forgotten Arcadia and convinced himself that he is human, he'll be ready. If he doesn't know what he is, he faces what he sees with horror and disbelief.

Either way, the fetch will, at some point, have to face the truth of what he is. Everybody sees someone who looks exactly like him. He sees something different: horns, strange eyes, fur, claws, skin of ice or fire or water or earth. He sees the Faeries, come to take him back, or the changeling he always feared would come to take his life away.

He's lived this life as his own for a long time now, and he's made it his own, steered it in his own direction. The changeling might not recognize it, and he probably wouldn't have a clue what to do with it if he got it back. Does the old owner of this life have any claim to it anymore? "It was mine first" is not always a convincing argument. Possession may not be nine-tenths of the law, but it's a big part of the discussion.

The fetch has magic. The reappearance of the changeling original causes powers to manifest in the fetch, beginning with a kind of sixth sense, an ability to *know* that a changeling is coming, even if the fetch doesn't know what one is. Every fetch can see fae seemings, whether he knows what they are or not.

One fetch knows and waits; another reacts with horror, or begins by thinking he's going mad. Then, the other powers come. A fetch runs from a fight with his original, and finds himself tearing the shadows from people and eating them without any idea of what he's doing. The changeling uses weird magics; his fetch throws them right back at him.

And some become living traps, able to cry out and call the True Fae to come and take back their property.

THE TRUE FAE

This is the story of Yallery Brown. A young man, a kind-hearted farm laborer, was walking through a field one day when he heard a sound, like a child crying. He followed the sound to a large stone, and he lifted it, and there under the stone was a tiny little man. The little creature said that his name was Yallery Brown, and that the man had saved him, and that he would help the kind-hearted man in all his work for as long as he lived. And the man must never thank him, warned Yallery Brown, for then all his help would end. Then Yallery Brown vanished. The laborer returned to work and found that, true to his word, Yallery Brown was giving him aid. But Yallery Brown's help was, it transpired, worse, much worse than useless, for in plain sight of everyone, threshing tools moved around in mid-air and sheaves of corn were tied and stacked by invisible hands. Soon, the laborers realized that the invisible force was doing the work of the kind-hearted laborer, and they began to shun him, and whispered dark accusations of witchcraft. The man moved to another village, but things became no better for him, for the invisible hands of Yallery Brown followed the man everywhere he went. The young man began to starve, for no one would employ him. One day, after being told to leave another field and never to return, the man remembered the faerie's words, and he called out into the air around him, "Thank you, Yallery Brown! For all that you have done, you have my thanks!"

But he heard a small voice, full of spite, whisper in his ear:

*Work as you will, You'll never do well;
Work as you may, You'll never gain grist;
For harm and mischance, and Yallery Brown,
You've let yourself out from under the stone.
...and that was all.*

That night, the young man's troubles began in earnest. For the faerie, taking offense, clattered pans and overturned tables, and spoiled what little food the young man had. Yallery Brown shrieked in the laborer's ear when he tried to go to sleep and laughed at him and sliced his shoelaces and cut holes in his clothes and pinched the man and repeated his

rhyme in the hearing of all as the man walked down the street, over and over again. He became an outcast, and no one would have anything to do with him. And after many days of this, the young man, hounded beyond endurance, starving and tired, drowned himself, and he was buried in an unmarked plot, and all for an act of kindness.

And this is how things are with the True Fae, the Others, the Gentry. They don't behave as people do. Words have different meanings. They operate by different rules, and not knowing the rules under which they operate is no excuse. There are things they *know* about the world that are not what we know. They make connections between things that are not the connections we would make. As best as changelings can describe it, the Others are solipsistic creatures. Nothing seems to really matter to them that is not of their own making, and they seem to have no ability to comprehend life from another being's perspective. They love and hate like fire and ice, but there is no empathy to them.

Some who collect Fae lore consider them to be mad. It's not an unreasonable conclusion. Consider: a person afflicted with schizophrenia hears voices and has bizarre visions and hallucinations. He knows for a fact that things are not how others see them. Objects and

words hold special meanings for him that they don't hold for other people. Everything is a symbol. And that's how every single one of the Fae sees the world. It's no wonder that once upon a time, communities sometimes thought that people with psychiatric illnesses were touched by the faeries. And, certainly, the more a changeling is

like the creatures that once held him captive, the madder he becomes.

And yet, even considering them to be pathological beings ascribes to them a humanity that they simply don't share. It makes them like us. It makes them understandable. And they are not understandable.

Some stories suggest that the Fae are simply dreams and nightmares. In dreams, we travel from location to location without any recollection of travel. In dreams, the rules of the world are different, and we know that things have always been the way they are: we always know that our fingers were made of jointed steel, or that we could fly, or that we are the best friends with Diana, who did not die, and who is just in hiding. In dreams, words and objects and places mean different things and have different connections. Dreams have their own rules, which must be followed.

And there's something in this, too. Certainly, if any creatures could be made of dreams, it's the True Fae: they follow arcane rules, they make little sense, they seem so very



familiar. The forms they take seem to be dictated by the subconscious wishes of the people who see them.

But the Fae are clearly more than just material expressions of the collective subconscious. They certainly have some relationship with humanity, but it's not a dependent one. The Fae don't always spring straight out of what we think and know.

While comparisons between the True Fae and madness and dreams give us an insight, it's only a shallow one. In the end, the most one can say about the origins of the Fae is that they simply *are*. They exist, and that is all.

CLAP YOUR HANDS IF YOU BELIEVE IN FAIRIES

Do people take faeries seriously any more? It seems that people in the olden days (whenever they were) believed in faeries, and they don't any more.

But it's getting on for 650 years since Geoffrey Chaucer wrote that same thing. People have *always* thought that faeries were something in which humans believed at some time in the unenlightened past.

And this isn't because it's true. It's because that's what the Fae represent. They are the reason to be afraid of the dark, and while sensible, enlightened people know that there is nothing to be afraid of, there's still that doubt, and so they dismiss it, and make it unreal, and a thing of the past.

In the last 100 years or so, people have been more reluctant to put down inexplicable events to faeries, but they still see them.

For example: in 1970, some schoolboys in Penang, Malaysia, saw three figures disembark from a tiny craft. They were no more than three inches high. They wore pointed shoes and had stars on their clothes. One had horns. The "spacemen" attacked the boys. One was burnt. In Kentucky in 1955, strange lights preceded the siege of a farmhouse by green, pointed-eared goblins with wide mouths and bulging eyes. In 1993, an Australian family saw an army of tall, round-bellied black creatures in a field in Victoria. The creatures floated rather than walked, and later, the mother would describe them as being absent in substance, as if they were made of void. In 1954, a woman in Arezzo, Italy, saw small, smiling men with crooked teeth. They wore capes, doubles and hose, and their caps were of tight-fitting brown leather. They tried to take her with them, but she escaped. In 1951, an Illinois man was swarmed by foot-tall creatures like frogs, aided by a swarm of black-shelled bugs. And in 1972, a man in Argentina picked up a hitchhiker who had a strange, stony face, like an Easter Island head, who later vanished from the car in a flash of light. The list of accounts goes on.

The point is that UFO lore has co-opted many of the stories of the Fae, but they are still there. They're still watching us, they are still invading the country we know.

Otherworldly Abductors of a Different Stripe

That aliens abduct people is enshrined in ufological lore. People get taken from lonely places. They are shown things they don't understand. Their captors perform experiments on them, sometimes. Sometimes the abductees have to explain random objects to their strange abductors. Sometimes they're subjected to bizarre abuses. Sometimes they're made to have sex. The victims lose chunks of their memory.

Sometimes their captors are benign; sometimes they're downright malicious.

Sometimes they're faeries. Are these weird beings always the Fae? No. Sometimes it never happened at all. And sometimes it's not the Fae.

Are there really extraterrestrial beings apart from the Fae doing these things? Even the Fae don't know.

CATEGORIZING FAERIES

The Fae don't fall into categories. Sure, those field guides to faeries that sit on the Mind, Body and Spirit shelf of any good bookshop and the serious books of occult lore alike divide the Fae into hundreds of species and factions. The stories talk about Callicantzaroi and *sidhe* and lutins and kobolds and Wichtlein and Fir Bolg and Tylwyth Teg and Duergar and brownies, Flower Fairies and nymphs, trolls and hags and a thousand other kinds of Fair Folk from all over the world.

The collector of Arcadian lore can quite easily be overwhelmed with the volume of lore about the different kinds of Fae, the ways they differ in behavior, the different rules they observe. Knockers need to be fed to be appeased, but Brownies require a saucer of milk. Some faeries demand interest on things they lend; others take offense at getting back more than they originally proffered.

In the end, while knowing this stuff has saved quite a few people from the inexplicable wrath of the Fae, it doesn't have anything to do with any "species" or "society" the Fae might have. The different kinds of fairies, faeries, Fair Folk, Good Neighbors, Devic intelligences or whatever they're called in the books are really just observations of different Fae behaving in different ways. The Fae aren't really constrained by shape or history or social mores. They're too fluid. A boggart could give birth to a Dobie or Bwca. A Fae who adopts the form of a glowing White Lady one year could become a loathly hag or a bone-grinding giant or a night-lurking troll the next. That little gray abductor could well have been a man-eating ogre a century ago.

This is the deepest secret of the True Fae: there are really no “kinds” of Fae. There are only faeries, in all their malice and power and inconsistency. Faeries *are* as faeries *do*. They change their shape and behavior as the whim takes them. Some stay the same for centuries. Some change weekly or daily, or from moment to moment. When they change, they become, for all intents and purposes, different beings. Often, they forget (or pretend to forget or choose to forget) their past, allowing enmities and friendships that might have been forged for centuries to dissolve as if written on the Arcadian breeze and forging new memories, new pasts.

In the end, the behavior of these faeries depends upon only one question: is it entertaining? The Fae do nothing that isn't interesting and fun. There are absolutely no other moral considerations they observe. If torture and murder is diverting, and a Fae is creative enough, he will be a fiend, until he becomes bored with it. If kindness passes a few years in an interesting manner, then the Fae will be a saint, until kindness becomes tedious. Mortals are interesting, but treating them in the same way over and over again can eventually become a bit dull. And being a monster or a saint or a lover or a demon stops being *fun*, the True Fae becomes something else.

But then, all this could be an imposture, a mask to hide the truth. Faeries lie.

THE FAE AND THE ERRANT

The people the Fae steal are inexplicable to the Fae as the Fae are to people. That's why so many of them have escaped over the ages. The attitude the Fae hold toward the ones who escaped varies. There are many humans, and nearly as many vulnerable humans, and if a changeling escapes, it may be less effort to make a new fetch and steal a new slave than it is to track down a lost one. Besides, mortals are 10 a fairy penny.

Fae who stumble upon a changeling in the human world or the Hedge immediately know what it is they've met, but usually don't care. Mortal slaves escape all the time. Most Fae just aren't interested in changelings. Faeries can be possessive and vengeful when they want to be. Usually, they don't care. One of the True Fae might well treat a changeling as beneath its notice, and ignore her. Maybe the Fae looks to one side, and absentmindedly squashes the changeling like an ant. Maybe the Fae gains some mild amusement with toying with the changeling for a while, before discarding her, forgetting her like a child disposes of a spent dandelion clock.

Things are different when the Fae come across one of those rare changelings with real power, a creature whose Wyrd is bright and fluid and approaches the stature of the fae themselves. The Fae understand power, and respond to it. *How* they respond to it depends on the changeling, and it depends upon the whim of the faerie. Violence might result,

as the Fae embarks on an attempt to kill or re-capture the errant thrall. But then, the Fae are not so predictable. One Fae might conceive a hate or an envy for a changeling with that sort of power; the same Fae might express paternal pride, the sentiment that “Junior” has finally come of age, come into his inheritance. That same faerie might think those differing things at the same time. A Fae could think of a changeling like this a fine potential cat's-paw for a fairy game of politics or lust, or an agent in the human realm or a pretty bauble that must be obtained.

THE BANISHED

Sometimes, the human world houses True Fae who can't return to Arcadia. They're less powerful, these Fae, and without their links to Arcadia, they are effectively mortal. There isn't a single one of them who doesn't want to go right back into Faerie.

Some are weak Fae who dawdled too long among people and forgot the way back. But some were kicked out, sentenced to mortality by some Arcadian court. It's difficult to imagine what could make a Fae anathema to his own. Certainly, some have committed crimes so bizarre and alien that humans or changelings couldn't ever understand them, even if they were clearly explained in detail, and illustrated with pictures.

Others make the mistake of becoming diseased, infected by contact with mortals. In Arcadia, everything is permissible, as long as it's entertaining. A Fae can become attached to a mortal, but actually falling in love, actually taking that seriously? That's not fun anymore. A Fae could wish revenge on some changeling, but if it becomes so important to the Gentry that it stops being diverting, then the Fae becomes a bore. The concepts of true love, true hate or any true emotion, are human concepts, and can only really be experienced by a being with a soul. The Others have no souls, but sometimes the emotion obsesses them. They become a little less Fae, infected with a false kind of humanity that they don't understand. A being like this is dangerous to the Gentry, and dangerous to the human world.

Banished Fae, however they were barred from Faerie, become obsessed about returning to Arcadia. They desperately need that point of escape. The irony is that in the action of *needing*, in that obsession, the desire that overrides everything else, they become less and less able to re-enter Arcadia. It's deadly serious for them, and that simple fact, more than anything else, is what keeps them excluded from Faerie forever. And it's what makes them so terribly, terribly dangerous.

Dwellers in the Hedge

Other beings exist in Faerie, too, beyond the Fae. Some sometimes make it into the Hedge, where an unfortunate changeling may encounter them.

Some creatures bear a resemblance to myth. There are things something like dragons. There

are chimerical fusions of cat and bird, poison-blooded scaled and humanlike birds and a thousand other things, that appear and disappear and feed on the unfortunate who stumble across them. Then there are things made of pure emotion, of fear or hope or any number of emotions, things that take human form and animal form.

Worst of all are the thing that were once people, caught in the Hedge and *changed* by the magic of the place or the design of the Fae into near-mindless creatures, predators and scavengers alike.

CHANCELINGS VS. CHANCELINGS

Any changeling knows that there's no guarantee that other changelings are going to be his best friends. Still, the seasonal Courts offer to the fae-touched the illusion of civility. There's something approaching a society, and with a society comes a community. If the community is dysfunctional, corrupt or downright violent, it's still a community, with its own ways of doing things and its own manners and forms. The seasonal Courts are a kind of microcosm of human society, and similar to human society, the Courts produce those individuals who can't be part of it: its dropouts, its sociopaths and its enemies, both willing and unwilling.

The most dangerous changelings are often those who are somehow "broken." Maybe they're mad. Maybe their escape didn't work out for them (or they never escaped at all). Or maybe, worst of all, they came back incomplete.

THE LOYAL

Not all changelings who return to the human world through the Hedge escaped. Not all of the changelings who are active now are free.

The truth is that sometimes the Gentry let some of their changelings go. Sometimes the Gentry send their changelings out as their agents.

A changeling might seem to have been a vital part of his Court for some 20 years, but he's dreaming of Arcadia, the hopeless slave of his Dark Lady, his will completely given over to her, his every action the result of a direct order from his sardonic mistress. He keeps his regional Court running smoothly, but the whole edifice depends on fragile structures he has helped to institute, and all it would take for a single element to be pushed, flicked away like a single standing domino, and the whole thing collapses. And the Dark Lady rewards her slave. Or kills him. It depends on how bored she is.

There's another changeling who doesn't even know she's still in thrall to the Fae. There are dreams and episodes

of lost time, but she thinks she's in control. She thinks she's in the driving seat. She isn't. When she's supposed to be sleeping, she's someone else, and she's doing the murderous work of a Bloody-Mouthed Hag who tips and jerks the sticks, who tugs at bloody strings.

A third escaped, only to have his Keeper track him down within mere weeks. The Heartless Giant claimed to be merciful, and so, faced with the prospect of destruction, the changeling betrays his enemies and his friends alike, because it's him or them. He's becoming desperate, and his works are careless. It's only a matter of time before someone gets him, whether it's his fellow changelings or a bored Giant who doesn't need him any more.

The ways in which the Fae use changelings are only limited by the Fae's need for entertainment, and many a free member of the seasonal Courts has fallen foul of the loyalists. They could be anywhere.

THE SICK

Some changelings don't come back through the Hedge intact. The touch of the Fae makes every changeling a little crazy. It's impossible to survive for long in Arcadia without losing one's mind a little. But some changelings are too well suited for Faerie. They escape, but the act of so doing shatters whatever mental balance they might have managed to maintain as prisoners.

Other changelings are sane enough when they burst through the Hedge, but find that the trials of being a faerie's former plaything in a world that has abandoned them are too much to take, and they tip over the edge.

A changeling could react to the loss of her balance in any number of ways. One changeling takes on the role of a nursery rhyme character. She sneaks back home, and takes an ax; she gives her mother 40 whacks. When she sees what she has done, she gives her father 41. She chants skipping-rope rhymes and nursery songs to accompany her gruesome actions. They are all she has to go on, and she builds her life, such as it is, from snatches of half-remembered childhood doggerel.

Another changeling appears to be in control, but the little studio apartment she makes her home is filled with her collections, such as the eyeball collection she keeps in her fridge and the molars and incisors that fill her kitchen cupboard. The charnel stench of her home is beginning to leak out into the community. So far, she's kept her enthusiasms secret from the ordinary people around her. Serial killers get sloppy and get caught. A serial killer with fairy magic on her side may be in no danger from human law, but the changelings she knows are a different matter entirely. They "wouldn't understand." And if they do find out, and they don't understand, what will this tooth fairy do to be able to continue pursuing her hobby?

Other changelings go into denial, entering a kind of fugue state. One, who tended toward religiosity before he was taken,

begins to imagine that he was in Hell, that he was kidnapped by devils and that they made him one, too, because he was a sinner. Maybe he tries to destroy the other “thralls of Satan” he meets in a pathetic attempt to save his soul and regain the favor of God. Maybe he decides that if he is damned, he should act as one of the damned. If he has no choice other than to be a devil, he should, he thinks, behave like one.

It doesn't make much sense. But then, madness rarely does. Sickness of this kind leads to tragedy, and there is very little anyone can do to avoid it.

THE SOULLESS

The human soul fascinates the Fae. It's the one advantage that humans have over them, the one thing that the Others crave, but can never really comprehend. It's one of the reasons why the Fae seek to kidnap humans in the first place: some of the Gentry apparently reason that if they can't have souls of their own, they can at least have a toy with a soul, which makes about as much sense as most of the things that the Fae do. Faerie isn't really suited for a human soul: some say while in the keep of the Others, the soul sleeps, only to really awaken when the changeling escapes. Some say it's caught on a thorn of the Hedge, and is reunited with its owner only upon the return. Except that some changelings don't arrive back in the human world spiritually intact.

The Lost call them the “soulless.” The prevailing belief among changelings is that though the Thorns may tear away one's soul along the road to Arcadia, it eventually returns as you find your way home — most of the time. Some never heal, though. They're unable to process emotion or to relate to humans. A soulless changeling is essentially a psychopath with no hope of ever getting a cure. All the soulless has is what he learned in Faerie: entertainment is everything, regardless of who gets sliced up and stuffed in the freezer.

They are particularly horrifying to their more fortunate kin, because the prevailing theory is such an ugly implication: not only can your soul be torn from you, but there's no guarantee that you can get it back. However chilling this supposition, though, it is still at least some comfort compared to a more sinister alternative: the idea that perhaps *no* changelings have been reunited with their souls, and that they all share a common damnation. Better to believe that the broken ones are soulless, for that at least tells you that you aren't.

THE FANATICAL

Some changelings have more difficulty carrying their

scars. Pushed past the breaking point, they refuse to simply hide and hope the Others don't surface again. They do their best to eliminate the threat of the True Fae once and for all — but the ways they choose may put all their changeling kin at risk of extinction. There might be one or two in any freehold, and sometimes there's more — enough to gather together and actually succeed. They're a difficult sort to deal with, in part because they're so sympathetic. They've been abused to the point of reprisal, which any Lost can understand. They aren't often “evil,” but their methods don't have any sym-

pathy for the changelings — or mortals — caught in their crusades. It may be efficient to remove them with cold iron, but it is that really the right thing to do? And will they always be easy to find?

Here and there, changelings with a greater aversion to the trappings of Faerie decide that the best way to keep themselves and others safe from the Others is to tear up their roads. The trods must be destroyed, so that the Fae can't come through any more and victimize others. Other changelings call them bridge-burners. After all, similar to bridges, trods work both ways; they're a boon to the Fae, yes, but they're all the more valuable to changelings. Thus



the bridge-burners pose a delicate problem. Trods are the lifeblood of a freehold, and without Glamour, the Lost are defenseless. There's a chance they might be right, and eliminating the trods would render an area safe from the Others — but if they're wrong, the changelings and their loved ones would only be all the more vulnerable. It's a chance very few are willing to take.

On the other hand, some do want to go back — in force. Most changelings have likely dreamed of exacting some sort of vengeance on their Keeper at some point, but realize that they have no realistic chance of overcoming the Gentry in their own citadels. But some lack that capacity for sane judgment. From time to time, a changeling begins preaching the necessity of unifying all the Lost and all the mortal fodder they can enlist into a single army, then marching on Arcadia. The trouble comes when these would-be warmongers are persuasive enough to sway others into their cause — and changelings are nothing if not persuasive. Such militia groups often act covertly, having learned that few freeholds are anything but sympathetic to their goals. Rumor speaks of brutal press gangs taking new “recruits” by force, or of seductive recruiters tricking their targets into accepting pledges or oaths to a warhawk and his banner. Both the Lost and their loved ones are potential targets for being pulled into a campaign that's sure to end in bloody tragedy.

THOSE OUTSIDE THE GATES

The Lost are aware to varying degree that other supernatural creatures roam the world, things that seem to have no connection to Faerie or the Hedge. In many cases, changelings dare not investigate too much further. Stories of a pale, beautiful woman seducing young clubgoers who later wake up strangely fatigued just might refer to a *belle dame sans merci* from Arcadia. If the woman later turns out to be “merely” a reanimated corpse with a cannibalistic

taste for blood, is that cause for relief? In general, the Lost try to keep as low a profile from their fellow supernaturals as they do from ordinary humans, driven by their well-justified paranoia and trust issues. There are the occasional exceptions, of course, and such contact brings a little more gossip to circulate through the freeholds.

Vampires and werewolves, different as they may be, are often lumped into the same category in changeling lore. Both are predators, clearly enough; one may favor human blood and the other human flesh, and one may seduce while the other savages, but both would potentially see the Lost as a fresh breed of prey. When a changeling or motley does decide to open relations with one of these hunters, the changelings do so quite cautiously. Some feel that there's a great advantage to having potential allies who have strengths quite different from fae magic, and try to woo a vampire or werewolf into a pledge of mutual assistance. It's not a common practice, but a few changelings are brave or mad enough to try.

Mortal sorcerers, on the other hand, present a different potential problem. The reassuring thing about them is that they are harder to mistake for the Others, and easier to recognize as simply human. But the troubling thing about them is that they so often prove very, very interested in Arcadia. Filled by some mad hubris, some magi have tried their best to convince the Lost to reveal the pathways to Faerie, perhaps confident that their magic would somehow bring them past the gates and guardians and protect them against the might of the Gentry, even at the source of the Fae's power. The very prospect is enough to make a changeling break off contact as quickly as possible. Even if a mage did have enough power to challenge a True Fae on Earth, could the same be said once the mage has traveled the roads to Faerie? When his soul was caught on the Thorns along the way, would he even have any power left at all? It would be a path to almost certain damnation, and only the maddest of changelings would want to walk that road again no matter their companions.

