

the World of Darkness

innocents



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the spook house

Corey lay awake in the darkness, listening to the racing beat of his heart. The house — it was still too new to think of it as home — was silent and still, save for the whisper of air from the vent by the bedroom door. It felt like an eternity since his mom had poked her head in and told him it was time to turn out the lights and settle down for the night.

Maybe it won't happen, he thought. Hidden by the darkness, his hands clutched anxiously at the rough fabric of his old Power Rangers bed sheet. It's got to be past midnight by now.

But then he heard the faint rustle at the foot of the bed, and Corey's breath caught in his throat. A pale, white glow rose from behind the wooden bedstead, throwing the bookshelves along the far wall into sharp relief. His heart sank as a silhouette rose slowly into view. The light from Eric's small cell phone gave the boy's face a ghoulish cast. "Eleven-thirty," he whispered, his voice taut with excitement. "Let's go!"

The light from the tiny screen went out, plunging the small room back into darkness. Corey heard the whisper of fabric as Eric climbed out of his sleeping bag and began pulling off his pajamas. Numbly, he kicked his way free of the sheets and swung his feet over the edge of the bed. The shirt and jeans he'd worn to school that day hadn't gone into the dirty clothes hamper this time, but were waiting in a pile by the nightstand. He dressed in silence, feeling a cold lump of dread settle in his stomach.

I can't do this, he thought. I can't.

Tell him you can't go. Your Mom and Dad will kill you if they find out.

"C'mon, hurry up!" Eric hissed, rising to his feet. He was already dressed, his black and white sneakers dangling from his hand. "We can't keep the guys waiting."

Corey took a deep breath and tried to think of a good excuse. I could pretend I'm sick, he thought. That's practically the truth. Or I could tell him that Mom might have turned the door alarms on. She does that sometimes when Dad goes out of town. Except that his dad wasn't out of town right now, and he didn't even know if the new house had a door alarm.

One thing he did know for certain: if he tried to back out now, by Monday every fifth-grader at Carson-Newberry Elementary School would hear that the new kid was a wuss, and that was a fate worse than death. So Corey Stiles clenched his jaw and kept his fears to himself.

He dressed quickly, knocking over tangled action figures and tipping a plate full of pizza crusts onto the floor.

After Corey pulled on his socks, Eric whispered, "No shoes yet. Wait until we get outside."

Corey nodded. From the way Eric talked, he and his friends snuck out of the house all the time and never managed to get caught. Just do what he says, and everything will be okay, he thought hopefully. We'll be back before anyone knows we're gone.

"Where are the flashlights?" Eric asked. "You said you had two, right?"

"Downstairs in the kitchen," Corey replied. "We'll get them on the way out."

Eric nodded approvingly. "Cool. Okay, then. Let's do it."

Corey grabbed his sneakers and rose to his feet. He was half a head shorter than Eric, with narrow shoulders and a skinny frame — his mom said he was going to be a "late bloomer," whatever that meant. Eric, by contrast, was almost as big as a sixth-grader; he played Little League and soccer, though he didn't act like the rest of the jocks at school. Nothing seemed to scare him, except maybe Math and Science. Those were two things Corey was really good at. It seemed like the basis for a good friendship, Corey thought.

With a deep breath, Corey crept across the room and laid his hand on the doorknob. He turned it slowly, then pulled the door open and peered into the hallway beyond. The bathroom light across the hall had been left on, throwing a rectangle of yellow light across the cream-colored carpet. At the far end of the hall, the door to his parents' bedroom was shut.

Moving as silently as he could, Corey slipped into the hall. The floorboards made a faint creak. He froze, expecting his dad to come charging out into the hall, but nothing disturbed the late-night stillness.

"Come on," Eric whispered. "Get moving!"

Corey nodded, pressing forward until they reached the top of the stairs. As they made their way unchallenged down into the great room, his confidence grew. Orange light from the streetlamps outside slipped past the thin blinds and made it easy to navigate through the dining room and into the kitchen.

The flashlight was kept in the cabinet underneath the sink. Corey took it, running his thumb over its rubberized yellow surface. "There's just one," he told Eric, holding out the light. "Here. You can use it."

But Eric shook his head with a grin. "No, you keep it. Just don't turn it on until I tell you, okay? We won't need it until we get to the spook house."

"Yeah, sure," Corey said, trying to sound as fearless as Eric. "Whatever."

Eric nodded approvingly and moved past Corey to the back door. "Hey," he said, "do your parents keep a spare key outside somewhere, in case they get locked out?"

Corey paused. "Um. I don't know," he stammered, suddenly feeling embarrassed. "Maybe."

"It's no big deal," Eric replied with a careless shrug. "We can leave the door unlocked."

Having a key just makes things easier."

Eric pulled open the door. Outside, the tiny backyard was bathed in bright moonlight. Corey could see the tops of the bare trees at the edge of the property, waving in a whispering breeze.

The two boys stepped outside into the autumn night. Corey pulled the door shut behind them, feeling the wind tickle the back of his neck. The subdivision, with its long rows of close-set homes, was silent and still.

No one knew where he was, or what he was doing. There was no grown-up to yell at him and tell him to get back into bed. Corey turned and stared down the slope, into the shadows beneath the trees, and smiled in spite of himself. He was free.

"Let's do it," he said to Eric, and the big 10-year-old took the lead, trotting down the sloping yard and into the waiting tree line. Within moments, they were gone.

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The sleepover had been his mother's idea from the start. Every time they had to move, she was the bane of Corey's existence, standing in his doorway and grilling him every day after she came home from work. Did he like his teacher? Did he like the school? Had he made any new friends? Were there any girls in class he thought were cute?

Girls. Like he would ever tell her about that.

Earlier in the week, he'd let Eric's name slip while he was doing his Math homework. By Thursday, his mom had worked out who Eric was and called his parents to see if he could spend the night on Friday. It turned out that Eric lived in the same subdivision, so working out the details was easy.

Corey was mortified. He went to school on Friday expecting Eric would think he was a freak, but he was surprisingly cool with the whole thing. He even invited Corey over to hang out with him and his friends at lunch.

That was when Corey learned about the fort in the woods behind the subdivision — and about the spook house.

He'd seen the house many times, when he'd ridden to the mall or to the grocery store with his dad. It was an old, two-story house, about a mile down the road from the subdivision, and sat way back from the street, surrounded by square fields choked with brush and debris. The place looked to Corey like no one had lived there in a very long time.

"An old man named Thompson used to live there," Eric told him as they ate. "Back when my mom and dad were kids. When his son died in Vietnam, he went down into the basement and blew his head off."

Eric's two friends, Daniel and Scott, nodded sagely. Daniel leaned over his tray; his blue eyes were bright as marbles in a round, doughy face. "If you go into the basement at midnight, you can see the old man's ghost come down the basement stairs. No lie."

Corey frowned. "How do you know?" he asked.

Daniel looked at the new kid like he was an idiot. "Everybody knows that," he said with a snort. "My big brother says he saw the ghost himself, back when he was in high school. He and a bunch of his buddies snuck in on Halloween night. Said it scared the crap out of him!"

"It's a creepy place, that's for sure," Scott added, taking a sip of milk. He was Daniel's polar opposite in size and build — tall and rangy where his friend was short and big bellied. "There's old furniture and all kinds of stuff still in there."

"You've been inside?" Corey asked.

The boys shared a conspiratorial look. "Heck, yeah," Eric said softly. "It's not that far from the fort."

Corey's eyes went wide. "You guys have a fort? Cool!"

Scott and Daniel glowered at Eric. "Well, yeah. Sort of," Scott grumbled. "It was supposed to be a secret."

"Corey's okay," Eric pronounced. "He can see the fort if he wants to."

Eric's two friends shrugged and grudgingly accepted the declaration.

Corey tried not to grin as he reached for his milk.

Then Eric grinned. "We can go Friday night."

Daniel gave Eric a quizzical look. "Go where?"

"The spook house," Eric answered. "We'll take Corey down into the basement and show him the ghost." He nudged Corey with his elbow. "Does that sound cool to you?"

Corey felt a chill run down his spine. I've never snuck out of the house in my whole life, he thought fearfully. He started to shake his head — but then he realized that all three boys were watching him intently. Eric was still grinning, but there was an expectant look in his eyes.

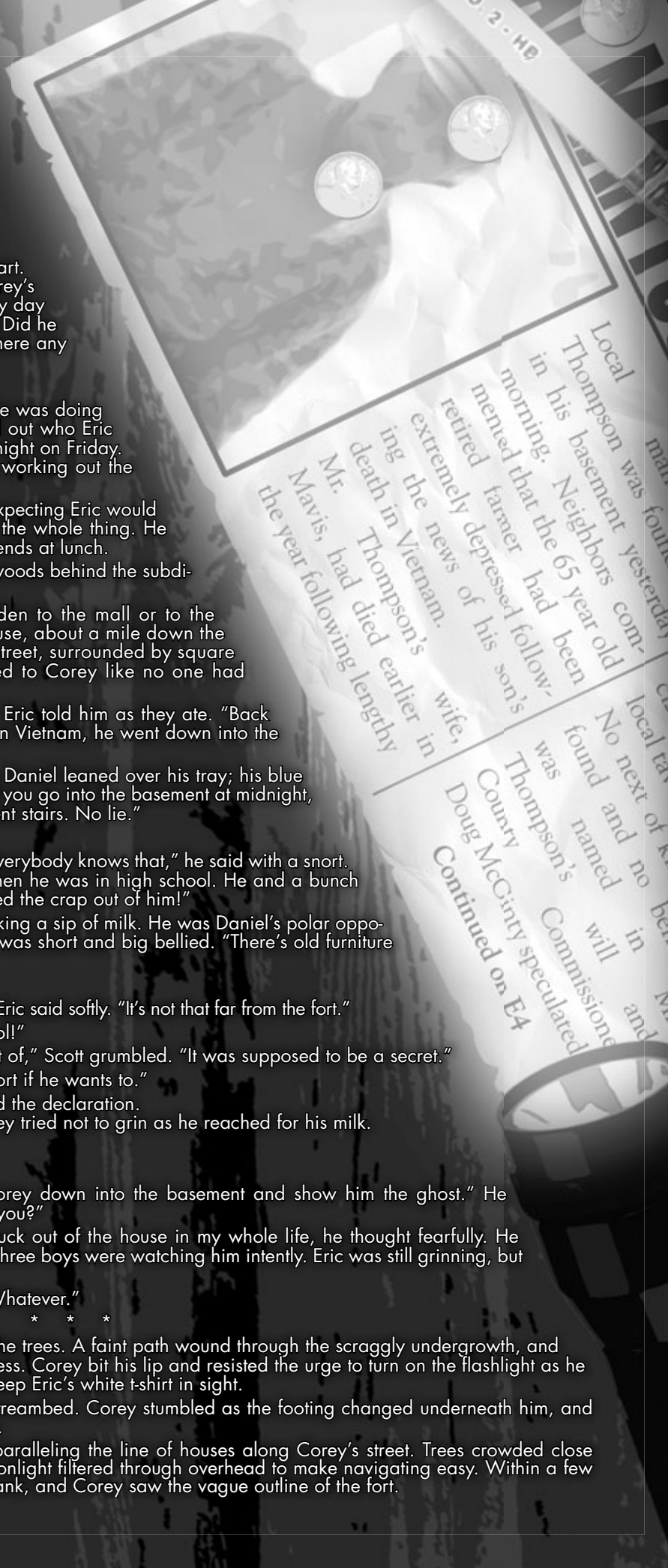
"Uh, sure," Corey said with a halfhearted shrug. "Whatever."

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Eric led him through the deep shadows beneath the trees. A faint path wound through the scraggly undergrowth, and the big 10-year-old followed it easily through the darkness. Corey bit his lip and resisted the urge to turn on the flashlight as he struggled to keep Eric's white t-shirt in sight.

After only a few yards, they came to a dry, rocky streambed. Corey stumbled as the footing changed underneath him, and the clatter of stones sounded like gunshots in the stillness.

They went along the streambed for a bit, roughly paralleling the line of houses along Corey's street. Trees crowded close along both sides of the rocky waterway, but enough moonlight filtered through overhead to make navigating easy. Within a few minutes, Eric turned and started climbing the opposite bank, and Corey saw the vague outline of the fort.





The opposite bank was much steeper than the subdivision side. Tall trees stood right along the edge, snaking roots as thick as Corey's arm into the bank for stability. Eric and his friends had found three trees growing close together and built their fort around the cage-like root networks. Old boards and squares of plywood formed an irregular wall along the streambed that seemed to stretch for yards. Corey's jaw dropped in wonder. Suddenly, a trip to a haunted house in the dead of night seemed like a small price to pay to be part of Eric's band of friends.

Daniel and Scott were waiting outside the fort, sitting on their haunches in the shadow of one of the structure's towering trees. "Where the heck have you guys been?" Daniel hissed. "We've been waiting here forever!"

White light flashed in Eric's hand. "Shut up. It's only a quarter to twelve," Eric replied.

"We got here as quick as we could," Corey added without thinking.

"Shut up!" Daniel snapped. "I was talking to Eric, not you!" The boy's round face glistened with sweat and his eyes were wide and fearful. To Eric, he said, "I can't be out long, dude. My dad was still up when I snuck out. If he checks in on me while I'm gone, I'll be grounded 'til I'm twenty!"

"Me, too," Scott muttered. "You remember what my mom said the last time she caught me. If I get busted again, I'm dead."

Eric folded his arms and shook his head in disgust. "What a bunch of wusses," he said. "You're scared of the spook house."

"I am not!" Daniel said, his pudgy hands balling into fists. Scott said nothing, instead kicking at one of the curving roots with the tip of his shoe.

Eric shrugged. "If you guys are too scared to go, then fine, Corey and I will go. Right, Corey?"

"Yeah, sure," Corey said, suddenly feeling brave. "I'm ready."

Daniel and Scott shared a sidelong look. "Okay, fine," Daniel said sullenly. "We'll go. But if my dad catches me —"

"Your dad is drunk and watching porn on Cinemax," Eric snorted. "He couldn't care less where you are right now."

The big 10-year-old turned and scrambled up the steep bank, ignoring the stung look on Daniel's face. For just a second, Corey felt sorry for him — but then Daniel caught him staring and gave him a rough shove.

"You want to see the spook house so damn bad, you go first," the chubby kid snarled.

Angry and embarrassed, Corey scrambled up the bank after Eric. Past a thin screen of trees lay a broad, overgrown field, painted blue and silver by the moon. Eric's white shirt wove and danced through the weeds like a will-o'-the-wisp, drawing further and further away with each passing moment.

In the distance, the ramshackle bulk of the spook house crouched like a wounded man beneath the moonlight.

* * *

They had to cross two large fields to get there, wading through thick weeds that rose nearly to their waist and climbing an ancient, rusting barbed wire fence that clutched spitefully at their clothes. As Corey waited his turn to climb the treacherous wires, he stole a glance back the way they'd come. The band of dark trees completely hid his subdivision from view. Try as he might, he couldn't get a single glimpse of his house. It was as though he'd crossed over into a completely different world.

Corey had always thought the abandoned farmhouse looked spooky from the road. Up close, it was even worse. The paint had worn away from the clapboard walls in huge patches, revealing raw boards warped by decades of snow and rain. Clumps of moss grew in the rusted, drooping gutters, and dozens of torn and curling shingles lay atop the matted grass in the house's side yard. Tall, broken windows gaped like wounds along the side of the building, their depths hidden in pools of shadow.

The four boys paused in the side yard, studying the old house warily. Corey shifted nervously; he couldn't shake the sense that the house was studying them as well. Suddenly he didn't feel quite so brave.

"Hey, look," Daniel said, pointing at a trio of windows along the house's foundation wall. "Those are basement windows, right? We could shine the lights in there and look for the ghost instead of going inside."

"Yeah," Scott chimed in. "That's a good idea. There could be rats inside. Or possums."

Eric turned to Corey. "Can you believe these guys?" he said. "What do you think? Front door or back?"

Corey felt the weight of all three boys' stares. He swallowed. "Uh, front door?"

The big 10-year-old nodded. "Cool." He turned to Daniel and Scott. "Come on, chickens," he said, and headed for the front of the house.

Daniel and Scott glared angrily at Corey as he fell into step behind Eric. He avoided their eyes, focusing instead on keeping his own growing fear in check.

They came around to the front of the worn house and climbed the creaky steps to the porch. The old boards groaned ominously under their feet. A screen door and a broken porch swing lay in a heap off to one side, covered in mounds of moldering leaves.

The house's front door was ajar, opening into blackness.

Eric stood aside at the threshold. He turned and gave Corey a grin. "You first," he said.

Corey took a deep breath, his hand tightening on the flashlight's rubberized grip. All at once, he wanted to turn and run for home, but he steadied himself out of sheer will. Can't back out now, he thought. With a nod, he stepped up and pushed the door wide. It gave beneath his hand with an ominous groan.

He switched on the flashlight. Beyond lay a large room, strewn with drifts of old leaves and empty beer cans. An entryway on the far side of the room opened onto a hallway, with a flight of rotting stairs leading up to the second floor. Faded graffiti was scrawled across the walls, covering the peeling wallpaper and the old plaster beneath. A doorway at the far end of the hall led deeper into the house.

Corey stepped inside. The air was palpably colder on the other side of the threshold, smelling of ashes, spilled beer and pee. The hairs on the back of his neck stood up, but he forced himself to walk farther into the room.

Eric and the others followed. Daniel and Scott pulled out their own flashlights and played the beams around the room. Corey waited for them, goose bumps crawling across his arms as he saw the fearful looks on their faces. Even Eric looked apprehensive, his face creased with a worried frown. That, more than anything else, made Corey's blood run cold.

"Now what?" Corey asked, struggling to keep his voice even. The sound echoed strangely off the walls, disturbing the stillness. A faint sound seemed to answer from deeper in the house. He whirled, flashlight probing the dusty air, but the long hallway was empty.

Eric looked back at his two friends — for confirmation or simple reassurance, Corey couldn't say. "The door to the basement," he whispered. "It's got to be here somewhere."

Corey's eyes widened. "I thought you said you'd been here before."

"No way," Eric replied. "Scott said that, not me."

"I said I'd been here in the daytime," Scott said. There was a quaver in his voice. "Sorta. I mean, I've ridden by here hundreds of times with my parents —"

Corey felt his knees go weak. "Are you kidding me?" he hissed.

Another faint sound echoed from the back of the house. Corey turned again, playing his light across the darkened entryway at the far end of the hall, but the glow could not penetrate the blackness beyond. "Did you hear that?" he whispered. "Let's get out of here."

Corey started to back away, retreating to the front door. If he ran as hard as he could, he could be back in his own bed in just a few minutes.

But Eric's hand closed about his shoulder. "No way," he said. "What are you scared of, Corey? You think there's a ghost in the basement? Are you a little chicken like these other guys?"

Corey paused, swallowing hard. He wanted to say yes. Instead, he shook his head savagely. "No way," he heard himself reply.

"Then let's go." Without warning, Eric's hand swept down and snatched the light from Corey's hand, and the big 10-year-old crossed the room and entered the long hallway.

Corey stared after Eric, feeling terrified and helpless at the same time. If he ran, he'd never hear the end of it once Eric went back to school. He cast a sidelong look at Daniel and Scott, then followed in Eric's wake.

He watched the circle of light play about the crumbling walls and broken stair rails — every time it swept past the far entryway, the breath caught in his throat; he half expected to see a headless body standing there, reaching for them with bloodstained hands. But at the end of the hall, Eric abruptly turned and shone his light against the side of the staircase. "Here it is," he said faintly.

Corey and the other boys made their way down the hall and found Eric standing in front of a small, wooden door. He reached out and gripped the tarnished brass doorknob and gave it a turn. There was a screech of rusted metal and the door popped open, revealing a second staircase descending into darkness.

A cold, musty smell wafted up from the depths, pungent with mildew and...something else. Something old and rotten. Corey wrinkled his nose. "What is that?" he whispered.

Eric didn't answer. Instead, he stepped through the doorway and began to descend the rickety wooden stairs, one step at a time.

Corey went next. His fumbling hand found a rough board nailed to the wall as a kind of crude stair rail, and he set off after Eric. He could see Eric's flashlight sweeping about just a few feet below, shining against the skeletons of wooden shelves and the dusty sides of old bell jars.

The smell got worse the farther down he went. It clung to the back of his throat, making him want to gag.

"Damn," Daniel whispered over Corey's shoulder. "It smells like something died down here."

"Eric, I don't like this," Scott said. "Let's just go, okay?"

Corey felt his sneakers hit hard-packed earth. Moonlight streamed through the windows set along the foundation wall, creating a kind of dull twilight in the cluttered room. He could make out more shelves and some workbenches, old boxes and heaps of dirty, rotting clothes.

The smell seemed to be coming from the far side of the basement. Corey looked that way and saw the glow of Eric's flashlight. The bigger boy had come to a stop, shining his light at something on the basement floor.

Corey felt a cold surge of dread well up from his stomach. "Hey," he called softly. "Eric. What's up?"

There was no reply. Eric was motionless as a statue.

Corey glanced worriedly at Daniel and Scott, then made himself walk around the piles of junk to see what Eric had found.

It wasn't a shotgun, or an old, dark stain splashed upon the floor.

It was bones. Dozens and dozens of them, some still bearing scraps of desiccated flesh. They lay in piles around a stacked pair of crates, like offerings at the foot of a makeshift altar.

Atop the crates lay the withered body of a dog. Its eyes were empty hollows, and its parchment lips were pulled back over its teeth in a feral snarl or a rictus of fear. Its throat had been torn open.

Corey felt his whole body turn cold. Behind him, he heard Daniel whimper. "Oh, God," the boy said. "Oh, God!"

Suddenly a shadow swept over the boys. Daniel cried out, his light waving wildly about the basement. Eric whirled and Corey saw the fear etched into his face. "What was that?" he whispered.

"Something ran past the windows," Scott said. Corey couldn't see his face, but the boy sounded like he was on the verge of tears. "Something's out there!"

For a moment, no one spoke. They froze, staring up at the windows in terror.

Then they heard the creak of old boards as something began to climb the steps up to the porch.

Corey heard Daniel start to sob. "I don't want to die!" the chubby kid said in a piteous voice. "Please, God, don't let me die... please, God —"

Eric never said a word. Instead, he started pacing across the basement, shining his light up at each window in turn. Each one flared with reflected light — except the last. A hole gaped at the far end of the basement where a window had once been.

The four boys dashed for the opening, just as they heard footsteps begin to cross the sagging porch. Without a backwards glance, Eric jumped onto a rickety crate and leapt nimbly for the window, catching the sill and pulling himself up through the window frame as agilely as a cat.

The sight of Eric's shoes disappearing through the empty frame left Corey near giddy with relief. He reached for the crate — but Scott grabbed him roughly and shoved him aside. Corey hit a dilapidated set of shelves and sent half a dozen jars skittering across the packed earth. By the time he'd recovered, Scott was through the window and gone.

Daniel stood by the crate, tears streaming down his face. "I can't," he said, shaking his head. "I can't fit. There's no way." He turned to Corey. "What am I gonna do?"

Corey heard the footsteps pause before the front door. He pushed past Daniel and started to climb onto the crate. Maybe I could try to pull him through once I'm outside, he thought wildly. Eric's strong. He could help.

But he knew Eric was gone. He and Scott were already running back across the fields as fast as they could go. And no amount of pulling was going to get Daniel out of the window.

Daniel knew it, too. He could see it in Corey's eyes. "Please don't leave me," he moaned.

At that moment, Corey wanted to do just that. He wanted to run home more than anything else in the world. Instead, he took Daniel's hand. "Come on," he said, trying to keep the fear out of his voice. "We've got to go back up the stairs and out the back."

Daniel recoiled in terror. "It'll get us!" he said.

"Not if we're quick," Corey said. "It's our only chance! Come on!"

Without waiting for a reply, Corey headed for the stairs. Maybe, if they were quiet, whatever it was would think they'd slipped out of the window with Eric and Scott. He listened for other sounds of movement, but the house was still once more. Corey wasn't sure what that meant.

There wasn't time to be afraid. He climbed the steps as quietly as he could, with Daniel close behind. At the top, Corey glanced back at the terrified boy. "Turn off the light," he said.

Suddenly, the stairway was plunged into blackness. Trembling, Corey laid a hand on the doorknob and pulled the door open.

Nothing but darkness lay beyond. Once again, Corey listened for telltale sounds of movement, but nothing disturbed the stillness. The thing, whatever it was, could be anywhere.

Corey fumbled behind him for Daniel's hand. Slowly, cautiously, he stepped into the hall.

The entryway to the rear of the house was a darker oblong off to Corey's right. The back door would be that way, he knew. He led Daniel to the threshold — and, sure enough, saw a dim square of light at the opposite end of a small and debris-strewn kitchen.

Daniel saw it too. He tore his hand from Corey's grip and dashed for the kitchen with a breathless cry. As Corey started to follow, he heard a small sound behind him — like a faint, indrawn breath.

The single sound turned his veins to ice. And yet he turned, moving as though in a dream, to see the thing that waited for him.

He saw a square of moonlight limning the house's front doorway, and for a moment, he noticed nothing more. But then, as his eyes adjusted to the light, he saw the faint outline of a figure standing to one side of the threshold.


It stirred, as though responding to the weight of his stare. The figure stepped forward into the light — and Corey caught a glimpse of a bald head and sickly, pallid skin. A single eye shone like a polished marble, fixing Corey with an unblinking, feral gaze.

Blue-black lips pulled back in a predator's smile, revealing rows of jagged, rotting fangs.

The figure took another step towards him. Corey turned and ran screaming into the night.

* * *

Two days later, Corey finished his homework early and slipped out of the house while his dad was cooking dinner. The sun was hanging low on the horizon, painting the trees in shades of red and gold and throwing long shadows across the backyard. He jogged down the slope and into the dense shadows within the tree line, then turned left and made his way along the dry streambed.



As far as he could tell, his parents had no idea what had happened on Friday night. He didn't remember getting back to the house. The door to the kitchen was standing open when he'd gotten back, and Eric was back in his sleeping bag. The next morning, Eric left before breakfast, mumbling something about a baseball game. Corey hadn't spoken to him since.

The fort was easy to find in the daylight. As Corey expected, the plywood door was wide open, letting in as much of the fading light as possible. As he got closer, he could hear low voices coming from within.

He paused, just outside the doorway, his courage wavering. Then he remembered Daniel's round face in the moonlight, streaked with tears, and Corey's hands clenched into fists. Taking a deep breath, he ducked his head and stepped inside.

The interior of the fort was one long, narrow space, made all the more cramped by the thick, curving roots that held up the patchwork walls and ceiling. Eric and Scott were sitting close to the door. The bigger boy was focused on a game he was playing on his Nintendo DS, while Scott looked on enviously. Both boys looked up with a start as Corey's shadow fell across the doorway.

Scott's gaze fell guiltily to the dirt floor when he saw who it was. Eric, however, glared angrily at Corey. "What do you want?" he snapped.

Corey felt another trickle of fear course down his spine. "I'm looking for Daniel," he said, meeting Eric's stare. "I haven't seen him since we got out of the spook house Friday night."

Scott shifted uncomfortably at the mention of the spook house. Eric, however, put his DS down and climbed to his feet. "That fat little wuss ain't here," he said, looming over Corey. Eric's broad-shouldered frame seemed to fill the cramped space, but instead of intimidating Corey, it only made him mad.

"Who are you calling a wuss?" Corey shot back. "You knew Daniel couldn't get out that window — both of you did — but you didn't care. You ran like a bunch of chickens and left me to get him out of there." He jabbed a finger at Eric's muscular chest. "You're the wuss, Eric."

"Shut up!" Eric snarled. He stepped forward and shoved Corey hard, knocking him off his feet.

"Stop it!" Scott yelled. The lanky fifth-grader leapt to his feet and lunged between the two boys. "He's right, Eric. I was scared. And so were you."

"All right, fine. I was scared. Happy?" Eric glowered at Corey and Scott. "You saw the bones, same as I did. No way I was going to wind up like those dogs."

Scott turned away from Eric, shaking his head ruefully. He looked down at Corey for a moment, then held out his hand. "I'm sorry, man," he said, helping Corey up. "I shouldn't have punked out on you guys." After a moment, he managed a halfhearted smile. "Daniel's never gonna let me live this one down. He'll be taking my Twinkies at lunch until we're in high school."

Corey folded his arms and glared at Eric. "Daniel wasn't at school today. Didn't you notice?"

Eric shrugged but couldn't quite look Corey in the eye. "He's out sick all the time. He's got asthma. He gets attacks — especially when there's a Math test the next day."

"Then why were the cops outside his house when I got home from school today?" Corey said.

Eric's head came up. "Are you serious?"

Scott's eyes went wide. "Oh, crap."

"I don't know if he saw that...that thing standing by the front door," Corey said fearfully. "But it definitely saw him." He pointed out the open door. "He could be back in that basement right now, and we're the only ones who can help him."

"Screw that!" Eric said, his eyes widening in fear. "Tell your parents! Heck, tell the cops! They've got guns!"

"Like the cops are gonna believe us?" Scott replied. "We're just kids."

"Exactly," Corey said. "And I don't think we've got much time. It's going to be dark in just an hour." He looked expectantly at the two boys. "Look, you don't know me. I'm just the new kid at school. But Daniel's your friend. He needs us. We've got to go and get him out of there."

For several long moments, neither Eric nor Scott spoke. Corey's heart began to sink, but then Eric took a deep breath and looked him in the eye. "We're gonna need flashlights," he said, "and something to fight with. Like baseball bats."

"My dad's got a big flashlight in his garage," Scott piped up. "I'll go get it!"

Eric nodded. "Okay. I've got three bats in my room. I'll be back in a minute."

Eric headed for the door. Corey stood across the threshold, arms folded across his chest.

They locked eyes. Eric glared angrily at the smaller boy, but then abruptly relented. "Don't worry," he said. "I promise I'll be back in five minutes."

Corey stared at Eric a moment longer, then nodded and stepped aside. "I'll wait right here," he said.

Eric nodded gratefully and ducked through the door with Scott hard on his heels. As the two boys ran off into the woods, Corey stepped back outside and studied the shadows lengthening beneath the trees. He wondered how much daylight they had left.

Not that it mattered. They'd go back for Daniel anyway. That was just what friends did.

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Coming Next for
the world of Darkness:
Dogs of war



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the World of Darkness

innocents

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"Who's got the flashlight?" Craig whispered. The three boys were crouched low against the faded clapboards of the old house, shielded from the distant street by ragged tufts of dry, late-summer grass. Long shadows were spreading across the cluttered side yard as the sun sank behind the scraggly oak trees at the western edge of the property.

Ethan shrugged off his backpack and fumbled among the schoolbooks inside with thick, stubby fingers. His "He forgot it," Will hissed, peering worriedly through the grasses as an SUV sped down the tree-lined street. "C'mon, let's go! If somebody sees us, they're gonna call the cops."

"Here it is!" Ethan said, dragging out a small, silver Maglite.

Craig took the small instrument and turned it on, shining a coin-sized circle of light against his wide palm. "You gotta be kidding me," he said incredulously.

Ethan spread his hands defensively. "You said bring a flashlight, so I did," he said. "That's the only one my mom's got. She'll kill me if she finds out I took it."

Will glanced back at Craig and managed a nervous laugh. "No way that's gonna work," he said. "Can we just go now?"

For a moment it looked as though Craig would relent, then his mouth set in a determined line. "There's still some sunlight to see by," he said. "Come on."

Before either of the two boys could reply, Craig began crawling along the side of the house until he came to a basement window. It was narrow and rectangular, set less than a foot off the ground, and its metal frame was ravaged by rust. The glass pane had fallen out many years ago and lay in dull green shards at the boys' feet.

Craig lowered himself onto his stomach and shone the Maglite into the blackness beyond. The faint glow picked out sagging wooden shelves and the sharp edges of crates. Taking a deep breath, he gripped the window frame and squirmed forward, inching into the basement. It was a tight fit, even for a lithe 12-year-old.

The air inside the basement was dank and still, reeking of wood rot and turpentine. Craig got halfway through the window and saw a shelf lined with murky bell jars just beneath him. He reached out and laid his free hand on the shelf for support — and the rotted wood gave way beneath him.

He fell through the window in a tremendous clatter of boards and old jars and bounced hard off the packed-earth floor.

It felt like an eternity before Craig got his wind back. He took a deep, shuddering breath and heard Ethan say, "He's dead! He's dead! Let's get out of here!"

Craig rolled his eyes in the darkness. "I'm not dead, you dork," he hissed, and rose onto his knees. Then he realized he'd lost the light in the fall.

Fighting a surge of panic, he glanced about in the gloom and saw a tiny point of light on the floor near the center of the room. Steeling himself, he crawled towards it, pushing stray jars aside as he went.

Craig stretched out his right hand for the tiny, welcoming light — and then he heard something move in the darkness above him. The light shifted, then rose into the air. A pale hand, long fingered and caked with grime, closed about the light and turned it off.

In the darkness, Craig heard a cold, croaking voice.

"Hello, little boy," the dreadful thing said.

"What's your name?"

Chapter One: Fragile Innocence

“Once upon a time, there were these kids...”

Cue the summer camp, abandoned mine, creepy old neighbor’s shed, haunted house, or any number of settings guaranteed to make people jump out of their skins. Stories with that beginning have been told around campfires, by flashlight, on sleepovers, in tree houses and under stars since there were children to gather and try to scare the bejesus out of each other. The modern-day slasher film has its roots in this tradition, as do the fairy tales we tell to our children, sanitized by the modern media to make them more palatable to adults.

Adults, you say wonderingly. Yes, I reply. Children understand horror quite well. They spend a great deal of their lives terrified by one thing or another, after all. It’s the adults of the world who don’t know how to cope with terror, banishing it from their sight whenever they can. It’s the adults who explain away the thing that goes bump in the night and thus assuage their own worries. Children take the more direct route, hiding beneath their covers until it goes away. They don’t have to know what it was. That it bumps around in the night is all they need to know.

Imagine you’re a child. You have an imaginary friend who comes to play with you, or there is an abandoned house down the street you’re afraid to walk by. Your parents tell you there’s nothing wrong and that you’re imagining things — and in the real world, you probably are. In the World of Darkness, though, that imaginary friend’s name is Jack, and he used to live in this house until the Bad Thing came. And that house down the street, where something seems to stare hungrily at you when you pass by on your bike — well, it probably does. The adults don’t believe you here any more than in the real world, at least not normally, but that doesn’t make it any less real. Not the whispers in the night, not the cold gleam of spectacles hovering in an empty hallway, not the frustrated gnashing of boards like teeth, not any of it — it’s all real, and only you and your friends understand the awful truth.

This is a game of dark and light. A game of innocence in a murky, dangerous world. The veil will not be stripped from your eyes, because you already know it for what it is. You will stand before it in terror and find a way to survive — not as predator, but as prey. Before you grow up. Before you forget. Before you die.

Welcome to **World of Darkness: Innocents**.

THE WORLD OF DARKNESS

Innocents is a roleplaying game set in a world very much like the one outside your window. History books say the same things, for the most part. Science teachers still wear strange ties and take a gleeful, almost perverse interest in the periodic table of elements. Some kids are still pulled out of class for speech therapy, physical therapy, counseling or a quick test of their blood sugar. Kids go to dances (chaperoned by helpful parents), and they giggle awkwardly about it.

The unpleasant details of the real world are present in the World of Darkness, too, of course. Some kids come to school hungry, exhausted or traumatized by what their parents do to them. Some kids have learning disabilities that go untreated because the school doesn’t get the funding that federal law mandates. Some girls get pregnant at age 12. Some kids attend three (or more) different schools in a year.

It sounded like her mother. Coraline went into the kitchen, where the voice had come from. A woman stood in the kitchen with her back to Coraline. She looked a little like Coraline’s mother. Only...

Only her skin was as white as paper.

Only she was taller and thinner.


Only her fingers were too long, and they never stopped moving, and her dark red fingernails were curved and sharp.

“Coraline?” the woman said. “Is that you?”

And then she turned around. Her eyes were big black buttons.

“Lunchtime, Coraline,” said the woman.

**— Coraline,
by Neil Gaiman**




Dear Santa,

This is Sahara. I am nine now. Thank you for teh bike last year. It is a lot of fun. How are you? I hope you like the cookies I baked for you last year. Mom helped please tell Mrs. Clawe that I like the apron she sent. It looks just like Moms.

I would like a barbie house and a car and a scooter. Jen has a scooter but she never lets me borrow it. I like my bike, but we can't take bikes o the sidewalks at ten park. It is a grate bike though.

I have a favor to ask. Could you please take back the doll you brognt last year? I liked her very much at first, because she is pretty, but I think she does not like me back. She watches me all night, and I do not like that. If I don't play with her first, she gets mad. I do not want her to be mad. she made my cat Angel go away when she got mad. I hope you don't mind. If you have another doll, maybe we could trade. Please don't tell her I asked you.

Sahara



The world is a confusing place for a child. Sometimes it's wondrous. Sometimes you learn about fantastic places, people and things in school and you rush home to tell your parents. And sometimes the teachers just don't listen to you, and you feel so mad you could shoot someone.

The World of Darkness is *all* of these things, everything you remember from your childhood. But the setting for **Innocents** adds something else: the supernatural. Vampires really do prowl the night, and they might come to your neighborhood, looking for a sip of your precious blood. People really do turn into wolves and *hunt* — what an ugly word, “hunt” — and who knows what they might be hunting tonight, under that barely visible crescent moon? There are people who can turn a mirror into a doorway to a horrible land of thorns and slobbering beasts, and they want to take you away. Sometimes Mom says she wishes the goblins would come and take you, and it makes you cry because that happened to Brenda in the third grade last year. You just can't prove it.

TELLING STORIES

A roleplaying or storytelling game can seem complicated at first, but it's very simple in principle. You need two or more people to play; a group of five or six works well. The players in the game are collectively referred to as the *troupe* — a term usually used to connote a group of actors. All of the players (except one) create characters to represent them in the fictional world of the game. These characters, in **World of Darkness**:

Innocents, are children between the ages of seven and 12 years old. This book is dedicated, in large part, to helping the players create and portray these characters, and explore their adventures within this world that is not unlike, but thankfully not exactly analogous to, our own.

The one player who does not create a single character is called the *Storyteller*. This player's job is to control everything else within the game. That can include, but is not limited to, animals, adults, other children, supernatural creatures, random events and the weather. The Storyteller works *with* (not *against*) the players to craft a tale that, hopefully, leaves everyone satisfied and anticipating the next installment.

Roleplaying games have rules to help determine what happens and how, but the rules are secondary to the story. Put another way: the only way you can play **Innocents** “wrong” is if you aren't having fun.

FORMAT OF THIS BOOK

The chapter you're reading now describes the World of Darkness and helps the Storyteller and the players understand what their characters are getting into. Much of this chapter takes the form of “artifacts” — drawings, letters and other documents that illustrate the interplay between the world we see and the supernatural. You'll see the truth about the world — the names of the monsters, the faces of bizarre creatures that lurk in the periphery of our understanding — later



Nate Redden's Journal

Age 10

The shadow king is a big humanoid with a taste for death. He's been entering kids dreams and destroying them (the kids) from the inside!

Me and me with Robert are the only two to tell the tale! I'll show him to you.



and, that's all I know about the Shadow King, except for him having ~~tots~~ tons of minions.



LAKESIDE ELEMENTARY
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WE HAVE PUMA PRIDE!

FROM Ms. Hutchins

TO Parents of Caralyn Holliday

WHERE Room 147

WHEN Next Friday, after school

Ms. Holliday, I was wondering if you might be able to stop by after school next Friday so we could discuss the recent issues with Caralyn. I have tried contacting you previously, but apparently our schedules are such that we've continually missed actually speaking with one another. Caralyn tells me that you currently work nights, so I realize that late afternoons may still be difficult for you. I am willing to stay late if that is more convenient. I believe that this is a necessary meeting. I'm concerned about Caralyn.

For the last month and a half, Caralyn's behavior has changed from easygoing and cheerful to defiant. For safety reasons, we have been forced to keep her inside at all recess breaks since the incident two weeks ago. This is not ideal. I'm sure you've heard of the new wing being added to the school. For reasons she can't explain, Caralyn seems to have a great deal of anxiety about that project.

Initially she refused to go outside at all when it first started, but then, after the first week,

we could not keep her away from it. She was found beyond the safety barriers and inside the construction zone three times during the following week. Even now, if we take the children outside for any reason, we have to keep an adult next to her so that she does not run off to investigate.

Children may not run off from the group, as you know. It simply isn't safe, and it puts the other children at risk as well by forcing an adult to go and chase down the errant child.

Whereas before Caralyn enjoyed interacting with her peers and taking part in class projects, now she is listless and withdrawn, constantly staring out of the window. It is a struggle to get her to complete even the simplest assignments, and her grades are falling rapidly. If something isn't done soon, she may have to repeat the grade next year.

Is there anything going on at home that I should be aware of? Any upset or disruption in her life that could be contributing to things here at school? Any information you could provide would be welcome. I'm very concerned, and I want to do all I can to help her succeed.

Please let me know if Friday afternoon is acceptable, or if there is another time that would be better. I would be happy to discuss any of the above information with you in more detail at that time. Thank you.

Celeste Hutchins

Celeste Hutchins

in this book. For now, have a look at what the supernatural *does*, how children see it and how the adults who care for them interpret it.

The next four chapters explain the rules pertaining to **Innocents** characters. They explain the numbers used to represent how strong, willful, fast and skilled your character is, as well as the resources she can draw upon from family and friends.

Chapter Six explains how the rules of the game work. Every player in an **Innocents** game should at least give this chapter a once-over, but the Storyteller should probably know the rules well. As mentioned previously, the rules are always secondary to the enjoyment of the game, but if the Storyteller knows the rules well, he can decide if something needs to be changed or not for the benefit of all.

Chapter Seven is an important chapter for everyone involved. It describes how to act as Storyteller (how to “run” a game), but also gives in-depth information on how to portray a child. It’s not just a matter of raising the pitch of one’s voice, after all. Children see the world in a very different way from adults, and part of the enjoyment of taking on the role of such a character is to experience that viewpoint.

The second part of Chapter Seven presents a selection of the supporting characters — controlled by the Storyteller — that **Innocents** characters can encounter. These include allies, antagonists and even animals.

Chapter Eight presents five scenarios that the Storyteller can flesh out and use for an **Innocents** story. Supporting characters relevant to these stories are included, as are suggestions for where the chronicle might go after a given story is completed.

Finally, the Appendix looks at **Innocents** within the context of the larger World of Darkness, including the other game lines set within this mysterious universe.

ESSAYS

Throughout this book, you will find essays on various topics relating to children in general and **World of Darkness: Innocents** in particular. These essays are written by the various authors of **World of Darkness: Innocents**, and contain personal reflections, stories, thoughts and opinions. It is our hope that these essays will help to establish the proper tone for **Innocents**, and give the reader an idea of our intentions in constructing this game. Please note that all the authors of **Innocents** are parents and, as such, take the portrayal of children in media seriously. We don’t feel the need to portray all children as saintly — some children are, for one reason or another, violent, selfish and cruel, and we recognize that. Likewise, **Innocents** doesn’t impart any particular magic to children simply because they *are* children. We just feel it’s important to respect children for who and what they are — and what they are, especially within the World of Darkness, is fragile.

HARRIET'S LITTLE BROTHER AND THE VACUUM CLEANER

This is about what happened to my Mum. About the accident. I'm writing this to you, diary, because you're not going to tell me I'm crazy.

I have this little brother. He's called Danny. When I was younger, like in eighth grade, he used to drive me crazy. I love him and everything. But he used to come in and rummage through my stuff and get snot and goopy mashed-up food on my clothes, and there was this one time he got hold of this Valentine card that Josh gave me, which was like the most important thing to me in the world back then, when I was still talking to Josh, and we were friends and everything, and anyway, I came into the room and he was there on the floor, laughing and talking crap because he doesn't have any proper words yet and he'd just screwed it up and I went ballistic at him and yelled and he started crying and then Mum came in and gave me a hard time for making him cry.

But he's not so bad. He's just a little kid. I just can't tell him that.

Anyway, so one day Mum and Dad were out and I was babysitting and it was, like, about eight o'clock, and he just started wailing. So I went into his room to see what was up and Danny was crying really hard, like tears and snot were all over his face and he was all red and he was shaking, like he'd been really scared by something. He couldn't really talk yet, so he was trying to say things and he couldn't. He could just point out the door of his room. So I looked, and the door across the hall was open. The closet. You could just see Mum's vacuum cleaner next to the door.

So I went over and I made this big show of looking inside and making sure there weren't any monsters there, and I lifted the vacuum cleaner out, and Danny started howling then, and then I realized he'd had a nightmare about the vacuum cleaner. So I had to put it inside the closet and shut the door and I gave him a cuddle and told him it was OK, it wasn't going to get out, and after a bit he calmed down and I got him to sleep again, but it totally ruined my evening.

He's never liked the vacuum. Mum told me about how when I was a baby, she'd be hoovering the carpet and I'd just fall asleep, but she tried it on Danny and he just cried and cried every time. The night he had the bad dreams was a couple of days after Gran came round. Mum and Dad were out working, and they thought I'd want to go out and everything, which was all right of them, and so Gran was in charge of Danny. She decided she wanted to help and stuff, so she did some cleaning. She just sat Danny in his high chair and started hoovering round him.

Danny went nuts. I could hear him screaming from my room, and I ran down and tried to calm him down, and I picked him up and held him a bit. Gran couldn't understand why he was crying. Stupid old cow.

So after that he was totally terrified of the vacuum cleaner. He wouldn't go near it. Sometimes Mum would use it and it'd be standing there under the stairs because she hadn't got round to putting it away and Danny wouldn't go near it or

KIDS IN HORROR

by Michelle Lyons

By the pricking of my thumbs,
Something wicked this way comes.

Though that quote originated with Shakespeare, he wasn't the only one to use it to good effect. Ray Bradbury also knew its uses, as quoted by the middle-aged father of a young boy in terrible danger in *Something Wicked This Way Comes*. Something wicked this way comes...It's a powerful statement, when you stop to think about it. Small in voice, concerned and definitely not all powerful – quite possibly the perfect summary for **Innocents**.

The World of Darkness covers a range of horror tropes, from abandoned highways to unfriendly spirits, not to mention vampires and werewolves and nameless things that scratch at your window in the night. One thing it has not covered, however, is the place of children in horror. It's a difficult topic. No one is comfortable seeing a child in the clutches of something or someone who means him or her harm. Children are victimized often enough in the real world. It might seem that creating a horror roleplaying game focused on children would remind us of this fact, and cause a game session to take on a rather grim tone.

In reality, though, the genre disagrees with us. From mythology to modern fiction, stories that ask us to journey into the dark and try to come back alive often cast children as the protagonists, especially older children. They stand on the threshold between innocence and independence, which makes them uniquely powerful. No writer in his or her right mind would turn away a chance to play with those kinds of supercharged metaphoric power tools.

Don't believe me? Look for yourself. In *It*, by Stephen King, a group of victimized children band together to stop a nameless evil, only to be forced to return and fight once more as adults. See also Mark Petrie in *'Salem's Lot*, Trisha in *The Girl Who Loved Tom Gordon*, and Dinah from King's novella,

The Langoliers. John Bellairs sent an orphaned boy and his uncle to stop a pair of evil sorcerers from bringing about the end of the world in the classic young adult novel, *The House with a Clock in Its Walls*. Neil Gaiman saw a young girl dropped into the clutches of a grasping sort of evil, with only her wits and a small rock to see her through, in *Coraline*. R.L. Stine's *Goosebumps* series of horror books is legendary in children's literature. Even J.K. Rowling's ubiquitous "Harry Potter" novels spend a great deal of time in some highly unpleasant places. While it would be a stretch to call it "horror," any series that features dark magic, death, betrayal, assassination, torture and murder as regular occurrences cannot be looked upon as wholly upbeat.

It should be no surprise that children make such powerful protagonists in horror. There are few things in the world so helpless and yet full of potential as a child. It's so easy to cross from reality to make-believe and back again, blurring the lines so that things you know and things you imagine become hopelessly muddled. That vulnerability, combined with an easy lateral move into what would be termed "insanity" for adults, has all manner of application in the horror genre.

It is that sense of wonder and terror, that transformative potential, which you can play with as younger characters in the World of Darkness. Their world is even darker and scarier than ours, yet if they are clever, hold fast to the good things they've been taught and keep their wits about them, they can walk through the fire and come out the other side, scarred but whole – possibly even triumphing in the end.

So put away your shotguns and sedans and get out your bicycle and Swiss Army knife. It's dark out there, but your friends are waiting. Last one there's a rotten egg.

walk past it unless me or Dad were standing in front of it, and then he'd run right past it.

This is the weird thing, though. He was only scared of our Hoover. No one else's. Just ours. There was this one time I had to go round and see Ellie, and Mum and Dad had left me to look after him, which wasn't fair, since they'd already said I could go hang out at Ellie's, and so I took him along, and we went into Ellie's house and I thought, oh shit, because they had a vacuum

cleaner just like ours, and it was right there in the hall, right in front of the door. Danny didn't flinch. He didn't complain, or try to get me to leave. I put him down and he even walked up to it and started tapping it with his hand.

Cross my heart and hope to die.

So I thought that maybe he'd gotten over the whole vacuum cleaner thing, but I got him home again, and there it was under the stairs, and Danny wouldn't go near it.



This kind of carried on.

There was this one time we found him crying and crying, and he was next to his teddy and its arm had been ripped off. Couldn't find it anywhere. Dad promised he'd look for the arm and mend it. Got us all looking everywhere. Couldn't find it. A couple of days later, they made me empty out the vacuum cleaner drum — it's either that or the trash — and there it was, this little mangled arm from a teddy bear, all covered in fluff and dust and crap. No idea how it got there. I mean, whoever was doing the cleaning would have noticed it, right?

If it was Dad cleaning, he would totally have missed it. We didn't tell Danny about that. Dad fixed the bear, but it wasn't the same.

And Danny kept being terrified of the Hoover.

Dad kept saying how he'd grow out of it, but he didn't. It got worse. Danny wouldn't go near the thing and started trying to stop Mum and Dad from going near it, too. Mum and Dad had to make sure it was in the closet and show Danny that the closet door was locked.

Even so, Danny kept having the bad dreams. And I kept finding bits of toys in the Hoover drum. Mum and Dad kept blaming me for leaving the vacuum cleaner outside the closet. Because they'd keep finding it in the lounge, or halfway across the landing — or even, that one time, in Danny's room just before it was time for him to go to bed and have his story. He nearly had a fit that time. I got grounded for it, even though it wasn't me, I swear it wasn't me, but Mum and Dad said it couldn't be anyone else, and it was a mean trick to play on a little boy.

I began to get scared of it as well. I remember having this really bad dream about the vacuum cleaner. I dreamed it went wrong and there was an accident and Mum died.

Which is what happened.

Only in the dream, it was like, I knew that the vacuum cleaner wanted this, which is stupid, because a vacuum cleaner can't want anything, because it's only, you know, a thing, but in the dream, I knew it wanted to kill my Mum, but I didn't tell anyone.

And it did kill my Mum. She was doing the Hoovering while Danny was having his nap and he woke up and started crying and I went upstairs and tried to calm him down and the Hoover was still running, so I went downstairs to tell Mum to knock it off, only I couldn't because it was just standing there in the middle of the lounge floor and Mum was lying on the floor next to it, and she had the cable wrapped round her neck somehow and she wasn't moving and I turned the vacuum off and started trying to get her to move and I couldn't, and I called an ambulance and they took her away and left me with Danny and they called Dad and Dad had to come home and tell me she was dead. Except the police started asking me about it, because they thought I might have done it somehow.

And Danny, poor Danny didn't stop crying until he fell asleep, and then started again when he woke up, which was how I felt, too.

Dad scrapped the vacuum cleaner. Eventually we got a new one. By that time, Danny had other things to be sad and scared about.

KIDZJOURNAL NEWS: SPECIAL SITUATION, PLEASE HELP IF YOU CAN!

As some of you already know, a long-time member of this community, Nyghtsong212, recently unsubscribed from the groups that she belonged to and in at least two cases founded, self-deleted her journal and vanished from our little corner of the Internet. Like many others, I received a PM from her, indicating that she needed some time away from the 'net and that she was going to go totally offline in the hopes of taking care of some real-life stuff that wasn't taking care of itself. It has recently come to my attention, however, that this might not have been the case. Nyghtsong212's mother emailed the Administrators, who passed the message on to me, that she has apparently gone missing. I must stress to everybody who might be freaking out right now that nobody knows what happened: at this point, her mom doesn't think that she was kidnapped or anything, but is very much worried that she might have run away. Nyghtsong212 made sure to delete all her emails from her computer, wiped out her email program's address book, and erased the cache from her browser; her mom only knew to look here for people who might have some idea about what she was doing because she'd heard Nyghtsong212 talking about us on more than one occasion. If anyone in the community can help, I think we ought to do so, and this News item has been posted in an effort to centralize our communications on the subject. Please post any relevant comments that you might have here, and please keep general well-wishing to just one thread. Nyghtsong212's mom is reading the community, though she doesn't have a user ID, and I'd like to keep things as streamlined as possible for her.



Thanks in advance! –
Cazadora, moderator of the NightHunters group.

Well wishes here, kplsthx!]  chuk jaxon

LEADS?



HERNE

Nyghtsong212 was talking about a bunch of really weird stuff before she went offline. I bookmarked a lot of it in my Memories, but didn't really have a chance to troll through all the links she posted before she self-deleted and all the entries she put on her journal went poof. If her mom would like a list of the links, I've got a short one I could post here. I don't know if it'd be a lot of help, but it might be some.



LYONESSE

Yeah, she was. I wasn't quite sure how seriously to take it — she could pull stuff like that, you know, and it's hard to tell how someone feels just from their typing. But she came across really strongly the last time she IM'd me: she told me that it might be the last time we talked and I asked her, "What, for a while?" and she said, "No. We might not talk again. Take care of yourself." I was pretty freaked out, and now this happens. Her mom's going to keep us informed of what's going on, right?



HERNE

I didn't know about that. What'd she say to you?



LYONESSE

She said she'd found out something about somebody who lived local to her. I think it was somebody in the NightHunters group, but I can't be sure — she belonged to a couple of the groups that were about ghosts and vampires and stuff and I knew she had snail mail addies and phone numbers for a couple people that lived in her area. Remember when she was planning that party last fall? The one that didn't go off because nobody could agree on the date? I think it was somebody from the group who was on her party list.



CAZADORA

Lyonesse, do you have the party list yet? I thought you were going to do favors or something like that for it.



LYONESSE

Yeah — I was going to make bat origami for everybody. Caz, weren't you going to go to that? Oh, and yeah, I've got the list in my PM box still. Haven't cleaned it out in ages. You want me to forward it to you?



CAZADORA

Please. I'll put it in an email to Nyghtie's mom. Thanks!

ADVENTURES CHILDREN HAVE

Readers familiar with other roleplaying games, *World of Darkness* or otherwise, are probably familiar with a particular sequence of events. Generally, the characters are given some kind of “hook” to get them interested, and often to bring the group together. The characters then pursue the hook, which may or may not be related to one or more of them personally, until they find the person(s) responsible for the conflict at hand and deal with them. Often, though not always, this involves violence. Afterwards, the characters either return to status quo, or continue to pursue events set up by or peripheral to the initial hook.

(This is, of course, a gross oversimplification of roleplaying. The details make all the difference, and the sequence of events above was deliberately shaved down to accommodate just about any type of roleplaying game.)

In **Innocents**, however, the characters are children in a world much like ours, at least on the surface. That means there are some considerations for both players and Storytellers when crafting **Innocents** stories, and it behooves us to talk about them right up front.

Some logistical concerns that we (and the players, and especially the Storyteller) are going to have to bear in mind:

- Children tire easily. They don’t go as long without food and sleep as adults can. Even preteens crash quickly.

- Children generally have much lower tolerances to drugs, alcohol, caffeine, sugar and basically everything else. Lower body weight combined with lower tolerance amounts to a greater effect.

- People notice when kids go missing. If an adult disappears for a day, people normally don’t worry unless they specifically notice that she misses obligations like work, school or something equally important. A child, however, kicks up statewide or national attention by disappearing (and for good reason). As such, the adventures of child characters are going to have to be highly episodic or involve the children being missing and the adult world unable to find them. It’s a silly example, but think of *The Goonies* — the kids there are missing, but they’re underground and can’t easily be found. That said, some kids can get away with disappearing for long periods of time without anyone kicking up a fuss, because their guardians are drunk, neglectful or simply don’t exist.

- Along those lines, the amount of territory children have nowadays is *much* smaller even than it was a few short decades ago. The essay called “Close to Home” on p. 106 discusses this in more detail.

- Adults will step in if they see kids in trouble — eventually. Our society has conditioned us to believe that keeping our heads down and letting the robbers take whatever they want is the appropriate response to threat, but put a child in jeopardy, and sooner or later, an adult will get involved.

- Kids don’t have the knowledge base that college-educated adults do. It might seem obvious, but it’s impor-

tant to remember. This means that the Storyteller should present descriptions rather than facts (many kids nowadays have never seen a record player, and so if the Storyteller describes it rather than labeling it, the players will have a better sense of the confusion that their characters are experiencing).

- What do the kids lose via the adventure? Horror always includes loss. Often it’s measured in flesh and blood, but for kids, it should be measured in innocence. Whoever increases knowledge increases sorrow, supposedly, and sometimes that’s true.

THEME AND MOOD

Theme is the underlying motif or “point” of a story. *Mood* is a collection of stylistic elements that define it. Both of these concepts receive more extensive treatment in Chapter Seven, but a brief discussion of the intended theme and mood of **World of Darkness: Innocents** is warranted at this point.

THEME: INNOCENCE AND FRAGILITY

People occasionally describe children as “sociopathic,” but this is a horrible exaggeration. Children don’t have the same social contexts as adults, and of *course* they’re egocentric. We’re all egocentric until we learn that the world does not, in fact, revolve around us. Children are innocent because of that naiveté, because of that inexperience. As characters in a *World of Darkness* game, children are *by default* losing that innocence because they are being exposed to the harsh truths of the world, probably well before they have any ability to handle them.

Innocents is about fragility. Human beings are born years before we can keep ourselves alive, especially in our society. Infant mortality is down, but that’s because of medical advances, not because human beings are any sturdier at birth. At nine years of age, a child is still too weak to protect himself. So how are kids going to stand up to the horrors of the *World of Darkness*?

They aren’t. They’re going to find ways to hide, to escape, to turn the tables, to get help. They’re going to go up against things that can scare them and shock them, but that aren’t interested in just tearing them up (or that need a special set of circumstances to do so). A good game of **Innocents** should be one in which the characters must conquer their fears, but *can* do so. It should involve the characters escaping from the bloodthirsty monster, or maybe tricking it into a pit or keeping it busy until the sun drives it away. That’s not to say that you *can’t* tell a story of blood and honor with children — especially older ones — just that the intended theme of the game presumes that characters are more delicate than that, and this fragility extends beyond the physical.

As long as we’re talking about innocence and fragility, combine them. How fragile is innocence? What does a child take with him from his experiences growing up in the *World of Darkness*? Why do some kids bounce back from traumatic events and some never get over it? How

fragile is the human mind and soul? What does the World of Darkness do to the children who must grow up in it?

MOOD: WONDER AND FEAR

Kids are fragile and they know it. For a child to stand up to a real threat takes some serious guts. As mentioned above, a good game of **Innocents** might be one in which the characters work up the courage to face the creature threatening the neighborhood. (It would also be very appropriate for **Innocents** for the characters to learn that the creature doesn't really mean any harm, but it is immature, selfish or incapable of perceiving the beings around it as living things. More about **Innocents** stories can be found in Chapter Seven.)

But despite the horror of the World of Darkness, there's a certain wonder to it all. There's a reason that kids tell ghost stories, even when it means they don't sleep. There's a reason that children are willing to sneak out after dark and break into the spook house. It's not that they *want* the hideous, spectral man to come walking up those stairs...but what if it did? The characters in **Innocents** might quickly find that they are in over their heads, because unlike the real world, the supernatural can and does make its presence known, but once that happens, do the characters just fold? Do they embrace what little they have seen in the shadows of the world, or do they pretend it never happened? The wonder and fear extends well beyond first contact with the supernatural, and it only ends when the characters decide they have seen enough.

Indeed, the decision to *stop* investigating the supernatural, or, conversely, to *refuse to stop* investigating the supernatural, might make a superb coming-of-age story for **World of Darkness: Innocents**.

STORYTELLING RULES SUMMARY

Later chapters of this book provide the rules for Storytelling in the World of Darkness, but the following section provides a short summary of the basic rules to get you started as you create characters and begin immersing yourself in the setting.

DICE

Like most tabletop roleplaying games, the Storyteller system uses dice to accomplish task resolution and simulate the effects of random chance in a variety of contexts, from combat to more general activities. Whenever a character performs an action in a high-pressure situation or when a dramatically appropriate outcome is unclear, dice may be rolled to determine success or failure. The Storyteller system uses 10-sided dice, and it's recommended that every player have at least 10 dice to start with. The better a character is at performing a particular task, the more dice will be needed for rolls; these dice are called the character's *dice pool*.

TRAITS

Characters possess a variety of traits, from inborn Attributes to trained Skills, from Merits and Flaws to measures of their Health and Speed. These traits are

fully described elsewhere in this book. Two particular types of traits of special importance are Attributes and Skills — traits rated 1 to 5 on a sliding scale of competence, combinations of which are used to form the dice pools referred to above. Whenever your character performs an action that calls for a dice roll, you build the dice pool for that roll from whatever Attribute and Skill are most appropriate for the occasion. For example: your character has an Intelligence of 3 and a Study rating of 2. Your character is trying to finish a tricky bit of homework in time to sneak out and help her friends with the adventure planned for that night. You would roll a dice pool of 5, made up of your Intelligence 3 and your Study 2.

MODIFIERS

Various external conditions and unexpected circumstances can greatly help or hinder your character's success at assorted tasks, and these are represented by bonuses or penalties to your dice pool. On one hand, having access to a new laptop computer with a high-speed Internet connection might very well greatly aid in the progress of your studies. On the other hand, the network might be down due to weather or mechanical failures, or your character might be easily distracted by friends instant messaging or incoming emails when she should be looking up facts about the Pharaohs. The Storyteller determines whether or not any circumstance imposes dice-roll modifiers and what those modifiers are.

ROLLING THE DICE

Any roll of 8, 9, or 10 is a success; anything else is a failure. Failed dice rolls are rarely fatal — they often represent temporary setbacks more than critical failures that could send the situation directly down the drain. Even in the case of combat, many rolls can be attempted more than once in order to achieve eventual success. Additionally, the Storyteller system employs a rule called "10-Again." Whenever a 10 is rolled, that die can be rolled again for an attempt at another success. In fact, you can keep rolling again, and accumulating successes, as long as you roll 10s.

THE CHANCE ROLL

If your dice pool is ever reduced to zero or fewer dice, you can still make a "chance roll." Your character makes a last-ditch attempt to accomplish a feat where he would normally have absolutely no or extremely little chance of success. Roll a single die: if the result is a 10, you succeed, and per the rule of "10-Again," you can roll again for more successes. If, however, you roll a 1 on your "chance roll," calamity occurs — a "dramatic failure," the extent and details of which are entirely up to the Storyteller's discretion.

TYPES OF ACTIONS

Different tasks require different mechanisms to be accomplished. The Storyteller system generally uses two main types of actions: instant and extended.

RE: The Voices in the Dark**Date: Friday March 9, 2008 9:58 am****From: Adelphi House Administrator (Gwyn)****To: Dr. Richard Kalloway****CC: Philadelphius House Administrator (Argent)**

First of all, let me assure you of one thing: no, you aren't insane. The things that you've observed are, in fact, real. That being said...

I have a great deal of personal sympathy for you and your clients. Until you wrote to me, and provided the evidence of your observations that you did, I hadn't been able to prove that this phenomenon wasn't local to the Chicago area or a matter of concern to others outside that area. (Not that it shouldn't be a matter of concern to begin with, but some people need a little more convincing than others.) As a consequence, I can now give you a bit more information than I was authorized to release in our previous communications.

1. The entities (which you called "shadow children" in your previous emails to me) are generally known to the Adelphi and Philadelphius Groups as "the Voices in the Dark." This term was handed down to us by my mentor, who made a fairly detailed study of their activities in the early part of the 20th century here in Chicago. (Unfortunately, the majority of his detailed research was lost in a fire in the 1980s and was never fully duplicated/recompiled before he passed away.)
2. The Voices in the Dark are beings of somewhat nebulous provenance. To my knowledge, no one actually knows what they are or where they come from, and the Voices themselves rather forcefully resist any attempts to discover that information. I strongly recommend abandoning any lines of investigation you might have opened into that topic — the danger to yourself and your clients cannot be overstated should you continue along that path. Believe me when I say that I understand your desire to comprehend what's happening to your clients and put an end to it, but this is not a road you want to travel. There are other means of repelling the Voices without delving too deeply into their origins.
3. The Voices in the Dark almost always choose to manifest themselves in the form of abused or murdered children, or as parents who have somehow died or been harmed as a result of their actions toward their children. We aren't exactly sure why this is so. It's one of the avenues of investigation into the origins of the Voices that we've had consistently, persistently blocked, with considerable violence, by the Voices themselves. One of my colleagues believes that the Voices choose this form of manifestation because, at a spiritual level, these entities might have been created in some way by the violation of innocence. This might also explain why the Voices are attracted to child victims. We aren't sure. The form of a brutalized child might also be chosen to cause otherwise cautious people to lower their guard and allow the Voices to do that person harm. Given your personal expertise and area of professional focus, I must stress that you shouldn't overly empathize with these entities, no matter how they might choose to present themselves to you or your clients. No matter how they came into being, these entities are no longer innocent victims — if, indeed, they ever were — but instead predators that torment innocents to obtain their own objectives.
4. Speaking on that subject, the overall objectives of the Voices in the Dark remain as obscure as their origins. Here in Chicago, we know conclusively that the Voices in the Dark were heavily involved in a number of serious acts of supernatural abuse, for want of a better term, stretching over the best part of a century, since the founding of the city at least, and quite probably prior. (Please find attached documents on the Potawatomi peoples, who originally occupied the area where Chicago was built, and certain events that occurred during the Great Chicago Fire.) The information you forwarded to us now allows us to conclude that the Voices, or entities fundamentally indistinguishable in form and action from the Voices, are also active elsewhere. What this says about any objectives these entities might be attempting to accomplish is unclear at this time. We assume that the Voices derive some form of satisfaction from their activities, which are of a uniformly malignant nature, but we can't be certain that they have any concrete long-term goals beyond satisfying themselves and spreading as much misery as possible.
5. Certain individual entities within the Voices appear to be much more distinct than others, meaning they tend to have a much more well-defined "personality" or method of operations than the others. Here in Chicago, we have observed at least four distinct individuals: the Bloody Boy (who appears as a young boy with a fractured skull, the blood from which runs down his face and into his mouth; some members of our group think he strongly resembles a somewhat famous murder victim from the 1920s); the Mush-Mouthed Girl (a teenaged girl who generally appears badly physically beaten, particularly in the face, with broken teeth and a broken jaw); and the Cold Twins (two prepubescent girls who generally manifest nude and appear to have frozen to death). The information you gave to us appears to bear out this observation, since several of your clients report contact with the individual you call "the Drowned Boy." It has been our observation that the Voices with the strongest personalities are also the Voices most likely to be pursuing specific victims that match their "tastes." I know this isn't very comforting.
6. Unfortunately, I don't have much good advice to offer on how to go about repelling the Voices from your clients, either. These entities cannot be banished with therapy, and trying to teach a child that they are figments of imagination that will go away on their own will only continue to leave the child exposed to danger. Believe me when I say that this frustrates

me at least as much as it does you. I lost a very dear friend to these entities. The best advice I can offer you is to seek assistance for your clients from a local specialist. (See attached document RE specialist services providers in your area.) They will be able to do much more to help you protect your clients than I, or any other affiliate with the Adelphi or Philadelphius Groups, possibly could at this moment. Please be aware that many of these specialists are quite eccentric and generally prefer that their practices be kept private and confidential.

I will, of course, keep you apprised of any further developments in our own investigations and ask that you do likewise. Also: please take care of yourself. I know what you're experiencing is extremely difficult and you want very much to help your clients to the best of your ability. I understand this deeply. You cannot, however, help them if you become a victim of the Voices yourself.

Gwyn

An instant action is resolved in a single dice roll and only one success is required to complete the action, though multiple successes sometimes improve the general results. Instant actions include anything that can be accomplished in three seconds: climbing a fence, passing a note, sneaking out of a window past your parents.

An extended action is resolved in a series of dice rolls, with the successes accumulated in each roll tallied together to achieve the total needed to complete a given task. The Storyteller determines the total number of successes required. Each roll takes a certain amount of time within the story to accomplish, depending on the relative demands of the action, and can be anywhere from a few minutes to a few hours to a few days. The Storyteller decides how long it takes to complete one die roll, during which time your character takes actions to accomplish the task. For example: researching the historical significance of a particular run-down house in the middle of town at the local historical society takes about 30 minutes per roll, and uncovering the information you're looking for requires 4 successes.

A third type of action — the contested action — comes into play when two characters are competing against one another to achieve a particular result. Contested actions can be either instant or extended, depending on the nature of the activity involved.

Combat: Fighting is a series of instant actions, continuing for as long as is necessary for one side to win. It involves a single dice pool roll per attack, and the result determines how much damage is inflicted (if any). The dice pool is determined as normal, but any equipment bonuses usually result from any weapons that are used in the conflict. Each success gained in an attack represents a point of damage inflicted against an opponent's Health trait. When the opponent has no more Health left, it is either dead or disabled, depending on the sort of damage inflicted.

The Storyteller system uses three types of damage: bashing (caused by blunt-force weapons like fists and clubs, which cause wounds that heal relatively quickly); lethal (caused by sharp weapons, such as knives, or penetrating ones, such as bullets, which cause wounds that heal slowly); and aggravated (caused by supernatural entities and their attacks, which cause wounds that take an extremely long time to heal, if at all). Detailed combat rules can be found in Chapter Six.

CHARACTER CREATION

In the Storyteller system, character creation is a simple, seven-step process. Make a copy of the character sheet (located on the last page of this book) and get a pencil.

1. Choose a background. First, come up with your character's general concept. This is usually expressed at the beginning as a short, two- or three-word sentence that describes your character's basic identity and/or motivation, such as: "Detective in Training," "Daddy's Little Princess," or "Junior Mad Scientist." Choosing the character's Asset and Fault can assist in this process; these traits are defined beginning on p. 87. (More extensive and detailed suggestions on in-depth character background development can be found in Chapter Seven.)

2. Select Attributes, the innate capabilities that your character possesses as a human being: these traits are divided into Mental (Intelligence, Wits, Resolve), Physical (Strength, Dexterity, Stamina) and Social Attributes (Presence, Manipulation, Composure). Prioritize these Attributes into Primary, Secondary and Tertiary categories, on which you will spend 5/4/3 points respectively. Your character begins play with one dot in each Attribute automatically filled at the start of game play; dots purchased now are in addition to the one already allocated. For more detailed information on Attributes, see Chapter Two.

3. Select Skills, the capabilities your character has learned in his lifetime thus far. Prioritize your Skills into Primary, Secondary and Tertiary categories, then consult the table on p. 47 to determine the points that your character has to spend on those Attributes, the numbers of which are linked to your character's age at the start of game play. For more detailed information on Skills, see Chapter Three.

4. Select Skill Specialties, your character's particular areas of expertise. Depending on your character's age, she can have one, two or three Skill Specialties of your choice. You can either select multiple Skills in which you assign Specialties, or assign all Specialties to one Skill. There is no limit to how many Specialties may be assigned to one Skill, though your character must have at least one dot in a given Skill to purchase a Specialty in it. For more information, see Chapter Three.

5. Determine Advantages, the traits derived from your character's existing Attributes: Defense (the lower of Dex-

terity or Wits), Health (Stamina + Size), Initiative (Dexterity + Composure), Morality (7 for starting characters), Size (4 for most human children), Speed (Strength + Dexterity + 4), Willpower (Resolve + Composure). For more detailed information, see Chapter Four. Note: Most Advantages may not be raised directly through experience point expenditures. Instead, the trait from which the Advantage is derived must be increased. Morality is the exception to this rule.

6. Select Merits, representing character enhancements and background elements. You have seven dots to spend on Merits. For more information, see Chapter Five.

7. To round out the details on your character sheet, record the title of the chronicle in which your character will be playing, which will be provided by the Storyteller, and the name chosen by her group of companions, if any has been chosen. List any equipment and a brief physical description of your character. You are now ready to begin your adventures in the World of Darkness.

ROLL AND TRAIT SUMMARY

Now that you've got the basics of the Storyteller system laid out, these pages are provided as a quick reference to some of the more common rolls and actions that take place during games. This list is not meant to be exhaustive, nor should it take the place of reading the rest of the book.

EXPERIENCE POINT COSTS

Trait	Experience Point Cost
Attribute	New dots x 5
Skill	New dots x 3
Skill Specialty	3 points
Merit	New dots x 2
Morality	New dots x 3

GENERAL MENTAL TRAIT-RELATED ROLLS

Create Art (Intelligence + Crafts + equipment, extended action, 4 – 15+ successes required, each roll representing 30 minutes of work)

Examine a Crime Scene (Wits + Investigation + equipment, extended action, 3 – 10+ successes required; each roll represents 10 minutes of activity)

First Aid (Dexterity or Intelligence + Medicine + equipment, extended action, one success per wound level being attended required; each roll can be made per minute or per hour for long-term care)

Hacking (Intelligence + Computer + equipment versus Intelligence + Computer + equipment, extended



and contested actions, 5 – 10+ successes required, each roll representing 30 minutes of hacking)

Jury-Rigging (Dexterity + Crafts + equipment, extended action, 4 – 10 successes required)

Repair Item (Dexterity + Crafts + equipment, extended action, 4 – 10 successes required, each roll representing 30 minutes of work)

Research (Intelligence + Study + equipment, extended action, 3 – 10 successes required; each roll equals 30 minutes of research)

Schoolwork (Intelligence + Study + equipment, extended action, 1 – 10 successes required; each roll represents 15 minutes of work)

GENERAL PHYSICAL TRAIT-RELATED ROLLS

Bypassing a Security System (Dexterity + Larceny + equipment, extended action, 5 – 15 successes required, depending on the complexity of the system; each roll represents a turn of work)

Catching Thrown Objects (Dexterity + Athletics, instant action)

Climbing (Strength + Athletics + equipment, instant or extended action, one success is required per eight feet of height; in an extended task, each roll represents one minute of climbing)

Foot Chase (Stamina + Athletics + equipment versus Stamina + Athletics + equipment, extended and contested action, each roll representing one turn of running)

Foraging (Wits + Survival + equipment, extended action, 5 successes required; each roll represents one hour of searching)

Hiding (Wits + Stealth + equipment versus Wits + Composure + equipment, contested action)

Jumping (Strength + Athletics + equipment, instant action, a character can jump one foot vertically for each success rolled)

Lock-picking (Dexterity + Larceny + equipment, extended action, 1 – 12+ successes required depending on the sophistication of the lock; one roll represents one turn of work)

Shadowing (Wits + Stealth + equipment versus Wits + Composure + equipment, contested action)

Skate or Ride a Bike (Dexterity + Athletics + equipment, instant action)

Sleight of Hand (Dexterity + Larceny + equipment versus Wits + Composure or Wits + Larceny, contested action)

Throwing (Dexterity + Athletics + equipment, instant action)

GENERAL SOCIAL TRAIT-RELATED ROLLS

Animal Training (Composure + Animal Ken + equipment versus Stamina + Resolve, extended and contested action, demanding a number of successes equal to the opponent's willpower, each roll representing one day of training)

Bullying ([Attribute] + Intimidation + equipment vs. Resolve + Composure, extended and contested action demanding a number of successes equal to the opponent's Resolve + Composure, each roll representing one day of bullying)

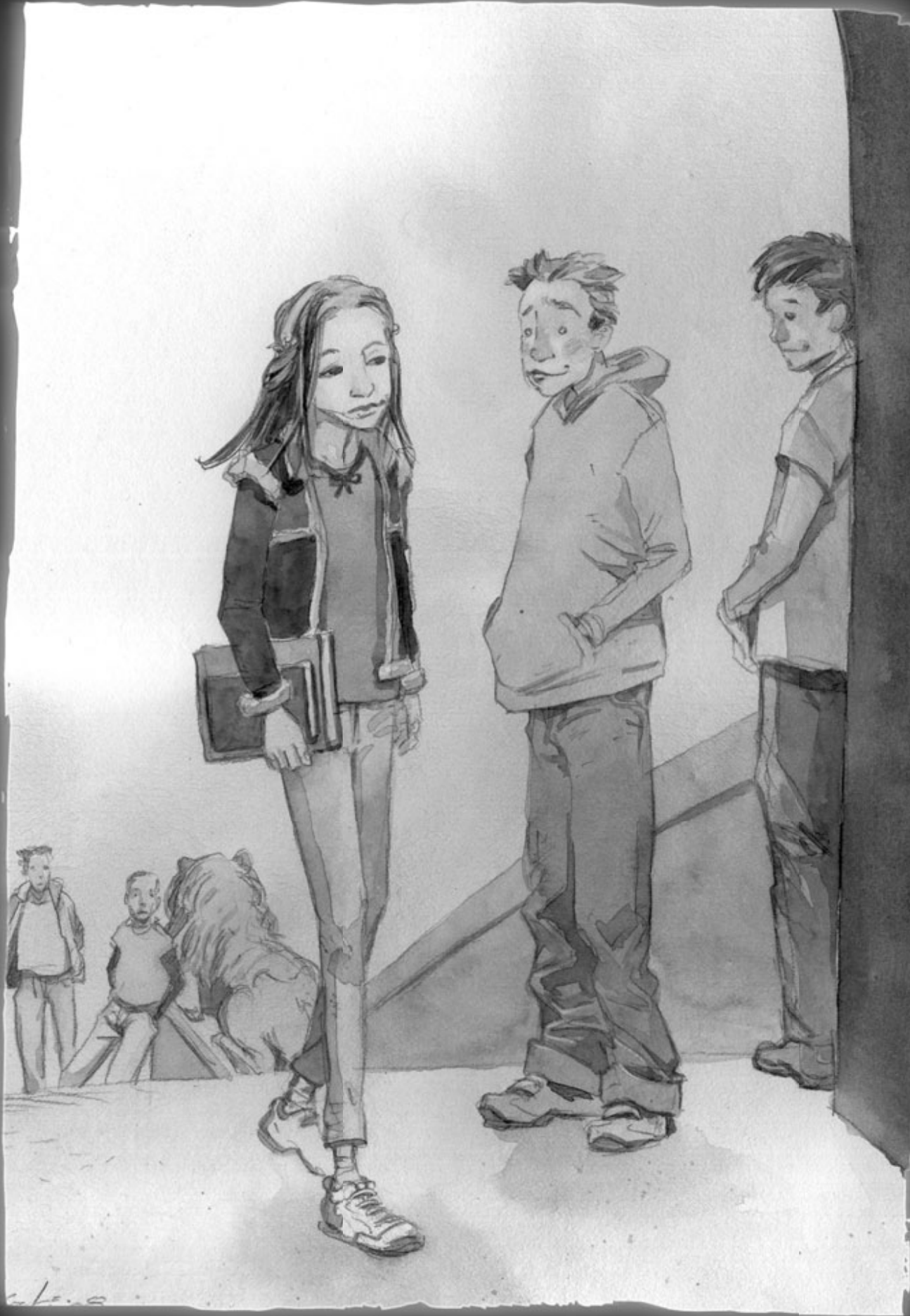
Catching Animals (Dexterity + Animal Ken + equipment minus animal's Defense or Dodge trait, instant action)

Disguise (Wits + Subterfuge + equipment versus Wits + Subterfuge + equipment, contested action)

Fast Talk (Manipulation + Persuasion + equipment versus Composure + Empathy or Subterfuge, contested action)

Working the Black Market (Manipulation + Streetwise + equipment, extended action, 2 – 10 successes required; each roll represents one day of working the streets)





"There she is!" Xavier whispered. He gave Steven an excited shove. "Now's your chance!"

There were still almost a dozen kids standing about the old stone steps of P.S. 105, even though the morning bell was going to ring any minute. Carla was still crossing the cracked sidewalk, her books cradled in her arms: at the curb, her father's black Mercedes was easing smoothly into the street, past the idling school buses.

Steven felt his heart leap into his throat. "Shut up!" he snapped, pushing savagely at his best friend. They were standing at the top of the steps, tucked into the corner of the school's arched entryway. "There's too many people around," he said, feeling suddenly exposed. "Rob Lowrie's at the bottom of the steps, for God's sake!"

Sure enough, Rob and three of his Neanderthal buddies were clustered near one of the weathered stone lions at the base of the broad steps, their shoulders hunched against the brisk autumn wind. On any other day, they would have been behind the bleachers on the other side of the school, sharing smokes Rob stole from his dad. Not this time, though. It was like Rob knew somehow.

"Screw Rob Lowrie," Xavier said, giving Steven another helpful shove. "Just imagine the look on his face when she talks to you! C'mon — I want to see this!"

"Stop!" Steven hissed, feeling more exposed with each passing moment. "If Rob sees me talking to her, I'm dead!"

"You are such an idiot!" Xavier shot back. "Use your brain, butthead. The minute she says yes, the whole school is gonna know. Gym class is gonna be hell for you no matter what, so go and get it over with already! Do you want to take her to the dance or not?"

Steven hesitated, his gaze going from Carla to Rob and back again. His mouth felt like it was full of cotton. "Yeah," he managed to say.

"Then get to it," Xavier hissed. "You can't lose, man. You've got the magic." He gave Steven another shove, more gently this time. "Go on."

She was at the bottom of the steps now. Rob turned to Carla and grinned, but she paid him no mind, her thoughts absorbed in some early-morning reverie. Rob's expression soured as she walked by, and Steven took heart from the sight.

He took a step forward, then another, edging towards the top of the steps so she would have to walk past him. Watching her approach, he felt his pulse begin to race. Carla was beautiful — there wasn't another girl in seventh grade who even came close. All of a sudden, Steven realized how shabby he looked compared to her. He hunched his narrow shoulders within his faded blue hoodie and glanced down at the scuffed tips of his sneakers poking from beneath the ragged hem of his jeans. She's gonna laugh, he thought. She's gonna laugh in my face, and I'm gonna die, right here on the steps.

Reaching into the hoodie's front pocket, his hand closed on the charm he and Xavier had stolen from the witch's house. He felt the clay disk and the bits of feather and bone dig into his palm. For just a second, he felt a fleeting twinge of guilt, but he pushed it ruthlessly aside. How else was he going to get Carla to pay any attention to a scrawny little geek like him?

Then Carla was right beside him. She glanced up, her green eyes meeting his, and Steven felt the charm grow warm in his hand.





Chapter Two: Attributes

By the time the average child is seven years old, he can read and write and has a vocabulary of several thousand words. He can run, jump, throw, catch and swim. He's capable of selfless honesty and blatant lies, and has more than likely developed several diverse social interaction strategies for dealing with peers and authority figures. By the time he's 12, while still short of the potential he will grow into as an adult, he's developed many of the characteristics he had as a child to an amazing degree.

Child characters have these same abilities. Their basic, fundamental capabilities are represented in the game by Attributes, which are the foundation of everything they do. Attributes are divided into three categories — Mental, Physical and Social. Any time your character does something, the Storyteller may require that you make a roll using the appropriate Attribute.

Mental Attributes include Intelligence, Wits and Resolve. They determine how smart, crafty and persistent your character is, respectively.

Physical Attributes include Strength, Dexterity and Stamina. They represent how strong, graceful and enduring your character is.

Social Attributes include Presence, Manipulation and Composure. They show how much of an impression your character makes on others, how easy it is for him to influence others, and how well he keeps his head in challenging situations.

Children's Attributes are rated from 1 to 5. It's possible for a young person to have more than five dots, but only in cases where they are being influenced or enhanced by something outside themselves — supernatural creatures, magical spells or weird occult situations.

Your child character automatically starts with one dot in each Attribute. These dots represent every kid's basic ability to think, move and interact in some way with others, and are already filled in on your character sheet. As you create your character, you will also be adding a number of additional dots to represent your character's capability beyond that basic level.

As well as being organized by categories (Mental, Physical and Social), Attributes can also be thought of as being organized by use — Power, Finesse and Resistance.

Power is the degree of effect that your character has on the outside world. The higher his score, the smarter, stronger or more impressive he is. Intelligence, Strength and Presence therefore apply when your character seeks to force himself on his environment. Intelligence helps him remember facts, memorize information and create art. Strength helps when he needs to run quickly, jump and climb. Presence helps when he needs to make an impression on others, be it bullying someone into giving up information or convincing his parents that there really is something in the closet.

Finesse is a measure of your character's capacity to subtly interact with the world and influence others. The higher her score, the craftier, more deft and more influential she is. Wits helps her figure out solutions on the fly, notice things that are out of place or find something to eat away from home. Dexterity helps when she has to ride a bike or roller skate, throw things or avoid falling into holes or off roofs. Manipulation is what she uses when she's sweet-talking her parents into a raise in allowance, convincing the policeman that she's lost (rather than trespassing) or trying to convince someone else to do her chores for her.

Resistance indicates how well your character copes with both internal and external influences that might affect him adversely. The higher his score, the more staunch, sturdy or held-together he is. Resolve, Stamina and Composure apply when your character reacts to coercion, injury, exhaustion, surprise or fear. Re-

It is not easy to be crafty and winsome at the same time, and few accomplish it after the age of six.

— John W. Gardner and Francesca Gardner Reese

ATTRIBUTE DOTS

Attributes range from one to five dots for ordinary kids between the ages of seven and 12, and each score indicates the degree of your character's raw capability in that area. Adults use the same Attributes as children, but an adult with Strength 3 is far stronger than a child with Strength 3. The adult Attribute scale is discussed in Chapter Seven.

Dots

Example

- Below Average. Other kids probably tease him about his lack of ability in this area.
- Average. Right in the middle of the pack.
- Good. He has a knack for this, or has worked to improve it. Probably the best on his block in this area.
- Exceptional. Probably the best in his school at this, whether it's due to innate talent or lots of hard work and practice.
- Outstanding. Near average adult capacity in this area. Other kids probably tease him about his ability in this area.

Normally, it's not possible for a character to have zero dots in an Attribute. That would mean they couldn't do the basic things that a kid can — read, write, talk, walk, etc. It's possible to play characters who are physically, socially or mentally handicapped to the point that they don't have those basic capabilities, but those handicaps are represented by Flaws (see pp. 94-97) rather than zero-dot Attributes.

About the only time that one of a character's Attributes can be reduced to zero is by supernatural means. A spell, curse or affliction might eliminate all of your character's dots in a particular Attribute. If this happens, you cannot make any rolls that pertain to that Attribute. So, if your character is cursed with stupidity (zero Intelligence), you can't make rolls for any action where Intelligence would normally be a part of the dice pool, even if she has dots in the appropriate skill or has access to tools (books, computers, etc.) that would normally help her complete that task. Your character can't even hope to remember her locker combination, solve the math problem or finish her homework. With zero dots in the appropriate Attribute, the action fails automatically.

solve helps him resist efforts to influence his mind and actions, whether it's someone trying to get him to do something he doesn't want to, or just horrible circumstances that threaten to make him go mad. Stamina helps him keep going when he's tired, hungry or hurt. Composure helps to keep him from falling apart during scary situations, whether they're the "monster under the bed" kind of scary or the "giving a report in front of class" variety.

USING ATTRIBUTES

When your character performs an action, the Attribute most appropriate to the effort is the one that will be used to see if he succeeds. If he tries to remember what his teacher said in class last week, you would use his Intelligence dots. If he is shooting a slingshot or tying knots, Dexterity would be more appropriate. Bluffing his way out of a kiss from Aunt Mabel (or the monster who's pretending to be her) would be Manipulation.

Your character's dots are usually used as part of a dice pool (see pp. 115-120). Attributes are sometimes combined (Strength + Dexterity, for example, or Wits + Resolve) and rolled to see if an action can be accomplished, but more often a dice pool will consist of an Attribute and an accompanying Skill. The Storyteller will tell you what Attribute is applicable to your character's actions and what rolls you should make.

PRIORITIZING ATTRIBUTES

While not everyone falls into the stereotypical "smart kid or sports kid" stereotype, most people, children included, are better at some things and weaker in other areas. Your character will be the same way. When creating him, you will prioritize his Attributes by category: Mental, Physical and Social. If you want him to be a little Einstein, Mental traits might be primary. If he finds it easy to make friends and schmooze his parents and teachers (but not quite as easy as acing pop quizzes), then his Social traits might be secondary, leaving his Physical traits tertiary, to represent a kid who is more at home in the library than the gym.

You get to spend five dots among the Attributes in your character's primary category. Each dot adds to the initial dots you started out with. You can divide each category's dots evenly, or, if it suits the character concept, pump up one or two Attributes in that category while neglecting the rest. Looking back at the character above, for example, you might spend three of his five dots in Intelligence, with one each in Wits and Composure. This would represent a kid who is more bookworm than quick-thinker, finding and remembering information but not the best at thinking on his feet. The same character

could instead be built with only two of his five primary category dots spent in Intelligence, three in Wits and no extra dots spent in Resolve, giving you a character who is in the middle of his class, but always the one to come up with solutions and harebrained (but viable) schemes. With only the initial starting dot in Resolve, however, he is also the one who's likely quickest to fall apart when things go wrong.

You split four dots among the Attributes in your character's secondary category. Using the above character as an example, you might decide to allocate one dot towards Presence (showing that while he's not a wallflower, he's also not the class charmer, either); two dots towards Manipulation (he knows how to work his teachers to ensure those As are all A+s); and the remaining dot on Composure (he isn't the first in the group to run when something jumps out of the closet.)

Your character's tertiary category receives three dots. Since the character we've been building has Physical as his tertiary category, we could spread one dot to each of Strength, Dexterity and Stamina, representing a physically well-rounded but average kid. Or, if we pictured him more as a clumsy brute, we could spend all three dots in Strength, leaving Dexterity and Stamina at one dot. In that case, he'd be able to throw a good punch, but he'd be no great shakes at sports (is winded easily — maybe he's asthmatic?) and trips over his own shoelaces.

ATTRIBUTE DESCRIPTIONS

The following is an explanation of what each Attribute entails and how it might be applied. In each Attribute description, you'll find suggestions for what characters with high and low ratings in the given trait might be capable of. Also included are examples of tasks that might require a character to use an Attribute or Attributes alone as a dice pool (rather than the more common Attribute + Skill, which are described in the next chapter). These activities are typically ones that any unimpaired person can perform, such as holding one's breath or lifting objects, and which don't require any special training or expertise.

MENTAL ATTRIBUTES

INTELLIGENCE

"I know it's in one of these!" Angel tossed another comic book onto the floor of the group's makeshift clubhouse. "I know I saw it!"

Pablo nudged the growing mountain of comics with one toe, shaking his head skeptically. "Angie, you're crazy." The girl was obsessed with comics. Funny comics, superhero comics, but especially the scary ones. Cemetery Tales. Ghost Stories. Vampire Adventures. She read them constantly, collected them like they were made out of gold, and had even done her book report last week on a graphic novel. The teacher had not

been impressed. But now she was tearing through her collection like a freak, throwing them on the floor rather than putting them back in their plastic wrappers and cardboard boxes.

"There! I told you!" Angel held out the comic triumphantly.

Sure enough, there, in the four-color art, was a house that looked an awful lot like Jenny's. And painted on the door were the same weird squiggles they'd found on Jenny's...only in the comic, the dripping paint they'd found on her door was red. Blood red.

"What do you think it means?" Pablo stared at the comic, and then at Angel.

"I don't know." Angel frowned. "But I bet it has something to do with why Jenny's family disappeared without even giving her a chance to say goodbye."

Book smarts. Brainpower. The ability to comprehend, process and remember information. Intelligence is, simply put, how smart your character is. She might be a straight-A student with no studying, or she might take hours to do her homework and barely pass her classes. She might be the one who taught herself how to defrag her parents' computer at age four, or the one who can barely remember her own phone number, let alone those of her friends or family. High Intelligence is often found in trivia experts, collectors and fanatics (sports cards, Beanie Babies, comic books), tinkerers, whiz kids, avid readers and know-it-alls.

In general, children have less capacity for critical thinking than adults do; they not only have had less time and experiences to learn things (and learn how to learn things), but their brains have simply not developed the same level of critical thinking of which adults are capable. Their thought processes are also more easily influenced by internal and external factors: exhaustion, hunger, fear, cold, thirst and pain are all capable of almost shutting down a child's thought processes much more quickly than the similar influences have on an adult. See *Fatigue*, p. 159, for details on how fatigue affects young characters' cognitive (and other) abilities.

MEMORIZING AND REMEMBERING

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Composure

Action: Reflexive

When a character wants to memorize something, whether it's a poem, a face or a sports statistic, the Storyteller may require the player to make an Intelligence + Composure roll. Another roll may be required later on to recall the memorized information. Composure is used in conjunction with Intelligence to reflect the fact that it is easier to commit things to memory (and dredge them back up again) when calm. In fact, if the information is very familiar to the character (his or her phone number or address, for example) or something that the character accesses regularly (the route to a caregiver's home), the Storyteller might not require a roll, unless the character is nervous or under a great deal of pressure.

Storytellers might implement bonuses or penalties depending on several factors. Memorizing something under pressure is much harder to do than when at leisure.

Short, simple facts are easier to remember than lengthy or complicated ones. Familiar names and places are easier to memorize than unusual or foreign ones, but it is harder to concentrate on boring subjects long enough to commit them to memory than interesting subjects. Things that just happened are easier to recall than things that happened days, weeks or months ago, and factors like being tired, hungry, scared or distracted have a strong negative effect on a child's ability to remember things.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character thinks he memorized or remembered the information correctly — but he got it wrong. The Storyteller should feel free to give you inaccurate “facts” as appropriate for the situation. Maybe several of the numbers are transposed, or the character remembers three left turns instead of two.

Failure: Your character can't remember anything about the situation at hand.

Success: Your character remembers the fact or information she was trying to remember.

Exceptional Success: Not only does your character remember the vital information, but he also manages to dredge up related tidbits or details about the situation.

Suggested Equipment: Book about the topic (+1), TV show or movie about the topic (+2), picture taken at the event (+2), video taken at the event (+3), info is common or simple (+2), information is short (a few sentences, a phone number, a name) (+3), event was witnessed within the past three hours (+1), something that was studied in school (+2)

Possible Penalties: Information is extensive (-5), foreign names or information (-3), details studied in a hurry (-1), under pressure or frightened when memorizing or recalling (-3), items observed days, weeks or months ago (-1 to -5)

WITS

The dark blue car pulled up alongside Brian as he walked home from school. The woman inside leaned across the seat and rolled down the window on the passenger side.

“Brian? Brian, honey, you have to come with me.”

Brian looked closer, but he didn't recognize the woman who was motioning for him to get in the car.

“What? Why?”

“It's your mom, honey. She's at the hospital and she sent me to get you. She's okay, but she wants you there, and I told her I'd come and pick you up.”

“My mom? Is she hurt? What happened?”

“I'll explain on the way, honey...Come on now, your mama's waiting.”

The woman pushed open the car door, and Brian took two steps towards the vehicle before he remembered something.

“What's the code word?”

The woman frowned, looking confused. “Code word?”

Brian nodded, and took a step back towards the sidewalk.

The woman shook her head. “I can't remember what your mama said it was, honey...come on, don't you want to see her? We've got to hurry...”

Brian turned and ran down the sidewalk, away from the dark blue car and the woman within it. As his sneakers



beat double time on the pavement and he rounded the corner towards home at a full run, he whispered to himself: "Cantaloupe...The code word is cantaloupe." His mama would never have sent someone he didn't know to pick him up without giving her the code word.

Behind him, the dark blue car sped away.

Cunning, Craftiness. The ability to improvise, think on your feet, under pressure or in a hurry. Wits refers to how quick your character thinks, how well he notices details or takes advantage of new information. He might recognize right off that the creak on the stairs is different from the one his parents make, or not notice the trap until the net is falling on his head. He might be the one who always comes up with a plan, or the kid who believes anything he's told. High Wits ratings are often found in kids who love puzzles, complicated video games or other quick-thinking challenges, as well as artists, daredevils and sneak thieves.

DEFENSE

Derived Traits: Wits or Dexterity

Action: Reflexive

The lower of your character's Wits or Dexterity is used to determine his Defense trait, which is subtracted from incoming Brawl, Weaponry and throwing attacks. See p. 140 for more information.

PERCEPTION

Dice Pool: Wits + Composure (or a relevant Skill in place of Composure per the "Skill-Based Perception" sidebar)

Action: Reflexive

There's always something going on. Perception is how much of what's going on your character notices. It covers things like someone hiding behind some curtains or a piece of furniture being out of place in her room, or that the light on the answering machine is blinking, indicating a message. It doesn't include information you're actively seeking out; that's the purview of Investigation (see p. 52). Perception just covers what your character notices when she's not necessarily trying to notice things.

The Storyteller typically knows when something "noticeable" is going on in the area your character is in, and might ask you to roll a reflexive Wits + Composure roll for her to recognize it. He might, instead, make the

rolls for you, so that you don't have more information about what's going on than your character does.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character notices something, but it's not what he thinks it is. He may make a wholly inaccurate assumption about the meaning of a perceived clue, taking a door that was left ajar to mean someone has broken into the room; or even get the details completely wrong, misjudging the height and weight (or even sex) of an assailant, or follow the sound of the stone the burglar threw in the opposite direction of his getaway.

Failure: Your character notices nothing strange or noteworthy.

Success: Your character recognizes that something noteworthy has changed or happened. If he wants to learn more, he has to rely on Investigation rolls, rather than Perception. (See "Investigation," p. 52.)

Exceptional Success: Your character not only notices when something suddenly happens, but he also manages to get a good view of the entire occurrence. Or, as soon as he walks into the room in question, the unusual or noteworthy items leap to his attention.

Suggested Equipment: Hopped up on sugar (+1) or caffeine (+2)

Possible Penalties: Dark (-3), obscuring weather (-1 to -3), subtle detail (-1), obscure detail (-3), distracting circumstances (-1 to -3), under the influence of various drugs (varies; see p. 156)

REACTION TO SURPRISE

Dice Pool: Wits + Composure

Action: Reflexive

The world is a scary place, full of situations, people and creatures that are just waiting to catch children off guard. When something unexpected happens, roll Wits + Composure for your character to determine if she's caught by surprise.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character is caught completely by surprise. She is incapable of action (and loses her Defense) for two turns. This may well be accompanied by crying, screaming or involuntarily wetting herself.

SKILL-BASED PERCEPTION

While Wits + Composure is the normal Perception roll, sometimes a character's interest, experience or training in a particular Skill will give them an additional chance to notice something about a situation. In these cases, a Storyteller may choose to have the player roll Wits + the appropriate Skill in place of the normal Perception roll. An athlete, for example, might be more likely to notice someone's monkeyed with nearby sports equipment (Wits + Athletics), or someone who spends all her time in libraries might be more apt to notice that a book is shelved in the wrong location (Wits + Study).

As a general rule, this is only done when the character's Skill is higher than his Composure, giving the character a benefit that a person with less experience in that area wouldn't have. If, as in the example above, a character has a Study rating of 1 and an Composure of 3, her normal calm observation would override her unfamiliarity with the Dewey Decimal system.

Failure: Your character is caught off guard and cannot take an action for a turn. She also loses her Defense for the first turn, if the surprise was a precursor to combat.

Success: Your character manages to keep her wits about her enough to react to the situation as normal. This includes the ability to roll Initiative and use her Defense if the situation involves combat.

Exceptional Success: Your character realizes that something is up and not only can react normally, but can also shout out a warning to those around her. Her companions are thus able to react to the situation without making their own rolls to react to the surprise.

Suggested Equipment: Hopped-up on sugar or caffeine (+2), presence of “safe” authority figure (parent, teacher, etc.) (+2)

Possible Penalties: Dark (-2), obscuring weather (-1 to -3), distracting circumstances (-1 to -3), attacker at long range (-3), presumed safe environment (-2)

RESOLVE

“Fight! Fight! Fight!” A pack of middle-schoolers can turn to frenzy in seconds, and the crowd was getting ugly. Charley was on the ground, curled up to protect her face and belly from the kicks and punches raining down upon her. It wasn’t much of a fight.

“Stan’ up. Quit bein’ such a wuss.” The girl’s slurred words and random blows suggested that the rumors of her drinking and drug use might not be far off. It wasn’t much help to Charley right now, though.

“Leave her alone!”

The bully paused, arm still raised, turning to see who dared interrupt her attack.

Rose broke free of the heckling mob of tweens and put herself between Charley and her attacker. “Leave her alone.”

“Stay outta this, unless you want some, too.” The bully wobbled unsteadily, turning her focus onto the intruding girl.

“I don’t want some.” That was an understatement. Rose had seen what the girl could do, what she would do. Rumor had it that she’d put some fifth-grader in the hospital, just for looking at her wrong. But someone had to stand up for Charley. “I don’t want some,” she repeated. “But I want you to leave her alone. Get out of here.”

The crowd held its breath, waiting for the bully’s response. Rose hoped it wasn’t going to hurt too badly.

Determination. Conviction. Stubbornness. The ability to stay on target, despite temptations, distractions and intimidation. Resolve is how focused your character can stay on the big picture. She might be easily manipulated or bullied by others or remain true to her own goals and desires regardless of outside influence. She might be the stubborn one who makes her parents throw up their hands in frustration when she sets her mind to something, or she might be easily swayed, fickle and quick to change her mind. High Resolve is often found in independent thinkers, leaders, those who have had to take on adult responsibilities at an early age, only children, and spoiled brats.

STANDING YOUR GROUND

Dice Pool: Resolve + Wits or Resolve + Stamina

Action: Reflexive

The world is full of people, things and situations that exert their influence on children. Some are merely greedy or self-centered, others blatantly malevolent. Children in the World of Darkness are regularly challenged by those who would bend their will, from marketing executives on “children’s programming” shows to bullies on the school grounds to the unkempt man in the ice cream van who wants to give them a ride and a popsicle for “free.” Children themselves use some of these same tactics, against each other or those they interact with.

When one person is attempting to coerce another into some course of action, the situation is a contested effort, with the target making a Resolve + Wits (for non-physical coercion) or Resolve + Stamina (for threats that include physical violence). Their total successes are compared to the bully’s appropriate roll (this might involve Wits for quick thinking, Strength for physical coercion, Presence for socially bowling them over, Manipulation for sneaky or deceptively convincing arguments). Whoever gets the most successes wins (with ties going to the target, rather than the bully).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character is utterly convinced or cowed into agreement. In fact, he’s surprised he didn’t see it that way earlier. He will go out of his way to pursue and promote the idea to whatever extent he is able.

Failure: Your character is persuaded. He might not really want to do it, but he will. He’s still not completely sure why it makes sense, but it does.

Success: Your character holds his ground. He’s not backing down this time.

Exceptional Success: Your character not only is not convinced or intimidated, but he manages to turn the tables on the bully, who reacts as if he were the object of the intimidation and had rolled a failure.

Suggested Equipment: Target is not alone (+2), target has weapon (regardless of whether the bully does or not) (+1 to +2), “safe” adult in area (+4)

Possible Penalties: Bully’s forces outnumber targets (-1 to -3), bully has a position of authority (parent, teacher, etc.) (-2), bully is significantly bigger/older than target (-1 to -3), bully is known to resort to physical violence (-1), unfamiliar territory (-1), target and bully are opposite genders (-2), bully has a weapon (-1 to -3)

PHYSICAL ATTRIBUTES

STRENGTH

“I heard her down this way!” Tomas took the lead, with Ali, Jake and Ki right behind him. Sure enough, as they ran down the hall, they could all hear Jane calling for help.

THE MOMENT EVERYTHING CHANGED

by Ellen Kiley

An 11-year-old girl stood alone on the playground. The fifth-grade teachers enjoyed pitting their classes against each other in organized games of kickball at recess. She was especially alone right now because she was behind the plate, ready to kick. The kids in the outfield, seeing who was up, began to pull in, laughing to each other and calling things like “easy out!”

I’ve had enough, the girl thought. Embarrassment and frustration fused into a small, white point of anger, focused on the ball. Her kick met the ball square and hard, sending it flying over the basketball hoops and far out into the field — the easy out turned into an easy home run. The girl rejoined her team on the sidelines to cheers. She wasn’t alone anymore.

Okay, I’ll admit it — the girl in that story is me. My family had recently moved. I was without friends, and too timid to reach out and make new ones. That one flying ball, as silly as it sounds, broke the ice. It gave me the courage to talk to the kids in my school, to toss the mousey wardrobe picked out for me by my mother (sorry, Mom), to wear my hair the way I wanted. After that day, I looked and acted like a different person. That was the moment everything changed for me.

Looking back on your own life, I’m sure you can pinpoint a few moments like this in your memories: times when your perceptions of yourself or of others — or of the world — were drastically altered over a very short period of time, or by a single action or event. To a child, each of these moments seems like a singular, distinct event, one that can be compared to nothing like it: “the moment everything changed.” Only later does a reminiscing adult connect the dots to find the pattern, all of those “singular” moments strung together in the shape of a life. Adults go to great lengths to seek out moments like these, using words like “enlightenment” or “transcendence” to describe the experience, but of course, such things aren’t easily found, especially when you’re looking for them.

The events themselves can be positive or negative in character. Positive moments bring courage, clarity or understanding. They might include sporting triumphs (like my dubious one above), winning a science fair after devoting hard work to your project, or summoning the nerve to audition for a play and landing a plum role. Or it can be much more subtle, like seeing a parent or sibling go to bat for you and realizing just how much you are loved.

Negative events bring in their wake fear, uncertainty and shame. They can include the illness or death of a loved one (especially a child’s first brush with death), mockery or belittlement of your skills or work by a trusted adult, or a frightening encounter with someone who preys on children. Unfortunately, the World of Darkness has more than its fair share of predators. A child in that world might stumble upon the scattered clues left by the monsters that skulk where the darkness hides them. Even worse, that child, maybe your character, may come face to face with a monster — an event certain to bring the safe, sane walls of that child’s world clattering down around her.

Hopefully, such negative events carry with them the seeds of future positive ones. A child marked by supernatural terror may find out that, even though he is afraid, he is not completely powerless against the creatures in the night. A child whose skill with math is mocked can respond by failing out of school, or by studying hard and proving her critic wrong with every report card. The first example is an “aha!” moment, the second merely years of hard work — but either way, a negative event has to be answered, or the child will grow into an adult still struggling with the same issues.

When such a formative event happens to a group of children — let’s say, a group of characters — the effects are likely to be especially dramatic. First, the event is usually negative, as positive ones are more private affairs. The characters may all get into trouble with the law, indulging in kid shenanigans or simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time. In the World of Darkness, they may run into a monster, and there’s no denying that’s what happened, because everyone was there and everyone saw. An experience like that can bind a group together, possibly for a lifetime. Even when those characters grow up and grow apart, even if they find others who know the truth about the dark corners of the world, the friends who stood with them when the whole world changed will always be remembered.

Keep an eye out for these moments as you play your character: both moments for your character alone, and the moments that bind her to the group. Use them as signposts along the road toward growing up. Allow your character to act, react and present herself in a dramatically different way after a life-changing event, even if it’s one that only you and the Storyteller saw. Watch your character grow up, right before your eyes. It really does happen fast!

"Here! Behind this rock!" The dark cave tunnel had branched so many times that none of them knew how far they'd gone, or at what point Jane had gotten lost. Somehow she must have become separated from them and then this big boulder blocked her way, keeping her from catching up with the rest of the group. "We've got to move it!" Tomas threw his weight against the rock, but it didn't budge.

"We can't move that! It's huge!" Ali started to cry as her big sister's voice continued calling for help from beyond the stone.

"We've got to! We'll never find her again if we go get help! Come on! We can do it!"

The rest of the children lined up, pushing with all their might against the rock. "Stay back, Jane! We're going to push it out of the way!"

"Hurry, please! I'm scared! It's dark in here!"

Together, the children counted to three and heaved against the huge rock with all their might. Slowly, it began to roll, turning over with a thud. A dark space could be seen behind it. It wasn't much, but it would be enough to get Jane out.

Only, the thing behind the stone wasn't Jane. Even in the darkness of the cave it sat in, it obviously wasn't Jane. Jane didn't have that many arms...or eyes...But when it spoke, there was no mistaking. It had Jane's voice.

"Thank you, children. I've been stuck in here for such a very long time."

Muscle. Brawn. Sheer power and physical might. Strength is your character's ability to interact in a physically powerful way with the world around him. He might be a hulking brute who can bulldoze over anything in his path, or a scrawny wimp who has to use his inhaler after walking quickly. He could be slim and wiry, or heavy, with more fat than muscle. High Strength is often found in kids who enjoy physical activity, whether it's competitive team sports, martial arts, gymnastics and tumbling, or just romping on the playground, as well as those who have inherited an above-average physique from their parents.

BREAKING DOWN A DOOR

See "Breaking Objects" on p. 131 of Chapter Six.

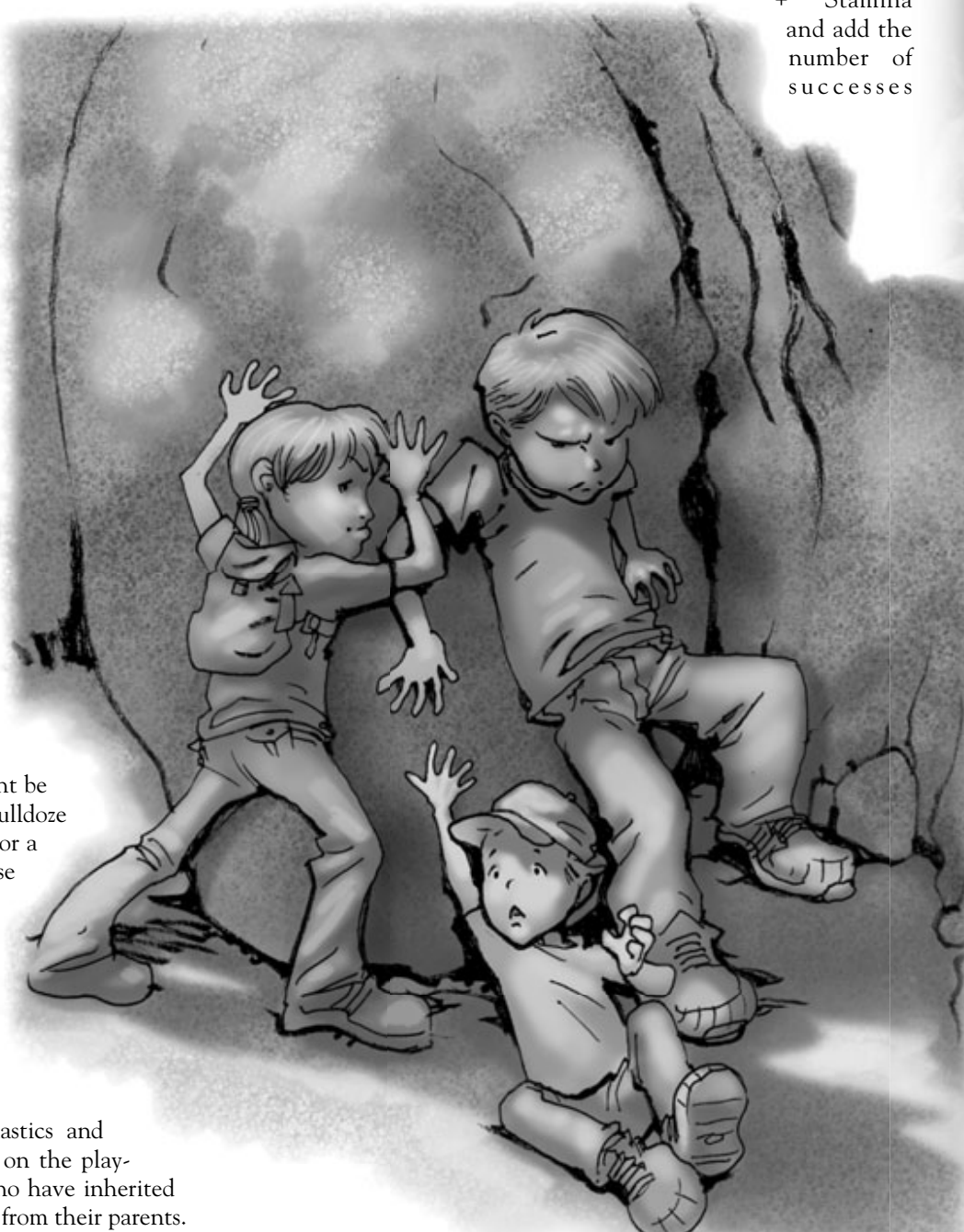
LIFTING/MOVING OBJECTS

Dice Pool: Strength (+ Stamina)

Action: Instant

Moving or lifting heavy objects requires muscle mass and skeletal leverage, to which children's bodies are not inherently well suited. The physics of human anatomy dictate that young people are less efficient at moving large objects than their adult counterparts, and their bodies are less capable of extended exhaustive actions.

A child can lift as much as his Strength indicates on the chart below. If he tries to lift more than his Strength rating would allow, he can roll Strength + Stamina and add the number of successes



Strength	Feat	Lift
1	Lift a bowling ball	12 lbs
2	Lift a small dog	25 lbs
3	Lift a car tire	55 lbs
4	Lift a large dog	100 lbs
5	Lift a rocking chair	160 lbs
6	Lift a public mailbox	200 lbs
7	Lift a wooden crate	400 lbs
8	Lift a teacher's desk	550 lbs
9	Lift a coffin	700 lbs
10	Lift a refrigerator	800 lbs
11	Overturn a small car	900 lbs
12	Lift a motorcycle	1,000 lbs
13	Overturn a mid-sized car	1,200 lbs
14	Lift a large tree trunk	1,500 lbs

he achieves to his Strength rating for that effort to determine how much he can lift. If his Strength or modified Strength for that action exceeds the amount required to lift that object, he can move it to whatever location he wants. If his Strength or modified Strength only matches what is required, he can move the object about a yard.

Children can also work together to try to move objects heavier than any of them could budge alone. Add the total number of Strength dots of those participating in the effort and consult the chart below to see what they are capable of lifting. For objects larger than even the group could normally move, each supporting character's Strength + Stamina is rolled and the successes are applied to one principal character's Strength as bonus dice. (See p. 127 for information on teamwork.)

Also, when figuring out what a child is capable of lifting (and especially carrying), bulk as well as weight must be taken into consideration. An awkwardly shaped object like a dining room chair or empty footlocker may be impossible for a child-sized character to lift or carry because of size, rather than weight. A size chart for objects is given on p. 129. When figuring out how much a child can carry, for every dot of the object's Size over 3, the child is at a one-dot penalty in how much they can lift (i.e., they can lift only as much as if their Strength was one dot less than it is). Children who are working together to lift or carry something do not suffer this penalty.

SPEED

Derived Traits: Strength + Dexterity + species factor

Action: Reflexive

How fast your character can move is based on how strong and nimble he is, along with an inherent factor of how fast his body is built to move. To determine his Speed, combine his Strength + Dexterity and his species factor (for a human child between seven and 12, the species factor is 4). See pp. 85 for more details.

DEXTERITY

"I can't do it!" Jenna whispered, clinging to the windowsill.

"You have to. It's the only way out!" Micah didn't want to scare her more than she already was, but he could hear its footsteps coming up the stairs. They only had a minute, maybe two.

Jenna looked out at the branch. It seemed so far away. So narrow. So...bendy.

"Grab that one." Micah pointed at another branch, roughly parallel to the first. "You can hold on there to keep your balance until you get to the trunk."

Jenna nodded, taking a deep breath. She reached for the upper branch with one hand, her other tightly gripping Micah's arm. With one foot on the windowsill and the other on the branch, she froze. "I can't do this."

Micah looked back into the room. The doorknob slowly began to turn. "You've got to!" He threw himself past Jenna, grabbing for the branch above them to steady himself. Both their weight on the bottom branch was more than it could bear, however, and the bough began to bend towards the ground. "Hold on!"

Wrapping one arm around Jenna, he rode the slippery oak bough to the ground as if he was skateboarding down a steep ramp. Leaves buffeted them, but within seconds, they were close enough to leap to the soft grass below.

Above them, the door slammed open and a light came on in the room they had just been in.

"Come on!" The twins ran for the gate as an imposing figure was silhouetted in the light of the open upstairs window.

Nimbleness. Grace. Hand-eye coordination. The ability to execute physical tasks with deft competence. Dexterity is a measure of how agile your character is, both in whole-body and fine motor skills. She might be a klutz, or have lightninglike reflexes. She might be able to play foosball like a champ, or barely capable of tying her shoes. High Dexterity is often found in athletes, video game enthusiasts, arts and craft creators, vandals and graffiti writers, and playground game champs.

Note: Dexterity covers both large and small motor skills. While it is possible to have a character who is good at both, your character may also be much better at one than the other. These differences can be represented by buying a base level of the Attribute and then supplementing with Merits, Skills or Skill Specialties to represent the areas of expertise. A character with beautiful penmanship might have Dexterity 2, but a high Expression Skill and/or a Specialty in Calligraphy. A children who's untouchable on a skateboard doesn't necessarily have Dexterity 5 — he might just have a high Athletics rating, and so on. A kid who's just generally nimble might have Fast Reflexes or Quick Draw.

DEFENSE

Derived Traits: Dexterity or Wits

Action: Reflexive

The lowest of your character's Dexterity or Wits is used to determine his Defense trait, which is subtracted from incoming Brawl, Weaponry and throwing attacks. See p. 140 for more information.

INITIATIVE

Derived Traits: Dexterity + Composure

Action: Reflexive

Your character's dots in Dexterity and Composure are combined to determine her Initiative score, which determines how quickly she reacts to a crisis situation, including combat. See pp. 79 for details on Initiative.

SPEED

Derived Traits: Dexterity + Strength + species factor

Action: Reflexive

How fast your character can run is based on how nimble and strong he is, along with an inherent factor of how fast his body is built to move. To determine his Speed, combine his Dexterity + Strength ratings and his species factor (for a human child between seven and 12, the species factor is 4). See pp. 85 for more details.

STAMINA

"Hey — share!" Toby snagged a handful of the bubblegum balls that Stew had been trying to keep hidden in his pocket.

"Don't take them all!" Stew struggled to retain control over his sugar cache, but within seconds, all five of the boys had taken several pieces of his gum, leaving him with an almost empty pocket.

"Come on, Stewie...it's share and share alike, remember? We're the Six Musketeers!"

Stew nodded, but Toby's words didn't make him feel any better. It was just like them to take his stuff because he was the youngest. It wasn't fair. Stew felt his eyes get hot as tears started to leak out, despite his best efforts to keep them back.

Toby glanced over at his younger brother. "Stewie? You okay?" The younger boy's face had turned beet red, and he was slumped over kind of funny.

Stewie nodded, but it sounded like his brother was talking to him from down in a well. His eyelids were so heavy and everything felt...woozy.

"Stewie, you okay? Your face is kinda...Hey...where'd you get that gum?"

Stew pointed vaguely across the playground, to where a pale man in a long coat sat on a bench, watching the boys intently. As Toby watched, the man smiled at them, but it wasn't a nice smile. It made him want to run.

By the time he turned back to Stewie, the younger boy was lying on the ground. "Stewie! Guys, we have to get Stewie home!" Toby turned, but the rest of the Musketeers were holding their heads and stomachs, their skin red and their eyes full of tears.

Endurance. Resilience. Toughness. The ability to take a beating and keep going. Stamina is a measure of how much abuse your body can endure and how quickly



it bounces back when injured, stressed or exhausted. Your character might be the kid with perfect attendance, who never gets a sniffle; or the one whose parents have the pediatrician on speed dial (in fairness, a lot of parents do that). She might be able to keep on playing despite bruises, sprains and bloody knees, or she might collapse after a single game of tag. High Stamina kids are often athletes, especially in contact sports or those that require long-term endurance, like running. They are also sometimes bullies, using their superior toughness against those who are weaker than they are.

In general, children not only wear out more quickly than adults, but when they do, the rest of their functions are affected more quickly and severely than an adult's would be in the same situations. See *Fatigue*, p. 159, for details on how fatigue affects young characters.

HEALTH

Derived Traits: Stamina + Size

A character's Health dots are determined by combining their Stamina and Size ratings. A human child between seven and 12 has a Size rating of 4, unless the character has the Tiny or Giant Merits. See pp. 85 for details on Size.

HOLDING BREATH

Dice Pool: Stamina

Action: Reflexive

How long a character can hold his breath is based predominantly on his Stamina, although other factors come into play as well.

During combat, a character can hold his breath for one turn per Stamina dot. The modifiers below can be applied to add or subtract rounds from the number of turns, but they cannot reduce the number of turns total below one.

Outside of combat, use the chart below as a base, moving up or down on the chart depending on any pertinent modifiers. The final level (after modifiers have been taken into consideration) is how long the character can hold his breath in a given situation.

Dots	Time
x	5 seconds
1	15 seconds
2	30 seconds
3	45 seconds
4	1 minute
5	2 minutes
6	3 minutes
7	5 minutes
8	7 minutes

Possible Modifiers: Submerged in water (above 65°F) (+2), unprepared/surprised (-1), submerged in cold water (below 60°F) (-1), was out of breath to start with (-1)

When a character has reached her normal limit, the player makes a Stamina Roll (without modifiers) to continue. Each success grants 30 extra seconds (or one extra turn per success in combat). When a character can no longer hold her breath, she begins to suffocate (or drown). She suffers one point of lethal damage per turn until she gets access to breathable air once more. If she loses all of her Health in this manner, she falls unconscious and suffers one aggravated wound per turn until she dies or is rescued (which, at that point, requires use of the Medicine Skill — see p. 53).

RESISTING POISON OR DISEASE

Dice Pool: Stamina

Action: Reflexive (potentially extended)

Illnesses and poisons affect people by overcoming their physical resistances to same. While adults may have the ability to turn their mental reserves (mind over matter) towards fighting these off, children live too much in the moment to be able to fight disease or toxins with anything other than their innate Stamina (and perhaps some applicable medicine or caregiving).

When exposed to an illness or poison, a character makes a reflexive Stamina roll (modified by any applicable equipment or penalties) to determine if he falls victim to the attacking force. If the roll is successful, he remains healthy. If the roll fails, however, the symptoms begin to kick in.

Once a character has become affected by an affliction, depending on the substance or illness, he may take damage only once, or be affected long term. Normally, poison inflicts damage once, while disease inflicts damage gradually as the illness runs its course. The full effects of poisons and disease are described in Chapter Six.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character's system is totally overwhelmed by the toxin or disease. All accumulated successes are lost and the Storyteller decides when — or if — your character ever recovers.

Failure: The disease or poison continues to ravage your character's body.

Success: In a simple reflexive roll, the toxin or illness is resisted. In an extended roll, some progress is made in resisting the effects of the affliction, but the symptoms persist until the required successes are accumulated, at which time the poison or ailment has run its course.

Exceptional Success: Your character develops immunity or makes a complete recovery.

Suggested Equipment: Healthy diet (+1), immunized against this particular illness (+5), antibiotics (against bacterial infections) (+3), purging (against ingested poisons) (+2), adult caregiver (+3), hospitalization/professional care (+5)

Possible Penalties: Injuries (-1 to -3), bad diet (-1), lack of sleep (-2 to -3), lack of medication (-2 to -4)

SOCIAL ATTRIBUTES

PRESENCE

"And if you buy three subscriptions, you get the fourth one free!" Ricky beamed at the old woman, holding out the brochure in front of him. It took everything he had to keep from turning his head to see where the other kids were. He only had to distract Mrs. O'Grady for a few minutes, just long enough for them to cut across her backyard and make it to the storm doors that led to the basement. They were counting on him.

"Aren't you the Murphy boy?" The old woman's rheumy eyes skimmed past the sales folder and settled on Ricky's clean-cut features. "You look just like your daddy."

"Yes, ma'am." They must have been there by now. It seemed like hours since he'd walked up onto the witch's front porch and rung the bell, although he knew that only seconds had passed.

"He was a good boy. You seem like a good boy, too. Now, tell me about those magazines again?"

As he stepped closer to show her the brochure, he could see the rest of the group cut across one corner of the yard, and for a second, he thought perhaps Mrs. O'Grady would look up and see them, too. But she seemed content to focus on him and, to a lesser extent, the magazine flyer. As the last of the other children disappeared from view around the back of the house, he breathed a sigh of relief.

Bearing. Aplomb. The ability to gain the attention of others through sheer force of personality. Presence is a gauge of how much of an impression your character makes on others. Physical appearance is only one part of Presence. Your character might be the prettiest thing in the world, or have a face only a mother could love, but how she comes across to others — attitude, bearing, confidence and style — determine her Presence. He might be a blustering bully no one thinks to say no to, or a milquetoast who is constantly ignored by those around him. In kids, Presence often translates to "cute." Not just physically cute, but the "I'm an adorable little kid, don't hurt me, give me what I want" ability that many kids can pull off without trying. High Presence children tend to be ringleaders, hall monitors, instigators or class presidents.

MANIPULATION

Mo looked at the cave opening and then back at the rest of the group. "My dad said there's mines all over this place. They used to dig up silver and gold and diamonds and stuff."

The group looked skeptical as they gathered around the hole in the side of the hill. It was pitch black inside and the cold wind that came up out of the tunnel smelled sickly sweet. About five feet from the opening, they stopped as one. Her little brother, Aaron, whined something about wanting to go home, and one of the other kids made vague noises about how she thought maybe Aaron had the right idea.

Mo looked at them, frowning. "What are you, a bunch of chickens?"

Joe, the oldest of the group, bristled.

"I'm not afraid. It's just...well, it would be too scary for the little kids."

"Then we'll go. Just you and me. They can wait here for us." Mo drew herself up to her full height, still a head shorter than the older boy. What she lacked in stature, though, she made up for in guts.

"We can't leave them alone." Joe looked over at Aaron, who was still whining, and the other three kids gathered around the youngest member of the group.

"They'll be fine. We'll just go a little way in and then come right back out. I just want to see what's in there."

"But —"

"Maybe there's gold...I mean, they might have missed some, right?"

Joe thought about the new video game he'd been saving for. "You think?"

Mo nodded enthusiastically. "Oh, sure."

"Well, maybe we could just go in a little way."

Mo smiled and trotted off into the darkness, her reluctant bodyguard following in her footsteps.

Charm. Charisma. Pizzazz. The ability to schmooze, wheedle and talk yourself into or out of anything. Manipulation is a measure of how well your character is able to influence others, appealing to their inherent needs, hopes and desires. Where Presence deals with social power, Manipulation is a measure of your character's social finesse. She might be able to talk others into doing her homework or chores, or be the child in the neighborhood all the parents go to when they want the truth (because she can't pull off a feasible lie). She may be a wallflower, or the most popular kid in class. High Manipulation kids are often the youngest in their family, the teacher's pet, class clowns or the ones who run a sideline business in bubble gum, forged hallway passes and other contraband.

COMPOSURE

Jackie slammed the door shut and threw the deadbolt and the chain-lock and then went to get a kitchen chair to prop under the door handle. When she was done, she turned back to the rest of the group.

Vali was crying, clinging to Mark like he was a life preserver. Neither one of them seemed hurt, though. Catie was a different matter. She sat cross-legged on the kitchen floor with her head in her hands. A steady drip of blood fell to the linoleum, creating a small but vivid pool.

"Catie? Catie, let me see your face." Jackie knelt beside her best friend, trying to get a look at her injury.

"What was that thing?"

Catie looked up and Jackie was relieved to see that the blood was coming from her nostrils, not a cut. She handed her some tissue.

"I don't know." Jackie didn't really want to think about it, but she couldn't help herself. Whatever it was had had claws and teeth like a big, ugly dog, but it was walking on two legs. She thought she might even have heard it speak.



"I don't know what it was," Jackie repeated. "But it doesn't matter. We're here and we're safe now. This is what we're going to do. First we're going to make sure all the doors and windows are locked, then we're going to call my mom. She'll know what to do."

A loud crash came from the front of the house, followed by the sound of breaking glass. Jackie got up and began pushing the heavy butcher block over in front of the door from the kitchen to the rest of the house. "Actually, we'll call my mom now."

Calm. Cool. Collected. The ability to remain unruffled when things get hairy. Composure is a measure of how well your character reacts when things get stressful, dangerous or scary. Your character might be the one who screams whenever someone says "Boo!", or the one who offers to lead the group out of the haunted house. He might be the first to check in the closets and under the beds when his sibling hears something stirring, or wet himself when the screen door slams unexpectedly. High Composure children often end up as leaders, protectors and caretakers, watching out for those who are more easily frightened. They can also end up being those who make (and take) the biggest, most scary dares; watch and read the spookiest movies and books without fear of nightmares; and generally have a reputation as the bravest kids in the group.

INITIATIVE

Derived Traits: Composure + Dexterity

Action: Reflexive

Your character's dots in Composure and Dexterity are combined to determine her Initiative score, which determines how quickly she reacts to a crisis situation, including combat. See pp. 79 for details on Initiative.

PLAY

Dice Pool: Composure + Wits + equipment

Action: Extended (four successes; one roll represents 30 minutes)

Play is more than entertainment and fun. It is a means of relaxation that helps to balance out daily stress and restore one's emotional center. Play allows children to shed the pressures put upon them by an often-demanding world and just be themselves, which in turn gives them additional strength when they have to go out and deal with the world again.

In terms of game systems, play acts as an emotional and mental fortification that allows one to deal with the trials and tribulations of life in the World of Darkness. Play enhances children with internal strength and flexibility that helps them deal with the often-horrifying things they experience or are called upon to do, without being permanently emotionally or mentally injured by them. In mechanical terms, it allows them to build up a bulwark against degeneration.

In order for play to protect a character against degeneration, he must spend at least 30 minutes of uninterrupted recreational time, during which he is unburdened by the weight of the world around him and can allow himself to just be a kid. Each roll represents one 30-minute play session, and play sessions can potentially run for several hours. Reading, playing games of all sorts, physical recreation (a game of hide-and-seek or Chinese freeze tag, for instance) and playing with toys all count as "play." Situational modi-

fiers, such as the character's mental and physical condition and environmental features or distractions, can apply. Once four successes have been accumulated, you gain a +1 bonus on the character's next degeneration roll. This bonus lasts until that degeneration roll is made, or your character sleeps, whichever comes first. Once he awakens, he must once again engage in a successful play session in order to reclaim the bonus. Once the degeneration roll has been made, he can play again to garner another bonus on his next degeneration roll, even if he hasn't yet slept.

The Pet Merit (p. 110) allows play to take place in a shorter amount of time.

Suggested Equipment: Playground equipment (+3), video games (+1), board or card games (+2), props for pretend-play (+1 to +3), art supplies (+3), playmates (+1 per other active participant)

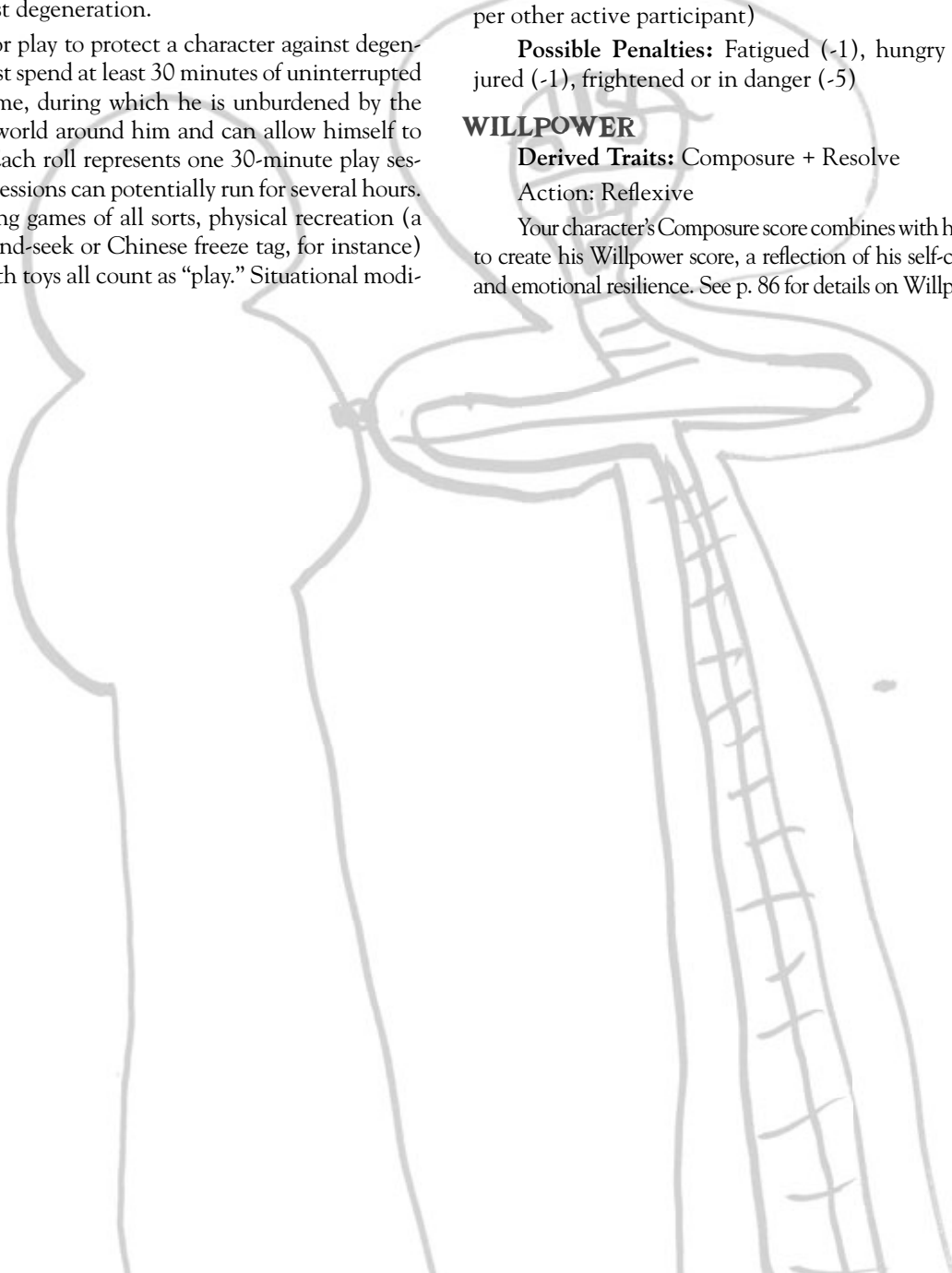
Possible Penalties: Fatigued (-1), hungry (-1), injured (-1), frightened or in danger (-5)

WILLPOWER

Derived Traits: Composure + Resolve

Action: Reflexive

Your character's Composure score combines with his Resolve to create his Willpower score, a reflection of his self-confidence and emotional resilience. See p. 86 for details on Willpower.





"You're not doing it right!" Tony blurted. "Don't try to get the crowbar under the screws! Don't you know anything?"

Owen stepped back from the shed's wooden door. The old padlock rapped dully against the rusting hasp, defying his efforts. He turned, brandishing the small crowbar at his best friend. "What the crap do you want from me?" he said nervously. "I've never broken into a building before!"

Tony snorted in disgust. "Don't you ever watch TV? Geez," he said, shaking his head. "Give me that. You watch the house and let me try."

Fuming, Owen handed the crowbar over and stepped aside. Off in the distance, crows rose squawking from the cornfield stretching in front of the shed. The old farmhouse loomed ominously a few hundred yards to the east, half hidden behind a withered old apple tree. An old tire swing hung from one of its branches, twisting slowly in the breeze. Nothing stirred in the farmyard, but Owen couldn't shake the feeling that something was watching them from the house's dark windows.

Their bikes were hidden near the cornstalks, just a few dozen feet away. If anyone came out of the house, they could be long gone before anyone reached the shed. Or so Owen hoped. "Did I mention I've got a bad feeling about this?" he said.

"Only about a few million times," Tony muttered as he slid the crowbar underneath the hasp and pulled for all he was worth. "You think I'm doing this at night, you're crazy," he said through gritted teeth. "That's when they come out here to work their spells."

Owen shook his head in exasperation. "You are such a freak. Where do you learn about all this stuff?"

"The internet's not just about WoW and porn," Tony grunted. He paused, breathing hard. "Damn. This thing's stronger than it looks. Give me a hand."

Reluctantly, Owen turned away from the farmhouse and took hold of the crowbar. The two boys counted silently to three and heaved. For a moment, nothing happened then they heard the sound of cracking wood, and the hasp tore free from the doorframe. Owen staggered backwards and Tony hit the ground hard.

The 10-year-old's tanned face split in a wide grin. "That's more like it!" he said, and bounced quickly to his feet. "Now let's see what they're trying to hide!"

Owen's heart sank as he saw the splintered doorframe and the pieces of the hasp lying on the ground. "Oh, this is so bad," he moaned. "We're gonna get caught for sure."

But Tony was already pulling the door wide open. He took a step across the threshold and froze. "I knew it," he said.

Despite his fear, curiosity got the better of Owen. He joined Tony at the doorway and stared inside. The shed, easily large enough to hold a tractor, was completely empty except for a complicated, circular symbol painted in red on the concrete floor.

Distantly, Owen heard the faint bang of a screen door and the frenzied barking of dogs. Big dogs. "Oh, crap!" he said, glancing back in the direction of the farmhouse. "We've got to get out of here!"

"Not yet!" Tony said, dashing into the shed. He fished his cell phone out of his pants and held it over the symbol. "I've got to get a picture. Give me just a minute!"

But Owen was gone, running for his bike like the Devil himself was on his heels.

Chapter Three: Skills

Duane rubbed his nose and adjusted his glasses. "I agree that something's strange about that school. I'll research it. Get some background information. Maybe I can dig up something on Roon and the others, too."

"Roon's a vampire," said Harlen, flicking away the last few drops and zipping up. "Van Syke's a werewolf."

"What's old Double-Butt?" asked Lawrence.

"She's an old bitch who gives too much homework."

**— Dan Simmons,
*Summer of Night***

A child's Attributes measure her innate physical, mental and social qualities — how strong she is, how quickly she thinks on her feet, and how well she interacts with other people. The different ways in which a kid can apply these Attributes are determined by his Skills. A child's Skills reflect the (relatively limited) education and training he's acquired thus far in life, and are a reflection of his origins and interests. Skills are typically acquired in school, in organized extracurricular activities, at jobs outside of school, from parents or family members, or just out in the world.

Like Attributes, Skills are broken down into three general categories: Mental, Physical and Social. A character's initial Skills are purchased during character creation and are prioritized just as Attributes are, with a set number of points to allocate among primary Skills, fewer points to allocate among secondary Skills, and the least number of points to allocate among tertiary Skills. Note, however, that you do not have to use the same prioritization for Skills as for Attributes; a character might be naturally smart (Mental Attributes are primary) but have little in the way of formal education (Mental Skills secondary or tertiary). Skill dots can then be increased further using experience points (both at the conclusion of character creation, if the Storyteller allows it, and later during play). New Skills can be purchased during a chronicle, at the player's discretion.

KIDS AND STARTING SKILLS

Characters in **World of Darkness: Innocents** have a variable number of Skill dots, depending on their ages. Also, child characters have fewer skill points than adult characters do.

The Storyteller might prefer to start all kids on an equal footing, even if there is a disparity in the kids' ages. This is fine. Give all the kids a spread of X in their primary, Y in secondary and Z in their tertiary category, regardless of their age. Maybe the younger ones are exceptional for their age. This is especially appropriate if all the kids are within a year or two of the same age, or are siblings and cousins.

SKILL SPECIALTIES

Skills are broad. The Crafts and Study Skills alone represent dozens of different individual areas of expertise. A character with dots in the Computer skill can write software, hack a network, or rebuild a server from scratch, and Computer is a comparatively narrow skill.

You may choose to buy one or more Specialties for your character. A Specialty provides specific expertise in a single aspect of the Skill to which it applies. In game terms, that means you gain +1 die to any roll using that Skill if your Specialty applies. If your character has Study 2 with a Specialty in Bugs, you would roll three dice (plus the relevant Attribute) for him to identify a creepy-looking insect crawling on his wall. Your character may have multiple Specialties in a single Skill. You must have at least one dot in a Skill to have a Specialty.

A child may start with one, two or three Specialties, depending on her age (older kids have learned more, and may have focused their learning more as well). You may spend experience points to purchase Specialties after the chronicle begins (Specialties cost three experience points apiece; see p. 185 for more on experience points).

SKILL DOTS BY AGE

Age	Points in Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Specialties
7	6	4	2	1
8	7	4	2	1
9	7	4	3	1
10	8	5	3	2
11	8	5	3	2
12	9	5	3	2
(teen)	10	6	4	2
(adult)	11	7	4	3

All the Skills listed in this chapter provide several examples of Specialties. You are welcome to devise your own, with Storyteller approval. Keep them relatively specific, roughly as specific as the Specialties listed. A Weaponry Specialty that reads “only against enemies” is inappropriate, even though there might be a few minor occasions where the Specialty wouldn’t apply. A better option might be “Defensive Strike,” meaning that you get the bonus when the character is trying to drive an opponent away rather than when she attacks.

SKILL TASKS

A Skill task describes a specific application of a Skill. Performing first aid, for instance, is a Medicine Skill task. Skill tasks combine an Attribute with the Skill, plus any modifiers for equipment, minus any situational modifiers, to form a dice pool. Climbing a tree, for instance, is a Skill task combining Dexterity + Athletics + equipment, such as a pair of shoes suited for the task, minus penalties, such as the bark of the tree being wet from a recent rainstorm. Many Skills in this chapter have one or more tasks associated with them that suggest different ways in which the traits can be applied in various situations. These are not the only ways those Skills can be used. Use them as guidelines for determining other Skill tasks that arise in your stories.

TOOLS

Having the proper equipment for a task can often mean the difference between success and failure. In addition to situational modifiers and Specialties, Skill rolls gain bonus dice if your character uses high-quality or specialized equipment when performing a task. For example, a musical prodigy with an extremely high-quality violin can create music that brings tears to the eyes of even the most hardened critics. See Equipment in Chapter Six for more information on the gear available to your character. Each task presented in this chapter lists a variety of tools that could provide bonus dice — or penalties — to your Skill roll. These lists are not exhaustive, and players are

SKILL DOTS

Skills are rated from one to five. A higher number of dots represent a higher proficiency with the given skills. For a child to have more than three dots in any Skill, he requires the Prodigy merit (see p. 101, 104, 111). Like Attributes, the scale is different for kids versus adults.

- Novice. Typical kid who has tried out the activity more than a few times.
- Practitioner. The character has been taking classes in this Skill for a few years and knows a few tricks, or has a great deal of natural ability and some strong models to imitate.
- Professional. A kid who has practiced it for years and has a great knack for it.
- Expert. Rare in children, this indicates a surprising degree of natural talent and long hours of practice.
- Master. Unheard of in children who aren’t genius prodigies.

encouraged to think of other objects that could grant bonuses or penalties.

Your character may employ other types of tools or equipment to assist in performing a task, but the Storyteller is the final arbiter on what bonus, if any, gear provides. Poor-quality tools can even make a task more difficult to perform, by reducing your dice pool, so choose wisely. The lack of any useful equipment can simply render a task impossible — a 10-year-old child of a mechanic might know how to change a car’s oil, but he can’t do it without a screwdriver, a pan and some fresh oil.

TOOL USE

It’s not enough to *have* the tools; you have to know what to do with them. Any kid can pick up a rock and break a window, but if the kid wants to open a window with a credit card, he needs to know how to go about

it. This requires life experience that many children don't have. Deciding exactly what your character knows is probably more work than you want to do. If a situation comes up in play in which your character has access to tools that would help him perform a task, but the Storyteller questions whether he would know what to do with them, you can roll Intelligence + [the relevant Skill].

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character not only doesn't know what he's doing, but he uses the tools in exactly the wrong way. Apply the unskilled penalty to the roll, even if the character has dots in the relevant Skill.

Failure: The character does not know what to do and receives no bonus from the tools.

Success: The character saw it done once, or he's had some instruction and can gain the full bonus from the equipment.

Exceptional Success: The character has incredible beginner's luck, or has been doing stuff like this since he could walk. Apply an additional +1 bonus to the Skill task; the character finds his "groove."

MENTAL SKILLS

Mental Skills are applications of a character's intuition, knowledge and experience. Mental Skill tasks include passing a midterm exam, building a birdhouse or figuring out what's different about your room today. These Skills are almost entirely gained from reading or schooling. Kids with

high Mental Skills may be teacher's pets or they may just be so naturally hungry for knowledge that they absorb every fact they bump into. Mental Skill tasks are generally associated with Mental Attributes, but can also be paired with Physical Attributes for hands-on applications such as repair (Dexterity + Crafts) or setting a splint on a broken bone while camping (Dexterity + Medicine).

Untrained Skill Use: If your character doesn't have the necessary Mental Skill required for an action, she can still make the attempt. Roll her Attribute alone, but with a -3 penalty.

COMPUTER

The Internet was gone, too.

"Check the cable from the router to the wall, guys," Brian said, but he knew as he spoke that the Internet was just as empty as the rest of the world.

"The cable's connected, you dumb-ass," Nelson said. Nelson's emo-boy haircut looked pretty hilarious after a night in a sleeping bag, but Brian couldn't bring himself to laugh.

"This doesn't make any sense," Will said. "No people, no cars going by, nothing on TV, and now the Internet's gone. Where the hell is everything?" He paused for a second. "Did you try rebooting?"

Children possessing this Skill can operate a computer, whether a server, desktop, laptop or handheld. At high levels (3 or more), a kid can write his own computer programs. Prodigies with high levels in this Skill are familiar



with a variety of programming languages and operating systems. This skill is not needed to operate “ordinary” consumer electronics.

The Computer skill does not apply to manually fixing or building machines, only to operating them. Construction and repair is the province of the Crafts Skill (see below). This skill is also not used for Internet research — use the Study skill for that.

Possessed by: Rich kids, suburban kids, nerdy hacker kids, PC gamers

Specialties: Artificial Intelligence, Hacking, Programming, Internet, Music and Video, Graphics, Networking

General Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Blue screen of death — your computer has crashed unexpectedly. You have probably lost some data or work; sufficiently catastrophic failures may even lead to damage to hardware. Hope you had backups!

Failure: The program you wrote does not function correctly, or your query provides no useful results (either you got nothing good, or you got too much data to sift through easily).

Success: Your program runs correctly; your query returns useful data.

Exceptional Success: Your program runs faster and better than it ought to — additional benefits may accrue at the Storyteller’s discretion.

HACKING

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Computer + equipment versus Intelligence + Computer + equipment

Action: Extended and contested (5–10+ successes; each roll represents 30 minutes of hacking)

A hacker generally operates in one of two situations. In the first case, he just generally keeps his eyes open for vulnerable networks and computers — and hopes to get something valuable or cool from a machine he can compromise. In the second case, he is interested in access to a particular computer, generally to get specific data from that computer.

Botnets

A hacker who is interested in trolling the Internet for susceptible machines can set himself up a “botnet” by taking over a group of vulnerable computers. Typically, these are unprotected personal computers running unpatched older versions of popular operating systems. A botnet can be set up with an extended Intelligence + Computer + equipment roll. Every five successes earned give the hacker a +1 equipment modifier to penetrate secure systems, which we’ll talk about shortly. The maximum modifier the hacker can gain from a botnet is +4. The hacker can split up the time he spends setting up a botnet — work half an hour here, two hours there, and so on. The botnet degrades slowly as people fix or remove vulnerable computers from it. Every week, the hacker’s botnet loses one die of bonus, and he must work as above to reestablish that bonus.

A functional botnet alerts the hacker when it finds a vulnerable network. This happens variously, at the Storyteller’s discretion. The hacker can then use any vulnerabilities to access those remote machines with an Intelligence + Computer + equipment roll. Generally speaking, the number of successes necessary to access any given machine is equal to its owner’s Intelligence + Computer skill, plus equipment bonuses for security software (see below). Vulnerable machines only rarely have items of monetary value; more often, they have things that the hacker finds cool, that he might earn some prestige with among his peers. A vulnerable machine may have credit card numbers, social security numbers, and bank account numbers — a hacker can use Streetwise to earn some money from these things directly.

Targeted Access Attempts

Access to a specific computer is more difficult for the hacker to acquire. The machine may have a security vulnerability — the hacker can make an extended Intelligence + Computer + equipment check to discover that (and he can apply his botnet bonus to roll — “rattling the doorknobs” of the machine in question with the help of his network). The required number of successes to detect the presence of a vulnerability is, as above, its owner’s Intelligence + Computer + equipment bonus. If it does have a security vulnerability, then a standard Intelligence + Computer + equipment roll allows access.

More often, the secure machine is up to date. If the hacker determines that the machine does not have a security vulnerability, he’ll have to create one. He might compromise another machine on the same network and watch connections to the target, or he might send email virus spam to users of the target machine.

Either of those two mechanisms uses the same game mechanic: the hacker rolls Intelligence + Computer + equipment as an extended action, with a required number of successes of the target computer’s Intelligence + Computer + equipment. Once that roll succeeds, the hacker has access to the machine.

Wily hackers may realize that the easiest and fastest way to access a target machine is through social engineering — calling up a user and just *asking* for a password, for instance. This is an application of the Subterfuge Skill, though, and not Computer at all.

Defense

The system administrator has a chance to notice the hacker’s activity. Every time a hacker accesses a compromised machine, a dramatic failure notifies the system administrator that something screwy is going on. Beyond that, every day a machine is compromised, the system administrator gets a reflexive Intelligence + Computer roll to notice that something isn’t right (this may also reflect the administrator installing standard security patches).

If the system administrator notices the compromise, the compromise is over: the admin pulls the machine off the network, eliminates the vulnerability, or alerts the police or FBI. Or maybe does all three!

WHAT ABOUT THE SYSTEM ADMINISTRATOR?

The truth is that botnets try to penetrate networks every hour of every day. Once a certain level of security is set up, the average system administrator doesn't prowl her networks looking for access attempts. She only notices hackers who cause a noteworthy load on a computer in her domain. If a machine starts acting screwy or falls under a heavy load, she'll notice. If a user calls up to complain about a machine, she'll notice. A hacker who uses discretion and stealth may get in and out of a vulnerable network with the system administrator being none the wiser.

The above, though, is not the case for paranoid institutions. Government computers, defense contractors and security providers operate under a different paradigm. In that case, security is a great deal more active. Networks are instrumented more closely, machines are kept up to date with security patches, and administrators are far more aware of specific penetration attempts. As such, a system administrator may make network configuration changes on the fly — with a successful extended Intelligence + Computer + equipment roll (each roll requires five minutes of work) with successes in excess of the hacker's Intelligence + Computer + equipment dice pool, the system administrator may blow away all of the hacker's successes thus far, resetting his total to zero.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: A dramatic failure on the part of the hacker indicates that the network administrators notice his access to the network. He is kicked out of the network and can't access it again for 24 hours. In some cases, this may also result in the system administrators of the network notifying law enforcement authorities of the character's activities.

Failure: The hacker accumulates no successes in his hacking attempt, but may continue to work.

Success: The hacker accumulates successes toward his goal.

Exceptional Success: The hacker accumulates considerable successes toward his goal. If he achieves his goal with five more than the required number of successes, he has covered his tracks extremely well and can leave himself a "back door" into this particular system. All that he needs to hack into this system again is a standard Intelligence + Computer roll.

Suggested Equipment: High-performance computer (+1 to +3), broadband Internet access (+1), disk of scripts (+2), system passwords (+3), botnet (+1 to +4)

Possible Penalties: Using a public computer (-1), outdated computer system (-2), slow Internet connection (-3)

CRAFTS

"He's in! He's in! Let the rope go, he's stuck in the cage!"

Emily let the rope go and was amazed to see Sam's pulley actually work — the cage door dropped, trapping whatever was inside. She heard growling in there, but whatever it was could also be heard crunching down Beauty's dog food.

Maggie was jumping up and down, clapping, next to her.

"We got her! Beauty is back! Yay!" She bounced closer to the cage, but Sam took two fast steps forward and put himself between little Maggie and the cage.

"That's not Beauty. It's too big."

Crafts represents a character's schoolwork and extracurricular practice in creating works of physical art or construction with his hands, from paintings to small gas engines and toy robots.

Kids possessing this Skill typically have the knowledge, but not necessarily the tools or facilities, to make

use of their capabilities. A child might have his own (real) toolset, but a child's toolset will not suffice for complex or dangerous tasks. A character might have learned how to reassemble the lawn mower's engine, but he's got to get into the garage and use adult tools when Mom and Dad aren't paying attention if he wants to do it.

Crafting a piece of art or repairing an object is almost always an extended action, with the length of time and number of successes required determined by the complexity of the piece. The Storyteller has the final say on the time required and the number of successes needed for a particular item.

Possessed by: Farm kids, mechanically inclined kids, robotics nerds, children of mechanics, artistically inclined kids

Specialties: Automobiles, Jury-Rigging, Knitting, Sculpting, Sewing, Woodworking

General Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character makes a horrible mistake in creating the piece, ruining it in the process. The glue dries on a badly assembled model, or he disastrously wires a circuit. He must begin the job from scratch.

Failure: Your character makes no progress in creating the item in question.

Success: Your character makes progress in crafting the piece (apply successes rolled toward the total needed).

Exceptional Success: Your character makes substantial progress in crafting the piece — a sudden burst of inspiration or a breakthrough speeds up the process dramatically (apply successes rolled toward the total needed).

CREATE ART

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Crafts + equipment

Action: Extended (4–15+ successes; one roll represents 30 minutes of work)

Your character sets out to create a piece of art, whether knitting a pair of socks or painting a still life in art class. Small, simple items require fewer successes than large or intricate works, which might require 15 or more successes.

Creating works that focus directly on communication, like poems, songs, or novels, uses the Expression skill (see p. 69).



Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: You ruin whatever work of art you set out to create. You may be able to salvage some materials, but you lose all successes; you have to start over.

Failure: You make no progress toward completion of your work.

Success: You make progress toward completion.

Exceptional Success: You make a great deal of progress toward completion. If your final roll puts you five or more successes over the target, you create a work of great quality that may be noticed as such by experts in the field.

Suggested Equipment: Kids' art set (+0 dice), high-grade tools (+1), high-quality raw materials (+1), high-tech tools (+2), extensive reference library (+2), full studio (+3)

Possible Penalties: Lousy, cheap, or toy tools (-1), poor-quality materials (-1), lack of reference materials (-1), improvised work area (-1)

REPAIR ITEM

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Crafts + equipment

Action: Extended (4–10 successes; one roll equals 30 minutes of work)

Repairing a damaged item is an extended action requiring a number of successes, depending on the extent of the repairs and the difficulty of the job. Changing the oil in an ATV might require only four successes. Getting Grandpa's old roadster to start again after 20 years in the garage could require 15 or more. Generally, one success is required on an extended roll for every point of damage the object's Structure has taken (see Objects, p. 129).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only does the character make no progress, but she actively makes things worse. The object takes one point of Structure damage (or, if damage isn't being tracked in points, the number of accumulated successes resets to zero).

Failure: The character makes no progress with fixing the item.

Success: The character progresses with the repairs.

Exceptional Success: The character makes great progress with the repairs.

Suggested Equipment: High-grade tools (+1), high-quality materials (+1), high-tech tools (+2), specialized tools for the task (+2), extensive reference library (+2), garage (+3)

Possible Penalties: Kids' tools (-1), poor-quality materials (-1), lack of reference library (-1), improvised work area (-1)

JURY-RIG A DEVICE

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Crafts + equipment

Action: Extended (4–10 successes needed)

The character wants to put together a relatively simple mechanical device. Examples include an animal trap, a noisemaker to warn characters when a door is opened, or even a simple machine like a lever or pulley to help move large objects. This task might also be used to rig a pitfall or other trap for an adult, large animal, or monster.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The device is apparently complete and functions correctly, but has no Durability. It ceases working if it takes one point of Structure damage (see Breaking Objects, p. 131).

Failure: You accumulate no successes toward completing the device.

Success: You progress toward completion of the device.

Exceptional Success: You make dramatic success toward completing your work.

Suggested Equipment: Toolbox (+1), workshop (+2), scrapyards (+2)

Possible Penalties: Wilderness (-1), barren area (-2)

INVESTIGATION

Kenny and Tommy tiptoed around the school's boiler room as stealthily as they could. It was still dark. School wouldn't start for another three hours, Mr. Hall the custodian was in the hospital, and they were sure they wouldn't be seen. Unless there was someone in the school building already — someone keeping an eye out for nosy kids.

"There," Kenny whispered. "Look at all those tools on the floor. They didn't just fall there — they were knocked down. Like somebody had a fight in here."

"Somebody strong," Tommy added, pointing at a head-shaped hole in the plywood wall.

"Mr. Hall didn't fall down in here. Somebody beat the hell out of him."

Investigation is the art and science of solving mysteries, examining seemingly disparate evidence to find a connection, answering riddles and overcoming paradoxes. It not only allows your character to get into the head of a killer to grasp his motives or plans, but it allows her to look beyond the mundane world to guess at answers to mysterious problems, or to have a "eureka" moment that offers insight into baffling circumstances. Your character might realize that all murder victims have the same digits jumbled in their phone numbers, she might interpret a dream that has striking similarities to events in the real world, or she could recognize why an intruder took the time to paint a room red.

Investigation is different from the Perception Attribute task detailed on p. 34. Perception (Wits + Composure or Wits + another Skill) is applicable when a character could spot something unusual or amiss when she isn't actually looking for it. A player makes Investigation rolls when a character *actively* studies a situation. Dots in Investigation don't give a character sudden insight or capability in the realms of other Skills, however. She can't identify changing brushstrokes in a painting, for example. That would be the realm of Study or Crafts. But she might identify how the placement of paintings throughout a house creates a pattern and imparts a message

Possessed by: Nosy kids, amateur detectives, crime enthusiasts

Specialties: Artifacts, Body Language, Crime Scenes, Cryptography, Dreams, Puzzles, Riddles, Scientific Experiments

General Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: You draw the wrong conclusion from the crime scene, or you focus on the wrong details.

Failure: You investigate the area, but you can't find the crucial detail that you need to solve the mystery.

Success: One or more critical clues are found. The answer to the puzzle becomes more obvious.

Exceptional Success: You find one or more critical clues, and you may also find an obscure bit of knowledge that ties this mystery into the broader context of the ongoing story.

EXAMINE A CRIME SCENE

Dice Pool: Wits + Investigation + equipment

Action: Extended (3–10+ successes; one roll represents 10 minutes of activity)

Examining a crime scene involves studying evidence and clues to piece together useful facts about events, perpetrators or a mystery. Roll Wits + Investigation. Each roll represents 10 minutes of observation and interpretation, and possibly referencing databases and calling expert adults or knowledgeable kids. Depending on the size of the crime scene and the complexity and obscurity of details, the task could demand anywhere from three to 10 successes (or more) for your character to make sense of things.

For most kids, simply gaining access to a crime scene will be a difficult social task, or it will have to be done after the police have left, or as part of an elaborate ruse.

Unlike many tasks, investigating a crime scene isn't an all-or-nothing effort. If your character has to abandon the project before it's completed, he can still come away with some useful information, depending on the number of successes earned. The Storyteller should share information each time a roll yields a success, starting with the most obvious facts and revealing increasingly obscure bits as the investigation continues. At no time should the player know how many successes are needed to complete the analysis — he should always wonder whether his character should invest a little more time and dig deeper. Storytellers may choose to make these rolls for players in secret to add uncertainty and suspense.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character makes a crucial mistake in understanding what went on at the scene. Maybe she assumes there was only one criminal when there were two. Accumulated successes are lost in favor of this new (wrong) theory.

Failure: Your character cannot quite figure out what went on here. No successes are gained on this roll, but you may keep rolling.

Success: You accumulate successes and may learn a pertinent fact or two as you do so.

Exceptional Success: You gather a critical clue and greatly expand your understanding of what went on at the crime scene.

Suggested Equipment: Forensic kit (+1), unrestricted access to the scene (+2), access to a good library or knowledgeable adult (+3)

Possible Penalties: Weather obscures scene (-1 to -3), scene has been compromised by intruders (-1 to -5), lack of equipment (-2)

MEDICINE

Nelson limped to Brian's back porch. He was heavily favoring his left ankle; his left foot dangled and he didn't put any weight on it at all.

"Oh, man, I think I sprained it," he said.

"Shit," Brian said.

"Hang on," Will said. "Did you hear a pop or snap when you fell?"

"No," Nelson said.

"Let me see it," Will said. Nelson obliged him, gingerly taking his shoe and sock off. "It doesn't look too swollen, either. I don't think you sprained it. But we should get some ice on it."

Brian stood up to go into the kitchen. "Hey, how do you know this shit, anyway?"

Will gently moved Nelson's foot around. "I sprained my wrist once and my knee once last winter playing hockey. I was a mess."

The Medicine Skill reflects a child's training and expertise in human physiology and how to treat injuries and illness. This skill is necessarily limited by a child's lack of exposure to formal training in medicine. No child will serve as a doctor or nurse. However, a child may well have picked up basic medical facts from parents, reading material, or documentary TV.

The trait represents knowledge of human anatomy and basic medical treatments. Characters with a low level in this Skill (1 to 2) often possess only rudimentary first-aid training, while adults with high levels (3+) are probably physicians or surgeons.

Possessed by: Doctors' kids, EMT junior auxiliary, student athletes, injury-prone kids

Specialties: Emergency Care, Illness, Pharmaceuticals, Physical Therapy

General Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: You make the victim's medical condition worse — you tilt the head of a neck-injury victim, or encourage a kid with a nosebleed to lean his head back. This causes an additional point of bashing damage to the target.

Failure: You can't help the victim, but you don't make him any worse, either.

Success: You are able to help the victim — stabilize his injuries or even improve his situation a little bit.

Exceptional Success: You are able to significantly improve the victim's medical situation, and decrease his recovery time.

FIRST AID

Dice Pool: (Dexterity or Intelligence) + Medicine + equipment

Action: Extended, one success per wound level is needed. One roll can be made per minute (first aid).

Note: Rules are not provided here for long-term care, given the fact that few children this side of a late-80s TV show can actually provide such care. In brief,

long-term care downgrades damage from aggravated to lethal, and then from lethal to bashing, at one point of damage per day (given adequate supplies). If a child is sick, rather than injured, hospital care adds dice to the child's attempts to shake off the disease (see Resisting Disease, p. 155). Note that doctors and hospitals don't heal; they facilitate the body's own healing.

See also States of Being in Chapter Six.

For first aid, roll Dexterity + Medicine. A character who is dying is stabilized if this roll is successful, but has only a number of minutes equal to the successes on the roll before she starts dying again. The character administering first aid can continue to work on the injured character. The player rolls Dexterity + Medicine once per minute, and needs to accumulate a number of successes equal to the wounds the injured character has suffered (usually this means successes equal to the character's total Health). Once this total is reached, the character is stable for the rest of the scene, which, hopefully, is enough time to get her to safety. If not, the processes must be repeated when the next scene begins.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character's efforts make the patient's condition worse instead of better. The patient loses one Health point to bashing damage and all your character's accumulated successes are lost. He must start over from scratch. If the subject is bleeding to death, an extra wound turns from lethal to aggravated, in addition to the wound lost for the minute that is wasted.

Failure: Your character makes no progress in alleviating the patient's injuries. If the subject is bleeding to death, a wound turns from lethal to aggravated over the course of the wasted minute.

Success: Your character makes progress in alleviating the patient's injuries. Until you succeed on the initial roll required to stop a patient from bleeding to death, one more of his wounds turns from lethal to aggravated per minute.

Exceptional Success: Your character makes significant progress toward alleviating the patient's injuries.

Suggested Equipment: Set of surgeon's tools (scalpels, retractors, clamps, etc., +1), field surgical kit (+1), military surgical kit (+2)

Possible Penalties: Lack of tools (-1 to -4), environmental conditions (darkness, rain, cold, etc., -2), distraction due to noise (-1), imminent danger (-4)

OCCULT

"Regina, this is scary stuff. Do you really think we can make her go away with that prayer?"

"It's not a prayer, Tamika, it's an exorcism. And I don't know that it'll work. It's just the only thing I can think of to do. We have all the things that the movies say you need — except for a priest, I guess. We have holy water, we have a cross, we have salt, we even have grass from her gravesite."

"Do you think it's going to work?" Dawn asked in a very small voice. "I don't want to make her mad."

“She’s already mad. We just have to give her permission to leave. I think.”

The Occult Skill reflects a character’s knowledge and experience with the world’s various legends and lore about the supernatural. A character with this Skill not only knows the theories, myths and legends of the occult, but can sometimes discern “fact” from rumor. Characters may come by this Skill in a variety of ways, from strange library books to learning legends and myths from the lips of superstitious family members. Immigrant grandmothers seem to be especially good for those sorts of legends.

Possessed by: Nerds, gamers, spooky kids, goths, Wiccans, obsessive fringe religious families

Specialties: A Specific Culture’s Beliefs, Ghosts, Improvised Exorcism, Magic, Monsters, Religious Rituals, Superstitions, Witchcraft

General Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character’s information is dangerously wrong. An exorcism intended for ghosts enrages the ghost, or a sigil that is meant to bring good luck instead brings bad luck.

Failure: Your character’s information is harmless but also useless.

Success: Your character can find a relevant fact to bring to bear on the situation.

Exceptional Success: Your character finds a pertinent and useful fact to bring to bear. This may provide an opportunity for characters to regain Willpower when fighting a mystical creature, or provide specific dice pool penalties based on the creature’s weaknesses.

POLITICS

Kenny leaned against the locker next to Maria’s, then looked around conspiratorially.

“I’m telling you, Hoover is getting seriously weird. Today he said ‘sacrifice your family pet’ instead of ‘do your homework.’”

Maria smirked. “He probably thought he was being hilarious.”

“No, Maria, I think he’s totally deranged. He seemed serious. We should talk to Dr. Walter.”

“What is the principal going to do? A couple of kids come to her and say that the Social Studies teacher has gone crazy? Come on, Hoover’s been at the school since my mom was a kid. He has tenure or something. The district can’t fire him for a couple of weird comments. There’s a whole process they have to go through.”

“What should we do, then?”

Maria thought about it. Her dad would know what to do. He was a lawyer, and he took hundreds of pages of notes all the time.

“Keep notes,” she said. “Every time he does something ‘deranged,’ write it down, write down what he said and when he said it. That way, if things get really weird, you have some evidence.”

Kenny sighed. “I’m going to need a new notebook.”

Kids possessing this Skill know how to make friends and influence people — large groups of people. They

may not be enormous fun one on one, but give them a group and they are in their element. They are also good at school elections, and they know how to navigate bureaucracies. They have a good idea of which government agency would be in charge of a given activity, and they may even know who to call in a given situation to get something done. Kids with this skill do tend to be more aware of government affairs and current events than the average kid might.

Socially, your character keeps track of who’s in power and how she got there, along with her potential rivals. He has a grasp of the issues of the moment and how they affect the social scene, and knows which kids will do you a favor in return for a specific kind of candy bar.

Possessed by: Student council, strivers, lawyers’ kids, popular clique kids, gang members

Specialties: School Administration, City Politics, School Cliques, Local Gangs, National Politics.

General Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: You misinterpret the local political situation, to your detriment. You buddy up to the outcast or show disrespect to a queen bee. Your Politics and Socialize rolls suffer a -1 penalty for the next day.

Failure: You can’t recall the political fact you’re looking for, or you are stymied as you attempt to navigate the bureaucracy.

Success: You can assess the political situation correctly, or you get the assistance you need from the bureaucracy — on the bureaucracy’s timetable.

Exceptional Success: Not only do you get the help you need from a bureaucracy, but your charm and panache get you the help you need in half the usual time or less.

STUDY

Regina pulled Gruesome Murders and Ghastly Crimes down off the shelf. Mrs. Kinsley, the librarian, would take the book away from Regina as soon as she noticed such an “inappropriate” book in the hands of a fifth-grader, but right now Mrs. Kinsley had her hands full with Reynaldo, the hyper kid from up the block. Regina had a few minutes — longer if she could hide somewhere.

Instead she settled in at a nearby table. She flipped to the index. Hauntings, 123, 247–8. Regina skimmed the first listing, the story of a dive bar on 166th Street that supposedly still bled in the corner where a notorious mobster was shot in the 1920s — irrelevant — and jumped to the second listing.

“Daniel Petrov, a Russian Jewish immigrant, was accused of strangling his wife, Elena, and breaking her neck on their wedding night in June 1958. Although he insisted that their apartment had been broken into, police found no evidence of a break-in and had only Petrov’s insistence. Other residents of the building overheard an argument between Petrov and Elena that night, leading to speculation that Daniel might have discovered that Elena was not a virgin.”

Regina had only a vague understanding of how that last part would work, but this fit with the information the other

kids in the building had found. A woman in white...hand-prints on her neck...weeping and murmuring in a strange language...

Regina felt a slim hand on her shoulder and nearly leapt from her chair. The stern face of Mrs. Kinsley looked down. With her other hand, the librarian reached for Regina's book.

Study represents a character's general knowledge of school subjects — science, the arts and humanities. Or, put another way, reading, writing and arithmetic. Kids with high scores in Study tend to get good grades — or if they don't, it's because they skip assignments or misbehave in class, rather than due to their ignorance. Kids with low skills in Study may simply be young, have no interest in “book learning,” or live in an environment that is not conducive to reading and schoolwork.

This skill includes biology, chemistry, geology and even meteorology and physics. Science-oriented Study skill tasks may include experimentation, in which case they may call for Dexterity or Stamina as the controlling Attribute. For the most part, however, Study relates to learning and knowledge, rather than applied knowledge (which should use Crafts instead).

Possessed by: Children of professors, nerds, teacher's pets, kids who hang out at libraries, students

Specialties: Art, Biology, Chemistry, English, Experimentation, Geology, History, Physics, Research

General Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character misses or misremembers a critical fact, and as a result is led to the wrong conclusions. A science student might believe that the best way to preserve a sample of sodium is to immerse it in water — which would have explosive consequences! The character might also misread the instructions on a test, providing answers that are correct but don't answer the questions asked. Alternately, the character might place too much faith in an unreliable piece of reference material in a library or on the Internet.

Failure: The character's studies lead nowhere: either she cannot remember the information she needs, or she cannot find the correct reference materials to solve the problem at hand.

Success: The character can quickly remember or find the needed information.

Exceptional Success: The character can quickly recall relevant information and find reference materials that point out obscure data relevant to the matter at hand.

RESEARCH

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Study + equipment

Action: Extended (3–10 successes; each roll represents 30 minutes of research)

Researching information is a straightforward task that usually involves querying libraries and online data sources. Roll Intelligence + Study + equipment. The number of successes required depends on the complexity and/or obscurity of the desired information. A simple set

of facts might demand three successes to obtain, while a little known or difficult-to-find reference might demand 10 or more successes to uncover. Depending on the quality of the libraries or online data sources available, the Storyteller may grant a +1 or higher modifier to task rolls.

The Storyteller may choose to give out information gradually — perhaps the researcher learns a few easy, publicly known facts at three successes, obscure but fascinating facts at five successes, and a bizarre occult secret at 10 successes. In this way, a character stuck doing a lengthy research task can periodically participate in the ongoing story while still making progress.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character finds incorrect but plausible information that causes her to discard previous theories in favor of a new one. Any previous progress toward success is lost.

Failure: The character progresses no further in her quest for information.

Success: The character continues to progress toward the needed information.

Exceptional Success: The character is well on her way to discovering the elusive information she's after. If the roll provides enough successes to push the total above the amount necessary to complete the task by five or more, she gains additional information pertinent to her research, providing greater detail and insight into the subject.

Suggested Equipment: Public library access (+1), wealthy family with huge home library (+1), Internet connection (+1), university library (+2), relevant government database (+3)

Possible Penalties: Unusual topic (-1), impoverished and out-of-date library (-1), obscure topic (-1 to -5)

SCHOOLWORK

Dice Pool: Intelligence + Study + equipment

Action: Extended (1–10 successes; each roll represents 15 minutes of work)

“No, Billy, you may not play outside with your ‘Adventure Club’ until your homework is done!”

This task represents the character's schoolwork, which may include rote assignments, projects, or studying for tests. It is never used in summertime or on holidays, unless the character attends summer school or is assigned a long-term project over a holiday. Some kids may not bother with their schoolwork.

Storytellers may present characters with a choice — spend an hour doing schoolwork, or get out of the house to investigate mysterious happenings before the sun goes down. Characters whose grades suffer as a result of attention to weird events in the neighborhood may even be grounded...

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: You botch an assignment entirely. Perhaps you ruin your papier-mâché *Santa*

Maria, or you misread the assignment and do pages 24–27 instead of 42–47.

Failure: You make no progress on your schoolwork.

Success: You work productively on your schoolwork.

Exceptional Success: You get a great deal of work done on your assignment. If you accumulate a large number of successes beyond the necessary minimum, you are assured a higher grade.

Suggested Equipment: Textbooks (+1), computer (+1), Internet connection (+2), help from competent adult (+3)

Possible Penalties: Assignment above or below grade level (-1), comprehensive exam (-2), semester-long project (-3), help from incompetent adult (-3)

PHYSICAL SKILLS

Physical Skills are applications of a character's might, endurance and coordination. Physical Skill tasks include rock climbing, racing a bicycle, or shooting a gun. Physical Skill tasks most often rely on the character's Physical Attributes, but Physical Skills can also be paired with Mental Attributes when the character tries to draw on his Skill to identify an object or answer a question. The Storyteller might ask for an Intelligence + Firearms roll to identify a particular rifle, for example, or Intelligence + Survival to read a map. Physical Skill scores represent a combination of personal experience and/or extracurricular training rather than time spent at school. You can't earn a degree in fist-fighting, but you can graduate at the top of your class in the school of hard knocks.

Untrained Skill Use: If your character doesn't have the necessary Physical Skill required for a roll, he can still attempt the action. Roll his Attribute alone with a -1 penalty.

ATHLETICS

The kids ran as if Hell itself was behind them — and as far as they could tell, it was. Tommy was pretty sure that Mr. Hoover had actually been possessed by the Devil, and that the Devil wanted to kill them and devour their souls.

All four of the kids played soccer — Kenny, Tavone, and Tommy had been on a team together when they were a little younger, and Maria was now on a girls' travel team. Tommy was always the best of the four of them, though. He was short but he was fast. He had no trouble keeping ahead of the rest of the group. Tavone had long legs but was kind of clumsy. Kenny was hurt from Hoover jumping on him just a minute ago. And Maria kept turning around and shouting for the dog rather than paying attention to what was in front of them.

Tommy knew he could get away if he wanted to. Like the old joke about running away from a lion — "I don't have to beat it, I just have to beat you." But if he did that, Hoover would kill the other boys and his sister. Hoover would eventually find him, too.

Athletics encompasses a broad category of physical exercise, from climbing to kayaking to extracurricular sports such as soccer or hockey. The Athletics Skill can be applied to any action that requires prolonged physical

exertion or that demands considerable agility or hand-eye coordination. Examples include climbing a high wall, marching long distances and leaping between rooftops.

In combat, the Skill is combined with Dexterity to determine the accuracy of thrown weapons. Athletics is also used to ride human-powered vehicles such as roller skates, skateboards and bicycles.

Possessed by: Jocks, dancers, farm kids, gym teachers, gang runners, delinquents, skaters

Specialties: Acrobatics, Climbing, Kayaking, Long-Distance Running, Sprinting, Swimming, Throwing

General Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The effort not only fails, but your character injures himself. It might be a sprained muscle or ligament, which inflicts a single point of bashing damage. Risky efforts such as climbing up the side of a building or swimming a long distance can have severe repercussions. See the rules on falling (p. 159) and holding one's breath (p. 40).

Failure: Your character fails at the action. A thrown item misses its target; the character can't jump the necessary distance or swim or run as fast as he needs to. This doesn't inherently have dire consequences.

Success: A thrown item hits its target, the character makes the jump, scores the goal, etc.

Exceptional Success: Your character succeeds at his goal skillfully enough to do extra damage, gain extra distance, or really impress onlookers.

CLIMBING

Dice Pool: Strength + Athletics + equipment

Action: Instant or extended (one success is required per eight feet of height; in an extended task, each roll represents one minute of climbing)

Climbing an object requires a number of successes in an instant or extended action. A child character can climb eight feet with each success rolled (adults can climb 10 feet per success due to their greater Size ratings). Objects that are eight feet or less in height can be climbed as an instant action. Rolls may be modified based on the availability of hand- and footholds, sheerness or slipperiness of the slope, and wind conditions, all at the Storyteller's discretion. By the same token, if the character chooses to take his time and pick his way carefully up the incline, each minute added to the roll provides a +1 modifier, to a maximum of +3. Thus, if a character takes his time and each roll represents three minutes of effort instead of one, a +2 modifier is added to each roll.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character has lost his grip or footing and falls. It could be fatal, depending on the height involved. See the rules on falling, p. 159.

Failure: Your character doesn't make any progress in his climb — but on the bright side, he doesn't lose height or fall, either.

Success: The character continues to make progress on the climb. If the total number of successes exceeds the total needed, he reaches the top.

Exceptional Success: The character makes exceptional progress on his climb. At the Storyteller's discretion, he may take an immediate instant action at the top.

Suggested Equipment: Nylon rope (+1), climbing cleats (+1), grappling hook (+2), pitons and hammer (+3)

Possible Penalties: Lack of tools (-1 to -5), bad weather (-1 to -3), sheer slope (-1), lack of handholds (-3)

FOOT CHASE

Dice Pool: Stamina + Athletics + equipment versus Stamina + Athletics + equipment

Action: Extended and contested (each roll represents one turn of running)

It's inevitable that your character will chase someone (or, more likely, be chased) in his burgeoning experiences with the supernatural. He may interrupt a creature preying upon a hapless victim and race after it, or he may need to escape from an elderly Social Studies teacher who has been possessed by the Devil.

A chase is a matter of endurance, reflexes and fleetness of foot. Roll Stamina + Athletics for each participant, once per turn. This is not quite the conventional extended and contested task, however. The quarry has a different goal to the pursuer. The number of successes that must be acquired for the quarry equals the pursuer's Speed. So, if the pursuer has a Speed of 12, successes accumulated for the quarry must reach 12 for him to get away.

The pursuer, however, does not seek to get away. His goal is much more specific: to stop the quarry from escaping. The number of successes that the pursuer needs is therefore different. He seeks to tally a number that equals or exceeds the quarry's current total of successes at any point in the chase. If the pursuer gets that number, he catches up.

The relative Speed traits of quarry and pursuer are also a factor in determining who is likely to escape or be caught. A human adult isn't likely to catch a cheetah, for example, but a cheetah can probably catch a human adult. For every three full points of difference between competitors' Speed traits, the faster one gets a +1 bonus on chase rolls. So, if a pursuer has a Speed of 11 and a quarry has a Speed of 8, rolls made for the pursuer get a +1 bonus. If a pursuer has a Speed of 10 and a quarry has a Speed of 11, neither party gets a bonus (the difference between Speed traits is less than three).

If the quarry of a chase has a head start, he gets a number of automatic successes at the beginning of the chase. Any successes rolled for him throughout the extended and contested task are added to that number from turn to turn, giving the quarry an advantage throughout. As a rule of thumb, a 10-yard head start is worth one automatic success. So, if Tommy were 30 yards away from Mr. Hoover when the chase broke out, he would have a foundation of three successes on which to add his own throughout the chase. That bonus would make it all the harder for his pursuer to accumulate an equal or greater number than she has in any given turn.



COME BACK HERE, YOU DAMN KIDS!

It's not hard to imagine that **Innocents** characters might wind up running away from an adult pursuer at some point. And, you might say, surely an adult should get a bonus to chase a child? Longer legs, more muscle mass, and so on?

That's logical. But look at it the other way: what if the adult is arthritic, or overweight, or a heavy smoker, or is otherwise impeded where sprinting is concerned? Kids are smaller, yes, but they're also in much better physical health than most adults. And while the Storytelling system allows for things like childhood obesity (just take a low Dexterity and no Athletics) or advanced athleticism (purchase the Fleet of Foot Merit or a high Athletics rating), the possible combinations of foot speed and endurance between *any given adult* and *any given child, age seven to 12*, are too numerous to properly simulate here.

Storytellers, the solution is this: use the foot chase system presented here, and feel free to assign modifiers to both parties based on physical descriptions, terrain, described characteristics and (above all) the needs of the story.

Negative modifiers to rolls due to hazardous terrain or dangerous conditions apply equally to opposing participants. A desperate escapee can even intentionally incur a negative modifier (leaping a hurdle or navigating a construction site) to force her pursuer to cope with the same conditions.

All of a participant's actions must be dedicated to running in a chase. If someone performs a different action in any turn, such as firing a gun, his Stamina + Athletics roll for that turn is forfeit. The character can still travel his Speed in yards, but he loses momentum in the race; he adds no successes to his total. Only a character who possesses a supernatural power or a special Merit might maintain a chase *and* be able to perform a separate action in a turn. The Storyteller has discretion to determine if there are actions that might be accomplished without losing the sprint — a kid who has practiced relay races, for instance, might be able to pick up or hand off a small item without losing time.

The actual distance between quarry and pursuer at any point in a chase is based on the difference of total successes between them. Each success is worth about 10 yards. So, if Tommy has six successes and his pursuer has two, he is 40 yards ahead. Of course, the Storyteller can set another standard for what the difference measures. If opponents race over broken, uneven ground, each success between them could represent only five yards or one yard. Or, if the chase occurs in wide-open spaces, each success between subjects could represent 20 yards.

If a pursuer's total successes ever equal or exceed a quarry's, the pursuer catches up. The race comes to an end. The pursuer is allowed one free action against the quarry. The quarry is fully aware of the threat, is not sur-

prised and is entitled to his Defense. Initiative is rolled thereafter for both participants if combat breaks out.

A simple foot race in which competitors seek to be the first to cross a finish line is handled like a conventional extended and contested task. Successes for each participant are accumulated and all seek the same total number of successes. The first one to get that total is the winner.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character trips and falls. He takes a point of bashing damage. The pursuit is over. If the quarry falls, he is caught; if the pursuer falls, the quarry escapes.

Failure: The character gains no successes toward capture or escape, but is still in the race.

Success: The character continues to accumulate successes.

Exceptional Success: The character does exceptionally well this turn.

Suggested Equipment: Good running shoes (+1), cleats (+2 on grass, -1 on a hard surface)

Possible Penalties: Bad running surface (-1), bad weather (-1 to -3), debris (-1 to -3)

JUMPING

Dice Pool: Strength + Athletics + equipment

Action: Instant

A character can jump one foot vertically for each success gained on a jumping roll. In a standing broad jump, a character can cross two feet per success rolled. In a running jump, a character can cross a number of feet equal to her Size + four more feet per success rolled. So, if a kid who's Size 4 gets three successes in a running jump, she travels 16 feet. In order to make a running jump, a child must be able to run a distance of at least eight feet (adults need 10 feet, but kids accelerate faster). If space is limited, every two feet (rounding up) short of eight imposes a -1 penalty on the Strength + Athletics roll. So, if a character who wants to make a jump needs at least eight feet to get a running start, but she has only five feet with which to work, the roll suffers a -2 penalty.

Before jumping, a character may attempt to gauge the distance and her chances of success before committing. Roll Wits + Composure or Athletics, at the Storyteller's discretion. If the roll is successful, you learn the number of successes needed to make the jump and decide if it's worth the risk. You may also learn what penalties are imposed by having insufficient space to get a proper running start. However, gauging difficulty is an instant action, and as such, it takes the full turn. Children who are being pursued by creatures of the night may not have the luxury of examining their path so closely.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character fails to jump the necessary distance and lands badly. If the character is attempting to leap a gap with a long drop in the middle, he suffers from a fall per the rules on p. 159. Otherwise, he

simply suffers a point of bashing damage from hurting an ankle or knee as part of his bad landing.

Failure: Your character cannot make the necessary distance. This may result in a fall, as described above — but if it doesn't, your character lands without injury. She just doesn't get as far as she'd hoped.

Success: Your character leaps the number of feet determined by his successes, as described above.

Exceptional Success: Your character leaps a great distance, and does so with enough grace that he is able to take a simple instant action upon landing.

Suggested Equipment: Running shoes (+1), ramp (+1), springboard (+2), vaulting pole (+3)

Possible Penalties: Slippery conditions (-1), bad weather (-1 to -3), difficult terrain (-1 to -3), strong wind (-2)

THROWING

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Athletics + equipment

Action: Instant

Throwing an object can be a brute-force physical act or a combination of grace and hand-eye coordination to hit a distant target. Your character can throw a non-aerodynamic object (such as a clay pot or bicycle tire) a distance in yards equal to his Strength + Dexterity + Athletics, minus the object's Size. The result is considered short range. Medium range is double that number, and long range is twice medium range. So, a character with Strength 4, Dexterity 3 and Athletics 2 can throw a bike tire with Size 2 a short range of seven yards, a medium range of 14 yards and a long range of 28 yards. Aerodynamic objects such as footballs and spears can be thrown double those distances. Thus, the same character who throws a football (Size 1) has a short range of 16 yards, a medium range of 32 yards and a long range of 64 yards.

An object with a Size that equals or exceeds your character's Strength or Size simply can't be thrown far enough to constitute range, even if it's an aerodynamic item. It's simply too heavy or bulky to be thrown.

While the distance that an item can be thrown is relatively fixed, your character's accuracy is rolled: Dexterity + Athletics + equipment. Weapons such as knives, spears and rocks, however, confer their damage ratings as bonuses when thrown (see Chapter Six). Mundane items such as baseballs or footballs can be thrown to hit and hurt (probably unsuspecting) targets, too. These items typically confer a +1 bonus and do bashing damage.

Modifiers to hit targets are -2 at medium and -4 at long range. By no means is long range the limit to which an item can be hurled. Your character could throw it with everything he has and achieve greater distance — up to twice long range. Accuracy is forgone, though. If your character tries to throw an object at a target beyond long range, he can still make the attempt. Roll a chance die to determine success (see p. 119), regardless of what your character's dice pool might normally be. Any target that is more than double long range away is considered completely out of range and no throw can hit it.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your throw lands wildly off the mark. The Storyteller may choose to roll randomly among potential targets who could be hit by it, and provide the accidental target with a quick Wits + Dexterity roll to avoid getting hit.

Failure: The object doesn't get the necessary distance, goes off the mark, or goes too far.

Success: The object hits the target, and does one point of damage for each success rolled (see p. 149 for details).

Exceptional Success: The object hits its target squarely and inflicts great damage.

Suggested Equipment: The thrown item provides an equipment bonus; see Chapter Six for details.

Possible Penalties: Bad visibility (-1 to -3), bad weather (-1 to -3).

CATCHING THROWN OBJECTS

A target might be able to catch a thrown object. The distance between thrower and target cannot be greater than the point to which the object can be thrown. The thrower's accuracy is also a factor in whether an intended receiver can catch the item successfully.

If an object is thrown *to* a receiver with the intent to be caught, the receiver's player rolls Dexterity + Athletics. The receiver's roll receives a number of bonus dice equal to the number of successes achieved in the thrower's roll. Thus, if Tavone throws a football to Tommy and Tavone's player rolls three successes, Tommy's Dexterity + Athletics roll to catch the ball gets a +3 bonus. If the thrower's roll fails to earn any successes, the receiver suffers a penalty to catch the object equal to the thrower's Strength. If the roll to catch an object results in a dramatic failure, the receiver suffers damage equal to the successes achieved in the throw.

If an object is thrown *at* a target (probably with the intent to hit and hurt him), and the target is unaware of the object's approach, the target can't catch the object. Additionally, the target gets no Defense. Successes achieved in the throw inflict damage to the target. If he tries to catch it, he loses his Defense against the attack (after all, he tries to put himself in the object's path). A contested Dexterity + Athletics roll is then made against the thrower's roll. If the thrower's player rolled as many or more successes than the target's player, the target is still hit and those successes are inflicted as damage. If the target's player rolls more successes than the thrower, the target catches the item. The Storyteller may rule that catching a blunt object such as a rock might be done completely without harm, but catching a sharp object such as a knife might still inflict a point of lethal damage. An exceptional success achieved on a catching roll negates damage from even a sharp item.

Of course, projectiles from guns or bows cannot be caught unless the target has some kind of supernatural power that allows him to see and react to such fast-moving objects.

SKATE OR RIDE A BIKE

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Athletics + equipment

Action: Instant

Your character rides a bicycle or a skateboard. With these devices and a successful roll, he can improve his effective Speed, or he can try a stunt — like jumping a gap, or pulling off some impressive maneuver to show off for the other kids.

A street bike allows a character to double his normal Speed without incurring any real difficulty. This is considered his Safe Speed (see Vehicles, p. 134). He may choose to accelerate beyond his Safe Speed, to a maximum of four times his base Speed, but must make a Dexterity + Athletics + Handling roll for each turn he does so. Failure means he must drop to his Safe Speed. A dramatic failure on that roll means that he spills the bike, taking one point of bashing damage for every five points of total Speed he had at the time of the wipeout (see Chapter Six, p. 137, for more details on laying down a bike).

A skateboard functions similarly, except that it has a lower speed cap (the character's Safe Speed is his Speed + 3, and his max speed is his Speed + 8). The player still needs to roll to stay balanced if traveling over the Safe Speed, but the consequences of failure aren't as painful. If the roll fails, the character stops, usually jumping off the board. If the roll is a dramatic failure, the character falls, suffering one *die* of bashing damage per five points of Speed at the time of the crash.

Performing a stunt on a bike or a skateboard requires an instant Dexterity + Athletics + equipment roll. The Storyteller applies a penalty based on the difficulty of the stunt, from -1 to -5.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: You spill your bike or fall impressively off your skateboard. Apply damage as described on p. 137.

Failure: You fail at your stunt and probably suffer a Social penalty with any onlookers, but you don't hurt yourself.

Success: You pull off your stunt.

Exceptional Success: You manage your vehicle so skillfully that you can take a simple instant action while doing so.

Suggested Equipment: Handling rating of the bike or skateboard (varies; see p. 137)

Possible Penalties: Secondhand bike or skateboard (-1), lousy road conditions (-1), stunt difficulty (-1 to -5).

BRAWL

The thing wearing Mr. Hoover's clothes and face crouched, the fingertips of its left hand on the floor. Its blood-shot eyes flicked from side to side, trying to assess the four kids and Maria's big mutt, Max.

Tavone's eyes got big. "Oh, man, this doesn't seem like a good idea..."

When Tommy and Kenny turned at the same time to shush Tavone, the creature leapt on Kenny. It was impossibly fast, and even though Kenny was the oldest of them, he was

WHAT ABOUT DRIVE?

Adults have access to a Physical Skill called Drive. **World of Darkness: Innocents**, however, is a game about kids aged seven to 12. Most of those don't have driver's licenses or legal access to cars. Kids at the younger end of this age group simply aren't large enough to operate a car and see where they're going. They certainly haven't received enough training to justify a dot in the Drive skill. If the kids need to attempt to drive a vehicle, the Storyteller should let them rely on their native Wits and Dexterity, probably with heavy penalties.

With that said, some older kids, farm kids, or the kids of NASCAR drivers may have some experience behind the wheel. With Storyteller permission, they may buy one dot in the Drive Skill. Adult characters may have one or more dots in Drive, just as they would any other Skill.

The Drive Skill allows a character to operate a vehicle under difficult or dangerous conditions. Characters don't need this Skill simply to drive a car. It's safe to assume in a modern society that most individuals — including older kids — are familiar with automobiles and the rules of the road. Rather, this trait covers the experience necessary to operate at high speeds, to tackle hazardous road conditions or to push a vehicle to its limits.

The Drive Skill is the difference between a suburban character's mom with a minivan and a police officer, car thief or racecar driver. (See p. 136 for dice-pool equipment modifiers for various vehicles.)

the smallest and slowest. Mr. Hoover's weight was enough to crumple Kenny to the classroom floor, and the small boy cried out in pain. The creature laughed with Mr. Hoover's voice.

"I'll have to abandon this body after tonight, and then my poor host will have to explain the deaths of four of his —"

Its voice cut off as Tavone drove his forehead into its mouth, Tommy leapt onto its back, and Maria dropped Max's leash. Tavone's forehead broke a couple of the teacher's teeth. Tommy managed to pull Hoover's left arm around behind his back and Max bit down on his left calf. Kenny whimpered as the weight pressing down on him doubled.

Hoover was incredibly strong, though. He yanked his left arm up, pulling Tommy with him, and pushed himself to his feet with his right hand. As he got to his feet, he stomped on Kenny's wrist with all his weight, eliciting a scream from the floor.

"Guys!" Maria shouted. "This isn't working! We're going to have to try Plan B!"

Brawl defines your character's prowess at unarmed combat, whether he's taking karate classes or gets in a lot of schoolyard and after-school fights. Characters with this Skill know how to hit an opponent, where to hit for maximum effect and how to defend themselves from attack. It can mean using fists, but also elbows, knees, shoulders, head butts, wrestling, joint locks and chokeholds. Kids

with several dots could be familiar with more than one technique of unarmed combat. Expertise in such techniques is reflected in the Fighting Style Merits (see pp. 103), which are based on Brawl.

Brawl is added to your character's Strength to battle people in unarmed combat.

Possessed by: Martial arts students, troublemakers, gang members, mouthy small kids, bored big kids, older siblings, younger siblings

Specialties: Boxing, Defense, Dirty Tricks, Grappling, Karate, Throws

General Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only does your character miss his opponent, but the attack leaves him open for a counterattack. Your character's Defense or Dodge trait does not apply to the next close-combat attack staged against him.

Failure: Your attack misses its target.

Success: You hit your target and apply one point of bashing damage for every success. See Chapter Six for a full discussion of combat.

Exceptional Success: Your character lands a particularly lucky blow or hits his opponent in a vital area, increasing damage or causing a special combat effect. Again, see Chapter Six.

FIREARMS

Sam pulled the rifle to his shoulder and sighted on the spray-paint can. Mom and Dad didn't know that he had brought Emily and Maggie out to the old mine to watch him shoot stuff.

Really, Mom and Dad didn't know he'd come out to the old mine to shoot at all, but they definitely didn't know he'd brought the girls with him. He didn't much care, though. He prepared to shoot the paint canister. This was going to look so cool.

"Are you sure this is okay with Mom and Dad, Sam?" Emily asked.

Sam sighed and lowered the .22 rifle. "What Mom and Dad don't know about won't get any of us in trouble, Em. I could tell them about the two Cokes you guzzled on the way out here..."

Emily sputtered. "You said I could have those Cokes!"

"No fair!" Maggie piped up. "I want two Cokes!"

"Guys, shut up and let me take this shot. It's going to look so cool when it explodes, I swear to God."

The girls quieted down. Sam brought the rifle back up to his shoulder, sighted the spray can, and fired. He was used to the kick — he'd been doing this most of the summer. Emily and Maggie let out little screeches of surprise at the noise from the .22.

The can exploded in the blue spray Sam had been hoping for. A fine mist of blue settled over the stone face behind the paint can.

Maggie was the first one to notice the shape. "That looks like a person!" she shouted, and pointed at a spot 10 feet from where the can had been. There, called out by the paint's mist, was the silhouette of a man.

The Firearms Skill allows your character to identify, operate and maintain most types of guns, including pistols, rifles and shotguns. Although very few kids have exposure to military weapons, a kid with the Firearms Skill at least understands the basics of automatic weapons — although recoil can be extremely hard for children to handle. Kids



usually acquire this Skill from parents or from hunter's safety courses. Some come by it in a more dangerous fashion, on the street or from other kids or criminals. The Firearms Skill also applies to using bows. Your character can use guns and bows equally. Dots in Firearms do not apply to manually fixing or building guns, only to wielding them. Construction and repair is the province of the Crafts Skill (see p. 50).

Possessed by: Farm kids, hunters, gang members, children of cops, children of responsible gun users

Specialties: Autofire, Bow, Pistol, Rifle, Shotgun, Target Shooting, Trick Shot

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The weapon malfunctions in some way or your character accidentally hits a different target (with a pistol, possibly himself). The most common type of dramatic failure is a misfire — the bullet simply does not go off when the trigger is pulled, and your character is free to shoot again in the next turn. Other mechanical failures, such as jams, may require an action to clear in the following turn.

Failure: Your character misses his intended target. However, every bullet fired eventually hits *something*. The Storyteller determines what the bullet actually hits.

Success: Your character hits his intended target and inflicts a number of points of lethal damage equal to the number of successes you roll. See Chapter Six for details on inflicting damage with firearms.

Exceptional Success: Not only does your character hit the target, but he strikes a particularly vital area, magnifying the damage as reflected by your stellar roll.

Suggested Equipment: See p. 148 for a list of firearms and their game effects.

Possible Penalties: Target's armor, target's concealment, target is prone, range to target. See Chapter Six for details on all the preceding factors. High winds (-1 to -3), low visibility (-1 to -3)

LARCENY

The boys pulled themselves out of the backyard tent not long after the sun came up. In past months, Mrs. Orfitelli had made the kids breakfast and fed it to them out on the picnic table after their night outside. The boys shivered and stomped their feet as they got out of the tent onto the dewy grass.

"I hope your mom makes pancakes again, Brian — those were awesome last time," Nelson said.

Brian was already up on the back porch, trying to open the door. It was locked. He banged on it. "Mom! Hey, Mom!" Bang, thump. "Mom! Hey, Mom!"

No answer.

"Aw, what the hell," Will said, "I really gotta take a leak."

"Use the back trees," Brian said, "like you did last night. Man, you got a bladder like a peanut."

Nelson got a goofy grin on his face. "Let's break in."

Brian and Will shouted simultaneous agreement.

"Mom locks the basement windows, but my bedroom window is unlocked," said Brian. "I'm too short to reach it, though."

Will pointed at Nelson. "He's tall enough to boost you. And hurry up, I gotta pee."

Nelson hoisted Brian up onto his shoulders. Brian shoved the unlocked bedroom window open, and tumbled forward onto his own bed.

"Mom! Dad! You guys forgot about us and locked the doors!"

There was no answer.

Larceny is a broad Skill that covers everything from picking locks to shoplifting to concealing hidden goods and everything in between. Most kids pick this Skill up in an offhanded kind of way. Young kids don't have much sense of personal property or ownership, so at this age, a kid who uses Larceny isn't so much deliberately doing bad things as he is doing what he wants, without much thought to the consequences.

Possessed by: Delinquents, latchkey kids who forgot their keys, homeless kids, nosy siblings

Specialties: Shoplifting, Picking Pockets, Picking Locks, Alarm Systems

General Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only does your character fail his attempted action, but he reveals himself in the process. The guy at the counter notices him stick the candy into his pocket or the alarm goes off.

Failure: Your character doesn't complete her intended action but does not necessarily call attention to herself. Successive failures at the same Larceny task may give observers a chance at a Wits + Composure roll to notice what's going on.

Success: Your character completes his action without arousing any notice or suspicion. He pockets the stolen goods, or slips inside the dark building without anyone noticing.

Exceptional Success: Your character not only succeeds at her criminal activities, but does so with speed and style. Extended tasks are done in a hurry and instant tasks are done so skillfully that the player receives a +1 to any Stealth rolls to get away without notice.

BYPASS SECURITY SYSTEM

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Larceny + equipment

Action: Extended (5–15 successes, depending on the complexity of the system; each roll represents a turn — three seconds — of work)

Bypassing a security system can be as simple as shorting out two contacts on a window frame, or as complex as opening a junction box and making major modifications to a sophisticated circuit board, all in a matter of seconds. Very few kids have the wherewithal to handle complex alarm systems, but almost any kid whose home has a security system knows how to disarm one before the alarm goes off. The task is an extended action, with the required number of successes depending on the complexity of the system in question. A basic alarm might demand five, while a standard home-security system might require as many as 10.

Sophisticated corporate or government security systems might require 15 or more successes to disarm, at the Storyteller's discretion. They may also pose penalties to the character's roll, particularly if the character lacks sophisticated tools. Using specialized tools can add dice to the roll.

Most home and corporate alarm systems have a warning period of 30 or 45 seconds to allow for an authorized user to disarm the system before triggering an alarm. Thus, a would-be burglar has 10 or 15 turns to locate and disarm the system before the alarm goes off.

Players and Storytellers alike should remember that the point of most security systems is not to keep people out. It is impossible to keep a truly dedicated and resourceful criminal (or investigator) from breaking through a security system. Instead, the system's goal is to make a cracker take as much time, effort and expense as possible to crack the system. In this way, the attacker will either get tired, get bored, get caught, or look for an easier target.

Example: Will picks the lock on the back door of his parents' mysteriously empty home and slips inside. The house's security system beeps a warning and Will heads for the keypad, trying desperately to remember how his older brother used to crack the case for the security box and disable it when he had parties. It takes him three turns to reach the box, leaving possibly as few as seven turns before the alarm activates. Will has a screwdriver, and his Dexterity is 3 and his Larceny is 2.

A standard home-security system requires 10 successes to disarm, and the first roll turns up two successes — eight to go. The second roll earns no successes. The third roll provides four more successes, bringing the total to six. Six turns down, four to go. The fourth roll only gives one success. With time running out, the fifth roll provides two successes — enough to disarm the system, six seconds (two turns) before the alarm activates.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character not only fails to disarm the system, but accidentally sets it off early. In the case of sophisticated alarm systems, this might be a silent alarm that alerts authorities without tipping off the intruder.

Failure: Your character makes no progress in disarming the security system.

Success: Your character makes progress in disarming the system (apply successes rolled toward the total needed).

Exceptional Success: Your character is well on his way to bypassing the system.

Suggested Equipment: Electronics toolkit (+1), improvised tools — mirrors, conductive tape and aerosol spray (+1), familiarity with system (+1), alarm schematics (+2)

Possible Penalties: Lack of tools (-1 to -5), unfamiliarity with system (-1), state-of-the-art system (-2), charging guard dogs (-2), darkness (-3), need to remain completely silent (-3)

LOCK-PICKING

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Larceny + equipment

Action: Extended (1–12+ successes required, depending on the sophistication of the lock; one roll represents one turn of work)

Picking a lock is one of the most common applications of Larceny, and requires nothing more than a basic set of tools, a steady hand and a few moments' concentration. The task is an extended action, whose difficulty is based on the toughness and sophistication of the lock. A suitcase or diary lock might require just one or two successes, while a padlock or a house lock might demand anywhere from four to seven. Combination locks could require anywhere from eight to 12. Using specialized lock-picking tools (as opposed to improvised picks) can add a bonus to the roll.

In a situation with no pressure, no observers and no chance of a dramatic failure, the only reason for a Storyteller to require a roll from his players is to get an idea of how much evidence they leave of the break-in. The fewer rolls the characters make, the less evidence they leave at the scene.

Example: Nelson's parents' house is locked up tight. He wants to see if his cat is in there — and, if so, make sure he has food and water. He goes to the back door to remain out of sight of any passersby — not that he has seen any. Nelson has his camping gear and he snagged a screwdriver and paperclips before he left Brian's house. He isn't good at this, though — his Dexterity + Larceny pool is only three, with enough equipment to get him one bonus die. His parents' locks aren't good enough to cause a penalty to his roll, so Nelson gets to work with a four-die pool. It ends up taking him four turns to get through the lock on the back door, which leaves plenty of evidence that he broke in. His parents will notice scratches and damage on the lock...if they ever return.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: You make no progress on the lock and, worse, you break a tool or damage part of the lock. You lose all accumulated successes and must start over. The damage you did to the lock may be obvious to any trained investigators who happen by later.

Failure: You accumulate no successes in this task this turn. You can keep trying, though.

Success: You accumulate successes this turn. If your total number of successes exceeds the difficulty of the lock, you have opened it.

Exceptional Success: You accumulate a large number of successes this turn and leave remarkably little evidence of your passage.

Suggested Equipment: Prybar (+1), basic lockpicks (+1), lockpick gun (+2), electronic keypad decryptor (+3)

Possible Penalties: Lack of tools (-1 to -5), darkness (-3), someone approaching (-2)

SLEIGHT OF HAND

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Larceny + equipment versus Wits + Composure or Wits + Larceny

Action: Contested

Your character picks a pocket, slips an object out of the notice of his parent or older brother, or otherwise

takes and hides an item with the intent of his action not being noticed and the item not being seen. Such objects need to be Size 0 or at most Size 1, small enough to fit in a child's palm (see Objects, p. 129).

Roll your character's Dexterity + Larceny + equipment versus a victim or possible observer's Wits + Composure or Wits + Larceny (whichever is greater). The Storyteller decides how many people could be possible observers. For a small group, he may wish to roll separately for them. For a larger group, however, the Storyteller should simply use the dice pool of the most observant character and add one die for every three additional observers. If you get the most successes, your character grabs, produces or hides something. If the victim or observer gets as many or more successes, she's wise to your character's efforts. She could call foul, call for the police or call your character out privately and give him a chance to return the stolen item and lead a safe and honest life (it helps your case if you're the kind of kid who has big, puppy-dog eyes).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character fails to grab the item and draws attention to himself. The Storyteller may ask you to roll initiative, or start a chase scene (p. 57).

Failure: Your character can't get the item without being seen, and realizes that before he bothers trying. He might have a better chance in subsequent turns, and he can try again. If the character tries and fails too many times, though, the Storyteller may grant onlookers bonuses to their Wits + Composure rolls.

Success: The character gets the item without anyone noticing — but it's only a matter of time before somebody notices that it's gone. She'd better hightail it out of there.

Exceptional Success: The character gets the item in such a way that the victim doesn't realize he's been ripped off. The character has plenty of time to leave the area without being noticed, too.

Suggested Equipment: Crowded area (+1), few possible observers (+1), timely distraction (+1 to +3), partner to whom to transfer an item (+2)

Possible Penalties: Subject wears tight clothes (-1), security system (-3 to -5), public attention on item (-3)

STEALTH

Brian whispered desperately to Will and Nelson.

"This guy is the first living person we've seen in three days! We have to find out if he knows anything!"

Nelson shook his head. "What if he's in on it? What if he's just looking for us because we're the last people left in town? We have to follow him, but we can't let him know we're here."

Will made a face. "Nelson's right. I'm going to follow him."

"Oh, man," Brian said, "be careful, then. We'll hang back a couple of blocks. If he sees you, run back to us."

Will snuck up the little street his family lived on and went out onto Grandview. This would ordinarily be a very busy road: two solid, high-speed lanes of traffic in each direction. It was silent. He could see the figure in army fatigues about half

a mile ahead of him. Sticking as close as he could to the trees alongside the road, Will quietly jogged in the man's direction.

The Stealth Skill represents a character's experience in avoiding notice, whether by moving silently, making use of cover or blending into a crowd. When attempting to sneak silently through an area or to use the local terrain as concealment, roll Dexterity + Stealth + equipment. When trying to remain unseen in a crowd, Wits + Stealth is appropriate. The Storyteller may make Stealth rolls secretly on your behalf, since your character usually has no way of knowing he's been noticed until it's too late. If your character attempts to avoid notice by a group of alert observers, a contested roll versus the observers' Wits + Composure + equipment is required.

Possessed by: Truants, lookouts, sneaky kids, hunters

Specialties: Camouflage, Crowds, Darkness, Hiding, Remaining Still, Staying Quiet

General Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character draws attention to himself, rather than hiding. Observers can see him or pinpoint his location easily.

Failure: You roll fewer successes than the observer's player. Your character does not hide skillfully, but he may not be immediately caught.

Success: Your successes equal or exceed the observer's. Your character remains unnoticed...for now.

Exceptional Success: Your character remains unnoticed and has found a decent way to remain hidden. You get a +1 die bonus on the first attack you perform against the target this scene.

SHADOWING

Dice Pool: Wits + Stealth + equipment (shadow) versus Wits + Composure + equipment (subject)

Action: Instant and Contested

Shadowing occurs when a character attempts to follow a subject without being detected. Rather than depending on fast reflexes to stay close, the pursuer engages in a game with his unsuspecting opponent, hanging back just far enough to keep the subject in sight while remaining unnoticed in the crowd.

When your character attempts to shadow a person, make a contested roll against the subject's Wits + Composure + equipment. If the subject wins, he notices he's being followed. If the pursuer wins, he follows the subject without being detected. Ties go to the pursuer. If this is a short walk, one roll may be sufficient. The Storyteller may call for a roll every half mile for long trips.

If your character acquires a shadow, the Storyteller may secretly make Wits + Composure rolls on your behalf. If the rolls fail, neither you nor your character know that something is amiss.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character is noticed, and the target recognizes that he's being followed. Additionally, the target will recognize him the next time they meet.

Failure: The target realizes that he's being followed and will probably change his course of action in response.

Success: The target does not know that he's being followed. You can keep up with him.

Exceptional Success: You can keep up with the target, undetected, for the remainder of the scene.

Suggested Equipment: For shadow: athletic shoes (+1), nondescript clothes (+1), small binoculars (+2). For subject: shadow wears gaudy clothes (+1 to +3), tipped off (+4)

Possible Penalties: For shadow: Unfamiliar subject (-1), poor visibility (-1). For subject: crowded area (-1 to -3), poor visibility (-1 to -3)

HIDING

Dice Pool: Wits + Stealth + equipment (hider) versus Wits + Composure + equipment (seeker)

Action: Contested

Children being pursued by other children or adults may need to hide themselves somewhere. Being smaller than adults, kids can often ensconce themselves in spaces an adult wouldn't even consider investigating.

In order to even attempt hiding, the hider must break line of sight between himself and the seeker. Usually this is easy, but if there is a sprinting pursuit going on, the Storyteller may call for a Dexterity + Stealth roll. After that, the hider must find a place that conceals him and where he can stay still.

The seeker takes penalties for searching for someone in the darkness, but also keep in mind that it is much harder to see from a brightly lit area into a dark one, and vice versa. If one person is in a bright area and the other in a dark, the Storyteller should apply a +1 die bonus to either the hider or seeker, based on which one is in the dark.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: You inadvertently give yourself away — perhaps you fall from a high perch and injure yourself slightly (one point of bashing damage), or you get stuck in a space that's too small for you.

Failure: The hider's roll comes up with fewer successes than the seeker's. The seeker sees him.

Success: If the hider's player rolls as many or more successes than the seeker's, he is not found for the time being.

Exceptional Success: If the hider rolls more successes than the seeker and gets an exceptional success, not only is the character well hidden, but the seeker gains faulty clues that suggest the hider is somewhere else entirely.

Suggested Equipment: Dark clothes (+1 to hider), small tight space (+1 to hider), plenty of junk around (+1 to hider), flashlight (+1 to seeker), keen sense of hearing or smell (+2 to seeker), great hiding place (+1, 2, or 3 to hider)

Possible Penalties: Hider has a lower Size rating than the seeker (-1 to seeker), dearth of good hiding places (-2 to hider), wearing bright or clashing clothes (-2 to hider)

SURVIVAL

"Sam, we need to start heading back," Emily said. "We've been down underground for an hour, and you know it's another hour back home. My watch says it's six fifteen, and it's going to be full dark in an hour. Maggie's hungry, I'm hungry, and we're tired. Can't we just leave this be for now?"

Sam stood silently for a few seconds. He knew he'd heard a person or thing moving around inside this cave before they came in — and who knew that the cave would turn into a full-blown mineshaft? The old mine was supposed to have been all dynamited shut before the kids were born.

It might already be too dark for them to find an easy path home. And his flashlight batteries weren't likely to last much longer.

"Okay, Em. And hey, I think I saw some blackberry bushes on the way out here. We can grab them as a snack for the rest of the walk back."

As they headed up and out of the mineshaft, Sam saw a canine shape nosing around the cave entrance.

"Hey," he said, "I think that's Beauty!"

Survival represents your character's experience or training in "living off the land." He knows where to find food and shelter, and how to endure harsh environmental conditions. The more capable your character is, the fewer resources he needs in order to prevail. This skill is frequently learned in scouting activities or organized camping expeditions.

Survival is not synonymous with Animal Ken (see p. 66). The former helps your character stay alive in the wilderness, living off the land with whatever supplies he has brought with him. The latter involves understanding animal behavior and interacting directly with animals. Your character could be knowledgeable in creating shelter and gathering plants to eat (Survival), but might know nothing about anticipating the actions of a bear in his camp (Animal Ken).

Possessed by: Rural kids, Boy and Girl Scouts, campers

Specialties: Foraging, Navigation, Weather, Shelter

General Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character's survival knowledge, combined with the bad conditions, lead him astray. He leads his group down a long, bad trail, sets up camp somewhere prone to flooding, or picks some poisonous berries to share.

Failure: Your character doesn't have the information he needs, but he doesn't make any outright disastrous assumptions.

Success: Your character can find the path, forage food, or build a decent shelter.

Exceptional Success: Your character finds a treasure trove of food, or a shortcut, or a natural shelter that could last for days without much work needed to keep it up.

FORAGING

Dice Pool: Wits + Survival + equipment

Action: Extended (5 successes required; one roll represents one hour of searching)

Foraging for edible food and clean water is an extended action. Each roll represents an hour of diligent work. Five successes are required to gather enough food and water to sustain one person for a single day. One success still provides some amount of food and water, but fewer than five means that your character becomes progressively malnourished and vulnerable to deprivation and disease (p. 155).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character's judgment leads him to unsafe food or water; you (and anyone who takes your advice) suffer from food poisoning, if not worse.

Failure: Your character is unable to find enough food and water during this hour.

Success: Your character finds more food and water this hour, although she hasn't found a full day's worth until she accumulates five successes.

Exceptional Success: Your character finds a large amount of food and/or clean, safe water; she has enough sustenance for the day with this single roll, and may be able to store some for the next day as well.

Suggested Equipment: Survival knife (+1), water purification tablets (+1), ultraviolet water purifier tool (+1), field survival guide (+2), survival kit (+3)

Possible Penalties: Bad conditions (-1 to -5), unfamiliar territory (-1), lack of tools (-2)

WEAPONRY

Dawn held the long kitchen knife out like she'd seen some of the boys on the block do. She held it steady in her right hand, with the point aimed right at the Strangled Lady in White's heart. The Strangled Lady's murmuring was just barely audible over Dawn's pounding heartbeat.

Mom wouldn't be home for another two hours. Dawn was alone and the Strangled Lady was standing on their apartment's tiny balcony, dragging her fingers down the glass. The Lady's long, white dress flowed around her as though it was windy, though Dawn knew that their balcony rarely got any breeze at all.

"Get out of here!" Dawn shouted. She hadn't meant for the word out to become a screechy scream like that; she hadn't meant to sound so afraid, but she couldn't stop shaking. The lady's eyes were closed. Her lips were purple, and her skin was pale everywhere except for the two huge handprints on her neck.

"If you come in here, I will hurt you!" Dawn now nearly screamed.

The Weaponry Skill represents your character's experience in fighting with everything from glass bottles to pipes, knives to swords. While formal instruction in Weaponry is very rare for kids (restricted to military and law-enforcement training and a few martial arts), any character growing up on the street or in the bad parts of town has ample opportunity to learn this Skill.

A character's Weaponry is added to his Strength to stage armed attacks. For more information, see Chapter Six.

Dots in Weaponry do not apply to manually fixing or creating weapons, only to wielding them. Construction and repair is the province of the Crafts Skill (see p. 50).

Possessed by: Gang members, martial arts students, theater students

Specialties: Improvised Weapons, Knives, Baseball Bat

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your attack misses, and you leave yourself open for a counterattack. Your Defense or Dodge trait does not apply to the next close-combat attack against you.

Failure: You miss, or connect too lightly to inflict damage.

Success: You hit, and inflict one level of lethal or bashing damage per success. See Chapter Six for more details.

Exceptional Success: You hit and inflict a great deal of damage.

Suggested Equipment: See Chapter Six for a list of hand-to-hand weapons your character can use.

Penalties: Opponent's armor, opponent's defense, blind-fighting, using an improvised weapon — see Chapter Six for conditional modifiers to attack rolls.

SOCIAL SKILLS

Social Skills are applications of your character's charm and cool, such as talking his way out of a confrontation with the school bully, speaking in front of the class, or telling a faultless lie. These Skills most commonly represent innate capabilities honed by experience rather than by any formal training.

You can teach someone the basic principles of Persuasion, but true leaders are born rather than made. These Skills are generally paired with your character's Social Attributes, but can also be used with Physical and Mental Attributes in cases such as bodily threats (Strength + Intimidation) or fast-talking your way out of detention (Wits + Persuasion).

Untrained Skill Use: If your character doesn't have the necessary Social Skill required for a feat, he can still make the attempt. Roll his Attribute alone at a -1 penalty.

ANIMAL KEN

"Hi, doggie!" Maggie said to the enormous canine in the improvised cage.

"Maggie, keep away from that cage," Sam said. "I think that thing is a wolf. It might try to break out."

"He isn't a wolf, Sam, he's just a big wild doggie."

"Maggie, don't be stupid," Emily said. "Come here and I'll give you a granola bar."

"It isn't a bad animal. Look at it, it's limping. It hurt its leg. Sam, look! It's bleeding from its hind leg there. He's scared and he's hungry. That's exactly how Beauty acted when she got back from the vet. Do we have any food we can give him?"

“Where is Beauty, anyway?” Emily asked no one in particular.

“She’s missing, and this dog is hurt. I think maybe something around here doesn’t like dogs,” Sam said.

Anticipating and understanding human emotions is one thing, but being able to interpret and recognize the behavior of animals is something else entirely. Your character intuitively grasps or has learned to read animals to know how they react to situations. The Skill also provides an understanding of how the animal mind operates, and what may appease or enrage beasts. The knack often coincides with a respect for animals, but it doesn’t have to — some kids learn about animals without developing any particular empathy for them.

Animal Ken could be applied to grasp the thoughts or intentions of supernatural animals, if the Storyteller allows. Sometimes these beings have human or greater intelligence and cannot be read by this Skill alone. In such cases, the Storyteller might have the player make an Animal Ken roll. If the roll is successful, the character realizes that the animal just isn’t acting right.

Possessed by: Farm and ranch kids, animal rescue volunteers, children of crazy cat ladies, kids of veterinarians

Specialties: Animal Needs, Sensing Imminent Attack, Training, Dog, Cat, Rodent, Bird

General Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character completely misreads the animal’s intentions, sometimes with disastrous consequences. She assumes that the tail-down, teeth-bared display of a wolf is a friendly and happy welcome, for example.

Failure: Your character isn’t sure of the animal’s state of mind, but knows that she is unsure.

Success: Your character has a pretty good idea of the animal’s state of mind and can react appropriately.

Exceptional Success: Your character gets a good idea of the animal’s state of mind and gains an Initiative bonus equal to her Animal Ken if the animal becomes violent.

ANIMAL TRAINING

Dice Pool: Composure + Animal Ken + equipment (trainer) versus Stamina + Resolve (animal)

Action: Extended and contested (the task demands a number of successes equal to the opponent’s Willpower; each roll represents one day of training)

Many parents get their kids pets as a way to improve the child’s empathy and to teach the child about living things that may come to depend on them. Such a child may be expected to help train his own pet. Other kids might learn to train animals on a farm. Training an animal involves communicating a need, encouraging a type of behavior and/or discouraging unwanted behavior. It’s an extended and contested process. Make Composure + Animal Ken + equipment rolls for the trainer. Roll Stamina + Resolve for the animal. The number of successes that each participant seeks is equal to the other’s



Willpower dots. Thus, if a trainer has Willpower 5 and the animal has 3, the interrogator wins if he accumulates three successes first. The animal wins if it accumulates five successes first. The winner breaks the opponent's will to continue training or to resist the desired behavior. The trainer's roll can be modified by equipment such as rewards (food) offered and abuse inflicted. Rolls made for the animal might receive a bonus based on how feral it is. A cat brought in from the wild might get a +3 bonus, for example. Likewise, non-mammals (lizards, birds) are harder to train than mammals, imposing a penalty on a trainer's rolls (-1 to -3). Some animals, such as wolverines, are so fierce that they simply can't be trained.

Only one trick or type of behavior (housebreaking, "attack," or retrieving a certain item whenever it's thrown) can be taught per extended and contested series of rolls. Alternatively, a few minor tricks, such as "sit," "shake" and "stay," can be combined in a single series of rolls.

Should an extended and contested training session end in a tie, neither side applies its will over the other. The process must start again from scratch if the trick is to be learned. If training for a type of behavior is interrupted for a number of consecutive days in excess of the animal's Intelligence, all successes gained thus far are lost. Training for that trick must start again from scratch. Animals with zero Intelligence cannot be trained at all. An animal can be taught a number of tricks (can undergo a separate number of training sessions) equal to its Wits.

For animals' traits, see p. 196. Pets gained through the Pet Merit learn tricks much more easily. They never apply a wildness or behavior penalty to the trainer's rolls.

Even after an animal has been trained in a behavior or trick, it does not necessarily perform the action automatically on command. You need to make a successful Manipulation + Animal Ken roll for the animal to respond as intended. You also get a bonus on the roll equal to the animal's Wits.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The regimen fails completely and the animal resists the intended behavior. A whole new training session must get underway for the intended trick. If animal abuse is involved, the creature attacks and tries to escape its handler.

Failure: Your character fails to make any progress on the current trick.

Success: Your character makes progress in conditioning the animal's behavior.

Exceptional Success: Your character makes dramatic progress with the creature and develops a rapport. The next time the character teaches the animal a trick, the player receives a +1 to all of the rolls.

Suggested Equipment: Rewards or treats (+2), trainer raised the animal (+3)

Possible Penalties: Training non-mammal (-1 to -3), physical abuse (-1), animal already been trained poorly (-1), animal distracted by environment (-2)

CATCHING ANIMALS

Dice Pool: Dexterity + Animal Ken + equipment minus animal's Defense or Dodge trait

Action: Instant

When a domestic animal has escaped, kids may need to catch it. They may also attempt to catch a relatively safe animal to bring it to an authority figure.

The Storyteller may prefer to simply run this as a chase or combat scene, in which case, refer to the foot chase rules (p. 57) or Chapter Six, respectively. If the pursuit and capture of the animal is a relatively minor part of the storyline, however, the Storyteller can simply have the players roll a Wits or Dexterity plus Animal Ken pool, with bonuses for equipment and penalties based on the animal's Defense or Dodge trait. Well-treated family pets won't use a full Dodge to escape from family members — most of them simply enjoy the escape as a sort of playtime. Abused or wild animals may use a full Dodge to prevent themselves from being captured, however.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character fails to catch the animal, and it takes the opportunity to race out of sight for the remainder of the scene. The character must stalk it for a while to attempt to catch it, if that's even possible.

Failure: Your character can't quite catch the animal yet, but can keep trying.

Success: The character has snagged the animal — he has the tiger by the tail, so to speak. Now what does he do with it?

Exceptional Success: The character captures the animal and leaves it in a good and happy mood. It comes along with you without much struggle.

Suggested Equipment: Appropriate food (+1), well-trained animal (+1), multiple pursuers (+1 for every 3 pursuers)

Possible Penalties: Wild animal (-2 to -4), abused pet (-2), animal's Defense or Dodge trait.

EMPATHY

"Look at him, he's like a baby. What's the matter, baby, do you miss your mom-meeee?" Will taunted Nelson as the dark-haired boy rubbed a tear away with one hand and smeared snot across his upper lip with the other hand.

"Well...well, where the hell are our parents, then? Where the hell is everybody? This was supposed to be just a sleepover, and now everybody is gone!" Nelson's anger mingled with his fear and the tears came again.

"You're not a baby! You're like a little girl, you're like my sister when she loses her doll-lleeeee —" Will jeered.

"Will. Cut it out," Brian said. "This is seriously screwed up, dude. I'm scared too. I think you're giving Nelse a hard time because you're just as scared as he is." Will started to protest. "Okay, then," Brian went on, "pretend you aren't scared, but leave Nelson alone, because we have to figure out what to do next."

This Skill represents your character's sense for others' emotions. For some kids, it's a matter of deliberately observing body language and non-verbal cues. Others are just unconsciously able to divine a person's true mood.

As the name implies, Empathy also involves the capacity to understand other people's views and perspectives, whether your character agrees with them or not. This is useful in everything from calming down upset friends, to getting your gang to go along with your idea, to trying to figure out who the new class troublemaker is. If a subject actively conceals his emotions or motives, make a contested roll versus the person's Wits + Subterfuge + any circumstance modifiers.

Possessed by: Perceptive kids, children of counselors, popular or savvy kids, observant outsiders

Specialties: Noticing Emotion, Lies, Motives, Discerning Personalities

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character misreads a person's emotional state, possibly with disastrous results. He may, for example, interpret nervous laughter as genuine, or start a fight with ill-timed humor of his own.

Failure: Your character is unable to gauge the subject's true emotional state or personality.

Success: Your character has a good read on a person's true emotional state or personality, regardless of the subject's apparent state of mind.

Exceptional Success: Your character notes enough telltale clues in the subject's behavior to gain a detailed understanding of her emotional state. Not only can he discern, say, that she is being deceptive, but he can also tell from her body language that someone just out of sight is threatening her, and that she is hoping for help but unable to ask for it.

EXPRESSION

Dawn took a deep breath. She'd sung in church hundreds of times and in music class every week. But this was alone — no musical instruments or anything. And it was such a sad song! A funeral song. What had Regina called it? A dirge?

Regina had found the recording of the song on the Internet, and Dawn had listened to it over and over again all day. Even though it was in Russian, Dawn had felt like she knew it well enough to sing it when the Strangled Lady appeared that night.

But now that the Strangled Lady — Elena — had appeared on her balcony, Dawn couldn't get out even a squeak.

Expression reflects your character's training and experience in the art of communication, both to entertain and inform. This Skill covers both the written and spoken word and other forms of entertainment, from journalism to poetry, creative writing to acting, music to dance. Characters can use it to compose written works or to put the right words together at the spur of the moment to deliver a rousing speech. Used well, Expression can sway others' opinions or even hold an audience captive.

When *composing* a written work, roll Wits or Intelligence (depending on whether the work is fiction/poetic or factual) + Expression. When *reciting* to an audience, roll Presence + Expression. Playing an instrument involves Intelligence + Expression for a known piece, and

Wits + Expression for an improvised one. Dance calls for Dexterity + Expression.

Possessed by: Theater kids, music students, dancers, writers

Specialties: Music, Theater, Dance, Oration, Specific Musical Instrument

General Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character's performance is muddled and confusing. It not only fails to communicate his ideas, but it's unbearable. Fortunately, you're only a kid. Your parents still think it was great, and within a day or so, everyone except your teacher has forgotten all about it.

Failure: Your character's performance fails to capture the audience's interest or attention.

Success: Your character's performance gets its point across in the manner intended, capturing the audience's interest.

Exceptional Success: The performance far exceeds the audience's expectation for youth performance. A standing ovation may be in order.

Suggested Equipment: Quality musical instrument (+2), supreme-quality musical instrument — a Stradivarius violin (+4 or +5)

Possible Penalties: Unfamiliar audience (-1 to -3), poorly made instrument (-1), foreign audience (-1), irritated audience (-3)

INTIMIDATION

Sam frowned at the human-shaped outline in the paint. That didn't make any sense at all. He started to walk toward it. Maggie and Emily followed behind, scared but equally intrigued.

"No. You two stay here," Sam said.

Emily folded her arms and stomped a foot down. "I will not."

Sam tilted his head down to look at her. His eyes narrowed. Maybe he was only 12, but she was only 10 and he had a full head on her, not to mention a lifetime of being bigger and stronger. "Like hell. There's something seriously weird over there. You two stay here where it's safe."

Emily lowered her eyes, sullenly, but nodded her head. Maggie — only seven — began to cry. "You stay where it's safe, too, Sam!"

Intimidation is the art and technique of persuading others through the use of fear. Your character can intimidate someone with a show of brute force (Strength + Intimidation), through more subtle means such as verbal threats (Manipulation + Intimidation), or simply through menacing body language (Presence + Intimidation). It can be used to get other people to cooperate (even against their better judgment), back down from a confrontation, or reveal information they'd rather not share.

It's extremely difficult for children to intimidate adults. Storytellers should apply penalties in the range of -3 to -5 for the mere attempt, and even then, the only time it's likely to work is when the kid has information that the adult couldn't bear to have revealed. Physical intimidation rarely

STICKS AND STONES

by Wood Ingham

Kids are awful to each other.

It's a truism. Every time you hear about your neighbor's kid getting picked on at school or you tell the story about that kid in school who, once a week, every week for three years, got dragged to the toilet block at breaktime and had his head flushed in the bowl, someone says, *Kids, eh? They're cruel.*

It's rubbish. Kids aren't any crueler than adults are. They're just less sophisticated about it. As they develop, children get their attitudes from the people around them: their parents, their teachers, their classmates. The very smallest kids don't tend to exclude other kids. They don't know how to. They need to be taught.

They tell you that the kids who bully are unhappy. That's not true. Well, it's not always true. Some kids do bully other kids because their parents are bullies. But it doesn't follow that their parents are necessarily bullying *them*. A kid who's being abused at home might take out his frustration on weaker kids, but he's just as likely to be as much of a victim in the playground as he is at home. On the other hand, take the under-12s netball captain, who has affirming, protective, loving parents who treat their employees like absolute shit and behave like complete snobs towards their neighbors. She's a piece of work. She's happy and confident and well adjusted and she's grown up knowing it's perfectly okay to pick on the weak. And she's got a tongue like a chainsaw. Just like Daddy.

Mum might have told you that bullies are cowards who always back down when they're challenged. It's not true, either. Our 12-year-old princess has the weight of numbers on her side. Maybe she'll back down if she's outnumbered, or if all the other kids turn on her – but come on, how likely is that going to be? The teachers love her, the other kids are either in awe of her or afraid of her, and she sees herself as a good girl. In her world, she's the hero.

And as the protagonist of her own story, she gets to decide who's in and out. Exclusion, on the whole, is one of the easiest ways to decide who's in, which is why, when the school bully, whoever he or she might be, decides that someone is out, everyone joins in.

And nothing ever gets done about it. Sure, schools might say they have a zero-tolerance policy for bullying, but it's almost impossible to enforce. And telling only makes things worse.

Bullies are living proof that life isn't fair. In a few years' time, this is going to be the kid who gets laid while you can't get ever seem to get past first base. And then, a few years after that, this is going to be your boss.

In a story set in the World of Darkness, the schoolyard bully is your characters' worst enemy. They might manage to defeat the coterie of teenage vampires who hang out in the creepy old cave. Old Man Reynolds isn't going to get away with it, because of those pesky kids. But the captain of the football

team and the head cheerleader? They're going to be fine. You might have saved the school, but it doesn't matter. You're still going to get your head shoved down the toilet bowl on Monday.

The bully becomes a symbol of a simple fact that all kids learn at some point: life isn't fair.

It works like this: the monster beneath the school picks off several of your characters' friends, but the school bully escapes unharmed. The kids might have to leave home and move to another area after what they've seen, but the new school they move to has a bully, just like the old one. Even if the most obnoxious, intimidating kid in the school gets eaten by a werewolf, there's always going to be someone to take his place.

The poor you may always have with you, as the saying goes, but the same goes for the playground thug and the bitchy cheerleader, the name-calling cool kids and all the others. They never go away.

Your characters don't have to be the victims, of course. They could be part of that mass of kids in the middle ground between "cool" and "outcast," who have the choice to try to get in with the in crowd...or side with the underdog. On the other hand, you could play the playground bully yourself, learning – despite what I've just said – that even the hardest kid in the schoolyard is just a kid when faced with supernatural evil.

Bullies *can* have weaknesses. They *can* be the victims. In fact, the process of learning that there's always something out there that's scarier than you can make for a pretty affecting story. Maybe a kid who's mean to other kids learns his lesson from facing the dark. Maybe he wins, though, and he's no different.

Anyone who's been through bullying at school knows the misery of being on the receiving end. It's easy to imagine the bully as thoroughly evil, as being in league with dark forces, and why not?

A brilliant way to make a story convincing is to stick to what you know, and the great thing about school stories – and the immediate, scary nature of horror stories set in schools – is the simple fact that most people went to school. It could be interesting and even cathartic to imagine the school your character goes to as populated with characters from your own childhood. You can canonize or savagely caricature anyone you want. Notwithstanding the sense of catharsis or ineffectual revenge with which this might furnish you, this has the added advantage of giving you a supply of absolutely convincing Storyteller characters. Talk about it with your players, and if they're comfortable with it, go ahead. It's an easier thing to do if none of your players went to school with you, obviously.

However you play things, young protagonists depend more on a cast of supporting characters – parents, friends, siblings, teachers and schoolmates. It stands to reason that among those will be some kind of bully, the nearest thing most children have to a real enemy, the best way to impress upon the young that life isn't always fair.

works between 12-year-olds and adults, though if the child has a firearm and obviously knows how to use it, a standard Intimidation attempt might be possible.

Possessed by: Exceptionally big and scary kids, crazy kids, bullies, teachers' pets

Specialties: Bluster, Physical Threats, Stare-Downs, Torture, Veiled Threats

General Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character's attempt at intimidation fails so miserably that it invites mockery from onlookers or physical violence from its target.

Failure: Your character is unable to cause his target to back down or do as he says.

Success: Your character's target backs down for a moment, or agrees to do as he directs.

Exceptional Success: Your character's target quails. You will be able to direct his actions fairly easily in subsequent encounters.

BULLYING

Dice Pool: [Attribute] + Intimidation vs. Resolve + Composure

Action: Extended and contest

Bullying can be a one-time thing. The bigger kid pushes the smaller kid down, takes his lunch, kicks dirt in his face, etc. More often, though, kids live with bullies every day. Sometimes a bully's victim turns it around, discovering that the bully isn't really so tough, and at that point, the bully generally picks a new target (or sometimes adopts his former victim into his circle of friends). Sometimes, the victim tattles, which can resolve the problem or make it much worse. And sometimes the victim just takes it, bottling up anger, fear and humiliation. Hopefully the poor kid has an outlet, someone he can talk to, before he explodes. But that discussion aside, let's consider the systems for bullying, regardless of which end of it your character is on.

Bullying is an extended and contested roll. One roll is made every day (provided any bullying takes place that day; if the victim is outside, he doesn't get bullied). The roll for the bully is an Attribute + Intimidation — which Attribute depends on the style of bullying. A big kid who pushes smaller ones around, stuffs their heads in toilets, trips them or beats them up uses Strength to bully. A girl who ruins reputations, makes cutting remarks and spreads rumors uses Manipulation. A boy who screams in people's faces and plays the dozens like nobody's business uses Presence (or possibly Manipulation, but if he relies on volume and forceful verbiage, Presence is more appropriate). A bully might change tactics, using Strength one day and Manipulation the next. The victim's player, meanwhile, always uses Resolve + Composure.

Either of these rolls can be a teamwork action (see p. 127), but it's much easier to get people to stand with you if you're the one doing the bullying. Victims tend to stand

alone, so being on the victim side of the bully equation is often a losing battle. The target number of successes for the bully is equal to the victim's Resolve + Composure. The victim's target number is equal to the bully's Resolve + Composure. All successes, for both parties, are lost if more than one day goes by without any bullying, so normally the victim just needs to last until Friday without succumbing. Unfortunately, that's not usually the case.

Note that bullying can cause loss of Morality (see p. 80).

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: If the bully's player rolls a dramatic failure, the victim sees the bully for the weakling he truly is — the bully has to confront it, too. The bully's player must immediately make a trigger roll (see p. 82), and any subsequent attempts to bully that particular victim suffer a -3 modifier. If the victim's player rolls a dramatic failure, the victim suffers a supreme humiliation at the bully's hands: de-pantsed in front of the class, taunted until he wets himself, or perhaps he just breaks down and starts crying. In any case, the victim must make a trigger roll.

Failure: No successes are gained toward the total.

Success: Successes are added to the total. If the bully reaches the target number, the victim breaks a little. The bully regains a point of Willpower, just as if he had acted in accordance with his Fault (if he *did* act in accordance with his Fault, he regains two points of Willpower). Once a victim has been bullied a number of consecutive times equal to his Resolve + Composure, he must make a trigger roll. If the victim achieves his target number first, the bully realizes that his victim isn't going to break...this week. No further bullying attempts between these two characters can be made until two days of no contact have passed (though the bully can attempt to muscle other kids, and other bullies can attempt to terrorize the victim).

Exceptional Success: Considerable success is made toward the goal. If the bully wins the contest with five more successes than necessary, the victim breaks as though he had rolled a dramatic failure (see above). If the victim wins and the player rolls five more successes than necessary, he regains all of his Willpower as though he had fulfilled the condition of his Asset. Next week, the victim gains a +1 to resist *all* bullies.

Suggested Equipment: For bullies: Giant Merit (+1), Striking Looks Merit (+1; see p. 111), rich parents (+1), reputation among other kids (+1), big friends (+2; not applicable if using the teamwork rules), older than victim (+1). For victims: appeal to teacher (+3), protection from older kid (+2).

Possible Penalties: For bullies: Tiny Merit (-1), younger than victim (-2), recently fouled up publicly — tripped in kickball, got dressed down by a teacher, etc. (-2). For victims: poor hygiene (-1), different manner of dress/speech from the majority (-2), known emotional disturbance (-3), different social class from the majority (-2).

SOCIALIZE

The old man had grabbed Will by the collar faster than any of them would have thought possible. Nelson and Brian sprinted forward, shouting. Their sudden appearance clearly confused the man just as much as Will's had. He let go of Will's collar and put his hands up, as though they were police.

Nelson noticed how bad the man smelled when they got to within a few feet of him. His clothes weren't clean, and he hadn't shaved in weeks.

"Please, kids, I don't mean to hurt anyone," the old man said as the boys ran up. He took a step back onto Grandview — a step that would have killed him on an ordinary day, given the usual traffic load Grandview saw.

"Who are you?" Brian asked. "Why are you still here? Where is everyone else?"

The old man stammered, "I-I don't know! I went down to the pantry at the church this morning, and it was all locked up. Nobody was there. Why aren't you boys vanished like the rest of them?"

Brian's eyes narrowed. "You slept outside last night, didn't you?"

"Sure I did," the man said. "Just like every night."

Socialize is the skill of getting along well with others, whether to extract information from them, make friends, inspire or change minds through logic, charm or sheer, glib fast-talking. Though it can be taught with varying degrees of success, most characters with the Skill possess a natural talent and have honed it over the years through trial and error, practicing their delivery until it rolls effortlessly off the tongue. Socialize is the Skill of convincing others by force of personality alone, making one's point through carefully chosen words, body language and emotion.

Possessed by: Suck-ups, popular kids, con artists

Specialties: Fast-Talk, Inspiring, Partying, Sales, Motivational Speeches

General Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Not only does your character fail at his attempt, but he manages to actively offend the people he was trying to buddy up to. He automatically fails any other Socialize rolls used against this target for the rest of the scene.

Failure: The character doesn't put his best foot forward, but doesn't make an idiot of himself, either.

Success: Your character is able to charm the people he needs to talk to, and get the information he needs or befriend them appropriately.

Exceptional Success: The character is able to turn a casual acquaintance into a real friendship, if he is of a mind to do so.

FAST-TALK

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Socialize + equipment (talker) versus Composure + (Empathy or Subterfuge) (target)

Action: Instant and contested

Your character needs to convince another person to perform a service, to look the other way or to simply be dis-

tracted for a few moments. Or maybe he just wants to convince some bullies to let him go. Rather than cook up an elaborate lie or ruse, he hurls explanations, excuses, pleas and/or trivia at his target in hopes of bewildering her. The intent is to achieve his intended result in the confusion.

Fast-talk is a contested action. Roll Manipulation + Persuasion + equipment for your character, against the target's Composure + Empathy or Subterfuge. (Empathy if your character preys upon the subject's feelings, Subterfuge if he preys upon her intellect.) If your character wins, the subject performs the intended minor chore, or is otherwise tricked into doing what your character wants. If the target wins, she sees through the bluster and refuses to comply or needs further convincing (which might make this roll into an extended action; see p. 121). If the two tie, the subject is in a daze, not convinced to do anything, yet too confused not to listen. In the case of a failed or tied effort, your character can make a successive attempt (see p. 125), if the Storyteller agrees that the subject will still listen.

Fast-talk can be used to achieve only harmless favors or results, such as gaining entrance to a clubhouse, allowing your character to "take a closer look" at the mummy's jewelry that should ordinarily be kept under glass, or distracting a guard while partners sneak by. It cannot be used to convince subjects to perform actions that are patently dangerous or harmful. The target still retains her common sense.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: You cannot bamboozle the target, and you are so obviously trying to con him that he calls for nearby teachers or other authority figures to get you in trouble.

Failure: The target just won't listen to you.

Success: The target listens for this turn.

Exceptional Success: The target is gobsmacked by your barrage of words. He'll be befuddled for the scene, or may even leave the immediate area if you encourage him to do so.

Suggested Equipment: Convincing clothing (+1), some object that the target finds desirable or interesting (+1), Striking Looks Merit (+1)

Possible Penalties: Inappropriate appearance (-1 to -3), lack of bribery items (-1), subject hard of hearing (-3)

STREETWISE

Tamika and Regina scurried from the library toward the apartment building. It was cold today; Tamika's mom had said it was going to snow tonight. Dawn's mom wouldn't be home until after McGee's closed at 12, so the girls had planned to get together at Dawn's and compare notes. To their surprise, Dawn met them on the front steps of the building.

"I left my key in my locker," Dawn said. "I'm freezing, but McGee's is like twenty blocks from here. Do you guys want to walk with me?"

"My mom just texted me — I have to be home in half an hour for dinner," Tamika said. "So I can't walk all the way with you. I don't know if it would be safe for just the two of you. I

heard that Mike Johnson is in the neighborhood again. And it is going to be dark soon.”

Regina frowned. “We have to talk about this. I found a bunch of information on the Strangled La —”

Dawn interrupted, “Shhh! Don’t say her name, even out here! She’ll come and get you!”

“Okay,” Regina continued, “I found a bunch of information, and if we can’t walk and talk, then we’re going to have to talk about it tonight after our parents are in bed.”

Characters possessing this Skill know how life on the streets works and are adept at surviving by its harsh rules. Streetwise characters can avoid trouble, gather information, make contacts, buy and sell on the gray and black markets, and otherwise make use of the street’s unique resources. The Skill is also important for navigating urban dangers, avoiding the law and staying on the right side of the wrong people.

Possessed by: Street kids, gang members, homeless kids, city kids

Specialties: Avoiding Trouble, Black Market, Gangs, Rumors

General Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character completely misreads the situation, committing an error that could have dangerous consequences. He might mouth off to the wrong dealer, or flash the wrong sign to the gangers on the corner.

Failure: Your character has no luck finding any of his street associates, or of convincing the locals that he’s legit.

Success: Your character gets together with someone who can provide what he needs.

Exceptional Success: Not only does your character find someone who can help him, but that person also turns up at just the right time to provide something quick and cheap.

WORKING THE BLACK MARKET

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Streetwise + equipment

Action: Extended (2–10 successes; each roll represents one day of working the street)

Even the most dangerous street kids have little use for the dangerous and deep corners of the black market. However,



plenty of popular and useful pieces of equipment, toys, and electronic goodies that “fell off a truck” can make their way into kids’ hands. Practically anything can be had on the black market if a buyer has enough money and time to find the right contacts and to secure a deal. (Kids typically have the time, though they may not have the money.) When your character wants to turn to the black market to buy illegal items (or unload stolen goods), the Storyteller first determines how many successes are necessary to complete the task. That number depends on the size or value of the items sought. Buying or selling throwaway cell phones might require just one success, while unreleased video game systems might require three. Highly illegal, hard-to-find items such as guns or explosives might require eight or more successes, and even hard-bitten fences might be skeptical of a child’s attempt to buy or sell such items (on the other hand, some drug dealers find young children to be superb runners and sellers, because if caught, they aren’t sent to prison). A successful series of rolls means your character finds someone able to trade, and a meeting is arranged. All your character has to do is show up with the money (or items to sell) and the deal is done.

Example: *Tamika learns that Mike Johnson’s gang, the Kings, recently robbed St. Theresa’s church. Among the loot they made off with were the bones of a saint — and Tamika hopes that those bones can be used to repel unholy creatures of the night. Tamika wants to meet with one of the younger members of the Kings and see if she can get her hands on those bones. The Storyteller determines that she will have to accumulate four successes, but doesn’t tell Tamika’s player that. Tamika’s player rolls Tamika’s Manipulation + Streetwise + 1 for Tamika’s cell phone — five dice. She rolls three successes — almost there but not quite enough. The Storyteller says that Tamika can contact Louis Freeman, a young member of the Kings, but he won’t meet with her just yet. She’ll have to keep working on it tomorrow.*

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character makes a serious mistake in her choice of associate. She may deal with an undercover cop or federal agent, or the associate plans to harm or kidnap her during the meeting.

Failure: Your character has no luck finding an associate who can lead her to the goods.

Success: Your character locates a potential seller or buyer and a meeting is arranged.

Exceptional Success: Your character finds someone who will sell her quality materials at a cost below market value. It probably means the seller is trying to unload some very hot merchandise, but the price is excellent.

Suggested Equipment: Pager (+1), cell phone (+1), time spent in juvie (+2), valuable barter items (+3)

Possible Penalties: Unfamiliar neighborhood (-1 to -3), foreign country (-4), upscale neighborhood (-1), lack of phone (-1), inappropriate clothes (-2), “You look like a snitch” (-3)

SUBTERFUGE

“Kenny, what do you need in Mr. Hoover’s room? Isn’t everyone else out at recess?”

Kenny’s eyes got big and then he blinked hard, twice. He hadn’t expected Mrs. Jackson to be here at all.

“I, uh, I guess I wasn’t going into his room, I just, I...”

“Kenny,” she said, “I know you don’t like running around outside with the other kids. But you’re starting to get pale. And you need the exercise.”

Kenny latched onto this, desperate to keep the math teacher from knowing his real reason for sneaking into Hoover’s room. He squinted hard and tried to force a snuffle or tear.

“Mrs. Jackson! They all make fun of me! The girls chase me around the playground and —” sniff — “T-Tommy Fuller says he’s going to beat me up if I try to just swing on the swings. I just wanted to read a book in the quiet!”

Mrs. Jackson’s face softened. She had bought it!

“Kenny, I know it’s hard, but those are the rules. And I’ll have a talk with that Tommy Fuller.”

Kenny slumped his way to the playground door, secretly triumphant. He hadn’t gotten into Hoover’s desk, but he hadn’t been caught, either. Of course, Tommy was going to be pissed...

Subterfuge is the art of deception. Characters possessing this Skill know how to lie convincingly, and they recognize when they’re being lied to. Subterfuge is used when telling a convincing falsehood, hiding one’s emotions or reactions, or trying to pick up on the same in others. The Skill is most often used to trick other people, but characters also learn it to avoid being tricked themselves.

Possessed by: Basically every kid in history

Specialties: Con Jobs, Hiding Emotions, Lying, Misdirection, Spotting Lies

General Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: You completely fail to hide the truth. Your target knows you’re lying, and can probably figure out what the truth is. No further Subterfuge rolls will work on that target for the remainder of the scene.

Failure: You lie unconvincingly. Your target doesn’t quite trust the words you’re saying, although he will not outright accuse you of lying. You may be able to trick your way out of this situation with subsequent Subterfuge rolls.

Success: Your target accepts your lie as the truth.

Exceptional Success: Your target accepts your lie as the truth, and you lay the groundwork for subsequent falsehoods — for the rest of this scene, you gain +1 die to Subterfuge tests against this subject.

DISGUISE

Dice Pool: Wits + Subterfuge + equipment versus Wits + Subterfuge + equipment

Action: Instant and contested

Kids may try to pass themselves off as other people, try to appear older, or simply try to appear not to be themselves. In any of these cases, the task is a contested roll of Wits + Subterfuge + equipment.

If a kid is trying to disguise himself as a particular person, he may gain bonuses for using theatrical gear, or bas-

ing his disguise on a photograph of the person he's impersonating. The viewer gains bonuses, in that case, from his familiarity with the impersonator or his subject. If the subject knows or is familiar with the person being impersonated, apply a -2 to -5 modifier to your roll (-2 if familiarity is passing, -5 if it's intimate). If both rolls achieve the same number of successes, the viewer is slightly confused; both parties should re-roll on their next turns.

In the event that the child is simply trying to appear not to be himself, the viewer only gains "equipment" bonuses based on his familiarity with the child.

This task can also be used for a child to try to appear not to be a teenager or adult — a big 12-year-old might be able to fool people into thinking he's old enough to have a driver's license, for instance. Use the same dice pool as other activities related to this task.

Note that if a child is called upon to actually *act* like someone else, an Expression roll is probably necessary.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character's disguise is badly flawed. Not only does the deception fail, but the disguise must also be abandoned altogether before any other attempt can be made.

Failure: Your character does not pass himself off as someone else.

Success: Your character manages to pass himself off as someone else.

Exceptional Success: Your character so thoroughly convinces his subject that she actively vouches for his assumed identity.

Suggested Equipment: Fake student ID (+1), hair dye (+1), good photo of target (+1), theatrical makeup kit (+2), Giant Merit (+1)

Possible Penalties: Lack of tools (-3 to -5), lack of appropriate clothes (-2 to -4), rushed disguise (-2), viewer's familiarity with subject (-2 to -5, as above), Tiny Merit (-3)





1.2019

win

Phil was out on the roof, taking a smoke break, when the text message came over his phone. He fished it out of his pocket and read the display. The on-call psychiatrist sighed and tossed the half-smoked cigarette aside, then glanced up at the bright, full harvest moon gleaming above Kirkland Memorial Hospital. "Never fails," he said wearily, glaring up at the amber disk, then he turned and headed back down to work.

They'd paged him to the ER, which wasn't all that unusual; nor was the sight of the two uniformed police officers standing outside the patient's exam room. Suicide attempt, Phil thought at once. But then he saw Detective Washburn over by the nurse's desk, conferring with the head nurse, and knew that this was something much more serious.

Frowning, Phil nodded to the officers and pulled the patient's chart out of the rack on the exam room's door. Emily Morgan, age 11, he read, scanning down the page. Shock...severe anemia... His frown deepened. What the hell?

"Evening, Phil," Detective Washburn said.

Phil started. The gray-haired policeman was as silent as a cat when he wanted to be. Phil never could figure out how the man did it. Phil glanced up from the chart. "What have we got here, Mike?"

Washburn grimaced. "We were kinda hoping you could tell us," the detective said. "Nine-one-one got a call about a house fire down on forty-third and Williams about an hour ago. When the firefighters arrived, they found your patient sitting on the curb with her sister. Mother was still inside the house, unconscious from smoke inhalation. If she hadn't been a few feet from the front door, they never would have gotten her out in time."

"And the father?"

Washburn took a deep breath. "They found what was left of him in the bedroom. He'd been bludgeoned and then doused with gasoline. From the positioning of the body, we suspect he was still alive when your patient tossed the match."

"Jesus," Phil whispered. "This girl's just eleven. You think she did it?"

Washburn nodded. "She pretty much confessed to it at the scene. Said something had to be done because it was about to be her sister's turn."

Phil glanced down at the chart again and his frown deepened. "Why hasn't she been checked for signs of sexual assault?"

"She won't let the nurses touch her. We had two female police officers at the scene, and she wouldn't have anything to do with them, either."

Phil shook his head. "That doesn't much fit the profile if it's a case of sexual abuse. Are there any obvious signs of physical trauma? The chart mentioned anemia."

The veteran detective didn't respond at first. "You'd better see for yourself," he said at last.

Phil stared quizzically at Washburn for a moment, then pushed open the exam room door and stepped inside.

The girl was nowhere to be seen. Phil let the door swing silently shut and then stepped slowly around the exam table.

He found Emily crouched in the far corner of the room, hugging her legs tight against her chest. Under the glow of the fluorescents, her pale skin was a deathly gray. She wore a faded t-shirt and ragged jeans, streaked with soot and spattered with dark stains that could only be her father's blood. Her eyes were cold and hard, devoid of interest or emotion. But that wasn't what sent a chill racing along Phil's spine.

It was the bites — dozens of twin puncture wounds, some almost scarred over and others inflamed with infection, covering the young girl's bare arms and neck.

Chapter Four: Advantages

Advantages are the things that differentiate one character with similar aptitudes and abilities from another. They include personality and esoteric attributes like Assets and Faults, as well as factors that are a blend of the internal strengths and weaknesses of a character with the external influences and experiences they've had, such as Morality and triggers. Advantages also include some inherent traits, such as Size, and some that are a product of other aspects of your character, derived from inherent or purchased traits.

With regard to derived Advantages, it is important to remember that when the traits from which the Advantage is derived change, permanently or temporarily, the Advantage changes as well. Thus, if your character's Dexterity goes up, his Initiative (the sum of his Dexterity and Composure) goes up as well.

An optional set of Advantages, called Flaws, are also included in this chapter. It might seem strange to call a Flaw, which acts as a detriment to a character, an Advantage, but you can derive certain benefits from these traits.

DEFENSE

Derived Trait: Your character's Defense is equal to the lower of his Dexterity or Wits.

Especially for a child, the best plan in a fight is often simply to avoid getting hurt until you can get away. Even when your character is actively engaged in combat, he is normally also protecting himself by ducking, moving and generally trying not to be where his opponent's blows will land. Your character's Defense trait is applied as a negative modifier to his opponent's rolls for Brawl, Weaponry and thrown-weapon (Dexterity + Athletics) attacks. If he is being attacked by multiple opponents, his full Defense trait is used as a negative modifier against one attacker, and then his trait is reduced by one as it is applied to each subsequent attack.

It's hard to duck a bullet. Defense can't be used against Firearms (gun and bow-based) attacks, unless they're happening within close-combat range (see p. 140). If your character is taken by surprise (p. 34) or immobilized by some means, his Defense does not apply.

Example: *Jake tattles on Butch for stealing kids' lunch money and Butch promises revenge. After school, Butch and his two toadies jump Jake in an alley. Jake's Dexterity is 3 and his Wits is 2. His Defense is 2, the lower of the two scores. As the bullies begin to attack, Jake does his best to avoid them. Butch suffers a -2 penalty to his attack roll — Jake's full Defense. The second bully's attack gets a -1 penalty, but the third bully's attack is unmodified, as Jake has run out of Defense.*

Defense isn't affected by wound penalties (p. 150).

For more details on how Defense is used in combat, see Chapter Six, p. 140.

As your character's Dexterity and Wits increase through the application of experience points (or are increased or decreased by temporary fluctuations during play), her Defense changes as well. Don't forget to note these changes as they come into play — you don't want to shortchange your character in an Advantage that might save her life!

HEALTH

Derived Traits: Stamina + Size

Your character's Health trait determines how much damage his body can take and still remain functional. The larger and more robust a character is, the more damage he can take before dying.

The test of the morality of a society is what it does for its children.

— **Dietrich Bonhoeffer**
(1906–1945)

Health is marked on your character sheet and has both a permanent and a temporary rating. The permanent rating (how much Health he has when completely healthy) is filled in on the dots on your character sheet. His temporary Health points are recorded in the boxes below. Every time your character loses a Health point, mark off, from left to right, the kind of injury inflicted. When the player makes a mark in the fifth-to-last box (that is, the character has four open boxes remaining), the character suffers a negative modifier to his dice pools and Speed. As he continues to take damage, the modifier increases and other penalties come into play, as his body slowly succumbs to the physical injury and shock. When the permanent dots and the filled-in temporary boxes are equal, your character is severely injured or dying. When all of his Health points are marked off as aggravated damage, he is dead. (See p. 150 for more details on injury and wound penalties.)

Different types of damage heal at different rates. See p. 150 for details on recovering Health and healing times for different types of damage. When damage is healed (and points are recovered), the Health boxes on your character sheet are emptied, from right to left.

If your character's Stamina increases by the use of experience points (or goes up or down due to temporary effects), his Health changes as well. Don't forget to adjust your character's Health dots when his Stamina changes.

INITIATIVE

Derived Traits: Dexterity + Composure

Your character's Initiative trait reflects how quickly she reacts to hostile situations, and determines the order in which she takes her action in combat scenes. When the Storyteller calls for an Initiative roll, you roll one die and add the result to your character's Initiative trait. The 10-Again rule (see p. 153) does *not* apply to this roll. The total determines the order in which your character interacts with all the other participants in the scene (highest goes first). Once you roll your character's Initiative, the number usually does not change for the remainder of the scene. She always acts after those with a higher total Initiative for the scene, and before those with a lower total. There are some exceptions. The Fresh Start Merit (see p. 119) allows a character to forfeit one action to change her place in the Initiative lineup for the rest of the scene, or possibly force all participants to re-roll Initiative. It is also possible to delay your action intentionally (see p. 104). In the event of a tie, the character with the highest unmodified Initiative trait goes first. If both Initiative traits are identical, the player's character goes first, or each player rolls a die, with the highest roll going first for that scene.

Example: Savannah's character has a Dexterity of 4 and a Composure of 3. Adding the two produces an Initiative trait of 7. During play, Savannah's character opens a basement door and the creature that has been living under the stairs leaps out at her. Savannah rolls a die, and the result is a 5. She adds the result to her Initiative trait and comes up with an Initiative of 12 for the scene (7 + 5). The Storyteller rolls a die for the creature and comes up with a 9. The creature's Initiative trait is 3, so the creature also has an Initiative of 12 for the scene.



Savannah's character has the higher unmodified Initiative trait, so her character goes first in every turn for the scene.

Refer to p.139 for more information on Initiative and how it applies to Combat.

If your character's Dexterity or Composure changes (rising due to experience point expenditures or going up or down due to temporary influences), his Initiative changes as well. Don't forget to adjust his Initiative trait when the derivative traits change.

MORALITY

Base Value: 7

Your character's Morality is, simply put, what actions he believes it is okay to take. Not necessarily what he thinks is right, or only what he is willing to do, but what he is comfortable with doing or sees as permissible or acceptable for him to do.

Idealized notions of right and wrong do not define your character's Morality rating. Many times, right and wrong are judgments that children are taught, with little context. Lying is wrong. Stealing is wrong. Killing is wrong. And yet, at many stages of emotional development, children may be completely comfortable taking these actions while still recognizing that those around them (parents, teachers and other authority figures) have lain down definitive statements about them being bad. Characters, especially children, are often comfortable with taking actions that they know society at large sees as wrong. They may believe that stealing is wrong, in general, but they may still feel it is okay for them to steal. Perhaps they think it's not as bad as what some other folks are doing, or that their need (or desire) for an object justifies their actions, or even that they deserve the item. It may not make logical sense, but humans (especially children) do this all the time.

Also, characters often take actions they are not comfortable with. Sometimes a situation puts pressure on a character to take an action they not only recognize as "wrong" from an ideal stance, but which is also outside their self-imposed definitions of acceptable and unacceptable behavior. A girl loses her temper and hits her friend with a stick or a rock on the playground. A jealous classmate smashes his rival's blue-ribbon science project. A curious and concerned band of neighborhood kids break into the abandoned house on the corner to find out why it sounds like someone is crying in the basement, and when they discover a monster living there, decide to burn the house to the ground to keep it from harming anyone else. None of these is an action the characters might normally be comfortable with, but they may be pressured or tempted into it by stress, fear, greed, or any number of other extenuating factors. When your character takes an action that is further down on the Morality chart than his current Morality, he risks coming to see that action (and others like it) as acceptable. This is represented by a degeneration roll (see p. 81 for details on how and when to perform a degeneration roll).

MORALITY RATINGS

All "wrongs," small or large, fall somewhere on the Morality Ratings scale. While not every action is detailed, enough are given to allow Storytellers to estimate where a given act should be placed. Any action that falls at or below that of a character's current Morality rating is considered a Morality offense, and requires a degeneration roll.

Morality 10 (roll five dice)

Selfish thoughts

Accidental minor harm — insect/bird/fish

Morality 9 (roll five dice)

Selfish behavior — not sharing

Accidental major harm — insect/bird/fish

Accidental minor harm — mammal (cat/dog)

Morality 8 (roll four dice)

Lying

Name-calling

Accidental killing — insect/fish/bird

Accidental minor harm — human or sentient non-human

Accidental major harm — mammal (cat/dog)

Morality 7 (four dice)

Stealing minor/shoplifting

Minor Vandalism — temporary (toilet papering/egging)

Cheating

Accidental killing — mammal (cat/dog)

Accidental major harm — human or sentient non-human

Morality 6 (three dice)

Intentional killing for self-defense/survival — insect/fish/bird

Minor Vandalism — permanent (tagging, carving initials, writing in wet cement)

Truancy/skipping school

Intentional minor injury to others

Morality 5 (three dice)

Intentional killing for self-defense/survival — mammal

Arson — small objects

Intentional major injury to others

Destructive vandalism (slashing tires, breaking planters, etc.)

Morality 4 (three dice)

Accidental killing — human

Arson — buildings/cars

Stealing Major (cars, valuables)

Morality 3 (two dice)

Intentional killing for self-defense/survival — human or sentient non-human
Intentional killing/torture for pleasure — insect/fish/bird

Morality 2 (two dice)

Intentional killing/torture for pleasure/curiosity
— mammal (cat/dog)

Morality 1 (two dice)

Intentional killing/torture for pleasure/curiosity
— human or sentient non-human

Directly below your character's Morality rating are the mildest actions that are offenses for that level. If your character is Morality 8, for example, he thinks it is not okay to lie or call names, let alone do anything further down on the scale. That doesn't mean he'd never do it, just that he's not comfortable with it (and if he chooses to, he risks degeneration).

Some acts included on the Morality Rating chart are accidental. In these cases, the sin is not based on whether the character would think it was okay to perform such acts (which would make them intentional), but whether he could come to terms with having accidentally done them, at the same level of moral guilt as intentionally doing the other acts at that level. In the case of the Morality 8 character above, he would have a difficult time forgiving himself for accidentally killing a bird, fish or insect, accidentally causing severe harm to a dog or cat, or accidentally causing minor harm to a human.

In the chart above, "major" and "minor" harm are largely situational. It's hard to cause "minor" harm to an insect, after all — if you've harmed it, you've probably killed it. A child might throw a stone at a playmate, figuring he'll miss by a mile...only to crack the little girl in the head and send her to the emergency room to get stitches. The injury isn't life threatening, and the worst that will happen is that she'll have a small scar — minor harm. If the same thing happens and she loses an eye, though, the offense is definitely major harm (accidental in both cases).

Innocents characters begin play with a Morality of 7.

DEGENERATION ROLLS

Violating a character's current moral code may change it. In taking an unacceptable action because of outside pressures or internal challenges, he may come to see that action (and others of the same moral equivalent) as acceptable. The game mechanic for this downward moral spiral is the degeneration roll, and it is made any time a character violates his Morality by doing something that is an offense for his current Morality trait rating.

Take, for example, a character with a Morality of 6. He does not believe it is acceptable to skip school or paint graffiti, although he's sometimes been known to toilet paper his principal's house. Then, one day, he and his friends start to suspect that a vampire is living in the basement of the church down the block. They agree that the only way to find out for sure is to go there during the day, and with church activities all day on weekends, they have to skip school to do so. He's not really comfortable with it, but it seems like the best thing to do in the situation. When the character does so, the Storyteller tells his player that he needs to make a degeneration roll. The player rolls three dice (the number shown on the Morality scale next to the level of the Morality offense his character performed; in this case, Morality 6). If he achieves a success (at least one die comes up 8 or above), his character's Morality remains where it is and all is well until the next time the character violates his Morality rating. If he fails the roll, his character's Morality rating drops to the next lowest level — 5 — and he immediately makes a trigger roll as well (see pp. 82 for details on trigger rolls).

Sometimes a character takes an action that is an offense several levels below his current Morality rating. In this case, the player rolls the number of dice for the offense level, but if he fails, he still moves down only one level and makes a single trigger roll.


What does it mean for the character when the player fails or succeeds at a degeneration roll? If the degeneration

ACCIDENTS HAPPEN

Adult morality is a complex web of ethics, morality, legality, personal responsibility and an assumed level of education, information and prediction (i.e. the awareness that in X situation, Y outcomes are likely). The existence of crimes such as criminal negligence, accidental manslaughter and the like are proof that, legally speaking, a person doesn't have to intend to do anything wrong in order to be found guilty of a crime, and the burden that these layers of complexity put on the adult psyche, when it comes to matters of right and wrong, is significant.

For children, however, Morality is a simpler matter. Between the ages of seven and 12, most children become aware of the concept of intention, and this idea plays a major part in their views of Morality during this time period. When faced with a person who has broken 15 cups accidentally and one who has broken one cup intentionally, most children under seven feel that the accidental destruction was the worse crime (judging simply on the amount of destruction). Somewhere around seven, however, most children go through a developmental change that allows them to begin to understand the concept of intent and its place in their views of morality. Between seven and 12, most children presented with the previous scenario will identify the intentional destruction of a single item as being "worse" than the accidental destruction of many. As children get closer to adult morality (through their teens), their views on morality become increasingly complex, taking on more and more of the assumptions of a minimum level of responsibility for actions (intentional or not) that cloud so many of the legal definitions of crimes.

Because of this developmental tendency to differentiate so strongly between accidental and intentional acts during the seven- to 12-year-old age span, the Morality Ratings chart for characters who are children places far greater weight on intentional acts than accidental ones, even if they have the same ultimate outcome.



roll succeeds, the character probably feels uncomfortable with what he's doing, and certainly doesn't feel that it's right in general, but "just this once," it's probably okay. Alternately, the character might have a bit of a breakthrough, realizing that ethics *aren't* black and white (something that everyone experiences as part of the maturing process, some a little later than others), and that "stealing is wrong," for instance, isn't an absolute. Yes, this means that the player's portrayal of the character might change, might become a little bit more adult or sophisticated, or might even regress as the character tries to get a grip on what he's feeling. After all, morality is often presented to children in absolutist terms, not because adults really function that way (usually, though of course some do) but because that's all a child's mind can handle on the subject. Functioning in the adult world is complex, and an **Innocents** character who learns that (*especially* in the context of the supernatural, which is something he probably can't just talk to his folks about), is in for a rough ride.

If the degeneration roll succeeds and the offense was something violent or extremely low on the chart (torture or killing, for instance), the character probably feels guilty as well as or instead of feeling justified. The character might feel compelled to tell someone, but knowing of no one who would understand, he starts to act out. He might deliberately get into trouble at school just to be punished and obviate some of the guilt, or engage in obsessive behaviors such as hand-washing or nail-biting. Yes, these behaviors resemble triggers, and the player is perfectly welcome to accept a trigger voluntarily to represent this internal struggle. At the Storyteller's discretion, if the character commits an offense at least four levels below his current level of Morality, the player might be required to make a trigger roll *even if the degeneration roll succeeds*. The numbers involved here make it fairly likely that the player will succeed on the trigger roll, actually, but a character who violates his own understanding of right and wrong that drastically should, perhaps, have some risk of trauma for it. Again, this rule is optional. Use it only if it's appropriate to the type of story you're telling.

What if the degeneration roll fails? Generally, this is much simpler. The character's world view changes to incorporate whatever the offense was. If the difference between the character's original Morality rating and the level of the offense is small (one or two dots; a Morality 7 character skipping school), the character realizes that skipping school is probably not going to hurt him in the long term, and it certainly isn't hurting anyone else. If the difference is larger than that (a Morality 7 character setting fire to a building, which is a Morality 4 offense), the character is still "liable" for similar acts, but probably experiences feelings and realizations similar to a character who succeeds on such a roll — the world isn't simple, and sometimes you have to break the rules. A character who comes to such an epiphany by losing Morality rather than retaining it, though, is likely to take a more ruthless view of ethics. Instead of thinking "the world isn't black and white," the character adopts a more "ends justify the means" type of mindset.

In the end, Storytellers and players need to remember that Morality is an abstract, fluid and hotly debated concept at the best of times. The Morality system presented here is meant to highlight the themes of fragile innocence within the context of a roleplaying game, not make any statement about the way ethics or morality work in the "real world."

MORALITY 0

A character who reaches Morality 0 isn't necessarily a serial killer or a school shooter in the making (though that's one possibility). Such a character has lost all ability to relate to other human beings. The child is probably non-functional, unable to communicate meaningfully with those around him. He might have lost the ability to use or comprehend spoken language, or he might remain able to deal with others but not see any point in doing so. Other people, to him, are objects or animals. *If* the character has a sinister bent (and he very well might), he may pretend to be normal and manipulate those around him. Without any context for social interaction, though, the charade won't last and the child will probably end up being labeled emotionally disturbed before too long.

A character with Morality 0 ceases to be available as a player-controlled character. The child can probably expect to be institutionalized.

TRIGGER ROLLS

When your character has failed a degeneration roll, you must immediately roll his *new* Morality rating as a dice pool called a trigger roll. If the roll succeeds, he manages to come to grips with his new Morality, slipping at least somewhat comfortably into the fact that he now accepts actions he once spurned as deplorable. If, however, the roll fails, the character has failed to come fully to terms with the new situation. He develops a mental or emotional ailment or condition that is caused by the stress, grief or remorse of having committed the "sin," or even guilt because he isn't suffering the stress or grief he feels he should. This ailment is called a trigger, and it manifests in certain specific circumstances related to the event that caused it to come into being. Characters may develop multiple triggers.

TRAUMA-SPAWNED TRIGGERS

Triggers are not always rooted in the character taking an action that violates her Morality. Sometimes a character encounters a situation or event that is so horrific it actually has an effect on her psyche, warping her in the same way that taking actions that violate her Morality might, even though she had nothing directly to do with the act. Trauma-spawned triggers of this kind are at the sole discretion of the Storyteller, although it is recommended that players are given the opportunity to make a roll (using their Morality as a dice pool) to resist developing a trigger in these cases. Two characters may react to the similar horrific situation in very different ways: one developing mental problems from it, and the other somehow managing to cope with the situation without severe or lasting emotional harm.

Other than their method of coming into being, trauma-spawned triggers are exactly like those created through failed degeneration rolls. The mechanics are the same, and they can be treated in the same manner.

TRIGGERS

Triggers are physical, mental or emotional switches caused by extreme stress or trauma. They lie in wait in the character's subconscious, dormant until the right circumstance activates them, at which point they "trigger" an unusual reaction to the given situation. Once activated, a trigger strongly influences the behavior of the character affected for a period of time that differs from trigger to trigger.

The trigger is always related, at least in the subconscious of the character, to the act that spawned it, although that connection may not always be understandable to outsiders — or to the character himself, for that matter. For example, if a character developed a trigger of Aversion because he killed a dog, he might avoid interacting with dogs (or wolves, or coyotes, or anything doglike) whenever possible. A less overt example might involve a character who got the Aversion trigger when she skipped school. Her trigger might be connected to the playground equipment she played on while ditching class, and she might develop a stomachache, headache or other physical pain every time she tries to swing or ride a merry-go-round.

EXAMPLE TRIGGERS

Aversion — Characters with the Aversion trigger will intentionally avoid a particular item, person, situation or location that they associate (consciously or subconsciously) with the event that caused this trigger. Aversion triggers differ from Phobia triggers in that the character does not exhibit fear symptoms, but will nonetheless do anything in his power to avoid interacting with the object of his trigger. Players must spend a point of Willpower per turn in order for their characters to interact voluntarily with the object of their trigger. The Aversion trigger is mild in reaction compared to some other triggers, but is constantly active.

Berserk — Characters with the Berserk Trigger react violently when their trigger is activated, going into an all-out blind rage. They physically attack people and objects around them, most often beginning with the person or thing that triggered their fit.

The Berserk trigger is most often activated by sensory input related to the event that spawned the trigger (gunfire, explosions/loud noises, or even being touched in a certain place), or to surprise. At any point at which the character is taken by surprise (see p. 34), his trigger becomes active. Characters in the middle of a Berserk trigger are impossible to reason with, and have no control over their fury. They continue to fight with all their might (and using whatever resources are available) until no targets remain, friend or foe. Because they do not spare any thought for protecting themselves, they forgo all Defense while this trigger is active, although they still gain the benefits of any armor they might be wearing. They continue their rage for a number of turns equal to (10 turns minus Morality), unless knocked unconscious. So a Mo-

ality 7 character rages for three turns, whereas a Morality 4 causes whatever destruction he can for six turns.

Compulsion — The Compulsion trigger becomes active when the character is exposed to an object, location or situation that reminds him of the event that caused the trigger. When the Compulsion trigger is activated, the player rolls Resolve + Composure. If the roll fails, the character engages in a particular compulsive behavior for a scene. Behaviors might include repetitive hand-washing or cleaning, counting objects around him, repeated pulling or plucking his hair or eyebrows, or straightening or arranging items incessantly.

Insomnia — Not all triggers manifest immediately when activated. When the Insomnia trigger activates, the afflicted character's only immediate reaction is a slight anxiousness and hyper-awareness. This offers a +1 bonus to Perception rolls while the trigger is active (see p. 34). The full burden of the trigger becomes evident when the character next attempts to sleep. The same state of heightened sensitivity that fuels the Perception bonus also makes it impossible for the character to slip into a restful sleep. Regardless of how many hours he lies in bed or what types of medication he takes, restful sleep eludes him. Treat this as if he were going without sleep altogether; even if he manages to catch an hour or two, it does not recharge him the way restful sleep does. For an adult character, this is inconvenient and slowly begins to take its toll. For a child, however, the effects are almost immediate and severe (see p. 159 for information on how fatigue works). The Insomnia trigger remains active for a week minus one day per dot of the character's Resolve + Composure, with a minimum of two nights' lost sleep.

Obsession — Characters with the Obsession trigger become unavoidably fascinated with or attracted to a particular thing, person or location that is related in some way to the event that caused this trigger. This could manifest as an undeniable desire to possess the item if it is not in their keeping, or a need to keep it on their person while the trigger is active. If neither is possible, the character's thoughts, words and actions still remain focused on the object for the duration of the trigger. With a successful Resolve + Composure roll, the character can take actions unrelated to the focus of his trigger for one scene, but it is never far from his thoughts. Obsession triggers manifest for one scene, once activated. For example, Jose gained the Obsession trigger when he set fire to a newspaper on a dare. When he sees a newspaper, his trigger activates. For the rest of the scene, he remains fixated on the paper, not necessarily needing to possess it, but unable to take his eyes off it. If someone removes the paper from the area, he asks about it. If he's asked to do anything unrelated to the newspaper, his player must succeed on a Resolve + Composure roll to do so.

Phobia — Characters with the Phobia trigger become irrationally afraid of a particular thing that poses little or no realistic danger to them (that is, the object of the phobia might actually be dangerous, but the character doesn't have to be in danger from the item in order to panic). Phobia trigger focuses might include



animals (mice, spiders, snakes, dogs), objects (needles, blood, guns), locations (elevators, tunnels, heights, being underground), situations (flying, driving, being hospitalized) or people (clowns, doctors, police officers, teachers). Each Phobia trigger has a specific focus related in some way to the event that caused the trigger. It is possible for a character to develop multiple related or unrelated Phobia triggers through different events or degenerations. When a person with the Phobia trigger encounters the target of her phobia, the player must make a successful Resolve + Composure roll to avoid activating the trigger. Success means the character has managed to avoid the trigger's effect for the scene. Failure means the trigger activates. While active, the character suffers a -5 penalty when performing any activity that is not directly related to removing herself from the presence of the phobia-target. Once activated, Phobia triggers remain active until the object or situation is no longer in the character's presence (or vice versa).

Self-Destruction — Characters with the Self-Destruction trigger find themselves overwhelmed with the desire to cause harm to themselves whenever their trigger is activated. This can manifest as cutting, punching or hitting, burning, picking at wounds or sutures, self-biting, poking or stabbing, or ingesting harmful items or substances. It should be noted that this trigger is not suicidal in nature, although if not stopped it can accidentally cause severe injury or death. Eating disorders such as bulimia could also be considered part of this trigger, though they aren't as likely to stem from supernatural events.

Self-Destruction triggers are often situational. A character with the Self-Destruction trigger often becomes overwhelmed with the need to self-harm when put into a situation that in some way resembles the one that caused the trigger. Exposure to a particular item (such as a knife, if the event that caused the Trigger revolved around one) can also cause the trigger to come active. Once activated, the Self-Destruction trigger remains active for a scene. If the character is not in a position to self-harm, she might delay the impetus for a few hours. Every scene, the player can roll Resolve + Composure to forestall the desire to self-harm. The maximum amount of delay, though, is eight hours. At this point, the character harms herself with whatever she has handy. She might not even notice she's doing it.

NOTE: This is a particularly touchy subject for many people. Some people do cut, or burn, or bite or otherwise harm themselves, and it's not funny in the slightest. The trigger is included because it's a common response to trauma, but if it's too uncomfortable a topic for anyone in your troupe, that should be respected.

REGAINING MORALITY

Morality is a slippery slope. Once you have begun to justify actions you once believed were unacceptable, it is difficult to clamber back up to moral high ground. Difficult, but not impossible, especially for children.

It is possible to spend experience points to increase a character's Morality level (see p. 185), but Morality should never be raised by more than a single level at a time. By buying higher levels one at a time, a player can raise his character's fallen Morality back to or even past its original level. The best time to allow players to spend experience points to increase their character's Morality level is at the end of a story, rather than at the end of an individual game session. This allows characters to demonstrate true repentance for the wrongs they've committed, and discourages players from taking a few brief moral actions in an attempt to justify a "quick fix" to their waning Morality. Exceptions, however, can certainly be made for especially intense game sessions or even between game character actions.

While the mechanics of Morality level increase involve spending experience points, there is far more to regaining Morality than game mechanics. Storytellers should only allow a player to buy up his character's Morality when the character has shown a consistent and ongoing dedication to moral tenets well above those espoused by his current Morality level. Developing a moral framework is a journey, not a destination, and as mentioned above, a child's outlook is in constant flux during preadolescence. If the player wants his character's game traits to increase, the character's behavior needs to reflect that increase.

When a character receives a trigger because of a Morality drop, the trigger is overcome when the character returns to the higher Morality level. The experience points spent reflect the character's efforts to come to terms with his actions and thus free himself of the burden thereof. He might undergo treatment, therapy or the like, or he may just get to the point where he's turned himself around enough that he can forgive himself for his past wrongs.

Example: *Things haven't gone well for Mark since the day he killed Rex. He's become sullen, his grades have dropped, and he's shunned all contact with animals, especially dogs — even Koko, his beloved companion since he was a toddler. His parents sent Koko to live with Mark's grandmother, because the boy refused to be in the same room with him. His Morality trait fell to 5, although he only acquired one trigger: Aversion (to dogs). He's become such a handful, however, that his parents insist he begins seeing the school counselor, and with her help, he's come to see that if he hadn't killed the neighbor's dog, it would surely have killed or maimed him. This burden lifted, Mark begins to turn himself around, quits skipping class and starts volunteering in the community. At the end of the story arc, Mark's player's Storyteller feels the character has really changed and gives the player permission to spend experience points to buy Mark's Morality up a level.*

When Mark's Morality rises to 6, the Aversion trigger that was associated with his drop to Morality 5 is erased from Mark's character sheet. He has come to terms with his actions and released himself from the guilt he's been bearing. Mark asks his parents to bring Koko home from his grandparents' house and the two become inseparable once more.

SIZE

Base Value: 4 (human child/young adult)

The Size trait represents your character's physical stature, roughly speaking. While the difference between an average seven-year-old and an average 12-year-old is fairly significant, both are larger than a kindergartner and smaller than a full-grown adult.

Size (along with Stamina) is a contributing factor in determining your character's Health trait. In general, your character's Size does not change unless your Storyteller allows you to convert her to an adult character (see Chapter Seven), in which case her Size changes to 5.

Here are some sample Sizes for various creatures.

SIZE	CREATURE
1	Human infant (up to one year)
2	Human toddler (one to four years)
3	Human youngster (five to seven years)
4	Human child/young adult (seven to 12 years)
5	Human teen/adult (13+ years)
6	Gorilla
7	Grizzly bear
8	Clydesdale horse
9	Hippo
10	White rhino
16	Elephant

SPEED

Derived Traits: Strength + Dexterity + species factor (4 for humans between the ages of seven and 12)

Your character's Speed trait is a measure of how quickly she can move, and is a combination of her Strength (muscle mass), Dexterity (coordination and agility) and a species factor that reflects her physical structure (and how well it's suited to quick movement — some creatures are just more built for speed than others), her age, Size and other factors.

She can travel a number of yards equal to her Speed trait in a single turn and still perform an action. She can move and perform an action, or perform an action and then move, but she cannot move, perform an action and then move again in the same turn. If a character takes wound penalties, her Speed is penalized as well (see p. 150).

FACTOR	SPECIES
1	Turtle
2	Duck
3	Human Toddler (two to six)
4	Human Child (seven to 12)
5	Human Adult (13+)
7	Dog/Cat
8	Wolf
10	Caribou
12	Horse
15	Cheetah

When necessary, she can forgo her ability to take an action during a turn and instead move at twice her normal Speed trait's worth of yards in a turn.

Example: Lisa's character has Strength 2 and Dexterity 3. The character is a human child, so her Speed is 9 (2 + 3 + 4), meaning she can walk or jog nine yards per turn and still take an action, or can run 18 yards per turn if she outright sprints. If the character is injured and has only three Health points remaining, she incurs a -1 modifier to her dice pools and Speed, reducing the trait to 8.

If your character's Strength or Dexterity changes (rising due to experience point expenditures or going up or down due to temporary influences), her Speed changes as well. Don't forget to adjust her Speed trait when the derivative traits change.

WILLPOWER

Derived Traits: Resolve + Composure

Your character's Willpower is a measure of how much self-confidence, determination and emotional resilience he possesses. Characters with high Willpower are focused, goal oriented and resistant to outside influences. This can manifest in a variety of ways; a virtuous schoolboy might have a high Willpower, resisting temptation to shirk his schoolwork for the sake of videogames or other "frivolities." Just as valid, however, is the rebellious high-Willpower dropout who leads his gang of street toughs and never backs down in the face of danger.

Willpower is rated on a scale from 1 to 10 and is measured in both permanent dots and temporary points.

Your character's permanent Willpower is filled in on the dots on your character sheet. His temporary points are recorded on the boxes below the permanent dots. When a temporary point of Willpower is spent, check off one of the boxes. When the number of dots and checked boxes on your character sheet are equal, your character is out of Willpower.

Characters with no Willpower points are exhausted — physically, mentally and emotionally. They've used up their reserves of internal strength and tend to be listless and depressed. Characters can regain Willpower in various ways (see Regaining Willpower Points below), but it isn't easy, so spend Willpower wisely.

SPENDING WILLPOWER POINTS

Willpower is not rolled in challenges, like Initiative, or (normally) taken away by damage, like Health. Instead, it is spent for various effects, most of which represent your character's sheer determination in overcoming challenges placed in his path. Willpower can also be spent to gain bonuses to resist forces applied against your character. Only one Willpower point can be spent in any given turn.

- You can spend one point of Willpower to gain a +3 modifier on a roll during a turn. Only one dice pool can be affected per turn, and some rolls may not be modified in this manner — final determination is up to the Storyteller. You cannot spend a point of Willpower to gain a bonus on a degeneration or trigger roll.

- A Willpower point may be spent to add two to your character's Stamina, Composure or Defense to resist mental or social/emotional pressures exerted on him, or to make a concentrated effort to avoid being harmed. See p. 126.

Uses of Willpower are explained more fully in Chapter Six, under "Heroic Effort," p. 126.

REGAINING WILLPOWER POINTS

Lost Willpower points can be recovered through four different methods, detailed below. Temporary Willpower points can never exceed your character's permanent Willpower dots. The only way to increase her Willpower dots is by increasing the Attributes from which it is derived: her Resolve and/or Composure. (See p. 185 for details on increasing traits via experience point expenditure.)

WILLPOWER	PERSONALITY
•	Spineless
••	Weak
•••	Timid
••••	Certain
•••••	Confident
••••••	Resolute
•••••••	Driven
••••••••	Determined
•••••••••	Iron Willed
••••••••••	Implacable

Since Willpower is a measure of your character's self-confidence and emotional fortitude, regaining Willpower is achieved through actions and situations that allow her to recover her sense of self and well-being. Ultimately, it is up to the Storyteller to determine when characters recover Willpower during a story. He should tailor regaining Willpower to suit the story the characters are involved with, while keeping a balance on how quickly it is recovered. Willpower is a powerful and useful trait, and being too stingy with its renewal can virtually excise it from game play, as players hesitate to utilize their Willpower for fear of never being able to recover it. On the other hand, if it is too easy to recover, players may abuse its powerful effects, which may denigrate the usefulness of Skills, Merits and Attributes by comparison.

Below are four situations in which characters can regain Willpower.

- Your character may regain one Willpower point per scene if her actions play out in a manner appropriate to her Fault (see below). Your character may regain all spent Willpower points if her actions play out in a manner appropriate to her Asset (see below). No more than one Willpower point may be regained per scene by fulfilling a Fault. Willpower can be regained by fulfilling an Asset no more than one time per chapter (game session). Final decision as to whether your character's actions have fulfilled their Asset or Fault is the purview of the Storyteller. If he feels that your character's actions are inappropriate to the character's concept and the situation, and are purely an attempt to gain the Willpower benefit, he is perfectly justified in refusing to award the Willpower, but the player should have a chance to explain why she feels her character's actions justify the Willpower recovery.

- Your character may regain a point of Willpower after she has had a full period of uninterrupted sleep (eight hours minimum).

- If your character achieves a significant goal or performs a particularly impressive act that affirms her sense of confidence, the Storyteller may choose to award a Willpower point. These might include, but are not limited to, completing a particularly taxing school project (think science fair entry, not daily homework assignment); overcoming a long-standing fear or phobia; undertaking and completing a notable act of charity; winning a significant competition due to her efforts or abilities; or being formally recognized by an authority figure or organization (teacher, newspaper, etc.) for her efforts.

- Your character regains all spent Willpower points at the end of a story (not at the end of a game session, but at the conclusion of an overall story).

Storytellers can award characters Willpower points at other times in the game as well. Situations where they have persisted despite the odds, or carried on with a chosen path despite challenges or temporary defeat are appropriate for Willpower awards. Granting Willpower recovery makes the situation a little easier on the players, whereas withholding it ups the challenge.

If your character's Resolve and/or Composure increase during a game (due to experience point expendi-

tures), her permanent Willpower dots increase as well, and she receives an additional Willpower point at the same time. However, if the Attribute increase was temporary (due to supernatural influence or other fleeting factors), the Willpower increase is only temporary as well. When the effect wears off, the Willpower dot that the character earned because of the temporary increase is lost, and if the temporary Willpower point that was granted has not been spent, it is lost as well.

ASSETS AND FAULTS

All characters have strengths and weaknesses, positive and negative aspects to their personalities. For all that parents try to cultivate their children's features and suppress their faults, both are an intrinsic part of every child's makeup and both contribute to the whole of the child's personality.

Every **Innocents** character comes into play with one dominant Asset and one dominant Fault, chosen during character creation. Your character's Asset and Fault may both be obvious to those who encounter him. Or, one or the other (or both) may be lurking below the surface, coming out only at times of stress, exhaustion or pain. A character who is a top student may have the defining Asset of Dependable and the Fault of Egotistical. He is reliable and organized, always completing the tasks he undertakes, but he takes a great deal of pride in his accomplishments and abilities and doesn't believe anyone else is as smart as he is. Alternatively, he could have the defining Asset of Polite and the Fault of Dull. He minds his manners, perhaps even too much for a child of his age, and would never consider misbehaving, raising his voice or breaking a rule.

When a character's actions in any given situation reflect his particular Asset or Fault, he is reinforcing the basic building blocks of who he is. If the Storyteller judges that your character's actions reflect his Fault, he regains one Willpower point (this can happen once per scene). If the Storyteller feels that your character's actions are representative of his dominant Asset, he regains all Willpower that he's previously spent (this can happen once per game session). These Willpower gains are only applicable in situations where the character's actions put him at some risk or have the potential to cost him in some way. Everyday portrayals of the character being Whiny, Rude or Dull, while they might make for good roleplaying, are not sufficient to gain him extra Willpower. It is only when the character's inherent qualities are exhibited in challenging or taxing situations that they are truly reinforcing the character's sense of self. Each Asset and Fault's description includes a sample situation that a Storyteller might consider appropriate for the regaining of Willpower.

It is worth noting that some Faults are a lack of or overabundance of the same qualities reflected in an Asset, and some are polar opposites. Greedy, for example, is a lack of the charity that defines being Generous, while Foolish can sometimes manifest as an overabundance of the same quality that defines being Brave. Being Cruel is the opposite of

I Didn't Mean to Scare Him

by Jim Kiley

It was winter, seven or eight years ago. This was before our second child was born — it was just Jimmy, my wife and I. It was bedtime; he was fooling around, doing kid stuff. I think he was two and a half, maybe three years old.

My wife said, in a lighthearted tone, “Oh, Jimmy, you’d better get up the stairs to bed or Daddy’s gonna get you!” She was grinning, I was grinning. I bounced out of my chair; Jimmy let out a holler and ran for the stairs. I yelled “Raarr! I’m gonna get you!” and ran up the stairs after him. Jimmy hollered up the stairs the whole way.

I was smiling — hell, I was laughing. But I got to his bedroom and he had jumped into bed, pulled the blankets up to his chin and he was shrieking, “No! Dad! I’m sorry! I’m sorry! I’ll be good! I’m sorry!”

He was *terrified*. He thought I was angry at him, he thought I was going to... I don’t know what. Hurt him, I guess, but somehow worse than that. Do *something terrible* to him. Somehow, despite a normal life to that point, he had decided that I had become a monster and was going to harm him.

It took me 15 minutes of hugging and reassuring and snuggling — and my wife’s help — to get him to calm down again. I reassured him over and over again that we had just been playing, that I was just joking around, and that I thought he *knew* I was just playing. I desperately wanted to erase this moment from his childhood somehow; I wanted to make it have never happened.

Parents aren’t just protectors and guardians and defenders and providers in their kids’ lives. They’re also monsters.

There are obvious cases.

Susan Smith, in 1994, put her two sons (ages one and three) in the back of her Mazda and rolled it into a lake in South Carolina. On purpose. She blamed a phantom black man, but she did it. She was tried and convicted and she’ll be in prison until at least 2024 for it. There are rumors as to why she did it, but she has never given a reason.

One summer day in 2001, Andrea Yates locked up the family dog and then drowned her five children in the bathtub of her house, one by one, over the course of an hour. She suffered from postpartum psychosis and had been cautioned not to have more children. She thought she was saving them from Satan. When the oldest child saw his infant sister drowned in the bathtub, he ran away; she chased him around the house, dragged him to the tub and drowned him in it. She is in prison today, where she shares a cell with Dena Schlosser, who killed her own 11-month-old daughter in 2004 by amputating her arms and offering her to God.

In early September 2007 — just a few weeks before this book went into development — a woman in Texas allegedly doused her three daughters with gasoline and set them on fire, killing one and maiming the other two. All three girls were under eight. Here in Pittsburgh, where I live, several unsupervised kids died recently as their house burned down while their mother was allegedly out at a nearby bar.

These are just the stories that were national news or are easy to find on the ‘net. This stuff happens *all the time*. The federal government estimates that more than 1,400 children died from abuse or neglect at the hands of a parent or caregiver in 2004. That’s four kids a day. (And that’s the real world. I expect the World of Darkness is just too goddamned awful to contemplate.)

Non-lethal child abuse numbers are also horrifying. During 2005, the federal government estimates that about 12 per 1,000 children in the US were abused or neglected. That comes to about 900,000 children in the US in one year alone.

We’re playing a game about kids fighting monsters. Looks to me like a million kids a year are facing monsters already. Now that I’ve got you all feeling sick, how can we deal with this stuff? There are two answers: the real-world one and the game-world.

First, if you have the means, I highly recommend donating some money to local child-abuse prevention charities. If you aren’t sure to whom you should send your money, ask your pediatrician; or, if you don’t have kids, find a pediatrician and ask. School counselors, daycare employees and pediatricians are the front lines in this. They need help.

Second, in an **Innocents** game you run or play, you may choose to deal with child abuse as an issue. Roleplaying games give people the opportunity to explore experiences they might not otherwise learn about, and this may be valuable to you.

But take it seriously. Do some research, whether as Storyteller or player. For instance, it should be obvious from the statistics above that the majority of abuse cases don’t end in a child’s death, so don’t build a mysterious death into the background of every abused-child Storyteller character. More generally, don’t trivialize the situation by making random stuff up and hoping for the best. **Innocents** is a game, but it’s a horror game and it’s fairly serious in tone, so if you are operating from a basis of ignorance, you may inadvertently turn an abusive situation into a cartoonish situation in-game. Avoid that if you can. Improve your own perspective by learning the truth about how and why abuse happens.

At the same time, make sure the rest of your group is comfortable with whatever themes you intend to visit. Some players may have bad stuff in their backgrounds that they aren't comfortable dealing with in-game, and you should respect that. If you're on the other side of that coin, don't use your gaming group as a therapy session (unless that is what everybody is expecting). Respect others' boundaries.

Finally, remember that to child characters, parents are awe-inspiring. They are distant, they can be scary, and they are sometimes motivated by urges that don't make a lot of sense to children. Sex? Alcohol? Ambition? When adults behave in apparently irrational ways, kids get scared. Don't hide from that as players. Use it.

being Kind. Taking related or opposite traits virtually ensures that any reaction to a given situation will qualify as fulfilling either the Asset or the Fault. Because of this, players should carefully consider what it says about their characters to take Faults and Assets that directly reflect each other, either as opposites or related traits (these are noted in the descriptions of each Fault or Asset).

Example: Dalton is an avid baseball card collector, with the defining Asset of Brave and the defining Fault of Greedy. While he and his friends are exploring an abandoned house on their block, they encounter the ghost of a weeping boy and are, naturally, frightened. If Dalton overcomes his fear and encourages the rest of the group to interact with the ghost despite their ongoing fears, he has fulfilled his Asset and the Storyteller may allow him to regain all of his spent Willpower. By the same token, if in the course of interacting with the ghost, he finds a dusty shoe box full of the dead child's sports paraphernalia, including several mint condition Mickey Mantle cards, and he pockets the cards without telling his friends, he is playing into his Fault, and the Storyteller rules that he gets a point of spent Willpower back.

ASSETS

When creating your character, choose one of the following Assets, detailed below, as his defining one. This is not to say that your character will not have other strengths or positive qualities, but the Asset you choose is the one that most clearly defines him. If you would prefer (and your Storyteller allows), you may instead work with your Storyteller to create a defining Asset that more directly represents your character (see Custom Assets and Faults, p. 93).

BRAVE

Characters with the Brave Asset are not hampered by their fears and take necessary actions despite being scared. They may encourage others to overcome their fears, leading by example, or may simply charge in, doing what needs to be done on their own.

The Brave Asset is the opposite of the Cowardly Fault and is related to the Brash Fault.

Example: Emily volunteers to act as "bait" for the trap her companions have set to catch the thing they believe is living in her basement. Several times as they build the trap, she almost backs out, but in the end, she follows through. When the creature comes charging at her, she fights back her fears, waiting until the last possible moment before leaping out of the way so that the monster is caught.

CALM

Characters with the Calm Asset are not overwhelmed by external or internal stressors, retaining an internal balance regardless of the pressures put upon them in any given situation. Calm Characters are difficult to ruffle, reacting to even dangerous or terrifying situations with cool aplomb.

The Calm Asset is the opposite of the Hyperactive Fault, and is related to the Lazy Fault.

Example: Something is pestering the children on Jacob's block, leaving little twig-dolls on their windows, scratching at their bedroom doors, and whispering to them when they're alone in the room. Everyone's freaking out, but throughout it all, Jacob remains cool and collected. He investigates each of the children's rooms and finds clues that lead them to discover that a school rival is tormenting them in revenge for some imagined slight.

CREATIVE

Characters with the Creative Asset excel at thinking outside the box and coming up with unique, if not exactly efficient, solutions to problems. They may be artistic or just freethinkers, but they can be counted on to see any given situation in a manner different from the norm.

The Creative Asset is related to the Dull Fault.

Example: Michael just knows that the lady down the street is a werewolf, but no one will believe him. Undaunted, he waits for the full moon, then sets up water balloon traps filled with filings from his mom's favorite silver brooch. He tricks Larry, the fattest (and therefore most tasty, he hopes) kid in the neighborhood to meet him outside the suspected lycanthrope's house as the moon rises. When the woman comes out to see why there are kids on her lawn at midnight, Michael throws Larry to the ground and bombards the woman with the silver-bombs.

DEPENDABLE

Characters with the Dependable Asset are responsible, seldom failing to follow through with the things they agree to do. Some Dependable characters are good at not taking on obligations they can't fulfill, demurring when appropriate. Others refuse to let others down by not taking on any obligation requested of them, and will exhaust or endanger themselves in order to avoid failing in their duties.



The Dependable Asset is the opposite of the Irresponsible Fault.

Example: Taneka promises to take her little brother trick-or-treating, and is then invited by the cutest boy in her class to come along as he and his friends wait for the Great Goblin who is rumored to appear on a certain hill on All Hallows' Eve. When she explains, they try to convince her to ditch the little guy and come with them, but she resolutely follows through with her sibling duties instead. Their path takes them within blocks of the big hill, and Taneka hears laughter coming from that direction, but she finishes her babysitting despite it all.

FAIR

Characters with the Fair Asset are proponents of justice and do not take advantage of others (or tolerate others' attempts to do so), regardless of their ability to do so in any given situation. Fair characters are quick to point out inequalities in any situation they encounter.

The Fair Asset is related to the Dishonest Fault.

Example: While exploring an abandoned junker car near their home, Isabella and some friends discover a satchel that contains banded stacks of 20-dollar bills from the 1930s.

Thinking they've hit the jackpot, the group proceeds to figure out how they'll spend the money, until Isabella insists they take it to the police and report it as lost. Amid much argument, she prevails and the money is handed over to the authorities. Two weeks later, the police call her and say that they've failed to identify the money's owner and that it's now hers. Rather than keep it herself, she divides it evenly among those who helped find it.

FRIENDLY

Characters with the Friendly Asset are open and welcoming to both newcomers and those familiar to them. They interact warmly with those around them, going out of their way to make certain others feel included and valued in social situations.

The Friendly Asset is related to the Rude Fault.

Example: Nobody likes the new kid in class, although they can't quite put their finger on why. Although it gets him a great deal of ribbing from his friends, Ethan goes out of his way to welcome the newcomer, introducing him around and insisting that his friends at least get to know him before deciding they don't like him. By the end of the first week, the newcomer is the only one speaking to him, but at least he has the one friend.

GENEROUS

Characters with the Generous Asset are free with their resources, sharing them equitably with those around them. They're willing to make do with less than their full share in order to make sure others have at least some, whether it's money, food, or other possessions, or other, less tangible assets, like time, attention or fame.

The Generous Asset is the opposite of the Greedy Fault.

Example: *While on a Girl Scout field trip, Ava and her friends are separated from the rest of the troop. They wander for hours in the woods, getting themselves even more lost. The next day, everyone is starving. Ava has jerky, trail mix and candy bars in her backpack. Although her own stomach is grumbling, Ava shares the bounty with her friends, ending up with barely more than a few mouthfuls herself.*

HONEST

Characters with the Honest Asset deal with the world around them in a forthright and non-deceptive manner. They are not willing to be party to lies, even if they are not the ones telling them.

The Honest Asset is the opposite of the Dishonest Fault.

Example: *Daniel and his best friend, Lauren, are in the back of the room during their Math final. Lauren whispers to her friend, asking for an answer. Daniel shakes his head, but Lauren persists, leaning over to try to read Daniel's answer. Daniel moves the paper away and his action catches the teacher's attention. The teacher calls both kids up and asks them what was going on. Lauren denies everything, but Daniel explains what was happening, even as his former best friend glares daggers at him.*

KIND

Characters with the Kind Asset are softhearted and gentle in their dealings with others. It pains them to see others in emotional or physical pain, and they will go out of their way to minimize the negative impact they have on others.

The Kind Asset is the opposite of the Cruel Fault.

Example: *Christopher is on academic probation because of excessive tardiness and absences. As he is cutting across the park to avoid being late for school, Christopher stumbles across a younger child alone and crying in the park. He tries to get the toddler to tell him where she belongs, but gets no response. Unwilling to leave her alone, he goes out of his way to take her to the local police department, even though it means he will be late for school and risk suspension.*

OPTIMISTIC

Characters with the Optimistic Asset strive to see the positive side of any situation, and remain confident that, no matter how dark things are, the light at the end of the tunnel is just around the corner. This confidence buoys them in even the direst of circumstances.

Example: *C.J. and her friends have become lost in a forest and night is falling. As they look for the path, one of her friends stumbles into a bramble and winds up with multiple cuts on his legs and arms. The boy starts to panic at the blood, but C.J. distracts him by joking about how it could have been worse — he could have fallen into the poison ivy. And any-*

way, scars are cool! The kids are still lost, but C.J. has managed to calm the boy down and keep him focused.

FAULTS

When creating your character, choose one of the following Faults detailed below as her defining one. This is not to say that your character will not have other weaknesses or negative qualities, but the Fault you choose will be the one that most clearly defines her. If you would prefer (and your Storyteller allows), you may instead work with your Storyteller to create a defining Fault that more directly represents your character (see Custom Assets and Faults, p. 93).

BRASH

Characters with the Brash Fault tend to rush in where angels fear to tread. They act or speak without thinking of the consequences, and as a result are often offensive socially or find themselves in dangerous situations through their lack of caution.

The Brash Fault is related to the Brave Asset.

Example: *Gordie and his friends open the basement door, expecting to find an animal making all that noise. Instead, they find a vampire sinking its fangs into their teacher's neck! It snarls at them to get out, but Gordie grabs a shovel and charges the monster.*

COWARDLY

Characters with the Cowardly Fault allow their fears to dictate their actions (or to force them into inaction). Cowardly characters will not willingly expose themselves to dangerous or frightening situations and may appear almost phobic to a wide variety of items or situations.

The Cowardly Fault is the opposite of the Brave Asset.

Example: *Michelle cowers in the corner of the attic. She knows her sister is just on the other side of the door. But "it" is out there, too, whatever it is...She can't bring herself to move, even when she hears her sister crying. Even when the cries become screams. Even when the blood begins to trickle under the door.*

CRUEL

Characters with the Cruel Fault care nothing for the feelings or well-being of others. This Fault is similar to the Self-Centered Fault, although Cruel individuals go out of their way to cause emotional or physical pain to those around them, rather than simply not caring if their actions affect others negatively. A word of warning: playing this Fault to the hilt can cause a character to lose Morality quickly.

The Cruel Fault is the opposite of the Kind Asset.

Example: *Porcelain makes a delightful crunch when struck with a hammer. Malcolm smiles and moves a large shard more towards the center of the pile before crushing it. Tiny china fingers disintegrate under his enthusiastic blows. From behind him, the sound of running footsteps and his sister's voice. "There you are! What are you doing?" Malcolm smiles, watching his sister sob as she tries hopelessly to put her destroyed treasure back together. Her screeches are sure to bring their mother upstairs, and when she sees what he's done*

to Amanda's favorite dolls, she is sure to punish him. It will be worth it, though, just to watch his sister's reaction.

DISHONEST

Characters with the Dishonest Fault have no compunction about lying, misleading or deceiving others. Some Dishonest characters only lie when it is convenient or beneficial to them, but others are pathological about it, seemingly unable to avoid deception even when it causes them direct harm.

The Dishonest Fault is the opposite of the Honest Asset.

Example: The police flashlight shines brightly in Jeremy's face as the officer asks them where they are going so late at night. Amy starts to explain that they were walking home from a movie, but before she can finish, Jeremy launches into an outlandish story about how they escaped from a gang of high school kids who had taken their money and threatened to beat them up if they told anyone. Amy stares at him, wide eyed, as the police officer begins speaking quietly into his radio, but it is as if the lie keeps growing and he can't shut it off. Within minutes, he's created fictitious descriptions for each of the three imaginary attackers, and the kids are sitting in the back of the squad car while a dozen officers search the area. "We are going to be in so much trouble when they find out there's no one there," Amy grumbles.

DULL

Characters with the Dull Fault are predictable, unadventurous and rarely come up with new ideas. They prefer (or are only able to) tread already established paths, physically, emotionally and mentally, reverting to the comfortable and familiar, even if it is not a functional situation.

The Dull Fault is related to the Creative Asset.

Example: It takes all afternoon, but they manage to get the hinges off the toolshed door to release their friend from where the kidnappers have left him. When they get inside, Jamie is sitting, teary eyed, on the tool bench. Sam glances around, frowning. "Jamie! Why didn't you use the saw to get out? Or the crowbar? Or just break the window with something, stand on the bench and climb out?"

Jamie looks around, as if seeing these options for the first time. "I guess I just didn't think of it."

EGOTISTICAL

Characters with the Egotistical Fault believe themselves to be inherently better than others. Sometimes this manifests as overactive pride in an ability or attribute, but more often than not, it is an overall feeling that, regardless of evidence otherwise, they are simply a notch above everyone else around them.

Example: Dierd're and her two brothers are running from something they can't quite identify. All they know is that it's vaguely cat shaped and it bit Allan's hand something awful. The kids come to the fence around their backyard and Dierd're starts trying to climb it. Even though she's smaller and weaker than her brothers, she figures she's the best at climbing, and she'll just give them a hand once she scrambles to the top.

GREEDY

Characters with the Greedy Fault are gluttons, always wanting more than their fair share and never satisfied with what they have, even if it is far in excess of their needs. Greedy characters are sometimes obsessed with a particular item or object — food, money, attention — but often they simply "want it all."

The Greedy fault is related to the Generous Asset — those who are Greedy find it difficult to be Generous, as they want or "need" to possess or consume more than they want to share.

Example: Robert finds a silver dollar near the edge of the playground. He almost calls out to his friends, but then he sees another one...and another. He glances over to the monkey bars, but no one has seen him yet, so Robert figures he's got these beauties all to himself. He starts picking them up and finds a trail leading into the bushes. He's so preoccupied, thinking of what he can buy with all this money, that he nearly bumps into the man before he sees him. The man smiles a wicked, snaggle-toothed smile, and the coins in Robert's hands turn to dirt as the man reaches for him.

HYPERACTIVE

Characters with the Hyperactive Fault have a hard time sitting still or concentrating on any one thing long enough to complete a project or a conversation. Sometimes this is a result of a chemical imbalance (as in Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder) but it can also simply be a personality characteristic.

The Hyperactive Fault is the opposite of the Calm Asset.

Example: "Five minutes, Amber...Don't forget! Five minutes, then call," Casey calls over her shoulder.

Amber scowls. "I won't! Sheesh!" They were always harping at her, always giving her a hard time. "Don't forget, Amber. Stay on track, Amber." They treated her like she was a child. And she wasn't. She was older than Cody, certainly older than Geoffrey. She might be not older than Casey, but she was definitely older than most of them.

Amber gets up and begins pacing around the playground. She wasn't going to forget. She wasn't dumb. She looks down at the phone in her hand, with the number already plugged into it, then slips it into her jeans pocket so she can climb up the monkey bars. She'll get a better view from up there. Halfway up, she notices the new fire pole and decides to see if it's as slick as it looks. A few more times up the bars and down the pole, and she decides to try the merry-go-round, but halfway there she notices that someone has written some new graffiti in the big cement tunnel-pipes, and crawls in there to read it. As she finishes reading and pulls out a marker to add her own artwork to the interior of the pipe, she hears the screams. "Oh, no! Five minutes!" She scrambles out of the pipe, hoping it's not too late.

IRRESPONSIBLE

Characters with the Irresponsible Fault are, intentionally or through lack of organizational skills, incapable or unwilling to follow through on their obligations to themselves or others. Irresponsible characters may intend

to complete all they take on, but simply take on too much, or they may flake on the simplest obligations through laziness, distraction or just not caring about the results.

The Irresponsible Fault is the opposite of the Dependable Asset.

Example: *Devon's parents ask him to finish cleaning up the yard before he goes out with his friends. "Yeah, whatever," scoffs Devon, and he's down the block before they realize he's left the yard. Later that day, when Devon and the other kids are sitting in Sarah's tree house, looking through the old book they found, Devon's dad yells up from the ground for him to get his rear end home now and do his chores. Devon, therefore, might miss something important because he failed to fulfill his obligations earlier.*

VIOLENT

Characters with the Violent Fault use physical force as a solution to any problem. Violent characters may have a bad temper, flying off the handle and losing control of their emotions at the least provocation, or they may be cool and calculating, but still rely on threats, bullying, or physical attacks in order to get their way.

Example: *Walter's papers sprawled as his binder hit the floor. "Hey!"*

The girl who'd bumped his arm was hurrying down the hall. "Oh, sorry," she said over her shoulder. Walter grabbed his Math book and hurled it down the hallway after her. The heavy textbook caught her in the nape of the neck and she went down like a sack of bricks. "Sorry's not going to pick up my papers!"

The principal's hand came down hard on Walter's shoulder. Walter shut his eyes and felt his face grow hot. Shouldn't have done that, he thought.

CUSTOM ASSETS AND FAULTS


A player who does not find a listed Asset or Fault that jibes well with her vision of her character is encouraged to work with her Storyteller to create a custom Asset and/or Fault that better suits her character.

The guidelines for creating a custom Asset or Fault are fairly simple. First, it should be an adjective that describes a dominant positive or negative inherent *personality* trait of the character. Smelly, for example, would not be an appropriate Fault, although Sloppy (in the sense of careless with details including hygiene) might work well, as might Careless or Negligent.

Secondly, it should be a personality trait rather than an inherent ability that is reflected by an Attribute or Skill. Stupid, for example, would not be an appropriate Fault, as it is more a measure of Intelligence (or lack thereof) than a personality trait. Unthinking, however, would be an appropriate Fault. Similarly, Thoughtful would be an appropriate Asset because it describes how the character interacts with the world around her, whereas Smart would not, as it is a statement of intellect (and thus Intelligence).

Also, while the Storyteller is always the final arbiter in whether a character's actions fulfill his Asset or Fault, custom traits should not require judgment calls as to whether they apply in any given situation. Adjectives





such as Good and Evil, Righteous or Profane are too black and white, requiring a judgment on the part of the observer as to whether the character (and those they are interacting with) are themselves “good” or not.

Finally, custom Assets and Faults should be broad enough to have a chance to come into play in many situations, but not so broad that any given action could be seen as applying to that trait. If a character could take two opposite actions in a given situation, both of which could be said to apply to the Asset or Fault, then it is likely that the trait chosen is too broad. Determined, for example, could equally apply to giving mercy or beating someone up, to giving into or resisting temptation.

OPTIONAL TRAIT — CHARACTER FLAWS

Nobody’s perfect. Everyone has little foibles, hindrances born of personality, bad luck, poor choices or just genetics. For the most part, these problems don’t need to be represented with game traits, or if they do, they can be used to explain a lack of a Skill or a low rating in an Attribute. Your character might be nimble as a cat, but suffer from asthma. When prioritizing Attributes, you set his Dexterity high and keep his Stamina at 1.

But what if you want to play a character with a defect that can’t easily be represented by the other traits? Suppose you want to play a kid with a hearing or visual impairment, or who is a bit lame in one leg? The penalties that these conditions impose are too wide ranging to be covered by simple trait reduction. Besides, just because a kid walks on crutches doesn’t mean he can’t, for example, have dots in Athletics. He might be an extremely strong swimmer; he just uses his arms.

Flaws are optional traits that allow a player to choose such a defect for her character. Flaws can be selected during character creation, but it’s possible that events in the story might cause a character to acquire one, as well. A character who has been reduced to dying (losing one Health point per turn to aggravated harm) might develop a condition associated with his injuries, if the Storyteller thinks it’s appropriate. For example, during a fight with a feral cat, a child’s face is scratched up and he loses an eye. The character develops the One Eye Flaw, with all the penalties (and benefits) that entails. In all cases, only the Storyteller has the power to inflict Flaws (or to *not* inflict them), and he should do so only if a player agrees.

BENEFITS OF FLAWS

If a character’s Flaw hinders her during a game session, the Storyteller awards the character one extra experience point for that chapter. A Flaw *only* awards an experience point if it adversely affects the character. Our one-eyed character would receive that bonus only if the penalties for his Flaw came into play during the chapter. If that character spent the chapter in his room, drawing up plans for the new clubhouse, he gets no extra experience. If, on the other hand, he spends a session actually *building* the clubhouse and has to take extra time to compen-

sate for his visual impairment (in game terms, the time required for each roll in the extended action increases), the character should receive the bonus.

Flaws might be temporary or permanent, depending on the nature of the trait and the player’s wishes. If the Storyteller deems that a Flaw has been sufficiently overcome, he can declare that a character no longer has it and no longer suffers from its effects (and thus no longer gains an extra experience point now and then). For the most part, though, a Flaw’s effects can be mitigated, even for a long period of time, but never removed entirely. For instance, a character with the Hard of Hearing flaw might get a next-generation hearing aid that fits entirely within his ear canal and isn’t externally visible. It removes the penalties he suffers to Perception rolls, and thus the character isn’t eligible for the experience bonus from his Flaw. But then the kids meet up with a mischievous spirit that likes to flummox electrical devices, and it disables the hearing aid. During that session (and, indeed, until the hearing aid is fixed), the character might once again be hindered by the Flaw and thus receive the experience point bonus.

PORTRAYING A FLAWED CHARACTER

The experience bonus is nice, and it is perfectly fair to ask that taking on an immediate burden benefits a character in some way (life isn’t fair, but this is a game, not life). The real fun of Flaws, though, is playing them — and ultimately overcoming them. A player *can* receive the experience point bonus if the Flaw hinders his character, but the character finds a clever way to work around it.

For example, consider, once again, the unfortunate child who lost an eye to a feral cat. The penalties associated with this Flaw have to do with judging distance and with depth perception. During a game session, the character is pursued through a makeshift maze in a haunted house by a man in a zombie costume (but carrying a very real knife). The character bumps into walls for a while, not able to gauge where he is in the dim light, but then wrenches off a piece of wood from the set and hold it out in front of him. This way, he can figure out where he’s going without slamming into things and giving away his position. His ingenuity probably saves his life, and the player should still get the experience point bonus — his character was challenged, but rose above it.

Flaws should act as carrots rather than sticks, rewarding roleplaying rather than enforcing it. If a player doesn’t incorporate a Flaw into his character’s actions, he should not be made to do so. His only punishment is that he does not gain the extra experience point. The Storyteller might remind him occasionally that the Flaw is there, and even structure events in the story to facilitate playing it, but if the player isn’t interested, the Storyteller shouldn’t force it. Remember, the only way to play **Innocents** wrong is not to have fun.

The Storyteller is free to devise new Flaws not represented here, or to allow players to create their own.



MENTAL FLAWS

Addiction: Your character is hooked on a certain substance. It might be disturbing to consider, but kids do get addicted to drugs, including illegal ones. If an addict doesn't get his fix at least once a day, he starts to suffer withdrawal symptoms. These can include headaches, nausea, hallucinations, shakes, sweats, irritability and even physical damage. The Storyteller can impose negatively penalties on any roll she deems appropriate if your character enters withdrawal. Likewise, you might be asked to roll Resolve + Composure to avoid indulging your addiction, with a negative modifier commensurate with how long it's been since your last fix.

Addiction is a wide-open Flaw, because different substances cause vastly different types of withdrawal. Likewise, a kid who is addicted to caffeine faces very different problems from one who is an alcoholic. The player and the Storyteller should think very carefully before anyone takes this Flaw for his character.

Amnesia: Your character cannot remember a certain period of her life. This might have been caused by physical or psychological trauma, and memories might come back at the most unexpected or inopportune moments. The Storyteller has control over when your character's memories come back, and what they are when they do, though you should certainly have some input into what happened to your character and why she forgot. If your character ever learns the truth about herself, of course, this Flaw no longer applies.

Learning Disability: Your character is in for a rough academic life. He might suffer from dyslexia (a disorder associated with reading), or any of a number of other difficulties, but in game terms, the results are the same. Rolls that require the character to read or write in order to process or convey information receive a -3 penalty. In effect, these are always "unskilled" actions for your character. Please note: this is a gross oversimplification of learning disabilities, and players and Storytellers interested in learning more about them can easily do so at a local library or on the Internet.

Trigger: You may select a trigger (see p. 83) at the time of character creation for the same benefit as a Flaw. This trigger is much more deep seated than triggers gained through degeneration, though. It cannot be removed with experience points, and "curing" it must follow an amazing affirmation of the character and at least one story's worth of attention to the events that caused it.

PHYSICAL FLAWS

Crippled: Your character cannot walk. He has no natural Speed trait, and must rely on a wheelchair or vehicle to travel. A manual wheelchair's Speed is equal to your character's Strength, but he must spend an action to move or suffers a -2 penalty to both Speed and any other action performed (he uses one arm to spin a wheel). An electric wheelchair has a Speed of 3 and allows for other actions in a turn without penalty (your characters' hands are largely free). Children who use wheelchairs to

get around draw just as much or more attention as adults who do so, and are very seldom unaccompanied.

Hard of Hearing: Your character's hearing isn't so good. Subtract two dice from any hearing-based Perception rolls. Even though he suffers this penalty on all hearing rolls, you get an experience point at the end of a session only if this Flaw caused him notable trouble. As mentioned, your character might have a hearing aid that reduces or obviates this penalty, but as many an audiologist has had to painstakingly explain to a parent, hearing aids only work when you use them.

Lame: Your character has a leg or foot condition that impedes his movement, slowing him down. His basic Speed factor is 1 (instead of 4). Add this to his Strength + Dexterity to determine his Speed trait (see p. 85). The Storyteller may also apply penalties to climbing, jumping and other Athletics rolls, as appropriate. You get an experience point at the end of a session only if this Flaw causes your character notable trouble.

Medicated: Your character has a condition that requires him to take medication every day. If he skips his meds, something bad happens. What exactly the effects of a missed dose are depends on the child's medical condition. Some examples are described below:

Asthma: The child doesn't necessarily need to take meds every day, but if he exerts himself, he'd better have his inhaler handy. If the character has to make a number of Athletics rolls equal to his Stamina score within the same scene, and he doesn't have access to his inhaler, he starts to suffocate (see p. 40).

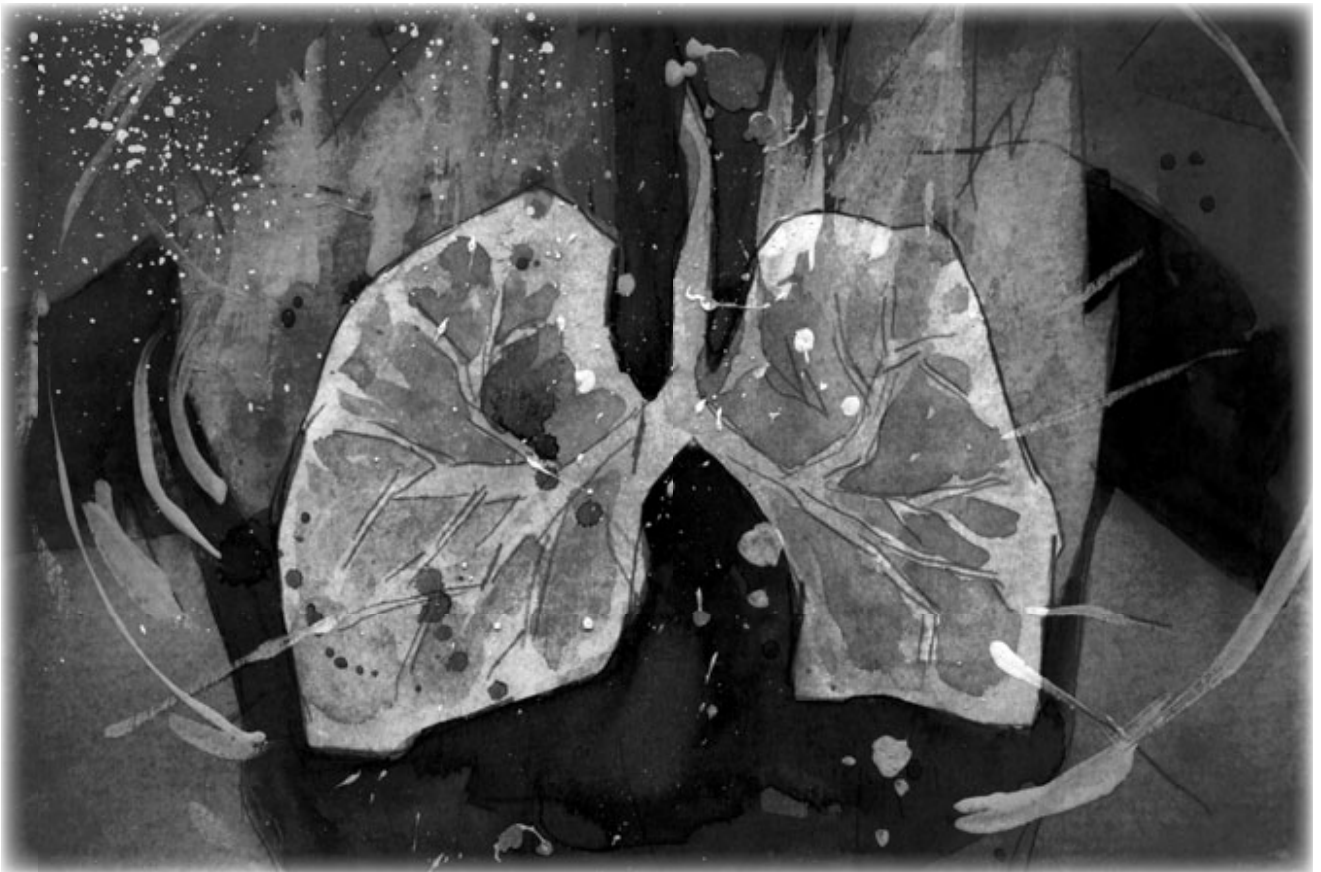
AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDERS

"Autism" isn't listed as its own Flaw. There are reasons for that. First of all, "autism" is really a specific part of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), which includes autism, PDD-NOS (Pervasive Developmental Disorder, Not Otherwise Specified) and Asperger's Syndrome. As researchers learn more about this disorder, the spectrum widens, and this means that without an entire chapter devoted to the subject, we couldn't do it any kind of justice.

One of the symptoms of autism is an inability to relate socially to others. Sufferers sometimes don't recognize other people as having thoughts and feelings of their own, and cannot pick up on social cues. A diagnosis of autism normally happens at a younger age than appropriate for **Innocents** characters, and the diagnosis is sufficient to place a child in special education (often with speech and occupational therapy).

We list autism as a potential cause for the Behavior Blind Flaw, but please understand that an autistic character suitable for play in **Innocents** would of necessity have an extremely mild case of the disorder. Before taking on such a character, do a bit of research into the disorder, preferably using reputable sources.

Attention Disorder: The child suffers from a condition like ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder).



If he skips his meds, he finds concentration almost impossible. If the character tries to take any extended action for which one roll equals more than 10 minutes (see *Extended Actions*, p. 121), you must roll *Resolve* for *each* roll in the action. If the roll fails, the character gets bored and switches to something else. Also, *Mental* rolls all receive a -2 penalty; even if the character is asked a simple question, he can't concentrate on the *question* long enough to answer it. As a side note, many medications prescribed for attention disorders are stimulants (see p. 156), though kids who are taking them regularly don't get the benefits or drawbacks usually associated with these drugs.

Epilepsy: A character on anti-seizure medication (normally for a condition like epilepsy, though these medications have other uses, as well) who misses a dose runs a great risk of seizing. The player must roll *Stamina* every *scene* (not necessarily at the beginning of the scene; the Storyteller can ask for the roll at any dramatically appropriate time). If the roll fails, the character collapses into a seizure that lasts for one to five minutes (roll one die and divide the result in half, rounding up). The seizure isn't injurious in and of itself, though the character can suffer *bashing* damage by *bashing* her head into the floor or being otherwise banged up.

Mute: Your character cannot (or does not) speak and must communicate through hand signs, gestures or by writing.

One Arm: Your character is missing an arm, which makes it hard to perform certain tasks. At the Storyteller's discretion, tasks that normally require two hands take twice as long to perform or are impossible. If your character attempts to perform a challenging task in the normal amount of time, he suffers a -3 penalty.

One Eye: Your character is missing an eye. He has no real depth perception, so all penalties for ranged attacks are dou-

bled, and even at short range, the character suffers a -2 penalty to hit a target (see p. 145 for more on ranges). In addition, running through dense forest or a labyrinthine house is difficult, since the character can't judge the position of objects or walls relative to himself. Any rolls that require judging depth, spatial relations or distance incur a -3 penalty. This can include certain *Athletics* rolls for riding bikes or skateboards (see p. 60).

Poor Sight: Your character has a visual impairment. Subtract two dice from any sight-based *Perception* rolls. As with *Hard of Hearing*, it might be possible to mitigate this Flaw with glasses or contacts, but the character can easily lose these and become subject to the penalties again.

SOCIAL FLAWS

Behavior Blind: Your character doesn't really understand human behavior and is blind to common social cues that communicate other people's basic feelings. Maybe his parents ignored or even abused him, or maybe he suffers from mild autism, but he is socially maladapted. He can't tell when others are using sarcasm or innuendo, or if he's boring them. An experience point is awarded only if this Flaw is directly related to a setback that delayed or prevented your character from achieving his goals. Perhaps an important contact or ally refused aid due to being insulted or disgusted by your character's behavior. Note: this Flaw does not preclude your character from having the *Empathy* Skill, but barring successful Skill rolls, he cannot figure out other people's moods.

Deformity: Your character has a misshapen limb, a terrible visible scar or some other physical affliction that might cause revulsion in others. It causes no other penalties, however. You suffer a -2 penalty on *Social* rolls when your character makes new acquaintances.

Speech Impediment: Your character has trouble speaking properly. This might be due to a lisp, stutter or wound to the vocal apparatus. This Flaw should be roleplayed whenever your character speaks.



Ever since she was three years old, Gretchen had been visited by the Weeping Lady.

She didn't actually weep — at least not that Gretchen could ever recall. Her hair was long and hung in fine strands around her lithe body, and somehow it reminded Gretchen of the weeping willow that had grown by the stream behind her grandfather's house. So she was called the Weeping Lady, and the ghostly figure didn't seem to mind the name.

As Gretchen got older and went to school, the Lady didn't appear as often, but Gretchen sensed the spirit's presence all the same. She kept Gretchen safe from harm, steering her away from danger or shielding her when accidents occurred. Like the time she'd tried to help her daddy paint the house and had fallen from the ladder instead — 20 feet straight down, and she'd bounced up as if nothing had happened. That was the day her mother told her she had a guardian angel watching out for her. Gretchen merely nodded her head and smiled.

Her parents let her walk to school by herself when she turned seven. Hopwood Elementary was just a block from their house, and they lived in a quiet neighborhood far from the city and all the bad people who lived there. So when the man called out to her as she walked home from school one winter evening, she didn't think too much about it at first.

"Hey there," the man said from the shadows of his porch as Gretchen walked by. The old house had once belonged to the Stevensons, before Mr. Stevenson had died and his wife had to be taken to another home somewhere. The SOLD sign still stood in the middle of the immaculate front lawn.

Gretchen paused, shifting the weight of her book bag. She squinted up at the porch. There weren't any lights on in the house and the sun had nearly set, so it was hard to see much underneath the porch's wide overhang. She could tell that the front door was open, and a figure stood just beside it.

"Hi," she answered, more out of habit than anything else.

"What's your name, honey?" the man said. He had a warm, cheerful voice.

"Gretchen Sanders," she replied. "Is this your house?"

"Sure is," the dark figure replied. "Hey, Gretchen. How old are you?"

"Nine and a half. Why?"

"Nine and a half, huh?" the man suddenly sounded vaguely disappointed. "Well, see, my dog just had a litter of puppies and I've been trying to find them good homes. They're free, but I can't just give them away to anybody, you understand."

"Puppies?" Gretchen brightened. "What kind? I love dogs!"

"Collies," the figure said proudly. "With big, soft eyes and honey-colored fur." The man hesitated. "You want to come in and see?"

Gretchen was about to say yes — she'd even turned and had started to walk down the sidewalk — when she felt the Weeping Lady's touch. It was a gentle pressure, like a small hand settling on her shoulder. Gretchen stopped, her smile fading. "I'd... better not," she said faintly.

The figure stirred. "Come on, honey," he said, stepping forward. "It'll only take a minute —"

But then the man froze, just at the edge of the glow cast by the streetlights. For a long moment, he just stood there, and Gretchen sensed that he was staring at something just over her shoulder. Then, without a word, he retreated swiftly and disappeared inside the house.

Gentle hands prodded at Gretchen, guiding her back to the sidewalk. It was only later, after the first kids began to disappear, that she realized what the Weeping Lady had been trying to tell her.

Chapter Five:

Merits

Every character has the same basic Attributes and access to all the same Skills. Merits are different; they are special, individual qualities that make your character different from all the other kids. These personality quirks or remarkable talents are purchased during character creation or with experience points as you play through your character's journeys.

The Merits below are split into three categories: Mental, Physical and Social. Merits may give you a bonus on certain actions, or allow you to use a Skill in an unusual way. Some Merits have a prerequisite that must be satisfied before you can buy that Merit for your character. For example, to buy Fast Reflexes for your character, she must have Dexterity or Wits 3. Some Merits have drawbacks that mitigate their benefits to some degree. For example, a character with Toxin Resistance might suffer few ill effects from a rattlesnake bite, but he'll have a hard time finding medicine to get rid of a headache.

Each Merit has a number of dots (•) associated with it. These dots represent the cost of each Merit at character creation. Some Merits have a range of dots available (e.g., • to ••••). You can purchase as many or as few dots as suit your character concept.

Some Merits are inborn traits (like Ambidextrous). These can only be purchased at character creation and are labeled appropriately. Most Merits can be developed over time or with training (and therefore bought with experience points). Merit dots must be purchased sequentially with experience points. To get to Fighting Style: Karate for Kids •••, for instance, you must first purchase Karate for Kids • (for two experience points) and Karate for Kids •• (for an additional four experience points) to get to Karate for Kids ••• (for still six more experience points, for a total of 12 experience points). This even applies to a Merit like Danger Sense, only available at ••: you must buy the first dot (two experience points), then the second dot (four experience points, for a total of six), before you gain the benefit of the Merit — there is no credit for one point of Danger Sense.

For Merits representing connections that your character makes with other people, such as Mentor or Allies, the Storyteller can choose to ignore the expenditure of experience points entirely. If your character, during play, meets and befriends the old man who's always feeding pigeons in the park, she might gain the benefits of the Mentor Merit without you spending any experience points. The downside, of course, is that this erstwhile mentor won't be as accessible or reliable as a character represented by a trait on the character sheet. You and your Storyteller need to decide where the dividing line is between an incidental benefit and a true Merit.

MENTAL MERITS

COMMON SENSE (••••)

Effect: You are blessed with sound judgment and natural prudence. Given a moment to think, you can generally suss out the proper course of action — or at least a sensible one.

Once per scene, when your character is about to do something very dangerous or stupid, or the group is at a loss for ideas or clues, the Storyteller may point out a fact or clue you've missed, or delineate the risks of your plan in very clear terms. You may ask the Storyteller for this hint when you feel you're completely out of ideas, but he is under no obligation to provide it — he may know you'll need your Common Sense even more just around the corner, after all. *Available at character creation only.*

Childhood is measured out
by sounds and smells and
sights, before the dark
hour of reason grows.

— John Betjeman

DANGER SENSE (••)

Effect: You have an uncanny knack for knowing when you're about to get jumped, whether it's a constant awareness of your surroundings, or just the hair standing up on the back of your neck.

You receive a +2 bonus on the reflexive Wits + Composure rolls made to detect the presence of an ambush (see p. 34). This roll is typically made prior to the first turn of a surprise attack.

EGO BOOST (••)

Effect: Kids thrive on well-deserved praise — not the forced kind that tells them that every child is a special snowflake, but praise that shows someone has really noticed what they do well. When your character receives an honest compliment on his talent in a Skill in which he has at least two dots, he receives a one-time +1 modifier on his next roll of that Skill in the same scene. This Merit can be used only once per Skill per scene.

EIDETIC MEMORY (••)

Effect: Your photographic memory is almost perfect. You can remember almost anything you have witnessed or read. Under normal circumstances, you do not need to roll to recall a fact, license plate or face. Under stress, you receive a +2 modifier to any Intelligence + Composure or Intelligence + Skill (Study, for instance, to remember a chemistry fact) roll made to pull something from your memory. *Available at character creation only.*

LANGUAGE (•)

Effect: Your character is fluent in another language in addition to her native tongue. Maybe you've lived in a foreign country, have family who speak another language, or you really paid attention in French class. Each language is purchased as a separate Merit.

MENTAL PRODIGY (•)

Prerequisite: Any Mental Attribute at •••••

Effect: Your character is a natural prodigy, an unlikely master of a Skill or an area of study at a remarkably young age. Select one Skill from the Mental category. Your character has access to the levels of that Skill beyond the cap imposed on child characters (see p. 47). You must still pay for all points in the Skill during character creation, or with experience points at a later date. The Skill should be related to the exceptional Mental Attribute. For example, Study would most likely be linked to Intelligence (your character is naturally gifted), but it could also be attributable to Resolve (your character studies with remarkable focus). The Storyteller has the final word on the chosen Prodigy and its prerequisite. *Available at character creation only.*

MULTILINGUAL (• TO •••••)

Effect: Your character grew up in a culture that teaches several different tongues, or maybe she has a prodigy-like gift for languages. In addition to the character's native language, the player may choose two lan-

guages for every dot in this Merit. The character speaks these languages conversationally.

Note that the character cannot speak effortlessly in these languages. Communicating quickly or over the telephone requires an Intelligence + Wits roll, and talking about anything more complicated than simple pleasantries or asking straightforward questions imposes a penalty of -1 to -3 dice. Reading the language requires an Intelligence + Study or Wits roll (depending on how the character learned the language; study or immersion, respectively), and writing something coherent in the language requires a roll of Wits + Study or Intelligence (again, study or immersion). Even if these rolls succeed, the character's utterances or writings obviously come from a non-native, unless the player rolls an exceptional success, in which case the character manages to sound like a native-born speaker of the language for a few moments.

The player can spend one experience point for the character to become fluent in one of the languages covered by this Merit, as described in the Language Merit, above.

PRIZED POSSESSION (•)

Effect: Your character owns a useful item that he has practiced with for many a long hour. As such, the item provides an equipment bonus (see p. 132) beyond what such an item would usually provide, simply due to the familiarity. The item provides a +2 bonus to applicable rolls within its intended function (a harmonica provides the bonus to Expression rolls to play it, while a laptop computer provides the bonus to Computer rolls) and a +1 bonus to rolls a bit outside or related to the usual purview (using the harmonica to wedge open a door or using the laptop for a Study roll to get homework done on time).

Combat rolls *can* benefit from this Merit, but the Storyteller and the player should consider why the child has spent that much time fighting.

Drawback: If the item is broken or lost, this Merit is forfeited.

TRIVIA HOUND (•••••)

Effect: Your hours spent digging for obscure and weird facts on the Internet were not wasted. You have very wide, but usually shallow, fields of knowledge from which you can pull when the need for those little nuggets of information arises.

Make an Intelligence + Wits roll for your character any time she is confronted with a situation or phenomenon outside her normal experience. If the roll succeeds, she remembers some bit of trivia that may be relevant to the situation.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The information you dredge out of your brain could not be more wrong — you've been reading too many comic books! (The Storyteller should make the Intelligence + Wits roll for you in secret if a dramatic failure is possible.)

Failure: Your character draws a complete blank on this topic.

Success: Your character remembers a piece of useful information: “Hey, is that band playing ‘Stars and Stripes Forever’? That means something bad’s happened at the circus! Let’s go see!”

Exceptional Success: Your character has a wealth of information on the topic hidden away in her mind: “An 1840 stamp from Britain? That’s the year postage stamps were invented! It should be small and black, and have some old lady’s head on it.”

UNSEEN SENSE (••)

Prerequisite: Mortal (non-supernatural); Wits ••

Effect: By the pricking of your thumbs, something wicked this way comes. You have a sixth sense that alerts you to the presence of the supernatural. It isn’t anything you can see or hear, but your body reacts in some consistent way to the paranormal. You may not even understand, at first, your body’s reaction as a signal. With some experience and some experimentation, you may be able to figure out just what sets off your unearthly radar — but those will be dangerous experiments!

The specific type of supernatural effect or presence (ghostly haunting, lurking vampire, stalking werewolf) to which your character is sensitive must be specified when this Merit is purchased. The Storyteller has the final word on both the target of your sensitivity and the cue it gives you. If you or the Storyteller prefers, he may keep under wraps the details of how this Merit will work for your character, for you to discover during play.

This Merit is only available to normal, mortal human characters. Should your character become somehow a supernatural creature herself, this Merit is eliminated. *Available at character creation only.*

PHYSICAL MERITS

AMBIDEXTROUS (•••)

Effect: Your character is equally capable with both hands: she can swing a bat righty or lefty, and even write legibly with her off-hand. She does not ever suffer the -2 penalty for using her off-hand in a fight or on any other die roll. *Available at character creation only.*

DIRECTION SENSE (•)

Effect: Your character never gets lost — not in the most confusing shopping mall, not in the abandoned quarry where kids aren’t supposed to play, anyway. Even in unfamiliar territory, your character can always retrace his steps back the way he came. He can also orient himself to cardinal directions (north, south, east, west) without reference to a compass or the sun.

FAST REFLEXES (• OR ••)

Prerequisite: Dexterity ••• or Wits •••

Effect: Your character is the first off the starting line for a race, the best in the neighborhood at stealing bases, or the first to throw a punch when a fight starts. Your character’s Initiative is increased by +1 per dot of Fast Reflexes. (But be careful — parents and teachers usually don’t accept “He started the fight, but I hit him first,” as an excuse.)





FIGHTING STYLE: KARATE FOR KIDS (• TO •••)

Prerequisites: Dexterity ••; Stamina ••; Brawl ••

Effect: Many kids take karate classes at small dojos in strip malls and tiny urban studios. Parents enroll them hoping their children will learn discipline, maybe a little self-defense, and at least spend a little time off the sofa and away from the TV. A good karate teacher will, in addition, make sure her pupils learn to avoid confrontations when possible, and to run away when the opportunity arises. When all that fails, her students may have a punch or kick to throw into the mix.

Dots purchased in this Merit allow access to special combat maneuvers. Each maneuver is a prerequisite for the next. Your character can't have "Cautious Engagement" until he has "Evade." The maneuvers and their effects are described below.

Evade (•): The first rule is to not get hit. When your character is facing a single opponent, he can dodge and weave pretty well. Add a +2 modifier to his Defense when he uses a Dodge action (after doubling his Defense for the Dodge). For example, a character with a Defense of 3 would have a total Defense of 8 against a single attacker when Dodging. See p. 142 for more on the Dodge system. If another opponent joins the attack, this bonus is lost.

Cautious Engagement (••): You attack, but keep a very healthy respect for your single opponent's

blows. Use the *higher* of your character's Dexterity or Wits to determine his Defense against Brawl-based attacks only (not against Weaponry attacks). If another opponent joins the attack, this bonus is lost.

Vulnerable Target Strike (•••): While there isn't a whole lot of chance to practice this at full speed in class, your character knows sensitive spots to attack — eyes, nose, ears, throat, groin, knee. If your character's attack succeeds, one of the points of damage he inflicts is lethal instead of bashing.

FIGHTING STYLE: PLAYGROUND DOGPILE (• TO •••)

Prerequisites: Strength ••; Stamina ••; Brawl ••

Effect: This isn't really fighting. It's just kids being kids. Kids being kids while they try to pound each other's faces into the asphalt, pull hair, scratch and even bite in a rolling pile of aggression. Adults may wax nostalgic about their own playground dustups, but kids can and do hurt each other, especially when they gang up.

Dots purchased in this Merit allow access to special combat maneuvers. Each maneuver is a prerequisite for the next. Your character can't have "Take Down" until he has "Cheap Shot." The maneuvers and their effects are described below.

Cheap Shot (•): Your character isn't afraid to hit below the belt, or jab an eye, or pull an ear. Strength + Brawl rolls made to damage an opponent your character has immobilized have a +1 modifier.

Take Down (••): A successful grapple attack immediately renders both your character and his opponent prone. The fight continues as normal, from the ground. See Grappling, p. 144.

Pile On (•••): Your character throws his body into the middle of a fight already in progress, squashing the unfortunate combatant at the bottom of the pile. If an opponent is immobilized in a grapple, your character may join the grapple with a Strength + Brawl roll (the opponent's Defense does not apply). Extra successes beyond the first to establish a hold are immediately applied as bashing damage.

FLEET OF FOOT: (• TO •••)

Prerequisite: Strength ••

Effect: Your character is the one to beat in a flat-out footrace. She gains +1 Speed per dot of this Merit.

FRESH START (• OR •••)

Prerequisite: Fast Reflexes • or ••

Effect: Your character is unpredictable in stressful situations — which isn't always a bad thing! With the first dot of this Merit, your character can use an action to change his place in the Initiative order for the rest of the combat. He can choose to take his actions first in the turn, or place himself immediately after a friendly character — or any other time that he thinks will be advantageous. For example, your character has an Initiative result of 8 in a playground dustup; the opponent has a result of 13. Your character can choose not to take a swipe in the first turn, instead repositioning himself for an advantage in the second and subsequent turns, changing his place in the Initiative order from 8 to 14. The prerequisite for this level of this Merit is Fast Reflexes •.

With three dots in this Merit (which has a prerequisite of Fast Reflexes ••), your character performs such a startling maneuver (knocking over a noisy tray of silverware, or executing a dance move he saw in a music video) that everything around stops for the briefest second. The Initiative order is then reset from scratch, with everyone involved rolling again, no matter how satisfied they were with their previous results.

Drawback: Changing the Initiative order is the character's entire action for the turn; he may only move up to his Speed in any turn he uses this Merit. For the three-dot version, remember that everyone involved in the situation must re-roll their Initiative result, even if they were happily at the top of the order.

GIANT (•••)

Effect: Your character towers over other children. She is, for all intents and purposes, the same size as an adult. She wears adult clothing, can ride all the rides at amusement parks, and can survive a deploying airbag. She gains +1 Size (to the adult size of 5). This also grants her +1 Health. This also adds one die to any attempt to pass as an adult (see Disguise, p. 74).

Drawbacks: People have a tendency to treat your character like an adult, when she's not. This can lead to

awkward social situations. Also, she no longer fits on or in a whole lot of fun kid stuff. Finally, when Dodging, you don't get as much of a bonus as most kids (see p. 142).

HARD HEAD (••)

Prerequisite: Stamina ••• or Resolve •••

Effect: Your character can take a big hit and still keep her focus. She receives a +2 modifier to all Resolve rolls to avoid being stunned. If she would normally not be allowed a roll (because the attack inflicted more points of damage than her Stamina), the player may still make a Resolve roll to avoid the stun. In this case, though, the +2 modifier does not apply. See p. 153 for more on stuns.

IRON STOMACH (•)

Prerequisite: Stamina ••

Effect: Your character is willing and able to eat almost anything. Most kids observe a five-second rule when food hits the floor; your character thinks nothing of eating pizza left out on the counter for days, or candy stuck to the floor. And none of this makes him sick.

Your character gets a +2 modifier on food-oriented Survival rolls (see p. 65), and a +3 modifier on Stamina rolls made to resist deprivation (see p. 155). Your character's willingness to try new foods or to eat whatever a questionable cook puts in front of him can also be a surprising social grace.

NATURAL IMMUNITY (•)

Prerequisite: Stamina ••

Effect: Whether your character stays out in the cold rain without galoshes or a rain slicker, or shares a bus seat with a kid with the flu, she never comes down with whatever bug is going around. She may have never once been seriously ill (in her admittedly short life).

Your character receives a +2 modifier on Stamina rolls to resist diseases and infections: parasitic, amoebic, viral, bacterial, fungal — you name it. Even if your character becomes infected, she continues to receive the +2 modifier on all rolls to fight off or survive the course of the disease.

PHYSICAL PRODIGY (•)

Prerequisite: Any Physical Attribute at ••••

Effect: Your character is a natural prodigy, an unlikely master of a Skill or technique at a remarkably young age. Select one Skill from the Physical category. Your character has access to the levels of that Skill beyond the cap imposed on child characters (p. 47). You must still pay for all points in the Skill during character creation, or with experience points at a later date. The Skill should be related to the exceptional Physical Attribute. For example, Larceny would most likely be linked to Dexterity (your character has fast, sticky fingers), but it could also be attributable to Strength (your character has mastered the "breaking" part of breaking and entering). The Storyteller has the final word on the chosen Prodigy and its prerequisite. *Available at character creation only.*

QUICK DRAW (• OR ••)

Prerequisite: Dexterity •••

Effect: He always knows exactly where all his stuff is — or maybe it's the result of endless hours spent playing pirate or mystic space knight. The end result is the same: your character can draw an item from somewhere on his person and use it in the same turn (even attack with it, if the item in question is a weapon). Your character does not lose his Defense for pulling an item from a pocket or bag worn, or even a concealed weapon from his person.

This Merit must be bought separately for tools (• used with all items like flashlights, cameras, cell phones or keys), melee weapons (••) or guns (••).

QUICK HEALER (••••)

Prerequisite: Stamina •••

Effect: Your character bounces back from injury with a speed that makes doctors shake their heads. Bones mend, wounds close, and she goes back to playing like it was no big deal.

All healing times for your character are halved: one point of bashing damage heals in eight minutes; one point of lethal damage heals in two days; and one point of aggravated damage heals in five days.

STRONG BACK (•)

Prerequisite: Strength ••

Effect: Your character is used to lifting and carrying heavy loads. Maybe she works around the farm, or helps stock shelves at the family store. Your character receives a +1 modifier to actions involving lifting or carrying weight.

STRONG LUNGS (••)

Prerequisite: Athletics •••

Effect: Swimming, diving deep, running until there are tears in his eyes and his leg muscles start to scream — none of this is a problem for your character. Your character's Stamina is considered to be two points higher on the "Holding Breath" chart (see Chapter 2, "Stamina") when determining how long he can stay underwater.

He also receives a +1 modifier on all Stamina + Athletics rolls — these are activities like running or biking over long distances.

TINY (•)

Effect: Your character is very small for his age. He may look (or actually be) underfed or in poor health, or he might just be waiting longingly for a growth spurt to kick in. On the plus side, he can fit in some very small spaces, and he has an easier time hiding when the need arises (see the Stealth Skill in Chapter Three). Also, there are times when being treated like a younger kid comes in handy — when it's time to take out the trash or wheedle treats, for instance. The character receives a +1 modifier to any attempt to hide (see p. 65), and to most other Stealth rolls. The Storyteller is encouraged to apply a positive modifier to any other situation where being a little smaller than average might pay off, such as Socialize rolls to convince an

adult of the character's innocence. The character can also walk across thin branches and other surfaces that won't support much weight. Finally, when Dodging (see p. 142), this character gets more of a bonus than bigger kids.

Drawbacks: Your character is at -1 Size (Size 3); this also means -1 Health. Also, there are times when being treated like a younger kid is a pain — when getting permission to stay up late or go somewhere "dangerous," for instance. Finally, your character receives a -3 modifier to any attempt to pass as an adult.

TOUGH (• TO ••)

Prerequisite: Stamina ••• or Resolve •••

Effect: Your character possesses a rare attribute among children: the ability to persevere, to push on through pain or exhaustion. Most children will be tempted to cry uncle when they hit "uncomfortable" or "tired." Your character plugs onward even as his body begins to suffer real harm. Coaches and scoutmasters love him. School counselors and social workers may want to sit him down to find out what dreadful experiences might have hardened such a young child to pain.

Each dot in this Merit eliminates a negative modifier (on a one-for-one basis) caused by injury or fatigue (see Chapter Six, Applying Damage (p. 150) and Fatigue (p. 159)). For example, a character with one dot in this Merit and a -2 penalty from injuries can ignore one point of that penalty, for a -1 modifier. With two dots, he could ignore the entire -2 penalty.

This Merit can only be used to remove penalties from your character's actions. It never provides a positive bonus to a roll.

Drawback: Your character crashes hard when he finally stops moving. When he finally falls asleep after fighting off the effects of fatigue, he must sleep for a minimum of 12 hours. Before that 12-hour period is up, he will be almost impossible to wake up — even if the house is on fire.

TOXIN RESISTANCE (•)

Prerequisite: Stamina •••

Effect: Your character suffers few ill effects from being stung by a bee — or from trying that weird cigarette the "cool kid" offered. She receives a +2 modifier to Stamina rolls made to resist the effects of drugs, toxins or poisons.

SOCIAL MERITS

ALLIES (• TO •••)

Effect: Allies are people — other kids or even adults — who will help your character out from time to time. Child Allies could be school friends, members of a club or sports team, or even a street gang. Adult Allies could include police or social workers, teachers, clergy, or even a local criminal enterprise. A child can even justify having Allies among a crowd most children do not normally have access to, through a parent or other relative. If your character's uncle is a highly respected attorney, a small amount of pull with local lawyers is not out of the ques-

Close to Home

by Jess Hartley

When I was a kid, my friends and I would take off on Saturday morning and not be back until dark. We'd ride our bikes across town, build tree forts in abandoned lots, or hang out at the arcade. This was before the advent of cell phones, so once we were out of sight (or yelling distance), we really had complete autonomy, at least until our parents came to track us down.

These days, I'd never let my own kids have that kind of freedom at that age. I need to know where they are, who they're with, what they're doing — and if I don't know, they stick around where I know they're safe. It's not that I don't trust them. It's the rest of the world that I'm less than sure about.

Most of the parents I know feel the same way. It's just not safe to let your kids wander the way we did when we were young. Children these days, in general, are kept closer to home, where their parents can know they're safe.

Unfortunately, not all dangers can be avoided by curtailing kids' wandering. Predators exist everywhere, and keeping children close to home doesn't stop them from encountering those who would do them harm. It just means that when they do encounter a danger, it's more likely to be in an area they have been taught to think of as safe.

Chances are that when an adult character encounters dangerous situations in the World of Darkness, he's somewhere other than on his home turf. He might stumble across a vampire while out at a nightclub, or a mage in the archives at his work, but since his normal stomping grounds are fairly extensive, these encounters are less likely to happen in or around his home. If he feels threatened by what he encounters, he has a safe haven to return to. And, if things get really bad, or the danger gets too close to home, he has choices: get a new apartment, change jobs, avoid that club, or move to another city.

Children don't have that luxury.

When your whole world is contained in a 12-block area, there's nowhere to run when you encounter something scary. The vampire you meet isn't at some nightclub across town; it's living in the basement of that abandoned house across the street. The werewolf isn't out in the wilderness while you're backpacking; it's in your backyard, howling at the moon from behind your garden shed and threatening to eat your dog. The monster isn't in the cemetery you drive past on your way to work; it's under your bed.

There's nowhere to run. They're in your space, in your neighborhood...maybe even in your home. And there's nothing you can do about it. You're just a kid.

You can try to convince your parents that a hairy creature has been scratching at your window every night, trying to get in and eat your face. But chances are, you're going to be told it's just the wind, or a

tree branch or, even better, your imagination. Very few parents are going to take a child's stories about something they *know* can't be true seriously enough to investigate them in more than a cursory manner, let alone to relocate their home and family based on what can't *possibly* be more than nightmares or an overactive imagination.

But sometimes, the kid is right.

Sometimes there really is something in the closet. Sometimes the man in the ice cream van isn't really selling ice cream. Sometimes the mean old lady in the big house on the corner really is a witch.

And there's nothing he can do about it. Unless he takes matters into his own hands.

I mean, what choice does he have? It's here. He knows it's here, he knows what it is and he knows what it's done. And worse...it knows he knows.

Maybe he can find proof, something his parents can't deny or ignore. Maybe he can find a way to protect himself and those he loves. And maybe, just maybe, if he doesn't have any other choice, he can find a way to stop whatever it is all on his own, or with the help of those who will believe him — other kids.

The fear inherent in having something dangerous or unknown show up in your safe space is a prevalent theme in **Innocents**. Kids deal with this all the time in real life, from the strange sounds at bedtime that their parents can't quite explain away, to finding a spider on their bedroom wall, to having new teachers, caregivers, even siblings, thrust upon them with no choice and little warning. Having nowhere to escape from these scary, threatening, or just unwelcome presences is something that many players will have experienced as a child.

Storytellers can use players' familiarity with those invasive fears to build dramatic tension in their games. Characters can be put in situations where the things they fear, the things that no one else believes in, exist in the places they go every day — where they have to go. Their school yard. Their bus stop. Their backyard. Their basement. Their closet. There's no real escape from these kinds of dangers. They have to be investigated and dealt with, or they just stay there... waiting. Finding antagonists (or at least uncomfortable surprises) in areas that they've previously come to see as safe zones brings the danger home, literally and figuratively.

More dramatic tension can be built by removing another layer of safety, that of the adults, on whom the characters are accustomed to relying for defining and providing safety. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways. Removing the protective adults from the picture not only assures that the characters will be dealing with the threats directly, but also sets up additional levels of worry and fear when their

parents are not home when expected, don't answer their phones or become otherwise inaccessible. Allowing the children to contact the appropriate adults (be they parents, teachers or police) but setting up a layer of disbelief between the children and those who normally protect them reinforces to the players that their characters must deal with the threats on their own. Conversely, the knowledge that, despite what they've been told, a particular area or person is not safe can lead to the characters distrusting the adult authorities in their lives. And, for particularly sadistic Storytellers, establishing a loving and protective relationship between the child characters and an adult and then revealing their protectors to actually

be antagonists can provide delightful plot twists in an **Innocents** game. All of these methods, separately or in conjunction with one another, reinforce the characters' realization that the things they once depended upon must be re-examined. That, in turn, can lead not only to building a dramatic and exciting game, but also to character introspection and growth.

Any time the familiar becomes threatening, dramatic tension soars. By placing the challenges, antagonists and mysteries that **Innocents** characters will encounter in "safe" locations that are familiar to them and which they cannot feasibly avoid, Storytellers can build a level of dramatic tension that is well suited to the themes of the **Innocents** game.

tion. Each group of Allies must be purchased as a separate Merit with its own dots: for example, your character might have Allies (Drama Club) • and Allies •• (Children and Youth Services), both acquired separately at character creation or with experience points during play.

Each dot in this Merit indicates the depth of your character's involvement in or influence on that group. At one dot, your character can ask for small favors, like an extra credit assignment from a teacher to boost a shabby grade, or just a verbal warning from police for being caught out after curfew. Favors at two dots are a little more involved; your character can arrange tutoring sessions with a teacher to help his grade, or get a safe, warm lift home in a police cruiser (no cuffs). With three dots, your character can get pretty substantial favors: the teacher fudges your character's grade upward because he knows "you know the material," or police sit an unmarked car in front of your character's house to watch for suspicious individuals.

The favors and requests made to Allies should fall within their spheres of influence, like the teacher and police examples made above. Obviously, asking a policeman to fix a grade isn't likely to have the desired effect. And while a very involved teacher may be willing to help with situations outside school, she doesn't have the authority or resources of the police.

The Storyteller needs to evaluate each request for help with the following criteria in mind: is it simple or complicated? Easy or difficult? Legal or questionable? Can it be traced? Some factors will matter more or less, depending on the Allies in question — a criminal might have no compunctions about breaking the law, but plenty about sticking out her neck, while a local minister might be willing to spend a great deal of time on an issue that is completely legally and morally on the level. In an unclear situation, the Storyteller can ask for a Manipulation + Socialize roll with a modifier equal to your dots in the appropriate Allies group. Penalties may apply to the roll based on the gravity of the favor (from -3 for a serious concern about the request, to a -5 for an almost deal-breaking concern). Penalties may also apply if your character asks for help too often and wears out his welcome with the group.

Your character can also call on Allies for immediate aid. In this case, successes on the Manipulation + Socialize + Allies roll determine how many members of the group show up to help; for example, how many Drama Club members come by to help your character hang up LOST DOG signs.

You do not need to designate individual members of a group as specifically being the Allies referred to in the Merit, although you and your Storyteller together can detail members of the group. It is important, however, to explain the connections between your character and the group as a whole. It can be as simple as "My character is in the Drama Club," or as roundabout as "My character has been picked up by the police a lot, but they can tell he's basically a good kid."

Drawback: Allies are characters in their own stories — they have their own lives to live, and they won't always be right where your character wants them, when he wants them. Also, favors are barter; a favor granted to your character may be a bargaining chip when your ally comes to ask for help in return. If your Allies are adults, they might not be so demanding, but then the relationship is different. The adults probably won't take as much for granted as other kids would, and if the favor is liable to land them in trouble or make them look suspicious (and, sadly, an adult slipping off with a child *can* look suspicious), they might well decline or call the character's parents.

CONTACTS (• TO •••)

Effect: Contacts provide your character with information — the word on the street or the gossip in the schoolyard. Each dot in this Merit represents one area of information; for example, Contacts ••• can cover goings-on at local bars, teachers' lounge gossip and the scuttlebutt at the firehouse. A child may take this Merit to represent a parent's or guardian's information sources, to which the child can gain access by listening in on phone conversations, reading papers he shouldn't, or carefully asking questions about how a day was at work. Contacts can include specific individuals who like to dish with your character, but more often, it is a large group of acquaintances your character knows just barely well enough to pose a question to. Contacts only applies to gathering information — favors and other help are the purview of other Merits.

Getting information requires a successful Manipulation + Socialize roll when asking around. (The Storyteller may instead allow a Manipulation + Subterfuge roll or even a Dexterity or Wits + Stealth roll to ask leading questions, listen in on conversations, or search a briefcase.) Penalties on the roll apply if the information is little known (-1 to -3), confidential (-3), or if sharing it could get someone in trouble or hurt (-3 to -5).

Even success on the roll doesn't guarantee that your character's Contacts have the desired information. If they don't have the information, they can't share it — but they would if they could! The information known by any single contact or set of Contacts is always at the Storyteller's discretion.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character's informant holds back an important piece of information, or gives completely false information (either unknowingly or on purpose).

Failure: Your character's queries turn up no information.

Success: One of your character's contacts provides the sought-for information, or something just as helpful.

Exceptional Success: Your character's contact is a font of information, sharing items of interest your character wouldn't have even thought to inquire about.

Suggested Equipment: An appropriate gift, like a desired trading card; a fistful of flowers, or can of soda (+1 to +2); an outstanding favor (+1 to +3)

Possible Penalties: Rude behavior (-1), frequent or repeated requests (-1 to -2)

DEEP POCKETS (••)

Effect: The latest style in shoes, a newly released video game, a shiny, tricked-out bike — things all kids would love to have. Not all kids get them, but you do. Your parents or guardians may be so stinking rich that they don't notice the money spent on your kid stuff, or they may have some other combination of monetary resources and parenting permissiveness. However the "financial managers" work it out, your character always has the stylish duds and required toys to keep up appearances in the neighborhood.

In addition, once per chapter, your character may make an outlandish request of the parent or guardian who holds the purse strings. To get them to accede, make a Manipulation + Subterfuge or Socialize roll (when purchasing this Merit, you must choose to use Subterfuge or Socialize, depending on your character's relationship with her parents or guardians, and then stick with it). Success means your character gets the desired item. The expense of the item, or its nature, may impose a penalty on the roll. A video game, a metal detector, a set of two-way radios, even a \$100 gift card to a nearby store are reasonable, or at least expected, requests and incur no penalty. An expensive bike, a new computer (for schoolwork, of course), or a pellet gun might raise eyebrows a bit (for a -1 to -3 penalty). Truly outlandish or dangerous requests — say, for an all-terrain vehicle, a swimming pool, or a real gun — might garner a penalty up to -5. Your character can gain a bonus on a roll by planting the seed of a desire

with the parent (wistful mentions of the desired item, or pictures cut from magazines stuck to the fridge), but forgoing any Deep Pockets roll for a while. For each chapter in which the player sacrifices his use of the Deep Pockets Merit, he gains a +1 modifier, up to a maximum +5.

Drawback: What is given can be taken away. If your character does not take proper care of her toys (the ATV is wrecked, or the pellet gun is used to shoot the neighbor's dog), she may find that she no longer gets what she wants — she loses access to this Merit temporarily, or permanently.

FAME (• TO •••)

Effect: The cult of celebrity embraces even children. Fame means recognition, measured in web site hits and column inches devoted to your character. This fame may be of a positive nature, if your character is a child star, a local Little League pitcher, or a hero who saved his family from a burning house. Salacious negative attention is also quite effective in the fame game. Perhaps your character was plucked from the smoking ruins of a cult compound on live cable TV, or testified in a high-profile kidnapping trial. The most neutral sort of fame is the product of having famous parents. Most child characters, with a few exceptions for nationally known actors or songstresses, will languish with at most one or two dots of this Merit.

Each dot of Fame adds +1 modifier to Social rolls among those impressed by such things.

Drawback: Fame does bring out the crazies. Famous people are often stalked, both by folks wanting to take their pictures and people of decidedly less wholesome intention.

GUARDIAN (• OR •••)

Effect: Someone is personally responsible for your character's physical safety on a day-to-day basis. This custodian accompanies your character everywhere — to and from school, on shopping trips and picnic outings, even to check out the mummies in the museum; everywhere but around the house. A one-dot Guardian may be a nanny, au pair or tutor. A three-dot Guardian is a bodyguard, someone trained in close personal protection, who may even carry a gun and wear body armor. Obviously, a typical nanny or tutor isn't trained to physically protect a child, but without a doubt, an accompanied child is much safer than one wandering around alone. Note: parents and other relatives may qualify for this Merit. The difference between a stay-at-home mom who is a Guardian and one who isn't is that the former expects her child to not be safe, and/or to cause trouble. Most parents, rightly or wrongly, expect that their children not be in danger every day.

Drawback: Your character's actions are limited by what the Guardian will allow. It is possible to ditch the Guardian to have a little fun, but it won't be easy, especially if the Guardian has tactical training (or your character has a reputation for escapes and escapades). But at least if your character disappears, somebody knows he's missing.

GUARDIAN ANGEL (••••)

Effect: A strange presence watches over your character, keeping her safe from harm — or so it seems. She

gets into and out of serious scrapes without any real harm. When a bad situation could go either way, it always tips just right. Your character may just be lucky.

You have two options for the Guardian Angel Merit. You might decide to specify what exactly the presence is that protects your character, give it traits and fully defined capabilities, and have the Storyteller control it during the game. The creature might be ghost or spirit (see p. 199), or a supernatural creature of some kind — perhaps even a vampire, werewolf or mage. The Appendix to this book gives some basic information on such creatures. Making the Guardian Angel into a character this way means that what it can and can't do is very well defined, but it also means that the Angel can die. The Angel should still be invisible much of the time, only appearing and helping the character indirectly.

The second option is that the character just seems to get all the breaks. The “Guardian Angel” here is metaphorical, rather than being an actual, sentient creature. Before every chapter, the player rolls Resolve + Composure. Multiply the successes by two. The result is the number of bonus dice that can be used on any roll during that chapter. The dice can, instead, be applied to characters acting in direct opposition to the protected character as penalties. Each die can be used only once.

Example: Alice has the Guardian Angel Merit. Before the session starts, her player rolls Resolve + Composure and gets three successes. She therefore has six bonus dice for this chapter. During the session, Alice winds up running away from one of her teachers, a man who turns out to be something other than he appears. She hides from the teacher, and her

player applies three of the bonus dice. The Storyteller picks up some dice to roll Wits + Composure for the stalker, and Alice's player, not liking the size of the dice pool she's seeing, applies the other three dice from her Guardian Angel as a penalty to the Storyteller's roll. The roll fails, so Alice is still hidden — but she's used up her Angel's influence for the chapter.

INSPIRING (•••)

Prerequisite: Presence •••


Effect: Your character can rally other children to action. Even if her speech is loaded with references to comic book characters and popular movies, it nonetheless raises the spirits of her intended audience and bolsters their courage, no matter what lies ahead.

Once per chapter, you may make a Presence + Socialize roll for your character. If the roll succeeds, all children listening — and who intend to help out or go along with a proposed course of action — regain one spent Willpower point (not to exceed their Willpower dots). Your character cannot use this Merit on herself.

MENTOR (• TO •••••)

Effect: A Mentor provides your character with support and advice, and a voice of experience and wisdom. For a lucky child, possible mentor figures abound: a parent, grandparent or other family member; a teacher; a social worker; a religious figure; a sports coach; or even someone from a mentoring organization. For a child from a more disadvantaged background, potential mentors may not be so thick on the ground, but they can still be found. A mentor can use her own assets, influence or abilities to help





your character, but she will also insist that her protégé learn something along the way. Mentors are not necessarily selfless and endlessly patient, either — a surly, lazy or unwilling pupil might find himself without an instructor.

A mentor always acts in what she perceives to be her protégé's best interest. Both the mentor's perception and actions are determined by the Storyteller. This means that in some situations, depending on the mentor, going to her for help may not have the results the child wants. For instance, a mentor may report to the police a stranger habitually lurking outside her charge's house, when the child really wanted help figuring out just what that lurking stranger is. The Storyteller may also employ advice given by a mentor to guide your character into a new storyline, or to nudge one that has stalled.

The number of dots purchased in this Merit determines the influence, knowledge and experience of your character's Mentor. One dot represents a Mentor with one or more specialized Skills in an area of interest shared with your character, and some life experience to go with it (for example, a baseball coach who played some college ball back in the day). Two dots represents a Mentor with a wide range of Skills and abilities and significant experience in that area of interest (here, a coach who played for a minor league team, and has some pull with local sports fundraisers). Three dots represents a Mentor with an even broader reach, years of experience and accrued influence (our coach has now led his young teams to state championships, owns a car dealership, and has donated generously to political and charitable fundraisers). Four dots adds major influence to your character's Mentor (Coach scouts for major league teams on the side, and keeps his fingers in a whole handful of high-profile dugouts). And finally, a five-dot Mentor is a leading figure in his area of expertise and has vast influence in that area and many others. (Your character's coach is an active baseball star or successful coach who runs a charitable foundation, owns a car dealership, works as a motivational speaker and still finds the time to throw the ball around in the backyard.) Baseball coaches, schoolteachers and other neighborhood types are not likely to be five-dot Mentors, though they provide much-needed guidance to the kids who rely on them. The most powerful mentors are likely to be individuals who wield power on a national or international level (or on a level that transcends such boundaries), who are also related to their child protégés. After all, how many such high and mighty types have time to deal with a child?

Your character's Mentor may have tasks that she requires be completed (some boring, like keeping up with piano practice, or some that may lead to great adventures), but it is highly unlikely that she will demand *quid pro quo* for her assistance. The earning of extra privileges (like joining the starting lineup, or not being grounded anymore) is another matter entirely.

ODD JOBS (•)

Effect: Mowing lawns, raking leaves, babysitting — these are time-honored jobs for kids looking for a little bit of pocket money. In some areas, other jobs exist, like shoveling snow or digging up bait worms. There are even jobs of dubi-

ous legality, like being a bookie's runner or a gang's lookout. Whatever your character's choice of jobs, he reaps the benefits. He's always got \$10 to \$20 in his pocket to spend. This money is his to spend however he likes, without asking anyone for permission. Of course, if your character doesn't take the time to do his job, he won't have any money.

PET (• OR •••)

Effect: Your character keeps a pet of some kind: a dog, a cat, a horse, a hamster, a snake, or practically any kind of animal that can be given a cute name. A pet can be a very important part of a child's life. No matter what grades are on the report card, or how shabby the family's clothes are, a pet given just the basics of food and care will always provide companionship and love. A kid can tell things to a pet that she would never dare tell a person, even a trusted parent or friend — hopes, fears and dreams and troubles all go safely into a pet's ear.

This judgment-free friendship is the sole contribution of a one-dot Pet. Spending 15 minutes playing with or caring for a pet gives your character a +1 modifier on her next degeneration roll; she knows there is always someone who will love her and listen to her, no matter what has happened. This bonus lasts until a degeneration roll is made, or until the character sleeps, whichever comes first. When your character has made a degeneration roll, she may go back to her pet for solace (and refresh her +1 modifier) without having to sleep first.

A three-dot Pet provides the same love and affection as a one-dot Pet, and therefore the same bonus on degeneration rolls. There is, however, a different bond between a character and a pet at this level of investment. The pet is fiercely loyal, even in the face of terrible danger or a terrifying creature. Your character's pet will remain with her through thick and thin. If rescue is possible, the pet will run for help. If there is nowhere left to run, the pet will gladly die protecting your character.

The type or size of pet does not matter when determining how many points this Merit will cost. A dog can be a one- or three-dot Pet — a one-dot dog will turn tail and run when danger appears, whereas a three-dot dog will interpose itself between danger and child. Admittedly, guinea pigs, fish and their ilk are lousy protectors and should be relegated to the lower rank.

Your character can teach her pet tricks with Animal Ken, using the normal method. All Animal Ken rolls for training the pet, understanding its body language or communicating a need to it are made with a +2 modifier. A three-dot Pet learns the "guard" and "heel" commands for free — your character must still train the pet, but these two commands do not count against the animal's known tricks.

Drawbacks: Here begins the parental lecture: having a pet is a big responsibility. A pet must be fed, taken on walks (or have its litter box or cage or tank cleaned), groomed, and shown attention and love. An abused or mistreated pet provides no benefits — an animal pushed far enough may even attack its owner.

It is a sad fact of life that pets die. They grow old, they get lost, or they may die tragic deaths before their time.

The loss of a one-dot Pet may grieve a child, but such pets are, blessedly, somewhat interchangeable. A fish dies, is replaced, and a few weeks later its owner loves it as much as its predecessor. After a month of story time, the benefits of the lost one-dot Pet can be provided by its replacement. The loss of a three-dot Pet is another matter. This bond between child and pet is unique, and if such a pet dies, the player must make a trigger roll for the character (see p. 82). The child may, in time, replace her lost friend with another animal companion that will provide the benefits of a one-dot Pet. At the Storyteller's discretion, this pet (if it is of an appropriate species), can eventually rise to the three-dot level.

SOCIAL PRODIGY (•)

Prerequisite: Any Social Attribute at ••••

Effect: Your character is a natural prodigy, an unlikely master of a social grace or an area of art at a remarkably young age. Select one Skill from the Social category. Your character has access to the levels of that Skill beyond the cap imposed on child characters (see p. 47). You must still pay for all points in the Skill during character creation, or with experience points at a later date. The Skill should be related to the exceptional Social Attribute. For example, Animal Ken could be linked to Presence (animals like your character a lot), to Manipulation (your character can make animals do what he wants), or to Composure (your character's unflappable calm reassures animals). The Storyteller has the final word on the chosen Prodigy and its prerequisite. *Available at character creation only.*

STRIKING LOOKS (••)

Effect: Your character's appearance is breathtaking, even while it remains childlike. Adults have been known to mutter things like "Watch out when that one grows up," or simply acquiesce to his demands with amusement. Your character receives a +1 modifier to Presence or Manipulation rolls made while taking advantage of his looks — this won't work over the phone, for instance.

Drawback: Your character's face is always remembered. You cannot simply vanish into a crowd. Also, he may attract the attention of predators — of the human kind or even worse.


TEAM PLAYER (••)

Effect: Your character knows how to work in a group with other children — when to delegate, when to lead, when to pitch in and get the work done. She also knows how to encourage others to cooperate, keeping even a motley group of kids organized and effective for at least a short while.

Once per chapter, you may make a Presence + Empathy roll for your character. If the roll succeeds, every child character gains a +1 modifier on all teamwork rolls made for the scene. This applies to both primary and secondary actors. If more than one character in the group successfully uses this Merit in the same scene, the bonuses are cumulative (+2 for two characters, +3 for three, etc.). More information on teamwork can be found on p. 127.







Maya never saw the man coming.

One moment she was jogging down the street — not just walking, but jogging, trying to make it home before the rain soaked her through — and the next she was yanked clean off her feet, like the dog in the cartoon who's suddenly and unexpectedly reached the end of his leash. A slim, muscular arm wrapped tight around her chest, pinning her arms, and a filthy hand clamped hard over her mouth and nose.

A voice grated in her ear. Not a word. Not a sound, it said. She couldn't tell for sure if it was a man or a woman — the words were flat and harsh, almost metallic, like one of those garbled voices she heard on those true crime shows her mother liked to watch.

She felt herself pulled backwards, down a short flight of stairs to a basement apartment beneath a grey, graffiti-strewn tenement. The world seemed to whirl around her as she was dragged down into the shadows. Her body was pressed against her attacker's chest. It felt hard and angular, not at all human. There were bumps and ridges where no human bone should be, and that, more than anything else, filled her with terror.

Last summer, her mother had taken Maya to the local YMCA, where a man from the Police Department taught a class on self-defense. Now all that went completely out of her head. Instead, she acted on instinct born of 10 years spent in a small apartment with four older brothers.

Maya lashed out with both feet, hammering her heels against her attacker's legs and abdomen. One foot connected squarely with the man's crotch. Her attacker staggered, his face pressed hard against the back of her head, and so she drew her chin all the way to her chest and then heaved back as hard as she could. She connected with something solid and heard a brittle crack.

There was a muffled croak of pain and the grip around her chest slackened. Maya writhed and twisted as fiercely as she could, feeling her thin jacket hike up to her shoulders as she wriggled downwards out of the man's grip. She hit the pavement and he lunged for her, grabbing her jacket's hood and tearing it away. By then she was running, leaping for the rain-slicked steps and screaming at the top of her lungs.

The man didn't follow. He didn't dare, not with her voice ringing from the tenement walls. At the top of the steps, Maya dared a single glance back at her attacker, and what she saw nearly froze the scream in her throat. A face glared up at her — a mismatched jumble of features, like a collage glued clumsily together and placed on a human head. The eyes, one brown, the other blue, fixed her with such an intense look of hatred it left her weak at the knees.

But then she saw the flashing lights of the patrol car, just half a block away, and she ran as though her life depended on it.

Later, when they asked her to describe the man who'd attacked her, she hardly knew where to begin.



Chapter Six: Dramatic Systems

A Storytelling game is about people getting together to tell a cooperative story, with characters acting and reacting to the course of a plot provided by the Storyteller. But what happens when your character attempts to do something under adverse conditions — or worse, is directly opposed by the actions of another character? Does your character succeed or fail?

In a sense, the Storytelling game hearkens back to the games of Cops and Robbers that you played as a kid. Now, as then, you need a method or system to determine who shot whom. The major difference is that Storytelling games revolve around far more complex interactions. Did your character manage to pick the lock to the cellar door? Did he scale the wall outside the house? Did he manage to hammer that stake into the vampire's heart?

To decide these and many other outcomes, a game needs a consistent set of rules. This chapter contains the rules and systems necessary to resolve all the myriad events that unfold in the course of your story. In addition to basic systems, such as the flow of time and the different ways that characters can perform actions during a story, this chapter also contains detailed systems for breaking objects and descriptions of common types of equipment and their effects in the game.

TIME

Pacing is crucial to telling a good story, and the same is true in a Storytelling game. We can change the flow of time to suit the purposes of the story, skimming quickly past hours or even days when nothing much happens to your character, then slowing down to focus on those life-or-death moments when each second springs into sharp relief. How fast or how slowly time passes in the game depends on the Storyteller and the actions of the characters. When the characters are creeping fearfully into the basement of their apartment building in search of an angry ghost, each movement or action becomes crucial, and it may take hours of real time to cover what would only take a few minutes within the game. Later, when the characters need time to rest and recover from their ordeal, the Storyteller can skim past hours of game time with just a momentary description in real time, letting the players jump right back into the action and keeping the story rolling along.

Storytelling games use six basic units of time, which fit together like puzzle pieces to tell a larger narrative:

- Turn — This is the smallest increment of time, and often the most important. A turn covers three seconds of game time, and is the amount of time a character needs to perform an instant action (see p. 120). Turns are mainly used during combat or other action-packed events where every moment counts.

- Scene — A scene in a Storytelling game resembles a scene in a TV show or theatrical play. The scene normally takes place in a single location, although a car chase or a short trip might be considered a single scene. A scene usually involves a single, specific event. The flow of time within a scene can vary greatly: it can play out in a number of turns, it may run parallel to real time, or the Storyteller may choose to fast-forward through parts of it (like when your characters are sitting around waiting for something to happen). As long as the location and the general event do not change, the scene remains in effect. The Storyteller determines when one scene ends and another begins.

For example, a scene may begin with combat, which is measured in turns, then slip back into “real” time once the angry ghost is driven off and the characters are

**Proud and insolent youth,
prepare to meet thy doom.**

— J. M. Barrie, *Peter Pan*

left to treat their wounds and decide what to do next. After fast-forwarding through a half hour of game time where the characters dig out some Band-Aids and hydrogen peroxide from their parents' bathroom and patch themselves up, the scene then returns to real time again as the characters try to figure out what they can do to get rid of the spirit. All of these occur in the same scene, but the flow of time changes so that the game can stay focused on the action.

- **Chapter** — A chapter represents a single game session. It will usually contain several complete scenes, dictated by the course of events that the Storyteller has planned for the session and what the players do.

- **Story** — A story tells one complete tale, whether that involves multiple chapters or can be told in a single game session. It typically has an introduction, a plot arc that involves rising conflict and a climax that brings events to a conclusion.

- **Chronicle** — A chronicle is a collection of stories that fit together to tell a much larger tale. When creating a chronicle, the Storyteller does so with a goal in mind, or a theme or overarching plot line that connects all the stories of the proverbial saga together. As the game progresses, you and your fellow players contribute to the creation of the chronicle, developing it into a full-blown epic.

Chapters, stories and chronicles are discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

- **Downtime** — Downtime is used to fast-forward over periods of time where either nothing significant happens in a story, or the characters are performing a lengthy but important task, like researching facts in the local library or lying in bed, healing their injuries. The Storyteller summarizes the events covered by downtime rather than actually playing them out. He may say something like, "You spend the afternoon at the library, poking through shelves of dusty books covering the town's history, until the librarian comes around and says it's time to go home." There's no need to go over the lengthy and tedious search through dozens of old books, so there's no reason to play it out. Instead, the Storyteller fast-forwards to the point where your characters find themselves on the library steps, ready to compare notes on what they've learned.

For more information on chapters, stories and chronicles, see Chapter Seven.

ROLLING DICE

The Storyteller has two options to choose from when he needs to determine the outcome of an action or event. The first option is to decide the outcome based on the character's relevant trait score. If a Strength score of 2 is required to open a jammed window, for example, and the character has a Strength score of 4, the Storyteller can simply declare that the character opens the window without difficulty. The advantage to this option is that it doesn't slow down the flow of the narrative and allows the troupe to focus on telling the story.

The second option to determining an outcome is for the Storyteller or the players to make a dice roll that will quantify the action's relative success or failure. This adds

tension to the story by involving the element of chance. The character may be more than strong enough to open the jammed window, but what if his hand fumbles at the latch and he can't get it open in time?

Dice rolls are usually reserved for actions or events that involve some amount of risk. Opening a door is a very simple action that a character could normally perform automatically — but opening the same door with a fanged beast breathing down the character's neck is another matter entirely. The Storyteller could ask for the player to make a dice roll to see if the character gets the door open in time before the beast's teeth closes about his neck!

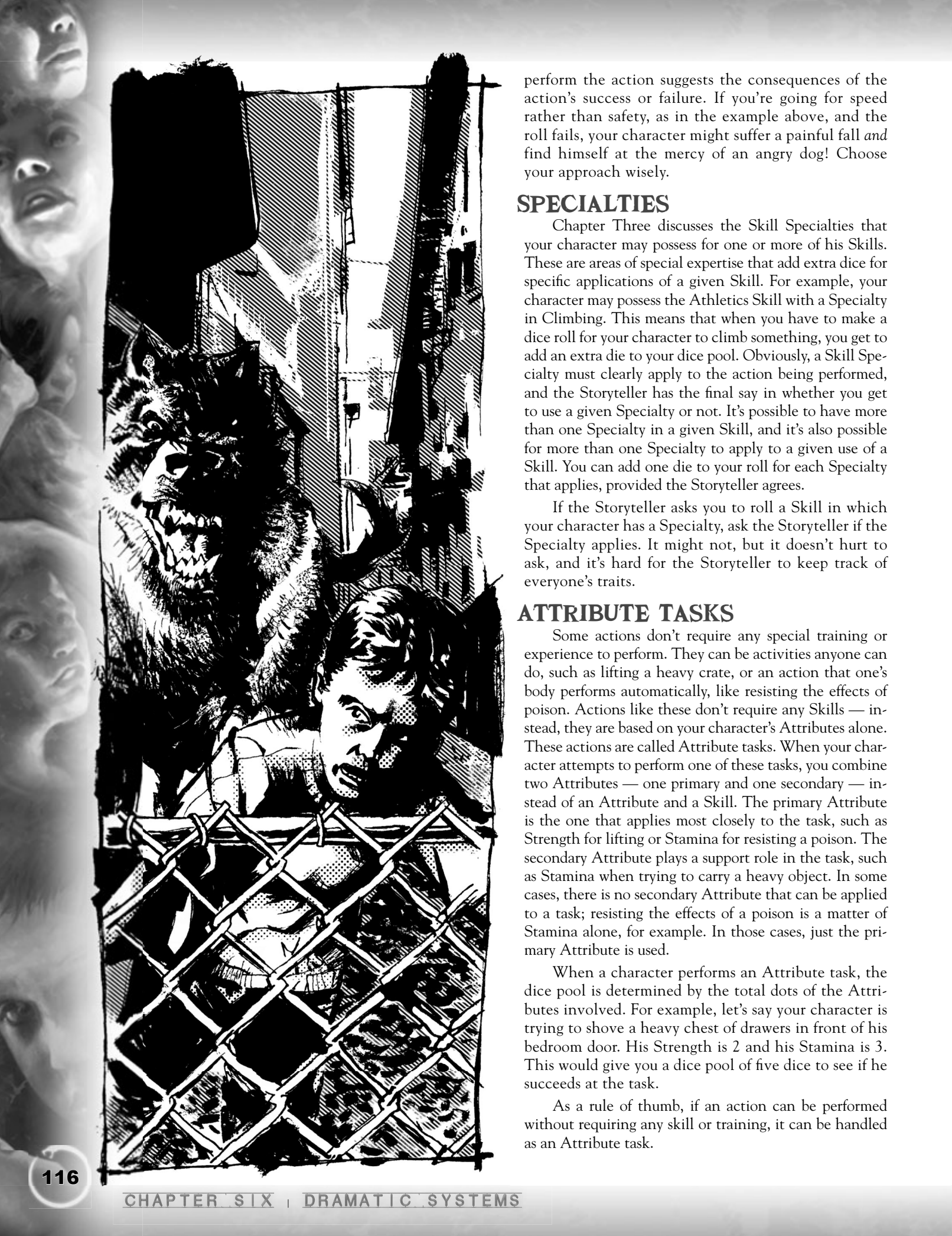
The Storytelling System uses 10-sided dice, also referred to as "d10s." Using multiple dice to make a dice roll is referred to as a *dice pool*.

FORMING DICE POOLS

A character's talents and capabilities are represented in the game using traits, which are further quantified using one or more dots (see the preceding chapters for more details). These dots measure how proficient your character is at a wide variety of actions. Attributes and Skills are rated 1 to 5 for most characters. When a character attempts an action that requires a dice roll, one Attribute and one Skill are applied to the action and the dots are added together. The total of these two traits determine the number of dice that the player rolls to determine if the action succeeds. The more dice the player is able to roll, the better the odds of success.

The Attribute and Skill used to determine a character's dice pool are those that are most relevant to the action the character wants to perform. Refer to the descriptions of these traits in Chapters Two and Three to determine the best candidates for the task, although the Storyteller is the final judge as to which traits a character may bring to bear. For example, if your character wants to climb a tree, it would be appropriate to use Strength + Athletics to perform the task. If he's been caught violating curfew and wants to talk himself out of being grounded, it might be appropriate to use Presence + Persuasion. In the previous example, if the character had a Presence of 3 and a Persuasion of 2, that would give you five dice in your dice pool to see if the character succeeds.

Sometimes more than one Attribute or Skill might be appropriate for a given action. If your character wants to climb a tree and is more interested in speed rather than safety — say, a Doberman is snapping at his heels — then you can appeal to the Storyteller to combine Dexterity + Athletics rather than using Strength. If your character tries to play on his parents' compassion instead of depending on his charm to get out of being grounded, you can attempt to use Manipulation + Persuasion rather than Presence. As a rule of thumb, *use Attribute and Skill combinations that best reflect the manner in which the character is trying to perform the action*. It's also important to remember that the manner in which the character is trying to



perform the action suggests the consequences of the action's success or failure. If you're going for speed rather than safety, as in the example above, and the roll fails, your character might suffer a painful fall *and* find himself at the mercy of an angry dog! Choose your approach wisely.

SPECIALTIES

Chapter Three discusses the Skill Specialties that your character may possess for one or more of his Skills. These are areas of special expertise that add extra dice for specific applications of a given Skill. For example, your character may possess the Athletics Skill with a Specialty in Climbing. This means that when you have to make a dice roll for your character to climb something, you get to add an extra die to your dice pool. Obviously, a Skill Specialty must clearly apply to the action being performed, and the Storyteller has the final say in whether you get to use a given Specialty or not. It's possible to have more than one Specialty in a given Skill, and it's also possible for more than one Specialty to apply to a given use of a Skill. You can add one die to your roll for each Specialty that applies, provided the Storyteller agrees.

If the Storyteller asks you to roll a Skill in which your character has a Specialty, ask the Storyteller if the Specialty applies. It might not, but it doesn't hurt to ask, and it's hard for the Storyteller to keep track of everyone's traits.

ATTRIBUTE TASKS

Some actions don't require any special training or experience to perform. They can be activities anyone can do, such as lifting a heavy crate, or an action that one's body performs automatically, like resisting the effects of poison. Actions like these don't require any Skills — instead, they are based on your character's Attributes alone. These actions are called Attribute tasks. When your character attempts to perform one of these tasks, you combine two Attributes — one primary and one secondary — instead of an Attribute and a Skill. The primary Attribute is the one that applies most closely to the task, such as Strength for lifting or Stamina for resisting a poison. The secondary Attribute plays a support role in the task, such as Stamina when trying to carry a heavy object. In some cases, there is no secondary Attribute that can be applied to a task; resisting the effects of a poison is a matter of Stamina alone, for example. In those cases, just the primary Attribute is used.

When a character performs an Attribute task, the dice pool is determined by the total dots of the Attributes involved. For example, let's say your character is trying to shove a heavy chest of drawers in front of his bedroom door. His Strength is 2 and his Stamina is 3. This would give you a dice pool of five dice to see if he succeeds at the task.

As a rule of thumb, if an action can be performed without requiring any skill or training, it can be handled as an Attribute task.

DICE ROLLING STEPS

Step 1: Determine the core dice pool. It's usually Attribute + Skill, or Attribute (primary) + Attribute (secondary) for Attribute tasks.

Step 2: Apply dice bonuses or penalties, if any. Add appropriate dice bonuses first, then subtract penalties. Dice bonuses include Skill Specialties, familiar items or equipment that the character can apply to the task. Dice penalties include lack of Skill, injury penalties or environmental obstacles. If a character's dice pool is reduced to 0 as a result of dice penalties, a chance roll may still be made. (See page 119 for details.)

Step 3: Roll the total dice remaining in your dice pool against a target number of 8. (See page 118.)

QUALIFIERS

For the purposes of simplicity and game balance, the Storyteller should never allow a dice roll combining more than two traits of any kind. Two Attributes can be combined to perform an Attribute task (see above), but two Skills should never be combined to determine a character's dice pool.

Sometimes a character may try to perform an action without possessing the necessary Skill for the task. In such a case, the Storyteller may still allow you to make a roll using the appropriate Attribute alone. Your chances of success will be greatly reduced, but you can at least make the attempt. For example, let's say your character wants to pick the lock on an attic door, but he doesn't have the Larceny Skill. Normally, the dice pool for such an action would be Dexterity + Larceny, but since the character doesn't have the relevant Skill, the character can only use his Dexterity instead. It's not much, but it's better than nothing.

In addition, if your character attempts a task without the proper Skill, a penalty is applied to the roll. Actions based on Mental Skills incur a -3 penalty, and actions based on Physical Skills incur a -1 penalty. Thus, if your character has no Medicine skill but tries to perform first aid on his injured friend, you would use the character's Dexterity Attribute to determine your dice pool, but at a -3 penalty. If your character has no Athletics Skill but tries to swim across a wide river, you would use the character's Strength Attribute, but at a -1 penalty.

Some traits, such as Willpower, have a maximum rating of 10, which is twice the maximum rating of any given Attribute or Skill. The Storyteller should not usually combine special traits like these with any other traits to determine a character's dice pool. These traits are typically used on their own — they're not even used to form dice pools, but instead provide points that are used to influence other dice rolls.

DICE MODIFIERS

Dramatic events don't unfold under ideal conditions. Characters fight or flee for their lives through darkened rooms, search for clues with one eye on the watchful adult at the far end of the room or try to sneak out of the house in the dead of night without waking the family dog. When a character attempts an action, there are almost always factors working against him, whether these are environ-

mental conditions, opposing forces or simple distractions. These influences create challenges for your character to overcome when performing an action, resulting in penalties to your dice pool. By the same token, your character can try to offset these challenges with tools or abilities that make the task easier, such as special equipment, innate advantages or Skill Specialties. These provide bonus dice to your dice pool, increasing the chance for success. In general, each bonus adds one die to your dice pool, while each penalty subtracts one die. Dice bonuses and dice penalties stack together. In other words, you can add together multiple bonuses and subtract multiple penalties from any given dice pool.

Tools, weapons or other pieces of equipment that a character can use are rated for the dice bonus that they bring to bear when used in a task, and examples of these are listed later in this chapter. It's important to note, however, that these ratings are derived with adult users in mind. Children do not have the same degree of experience or familiarity with many types of tools or other equipment that adults do, and will not automatically benefit from any bonuses they provide. For example, a fine set of precision lockpicks might provide a +2 bonus when used to pick a lock, but very few eight-year-olds have ever seen a lockpick, much less had the opportunity to use one. Thus, unless a tool, weapon or other piece of equipment is something your character is familiar with and has had ample opportunity to use, he does not gain any dice bonuses from using it to complete a task. Continuing with the previous example, if your character is trying to open a locked door and has never used a set of lockpicks before, he would not gain any dice bonus provided by the tools — but if he pulled out his trusty pocketknife and tried to force the lock instead, he would gain a +1 bonus from this familiar and well-used item.

Obviously, different children have such varied experiences that deciding whether a tool is of benefit is going to be a judgment call for the Storyteller. The Tool Use roll, described on p. 47, is one way to make this decision. You can also fall back on a character's history and prelude for the answer: *has* the character ever seen a lockpick before? If so, why? Who taught the kid to pick locks, and to what end?

Tools that don't require any real finesse or understanding to use, however, still grant their full bonuses. A child might not understand why one pair of sneakers

ADDING AND SUBTRACTING

Remember to always add your dice roll bonuses to your dice pool before subtracting any penalties. Once all penalties have been subtracted, you roll however many dice you have left to determine if your character's action succeeds. It's possible that in the case of extreme penalties, your dice pool may be reduced to zero dice, leaving you with just a chance roll. See "The Chance Roll" on page 119 for more information.

helps when climbing trees and another does not, but the football cleats still grant a bonus to climbing rolls.

APPLYING MODIFIERS

Determining the value of modifiers assigned to a dice roll can be either an art or a science. If your troupe wants to create a gritty and realistic feel for your game, this book lists a wide variety of potential bonuses and penalties, from equipment and tool bonuses and innate advantages, to environmental penalties and character disabilities. You, the player, assume responsibility for looking up the various bonuses that apply to your roll, while the Storyteller focuses on tallying any penalties that apply. Sometimes penalties will be applied that your character would not necessarily be aware of. Perhaps he is under the influence of a supernatural effect, or something more mundane, like a drug or poison, whose influence is too subtle to detect. As a result, there may be times when the Storyteller levies a penalty to the task without telling you the cause.

All modifiers are cumulative. That is, your character can take advantage of multiple bonuses (from tools, Skill Specialties, innate advantages, etc.) and suffer the effect of multiple penalties.

Example: *Your character is trying to sneak out of his house without being caught by his parents. His core dice pool is six. He is wearing his favorite sneakers (+1) and it's late at night, so his parents have been asleep for hours (+1). Unfortunately, his house has creaky floors (-1), he has to sneak right by his parents' bedroom to get to the stairs (-1), and the family's yappy little poodle is prowling around downstairs (-2). That's a cumulative bonus of +2, and a cumulative penalty of -4. After applying these modifiers, you have a final dice pool of four.*

Another, more intuitive approach to dice rolling avoids exhaustive tallying of "official" modifiers. Instead, the Storyteller considers the overall circumstances surrounding a given task and assigns modifiers on the fly. This approach is less detailed and specific, but involves less number crunching and potentially speeds up the flow

of the game. Using this approach, slight bonuses or penalties are assigned a rating of one. Moderate bonuses or penalties are assigned a rating of three, and exceptional or extreme examples are rated five. As a rule, no modifier ever exceeds five, as either a bonus or a penalty.

To abstract this method even further, the Storyteller may simply consider *all* of the factors at work in terms of a one-to-five range and come up with one total that applies to a given task. He might allow you to calculate some bonuses for your character, but then summarily decrees that weather and other character disabilities render the action "a trying task," and applies a -3 penalty.

Some general suggested modifiers are listed in the table below.

TARGET NUMBERS

So you've formed your dice pool, added dice bonuses (if any) and subtracted penalties. Now what? Almost all dice rolls made in the Storytelling system have a target number of 8. In other words, you want to roll 8 or higher on each of your dice.

For each die that turns up 8 or higher in your roll, your character achieves a success at his intended task. Sometimes the number of successes is counted to determine the final result, such as in combat, but usually a single success is all that's necessary for an action to take place, such as leaping over a fallen log or noticing the old key that's fallen behind the radiator grate.

Example: *Your character is trying to rig up his parents' camcorder in his room in the hope that it will catch an image of the spirit that slips into his room while he's asleep. His Dexterity + Crafts is 4, and he's in the AV club at school, so the Storyteller grants him a +1 inherent bonus to the task. However, the camcorder doesn't have a tripod, so there's no easy way to secure it in a stable location; the Storyteller imposes a -1 penalty for this. This leaves you with four dice to roll against a target number of 8.*

You roll the dice, and get a 4, 9, 8 and a 3, for two successes. Since you only need one success to complete the

BONUS DEGREE OF CHALLENGE

+1	A helping hand
+2	A walk in the park
+3	Nothing to it
+4	Easy as pie
+5	You can do it in your sleep

PENALTY DEGREE OF CHALLENGE

-1	A minor obstacle
-2	A hard time
-3	A trying task
-4	It's demanding
-5	Sorely tested

task, your character succeeds in placing the camera so that it covers most of his bedroom.

10-AGAIN

Extremely good rolls can lead to exceptional success for your character. Through a mixture of skill and great good luck, his action succeeds in a spectacular fashion. Any time you get a 10 on a die roll, you earn a success and you get to roll the die again. This is called “10-Again.” If the re-roll results in another 10, you get to keep re-rolling and add an additional success for every 10 you get. If multiple dice in your pool turn up 10s, you re-roll all of those dice and can keep accumulating extra successes.

Example: *Your dice pool consists of five dice. You roll a 5, 6, 3, 8 and 10. That's two successes right off, but you now get to re-roll the 10 and try for more. Say you roll a 3; that's not a success, so your total number of successes remains at two. If you had rolled an 8 or a 9, then your total number of successes would have increased to three. If you had rolled a 10, not only would your total successes have risen to three, but you would also be able to re-roll the die again. So long as you roll a 10, you can keep re-rolling the die and potentially add to your successes.*

The rule of “10-Again” applies to every dice roll, whether your character is trying to wriggle out of the grip of the school bully or determining the effectiveness of a punch. A roll of 10 always calls for a re-roll, even on a chance roll (see below). If you keep re-rolling 10s, you keep accumulating successes. The only roll to which 10-Again *doesn't* apply is the Initiative roll, which isn't really a roll to achieve success, anyway (see p. 79).

THE CHANCE ROLL

Any time that a dice pool is reduced to zero dice, you may still make a *chance roll*. No matter how high the odds are stacked against you, there's still a chance, however slim, that your character's action might succeed. Maybe he hurls his lucky baseball in a near-impossible throw to break open a basement window and let the first rays of dawn inside, or he makes a desperate leap from one apartment roof to another to escape the clutches of a shambling zombie.

The chance roll is a single die, and the target number is 10. If you roll a 10, your character succeeds against all odds and miraculously accomplishes the task. As always, the rule of “10-Again” applies. If you roll a 10, you can re-roll the die and try for additional successes. It's possible to gain an exceptional success with just a chance roll.

Example: *Your character's silver cross fell out of his pocket while he was running across a field, and he desperately needs to get it back. Unfortunately, it's dark and raining, and the penalties in this situation reduce your dice pool to zero. You are left with a chance roll. You can roll one die, but you need a 10 to get a success. You make the roll, and you get a 10! Against all odds, your character finds the cross amid the mud and weeds. Since the “10-Again” rule applies, you get to re-roll the die and try to get another 10, further increasing your degree of success and allowing your character to find the holy symbol even more quickly.*

STORYTELLING CAVEAT

Sometimes your character attempts a task under conditions that he — and you — are not familiar with, and you are not meant to know what those conditions are. For reasons important to the story (or to maintain a sense of drama), the Storyteller must keep you guessing about the circumstances surrounding the task. Maybe the effects of a spell or a curse are working against your character's efforts, or the information he's seeking is coming from a source that contains intentionally misleading information. Under these circumstances, the Storyteller assembles your dice pool for you, applies all relevant modifiers, then makes the dice roll on your behalf without showing you the roll or the exact results. Your character is unaware of all the factors affecting his attempt, and you are likewise none the wiser. All you know is whether he succeeds or fails, and you must abide by whatever the Storyteller rolls. That way, the Storyteller can maintain the sense of uncertainty that the story requires, and you can enjoy the heightened sense of drama as the character has to grapple with mysterious circumstances he doesn't fully understand.

Storytellers should use this approach only when absolutely necessary in order to maintain suspense, or when the characters and players must remain ignorant of certain aspects of the story until the time is right. There's nothing more frustrating to a player than to have the results of his actions taken entirely out of his hands.

It's important to point out that you are not always required to make a chance roll if you don't want to. Your character can size up his odds and decide that the action isn't worth the risk. Because while a chance roll gives your character a slim possibility of success, it also carries the risk of dramatic failure (see below). Sometimes, however, the Storyteller may decide that your character has crossed the point of no return when he committed to his action, so a chance roll must still be made. (Storytellers: beware of doing this. When a player rolls a chance die, he has the same chance of rolling a dramatic failure, described below, as of rolling a success.)

DRAMATIC FAILURE

Sometimes a character's action is spectacularly successful — and sometimes things go catastrophically wrong. He slips at just the wrong moment, puts a little too much spin on the ball or his bike hits a pothole and sends him flying over the handlebars. These events are called *dramatic failures*. A dramatic failure only occurs when you attempt a chance roll and the die comes up a 1. This *does not* apply to re-rolls; if your first chance roll is a 10, and you re-roll the die and get a 1, you've still succeeded at the task, so no dramatic failure is possible.

When a dramatic failure occurs, the Storyteller determines how the character's action goes terribly wrong. As a rule of thumb, the severity of the consequences



should be equal to the risk inherent in the attempt. If your character was leaping from rooftop to rooftop three stories off the ground, he's in for a potentially deadly fall. If he's speeding around a corner on his bike and hits the side of a car, he may escape with a few bumps and scrapes, but his bike may be wrecked. If he's trying to research some obscure or arcane piece of information, crucial documents may be lost or destroyed, or he may completely misunderstand the information and operate based on a flawed set of facts.

Chapter Two and Chapter Three provide possibilities for dramatic failures, as does the combat section later in this chapter. A dramatic failure doesn't necessarily mean that the character is gravely injured or killed, only that fate has thrown a gigantic monkey wrench in his plans. A clever Storyteller can turn dramatic failures to his advantage, using them to heighten the tension of a scene or even provide opportunities for character development. How does your character deal with the consequences of his failure if his flawed research causes his friends to come to harm?

Dramatic failures should never be used to punish a character. Instead, they should be used to add drama and excitement to the game.

ACTIONS

Like you, your character can attempt pretty much anything he sets his mind to. He can try to swim a river, climb a tree, or ask the most beautiful girl in school to go to the Halloween Dance with him. His degree of success depends on his traits, any tools or specialties he can bring to bear, and the luck of the dice.

Some actions, like throwing a punch or jumping off a ledge, have an immediate effect. Others, like researching the history of vampires or melting down a silver cross to make a bullet, take considerable time to complete. Still other actions can have immediate or extended effects, but involve direct competition with someone else, like arm wrestling or competing in a long-distance race.

This section describes the various types of actions that your character can perform, along with systems for determining their degree of success or failure.

INSTANT ACTIONS

Many actions take almost no time to achieve, such as throwing a rock or opening a door. These tasks are performed in a single moment, usually with obvious results; the attempt either fails or succeeds. In general, any activity that can be performed in the space of one turn — three seconds — is considered an *instant action*. Instant actions are resolved with the roll of a single dice pool. Usually, an instant action requires only one success in order to take place. In other cases, such as in combat, the total number of successes is used to determine how effective the action was. If you get no successes on your roll, then the action fails. Most likely, no result occurs and the character simply wastes three seconds of his time.

It's also possible to achieve exceptional results when five or more successes are generated with a single dice roll. By luck or design, your character does even better than he hoped. Not only does he find the missing key to the attic room, but he does so in record time, or his research provides information he didn't even realize existed. The Attribute and Skill tasks detailed in Chapters Two and Three suggest possible results when failure, success and exceptional success occur.

Since the target number of any action is always an 8, the relative difficulty of an action is determined by the number of dice available in your dice pool. The more dice you have in your pool, the greater the potential degree of success, while the fewer dice you have, the slimmer your character's chances. Dice bonuses (for tools, Skill Specialties, circumstantial advantages, etc.) increase your chance for success, while dice penalties (for injuries, environmental effects, physical obstacles, etc.) limit them.

Example: David tries to move his heavy chest of drawers in front of his closet door so that the thing in the closet can't get out while he's asleep. His Strength is 3 and his Athletics is 2, for a core dice pool of five. Unfortunately, the chest of drawers is a heavy antique, it's top heavy to boot, and he has to push it across several feet of thick carpet, so the Storyteller imposes a -4 penalty. This reduces the dice pool to just two. The roll is a 5 and an 8. David gets the one success he needs to push the chest of drawers in front of the door.

EXTENDED ACTIONS

Some actions demand time and effort to perform. They can't be completed in just a few seconds, like instant actions can. Activities such as researching the history of an old house, repairing a broken bike or building an elaborate and well-defended fort are examples of *extended actions*. Rather than requiring a single roll, these actions demand multiple rolls over a period of time and require the accumulation of a large number of successes before they can be completed. Each roll represents a milestone or a step towards accomplishing the overall goal. A failed roll means that no progress was made, and your character's investment of time and energy during that period was wasted. Success is still possible, but the project will take longer to complete than planned.

It's also possible for penalties (sometimes crippling ones) to be imposed on the dice rolls at any point in the process, reducing you to a chance roll. Maybe a violent thunderstorm washes out part of the fort and turns the surrounding area to mud, or a server crash has made access to certain Internet sites extremely difficult or unreliable. In such a circumstance, a dramatic failure means that all accumulated successes have been lost, and that the character must start the project again from scratch. It also might mean a change in circumstances: a new site for the fort might have to be found, or the character may have to buy an entirely new brake assembly for his bike. In extreme cases, your character may suffer harm as a result of the failure: his research into explosives may garner the attention of the authorities, or his experiments might literally blow up in his face.

The Storyteller is responsible for determining how many successes an extended action requires before it's completed. He also determines what period of time must pass between dice rolls, then translates what each stage of the process means for your character. Chapter Three suggests a number of likely extended actions, as well as the number of successes they require and how much time passes between each dice roll. A relatively easy task, such as unpacking and setting up a desktop computer, may only require four successes, with each roll constituting 10 minutes of elapsed time. The early stages involve unpacking the equipment and reading through the installation guide, while the intermediate stages involve making the correct physical connections between the pieces of hardware. The final stage involves testing the new equipment and installing any necessary software to make the system function. A more demanding task, such as melting silver jewelry down and casting the metal into bullets, might demand as many as 15 successes, with each roll representing two hours of work. The first stages would involve collecting the necessary materials: the silver, the mold and the tools necessary to cast the bullets. The intermediate stages would involve melting the silver down and pouring it into the mold, then allowing it to cool and removing the bullet from the mold. The final stages would involve polishing the surface of the bullet to ensure it was smooth, then fitting it to a cartridge so that it can be fired.

Unless a particular task or roll is described as an extended action, assume it to be instant.

Example: Derrick hears the vampire break through the door downstairs and realizes that if he doesn't come up with a weapon — and fast — he's going to die. Remembering something he saw in a movie once, he tries to jury-rig a crude flamethrower with a can of hairspray, some duct tape and a cigarette lighter. This is an extended action, and the Storyteller declares that it will require Wits + Crafts rolls because of the improvisational nature of the task. Time is of the essence, so 30 seconds of time will pass with each roll, and a total of eight successes must be achieved before the improvised weapon is complete. Secretly, the Storyteller knows that it will only take the vampire a couple of minutes to search the house, so Derrick has only four rolls to complete the flamethrower before the monster finds him.

Derrick's first Wits + Crafts roll generates no successes. Thirty seconds pass while he frantically paws through the piles of junk in his room in search of duct tape and a lighter. His second roll nets him two successes; he finds tape and lighter and dashes to his parents' bathroom in search of a can of hairspray. By now, the tread of feet can be heard upon the stairs as the vampire closes in on his prey. Derrick locks the bathroom door and starts searching the bathroom shelves.

The third roll generates two more successes. Derrick has found a can of hairspray he thinks will work. Now he just has to assemble the pieces as fast as he can. He hears the floorboards in his parents' bedroom creak as the monster reaches the doorway.

The fourth and final roll nets a whopping five successes — one more than the eight Derrick needed to complete the task! The flimsy bathroom door smashes inward and the vampire's

cruel sneer changes to a look of terror as Derrick unleashes a plume of hissing flame into the monster's face.

RULE OF THUMB: EXTENDED ACTIONS

Roll Limitations

Tasks described throughout the Storytelling System involve extended actions. Examples include constructing an elaborate booby trap or sharpening a chair leg to make a wooden stake. By definition, an extended action calls for a total number of successes, which the character tries to meet. His successes from roll to roll are accumulated until they equal or exceed that number. At that point, the project is completed and the time the task required is determined by the number of rolls made. For example, if each roll involves an hour and six rolls are made, then six hours of work have elapsed.

The Storyteller can impose a limit on how many rolls may be attempted to complete a given project. The character may only have until sundown to find the information he needs before the vengeful spirit returns to haunt him; if each roll involves an hour, he may only get four rolls until his time runs out. As in the real world, characters rarely have all the time they need to complete a project at their leisure.

Time isn't the only limit to completing an extended action. A character's inherent capabilities could be a limit, too. The Storyteller can rule that a maximum number of rolls can be made in an extended action equal to the character's pertinent Attribute + Skill. If he can't complete the task within that number of rolls, the project proves too much for him to handle. In the case of the research task described above, let's say the character had Intelligence 3 and Study 2. Assuming he had an unlimited amount of time to conduct the research, the Storyteller could still rule that if the required number of successes hasn't been reached within five rolls, the character won't be able to locate the information at all. Maybe he's asking the wrong questions, or he simply doesn't have the patience to dig through page after page of dry history to find what he needs.

In addition to these challenges, there is also the matter of a child's attention span to consider. The longer a given task takes to complete, the more likely the child is to get distracted or lose interest altogether. If an extended task is measured in an hour or more between rolls, the Storyteller can declare that the player can make a number of rolls equal to the character's Resolve without penalty. After that point, he must first make a successful Resolve roll to see if the character can remain on task and continue the project. If the roll succeeds, then another extended action roll may be made. If the roll fails, the character loses interest in the project and gives up on it, at least for a time.

Just because an extended action fails or is abandoned doesn't mean that it eludes the character forever. The Storyteller decides how much time must pass before another attempt at the extended action can take place. If the action involves a relatively short period of time,

like picking a lock, the task might not be resumed within the current scene, but can be attempted again in subsequent scenes. If the project involves considerable time, such as hours, days or even weeks, a new attempt at the project might not be possible for a month. Unlike adults, however, children have a distinct advantage in that they often have the space and freedom to leave projects for long periods of time and then pick them up later, as the mood takes them. As a result, depending upon the nature of the project, the Storyteller can allow the character to save the successes already gained on an extended action instead of beginning the project completely anew.

If the Storyteller does allow work to resume on a project, he may impose a penalty on all its rolls. If this is the second attempt, all rolls might suffer a -1 penalty. If this is the character's third attempt, all rolls might suffer a -3 penalty, and so on. These modifiers are akin to those imposed under Successive Attempts (p. 125), and are the only case in which such penalties might apply to the rolls of an extended action.

Example: Clayton wants to build an elaborate fort up in the woods behind his house so that he and his friends have somewhere secret to meet and discuss what to do about the strange happenings that have been occurring around town. The Storyteller rules this to be an extended action, and declares that a total of 15 successes are required to complete the task. Each roll will consume a full day of work. Clayton's Intelligence + Crafts is 6; he can borrow some tools from his father's shed, but he doesn't have much experience working with them, so he won't be able to take advantage of any bonuses they confer. Working without them, though, would certainly give Clayton penalties, so he's better off with them.

Unfortunately, time is of the essence, because summer vacation is over in just five days, so the Storyteller decides that Clayton only gets five rolls to complete the task. Clayton's Resolve is 3; since this is such a lengthy project and there are many other claims on Clayton's time and energy, it's going to test his determination to stay on task and complete the job after three consecutive rolls are made.

After three rolls — and three solid days of effort — Clayton accumulates nine successes towards his goal. The fort is taking shape nicely, but there's still a lot to be done. Before the next roll can be made, a successful Resolve roll is required. The Resolve roll succeeds, so another extended task roll can be made. Clayton gains two more successes, bringing the total to 11, just four successes shy of the goal. On the fourth day, however, the Resolve roll fails — the fort still has a long way to go, and there's a movie in town he's been dying to see. Work is abandoned on the fort, and the project goes unfinished.

The Storyteller decides that a week must pass before work can resume, but since summer vacation is over, Clayton only has the weekends to complete the task. He still has to gain four more successes to achieve his goal, and this time the Storyteller imposes a -1 penalty on his rolls. Despite this penalty, Clayton gains two successes on his first roll and three successes on the next. By the end of the weekend, the fort is complete. Had this second attempt failed, the Storyteller might allow a third attempt, but all rolls would incur a -2 penalty.

Below are some guidelines for the amount of time to assign per roll in an extended action.

PACE OF ACTIVITY	TIME PER ROLL
Quick	1 turn (3 seconds)
Short	10 minutes
Long	30 minutes
Lengthy	1 hour
Consuming	1 day
Exhausting	1 week or month

Target Successes

The target number of successes in an extended action shouldn't allow the task to be resolved too quickly, but it shouldn't drag on and on, either. A target should reflect the overall difficulty of a task, but should also involve some kind prolonged challenge; otherwise it could be resolved as an instant action.

Ultimately, the Storyteller decides how long an extended action should last, and therefore how many successes it requires. If the prescribed target in this book will make for too quick an effort or competition in your game, feel free to increase the number of successes needed to make it more dramatic or interesting to the players. A number normally based on Speed, or double an Attribute or Skill can be turned into an artificial target of 15, 20 or 25 instead. An increased target could allow for a demanding effort or an intense creative process, or could heighten the tension of a competition between characters (in an extended and contested task — see below).

Here are some guidelines for target numbers that you can assign to extended actions. These are based on the complexity or sheer scale of the task, or on the level of drama you want to evoke.

CHALLENGE	TARGET NUMBER
Simple/Relaxed	5
Involved/Trying	10
Elaborate/Demanding	15
Ornate/Daunting	20
Intricate/Epic	25

CONTESTED ACTIONS

Some actions that your character performs are conducted in direct competition with someone else, whether it's another player's character or one of the Storyteller's characters. A race is a good example. Playing a game of

hide-and-seek is another. You pit your character's capabilities against someone else's.

Contested actions are easy to resolve. You determine your dice pool as normal, applying all modifiers, and then you make a roll. The same is done for your character's opponent. The one who gets the most successes wins. Exceeding your opponent's successes and gaining five or more successes indicates not only a win, but an exceptional success as well. If either side of a contested roll gets a dramatic failure, he fails utterly, or his opponent automatically achieves the equivalent of an exceptional success.

If neither side gets any successes, the effort fails altogether or successive attempts (see page 125) can be made in subsequent turns, if appropriate. The Storyteller decides if the effort can be attempted over and over until one competitor wins. If the characters are trying to outdo one another on a test in Math class, they only get one chance to test their skills. If they are playing a game of chess, however, they can try again and again until one side or the other is the clear victor.


If both parties roll the same number of successes, but still succeed, the results vary depending on the type of task. In a tug-of-war, neither side gains any ground. On a Math test, they get the same number of questions right. But if one character is hiding from another, ties might go to the hiding character, meaning that the seeking character needs to *exceed* the hiding character's successes to find him. Chapter Three gives examples of contested actions and states whether a given character needs to meet or exceed her opponent. The Storyteller needs to make this call on a case-by-case basis in play, however.

In some cases, rolls aren't made for opponents in the moment of the contest. Sometimes one participant creates an obstacle or defense that the challenger must later try to overcome. For example, suppose a character sets up an alarm to warn him if someone tries to enter his room while he is gone. The roll to set up the alarm is made first, and any successes achieved are noted down for future reference. Later, when the challenger attempts to enter the room unnoticed, his successes are then compared to the defender's original score.

The Skill descriptions in Chapter Three indicate when contested actions are appropriate for various tasks. Rolls made are based on the activity performed, as always. Running a race may involve Dexterity + Athletics, or playing hide-and-seek might involve Wits + Stealth.

Note that in a contested action, the total successes rolled for each participant are compared, and the one with the higher total wins. So if one participant gets two successes and the other gets five, the latter of the two wins with five successes.

Another important note is the matter of scale in contested actions between children and adult (or adult-sized) opponents. Although the traits for children and adults use the same scale of one to five dots, adults possess much greater physical capability and experience than children. To represent this, adult-sized characters receive bonuses on certain types of contested rolls when facing children.



Players of **Innocents** characters don't necessarily need to be aware of the particulars (since they don't change child characters' dice pools for contested actions), but Storytellers should review the rules for adult characters, beginning on p. 192 in Chapter Seven.

Contested tasks can be instant actions or extended ones. Actions that take only a turn to perform between competitors are considered instant actions and can be decided with one roll each. Wrestling over a weapon probably requires just a single action's effort to determine who ends up with the weapon. If the rolls are a tie, or neither roll results in successes, the struggle can continue into the next turn. It is still considered an instant action, however, because the act itself can still be resolved in the space of one turn.

More time-consuming or demanding activities that are performed in competition are considered extended actions and use the rules detailed above. These actions are still contested, though, and rolls are made for each competitor in each stage. The one who gets the most successes wins that stage, and successes achieved by each side are added to a running total. The winner is the first competitor who accumulates successes equaling the total required to complete the task. Such competition over a period of time and effort occurs in a long-distance race, or perhaps in a tug-of-war between two sides. Essentially, any effort that requires more than a single turn's effort to decide a winner involves an extended *and* contested action.

Example: *Kevin is running for his life (or so it feels to him) from Ivan, the school's meanest bully. Kevin dashes for the gym's exit, hoping he'll find a teacher who will keep Ivan at bay, so the challenge is essentially a race to see who can get to the door first (as opposed to the usual foot chase, described on p. 57). Dexterity + Athletics rolls apply to both competitors. Ivan's Speed is three higher than Kevin, though, so the Storyteller awards him a +2 bonus. Kevin's player rolls, and the Storyteller rolls for Ivan. Kevin's roll nets three successes and Ivan's roll nets only two, so Kevin reaches the door just ahead of the bully.*

Now, suppose Kevin bursts through the door but there's no teacher in sight. Now he's got to run the length of the football field outside the gym before he can reach a safe place. If Ivan pursues (and, naturally, he will), then the contest becomes a contested and extended action. Again, this action is similar to a Foot Chase, but Kevin isn't trying to lose Ivan, he's just trying to reach the end of the field. As such, the Storyteller decides that if Kevin gets six successes, he gets far enough ahead that Ivan can't catch him in time. If Ivan matches or exceeds Kevin's total at any point in the race, the bully cuts the poor kid off and a pounding ensues. The Storyteller also decides that this chase is more a measure of endurance than pure speed, so both sides must roll Stamina + Athletics. Ivan still has his Speed advantage to depend on, unfortunately for Kevin.

On the first roll, Kevin gets two successes and Ivan gets none — Kevin opens the distance between him and Ivan. On the second roll, however, Kevin gets only one success, and Ivan gets two (meaning Kevin's total is three and Ivan's is two). Kevin's still ahead, but the gap is closing. On the third roll, Kevin gets two successes (total of five), and Ivan gets

only one (total of three) — Kevin is almost home free. On the fourth roll, Kevin fails to get any successes, but Ivan gets three! At the very edge of the football field, Kevin feels a meaty hand close upon his shoulder and feels Ivan's rancid breath against his neck.

If participants in an extended and contested action accumulate the required number of successes at the same time, no winner is determined. They could both finish their separate tasks simultaneously, with no clear leader. Alternatively, the competition could continue until one side gains the most successes.

On the other hand, if an extended and contested action is a tie, the Storyteller might rule that further rolls are pointless. Perhaps the competitors have run out of time, or the goal they are competing for is no longer within reach, and the competition ends in a stalemate with no clear victor.

REFLEXIVE ACTIONS

In addition to instant, extended and contested actions, there are actions your character can perform that occur automatically, without his conscious control. These reflexive actions occur like the autonomic functions of the character's body; accounting for them in a turn would be like rolling for his heart to beat or his lungs to draw in air.

Reflexive actions are best considered as defensive or reactionary responses that don't interfere with a character's conscious behavior. They include resisting poison, seeing through a deception, defying peer pressure and spending Willpower points. These actions don't preclude your character from taking his normal action in a turn. They are performed *in addition* to that action, and are resolved immediately in reaction to the instigating action or attack (when the poison is injected, when the threat is brought to bear or when your character decides simply to go for broke).

See Chapters Two and Three for examples of common reflexive actions. Other reflexive actions are described in the combat section later in this chapter.

EXCEPTIONAL SUCCESS

Sometimes your character performs a task with exceptional skill and precision. In game terms, when you roll your dice pool to complete an action and gain five or more successes, your character achieves an exceptional success. When this occurs, the Storyteller is encouraged to elaborate upon your character's accomplishment, allowing for an even greater degree of success than was expected. Maybe on an exceptional Persuasion roll, your character not only talks the guard into letting you go, but the guard is also willing to look the other way on future incursions, deeming you more of a harmless kid than an actual nuisance.

The significance of an exceptional success varies according to the kind of roll that was made and the circumstances surrounding the task. For an instant action that happens in the space of one turn, as in the example cited above, the Storyteller typically decides the outcome.

Action

Example

Instant

Throwing a punch,
opening a door

A one-shot chance of success or failure; success is determined by a single roll.

Extended

Climbing a tall
tree, building a
fort

Task stretches over a period of time and each stage renews the chance for success or failure. You make several rolls with the goal of collecting a predetermined number of successes.

Contested

Running a race,
hiding from a
monster

An instant action that pits two characters against each other. The two compare successes. The one with the highest total successes wins.

Extended + Contested

Chasing someone,
competing in a
pie-eating contest

Players roll repeatedly in order to accumulate a predetermined number of successes. The first to reach the total wins.

Reflexive

Smelling smoke,
resisting poison

An action that takes place without conscious control; reflexive actions can be taken in the same turn as other actions.

Some extra benefit or award is gained. If an exceptional success is gained in combat, the results are obvious. Each success rolled inflicts a point of damage on the target. See the Combat section later in this chapter for more details.

For a contested action that involves two characters in competition, the winner who has five or more successes — and more total successes than his opponent — is the clear victor. He also makes the contest look easy and his opponent appear hapless and clumsy. Suppose your character and the local bully dive for the same baseball bat. You not only roll more successes, but you get a total of five or more successes on your roll. Your character grabs the bat and brings it up in one swift motion, leaving the bully facedown with a handful of air and a mouthful of dirt.

For an extended action that occurs over a period of time, any single exceptional success catapults your character toward a swift completion of his task. In such a case, you gain five or more successes toward the total that you need. A major stroke of luck or a sudden burst of inspiration advances the project by leaps and bounds.

If you accumulate five or more successes than the number required to complete an extended action, the Storyteller might bestow an extra reward or favorable result. For example, let's say your character is trying

to uncover the secret to a ghost's mysterious past. The spirit's tragic history is an obscure one, and requires a lot of dedicated research, so the Storyteller declares that 10 successes are required for him to find what he's looking for. After four rolls, your character accumulates a total of nine successes, then on the next roll, you gain an incredible six successes, for a total of 16! Not only did your character complete his task, but since the last roll netted five or more successes, he was exceptionally successful in his task. He not only uncovers the ghost's obscure history, but also comes up with a clue as to how he can lay the spirit to rest forever.

Examples of possible exceptional successes are listed throughout Chapters Two and Three for various Attribute and Skill tasks.

SUCCESSIVE ATTEMPTS

If your character fails an action in a turn, he can try again on the next turn, if time and circumstances permit. He can throw darts repeatedly until he hits a bull's eye, for example. The Storyteller may allow you to attempt the task again and again with a full dice pool.

If, however, time is short and the circumstances are tense — say, he's trying to break his way out of a burning building — repeated attempts are possible, but the Storyteller can choose to impose a -1 penalty for each successive attempt. This penalty is cumulative, so the character would suffer a -1 penalty on the first retry, a -2 penalty on the second retry, and so on. Children, in addition, are more prone to frustration or panic under stressful circumstances, so the Storyteller may limit the number of retries to an amount equal to the character's Resolve. Once that limit is reached, the character gives up the attempt in a rage or believes it to be a lost cause.

The nature of an action determines whether subsequent attempts are possible. They might be possible if your character is trying to persuade someone to do something, or to wriggle free from the ropes binding his wrists. It does not apply to tasks like catching a falling vase or dodging an incoming ball, which only allow one chance for success.

Example: Lana is trying to remember her father's password so she can access his laptop. Her Intelligence + Computer roll comes up with no successes. The Storyteller allows her to make a second attempt, but this time at a -1 penalty. Again, the roll fails to generate a success. She can make a third attempt, this time at a -2 penalty, but since her Resolve is a 3, if this roll fails, she will give up the attempt in a huff and try to get Internet access somewhere else.

The Storyteller might also interpret a failed roll as an indication that the character just does not have the requisite knowledge to perform the task. This is especially appropriate on rolls to see if a child knows a particular fact. For example, the Storyteller might ask for an Intelligence + Study roll to see if a character knows the result of mixing acids and bases. If the roll comes up with no successes, the character simply doesn't know, and the player cannot make successive attempts.

Note that successive attempts cannot usually be made in the stages of an extended action. If one roll in an extended action nets no successes, you can re-roll it in a successive attempt. No progress is made at that stage of the project, and the time invested is lost. The next roll in the extended action proceeds as normal. If, however, the *entire* extended roll fails or the task is abandoned, the Storyteller may allow a completely new attempt to be made, but subject to a -1 penalty. See “Rule of Thumb: Extended Actions,” above, for more information.

HEROIC EFFORT

Sometimes failure isn't an option. It's do or die — your character has to grab his best friend's hand before he slips and falls to his death, or his last silver bullet has to hit the mark. That's when your character “goes for broke.” Before the roll for the action is made, you spend a Willpower point in a reflexive action and receive three bonus dice on your roll. These dice are available even if the penalties for the action would normally reduce you to a chance roll.

You must decide whether or not to go for broke and spend your Willpower before the roll for an action is made. Once the dice have been rolled, it's too late. Also, only one Willpower point can be spent per turn, no matter how it's used.

Willpower can be spent on only one roll at a time in an extended action. If your character goes for broke at each stage of the action, he must spend a Willpower point at each stage as well.

If, for some reason, your character's Resolve or Composure temporarily increases during play — perhaps as a result of a mystical charm or spell — he gains one Willpower point per dot increase. He has access to one or more free Willpower points for the duration of the effect. When this Attribute returns to normal, the free Willpower points are lost. If he hasn't spent those Willpower points by that time, the opportunity is gone.

See Chapter Four, p. 86, for more on Willpower.

RESISTANCE

Willpower can also be used to reflect your character's efforts to resist outside influences and dangers imposed upon him. Your character might be determined to resist a poison or illness that depletes his Strength, or avoid suffering harm through sheer stubbornness and force of will.

In this case, you may spend a point of Willpower in a reflexive action to gain a bonus to Resistance attempts. In combat, a point of Willpower spent adds two points to your character's Defense rating to resist harm against a single attack. You must announce that you are spending a Willpower point in this manner before the attack is rolled. Your character could even commit to a Dodge during a turn (see p. 142 for details) and you could still spend a Willpower point to gain a further two points of Defense against a single attack. Remember that Defense (and, therefore, Willpower) does not apply against attacks from firearms or bows.

Otherwise, Willpower can be spent to bolster one of your character's “Resistance” Attributes — Composure, Resolve or Stamina — when he is threatened. Suppose



your character is exposed to a supernatural power that diminishes his cognitive capacity. The power temporarily steals one Intelligence dot per success achieved, and your character's Resolve is subtracted from the dice pool rolled. Spending a point of Willpower increases your character's Resolve by two for the purposes of resisting the power. In other words, your character's Resolve + 2 is subtracted as a penalty from the dice pool of your opponent.

Remember that only one Willpower point can be spent per turn, no matter how it's used. You can't, for example, spend one Willpower point to gain three extra dice on a roll *and* spend another point to increase your character's Resolve in the same turn.

Wound penalties (see p. 150) do not apply to your character's Defense or other Resistance traits when those traits are subtracted from an opponent's dice pools.

TEAMWORK

Characters can aid one another to achieve the same goal. They may work together to open a jammed door or wrestle an adult opponent to the ground.

Choose which character is the primary actor. Form the core dice pool for the action as normal. The same roll is made for each secondary actor. Any successes collected from these assistants are added to the primary actor's dice pool as bonus dice. *Thus, assistants' rolls are made before the primary actor can make his roll.*

If one of the contributors suffers a dramatic failure, no penalty is imposed on the primary actor. Children aren't daunted by the catastrophic failures of others — it never occurs to them that they can fail at something until it actually happens, and even then they have a hard time accepting it.

There is no limit to how many secondary actors can contribute to a character's roll — even if they are just standing on the sidelines shouting suggestions or encouragement. Sometimes a show of support is all a child needs to pull out the extra effort to succeed. That said, Storytellers need to use common sense. If a whole crowd is cheering a character on during the soccer game, his player should probably receive a bonus to Athletics rolls for the support, but it's not a teamwork action. All participants need to be directly involved.

SYSTEMS PERMUTATIONS

The basic Storytelling system involves rolling a number of dice based on your character's capabilities (Attribute + Skill). Dice are then added to and/or subtracted from your dice pool based on the tools used or the circumstances of the action performed. Typically, one successful die roll is enough to complete the task, while multiple successes can indicate an increasingly rewarding result.

This approach to tasks — from sweet-talking a disapproving teacher to swinging a baseball bat at a vampire — can resolve many of the actions that might occur in your game. At times, however, you may want to throw a curve

or create unique situations that bend or break the traditional rules. Maybe the weapon your character wields can be used in a unique way, or the powers of a supernatural being are capable of warping reality in some way. In cases like these, you can introduce system variations to spice up your game.

The following are examples of possible adaptations to the Storytelling System that your Storyteller can apply when he pleases. The Storyteller alone is the final arbiter on when or if these variations appear in the course of the game.

- **9-Again:** You can re-roll 9s as well as 10s. The result is effectively a "9-Again and 10-Again" rule. This rule might be applied to a power that brings luck or to an exceptionally powerful tool or weapon.

- **8-Again:** You can re-roll 8s, 9s and 10s, as above. The power or phenomenon represented by this rule is very potent or pervasive. Either a result doesn't occur, or it's potentially extremely effective.

- **Extra Successes:** The power, tool or phenomenon is extremely potent. A number of extra successes are added to any rolled for the effect, automatically improving its results. A massive weapon might inflict crippling harm, for example. Its Damage rating (see page 147) is applied not as bonus dice to your attack roll but as *extra successes* instead. For example, if the weapon's Damage rating is 4, it adds four successes to any achieved by the dice roll. If you roll no successes at all, however, the extra successes go to waste.

- **Modifies Resistance:** The power, tool or phenomenon has an advantage over its targets not because it overpowers them, but because it undermines them. Targets of the effect lose a certain number of points in any Resistance trait that they can pose (Stamina, Resolve, Composure or Defense). A power to control a victim's mind, for example, might reduce his Resolve to maintain its control. The target's reduced Resolve is then rolled or subtracted from the attacker's dice pool. Or a victim's Defense rating is diminished in combat by an entangling weapon, such as a lasso or whip (see "Defense" on p. 78 for more details). Alternatively, the effect bolsters the user's own Resistance, granting him bonuses to traits such as Resolve, Composure, Stamina or Defense for countering harm or influence over him. A protective device might work in such a way without burdening the character with the weight of mundane armor, or a spell might erect barriers in a character's mind that helps him ward off attempts at outside control.

- **Rote Actions:** Once you've done something a thousand times, it's hard to mess it up. Muscle memory takes over, and the character finds himself following a pattern. When you make a roll for your character, this pattern allows you to re-roll any dice that result in failures. You get one re-roll as a whole, and add up all successes achieved to see how well your character does. If for some reason you're reduced to a chance roll on a rote action, a dramatic failure on your first roll indicates that something has gone disastrously wrong from the outset. No re-roll is

The Ties that Bind

by Michael B. Lee

When children are very young, they are full of questions about the world around them, and they come to their parents expecting answers. Big questions, small questions, silly questions and serious questions: they come in a seemingly endless stream, until parents learn to answer them almost without thinking. Driving a car and explaining why birds fly or what clouds are, cooking a meal and holding forth about how vegetables grow — or, more delicately, where the hamburger comes from: all this and more at every hour of the day. By the time the kids are old enough to start school, parents take it for granted that if their child is curious about something, they'll be the first to hear about it.

In fact, this could not be further from the truth.

Kids are endlessly curious about — and as they get older, increasingly troubled by — the world around them. Every day brings new challenges they must learn to cope with, particularly once they start spending time with other children and learning how to relate to one another. Teachers and parents try to provide guidelines: be considerate of others, learn to share and to take one's turn, but when kids find themselves in situations where those guidelines don't apply, they're left to figure things out for themselves. Sometimes kids in those situations look to the adults around them for guidance, but most often, they follow the lead of the other children around them. Rather than risk embarrassment or disapproval, the child follows the path of least resistance and copies the behavior of her peers. Over time, this becomes the touchstone that children return to again and again when confronted with things in life that they don't understand.

It's not that kids don't want to talk to adults about their questions or feelings. Often they simply aren't able to articulate what they're struggling with. When a parent tries to find out what a child is thinking and they say "I don't know," it's not necessarily an evasion. They just don't have a frame of reference to explain what they're going through, so sometimes that's the best answer they can give.

Instead, kids find it much easier to talk things out with their friends. They share the same day-to-day challenges, and even if they don't know the answers to what they're feeling, at least they can take comfort in a shared sense of bewilderment. As kids grow older and their lives become increasingly complex and contradictory, the bonds of friendship grow deeper still, built on shared ordeals, secret triumphs and inevitable tragedies. Together they try to make sense of all the changes life throws at them, and offer support when things don't work out the way they should.

If our world is often confusing and painful for children, now imagine one with monsters lurking in

the shadows as well. The characters in **Innocents** are confronted with supernatural horrors to which their parents are often completely oblivious. Who else can they turn to for help but their friends? When you're eight years old and the world is one big mystery, how much more of a stretch is it to believe that there really is a ghost lurking in the basement? At its core, this is the dynamic that keeps characters together in the game: they need one another's help to make sense of what is going on around them. When confronted by the unknown — even something as terrifying as a ghost or monster — they will look to one another for guidance and support before they consider taking their fears to an adult. It's the only way most kids know to deal with their problems, and it's a method that works. With luck, they can deal with the danger, and no one outside their circle of friends ever has to know about it.

This reliance on friendship and peer support provides a simple and effective way of bringing characters together in a game. Even if the characters don't know one another, they will group together in the face of the unknown, because that's how kids instinctively deal with what they don't understand. They may not know what questions to ask, but at least they can compare their experiences and learn what they can from them. In this way, child characters form quicker and easier bonds than adults, even coming from different backgrounds and ethnicities. This isn't to say that there can't be conflicts within the group: issues of dominance, peer pressure and insecurity don't just disappear, but when push comes to shove, internal conflicts will take a backseat to the external threat.

As a Storyteller, the easiest way to create this dynamic is to play upon the isolation that kids feel in an adult world. Parents and teachers react to claims of the supernatural with disbelief or even angry denials, leaving the characters to provide their own answers to the problems facing them. Even when confronted by compelling evidence, adults try to rationalize what they are witnessing in order to make it fit their worldview. The character's world, already very small, shrinks even further. The only chance they have of overcoming their isolation is by finding other kids who share their experiences — or are at least willing to accept the character's claims at face value.

By focusing on the ties that bind children together — the need for support and the search for answers in the face of the unknown — Storytellers and players can create intensely personal stories of horror and survival. If there is one thing that the monsters of the world can teach us, it's that none of us have to face the darkness alone.

allowed. If your first roll results in a success (a 10), keep re-rolling for more successes according to the “10-Again” rule. When you stop getting extra successes, you then make *another* chance roll for the rote effect, and may keep rolling for extra successes again if a 10 comes up.

Example: *Dyson’s father has been pushing him to be an Olympic gymnast since he was four. Dyson resents the fact that his dad never lets him just go out and play, but when the slavering dog-creatures come for him, Dyson is damned glad for his athletic prowess! Climbing up a trellis and into a window would be hard for anyone else, but Dyson’s long years of practice make it a rote action. The player rolls Dyson’s Strength + Athletics (six dice), and the dice come up 8, 1, 2, 5, 7 and 4. Not great — normally one success is enough, but Climbing is an extended action (p. 121) and Dyson needs three successes to get to the window. Until then, those dogs might be able to reach him! Because this is a rote action, though, Dyson’s player gets to re-roll the five dice that came up failures. The results: 8, 9, 7, 6, 9. Three more successes, for a total of four — more than enough to escape the beasts.*

- **Advanced Actions:** Your character is amazingly fast, so much so that others seem to move in slow motion by comparison. He exists outside the normal flow of time and can perform tasks while others are essentially “standing still.” Or perhaps he has the luxury of retrying a failed action without repercussions for failed results. Whatever the case, you get to make the roll for an action twice and choose the best result. A magical item or power that allows a brief glimpse into the future might bestow this ability.

- **Extra Talent:** Your character can bring extra capabilities to bear in an effort. An additional Attribute is added to your character’s dice pool for an action. Perhaps a supernatural power allows his Intelligence to be added to his Strength + Skill roll, as the force of his mind literally fuels the power of his muscles. Or a blessed weapon has its own supernatural speed that adds to your character’s own natural prowess. The weapon has a Dexterity rating that adds to your character’s Strength + Weaponry rolls.

OBJECTS

A tool to accomplish an end, a barrier in one’s way, or just something to pick and play with: objects are all around us. Children often have a hard time keeping their hands to themselves, both because they don’t have the self-restraint that adults do, but also because everything is new to them. As such, kids are going to wind up handling (and potentially breaking) the inanimate objects around them, and so some game systems to represent the traits of objects are necessary.

Inanimate objects have three traits: Durability, Size and Structure.

Durability: An object’s Durability is a measure of its material strength and hardness. Objects with high Durability are much harder to damage. If an object suffers an attack, successes on the attack roll *in excess* of the object’s Durability inflict damage directly to its Structure (see be-

low). For instance, if a wooden door has Durability 1, an attack needs two successes to do any damage to it.

Attacks that inflict aggravated damage (see p. 141) ignore Durability and inflict damage directly to Structure. Magically or supernaturally enhanced objects are sometimes exempt from this rule.

Durability Rating	Material
1	Wood, hard plastic, thick glass
2	Stone, aluminum
3	Steel, iron
+1	Per reinforced layer

Size: Size for objects works on a different scale than for living creatures (see p. 85). A Size 0 object is of negligible size to an adult, and even a child can probably conceal it in a pocket or behind a back. The Size of an object can limit whether a character can lift or carry it; see p. 38 for details.

Size	Object
1	Handheld video game
2	Baseball bat
4	Coat rack
5	Door
10	Two-seat sports car
15	SUV
20	Dump truck

Structure: An object’s “Health” is called Structure. Structure is equal to Durability + Size. Therefore, a wooden door has Structure 6. Structure is the amount of damage an item can sustain before it is destroyed. Objects that grant equipment bonuses, though, can lose those bonuses and cease to be functional long before they are completely destroyed.

If an object suffers damage to its Structure equal to or in excess of its Durability, anyone using that object suffers a -1 penalty. In the case of objects that normally grant an equipment bonus, this penalty is applied *in addition* to the bonus (which effectively means the bonus is reduced by one). For instance, a wooden baseball bat used as a weapon grants a +2 modifier. If that bat suffers one point of Structure damage (its Durability is 1), it is chipped, cracked or warped, and becomes so unwieldy that its bonus is reduced to 1.

When an object loses all of its Structure, it is damaged beyond functionality (though not necessarily beyond repair). A door reduced to zero Structure is smashed in — possibly still on the hinges, but with gaping holes in it. A car reduced to zero Structure is totaled and undriveable. Smaller objects might break in half at Structure 0, while larger ones might be crushed, smashed or lose important pieces from their mechanisms.

More on deliberately reducing an object's Structure to zero can be found below, under "Breaking Objects."

REPAIRING OBJECTS

Damaged objects don't heal by themselves, obviously. In order to fix a damaged object, a character needs time, tools and expertise (this last is represented by the Crafts Skill). Most children aren't well schooled in car repair or carpentry, but older kids who grew up with mechanic or craftsman relatives might have enough knowledge to make the attempt.

Fixing an object requires a roll of [Attribute] + Crafts. The specific Attribute depends on the type of repair being performed. Working on something delicate, like fixing a clock or gluing Aunt Sandra's favorite vase back together, would be a Dexterity + Crafts roll. Fixing something that can just be snapped back together, but that requires some spatial understanding and puzzle-solving ability, might use Intelligence. In addition, if the character is fixing something whose use is covered by another Skill, the Storyteller might require that the character have at least a dot in that Skill to make the attempt. For instance, if Kurt is trying to repair his father's laptop (broken when the man with the dirty gloves kicked in the door and stepped on it), Kurt needs at least one dot in Computer to know what he's doing.

Fixing objects is an extended action. The Storyteller determines how much time is required for each roll. Gluing that vase together might require 10 minutes per roll (which isn't bad, until you consider that Aunt Sandra's going to be home in less than an hour!). Fixing the computer might take an hour per roll, as some of that time is taken up with calling friends for advice, looking at a still-working computer to see how things fit together, and running around the house looking for a tiny screwdriver. As a rule of thumb, every success on the roll restores one Structure point, but for complicated machines, the Storyteller might rule that every *two* successes restore one Structure point.

Finally, some objects are irreparable, or so badly damaged that repairing them is akin to building a new one. That smashed-in door might be fixable, yes, but it's probably simpler to buy a new one. That might not stop some desperate kids from propping the broken door up and nailing some boards over the holes (thus repairing the door) — it depends on what's still trying to get through.

OBJECTS AS WEAPONS

Some objects are designed to be used as weapons, but they're not always around when you need them. In a

SAMPLE OBJECTS

Board, 2"x4": Durability 1, Size 3, Structure 4, Damage 1

Cabinet, Wooden: Durability 1, Size 4, Structure 5, Damage 1

Car Door: Durability 3, Size 3, Structure 6

Car Tire: Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3, Damage 1

Car Window: Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3

Chair, Wooden: Durability 1, Size 4, Structure 5, Damage 1

Coffin: Durability 1, Size 6, Structure 7, Damage 1

Crate, Wooden: Durability 1, Size 4, Structure 5, Damage 1

Door, Bank Vault: Durability 3 (reinforced to 10), Size 8, Structure 18, Damage 8

Door, Metal (Security): Durability 3, Size 5, Structure 8, Damage 3

Door, Wooden (Exterior): Durability 2, Size 5, Structure 7, Damage 2

Door, Wooden (Interior): Durability 1, Size 5, Structure 6, Damage 1

Fence, Chain-link: Durability 2, Size 4, Structure 6, Damage 2

Fence, Steel: Durability 3, Size 6, Structure 9, Damage 3

Lamppost, Steel: Durability 3, Size 8, Structure 11, Damage 3

Manhole Cover: Durability 3, Size 3, Structure 6, Damage 3

Steel Bars: Durability 3, Size 2, Structure 5, Damage 2

Tempered Steel: Durability 3, Size 2 (variable), Structure 5, Damage 2

Window: Durability 1, Size 3 (on average), Structure 4, Damage 1

Damage: Indicates how dangerous the item is when used as a weapon or to do harm. Damage is the lower of the item's Durability or Size. This rating is added to attack rolls in bonus dice to inflict harm. If the weapon is improvised, it suffers a -1 penalty.

pinch, anything small enough to lift and swing (or throw) but heavy enough to pack a wallop works as a weapon. Improvised weapons, though, have the disadvantage of being unbalanced and hard to manipulate, and so penalties are imposed for using them this way.



Any item not meant to be used as a weapon imposes a -1 penalty on the wielder. The Storyteller needs to use common sense, here, obviously — a baseball bat isn't *meant* for combat use, but it works just fine in that arena, so the penalty is inappropriate.

The damage bonus for improvised weapons is normally the lower of the object's Durability or Size. The chart below has a number of common objects and their traits, including a damage rating should someone (or something) pick one up with hostile intent.

A character needs to have a Strength rating at least equal to the object's Size to use that object as a weapon effectively. The Storyteller can choose to increase the Strength requirement for objects that are exceptionally heavy or dense. If the character's Strength is lower than the requirement, the player suffers a -1 penalty for every point of difference. As such, a child with Strength 2 trying to wield a 2x4 as a weapon suffers a -1 (improvised weapon penalty), and a -1 (difference between his Strength and the door's Size), but then applies a damage bonus of 1 die, for a net modifier of -1 to the roll.

As with the improvised weapon penalty, Storytellers need to apply common sense. A seven-year-old child isn't going to be using a wooden door as a weapon, even if the character's Strength + Weaponry rating would somehow make it possible.

BREAKING OBJECTS


Anything can be destroyed — it's just a matter of force and time. Whether a character can muster the force necessary, or has the time, is another matter. The following systems are used to simulate destroying inanimate objects.

As mentioned above, an object suffers damage to its Structure when damage from an attack exceeds its Durability. Successes on the attack roll must exceed the object's Durability to inflict any damage at all. For instance, if a door has Durability 1, a kick that inflicts three points of damage causes two points of damage to that door's Structure. When an object has Structure 0, it is destroyed.

Destroying an object doesn't have to happen all in one action, of course. Usually, this is an extended action, with damage accumulating over a number of turns. As the object suffers damage, it buckles, cracks and finally shatters or crumples.

Below are some examples of breaking objects that might come up in an **Innocents** game:

Breaking down a door: Roll Strength + Stamina. Successes in excess of the door's Durability are inflicted as damage to the door's Structure. If the damage inflicted exceeds the door's Durability, the lock breaks and the door can be opened (though it remains on its hinges). If the door is reduced to Structure 0, it caves in entirely or falls off the hinges.



Holding back a barrier: A character seeks to prevent someone else from smashing in a door. The player rolls Strength + Stamina, with successes adding to the door's Durability rating. This does *not* increase its Structure, however — the door isn't really any more durable because someone is holding it; it's just harder to batter down because of the added resistance. The holding character suffers half of any damage applied to the door's Structure (rounding up).

If a character braces a door (Durability 2) and the player rolls three successes, the door's Durability is increased to five. That means that the breaking character needs six successes on any one attack to damage the door. If the next attack gains seven successes, the door suffers two points of Structure damage and the holding character suffers one point of damage (bashing or lethal, depending on the method of the attack).

If the damage done to the door exceeds the door's Durability (including any gained from a character bracing it), the door is forced open. If the damage exceeds the door's Structure, the door is destroyed, as described above.

Smashing one object with another: The most efficient way to break something, especially for a child, is to hit it with something else. Depending on the choice of weapon, though, the character might wind up breaking either object, or both of them. The player rolls Strength + Weaponry (melee) or Dexterity + Athletics (thrown), and adds an equipment bonus depending on the weapon. Any successes in excess of the target object's Durability are applied as damage to the object's Structure, as usual.

If, however, the roll results in successes in excess of the *weapon's* Durability, but not of the target's, the weapon suffers the appropriate amount of damage.

Example: *Kevin loses his temper and throws a heavy glass ashtray at his little brother's toy truck. The truck is an older (that is, sturdy) toy, and has Durability 2. The ashtray has Durability 1. If Kevin's Dexterity + Athletics roll results in three or more successes, then the truck suffers Structure damage. If Kevin's player only rolls two successes, though, the ashtray takes a point of damage and cracks. If Kevin's player rolls one or no successes, neither object is damaged (since the successes don't exceed either object's Durability).*

Targeting items: The rules for breaking items work just the same if a character tries to target an object in combat, except that the attacker takes a penalty based on the Size of the targeted object (see p. 147 for more on Specified Targets). If a character is carrying an object and another character wishes to break it, rather than attack the person holding it, she may do so by making a normal attack (usually Strength + Weaponry), applying the penalty for specifying the target, and applying any damage over the object's Durability directly to its Structure.

If the defender is trying to hold on to an object while the object is being attacked, the Storyteller can impose a Strength + Athletics roll. If this roll fails, the defender loses his grip on the object and it drops from his grasp.

Falling objects: The rules for computing falling damage are found on p. 159. When one object lands on an-

other, both of the objects suffer damage as appropriate for the fall. Also, each object inflicts an additional amount of damage equal to its damage rating. So, if a chair (Damage 1) falls on a lamppost (Damage 3), the chair suffers damage as appropriate for the fall plus an additional three points, and the lamppost suffers damage appropriate to the fall plus an additional point. Again, damage in excess of the object's Durability is applied to Structure.

If an object falls on a person, the same rules apply, except that people don't normally have damage ratings per se. A person only inflicts damage on an object if that person has an Armor rating (see p. 140). Otherwise, the falling object suffers no extra damage from the collision, though the person suffers the object's damage rating normally.

Piercing Durability: Some objects are specifically designed or uniquely suited to pierce tougher objects. Saws, by design, are meant to tear up larger objects. If an object is designed to pierce more durable material, it is assigned a number of Durability points that it ignores. A saw might ignore one point of Durability, so that if it is used to pierce a wooden door (Durability 1), any successes rolled are applied directly to Structure. The attacking character doesn't add any dice for the saw, but the roll results ignore the Durability.

EQUIPMENT

The right tools for the right job, as they say. Having a tool can mean the difference between performing a task quickly and efficiently, and not being able to do it at all. The following sections discuss how equipment plays into dice pools, and gives some examples of the types of things that **Innocents** characters are likely to carry. This book could not hope, however, to detail all of the different objects that players will want for their characters, and so the Storyteller will probably need to adjudicate what kinds of bonuses (if any) a given character's gear allows.

DICE BONUSES

Using tools appropriate to the task that a character is attempting can add dice to the roll. This modifier is usually called an *equipment bonus* (or *penalty*, potentially) and normally has a maximum of +/-5 dice. The exact bonus is up to the Storyteller, but he should consider the following guidelines when making the call.

- **Equipment is Nothing Without Know-How:** As mentioned previously in this chapter, kids don't always know *how* to make best use of tools. The Tool Use roll (p. 47) is one way to figure out whether or not a child knows how to make use of what's at hand; the character's background and concept should also inform the decision. Sometimes, a kid might take penalties if he *doesn't* use tools, but not get a bonus if he does.

- **The Right Tools for the Right Job:** A tool that was designed with the given task in mind should bestow more of a bonus than an improvised tool. This same principle is found at work with improvised weapons (see p. 130), in fact. If a character tries to break into a house with a crowbar, the player gets a bonus,



but not as great a bonus as if the character had employed a set of lockpicks.

- **You Get What You Pay For:** The more something costs, the better the quality (usually). Staying with the example of breaking and entering, a set of homemade lockpicks, fashioned out of old watchmaking tools, provides a better bonus than a crowbar, but *not* as great a bonus as the set of mail-order lock-picking tools. Likewise, those tools don't bestow as great a bonus as the police-grade pick gun. This plays into using appropriate tools, but consider also that there are gradations of quality.

- **Sometimes Tools Aren't Optional:** You can't drive without a car. You can't shoot something without a gun (or a camera). Sometimes an action isn't *possible* without a tool, and the tool in question doesn't bestow a bonus; it allows the action to take place period. The Storyteller is free to say that without the proper tools, the action *can't* be attempted, or that attempting it reduces the player to a chance die.

- **Define "Success":** It's not hard to break into a car, really — all you need is a big rock. But that's intrusive, loud and probably sets off an alarm, if the car has one. As with much of the Storytelling system, common sense needs to be applied. A character can, potentially, bind someone's wound with a torn shirt, but the dressing isn't going to be pretty, and it's a temporary fix at best. The Storyteller should make clear to the player what "success" on a roll means, given the character's circumstances and the tools to which she has access.

- **Unlikely Tools:** Kids carry strange things, and it's amazing the uses to which they can put them. The section below enumerates some of things that children might be carrying, and as a player, you can certainly suggest that such objects grant equipment bonuses in appropriate circumstances. Storytellers, be fair, but do reward creativity. Using a rabbit's foot to jam a door might work for a few seconds, and sometimes a few seconds is enough.

- **Dramatic Failures:** If a character is using a tool and the player rolls a dramatic failure, something goes horribly wrong with the tool involved. The tool might be broken, lost or otherwise rendered useless. This can actually be something of an advantage at times — if it's the *tool* getting the worst of the effects, at least the character isn't injured.

THINGS KIDS CARRY

The following is a list of things that children might be carrying. Obviously, some items are more appropriate for children on the 12-year-old end of the **Innocents** scale than the seven year old, but it's not unthinkable that a young child might get his hands on a canister of pepper spray.

Storytellers, it's not a bad idea to ask your players what their characters are carrying "now"; that is, as the chapter begins. At the same time, ask what the characters *always* carry — objects of superstitious or sentimental value rather than practical application. Note that an object that has nothing but sentimental value or that the character believes to be "lucky" might actually add a die

or two to certain rolls, just by giving the character some extra confidence, but don't abuse this bonus.

The lists below also contain some suggestions for uses for the items. The actual intended use isn't always listed, but it should be assumed (yes, you *can* use cards to play a card game, not just start fires).

- **Toys:** Stuffed animals, yo-yos, action figures, collectible card games, dice, flying discs, dice, marbles, bouncy-balls: the list goes on. Marbles, jacks and dice might make a good deterrent for pursuers, while action figures or stuffed animals might be used as decoys, if they're properly set up. Some toys (yo-yos, for instance) might work as improvised weapons, and cards or other flammable toys could serve as kindling in a pinch.

- **Cosmetics/Personal Care:** Girls of almost any age can carry makeup, nail files or trimmers, or perfume. Boys might carry combs, but that's often as far as cosmetic care goes for them (at least while out and about). Don't overlook the disguise potential of makeup — a girl who knows what she's doing can make herself up to look 18 in a matter of minutes (pulling the deception off requires some degree of acting skill, of course, but looking the part certainly adds dice to the Expression roll). Older girls might be carrying tampons or other such implements, and children of either sex might carry birth control, either as a joke or because they really believe (or hope) they'll need it.

- **Electronic Devices:** Everyone has a cell phone nowadays. Younger children might have preprogrammed devices that only call a few numbers (their parents, emergency services, a trusted family friend, etc.), while older kids might have normal phones, mp3 players, video games, and other personal electronic devices. The amount of data that these devices can store is amazing, and unscrupulous kids use them to cheat on tests.

- **Weapons:** Depending on where your chronicle is set and what the circumstances of the characters are, an **Innocents** character might have access to a pocketknife or Swiss Army knife, a canister of mace or pepper spray, a slingshot, a BB gun, a water pistol, or a real, working gun. A weapon in the hands of someone with poor impulse control in a stressful situation is a disaster waiting to happen, of course. More information on weapons and combat can be found beginning on p. 138.

- **School Supplies:** During the school year, children are rarely without writing instruments. Depending on the grade level and the child's economic status, he might also have a calculator, a compass (safety or otherwise — the metal ones have very sharp points and could easily be used as weapons), a ruler, notebooks, textbooks (potentially useful as part of a barricade, or even for looking up facts, though many of them are woefully out of date), scissors (again, safety or otherwise), crayons (which can be melted for wax, should that become useful), rubber erasers, or glue/rubber cement (which burns nicely).

- **Drugs:** Yes, some kids use illegal, mind-altering substances, and their effects are covered on p. 156. Note, though, that many children take prescription drugs, including insulin, antidepressants, stimulants to control atten-

tion deficit disorder and allergy/asthma medication. The consequences for *not* taking these meds can be unpleasant, and so the Storyteller is well within his rights to ask the player for an Intelligence + Wits roll to have the character remember to take his pills. See also the Medicated Flaw; p. 96. Drugs can be used, beyond their normal intent, as trade fodder or even to incapacitate enemies.

- **Contraband:** Cigarettes, lighters, matches, chewing tobacco, pornography — anything that the kid's parents and teachers would be upset over could be called contraband. It doesn't always have any special effect on its own (obviously one could use matches to start a fire, but chewing tobacco isn't good for much other than a nicotine hit), but might give the player a bonus die or two in an attempt to impress or shock other children.

- **Money:** Cash, of course, can be paper or coin, but there are other options. A kid might have gift cards for various stores, for instance. A handful of loose change can be flung in someone's face as a distraction, or thrown into machinery to gum up the works. If a character carries a wallet, the player should consider what else is in it, both to nail down what a character is carrying and what anyone who *finds* the wallet now knows about the owner.

- **Clothing:** It's not a bad idea to make a note of what a character is wearing. Older kids, especially, often take great pride in their clothes, and some children use particular colors or styles of clothing to indicate gang membership. Likewise, a hat with a brim might mitigate a penalty to Perception rolls (see p. 34) in bright sunshine, while being dressed for the weather can bestow bonuses (or mitigate penalties) to Survival rolls.

- **Transport:** Skateboards, scooters, bicycles and so on. Systems for such items can be found in the next section, beginning on p. 136.

- **Miscellaneous:** Children take likings to strange things. Sticks, rocks (odd shapes or with holes in the center, especially), beads and other interesting objects might wind up in a kid's possession. It's perfectly in theme for an **Innocents** game for that weird-looking *thing* that the kid found and decided to pick up to be an arcane object, a mystical trinket — or the missing finger of a creature who really would like to have it back.

- **Food:** A diabetic or hypoglycemic child might carry a granola bar or other easy snack in case his blood sugar drops, but any kid might have a bag of Gummy Bears or a pack of gum. The wrappers from such things can leave a trail, if the character isn't careful (or can leave a *false* trail, if he is).

VEHICLES AND TRANSPORTATION

Children don't normally have access to their own cars, of course, but most of them spend a good deal of time in vehicles of one kind or another. Children ride school buses, ride in parents' cars, use public transportation and, of course, use bicycles and skateboards to get around. This section discusses the rules for using vehicles, and for those unfortunate instances when vehicles crash.

VEHICLE TRAITS

Vehicles have the same traits as other objects (Structure, Durability and Size). A vehicle that moves under its own power (i.e., anything with an engine) also possesses four other traits:

Acceleration: Measured in yards per turn, much like a character's Speed (see p. 85). When a vehicle accelerates or decelerates, the vehicle's Acceleration rating is added or subtracted from its present Acceleration. Each turn of Acceleration, the rating is added to the present Acceleration, until the driver reaches the speed he wants and stops accelerating. Each turn of deceleration, up to *triple* the Acceleration can be subtracted from the present Acceleration, depending on how fast the driver wishes to stop.

Example: *Danny's older brother picks him up from school and starts driving him home. The car has Acceleration 13. As Danny gets into the car, the vehicle is at a stop (present Acceleration 0). Danny's brother, not the most responsible driver, floors it, and in the first turn of driving, the present Acceleration climbs to 13. If the driver keeps picking up speed, the car's present Acceleration climbs to 26 on the second turn, 39 on the third turn, and 52 on the fourth turn. At that point,*

the car is moving at about 35mph. A little girl darts in front of the car, and Danny's brother hits the brakes. He needs

two turns to stop the car; on the first turn, the present Acceleration drops from 52 to 13 (car's Acceleration of 13 tripled = 39, 52-39=13), and on the next turn, the car stops (present Acceleration 0). Hopefully, that's enough time to avoid the child.

Handling: A measure of how easily maneuverable the vehicle is. Large, heavy vehicles have lower ratings, while smaller vehicles have higher ones. Handling is added to or subtracted from rolls to control the vehicle.

Safe Speed: The speed in yards per turn at which, in absence of unforeseen conditions, no roll is needed to control the vehicle. "Unforeseen conditions" can include a sudden obstacle in the vehicle's path, inclement weather or distractions in the vehicle.

Maximum Speed: The fastest the vehicle can travel, measured in yards per turn.

PARTS OF A VEHICLE

The Structure of a vehicle, as described in the list at the end of this section, refers to the vehicle as a whole. If that Structure is reduced to 0, the vehicle doesn't function. But it's possible to target one portion of a vehicle separately. For instance, a car's window has Durability 1, Size 3, Structure 4.

Reducing the window's Structure to 0 doesn't disable the car; it just breaks the window. Targeting a particular part of a car imposes penalties to the attempt (see Specified Targets, p. 147).



BODY-PROPELLED VEHICLES

Most of the time, a “vehicle” for a child is a bicycle, skateboard, scooter or other form of transit whose propulsion comes from the rider. Such vehicles allow for greater speeds than would be possible on foot, but not nearly as great as those permitted by a vehicle with an engine. Body-propelled vehicles don’t have assigned Safe Speeds or Maximum Speeds, because those values depend on the rider in question. Likewise, Acceleration isn’t a fixed number. Such vehicles do have Handling ratings, however.

Rules for various body-propelled vehicles are listed below.

BICYCLES

A cyclist has an Acceleration rating equal to the higher of his Strength or Athletics rating (a Specialty in Cycling is also applied to Acceleration). The Safe Speed of a bike is equal to twice the rider’s normal Speed rating, while the Maximum Speed is equal to four times the rider’s Speed rating. Traveling above Safe Speed requires a Dexterity + Athletics + Handling roll each *turn* to maintain control. Failure on this roll means that the character must brake, slowing to his Safe Speed. Dramatic failure means that the character falls off the bike, suffering damage as described on p. 137.

Bikes designed for road travel don’t necessarily have lower Handling ratings than mountain or off-road bikes, but they don’t handle terrain nearly as well (double all penalties for unsafe road conditions on a road bike).

SKATEBOARDS AND SCOOTERS

These vehicles consist of a board with wheels, sometimes with a handle that allows for steering. In either case, the rider can’t achieve Speed much in excess of his normal rating without help (hitching on the back of a car, a downhill slope, etc.). A character on a scooter or skateboard has a Safe Speed of his normal Speed rating +3, and a Max Speed of his normal Speed rating +8. Handling ratings are higher for scooters, since they’re easier to steer. Acceleration is equal to the higher of the character’s Strength or Athletics rating. Scooters and skateboards are useless on anything other than a flat surface.

CHASES, CRASHES AND OTHER SYSTEMS

Put someone behind the wheel of a car, or even the handlebars of the bike, and add a supernatural threat, and sooner or later that vehicle is going to hit something it shouldn’t. This section covers systems for crashes, collisions and just keeping vehicles on the road.

Note that driving a car is an adult Skill, and not one that **Innocents** characters have access to normally. See “Drive” (p. 60) for more information. Because **Innocents** characters don’t normally know how to drive cars, these systems are written detailing the effects on passengers, rather than drivers, where cars are concerned.

COVER IN A VEHICLE

When bullets start flying, smart people head for cover, and you could do worse than to take refuge in a vehicle. A

vehicle with all doors and windows intact provides complete cover to anyone hiding inside; see p. 146 for rules on cover. Any attack aimed at a person in a car hits the car first, and must overcome the Durability of the window or door in order to strike the person within. See the chart above for traits of car windows and doors.

SKILL TESTS

As mentioned on p. 60 in Chapter Three, adults have access to a Physical Skill called Drive. This Skill is paired with Dexterity and the Handling rating of a vehicle to avoid (or cause) crashes, to navigate difficult roads and to race or shadow other cars. Since kids won’t be in the driver’s seat, though, the systems for driving in **Innocents** are kept to a minimum. If you need to check to see if an adult crashes a car, roll the adult’s Dexterity + Drive + Handling. Most adults have a single dot of Drive, if that. Characters such as policemen and frequent travelers, who have either received special training or drive for a living, obviously have greater ratings in the Skill. The circumstances under which you should make this roll are much the same as listed below for bicycles (tire blowout, sudden change in road conditions, etc.). If the roll fails, the car spins out, leaves the road, or potentially even crashes into something.

A child riding a bicycle might fall off if the bike encounters a sudden bump or shift in terrain, or if something strikes the bike. The roll to avoid losing control of a bicycle is Dexterity + Athletics + Handling. The following are examples of situations that might necessitate this roll:

- The bike strikes a solid object and is moving at more than the rider’s normal Speed rating.
- A sharp turn; -1 to -3 for wet or slick roads, -2 for exceeding Safe Speed.
- Something strikes the bike while it is in motion; apply a negative penalty equal to the successes on the attack roll.
- A tire blows out.
- Terrain worsens suddenly (pavement to uneven ground or gravel, for example); -1 for mountain bikes, -2 for road bikes.
- Performing any kind of stunt — sliding down a flight of stairs or a steep hill, jumping an obstacle, etc. See the Athletics Skill for more information.

A child on a skateboard or scooter might fall off in much the same circumstances, but unless the child picks up a great deal of speed, stopping is normally a matter of jumping off. Any of the circumstances listed for bicycles might apply to skateboards or scooters (“blowing a tire” doesn’t apply, though “losing a wheel” might).

JUMPING FROM A MOVING VEHICLE

The distance here isn’t the problem, it’s the speed, and the fact that the unfortunate character is going from fast motion to an abrupt stop. Treat jumping from a moving vehicle like falling from a vertical height of nine feet per 10mph. So, jumping from a car going only 20mph inflicts two bashing damage, but jumping from a car traveling 90mph inflicts *nine* levels of bashing damage (prob-

ably wrapping the character's Health around into lethal damage; see Applying Damage, p. 150).

It is possible to roll as one lands, reducing the amount of damage suffered. This requires a Dexterity + Athletics roll, with each success reducing the amount of damage by one. The Storyteller should apply modifiers to this roll based on the terrain — jumping onto hard asphalt might levy a -1 penalty, while jumping into a soft marsh might grant a +3 bonus. Jumping onto a jagged, rocky plain or onto broken glass might bestow a penalty *and* inflict lethal damage, no matter how fast the car is traveling. A dramatic failure on the Dexterity + Athletics roll means that the character lands badly, and suffers additional damage equal to his own Size rating (bashing or lethal as appropriate for the speed at which the car was traveling).

See also "Falling" on p. 159.

CRASHES

Car crashes work much the same as attack rolls, just on a larger scale. Whenever a car hits something, be it a person or an inanimate object, the Storyteller rolls the vehicle's Size + 1 for every 10mph that the car was traveling at the time of the impact. Successes on this roll inflict *lethal* damage to any character struck by the car. Successes in excess of an object's Durability are applied to the object's Structure.

It is possible, of course, for a car to strike something larger and tougher than itself, and come out the worse for it. Successes on the Size roll are compared to the *car's* Durability as well as the object's, and damage is applied normally. If the car fails to damage the object (that is, the Size roll doesn't turn up enough successes to exceed the object's Durability), the car immediately stops. The car also stops if it hits something equal to or greater than its own Size. So, a sports car (Size 10) that hits a mailbox (Size 3) keeps going, but if it hits a bus (Size 21), it stops cold.

Ramming a living being can damage a car; hitting a deer can quite easily total one, in fact. Whether striking a living (or at least animate) being damages a car is up to the Storyteller. If the Storyteller feels this is appropriate, compare the damage successes rolled against the target to the car's Durability. Any successes in excess of the Durability are *halved* (rounded up), and then applied to the car.

Passengers inside a car, of course, can suffer damage in a crash. After damage to the car has been computed, the Storyteller rolls dice equal to the Structure damage that the car suffered in the crash. The Storyteller subtracts the rating of any armor that passengers are wearing from this dice pool. Successes in this dice pool are applied as bashing damage to passengers who are wearing safety belts, or as lethal damage to passengers who aren't.

Bicycles, Scooters and Skateboards

Crashes with bikes and other body-propelled vehicles are figured in the same way as cars, except that they offer no protection to their riders and their low Durability ratings mean that a bike or a skateboard that is hit by a motor vehicle is probably destroyed. A cyclist or skater hit by a car suffers lethal damage, just as a pedestrian does.

If a cyclist spills his bike, he suffers one point of bashing damage for every five points of Acceleration he had at the moment of wipeout. Any armor that the cyclist has is subtracted from this damage, and if the cyclist is wearing a helmet, subtract two points of damage from the total. As with jumping from a moving vehicle, above, this damage can be reduced if the cyclist falls onto something soft, or made lethal if the cyclist spills onto jagged rocks or broken glass.

A kid riding a skateboard or scooter can also take damage if the player rolls a dramatic failure, but damage is equal to one *die* of bashing damage per five points of Acceleration, rather than one point. A helmet reduces this dice pool by two, and any armor the character is wearing also applies.

SAMPLE VEHICLE LIST

Bicycle: Durability 2, Size 6, Structure 8, Acceleration (Greater of Strength or Athletics), Safe Speed (Normal Speed x 2), Maximum Speed (Normal Speed x 4), Handling 5

Skateboard: Durability 1, Size 2, Structure 3, Acceleration (Greater of Strength or Athletics), Safe Speed (Normal Speed + 3), Maximum Speed (Normal Speed + 8), Handling 2

Scooter: Durability 1, Size 3, Structure 4, Acceleration (Greater of Strength or Athletics), Safe Speed (Normal Speed + 3), Maximum Speed (Normal Speed + 8), Handling 4

Motorcycle: Durability 2, Size 7, Structure 9, Acceleration 22, Safe Speed 132 (90 miles per hour), Maximum Speed 235 (160mph), Handling 4–5

A motorcycle has no frame; it's an engine and chassis on wheels. Bike and rider take separate damage. Damage successes rolled are compared to the bike's Durability to see if it suffers harm. Armor worn by the rider is automatically subtracted from damage successes rolled (as opposed to being subtracted from the damage dice pool). Say four points of damage are inflicted to bike and rider in a collision. The bike has 2 Durability, so it suffers two Structure. The rider, meanwhile, has no armor. He suffers four Health.

If damage done to a bike in a collision does not exceed its Durability, assume that the rider goes unharmed, too. So, if a bike with 2 Durability suffers two damage, neither bike nor rider is harmed.

Sports Car: Durability 2, Size 10, Structure 12, Acceleration 20, Safe Speed 161 (110mph), Maximum Speed 235 (160mph), Handling 4

Compact Car: Durability 3, Size 9, Structure 12, Acceleration 15, Safe Speed 103 (70mph), Maximum Speed 191 (130mph), Handling 3

Mid-Sized Car (Sedan): Durability 3, Size 12, Structure 15, Acceleration 14, Safe Speed 110 (75mph), Maximum Speed 183 (125mph), Handling 2–3

Full-Sized Car (Family Vehicle): Durability 3, Size 14, Structure 17, Acceleration 12, Safe Speed 103 (70mph), Maximum Speed 176 (120mph), Handling 1

SUV/Pick-up Truck: Durability 3, Size 15, Structure 18, Acceleration 13, Safe Speed 103 (70mph), Maximum Speed 169 (115mph), Handling 0

Eighteen-Wheeler (rig only; no trailer): Durability 3, Size 18, Structure 21, Acceleration 10, Safe Speed 103 (70mph), Maximum Speed 161 (110mph), Handling -1

Bus: Durability 3, Size 21, Structure 24, Acceleration 10, Safe Speed 88 (60mph), Maximum Speed 147 (100mph), Handling -2

HURTING PEOPLE (AND AVOIDING GETTING HURT)

A story needs conflict, but that conflict doesn't have to depend on violence. **Innocents** stories are generally geared toward escaping combat, rather than winning it. It's one thing to play the part of a savage werewolf who defends his territory against other shapeshifting monsters with tooth and claw, a vampire driven to murderous frenzy by the need to drink human blood, or a man who coldly defeats his foe with an enchanted bullet. It's quite another to play a child.

It's not that kids aren't capable of violence, either against adults, or against each other. Anyone who watches the news knows that's not true. But the consequences of violence are so much worse. Adults who experience it — on either side of the equation — can be marked for a very long time. But somehow, everyone, however unfairly, expects an adult to cope, and to understand what he has done and experienced.

Kids very often don't understand the real implications of what happens to them, or of what they do. Sure, any number of TV shows and R-rated movies they shouldn't really be watching might include images of death and violence, and they might play games where they shoot each other and fall down pretend-dead, but not all kids really understand death. And that's partly because of adults who try to protect them from the reality of death as long as they can. A child of 10 who kills might not have any idea what it really means to kill someone, or what it means to see someone die.

In a World of Darkness not too different from our own, violence happens far too often. And all too often, children are involved. Children are not safe.

WHEN CHILDREN ARE INVOLVED

We're going to talk about violence as it applies to child characters. The most important thing to remember, when children are involved, is that it takes a lot for a kid to actually get into the kind of fight that might result in someone getting seriously hurt.

Sure, a little boy might get into a rough-and-tumble with his big brother any time, but a cuff to the head from a sibling is hardly the same as a knife in the guts. In the playground, kids spend a lot of time posturing. Groups

THE JAMES BULGER CASE

In 1993, Robert Thompson and John Venables abducted and beat to death James Bulger, a three-year-old boy from Liverpool. They left the child's body next to a railway line. What made this case so shocking at the time was that little James' two murderers were themselves only 10 years old.

Dumb disbelief greeted police photographs of the two ordinary-looking boys. They were just kids. But they did it. And cried for their parents when they were finally locked up.

Their age was no defense. Not really comprehending what they had done, Venables and Thompson became, for a while, the most hated people in Britain.

When the time came, 10 years later, for their release from the juvenile detention center in which they had spent the remainder of their childhood, the law had changed to protect underage children who committed crimes like this. They had to be given new names; the only images that could be broadcast or published were of them as they had been 10 years before. To the public, they were eternally those two children who had done a terrible thing, one act that had destroyed their lives forever.

Not that this was any consolation to their victim, of course.

of kids in opposition to each other don't always come to blows. They posture. They call each other names. Often, one side backs down before anyone gets hurt.

And when people do get hurt, the results are often swift and tragic. Faced with a monster, whether human or supernatural, a child's first reaction is to try to get away, however he can.

One moment can blight a life. One act can end a childhood.

SCENES AND TURNS

For the sake of simplicity, we're going to continue to call scenes that depend upon violence, the avoidance of violence or the threat of violence *combat scenes*, even if they don't actually involve much of what a player of storytelling games might necessarily recognize as combat.

It helps play to divide combat scenes up into three-second *turns*, which we then further divide into these two stages: *initiative* and *effort*. It's easier for players to manage the brief, confusing events that surround a violent confrontation if they're divided up into a sensible order. It's important to remember, though, that while the players might know exactly what's going on, their characters are in the dark. They're wildly lashing out; they're running, diving, scrambling away from the thing that has just come out of the shadows; they're screaming; they're panicking; they're passing out in pain from a blow that descended from an unknown source.



INITIATIVE

The question that often settles the result of any potentially violent confrontation is pretty simple: who goes first? Do you freeze? Do you wait? Do you break and run before the werewolf can get you?

This is how you settle it: at the start of a scene, each player rolls one die and adds the character's Initiative modifier (equal to Dexterity + Composure) to the number she rolled. If your character is surprised (see p. 34) and you fail the Reaction to Surprise roll, you might not be able to roll Initiative until next turn.

Everyone takes note of the total they rolled. The Storyteller rolls and records initiative totals for all the characters he controls, too. The character with the highest total goes first, and then the next highest, and so on, until everyone has acted.

If a player's character and one of the Storyteller's characters tie, compare their unmodified Initiative modifiers: the higher Initiative modifier goes first. If the Initiative modifiers are the same, the player's character goes first. If two players' characters have the same total and Initiative modifier, the players roll again as a tie breaker, until it's clear who goes first. If two Storyteller characters have the same total, the Storyteller decides who's faster.

When everyone on the list has acted in some way, whether to attack someone, run away, dive behind an object and hide, try desperately to hold a door shut, etc., that's the end of the turn. The next turn begins, and everyone gets a chance to act again, in the same order.

OPTIONAL INITIATIVE

The Storyteller can, if she wants, call for Initiative rolls at the start of every turn, meaning that there's a new roster for each turn.

This way of doing things has its pros and cons. On the one hand, it means that combat scenes don't have the danger of becoming these mechanistic "your turn-my turn-your turn" affairs, where everything progresses in a predictable manner (even if the characters don't perceive it that way). On the other hand, it does add an extra layer of complexity, since everyone has to roll the die and add their Initiative modifier, and then the Storyteller has to write it all down in the roster. This approach also invalidates the Fresh Start Merit, so if you're planning to use this rule, don't let players take the Merit.

In the end, it's entirely up to the players and Storyteller which works best. It might be that the Storyteller wants to use this optional version for smaller combats (when there are only two or three opponents, for example), and the usual version for larger combats. Use whatever works best for the group.

HOLDING BACK

Sometimes a character might want to hold what he's doing until he's seen what the other people have done. So, for example, a kid might choose to remain cowering behind the sofa until the noises stop, or *lie absolutely still*

until the creature stops sniffing at his neck, or wait until the man with the gun gets distracted somehow before hopping out from under the table and making for the door.

It's easy enough. If a player chooses to do this, the character loses his place in the Initiative roster and is reinserted in the list by the Storyteller in a more appropriate position. Of course, things don't always happen as you expect, but even so, there's still usually a sensible place to come in and act.

Example: *Charlie's in a fix. There's this man — except it's not really a man, because it did something strange a minute ago, and for a minute Charlie could see that it's really made of bits of people, all stitched together — and the man's got Charlie's little sister, Lola, by the arm. Charlie's dog, Jack, is also in the room, growling, and the patchwork man is looking at the dog and hasn't seen Charlie, because Charlie's behind the door. Everyone rolls Initiative. The Storyteller gets a total of 9 for the patchwork man and 8 for Jack. Charlie's player gets 11 and Lola's player rolls 7. Charlie knows his dog and guesses that Jack is going to launch himself at the monster, so Charlie's player says that Charlie is going to wait until the monster is busy with Jack and then get Lola out of the room. The creature goes first and tries to hit at Jack with its enormous fist. He misses. Jack, instead, bites the monster's arm and holds on. The creature drops Lola and tries to pull the dog off with his other hand. Charlie grabs Lola and whispers, "Run!" The two of them dart into the house. Charlie tries not to think about the snapping noises in the room behind him.*

If two players hold off until the same moment, the one who had the higher original Initiative total goes first.

In the next turn, the character returns to his original ranking in the roster.

TRYING TO HURT PEOPLE

When a character tries to hurt (or even kill) people, you make an attack roll. The dice pool you roll depends on what the character is using and what he's doing.

• **Close Combat:** This happens when your character is standing next to the person he's trying to hurt (within two yards). If the character isn't using a weapon — she's trying to pummel someone with her fists, or biting the hand of the adult who just grabbed her from behind, or kicking at an adult's shins — the player rolls Strength + Brawl.

If the character has a knife, or a bottle, or a baseball bat, or any other object she's using to try to hurt someone, the player rolls Strength + Weaponry.

• **Ranged Combat:** This happens when a character is trying to hit someone from a distance with a weapon of some kind. If the character's throwing something, like a rock, the player rolls Dexterity + Athletics. More rarely, if the character has somehow got hold of a gun (or maybe even a bow), the player rolls Dexterity + Firearms.

ATTACK DICE POOLS

When your character is trying to harm someone, the dice pools work the same way they always do: you take the Attribute and the Skill and add them together to form the pool. The number of successes you roll is the number of points of damage

your character's opponent suffers. When you make an attack roll, you're only really rolling to see how much your character hurts the other guy. That's all there is to it. It's not about being faster, or even about being stronger. It's about causing injury. And if you succeed, your character *will* hurt them, particularly if the victim is a kid, too. But then, your character could just as easily end up on the other end.

A lot of factors can change the pool of dice you roll.

• **Adults:** Even the strongest 12-year-old is going to have a hard time hurting an adult, at least unless he picks up a weapon. Unarmed attacks made by children against adults suffer a negative penalty equal to the adult's Stamina. This includes adult-sized creatures, but *not* children with the Giant Merit (they're big, but they're not as strong as grown-ups).

• **Defense:** When your character is fighting someone in close combat, or if you're throwing something at him, you have to subtract his opponent's Defense trait from your dice pool. If you've got a gun and your character is shooting at him, you *don't* subtract the Defense trait — people don't dodge bullets, they get the hell out of the way. The one exception is if the character is shooting at someone at point-blank range, from only a few feet away. Even though you still roll Dexterity + Firearms, it counts as being in close combat, and you have to subtract the opponent's Defense from your dice pool.

• **Weapons:** Weapons add bonus dice to the pool. If you hit someone with a brick, it's going to cause a hell of a lot more pain, bruising and bleeding than just punching them in the face. A carving knife is more likely to hurt someone than a penknife. A rifle shell has more potential to kill a man than a thrown rock. If your character is just using his bare hands, you don't add any dice to the dice pool. Most weapons add between one and five dice to the dice pool. Some don't add any dice, but might still have the potential to harm or kill someone more than your bare hands would.

• **Armor:** It's not very likely, but the kids might come up against someone who has some sort of armor, like the old vampire who lives in the creepy old castle, dressed in the suit of armor he wore 600 years ago, the monster with the bits of metal stitched into his skin, or the zombie SWAT man who's still wearing the police-issue flak jacket he was in when he died. Armor has a rating, and you subtract it from any attacking dice pool, as well as Defense. However, some armor is so bulky that it *subtracts* from Defense, even while giving protection. The advantage to armor over Defense, though, is that armor is subtracted from *every* incoming attack, while Defense diminishes with multiple opponents (see p. 78).

• **Supernatural Powers:** Some supernatural beings have powers that might add to attack rolls. A vampire might be superhumanly strong. A warlock might be able to make the blade of his evil-looking sacrificial knife burst into flames.

• **Circumstances:** All sorts of other things might add or subtract to your dice pool. Bad weather might make the ground slippery and make it hard to concentrate because you're being rained on, and you can't see. If you've a gash on your forehead that's getting blood in your eyes, the

pain and the distraction are going to make things difficult for you. On the other hand, throwing rocks at someone is a bit easier if you're halfway up a tree — and you're harder to hit, too, because you've got some cover. There are lots of different things that can help or hinder a character (and add or subtract from his dice pool). A large portion of this chapter deals with them.

Example: *Charlie and Lola have made it out into the woods behind their parents' home, but the monster is right behind them. The kids make the mistake of climbing a tree, although Charlie has enough presence of mind to grab a couple of large, heavy rocks. As the monster approaches, Charlie throws one of the rocks with all his might. Charlie has Dexterity 3 and Athletics 1, so he starts with a pool of four dice. He has the advantage of higher ground, and the Storyteller rules that's another die to add to the pool, and he gets another two, because the rock is jagged and the size of Charlie's fist. That makes seven dice. The monster has Defense 2, which gets subtracted from the dice pool, meaning that Charlie's player rolls five dice. He might get lucky and really hurt the monster, but the chances of him taking the creature out with one blow are pretty slim.*

DAMAGE

As mentioned above, for every success you gain on an attack roll, your character's opponent suffers one point of damage, marked off on his Health track. If you get no successes, you didn't hurt him.

The points are pretty abstract, and the character who's just been injured doesn't perceive it as points of Health damage. For him, it's a bash on the head that stuns him, causes him to stagger and his eyes to water, or a gash on the arm, or a vicious blow to his leg, or a punch in the guts, or a slash across the face. It's visceral. It hurts.

Adults can take a bit of pain without it affecting what they do too much. Kids, on the other hand, are badly affected by pain. In game terms, that means they usually start suffering penalties from the moment they get hurt. In terms of the story, they fall over, they clutch their damaged limb, they see stars, they fall unconscious, they scream and give away their position, and they cry.

It's up to the Storyteller and the players to collaborate in describing what a character experiences when those abstract points are marked off the Health track. For more on this, see p. 150 below.

TYPES OF DAMAGE

Different kinds of weapon hurt people in different ways. For the purposes of the game, we divide these up into three different categories, each more dangerous than the one preceding it.

- When your character pummels someone or hits them with some kind of blunt object, like a baseball bat or a rock, she causes *bashing* damage. It can make someone reel, but normally, it takes quite a lot for it to kill someone. It doesn't take very long to heal from the ill effects, although the bruises remain.

- Weapons that have a good chance of killing someone, or at the very least of causing interior damage, cause *lethal*

NO ATTACK DICE?

It's quite possible that penalties from injuries, Defense and Armor traits and other circumstances reduce your character's dice pool to zero. If they do, your character can still make a chance roll. Any successes still count, but if you do choose to roll the dice, your character stands the chance of a dramatic failure on a roll of 1.

What happens if you roll a dramatic failure on an attack roll is up to the Storyteller. It could be any number of things: falling flat on your face, maybe losing the only thing you had that could have been a weapon against the thing pursuing you, maybe even cutting yourself with your mother's chef knife. The only thing that's really set in stone is this: whatever it turns out to be, it's not going to be good.

damage. Knives cause lethal damage. So do bullets and really heavy blunt objects that can crush and snap bones.

- If someone is already very badly hurt, injuries he suffers on top of that might be counted as *aggravated* damage. This is bad news. If your character has been hurt enough to take aggravated damage, it means she's probably already unconscious and stands a very real chance of dying. Sometimes supernatural beings take aggravated damage from things that play on their weaknesses. Vampires take aggravated damage from sunlight, for example; werewolves take aggravated damaged from silver. But some of these creatures have powers that can also cause aggravated damage.


STAYING OUT OF HARM'S WAY

Anyone who gets in a fight does their best to avoid being hit. That's really what your character's Defense trait (which is reckoned as equal to the lower of Dexterity and Wits) represents. The other person is trying to hurt you, but you're getting out of the way, which is why the person trying to hit you subtracts your Defense trait from their dice pool. It doesn't take up any time. It's a reflexive action, and the game assumes that your character is doing it at about the same time as whatever else she's doing, which, if she's an adult, probably involves doing unto the other guy before he does whatever he's trying to do unto her.

But a kid who gets in a fight with an adult spends more time trying not to be hit than trying to hit, and probably just wants to get away. This section deals with some of the things a kid can do to avoid getting hurt by a bigger, meaner opponent.

HELPLESSNESS

One of the scariest things anyone can experience is helplessness. For a kid, it's worse, and much more common. Kids spend a great deal of their early lives being at the mercy of adults. For most kids, the parents they love are the most frightening thing they know, because they have those children at their mercy. It's why it's such a terrible betrayal for a parent to harm his own child.



To be at someone's mercy is an awful thing. The game system can model some of what that means. What it can't model is the fear, the dread that being young and unable to fight back brings with it. That's up to you, the Storyteller and the players, to play out. Try to think back to what it was like to be small, to be carried about by adults, to be shut in school, to lie in bed awake at night, knowing that the thing under the bed or in your wardrobe or closet will come out and eat you if you move or make the slightest sound, and how there's nothing you can do about it...It's like that.

We can only supply so much of that. The important stuff, the actual play of the game, the pleasurable scares that come from dredging up old fears and getting entertainment from them — that's up to you (but we discuss it more in the next chapter).

- *Completely helpless* characters — characters who are tied up, or asleep, or unconscious, or who are unable to move are completely at an opponent's mercy. A character who would try to harm or kill someone who's completely helpless like this doesn't need to roll. She does damage equal to her complete dice pool (Attribute + Skill + equipment) without subtracting her opponent's Defense. And she can keep hitting, and hitting, as many times as she wants, until the opponent never moves again.

- Characters who have been caught by surprise (see p. 34) don't get their Defense, or get to roll for initiative, until the second turn of combat.

- The more people trying to hit the character, though, the harder it is to get out of the way of it all. *Every attack after the first reduces your character's Defense by one.* If your character has Defense 2 and she's being attacked by three people at once, the first person who attacks her in a round subtracts two dice from her dice pool, the second subtracts one die and the third doesn't subtract anything at all. If there were a fourth attacker, he wouldn't subtract anything either (but he also wouldn't add anything — your character's Defense can never be a negative number). If many enemies close in, desperation results, as it becomes harder to get out of the way. You start each new turn with your character's full Defense.

EVADING ONE ATTACK

Your character might be trying to do something while avoiding being hurt. Sometimes that takes a special effort.

You can elect to spend a Willpower point to increase your Defense by 2 against a single attack roll.

If several people are trying to hurt your character, you can choose which one you want to put a special effort into avoiding, but remember that the penalties to your character's Defense caused by having more than one person attack him still stand. So, if your character started with Defense 2, you can spend the Willpower point to give you a Defense of 4 against the first attacker (2 + 2), or 3 against the second attacker (2 - 1 + 2), or 2 against a third or fourth attacker (2 - 2 + 2).

Remember that you can only ever spend one point of Willpower in any one turn, so you can only do this once per turn, as long as you have points of Willpower left to use.

KIDS ARE REALLY HARD TO CATCH

A kid with the chance to do so will probably desperately try to get out of the way of harm, wriggling under tables and chairs, diving between legs and just avoiding getting hurt.

Dedicating a turn to simple self-preservation is easy: you declare at the start of the turn that your character is Dodging, and you double his Defense trait for the rest of the turn. You *also* apply a bonus of one for every point your character's Size trait is under 5 when fighting a larger opponent.

This operates a bit outside the normal Initiative rules, and so a few additional factors must be taken into account:

- It doesn't have to be your character's turn when you declare that he's Dodging. The only rule is that he can't have done anything else that turn.

- Again, if more than one person is after your character, you subtract one from the new Defense total for every attacker beyond the first.

- The only other thing your character can do in a turn where he's Dodging is to move up to his Speed.

- If he's already been attacked once or more when you declare that he's Dodging, you only get to double your character's *reduced* Defense trait (so if your character has already been attacked once when you declare that he's Dodging, and he's about to be attacked again, you double his Defense trait *minus one*).

- You can still elect to spend a point of Willpower to add two to the total, whatever it is at this point, against a single attack.

Example: *Charlie's situation goes from bad to worse. The monster has two friends, and they have him cornered in the cave and they're trying to catch him. Charlie's Defense is normally 2. Charlie's player elects to Dodge right at the beginning of the turn. He dives behind bushes, and over rocks, trying to slip out of the creatures' hands. Charlie is Size 4, so his Defense starts as 5 (2, multiplied by two and with one more for Charlie's Size — one less than 5) against the first of them. Against the second, it drops to 4, and against the third, it drops to 3.*

WHERE'D HE GO?

Kids have an amazing ability to take advantage of distractions. Turn your head for a split second, and the next thing you know, they're halfway across the room (or the street).

The player of a child character can elect to watch for a distraction in an opponent. He can only do this if the opponent is faced with at least one other individual, animal or thing to hold his attention. If the character's got his opponent's undivided attention, he can't take advantage of this rule.

When a character does this, he keeps his usual Defense. As an instant action, the character chooses the precise moment his opponent turns his head, for whatever reason, and decides to either run or find a place to hide.



- **Running for it:** The player rolls Dexterity + Wits, opposed against a reflexive roll of his opponent's Wits + Composure. If the player wins, or if it's a draw, the character runs away, out of his opponent's reach. Every success the player rolls counts towards one of the successes he needs to outrun his opponent in a foot chase before the chase even starts (see Foot Chases, p. 57). If this roll is made against an adult, the adult character does not get 8-Again on the roll (see Contested Actions, p. 123).

- **Hiding:** The player rolls Dexterity + Stealth, opposed against a reflexive roll of the opponent's Wits + Composure. If the player wins, the character ducks out of sight, and the opponent has to figure out where the kid has got to, as per the rules for hiding (see p. 65). This is only really useful in a place where there are enough things to hide behind (such as a heavily forested area, with a lot of bushes). In a place where the only thing to hide behind is a single chair, it's pretty obvious where the kid has gone. Once again, if this roll is made against an adult, the adult character does not get 8-Again on the roll.

- **Escaping en masse:** If two or more kids are trying to evade the same opponent, they can *all* try to make a run for it, or hide, even if there isn't anything else taking up the opponent's time: as anyone who's tried to manage a number of kids knows, one moment's distraction and they've *all* slipped through your fingers. The opponent only gets to roll Wits + Composure once, which is compared against any and all of the kids' players' rolls, independently.

Example: Charlie and Lola, in a clearing in the woods, both try to get away from the patchwork monster. Charlie decides to hide behind a bush. Lola just runs for it. They're both running around the monster, and they both get a chance to exploit his distraction. Charlie's got Dexterity 3 and Stealth 2, meaning he rolls five dice. Lola has Dexterity 2 and Wits 2, and so rolls four dice. The monster's Wits + Composure add up to six dice. The Storyteller rolls three successes for the monster. Lola's player rolls three successes, a draw, meaning that she gets away and has a head start of three successes toward the total she needs to outrun the monster if he chases her. Charlie's player rolls two successes, which means that the monster, with his three, sees exactly where Charlie tried to go. He reaches over and grabs Charlie's arm...

CLOSE COMBAT COMPLICATIONS

Violence hurts. Sometimes it's easy to harm people; sometimes other things get in the way. The game provides a relatively painless system for modeling injury and hurt. In the end, every complication either adds or subtracts to the attacker's dice pool. Here are two complications you can use.

- **Using the wrong hand:** If your character, for whatever reason, is using the other hand to the one he normally uses when trying to hit someone (he's right-handed and has to use his left because he's injured, for example), you suffer a -2 penalty to your roll. You don't get the penalty if your character has the Merit: Ambidextrous (p. 102).

- **Going All-Out:** Sometimes a kid just loses it, or thinks he has nothing to lose, or he's cornered, and he kicks and punches and does whatever he can to hurt the

other guy. If you want your character to do this, you declare it at the start of the turn. Your character loses his Defense trait for the turn, but gains two bonus dice to his attack roll. He's easier to hurt, because he's just laying in with no real thought for himself, but he's so frenzied, he attacks with more force.

FIGHTING WITH FISTS, FEET AND TEETH

Kids don't tend to go armed (unless they're in a war zone, or a really bad inner-city area, or an area where guns are more commonplace). Often, the best they can do is pummeling with fists, kicking and biting (which is why the best option is to run away). Sometimes, there's no choice.

- **Fists and Feet:** If your character is forced into a fight and has to resort to fists or feet, you roll Strength + Brawl (minus the opponent's Defense). You don't get any bonus dice. If you succeed, the attack causes bashing damage.

- **Biting:** Kids bite. The player of a character who decides to bite an opponent (and a kid caught in a grapple — see below — can always resort to a bite) rolls Strength + Brawl (minus the opponent's Defense), with no bonus dice, causing bashing damage on a success. Animals and supernatural creatures do get bonus dice, and might even cause lethal damage. A large dog gets a +1 bonus and causes lethal damage, while a wolf gets +2 (and also causes lethal damage). Other animals might cause more than that, depending on the size of the animal.

GRAPPLING AND WRIGGLING

If a character wants to grab another character, the player rolls Strength + Brawl, minus the opponent's Defense. If the player gets at least one success, the character gets hold of his target.

- **Getting Free:** The character being held has the chance to try to wriggle free when he next gets to act. If he hasn't acted yet that turn, he can try to get free when it's his turn to do something. If he has, he has to wait until the next turn. For the character to get free, the player needs to roll Strength + Brawl, minus the opponent's Strength. If the player gets one success, the character goes free.

- **Turning the Tables:** A character caught in a hold by another character can try to turn the tables on his opponent, getting the upper hand. The player rolls Strength + Brawl, minus the opponent's Strength. If the player gets a success, the character can try a maneuver next turn.

Maneuvers

All of the maneuvers require a roll of Strength + Brawl, minus the opponent's Strength.

- **Rendering an Opponent Prone:** The character bears his opponent to the ground (and gets a +2 bonus on any further attack rolls). Either side must get free to stand up. Getting up to your feet after this counts as your action in a turn.

- **Harming an Opponent:** Your character squeezes, kicks, butts, scratches or bites his opponent. Every suc-

SIZE AND GRAPPLING

Being small is something of a help, and something of a hindrance. When escaping a grapple from a larger opponent, a child's player adds one die for every point of difference between the character's Size trait and the opponent's.

On the other hand, a kid trying to hold on to someone bigger than he is loses one die from his pool for every point of difference between their Size ratings. Also, a larger character holding a smaller one gets a +1 to dice pools on maneuvers (see below) for every point of Size difference.

If a smaller person (a child) is grappled by a larger person (an adult), the kid can try to break free, but isn't allowed to turn the tables. A smaller person who grabs a larger one can't cause damage to that person, except by biting. To turn the tables, a character has to be the same Size or larger than his opponent.

cess on the roll counts as one point of bashing damage inflicted on the character's opponent.

- **Immobilizing an Opponent:** The character grabs his opponent, pinning his arms down, sitting on him, or twisting his arm, making it more or less impossible to move. Even one success stops the other character from doing anything other than trying to wriggle free. More than that, the opponent's Defense doesn't apply against any attacks from people other than the person holding him. The character keeping hold doesn't have to roll again in subsequent turns, until the other character breaks free, but he can't do anything other than maintain the hold. A player whose character tries to wriggle free from being immobilized rolls Strength + Brawl, minus the opponent's Strength, and has to get more successes than the character keeping hold did when he immobilized the character.

RANGED COMBAT

Kids don't often carry guns, and when they do, it rarely has a positive effect on them. You hear about kids in the most deprived urban areas being shot. You hear about child soldiers abducted from their families and forced to fight and kill across Africa and Asia.

Few of these kids have much hope of growing up well adjusted. These things are far outside our experience. A kid with a gun is a rare thing. All that said, children of families that shoot trap and skeet, hunt or are just interested in teaching their kids to know how to handle firearms might well grow up knowing how to shoot.

On the other hand, kids throw things all the time. Sometimes a well-aimed rock is the best chance a kid has.

RANGED ATTACKS

If the character is trying to hit someone by throwing something at them, the player rolls Dexterity + Athletics. If the character is using a gun, the player rolls Dexterity + Firearms.

A character who is being shot at uses Defense against thrown weapons, but *not* against bullets or arrows.

RANGE

How far away something is can really make a difference when it comes to shooting or throwing things at it. The Ranged Weapons Chart (see p. 148 below) lists the different ranges of different weapons. They're broken up into short, medium and long ranges.

- At *short* range, you can see the whites of their eyes. Attack rolls don't suffer any penalty.
- The upper limit of medium range is twice short range. Attack rolls suffer a -2 penalty.
- The upper limit of long range is twice medium range. Attack rolls suffer a -4 penalty. A character can attempt to shoot or throw further than the limit of long range, but loses his dice pool, only getting a chance roll.
- A character can't shoot or throw anything farther than twice long range.
- How far a character can throw things depends strongly on how aerodynamic the object is, and how strong and nimble the person throwing it is. A character can't use anything as a thrown weapon if it has a Size greater than his Strength + Size - 5, with a minimum of 1. A normal adult (Size 5) can't use anything with a Size greater than his Strength as a thrown weapon, but a kid can't throw anything with a Size greater than his Strength or Size, whichever is *lower*. So 12-year-old Chloe with her Size of 4 and Strength of 2 can't use anything with a Size greater than 1 as a thrown weapon. She can throw bigger stuff than that, but she can't hope to harm people with it. See Throwing on p. 59 for more detail on what kids can throw and how far.

BRINGING YOURSELF TO FIRE

The first time a character under the age of 12 fires a gun (or a bow) at another person, the player has to make a reflexive Resolve + Composure roll. If he fails, he shoots, but aims high or wide, meaning he's got no chance of hitting his opponent. The player has to roll again next time the character points a gun at someone, and has to keep doing so until he gets a success.

The character can only make an attack roll after the player has succeeded in this roll once. Once the player has made the roll successfully, he never needs to roll again. The character is considered to be hardened to shooting at people after this, which may create its own problems, as the character may have to deal with degeneration, or gaining triggers.

FREEZING UNDER FIRE

If shooting people is hard to do, bringing yourself to do something when you're being shot at is worse. Coming under fire is, for most people without experience of armed combat (and a lot of people with experience), absolutely terrifying. The natural thing to do is to panic, particularly if you're a kid.

The first time a character who's under about 12 finds herself shot at, the player must spend a point of Willpower to be able to do something. If she doesn't spend the point of Willpower (or can't, for whatever reason), the character freezes and can't do anything that turn, or until the start of a turn where the player spends a Willpower point. A frozen character doesn't lose her Defense trait against things thrown at her or people trying to hit her hand to hand.



Once the player has spent one point of Willpower, the character can act any way she wants for the rest of the scene.

The player must do this every time the character comes under fire, until she's spent a total number of Willpower points equal to 10 minus the character's Resolve. Once she's spent the requisite number of points of Willpower, she never need spend points again. Coming under fire is a good way for your character to get a trigger (see p. 83).

Example: *Charlie has a Resolve of 2. He needs to spend Willpower on eight (10 minus 2) separate occasions before he can really deal with being shot at.*

AIMING

Just because kids might not be able to bring themselves to shoot at someone doesn't mean they don't know how to aim. A kid who can aim a BB gun probably has a chance to aim a rifle or shotgun. Water bombs and rocks need to be aimed, as do baseballs and cricket balls.

A player can declare that his character is aiming at any time. For every full turn that a character spends aiming a firearm, bow, or thrown weapon (and doing nothing else), the player adds one die to the attack pool, to a maximum of three dice.

The player can elect to use his character's Defense, but if someone attacks the character before he gets off his shot, and he uses his Defense, the player loses the entire bonus.

AVOIDING GETTING SHOT

Assuming your character hasn't frozen up, any kid who's watched TV knows that the best way not to be shot is to get behind something, or get down on the ground.

CONCEALMENT

One of the best ways to avoid being shot is to get behind things. Kids do this better than anyone else, simply because they're small.

Getting behind cover offers four different levels of concealment, each of which makes it progressively harder to shoot a character. Concealment is different from hiding: when you're concealed, your opponent knows where you are — he just can't see you.

Obviously, close combat attacks aren't penalized by concealment, because if they're standing next to you and they know exactly where you are, they can see you.

- **Barely Concealed:** -1 (ducking behind something that only hides part of you)
- **Partly Concealed:** -2 (standing behind something that hides you from the waist down, for example)
- **Substantially Concealed:** -3 (sticking your head out from a hidey hole, for example)
- **Completely Covered:** the character can't be hit — all shots hit the cover (see below)

COVER

Cover is the stuff you're hiding behind. Again, it's only useful when it comes to shooting. If a character is completely concealed, her cover is what is shot.

Shots do their normal damage to cover (see p. 129 for object traits). If the shot deals more points of damage than the cover has points of Durability, the shot passes through the cover and hits the first person directly behind it. Then the object takes those extra points (damage dealt minus Durability) as Structure damage. Those points of Structure damage are then rolled as a new dice pool against the person behind the cover. When the object doesn't have any Structure points, it can't protect anyone.

GOING PRONE

When there's nothing to hide behind, all you can do is get down on the ground and hope they don't hit you. Getting down on the ground counts as your action for the turn, but a character can do it at any time in the turn, even before his place in the Initiative roster, as long as he hasn't already acted.

- **Ranged** attacks against someone lying prone suffer a -2 penalty.
- **Close combat** attacks against someone lying prone, on the other hand, get a +2 bonus, simply because it's easier to hit someone who's just lying there.

GENERAL COMBAT COMPLICATIONS

When violence is likely, things get crazy. Things get confusing. All sorts of things might happen. Here are a few guidelines for handling combat scenes.

MOVEMENT

Your character's Speed trait represents the number of yards he can cover in one turn without exerting himself unduly. A character can walk or jog a number of yards equal to his Speed trait and still perform his action that turn. He could move up to that distance and perform the action, or perform the action and move at the end of it. He can't move a bit, perform his action and then move again.

The character can use his action to break into a run, meaning he moves twice his Speed that turn. When you're running, you can't really do anything else.

SNEAKING UP FROM BEHIND

Sometimes it helps to be sneaky. Hitting someone over the head from behind is a good way to get an advantage. For a kid, it might be the only way.

The player of a character who's not expecting to be caught from behind or flanked (i.e., he's not expecting an attack, or doesn't know the attacking character is there) gets to roll Wits + Composure to realize what's coming. A character taking pains to be sneaky can get close without the victim noticing; in game terms, the roll becomes contested against the attacker's Dexterity + Stealth.

If the player doesn't make the roll, the character is caught completely by surprise (see Reaction to Surprise, p. 34) and doesn't get to use her Defense.

If she *does* get a success on the Wits + Composure roll, the player gets to roll Initiative and the character acts just as if it's any other combat.

The player gets to roll Wits + Composure even if the character is being shot at — maybe the character spots a gun barrel poking out of the bushes at the last minute, or just feels the prickling at the back of her neck that tells her she's being watched. The Storyteller should impose modifiers on this roll as appropriate.

FIGHTING BLIND

One of the most terrifying things anyone can face is being attacked by an enemy he cannot see, either because he is in pitch darkness, or because the thing he's facing is invisible. In the end, it's like shooting at someone who's completely concealed — you just have to shoot (or swing, in close combat) in the general direction.

The player nominates a direction she thinks the opponent is in, in relation to her character, and the Storyteller makes a secret chance roll for the character as the attack roll, applying damage based on any 10s he rolls, and narrating the results. A 1 still counts as a dramatic failure, and it's up to the Storyteller what the consequences of that might be. If it's dark, it might mean the character falls on her face, or hurts herself hitting a wall, or walks into a door. If she's facing an invisible foe, it could mean misjudging the blow and dropping her baseball bat as it fails to connect with anything but air.

LISTENING AND SMELLING

Seeing the monster hiding inside your closet or under your bed is the last thing you want. But you can hear it, as you lie in bed. You can hear its scratching against the door, its heavy breathing as it approaches. You can smell it, smell its foul breath as it pollutes the air of the room, the smell of rain on its wet fur.

- **Listening:** A character can listen for an opponent. The Storyteller makes a Wits + Composure roll for the player, and keeps the result secret. The Storyteller tells the player if he hears anything. If the person or thing the character's listening for is making a lot of noise (a heavy man walking on dry twigs, maybe, or a werewolf breathing heavily, or a woman wearing high heels on a hard surface), the Storyteller can choose to give a +1 to +3 bonus to the roll. On the other hand, if the person or thing being listened for is very quiet, the Storyteller can penalize the roll by the same amount, or make it a contested action against the opponent's Dexterity + Stealth.

- **Smelling:** Kids are good at catching smells. If something has a strong smell, a kid can probably know it's coming. Monsters often smell bad — it's one of their defining characteristics. Some adults wear too much cologne or perfume. And some adults — the old tramp who sleeps in the abandoned mill, the fat, unwashed man who hangs around the comic shop — just stink. A kid gets a chance to notice someone like that coming. The Storyteller makes a Wits + Composure roll and lets the player know if he succeeds. The kid only gets to know the exact direction the smell is coming from if the roll is an exceptional success.

- **Tracking by Scent:** Dogs, wolves and other animals and supernatural beings with heightened sense of smell can track down most people by scent. They can take actions to

track persons or animals down by scent. It works like listening: the Storyteller makes a Composure + Survival roll for the animal or monster and applies bonuses or penalties of +1 to +3, depending on how badly the opponent smells and whether or not there are other strong scents in the area (a paper mill or a sewage plant in the area, for example, is going to smell so bad that other smells are hard to pick out, so it'll probably mean a -4 or -5 penalty to the roll).

OTHER COMPLICATIONS

- **Drawing a Weapon or Item:** If a character has a weapon or useful object somewhere on his person — in a pocket, stuck in a belt loop, or even in a holster — he can draw it and use it in the same turn. Unless the character has the Quick Draw Merit, though (see p. 105), he loses his Defense for the turn. If he wants to draw the object and take no other action, he retains his Defense for the turn.

- **Wound Types:** Some weapons do one kind of damage against one opponent, and another kind of damage against another. The classic example is the silver bullet, which does lethal damage against an ordinary human, but aggravated damage against a werewolf.

- **Knocking Someone Out:** A character can knock someone out if the player makes an attack to the head (with a -4 penalty on the attack pool), and the damage done exceeds the opponent's Stamina. The victim's player rolls Stamina. If he succeeds, he reels a bit, but doesn't suffer any penalties beyond taking the damage and feeling the pain. If he fails, the victim falls unconscious for a number of turns equal to the damage the victim suffered. Note that this effect is more drastic than a simple stun (see p. 153), and works on adults as well as children.

- **Knocking Someone Down:** Sometimes weapons or supernatural powers can knock a character off his feet. The player of a character who is in danger of being knocked down rolls Dexterity + Athletics as a reflexive action. If she succeeds, the character stays on her feet and doesn't suffer any ill effect. If she fails, the character is knocked prone, with all that entails (see Going Prone, p. 146 above). It takes an action to get up.

- **Specified Targets:** Characters can call their shots, but it's not easy. A kid with a slingshot might try to put a stone in someone's eye. In a fistfight, a character might try to punch his opponent in the nose. No matter what the circumstance, attacking a specified target applies a negative modifier to the attack roll. How much of one depends on the size of the target. In general, aiming for a torso or something of roughly equivalent size (say, a fire extinguisher) applies a -1 penalty. Hitting an arm or a leg might apply a -3 penalty, and hitting someone in the head applies a -4 penalty. Something even smaller — shooting at an eye or a mouth — puts the penalty up to -5. If the target is brightly colored in relation to the rest of the backdrop, the Storyteller might reduce the penalty slightly.

If the attack roll fails, the attack misses. If it succeeds, the Storyteller needs to decide what happens. If, for example, a character aims his wrist rocket at an opponent's hand to make him drop his gun, the Storyteller might

Ranged Weapons Chart

Type	Damage	Ranges	Clip	Strength	Size	Example
BB Gun (rifle)	1(B)**	10/20/40	300	1	2	Red Ryder Air Rifle
Handgun	2 (L)	20/40/80	7+1	3	1	Glock
Hard Ball	1(B)	varies	n/a	n/a	1	Cricket ball
Rifle†	5 (L)	200/400/800	5+1	2	4	30.06 rifle
Shotgun†	4 (L)*	20/40/80	5+1	4	2	12-Gauge
Rock	1-2 (B)	varies	n/a	n/a	1	Large pebble

give the opponent a reflexive Dexterity + Athletics roll (perhaps penalized by the shooter's successes) to hold on to it. If the character was using a real gun and called his shot at an opponent's head (not, unfortunately, an impossible occurrence for a child), the damage inflicted might be aggravated instead of lethal.

- **Stunning:** If a child takes damage from a single attack equal to or greater than her Stamina rating, she may be stunned. See p. 153 for details.

WEAPONS

Kids don't often use weapons, or at least they don't tend to use the kind of weapons that adults use. Still, even so, that baseball bat or fist-sized rock may be all that stands between the kid and a terrible fate.

For the purposes of the game, we class weapons as *melee* and *ranged*.

Many weapons require a character to have a certain number of dots in Strength before he can use them. If the character's Strength is too low to use the weapon effectively, the player suffers a -1 on dice pools when the character tries to use it.

Damage: Indicates the number of bonus dice added to your dice pool for using the weapon. Firearms deliver lethal damage against ordinary people. Thrown rocks cause

bashing damage. The type of damage sometimes varies against supernatural enemies, such as vampires, who suffer only bashing damage from conventional firearms.

Ranges: The numbers are short/medium/long ranges in yards. Attacks at medium and long range suffer a -2 and -4 penalty, respectively. The range of thrown weapons depends on the shape of the object, and the Strength and Dexterity of the character throwing it (see p. 59).

Clip: The number of shells a gun can hold — a "+1" indicates a bullet can be held in the chamber, ready to fire.

Strength: The minimum Strength needed to use a weapon effectively. A wielder with a lower Strength suffers a -1 penalty on attack rolls.

Size: 1 = Can be hidden in a jacket (child) or in hand (adult); 2 = Cannot be hidden (child) or can be hidden in coat (adult); 3 = Cannot be hidden on one's person

† This weapon requires two hands. If used one handed, the Strength requirement increases by one. A child needs a Strength of 5 to wield a shotgun one handed without penalty, for example.

* 9 again on attack dice pools.

** This weapon inflicts a maximum of one point of bashing damage. If the shooter aims for an eye (see Specified Targets, p. 147), he can temporarily blind someone.

Melee Weapons Chart

Type	Damage	Size	Strength
Baseball Bat	2 (B)	2	1
Cricket Bat†	2 (B)*	3	2
Hammer	1 (L)	1	n/a
Knife	1 (L)	1	n/a
Pocket Knife	0 (L)	1	n/a
Stake**	1 (L)	1	n/a
Wood Ax	2 (L)	1	1

Type: Your character may use many other types of weapons. Use the traits from the above lists that best approximate those weapons. See p. 130 for determining the traits of improvised weapons. Note that most improvised weapons suffer a -1 penalty.

Damage: The number of bonus dice added to dice pools when using the weapon. The type of damage inflicted is also indicated: aggravated (A), lethal (L) or bashing (B).

Size: 1 = Can be hidden in a jacket (child) or in hand (adult); 2 = Cannot be hidden (child) or can be hidden in coat (adult); 3+ = Cannot be hidden.

Strength: The minimum Strength needed to wield the weapon. A wielder with a lower Strength suffers a -1 penalty on attack rolls.

† This weapon needs two hands. If used one handed, the Strength requirement increases by one. You need a Strength of 3 to wield a cricket bat one handed without penalty.

* 9-Again on attack dice pools.

** To put a stake through the heart of a vampire, an attacker must target the heart. The efforts to stake a resisting vampire are at a -5 dice penalty, and an exceptional success must be scored to strike all the way to the heart. If an ordinary success is achieved, damage is inflicted, but not enough in the proper spot to have any special effect on the target.

Combat Summary Chart

Stage One: Initiative

• **Everyone rolls Initiative:** The result of a die roll + Dexterity + Composure. The character with the highest Initiative performs her action first. Or you may hold your character's action until later in the Initiative queue, or into the next turn.

Stage Two: Attack

• **Unarmed close combat:** Strength + Brawl, minus target's Defense and armor

• **Armed close combat:** Strength + Weaponry, minus target's Defense and armor

• **Ranged combat (guns and bows):** Dexterity + Firearms, minus target's armor

• **Ranged combat (thrown weapons):** Dexterity + Athletics, minus target's Defense and Armor.

Add bonus dice based on weapon used or effect performed, and then subtract penalties for circumstance conditions. Roll your remaining pool. Each success equates to a Health point of damage inflicted, the type of which is determined by the nature of the attack.

The Storyteller describes the attack and wound in narrative terms.

Possible Modifiers

• **Aiming:** +1 per turn to a +3 maximum

• **All-Out Attack:** +2 with Brawl or Weaponry attack; lose Defense

• **Children vs. Adults:** Child suffers a penalty equal to adult's Stamina

• **Concealment:** Barely -1; partially -2; substantially -3; fully, see "Cover"

• **All-Out Dodge:** Uses one action. Double target's Defense and then add one for every point the character's Size trait is lower than 5.

• **Running for It:** Uses one action. Roll Dexterity + Wits vs. Wits + Composure; successes equal head start on successes needed for foot chase.

• **Ducking out of Sight:** Uses one action. Roll Wits + Stealth vs. Wits + Composure; if successful, character hides from opponent (see Hiding, p. 65).

• **Offhand Attack:** -2 penalty

• **Prone Target:** -2 penalty to hit in ranged combat; +2 bonus to hit in close combat

• **Range:** -2 at medium range, -4 at long range

• **Specified Target:** -1 to -5, depending on how small the target is

• **Surprised or Immobilized Target:** Defense doesn't apply, or attacker can inflict damage equal to unmodified dice pool (for completely helpless target)

• **Willpower:** Add three dice or +2 to a Resistance trait (Stamina, Resolve, Composure or Defense) in one roll or instance; only one Willpower point may be spent in a turn

HEALTH

It's a fact of life that kids get hurt. It's really no surprise, given all the crazy things they get up to: riding bikes over makeshift ramps, skateboarding down the steepest hills they can find, playing sports (organized or playground) and running from real or imagined trouble. Your character's Health trait provides a system of accounting for all of her bumps and scrapes — and also for injuries requiring more serious care than a mother's kiss.

Chapter Four shows you how to calculate your character's Health trait: Stamina + Size. The bigger and sturdier your character is, the easier it is for her to take some knocks and stay standing. The average child has 6 Health: 4 Size plus 2 Stamina.

Your character sheet has a Health chart of dots and boxes for recording your character's permanent Health trait and your temporary Health points. The permanent Health trait is shown by the dots; fill in a number equal to the value of the Health trait from left to right. Temporary Health points are represented by the boxes. When your character is hurt, you fill in these boxes, also from left to right. When no boxes are marked, your character is in perfect health. If he falls off his bike in somewhat dramatic fashion, the Storyteller may rule he takes one point of damage.

That damage is marked in the leftmost box. Leave it to the school bully to kick a kid when he's down — one success on the bully's attack roll inflicts another point of damage on your character, marked in the second box on the left. A sideswipe by a careless driver on the bike ride home would leave your character gravely wounded, filling in boxes three, four or maybe even more.

It's hard to function when you're hurt. Pain, or even just discomfort, is a distraction. When you're seriously hurt, your body may no longer even be capable of doing what you ask it to. Your character takes penalties on die rolls, depending on just how hurt he is. Because your temporary Health points are marked off left to right, the boxes on the right represent more serious injuries. Count back from the rightmost box to figure out what injury penalties your character suffers. It helps to note the penalties beneath the appropriate boxes on your character sheet for reference, once you've figured it out.

Health Boxes Marked	Penalty
Fifth-to-last	-1
Fourth-to-last	No 10-Again
Third-to-last	-2
Second-to-last	No Heroic Effort
Last	-3

The negative numbers are dice penalties; subtract that number of dice from your dice pool for every action your character takes. This penalty does not apply to Stamina rolls to remain conscious (see "Incapacitation," below), but it does apply to Initiative rolls.

The "No 10-Again" entry means you no longer re-roll dice that come up 10 for your character's actions. At this level of injury, your rolls are no longer open ended. An exception to this rule, however: certain weapons (like shotguns) bestow 9-Again on the attack rolls. It doesn't matter how injured a character is — if he can still lift and fire the shotgun, he still gets 9-Again. Unless a special effect is in play, though, a character at this level of injury doesn't get 10-Again.

The "No Heroic Effort" entry means that you can no longer spend a Willpower point for three bonus dice to an action. Your character is too wounded to tap into his reserves for that extra effort — his reserves are empty. You may still spend a Willpower point to bolster your Defense or a Resistance trait for a turn, however.

The dice penalties noted above (-1, -2, -3) are not cumulative. Apply only the highest penalty to your character; do not add them together. The "No 10-Again" and

FOUR DOTS OF HEALTH

It is possible for an **Innocents** character to have Health 4, though it requires a specific set of circumstances (Stamina 1 and the Tiny Merit, described on p. 105, which reduces the Size trait to 3). In this instance, the character doesn't suffer a wound penalty just for being small and somewhat puny. The character takes no penalty at full Health (no boxes marked), but as soon as the first box has a wound of any type, the character suffers both the -1 penalty and the loss of 10-Again.

"No Heroic Effort" penalties are levied in addition to the dice penalties, and to each other. For example, if your character has an injury recorded in his fifth-to-last box, he subtracts -1 die from all of his actions. If your character takes another single Health point in damage, he notes it in the fourth-to-last box. Now his rolls suffer the combined penalty of -1 die and "No 10-Again." Should he take two more damage, he is in dire straits: his dice penalty is -2, he no longer re-rolls 10s, and he may no longer spend Willpower for bonus dice.

The dice penalties listed above for wounds also affect your character's Speed, reducing his Speed trait by the highest modifier listed. Wound penalties do not affect your Defense or Resistance traits (Stamina, Resolve or Composure) when these traits are subtracted from an opponent's dice pool.

APPLYING DAMAGE

Three different types of damage can be inflicted: bashing, lethal and aggravated. Bashing damage is caused by blunt force injury, including punches, kicks, baseball bats and bowling balls. Lethal damage is caused when skin and flesh are cut or pierced as by knives or bullets, or by fire. Aggravated damage is not caused directly by any natural source, but anyone can suffer from aggravated damage when bashing or lethal wounds accumulate to the point of unconsciousness, coma or even death.

All three types of damage are cumulative and tracked together on your character's Health chart. The total of all types of injuries determines your character's current Health points. Specifics on each type of damage are given below.

Lethal damage is, as the name suggests, potentially lethal to your character. Death does not come immediately, however. When a normal human's Health chart is completely filled with lethal damage, she is gravely injured and unconscious (possibly even in a coma). She is also bleeding to death (see "Incapacitation," below). Any new injuries that occur upgrade lethal damage to aggravated damage (Xs to *s). When all of her Health boxes are filled with asterisks, the character is dead, and beyond any hope of medical intervention.

When your character is unlucky enough to suffer a mix of bashing, lethal and/or aggravated damage, mark the most severe injuries in the boxes on the left side of his Health chart. Less severe damage is pushed to the right.

For example, the first point of bashing damage your character suffers is marked in the leftmost box of the Health chart with a “/”. He then suffers a lethal wound; the lethal wound is marked in the leftmost box on his Health chart with an “X”, and the bashing wound is pushed to the next box on the right. Any future bashing damage is recorded in the third box and continues to the right. Future lethal wounds again go on the left and push all bashing wounds to the right.

Aggravated damage works the same way. Your character, as above, has one lethal wound recorded (an “X” in his first box) and one bashing wound (a “/” in the second box). He then takes a horrible, eldritch wound — aggravated damage. This is the most severe injury he has suffered, and so goes in the leftmost box (marked as a “*”). The lethal wound moves to the second box, and the bashing wound to the third. If your character doesn’t skedaddle, and fast, he may find himself with more aggravated wounds (which again are recorded on the left of the chart, pushing lethal and bashing wounds to the right).

The first rule of tracking your character’s Health: *a more severe wound always “pushes” a less severe wound to the right.* Wounds that are “pushed off” the right edge of the Health chart as a result are ignored. The second rule covers increasing wound severity: *once all the boxes on your character’s Health chart are filled and there are no less severe wounds to push to the right, any new injury upgrades the least severe wound he already has, from left to right on the chart.*

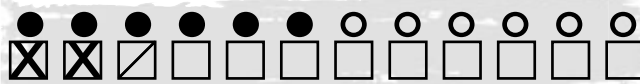
The system for tracking your character’s Health may seem complicated at first, but it is both easy and helpful once you get used to it. The least severe injuries are always the first to heal — and since they have all been pushed to the right of your chart, it is simple to erase them as your character heals (and hopefully is no longer suffering from wound penalties). The system also makes tracking temporary Health dots, should your character be lucky enough to benefit from such an effect, easy as well (see the “Temporary Health Dots” sidebar).

Here’s a painful-sounding example of the Health system at work: Tim’s character, Cooper, has 6 Health (which is average for a child). Cooper is off the baseball team for a time, due to a long gash on his leg that is still healing, but his mother has allowed him to go to the park to watch his team play. With two points of lethal damage, Cooper’s Health chart looks like this:

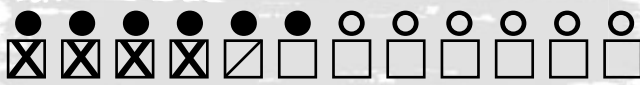


Cooper got a ride with a friend to the park, but after the game, his friend forgets him and Cooper is left stranded at the park. He begins the slightly painful walk home. Several blocks from the park, Cooper is confronted by a vicious dog. Tim makes an Athletics roll to run away, but Cooper is hampered by his wounded leg (he is currently impaired by a -1 wound penalty). The dog catches him and knocks him down; Cooper suffers one point of

bashing damage as he hits the ground. Tim records this on Cooper’s Health chart, to the right of the lethal wounds.



Cooper calls out for help and tries to get away from the dog. He cannot budge the dog, but his cries are heard. Before assistance arrives, however, the dog mauls him savagely, causing two more points of lethal damage. Tim records these wounds next to Cooper’s existing lethal damage (on the left), bumping Cooper’s bashing damage to his next-to-last box. Cooper is now in very bad shape (he’s saddled with a -2 penalty on all actions, and he cannot roll 10-Again or spend Willpower for a heroic effort).



A stranger arrives on the scene to pull the dog off Cooper. The boy takes the opportunity to hobble as far from the dog as he can, into the dubious safety of a nearby alley. In the alley, a large puddle of foul-smelling ooze blocks Cooper’s path. The stench warns him not to touch the puddle, but even as he looks for a safe way around, more of the viscous glop falls on Cooper from the fire escape above. It burns with a pain Cooper has never felt before (and this poor kid has had more than his fair share of injuries). Cooper has suffered a point of aggravated damage. Tim shifts all of the lethal- and bashing-marked boxes on the Health chart one space to the right, and puts an asterisk in the leftmost box.



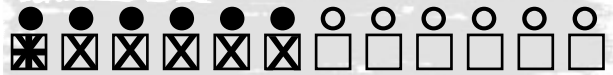
Cooper is now reeling, barely able to keep on his feet. Tim must make a Stamina roll (at no penalty) for Cooper every turn to see if he remains conscious. Cooper is able to drag himself out of the alley to collapse on the sidewalk. Now unconscious, Cooper will remain out until his single bashing wound, in the rightmost box, heals. He’s badly hurt, but alive. His parents will probably take him to the emergency room, where he will be seen by a doctor, treated and released with strict orders to convalesce at home. At the most, he might be kept a day or two for observation.

But Cooper’s terrible day isn’t over yet. Behind him in the alley, the puddle of ooze begins to move under its own power, reaching out pseudopods of ichor toward the unconscious boy. Tim can only hope that help reaches his injured character in time. Even one more point of aggravated damage would leave Cooper’s Health chart looking like this:





But even a single point of bashing damage would do Cooper in at this point. Because his chart is full, the point of bashing damage would upgrade his least severe wound (his single bashing wound) to lethal, like this:



In both cases, Cooper would be only minutes from death. Immediate medical aid would be required to save his life, and even after that, he would spend days in the hospital before he is allowed to go home. Tim crosses his fingers and hopes for the best for his character.

TEMPORARY HEALTH DOTS

It is possible that your character might gain extra, temporary dots of Health through some unlikely means. Any strange effect that increases your character's Size or Stamina also increases her Health total, or the effect may instead affect your character's Health independently of any other trait. These extra Health dots are added to the right side of your character's Health chart (remember to temporarily adjust any wound penalty notations you have as well).

Having extra Health dots is great — but what happens when you lose them? Any wounds your character has accumulated in those extra boxes don't disappear when the beneficial Health-granting effect ends. First, erase the bonus Health dots (and readjust your wound penalty notations). Any wounds that were carried in the bonus boxes provided by temporary Health now upgrade your character's least-severe wounds, from left to right.

Example: Alice (Health 5) finds a strange little cake that says "Eat Me," eats it, and goes up 2 Size levels. This gives her 2 bonus Health dots, for a temporary total of 7. During a prolonged scuffle with a vicious cat, she fills in three of her Health boxes with lethal wounds, and three with bashing wounds. As the cake's weird effect wears off, Alice finds herself in a very tenuous position: with her two bonus Health lost, the bashing wound in her sixth Health box now worsens the severity of the bashing wound in her fourth Health box, turning it lethal. Also, since Alice now

MARKING HEALTH

All injuries suffered by your character are recorded on your character sheet by filling in the boxes of her Health chart. Bashing wounds are marked with a "/", lethal wounds are marked with an "X", and aggravated wounds are marked with "***". As injuries of greater severity are suffered, lesser wounds shift right. Don't bother to erase your marks; transform a bashing wound into a lethal wound by drawing a "\" to create an "X", and add a "+" to your "X" to create a "***".

When your character gets a chance to rest and heal, you'll finally get to erase those marks.

has a bashing wound noted in her last Health box, she is in danger of falling unconscious (see “Incapacitation,” below).

INCAPACITATION

When all of a character’s Health boxes have been marked with any type of damage, and she has a bashing wound in her rightmost, final box, she may become incapacitated. Make a reflexive Stamina roll each turn to allow the character to remain conscious. This roll should be made before the character takes any action for the turn, and it does not suffer the -3 wound penalty. If the character receives that last bashing wound after her action for the turn, make the first Stamina roll before her action in the next turn.

Failure means the character falls unconscious and can no longer act. Success means that the character remains in control of her faculties and can act in that turn. Her actions are hampered, however, by her -3 wound penalty.

These Stamina rolls continue, once every turn, until the character falls unconscious or heals the bashing wound assigned to her last Health point. If she takes enough damage while struggling on to worsen that bashing injury to a lethal one, she succumbs to unconsciousness, and worse, is bleeding to death (see below).

A character who lapses into unconsciousness after failing a Stamina roll stays out cold until she heals at least one point of bashing damage (emptying that rightmost box — see “Healing,” below).

A fight that lasts until one of the combatants is down for the count is a brutal, dangerous affair — especially when at least one of the combatants is a child. Adding bladed weapons like knives to the mix only makes things bloodier faster. When all of a character’s Health boxes have been marked with lethal, he is unconscious — possibly even in a coma — and has only minutes to live without some kind of medical attention. Each minute that passes without medical intervention, the character suffers one more injury. This upgrades the leftmost lethal wound on the Health chart to an aggravated wound. Once aggravated wounds are assigned to all of the character’s Health points, he is dead, beyond any hope of resuscitation. (See Medicine in Chapter Three for more information on administering first aid.)

Successful medical attention, in the nick of time, can save the character’s life. Perhaps an ambulance arrives, or a bystander well versed in first aid stops the bleeding — or some unexplainable supernatural effect closes his wounds. Once the character’s condition is stabilized, he stops taking damage. He is still unconscious for quite some time and requires round-the-clock care, hopefully in a hospital, until the wound noted in his rightmost Health box is healed.

STUNNING

The sudden shock of pain can be enough to overwhelm a person — especially a child. Careful plans, immediate danger and maybe even bone-chilling fear are pushed aside by nerves firing in agonizing unison. After suffering a significant injury, the combination of pain and physical trauma may leave a character stunned.

If a single attack inflicts an amount of damage greater than or equal to the character’s Stamina, the character may be stunned. If the damage caused by the attack is equal to the character’s Stamina, make a reflexive Resolve roll (wound penalties do not apply). If the roll succeeds, the character keeps her focus and is able to act normally. If the damage is greater than the character’s Stamina, no roll is allowed — the character is automatically stunned.

A stunned character loses her next action and her Defense for the remainder of the turn. (If she has already acted in a turn, she loses her action for the next turn, but her Defense returns at the end of current turn.) She may not move up to her Speed while stunned, though she might be able to stagger a few feet.

The Hard Head Merit mitigates the stun rule somewhat (see p. 105).

HEALING

When the dust has cleared and the fight is over, undoubtedly characters will be left with some painful souvenirs of their scuffles. Injuries, from the lightest bruise to the deepest gash or shattered bone, require time to heal. If a character has not been knocked unconscious by bashing damage or incapacitated by lethal damage, he is alert and able to act even in his wounded state.

Wounds heal at the following rates:

Bashing: One point is regained in 15 minutes.

Lethal: One point is regained in two days.

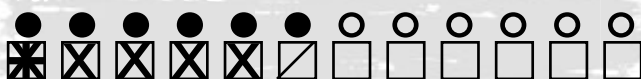
Aggravated: One point is regained in a week.

These are the healing rates for normal humans. The supernatural creatures lurking in the shadows have their own methods of dealing with injuries. Some of them simply heal with unlikely speed, while others will their wounds to close with a thought.

Your character does not need to rest or receive medical treatment to heal at the rates above (though a parent is quite likely to send an injured child to bed, the doctor’s office, or the hospital, depending on the severity of the injury). The Health point is automatically regained after the amount of time listed above passes. If the character has been incapacitated, ongoing medical care is required (see “Incapacitation” above). Ongoing care in a hospital also speeds up the healing process by reducing the severity of wounds, even for characters who are not in immediate danger of dying (see p. 53 for the Skill’s effect on healing times).

Recording healing (in other words, removing wounds) on a character’s Health chart moves right to left, the opposite of recording wounds as discussed above. Your character’s least severe injury, recorded in the rightmost box, heals first; after the allotted time, erase it. Keep erasing to the left as the character heals. When all the boxes are empty, the character is once again fit as a fiddle.

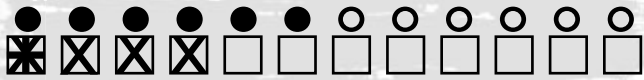
For example: Cooper is loaded onto an ambulance before the noxious ooze reaches him. His Health chart looks like this:



His least severe injury, the single point of bashing damage, heals in 15 minutes. Cooper wakes up in the emergency room. Tim erases the “/” from Cooper’s Health chart.



Because their family is uninsured, Cooper’s mother takes him home to mend up, against the doctor’s recommendation. After two days, some of the minor bites and scratches inflicted by the dog have healed. Tim erases the rightmost lethal wound from Cooper’s chart.



Each remaining “X” will require another two days to heal: six days in total. Then the aggravated wound — an injury that baffled the doctors — can finally start to improve. A week later, just over two weeks after his encounter with the dog and the slime, Cooper will be just fine. If he can stay out of trouble.

OPTIONAL SYSTEM: CASTS AND STITCHES

These are the badges of childhood bravery: bright fiberglass casts with names scrawled in marker all over them, and crisscrossing lines of puckered skin and thread to show to grossed-out but admiring classmates. But a point of bashing damage (from blunt force trauma, which would be the likely cause of a broken bone) heals in 15 minutes, and a lethal wound (a good reason to want stitches) in four days. How do healing times and long-term damage work together?

Stitches actually work pretty well within the healing time framework. A child who gets stitches typically needs to keep them in for three to 14 days, depending on the location or severity of the wound. So an injury that resulted from two points of lethal damage would normally take four days to heal, within that time frame. Smaller, one-point cuts and scratches probably wouldn’t be stitched at all, unless they were on the face or a body part that sees a lot of movement, like a hand or shoulder. Stitches do not cause any kind of penalty to physical actions (though they may impose a penalty on certain social interactions). As the wound itself slowly heals, the penalties it imposed decrease. And when the wound is gone, the stitches (or staples, or skin glue) are removed or absorbed and life goes back to normal.

Broken bones are a sticky wicket. Obviously, a broken bone takes longer than half an hour or so to heal. It will take three to eight weeks — and that’s for a child, whose bones are still growing and therefore faster to heal. It is easiest to consider a broken bone to be the lingering sign of a serious bashing injury — after all, the black eye caused by a punch to the face doesn’t fade after 15 minutes, either. Luckily, bruises are a far more common result of a bashing-type injury than a broken bone.

A significant bashing injury that is the result of a single attack (or other source of damage, like a fall) is most likely to result in a broken bone. Repeated, minimally damaging punches or kicks can wear a victim down quickly, but she is unlikely to remain seriously hurt after a day to recover. If that single source inflicts more points of bashing damage than the victim’s Stamina, there is a 50% chance that a bone will break (flip a handy coin, or roll a die and call evens or odds). If the victim is unfortunate enough to have filled her Health chart with bashing damage and begins upgrading her boxes to lethal wounds, there is certainly a broken bone involved somewhere, with sharp fragments cutting into blood vessels, muscle tissue and skin.

When the fighting stops and the healing starts, the wound penalties from the bashing damage disappear as normal — as long as the broken bone is set and put in a cast by a doctor, or at least splinted by someone with some first aid training (that is, dots in the Medicine Skill). The broken bone, and the cast or other device associated with it, continues to apply a penalty for as long as it takes the bone to heal. A broken arm, shoulder, wrist or hand applies a -1 penalty to all actions that require manual dexterity from both hands (single-handed tasks can be done without penalty, unless the off-hand penalty applies; see p. 143). A broken leg, ankle or foot causes a -1 penalty to all gross-motor actions, and the character’s Speed is halved. A broken bone that doesn’t bear weight should heal in three to four weeks. A weight-bearing bone heals in six to eight weeks. Bones other than these can break, of course, like the ribs, pelvis or skull; in the case of these injuries, a child character should be made to lie down by an adult until it is safe for them to get up and play.

This optional system is a bit complicated: it introduces even more record keeping into tracking your character’s Health, and it imposes more penalties on wounded characters. More attention needs to be paid to combats that occur. It is sufficient to say, “The attacker gets three successes on his roll; take three boxes of bashing damage.” The fight scene requires more detail: “The creepy grownup shoves your character with both hands, and you stumble back and whack your right shoulder hard on the door frame. Take three boxes of bashing damage; your character’s right arm might be broken.”

The Storyteller and players have to cooperate to make the system work. Players should never feel that their characters are being unfairly “punished” by lingering injuries. At the same time, everyone playing should recognize that, even with their fast-healing bones and bounce-back-to-play natures, children are fragile and do not walk away from serious physical confrontations unscathed.

At the Storyteller’s discretion, one way to make this optional system a bit more palatable to the players is to allow a character with a broken bone to take a temporary Flaw (see p. 94). The broken bone has the potential to grant the character extra experience until it heals, at which point the Flaw is erased from the character sheet.

DEPRIVATION

Children go hungry and thirsty all over the World of Darkness (and, unfortunately, in our world as well). Not all of them look like fundraising pictures from international children's groups, from countries ripped apart by wars and famines. Some of them live in cities where the rich dine on imported delicacies and stores full of food are lit with floodlights 24 hours a day. Others live in small communities where everyone feels the pinch of factory closings, with jobs and money vanishing. Still other children find themselves temporarily deprived — a child lost deep in the woods on an ill-planned camping trip, or locked in a cage by a sadistic parent and fed only stale bread and dirty water. Whatever the cause of the deprivation, the effects on a child's growing body are terrible and, in some cases, even permanent.

An adult can go for several days without water, and even longer without food. Children are more susceptible to the lack of water and food, both mentally and physically. After 24 hours without water, or without food, a child character suffers a -1 penalty on all actions. If the character is without both food and water, the penalty is -2. This penalty is not a physical one, at first, but psychological. Even a few tiny morsels of food and sips of water are enough to convince the child that she is not, at this very moment, starving to death.

Actual physical damage starts to accrue at a slightly later time, when the child goes a number of days greater than her Stamina without water. She suffers one point of bashing damage that day, and an additional point of damage for each day that passes. The child begins failing for lack of food after a number of days equal to her Stamina + Resolve, likewise at a rate of one point of bashing damage per day. If the child goes without both food and water (once past both Stamina thresholds), she will take two bashing wounds each day. She quickly begins to suffer a wound penalty to her actions. Apply only the greater penalty caused either by the psychological distraction of deprivation (a maximum of -2, above) or physical damage. The hurtful reality of the child's situation quickly eclipses her worries and fears about going hungry.

As days pass without food and water, the child's immune system becomes weak at the same rate as the rest of her body. Any rolls made to resist disease suffer normal wound penalties when the character has taken any damage from deprivation. The Storyteller might also call for rolls to fight off disease or infection where he would not have done so if the character were properly nourished.

The Survival Skill (see Chapter Three) allows your character to forage for food and water (for herself and any companions). The Iron Stomach Merit (see Chapter Five) also helps characters pull through by allowing them to eat (and actually digest) things that are not normally people food, and to drink not terribly clean water without becoming sick.

The Health points lost to deprivation cannot be healed until a steady supply of food and water is available

to the ailing character. As a guideline for the Storyteller, the character should consume three full meals and a liter of water in one day of rest before beginning to heal. She may heal even faster if she is receiving IV fluids and nutrients in a medical facility. If the character has lost Health points due to a lack of both food and water, then finds a suitable water source, she can heal only the damage caused by lack of water. The lack of food continues to cause one Health point of damage a day until food is found. Using the Survival Skill to find food and water for one day doesn't constitute a "steady supply." It only suspends the loss of Health for those days, after which the character needs to forage again or start taking damage once more.

Continually going without adequate food and water is an especially serious problem for children. A child needs to do more than simply stay alive — a child is supposed to be growing and learning. Chronic hunger and malnutrition can cause physical problems for a child, stunting her growth or even completely stopping it at the size appropriate to a much younger child. Her mental development is threatened as well, since her brain also suffers from the lack of nutrition. In the long term, mental retardation can result. Polluted water is a constant danger to children. Water contaminated with disease can easily kill a child already weakened by hunger. It is unlikely that a child character in a roleplaying game will ever face the worst of these consequences, but it is possible that a child who was confined or abused for an extended period of time could suffer some long-term deprivation effects. This might be a justification for certain Flaws, triggers, or just low ratings in a given set of Attributes.

DISEASE

Disease is a scary thing to a child. One day you're having a grand time out splashing in puddles, until your feet get wet, or somebody sneezes on you, and then you die. Of course, this is not the usual course of events, but to a young child, it all makes about that much sense. An older child may have a slightly more advanced understanding of germ theory, but even so, all a kid can do is grin, bear the shots and hope for the best.

In the World of Darkness, new and exotic diseases do crawl out of their third-world breeding grounds to hitch rides on the coattails of unsuspecting airline passengers, who then infect the citizens of a whole handful of countries simultaneously. Reliably deadly favorites like AIDS fester in urban centers. Chronic killers like cancer stalk grandparents, seemingly tearing them apart from the inside before horrified grandchildren's eyes. The abject terror of catching something deadly keeps people from helping a bleeding stranger in the street. Even more so than in the real world, incurable disease is a metaphor for an imagined moral failing, sin written large in the flesh. In an atmosphere like this, a child may dread coming down with a cough, fearing that he will be shunned or even die.

Most children (in developed countries) are actually relatively protected from disease. Their required vaccinations against the most common childhood killers are recent, and



many other diseases prey mostly on older populations. If a child character is exposed to something catching, his player can make a reflexive Stamina roll to avoid him contracting the disease (see Chapter Two, p. 40, for a full explanation of the roll and modifiers). The Natural Immunity Merit provides a +2 modifier on rolls to resist disease (see Chapter Five). The roll to resist infection with a disease does not suffer wound penalties unless the exposed character is suffering from deprivation (see above), or the disease vector is the injury (like a bite from a rabid dog).

If a child contracts a disease, he may take damage over time. The Storyteller should decide in advance how quickly the disease acts: does it potentially inflict damage every hour, every day, every week, or even as slowly as every month? A fast-acting infection like bacterial meningitis can kill a child in 24 hours, so it probably has the potential to inflict damage every hour. A slow-moving cancer could progress and cause damage only every month. The Storyteller should also decide how much potential damage the disease causes each time period, whether that damage is bashing or lethal (bashing is more common), and any virulence penalties it imposes on rolls to resist it.

Each time the disease progresses, the infected character may make a reflexive Stamina roll to resist. Virulence imposes penalties as above, while medical care or medications provide positive modifiers. Wound penalties do not apply to this roll unless the afflicted character is suffering from deprivation (even if the disease was contracted through an injury, that penalty no longer applies). Any successes on the roll subtract from the damage caused by the disease in that time period. If the successes on the roll exceed the possible damage, the character accumulates a success toward recovery. Most common illnesses only require five extra successes to get rid of them. A serious, life-threatening illness would require 10 accumulated extra successes, or more. And some fatal diseases might never be purged, only endured for as long as possible.

Example: *Mikey, an energetic kid with 6 Health and 2 Stamina, is exposed to the flu. His player makes a reflexive Stamina roll of three dice (two for his Stamina, +1 because his mom makes sure he eats a healthy diet) for him. Unfortunately, he gets no successes, and begins to feel pretty poorly. The Storyteller has decided that this flu virus has the potential to cause two points of bashing damage every day, and requires just three extra successes to recover from. After day one, Mikey's player rolls his Stamina again. This bug isn't especially virulent, so there is no penalty. Mikey's mom got him some over-the-counter medicine (+1), and the diet still helps (+1). Four dice are rolled, with one success. Mikey takes one point of bashing damage — not enough to inflict a wound penalty on any actions he feels up to taking. The next day, four more dice yield one more success, and Mikey's player marks a second box of bashing damage. Mikey is now suffering a -1 penalty on his actions. His mother sends him to bed, as he is looking peaked. The Storyteller rules that bed rest provides an additional +1 modifier, and Mikey's player rolls five dice the next day, for a lucky four successes. This exceeds the two points of damage the flu might cause, so Mikey has two extra successes in the bank. When he gets three more, he'll be back on his feet.*

DRUGS

The message that kids are supposed to get about drugs is “Just Say No.” Unfortunately, the message that actually reaches their ears is a lot more muddled and confusing. Adults have a wide array of drugs at their disposal. Coffee in the morning, cigarettes for breaks, alcohol to wind down in the evening — and those are just some of the legal ones. The medicine chest is full of muscle relaxants, pain pills, pills to calm jangled nerves, pills to keep you on an even keel, pills so you don't have to eat your vegetables. It's no wonder a kid might feel an urge to experiment.

The lists below are a quick overview of some common types of drugs and the effects they have on child characters. The effects discussed assume that the drug is taken with recreational intent and in a tolerable dose. The effect of an overdose, whether self-inflicted or administered by someone else, is covered in “Poisons and Toxins,” below.

A tolerable dose of a drug alters a character's awareness and (usually) impairs how their body functions. Your character might willingly take a drug, or it might be secretly slipped to him — its effects are the same either way. It may be possible to fight the effects of the drug with a reflexive Stamina + Resolve roll (see Resisting Poison or Disease in Chapter Two). The Merit Toxin Resistance gives a +2 modifier on this roll (see Chapter Five). The potency or dosage of a drug imposes a penalty on the roll. A particularly potent drug or large dose could impose a penalty of -3 to -5, while a smaller dose or mild drug could range from no penalty at all to -2. Remember: most drugs are tested on, and administered in doses for, adults. An adult-sized dose of a powerful drug might send a child directly into an overdose.

The Storyteller might rule that a drug's effects are a long-term challenge to overcome, making it an extended and contested test to do so. Rolls might be made every 15 minutes, half hour or hour. Successes gained in that period reflect how well your character has resisted the drug's effects in that time. If the Storyteller opts to use this system, he should assign a standing number of successes to the drug against which the player rolls each time (three successes would be appropriate for a mild drug, up to six for a highly potent drug). If the player's roll nets more successes, the character fights off the drug's effects for that period of time, otherwise the character succumbs, at least for a while. A drug's effects will wear off on their own in a set period of time determined by the Storyteller. If the character can accumulate enough successes on these contested rolls in the time before the drug wears off, he may be able to purge it from his system early (the Storyteller must determine the number of successes needed to do this depending on the drug's potency, with a suggested minimum of five).

• **Alcohol:** Subtract one die from any Dexterity-, Intelligence- and Wits-based dice pools (including Perception rolls) for every drink (six ounces of beer or wine, two ounces of hard liquor, as a rule of thumb) your character consumes in one hour. Defense is also reduced accord-

ingly. These effects fade at the rate of one die per hour until all the alcohol is purged from the character's system. Social rolls suffer penalties or enjoy bonuses depending on the character's audience. Generally, kids are impressed (+1) while adults are appalled (-3).

- **Marijuana:** Subtract one die from any Dexterity-, Intelligence-, Resolve- and Wits-based dice pools (including Perception rolls) for every hit your character takes from a joint or bong in an hour. Defense is also reduced accordingly. This effect fades completely an hour after the last hit taken.

- **Hallucinogens:** A child under the effect of a hallucinogen is very unlikely to understand, on any level, that the events unfolding in front of her mind's eye are not real. She sees, hears, tastes, feels and smells things that do not exist — she may also taste things she sees, or hear things she smells, or other confusing manifestations of synesthesia. Any violence or perturbation around the “tripping” child may send her on a “bad trip,” an attack of acute paranoia or panic. This may happen anyway, without any unpleasant elicitation. If the hallucinogen-using character suffers a particularly bad trip, the Storyteller may require the player to make a trigger roll. In addition to these illusions, the character suffers a penalty to all dice pools and to Defense from -1 to -3 (depending on the intensity of the trip) for the duration of the experience. Effects may last up to eight hours.

- **Cocaine/crack/speed/amphetamines:** A child on these kinds of uppers becomes very agitated and overly energetic. Paranoia often follows. Subtract one die from all Social rolls. Add a +1 modifier to Strength- or Stamina-based rolls, and a bonus to Perception rolls of +1 to +3, depending on the strength of the drug (stimulants heighten reaction time, at least temporarily). The positive effects last from half an hour to three hours. The negative effects linger, and when the drugs wear off, the child becomes listless and withdrawn (-1 to *all* rolls due to apathy and fatigue for an hour after the drug wears off). Note that many drugs commonly prescribed to children for ADHD fall into this category when abused for recreational purposes.

- **Heroin/morphine/barbiturates:** These drugs are very potent painkillers, allowing a character to ignore all wound penalties. However, that character's perception will be fogged, at best — she may even enter a trance-like state. All dice pools and Resistance traits (including Defense) are reduced by -2 while the drug is in effect.

Addiction is a real danger of recreational drug use. Roleplaying a young child with a drug addiction would be a significant challenge, one to be undertaken only after serious consultation between the player and the Storyteller.

ELECTROCUTION

Don't stick a fork in the electrical outlet, don't pee on the third rail. Every kid hears these admonishments (and they're all good advice). But sometimes they can't get home before the rain starts to fall, or just “accidentally” jam a screwdriver



into the wall socket. Even worse, a child might stumble across the path of a witch with the power to call down lightning, or a monster who makes the very air around him crackle. These characters are going to get shocked.

Electrocution automatically causes a set amount of bashing damage per turn of exposure. No attack roll is made (except probably in the case of the witch mentioned above). If the harm from electricity is caused by a constant current, the shocked character might have to fight to escape. Electricity causes muscle contractions, which might prevent the character from removing himself from danger. Roll Strength as a reflexive action each turn of contact. Failure means the character is still stuck in the electrical current and will continue to take damage.

Source	Damage
Minor; wall socket	4 (B)
Major; high-voltage fence	6 (B)
Severe; junction box	8 (B)
Fatal; main line feed/subway rail	10 (B)

EXPLOSIVES

Children play with explosives all the time. The tiny little child-sized bombs come in bright, shiny packaging, decorated so alluringly that the dour warning messages on how to use the devices safely are easily ignored. Even the pretty sparkler, not an explosive but a fun playtime incendiary device, burns at temperature of 1800°F or hotter — and these are the toys for children.

A child might find a need to actively wreak havoc with his toy fireworks, say to fend off monstrous creatures in the night. It's very dangerous to modify a firework in any way, but it can be done. Shave the material off a sparkler into a container, or strap a bunch of them together, for a bomb. Adjust the firing angle of a reloadable shell tube and carry it into battle. Learn to aim your bottle rocket launches. All of these are terrible ideas, but not as terrible as being carried off in the night by a slavering monster.

Other homemade devices, like Molotov cocktails and pipe bombs, reside firmly in bad idea territory. Any child can find the instructions to construct one of these devices with a computer search engine. The materials to make them are available anywhere with a hardware store. The damage these devices can cause — one from a raging fire, the other from bits of shrapnel propelled through the air — is enormous.

As if these sources of explosives aren't enough, a child might find others. Old caches of dynamite turn up in mines, old barns and dilapidated warehouses. More than one soldier has brought home from the war a souvenir grenade, which sits in the attic until it finds its way into a child's hands. High explosives like dynamite or plastic explosives are used in construction, demolition, forestry and even avalanche control. They are meant to be kept under lock and key, but the security at a ski lodge might conceivably be a little lax. When a grenade explodes, it kills. Quite simply, that is what it was made to do. When a high explosive detonates, it destroys.

Designing a homemade explosive requires an extended Intelligence + Study roll. Building it requires an

EXPLOSIVES CHART

Type	Throwing Modifier	Blast Area	Damage	Size	Example
Single firework	+1	1	1	1	Reloadable shell
Homemade incendiary*	-1	1	4	1	Molotov cocktail
Concussion	+2	2	5	1	Concussion grenade
Fragmentation	+2	5/15	5/3	1	Fragmentation grenade, pipe bomb
Single high explosive	—	5/12	6/4		Stick of dynamite
Multiple high explosive	n/a	20+	10+	C4	

Throwing Modifier: This modifies the Dexterity + Athletics roll to throw the device (see "Dexterity"). The n/a entry means that device cannot be thrown.

Blast Area: The diameter in yards in which an explosion occurs. Where two numbers are separated by a slash, it represents an inner and outer radius of the explosion.

Damage: Where two numbers are separated by a slash, the higher number is the damage caused in the inner radius, and the lower number in the outer radius. The damage is inflicted once as points of lethal damage, then that number of dice is rolled for additional damage.

* An incendiary device only inflicts damage once, as fire damage (see "Fire," below). Any person or object in the Blast Area will be covered with gasoline and continue to burn, taking four points of lethal damage each round until the fire is put out.

extended Dexterity + Crafts roll. The Storyteller must set the targets for these extended rolls. The explosion can be triggered with a fuse or another sort of timer, or with a remote detonator. A simple fuse requires fewer successes, while a remote device is more difficult. Throwing an explosive requires a Dexterity + Athletics roll (see *Throwing*, p. 59). Placing a bomb properly requires an Intelligence + Study roll. Failure on any of these rolls can cause an explosion. Dramatic failure certainly will.

An explosive has a Blast Area and Damage rating, listed on the explosives chart below (these are suggested values, and can vary wildly). Blast Area is the radius in yards in which the explosion takes effect. Where two numbers are listed, the device will cause a greater amount of damage in the inner radius indicated. The number listed under Damage is inflicted first as points of lethal damage. That number of dice is then rolled to generate a random amount of damage, re-rolling 10s as usual. (The concussive force of an explosion without shrapnel might appear to be bashing damage, but the overwhelming force of the attack renders the damage lethal.) Everyone in the Blast Area takes damage. Defense does not apply against explosives. A character may go prone as a Dodge action to avoid some damage (see “Going Prone” earlier in this chapter). This reduces the damage by two points. The only reliable way to survive an explosion is to be far away from it, hit the ground and get behind solid cover.

FALLING

Kids climb trees and fall out of them. They climb walls and fall off. They lean way, way out of windows and fall out. Kids fall a lot on their own. Unfortunately, sometimes they are also pushed. All damage taken from a fall is bashing damage, unless the character falls on something sharp, like broken glass or a fence (these cause lethal damage). Falling at terminal velocity also causes lethal damage.

A child suffers one point of bashing damage for every three yards she falls. Terminal velocity is reached in falls of 30 yards or more, meaning a fall from that height causes 10 points of lethal damage — a fall that might easily be fatal to a child. The maximum damage a fall can cause is 10 lethal damage, since terminal velocity cannot be exceeded.

If a character falls where there are objects or handholds to help break her fall (like tree branches or handy awnings), her player can make a Dexterity + Athletics roll to mitigate the damage. Every success on this roll cancels a point of damage. The Storyteller may cap the number of successes possible on this roll to reflect the environment of the fall, but it is possible for an agile (and lucky) child to fall out of a tree and suffer little real damage. Falling into a pool or lake, or a fluffy snowbank, might automatically reduce the damage inflicted by a fall, at the Storyteller’s discretion. Once terminal velocity is reached, it is practically impossible to break a fall by any natural means.

FATIGUE

Staying awake to watch the creature feature in black and white in the middle of the night is fun. Staying awake because something keeps scratching at the window, or to ward off the monster that wants to steal your little sister, is not fun at all. Children have a much harder time than adults staying awake, in large part because they require more sleep to be healthy and well adjusted. A child can slide by on minimal sleep for a night or two, but it will show in his mood. Even one night without any sleep at all can turn a child into a monster himself.

For every six hours that a character tries to remain awake past his normal bedtime, make a Stamina + Resolve roll. If the roll fails, the character falls asleep. If it succeeds, he stays awake for that six-hour period, remaining relatively alert. For each six-hour period past bedtime, all of the character’s dice pools suffer a cumulative -1 penalty (this penalty applies to continued rolls to remain awake). Fatigue sets in. After a long enough time awake, minor hallucinations might occur (figures seen in peripheral vision, or phantom voices). Some children may become oddly hyperactive when overtired, burning off energy they shouldn’t have, with irritable twitching and erratic movement.

The penalties imposed by forced wakefulness do not disappear until the character gets 10 hours of sleep. Therefore, a child who stays up six hours past his bedtime and then only sleeps for six continues to suffer a -1 fatigue penalty, until he manages to get a nice four-hour nap. If naptime is out of the question and he attempts to stay awake again at night, he begins with a -1 penalty to stay awake at all, and moves on to -2 if he manages to keep his eyes open for six long hours.

If a character is forced to perform strenuous activity while staying awake — say, running away from a monster — the Storyteller may call for a roll to remain awake as soon as the immediate danger has passed. She can also impose penalties on this roll as she sees fit.

FIRE

Campfires, kitchen stoves, playing with matches, even the Bunsen burner at school: these are all ways your character can be burned. The most serious fire a child is likely to encounter is a house fire — doubly horrifying, as he must first escape and then watch as his home goes up in smoke.

Fire automatically inflicts lethal damage per turn of exposure. No attack roll is required. A larger, hotter fire causes more damage, described by the factors below:

Size of Fire	Damage
Torch	1
Bonfire	2
Inferno	3

Heat of Fire	Damage	Modifier
Candle	(first-degree burns)	—
Campfire	(second-degree burns)	+1
Bunsen burner	(third-degree burns)	+2
Chemical fire/molten metal		+3

A kitchen grease fire would be about the size of a torch (1) and intense enough to cause third-degree burns (+2) for a total of three points of lethal damage per turn of exposure. A fully engulfed house would have the Size factor of an inferno (3), with at least the intensity of a campfire (+2), for five points of lethal damage per turn of full contact. (The first danger in a house that is on fire is smoke inhalation, however. See “Poisons and Toxins,” below.)

If a fire persists for more than one turn, anything flammable in contact with it will catch fire. Synthetic clothing burns readily, or melts into the wearer’s skin. Natural fibers extinguish themselves in a turn once removed from flame. A character whose hair or clothing has caught fire takes two additional points of lethal damage per turn until the fire is put out (a good time to stop, drop and roll).

A splashed accelerant, like gasoline or lighter fluid, burns until the accelerant is exhausted or the fire smothered. This type of fire causes four points of lethal damage per turn, and requires the help of another person to smother successfully.

POISONS AND TOXINS

Poisons and toxins cover a broad territory, from a rattlesnake’s bite to the noxious cleaners found under the kitchen sink. A poison might make a character feel sick, and a toxin might make him feel pain, but both carry the potential to be life threatening. A poison or toxin is introduced into the victim’s system by a particular delivery method, depending on the substance in question. The four delivery methods are listed below:

- **Injection:** The substance is introduced directly into the bloodstream with a needle or a puncturing weapon (like a snake’s fang).

- **Ingestion:** The substance must be consumed, hidden in food or drink or swallowed as a pill. Spoiled foods may contain toxins that might be inadvertently consumed.

- **Inhalation:** The substance is breathed as a gas. Glue fumes and the smoke from a burning house are both inhalation toxins.

- **Touch:** These poisons are relatively rare. Some chemical weapons (or chemical accidents) can be absorbed through the skin, as can the poison of a poison-dart frog. A simple touch on bare skin may be all that is needed to introduce the poison.

Once the poison has been delivered into the victim’s system, it automatically inflicts damage (usually lethal, but some poisons, like a knockout gas, could cause bashing damage instead) equal to its toxicity level. Some poisons inflict damage only once. Another might inflict damage over a period of time, until it naturally runs its course or until the victim purges the toxin from her system. A character can resist the effects of a poison or toxin with a reflexive Stamina roll. The poison’s strength or the amount of it delivered applies a penalty to this roll. Note that an amount of poison or a drug meant to harm or incapacitate an adult will have an even more pronounced effect on a child. The Toxin Resistance Merit provides a +2 modifier on this roll (see Chapter Five). If the roll succeeds, the victim can ignore (at least temporarily) the poison’s effects. If the roll fails, the poison inflicts the full damage listed below. If the poison delivers its effects over time, the roll to clear it from the victim’s system is extended, with the Storyteller determining how many successes are required to eliminate the poison from the victim’s system completely.

Poison/Toxin	Toxicity
Smoke inhalation (inhalation)	2
Ammonia (inhalation)	3
Bleach (ingestion)	4
Cyanide (ingestion or inhalation)	7
Drug or alcohol overdose (ingestion, inhalation, injection)	3 to 7
Botulinum toxin (ingestion or injection)	5
Animal venom (injection, ingestion or touch)	3 to 8

TEMPERATURE EXTREMES

Exposure to extreme environmental conditions, both heat and cold, can kill an unprotected child. Even worse, the effects of both heat stroke and hypothermia both include confusion and hallucinations, so the child may not even realize that he is in grave danger.

Hypothermia occurs when the body's core temperature drops below the normal 98.6°F. It does not have to be brutally cold for this to happen. Most hypothermia deaths occur when the weather is between 30 and 50°F — just warm enough for someone without survival training to think, "Aw, it's not so bad out!" The addition of water to chilly temperatures is extremely dangerous, as water carries away body heat much faster than air.

For every hour of exposure to temperatures below 50°F, make a Stamina + Survival roll. The Storyteller should assign penalties for temperatures at (-2) or below (-3) freezing and for wet conditions from damp to soaked (-1 to -3). She should also assign bonuses for equipment, from a simple wool coat (+1) to a fully equipped camp and cold weather gear (+5). Every six-hour time period spent out in the cold adds a cumulative -1 penalty to the roll. If the roll succeeds, the character stays warm enough to avoid the symptoms of hypothermia. If it fails, he takes a point of bashing damage. Dramatic failure on the roll indicates that the character has gone into shock. The player fills any empty boxes on his Health chart with bashing damage and the character struggles to remain conscious (see "Incapacitation," above). An unconscious character automatically takes one point of bashing damage each hour from the cold, unless he is given aid by someone with the Medicine or Survival Skill. The Storyteller may rule that characters who have the Survival Skill and who have the time and resources to prepare for a trip out into the cold are sufficiently protected and do not need to make any rolls. If their equipment is lost or damaged, or the weather takes a turn for the worse, Survival rolls may again be required.

Example: *Julia is lost in the woods on a cold night, with only a light jacket. She has 6 Health, a Stamina of 2 and no Survival skill. The Storyteller adds no penalties to the player's roll, since the weather is dry and not severe. But Julia's player has no bonuses to add to the roll. Since Julia does not have Survival, her player rolls Stamina with an unskilled penalty (-1), taking her two dice down to one. There are no successes on the first roll, or the second — two hours into the long, cold night, Julia is suffering from two bashing wounds. With an added -1 wound penalty, the Stamina roll is reduced to a chance die. If Julia's player rolls a 1, she must fill Julia's Health chart with bashing damage. Julia will probably soon drift into unconsciousness on the forest floor.*

Luckily, children recover from hypothermia more easily than adults or the elderly. It is possible for a cold and lifeless child to be revived with fast and sophisticated medical attention. Assume that a child who has "died" from hypothermia (all Health boxes filled with aggravated damage)

can be saved within 15 minutes of the last box being converted to aggravated damage. This requires someone with medical know-how and the right equipment. The would-be savior rolls Wits + Medicine with a -3 penalty; if this roll fails, the character dies. If the roll succeeds, the character's rightmost Health box converts to lethal damage and she remains stable, provided she is given immediate hospital or otherwise skilled medical care.

Heat stroke occurs when the body is unable to cool itself, and the core temperature rises (up to a serious 106°F). Heat stroke can occur when temperatures rise above 90°F. Remember that the temperature in enclosed spaces (like a car) can rise much faster than the outside temperature. Under normal outdoor conditions, a character will not suffer heat stroke as long as he can drink enough water to keep his body cool. If water is not available, the character begins to suffer from heat stroke long before he takes damage from deprivation.

For every hour of exposure to temperatures above 90°F without an adequate water supply, make a Stamina + Survival roll. The Storyteller should assign penalties for extremely hot temperatures (-1 for every five degrees above 90), and for strenuous activity (-1 to -3). Bonuses can be provided by appropriate clothing (+1) and shade (+1 to +3). Every six-hour time period spent in the heat adds a cumulative -1 penalty to the roll (ironically, in many places where it is hot enough to kill during the day, it is cold enough to cause hypothermia at night). If the roll succeeds, the character stays cool enough to avoid heat stroke. If the roll fails, he takes one point of bashing damage. If the roll is a dramatic failure, the player fills any empty boxes on the Health chart with bashing damage and the character's condition rapidly deteriorates into a coma. An unresponsive character automatically takes one point of bashing damage each hour from the heat, unless he is given aid by someone with the Medicine or Survival Skill.

EXAMPLE OF PLAY

Joel, Marlowe and Leanna have gathered around the table to play. Joel is the Storyteller. Marlowe is playing Zackary, a fifth-grader who enjoys sports and hates school. Leanna is playing Gwen, Zackary's third-grade sister, who likes to draw and also hates school. The characters have been cooped up in the house all winter, but the snow is finally starting to melt and they are going into the basement to get their bikes.

Gwen stops at the top of the stairs. The basement of the old house always smells funny, and she hates going down there. She spends a moment listening, like she always does, before heading down the stairs to grab the string that lights a bare, swinging bulb overhead.

Leanna asks Joel if she can make a Perception roll for Gwen. Joel agrees; Leanna rolls Wits + Composure. Gwen's 3 Wits and 2 Composure give Leanna five dice: she rolls 10, 9, 9, 5 and 2. Pleased, she rolls the 10-Again, but gets a 3. Since Leanna succeeded on the roll, Joel tells Leanna that Gwen can distinctly hear water dripping in the basement.



“Hurry up, slowpoke,” Zackary ribs behind her.

“Shh! I can hear something. I think there’s a leak,” Gwen answers.

Both children hurry down the stairs now. Leaks happen every spring when the snow melts, and their parents will want to know where the water is coming from before it causes too much damage. At the bottom, Gwen turns on the light.

Leanna tells Joel that Gwen is going to stay under the light bulb, since she is scared of the basement. Marlowe knows that his character does not want to look like a sissy in front of his little sister, so he says that Zachary will go further into the basement to look for the leak.

“Be careful, Zack,” Gwen says, her face stark white under the bare bulb.

“It’s just a leak, dummy,” her brother shoots back. “Can you tell where it is? I don’t see it.”

The players and Storyteller briefly confer on what Skill would be most useful in finding the source of the drip — Crafts or Investigation? Joel asks Marlowe to roll Wits + Investigation, which they all agree should work. Zackary also has 3 Wits but no Investigation skill. Marlowe subtracts the -3 unskilled penalty, leaving him with no dice. He rolls his chance die, and gets a 4. No luck. Marlowe tells Joel that his character will go further into the basement.

Zackary sighs, and trudges deeper into the shadows of the basement. “I still don’t see it. Why don’t you come look?” Gwen shakes her head no. Zack trudges all the way into the corner, where the basement toilet sits. He steps in a puddle of water. “Ewww, the toilet’s backed up! Who stuffed it up?”

Marlowe can’t believe his character missed the overflowing toilet, but at last, Zack now knows the problem. The Storyteller rolls a few dice — secretly; this is a Perception roll for Zackary. The character’s Composure rating (2) gives a total of five dice for the roll: the dice come up 9, 6, 4, 2 and 2. One success is enough for Joel to tell Marlowe that his character sees something moving in the bottom of the toilet bowl.

Zackary stands, staring at the toilet bowl in front of him with a look of mixed disgust and bewilderment on his face. “Hey, Gwen, I think you better get Dad down here with the plunger.”

“What is it?” Gwen calls.

A rat with wet, matted fur and red eyes, bigger than the neighbor’s dog, scrambles up out of the toilet bowl.

Joel describes the rat, while both players make faces. Leanna points out that Gwen probably can’t see the rat — Zack is in the way and the light barely reaches that far. Joel asks Marlowe to make a Wits + Composure roll, again. Marlowe winces; this is probably a surprise roll, which means

Zackary is about to be attacked by a toilet rat. His five Wits + Composure dice roll 10, 9, 5, 5, 4, with a 10-Again roll of 8. Three successes! Zackary gets to act this turn, and gets to keep his Defense against the rat.

Everyone rolls Initiative, Joel for the rat and the others for their characters. The rat's Initiative (Dexterity + Composure) is 8, but Joel rolls a 1 on the die for a total of 9. Marlowe rolls an 8, and Zackary's Initiative is 5, for a total of 13. Gwen's Initiative is 4, and Leanna rolls a 3, a total of 7. Zackary will act first, then the rat, and finally his sister. Marlowe says that Zackary will retreat his Speed, and take a Dodge action if the rat attacks.

"Gwen, get up the stairs. Get Dad!" Zackary yells, backing away from the basement corner toward the light.

"What is it? Zack, what is it — what's wrong?" Gwen pleads, fear plain in her voice. She isn't used to seeing her big brother act like this. Then she sees the dark shape launch itself from the corner of the basement, claws stretched out to tear into Zackary, and she screams.

Zackary has moved his Speed (which is Strength + Dexterity + 4 for a child, or $2 + 3 + 4 = 9$), but the rat is significantly faster, with a Speed of 13. It leaps off the toilet and

attacks. Joel figures the rat's attack, Strength + Brawl (1 + 2), three dice. Its tiny claws don't provide any bonus. Zackary's Defense is 3 (since both his Wits and Dexterity are 3), doubled because he is Dodging the rat's attack. He doesn't get to add a bonus for his small Size, though, because the rat is smaller than he is (see p. 142). Joel realizes the rat is lucky to have a chance die to roll, and gives it a toss: it comes up a 2. Zackary eludes the rat's leap and claws.

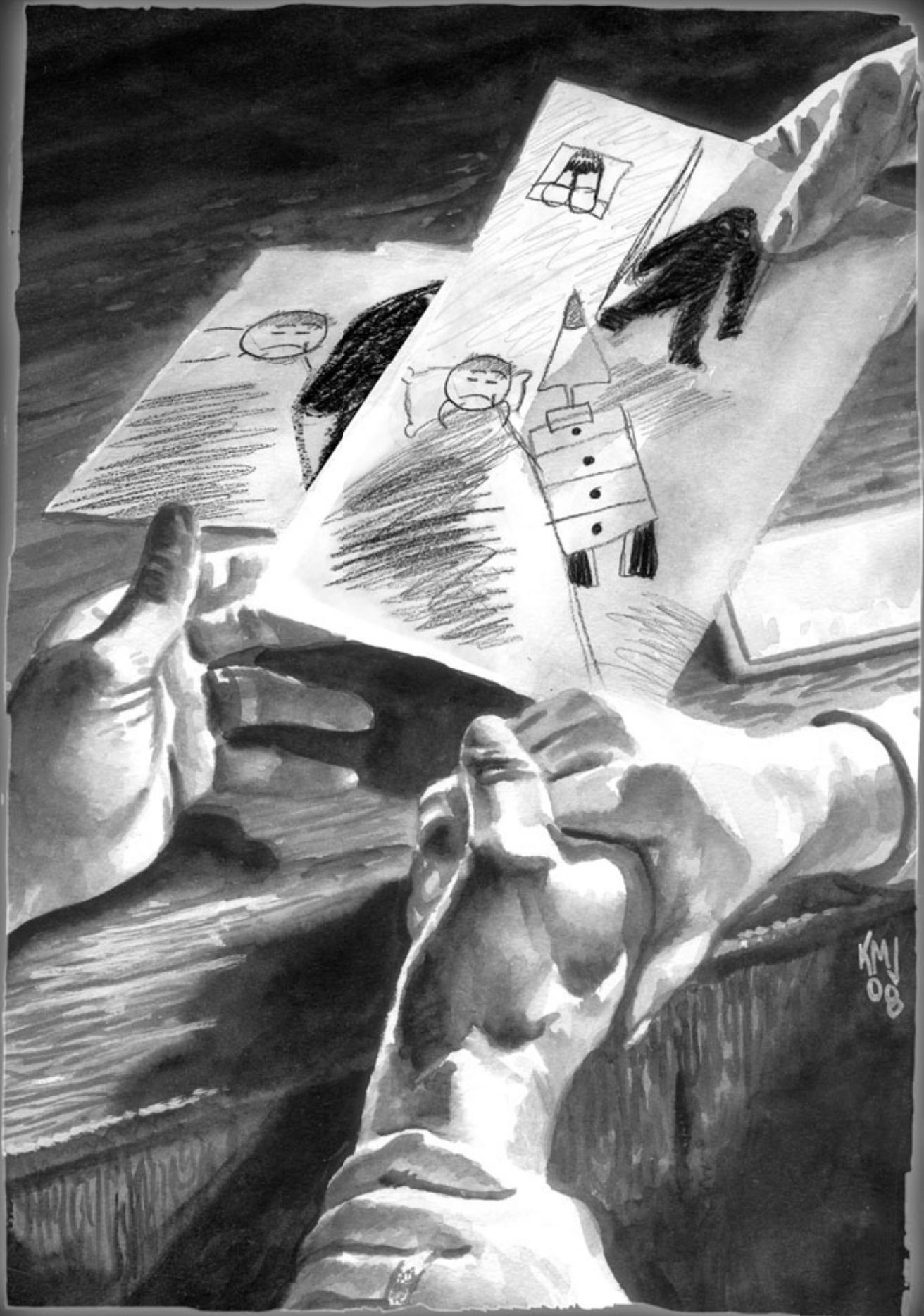
Joel drops five dice on the table — this time it's a Perception roll for Gwen, who isn't quite so busy hopping around with the rat. The dice come up 10, 9, 4, 4, 1 and a 7 for 10-Again. Joel motions to Leanna to lean in close, and whispers to her what Gwen sees.

Banging noises come from upstairs; their parents have heard the racket.

Gwen doesn't notice the noises upstairs. Her eyes are fixed on the basement corner. "There's more coming, Zack!" she wails. "They're all coming out of the toilet! Run!" Gwen turns and flees up the stairs toward safety, leaving her brother to follow.

In the corner, one by one, rats pop, dripping, from the toilet bowl, to clamber into the basement of the chilly old house.





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like to thank you both for coming on such short notice." Mrs. Felding said, gesturing for Karen and Drew to sit in the two leather-backed chairs opposite the principal's mahogany desk.

"Can you please tell us what's the matter?" Karen said, perching on the edge of her seat. She looked to her husband for support, crumpling a worn tissue in her hands. "The note from Carl's teacher was very vague."

Mrs. Felder nodded gravely. "Yes, I'm sorry about that, but we thought it best to discuss this face to face." She nodded at the tall man waiting near the office window.

"I'd like you to meet Mr. McWilliams. He's the school counselor."

"It's a pleasure to meet you both," McWilliams said, smiling reassuringly as he stepped forward and offered his hand. There was a manila folder tucked under his arm with a small stack of crinkled pages held inside.

Drew gave McWilliams' hand a perfunctory shake and straightened in his chair. "Look, I don't mean to be rude, but I've got an extremely important meeting in about an hour. Can you please tell us what's wrong?"

McWilliams sat awkwardly at the edge of the principal's desk. "Well, that's what we're trying to determine, Mr. Walters," he said evenly. "Carl began the school year as an exemplary student. He was making friends and seemed to be adjusting very well to his new environment, but in the last few weeks, things have changed drastically. His grades are suffering and he's begun acting out in class. His teacher describes him as being anxious or depressed, and lately he's been nodding off at his desk." The counselor leaned back and regarded Karen and Drew. "Has something happened at home recently? Are the two of you doing okay?"

Drew eyed McWilliams incredulously. "Well, frankly I don't see as that's any of your damned business," he said. "Sure, there's been some stress. We've moved halfway across the country, for God's sake."

"But it's nothing serious," Karen cut in. "We've moved plenty of times before; Drew gets transferred a lot in his line of work, and Carl's always been a trooper about it."

McWilliams took a deep breath. "Well, then, maybe you could enlighten us about these." He opened the folder and pulled out a sheaf of flimsy pages, stiff with patches of paint or layers of crayon. The counselor laid them in a row across the front of Mrs. Felding's desk.

Karen and Drew leaned forward, studying the pictures. Karen frowned. "That looks like Carl's bedroom," she said, reaching forward and tracing the crude lines with a manicured fingertip. "But what's that?"

She pointed at a dark, vaguely manlike shape. Carl had colored the image in shades of gray that revealed little detail—just a tall, looming shape with hunched shoulders and long, powerful-looking arms held close to its sides. There wasn't much of a head, just a squat, angular shape atop the shoulders and sunken hollows that might have been eyes.

In the first picture, the figure stood at the open doorway to Carl's room. In the next, it was just inside the room, framed in the glow of the hallway light. With each picture, the figure drew a little closer to Carl's bed. In the last picture, the figure was standing at the boy's bedside. Carl had drawn himself as just a shapeless lump, cowering beneath the blankets.

McWilliams tapped the last picture. "Carl drew this one yesterday," he said. "When he had art time today, he refused to draw anything.

When the teacher threatened to discipline him, he broke down in hysterics. So you can see why we're all a bit concerned."



Chapter Seven: Storytelling

We were all children once. At some deep level of our minds, we even remember exactly what it was like to be small in the middle of a huge world. We were small and surrounded by people who loved and comforted and protected us, small and lost and alone, small and doing things we knew we shouldn't but couldn't help taking into our own hands out of curiosity, the need to know and do, and hundreds of other reasons that seemed like good ideas at the time. If we try, we can recapture those feelings and turn them into the stuff of which stories are made.

WHAT IS STORYTELLING?

In its very simplest form, storytelling is the art of putting together a narrative in a manner that draws others into that narrative, and makes them want to follow it to its completion. Most *writers* accomplish this task by developing a compelling plot, an engaging world, and interesting characters to present to their readers. In the case of storytelling games, this process is far more interactive at all levels. Yes, the Storyteller creates the pieces of the story, but it's up to the players to put them all together into a pleasing and coherent whole, and the Storyteller can help that process along in numerous ways.

Fairy tales are more than true: not because they tell us that dragons exist, but because they tell us that dragons can be beaten.

— G.K. Chesterton

CHARACTER CREATION

The first place a Storyteller can assist her players is during the process of character creation. This game is not entirely identical to the other games set in the World of Darkness, inasmuch as the player characters are children instead of adults, and that necessarily colors everything else in the chronicle. (Specific advice for storytelling child characters comes later in this chapter.) Storytellers should assist their players in developing a child character in accordance not only with the sort of chronicle the character will be involved in, but also guide their players in developing a character whose personal identity is authentically childlike, not an adult in a child's body.

STEP ONE: CHARACTER CONCEPT

Before filling in a single dot on the character sheet, the players should consider what sort of characters they want to play. In this case, a major component of this is deciding how old they want their characters to be. The age range for this game is seven to 12 years. A child character created at the younger end of that spectrum will naturally be physically weaker and intellectually less mature and developed than a character at the older end of the spectrum, and the players should take that into account. During the initial character conception stage, the Storyteller can ask a number of questions that can assist a player in fully fleshing out the bare bones of their idea. For example:

- How old are you? When were you born (date, time of year, etc.)? What is your general appearance (hair and eye color, build, etc.)? Are you typical for your age or do you look a little older/a little younger? Are you more mature than you seem? Less? Have you been to the hospital for anything since you were born? Are you disaster prone? Healthy as a horse? Asthma and/or allergies? Broken bones? Stitches? Does your pediatrician even know what you look like? Do you like/dislike doctors? How about other non-parental authority figures? What are your hobbies? What are your daily/weekly chores? Do you have any pets? Do you have your own room? Do you share a room? How do you keep your room? Do you know how to ride a bike? How to swim? How to climb a tree? Do you want to learn?

BIRTH ORDER

A great deal is often made in fiction about three things whenever children are involved in the main action of a story: birth order, sibling rivalries and only-child syndrome. Simply put, the stereotypes usually break down as follows:

- Older siblings are almost always bossy, take-charge types who are regularly accused of “trying to be like Mom and/or Dad,” particularly if the parent whose behavior they’re trying to emulate is either entirely absent or otherwise distant/generally uninvolved in the lives of their children. Middle children are generally portrayed as the sort of kids who are functionally “invisible” within their family structure, unobtrusive and un-extraordinary, unless or until that child develops some sort of disability or talent that distinguishes her from her siblings. Younger siblings are often depicted as sickeningly sweet and cute, or else hellacious brats whose uncontrollable appetite for attention consumes all in their path, with little else in between.

- Only children are often depicted as being far more mature than their chronological years, often almost to the point of parody, sometimes being little other than mental adults in a child-sized-and-shaped body. In fairly extreme but not unheard of cases, only children are sometimes depicted as being even more mature than their ersatz parental figures. This is particularly true if the parent in question is a single mother.

These stereotypes are not culturally universal, though they are fairly common in most of the media depictions of children with which the average player is likely to be familiar. They can also be a useful place to start when developing a child character, but can, and should, evolve according to character changes driven by storyline events.

- What is your family life like? Are your parents married? Divorced? If they’re divorced, have either or both remarried? Do you live with your parents? One parent? Grandparents? Legal guardians/other foster family arrangement? Do you have older/younger brothers and sisters? Step-siblings? How do you feel about your siblings? Do you like/dislike them? Why? Are you the oldest child in your family? The youngest? In the middle? How do you feel about your family situation? Is your family well off? Middle class? Poor? Do you have a favorite aunt/uncle? A favorite grandparent? A favorite cousin? Are you close at all to any members of your extended family? Do you like them/dislike them? Why?

- Where are you from? Where were you born? Have you lived there all your life? If not, where are you growing up? Have you moved a lot? Were those moves a result of one or more of your parents’ careers? If so, how do you feel about it? Do you like the place where you’re living? Dislike it? Indifferent?

- Where do you go to school? Do you go to public school? Private? Parochial? Do you like it? Do you wear a

uniform? If so, do you hate it, or do you find it comforting? Do you feel that you’re good/bad at school in general? If so, why? What is your favorite subject? Who is your favorite teacher? Do you have a lot of friends? A few good friends? No friends? Are you popular/unpopular? Do you play sports? Play in the school band? Sing in the school chorus? Do you have a favorite extracurricular activity? Does the school librarian know what you look like? Have you ever been in trouble with the school authorities? Do you have a reputation for getting in trouble? Do you have a reputation for being particularly good/responsible/trustworthy? Does the principal/vice principal/school nurse moan in despair when they see you coming? Do you receive special services like counseling, tutoring, speech therapy or occupational therapy?


Most children have not yet had the opportunity to develop many life experiences outside of family or school, and so much of the initial questioning focuses on these elements. Some children — such as the children of celebrities, or children who are celebrities themselves — naturally have a wider range of experiences than average. Such characters are also rather rare.

At this stage, select the character’s Asset and Fault. Every character comes into play with one dominant Asset and one dominant Fault (see p. 87), the expression of which aids the character in regaining Willpower. Examine the list of suggested Assets and Faults, discuss how they would apply given the character’s specific conceptualization, and let the player choose (or create one) accordingly.

EXAMPLE OF CHARACTER CREATION: CONCEPT

Matt is running an **Innocents** game in which all of the player characters are related in some way (siblings, cousins) and no more than two or three years apart. Jess decides she wants to play a character based on her oldest niece, who is 12, making her one of the older characters involved in the game. Jess talks matters over with the Storyteller and decides that her character, Olivia, will definitely appear to be at the more mature end of the spectrum — she’s started to “blossom,” and has become interested in boys, makeup, and clothes far more grown up than either of her parents like, as many “teens” do — but she’s not as mature or experienced as she likes to present herself, particularly to her younger brother and cousins. Her parents split just after she was born and she and her brother live full time with her mother and stepfather. She hasn’t seen or heard from her birth father in years, except for the occasional card with money in it on her birthday, and she considers her stepfather more of a real dad to her than anyone else could be, though she’s a little embarrassed to admit how strongly she feels. Similarly, she and her little brother pick at each other as only siblings can, but if anyone hurt his feelings, much less physically picked on him, she’d react harshly.

Olivia gets along best with the schoolmates and cousins closest to her own age, the peer group with which she has most in common at the small private school they all attend. She’s a bit oblivious to her own standard of



privilege: her mom works out of the home in a small retail sales business and her stepfather is a lawyer, and their combined income has made the family extremely comfortable, with a nice house and nice things for everybody. She's never been poor, and doesn't really understand that some people just can't afford the newest gear the instant it comes out, even if they can afford to go to her school — she knows that some kids go there on “scholarship,” but doesn't really comprehend the economics of it. She isn't, however, really a snob, just a bit oblivious to others' situations. Jess chooses the Friendly Asset for Olivia (she'd never not be friends with someone just because they don't have the coolest clothes — that would be *rude!*) and the Egotistical Fault (because Olivia is an almost-teen, and it is most definitely All About Her a good percentage of the time).

STEP TWO: SELECT ATTRIBUTES

Once you have your basic concept, it's time to begin assigning numbers. The first step is to assign scores to each Attribute. Attributes are divided into three categories, each ranked 1–5, and consisting of Mental Attributes (Intelligence, Wits and Resolve), Physical Attributes (Strength, Dexterity and Stamina), and Social Attributes (Presence, Manipulation and Composure). Each Attribute begins with one dot already assigned to represent a bare minimum of human capability. Based on the character concept, the player should prioritize Attributes into primary, secondary and tertiary ranks, to which she assigns 5, 4 or 3 points respectively. A child character possessing five dots in any Attribute is quite extraordinary: a genuine intellectual prodigy or physically/socially precocious.

EXAMPLE: ATTRIBUTES

Olivia is easily the most outgoing member of the group, and so Jess designates Social Attributes as primary, followed by Mental Attributes (she's good enough at school work when she applies herself; she just doesn't apply herself as hard as she could, a good bit of the time) and then Physical Attributes (this is not the girl you'd find wrecking her new tights by falling out of trees). Olivia is the sort of young girl who's got all the signs of growing up into an absolutely gorgeous teenager, and so Jess assigns her a Presence of 3. She knows how to flash her dimples just enough to get what she wants at least some of the time, and so Jess assigns her a Manipulation of 2. She's got a nine-year-old kid brother who loves trying to get her goat with newts, frogs, and assorted other slimy things stuck in places you wouldn't expect to find them, so Jess assigns her a Composure of 3, as well.

Olivia would probably be much smarter if she cracked a textbook as enthusiastically as she reads the most recent teenybopper pseudo-romance novel, and so Jess assigns her an Intelligence of 2. She's good enough with a snappy comeback when she has to be, and so Jess assigns her a Wits of 2. She is, perhaps unsurprisingly, headstrong and willful, so Jess assigns her a Resolve of 3.

Olivia is outgrowing a case of juvenile asthma and she tends to pretend that she thinks sweating is “icky” to keep her inhaler usage around others to a bare minimum — consequently, Jess assigns her a Strength of 2, a Dexterity of 3 and a Stamina of 1, because that little brother of hers has made her quick with the hands.

STEP THREE: SELECT SKILLS & SPECIALTIES

Like Attributes, Skills are divided into Mental, Physical and Social categories, with a number of individual subdivisions representing areas of relative expertise. In keeping with the general character concept, players should divide Skill categories into primary, secondary and tertiary ranks on which they can spend their points (note that these priorities *don't* have to be the same as for Attributes). **Innocents** characters do not start with as many Skill points as an adult character would. Consult the chart on p. 47 for Skill point breakdowns by age. For a child character to have four or five dots in a Skill requires the Prodigy Merit, as the child has a decidedly unchild-like degree of development in that Skill.

EXAMPLE: SKILLS & SPECIALTIES

Olivia, little social butterfly that she is, naturally has her Skills prioritized Social, Mental and Physical. Since Olivia is 12, Jess has 9 points to assign to Social Skills, 5 points to assign to Mental Skills and 3 points to assign to Physical Skills, with two Specialties to assign wherever she wishes. Olivia isn't the most sensitive tween in the world, but she isn't completely oblivious to other people's feelings, either, and so Jess assigns her an Empathy rating of 1. She frequently calls upon her role as the big sister to get her little brother to listen to her, and so Jess assigns her an Intimidation of 2 with the specialty Younger Kids. She spends the majority of her time when out of school engaged in various sorts of social activities, and a good bit of her time in school on planning and practicing for extracurricular activities, such as chorus, and so Jess splits the remaining 6 points evenly between Socialize and Expression.

Olivia's five points in Mental Skills go to Computer 1 (she knows her way around instant messaging and online journaling), Crafts 2 (she's pretty handy with a sewing machine and has even made some of her own dresses — Jess assigns a Specialty in Crafts: Sewing), Medicine 1 (she's had a basic CPR and First Aid class, and since she usually gets stuck babysitting her little brother, she knows how to clean up scrapes and cuts and when to call an ambulance, if necessary) and Study 1 (she's not a bad student; she's just not that motivated to push herself scholastically, either).

Olivia has had the same PE classes as everyone else in her school, and so Jess assigns her Athletics 1. One of her remaining points goes to Larceny, since Olivia occasionally has to break into her own house if her mother's not home when she arrives from school and has (again) forgotten to leave a key under the flowerpot on the front porch. The last point goes into Stealth — Olivia can be quiet when she needs to; it's just not her default state.

STEP FOUR: SELECT MERITS

Like Attributes and Skills, Merits are divided into Mental, Physical and Social categories. The player has 7 points to spend on Merits and the dots next to individual Merits represent the points cost, either an absolute cost (three dots, for example) or a variable cost (one to three dots, representing the possibility of having a low initial ranking that can be improved with effort and practice). Some Merits apply to a character's basic traits to enhance them in particular situations. Some Merits have prerequisites that must be met before they can be purchased, some can be acquired solely at character creation and some can be acquired later on through effort, training/education, or trial and error. Discuss the Merits in accordance with the player's character concept and assign points accordingly.

EXAMPLE: MERITS

After considering Olivia's background details and general development as a character thus far, Jess assigns most of her points in the Social Merits category: Deep Pockets 2 (her family's financial status and personality combine to make Olivia quite the little fashion plate), Contacts 1 (her social network at school) and Team Player (Olivia works well in groups, and she's good at getting people to work together). For her remaining two points, Jess chooses the Danger Sense Merit. Years of watching out for her little brother's practical jokes have made her alert to impending trouble.

STEP FIVE: ADVANTAGES

Now that all the points have been assigned, it's time for the player to calculate the values for her character's remaining traits. Health is the product of Stamina + Size (4 for children, unless the Giant or Tiny Merits are purchased). Willpower is the product of Resolve + Composure. Defense is the *lower* of Dexterity or Wits. The Initiative Modifier is the sum of Dexterity + Composure. Speed is the product of Strength + Dexterity + 4. Starting Morality is Rank 7.

EXAMPLE: ADVANTAGES

Finally, Jess calculates Olivia's remaining traits. Health is generally not Olivia's strongest suit, ranked at 5. She's a headstrong girl, however, with a Willpower of 6. She's not generally the sort to pick fights, especially considering that her Defense of 2 means she's more likely to get hit than get out of the way. On the other hand, her Initiative of 6 often lets her spot trouble before it starts. Usually, she runs, with a Speed of 9.

Now that the character's concept is developed and set down in raw numbers, it's time to see what will happen when the story starts.

STORYTELLING FOR CHILD CHARACTERS

Storytelling for child characters is not quite the same as storytelling for adult characters. Fairly substantial differences, cognitive, social and physical, exist between children and adults that should be factored into the

chronicle itself at the planning stage, or else a good deal of the drama involved in playing child characters could be lost. Of course, it's entirely possible, and even probable, that some of those differences can and will fall by the wayside in the course of play, or else be emphasized in different ways by different players. This is fine, but it's also important to check the desire to minimize the fundamental differences between adults and children.

The most basic differences between adults and children are the physiological ones. Simply put, adults are bigger, stronger and faster than all but the most physically exceptional children. Adults are also, in general, far more capable of functioning at peak physical capacity without adequate food, water or rest, and for longer periods of time. Child characters within the target age group of this game (ages seven to 12) rarely possess anything close to their full adult growth or physical capabilities, even allowing for the possibility of precocious adolescence. (Precocious adolescence — also called precocious puberty — can occur in male children as early as nine and female children as early as seven, but this would result in a child character going through the hormone-driven discomforts of becoming physically mature early, not a child character in possession of effectively adult physiology.) Child characters are physically shorter than adults, usually by at least a foot and likely more in the case of female characters, and much lighter in terms of build, even allowing for the possibility of childhood obesity. Few obese children are as physically heavy as obese adults.

The vast majority of child characters are not as strong or as fast as adult characters, even those characters heavily involved in sporting activities, as a pure function of greater adult muscle mass. On the other hand, child characters may very well be in much better overall physical condition than adult characters, whose general health might be compromised by decades of abuse in the form of smoking, drug use, or chronic illness. Child characters physically require more sleep than adult characters to remain optimally functional, approximately nine to 10 hours per night, versus the six to eight hours an adult requires. Both child characters and adult characters can have less sleep than this and still function, just not at the peak of physical and mental capacity, and child characters are far more likely than adults to reach a point where they simply "crash" from insufficient rest and have to sleep, whether they want to or not (see *Fatigue*, p. 159). This is particularly true for child characters experiencing the sort of physical, mental and emotional stresses common in stories set in the *World of Darkness*. The same is true for eating and drinking. In general, the average human can survive for two to eight weeks without food, the body continuing to function by burning fat reserves, but within a couple of days at most, the *need* for food starts wearing on both adult and child characters. Adult characters are more likely to be mentally equipped to endure prolonged physical deprivation of this sort. Child characters need to eat, and the younger the character, the more likely they are to need regular meals in order to function.

JEAN PIAGET'S AND ERIK ERIKSON'S THEORIES OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT IN CHILDREN

Jean Piaget was a Swiss philosopher, natural scientist and developmental psychologist, primarily known for his work studying children and his theory of cognitive development. Piaget's theory acknowledges four basic stages of childhood cognitive development:

The Sensormotor Stage: Ranging from birth to two years, children experience the world primarily through movement and the input of their senses, learning as they do of object permanence (i.e., the permanent physical reality of things and people other than themselves — things exist even if you can't see them).

The Preoperational Stage: Ranging from ages two to seven, during which children obtain and refine their motor skills.

The Concrete Operational Stage: Ranging from ages seven to 11, in which children begin to think logically about concrete events.

The Formal Operational Stage: Occurs after age 11, in which children develop their sophisticated abstract reasoning skills.

Erik Erikson was a post-Freudian psychologist who developed his own theory as an improvement upon Freud's psychosexual stages of cognitive development. While he found value in some of Freud's theories (he accepted, for example, the existence of the id, ego and superego constructions), he rejected others (such as Freud's belief that human personality was entirely developed and fixed by the age of five years). Erikson divided the human life cycle into eight psychosocial stages of cognitive development:

Infancy (birth to 12 months): The formative stage of the human psyche, in which the ego develops the ability to trust or mistrust according to external stimuli.

Younger Years (one to three years): The stage at which the individual begins developing a sense of autonomous existence, as well as the capacity for shame and doubt.

Early Childhood (three to five years): The stage at which the individual enhances a sense of independence by adding the intellectual quality of planning, doing and acting — i.e., a sense of personal initiative usually expressed in the desire to play.

Middle Childhood (six to 10 years): The stage at which the pure desire to act out of playful motives gives way to the desire to finish a task for its own sake, and to have one's industry rewarded with success.

Adolescence (11 to 18 years): The stage at which an individual begins to ask, "who am I and what is my goal in life?"

Early Adulthood (18 to 34 years): The stage at which an individual begins to actively seek intimacy with others.

Middle Adulthood (35 to 60 years): The stage at which an individual begins to desire "generativity," the urge to establish and guide the next generation, usually expressed in the desire to have children of one's own or obtain work in socially valued disciplines.

Later Adulthood (60 years until death): The stage at which an individual, having accumulated the self-assurance of a lifetime, begins to fear death, fear loss and fear diminishment of personal capacity.

All of these theories can be used as general guidelines in the development of child characters and in their continuing development into adulthood.

Cognitively speaking, child characters cannot be considered miniature adults, either — not without compromising the unique qualities of playing a child character. Even the most intellectually precocious child does not possess the same level of cognitive development as an adult. For that matter, cognitive development tends to vary considerably between individual children and across peer-age groups, resulting in a wide latitude of intellectual options for child characters aged seven to 12. That said, no single unified theory adequately covers all stages of cognitive development experienced by children. Most child psychologists

acknowledge the existence of at least four or five stages of cognitive development: infancy, pre-school/younger years, childhood (usually split into younger and middle stages of childhood) and adolescence. Each stage is characterized by its own individual structural elements that affect the way a child thinks and defines how the child perceives reality at that time. Forward development is thought to occur when a child's observations of the world clash with his understanding of how the world works, forcing a cognitive reorganization of information and maturation of perspectives. Simply put, the more the world refuses to make sense, the



more a child's mind works to solve the problem, causing the child's mind to develop a more complex and nuanced understanding of the world as a result.

By the time a child reaches the age of seven, she has already undergone a significant amount of cognitive development, though she is still a considerable mental distance shy of true intellectual maturity. Child characters falling within the target age group of this game can display a wide variety behaviors and perspectives, but, in general, should not respond to the world in precisely the same manner as adults. Child characters might very well perceive the same events as an adult character, but reach an entirely different conclusion about the nature and meaning of those events due to faulty understanding, immature reasoning abilities, or a perspective on those events that an adult character lacks or discounts. Child characters are not always wrong about the things they perceive as being true or rational, even if what they understand to be true defies reason or logic. This is the World of Darkness, after all, and child characters may very well have a leg up in the believing the incontrovertible evidence of their own senses department.

Socially, children and child characters are at a distinct disadvantage in nearly every situation compared to adults and adult characters. Adult characters command a certain automatic level of respect and consideration by the simple virtue of being adults: in most cases, they are automatically assumed to be more mature, more trustworthy and more capable than child characters, even if they are none of the above. Authority figures respond more positively to adult characters almost by reflex than they do to even the most mature and well-spoken child character, often even if that child is demonstrably cor-

rect in his actions or behavior. A certain degree of ageist anti-child bias exists in most cultures. The experiences and perspectives of children are almost always devalued, except as those experience and perspectives can be used to justify adult agendas. Moreover, child characters are bound by multiple layers of rules, restrictions and sometimes even laws to which adult characters are generally not subject: local community curfews, restrictions on the numbers in which they're allowed to congregate at public locations such as malls and parks; parentally imposed rules about where they're allowed to go and with whom they're allowed to associate; mandatory schooling regulations and the rules they're required to follow while attending school... The list is fairly substantial and governs just about every aspect of a child character's life, with punishments for transgressions that can range from the mild to the completely life altering. Adult characters intrinsically possess the power to bring the full force of these restrictions to bear against a child character. The child character can usually only counter this power by being willing to break the rules when necessary, which, as noted, is not without consequences.

PORTRAYING CHILD CHARACTERS

For the most part, it's been a long time since the average roleplayer has actually been a child. This creates some fairly significant problems when it comes to accurately developing and portraying a child character in-game, specifically the tendency to overdevelop certain aspects of childhood (such as useful "precocious" traits) and underdevelop others (the genuine limitations of childhood).

PLAYING LITTLE KIDS...

...is hard. Young children are dependent on the people around them, they're small, they're weak and they're largely ignorant. That affords incredible roleplaying opportunities, especially in a horror game, where everything is so potentially dangerous. But it also means that the Storyteller is perfectly justified in asking for rolls to know facts, keep balance, lift relatively light objects. The world is just bigger.

And what a world it is. The World of Darkness includes spirits, ghosts, vampires, werewolves... and those are some of the more easily understood creatures. As you might notice after reading the example of little Daniel, a kid's weird fixations might just be idiosyncrasy, or those toys might actually be moving around. The adults in the kid's life won't usually consider that latter possibility. A young child can't tell the difference. It's up to other kids to believe the character and to help him.

As has been mentioned, **World of Darkness: Innocents** is a game in which the characters *must* look out for one another. It's the only way they're going to make it through the story, especially if some or all are only seven.

Assisting players in overcoming this problem is the province of the Storyteller, who is in a position to offer advice and support. Below is a list of general age-related guidelines for Storytellers to reference when assisting their players in developing the perspectives and personalities of their child characters.

Age seven: According to Piaget's stages of cognitive development, seven-year-old children are the end of the Preoperational Stage. By this age, normal children are presumed to have fully and completely developed their sensory and motor capabilities (provided no disability affecting those capabilities exists). By now, most children have either completed or are in the process of completing their next stage of psychological function development: logical but inadequate mental operations. Aspects of this psychological function development include symbolic functioning (the use of mental symbols, words, or pictures by which a child represents something that is not physically present); centration (the characteristic focus on only one aspect of the physical world or a single aspect of stimulus — the ability of a child to concentrate fixedly on one thing to the exclusion of others); intuitive thought (the ability of children to believe something without knowing why they believe it); egocentrism (the ability of a child to see things only from their own point of view; the inability to comprehend the point of view of others); inability to conserve (the inability to understand the conservation of mass, volume, or number); animism (the belief that inanimate objects are alive or have lifelike qualities, a function of imagination).

In short, seven-year-olds are distinctly the most immature of the options covered by this game's target group. They behave illogically and irrationally, according to adult standards, though their behavior may very well be internally consistent according to the way they perceive and interact with the world. Most seven-year-olds are extremely self-centered and lack much in the way of empathy for others. They can be both cruel and kind without fully understanding the impact their behavior has on others. They are capable of reasoning, within limits, and intuitively grasping abstract concepts without fully comprehending them.

Example: *Stephen's character, Daniel, is seven years old. He's in second grade at his local elementary school. He reads well, but his writing is still sloppy (he's not receiving occupational therapy for penmanship yet, but he's on a "watch-and-see" list). He loves dinosaurs and dragons, and every now and then, he thinks he sees one outside his window. He can't sleep if his toys are still out on the floor. His parents think that's because he doesn't like clutter, but really it's because he's sure he saw them moving around on their own one night.*

Ages eight, nine, 10, 11: According to Piaget, this general age group falls into the Concrete Operational Stage. These ages are characterized by an increasingly appropriate, complex and sophisticated grasp of logical thought processes. Aspects of this psychological function development include seriation (the ability to arrange objects in an order according to size, shape, or other defining characteristics); classification (the ability to name and identify sets of objects according to appearance, size, or other defining characteristics; this function is thought to eliminate animism as a cognitive function, although obviously some people carry it into adulthood); decentering (in which a child takes into account multiple aspects of a problem in order to solve it); reversibility (in which a child comprehends that objects can be changed and then returned to their original state); conservation (the child comprehends the nature of conservation of quantity, length, or number); elimination of egocentrism (the child develops the ability to view things from another's perspective). Children in this stage of development are generally defined as "preteens" and as they age, their changes in personal perspective are usually defined as a greater grasp of and appreciation for the real nature of the world. They tend to have more realistic fears, fed by a superior understanding of how the world affects them and their lives (i.e., kidnapped by a child molester instead of kidnapped and eaten by a "monster"); more realistic expectations in terms of punishments and rewards, as well as goals for the future; and more realistic thoughts and actions in general. They often have a greater tendency toward personal independence derived from a more developed sense of self and individual identity, as well as a developing sense of personal responsibility that is often encouraged by their parents, older siblings, peers and other adult authority figures. Most children of this age do chores of some type for the purpose of earning an allowance. Towards the older end of this age spectrum, they may very well be put in charge of watching and tending to the care of younger siblings for short amounts of time. By the age of 11, some

girls may be experiencing the onset of puberty, with all the attendant biological and psychological changes.

Example: Fred's character, Alex, is 10 years old and is in fifth grade at a very expensive private school. He's an avid soccer player and has been since he was a kid. He's learning that if he lies for other people, the kids regard him as a solid player, and so he's getting a reputation as the guy who'll cover for you if you get busted in class. He hasn't figured out how this might come back to bite him; to him, he's doing people favors and that's a good thing. He's got a stock list of excuses that he uses to get out of homework, and his teachers are starting to notice that he's telling them all the same stories. Alex probably has a parent-teacher conference in his future.

Age 12: According to Piaget, age 12 is the start of the Formal Operational Stage, the fourth and final stage of cognitive development. It is characterized by the acquisition and maturation of the ability to think abstractly, reason logically, and draw both correct and incorrect conclusions based on available information. At this stage, a young adult is capable of understanding abstract emotions and concepts, moral shades of gray, logical proofs, and complex values. At this point, the rapid changes in biology occasioned by the onset of puberty are most definitely a factor in both cognitive development and general behavior. This is still considered a "preteen" stage, but it's the oldest and most matured of the preteen ages, the age most likely to possess some knowledge of human sexuality, increased responsibility for the care and well-being of younger children, and a somewhat more sophisticated worldview, encouraged by educators and other adults. This is, to put it mildly, an "awkward" age: a transitional period between pure childhood and young adulthood, often made even more difficult by personal fears about growing up and an increasing awareness of peer pressure to conform to others' expectations just as one's own sense of self is truly beginning to flower.

Example: Wayne's character, Matt, just turned 12 and is in seventh grade. He's a good student in some subjects, but put a math book in front of him and he loses interest quickly. He's smart, but he's got a habit of figuring out plausible (but wrong) conclusions to situations and assuming he's right without checking. He's interested in girls, but is shy around them, and when he gets nervous, he tends to get short and terse in conversation, which leads some of his classmates to believe that he's snobby or just weird.

CHILDHOOD SEXUALITY

Contrary to popular belief, the sexuality of children is an extremely poorly understood topic in psychology. There are two basic schools of thought regarding the sexual development of children: the *medical model* of development, which emphasizes the innate biology of the process and which may be encouraged or disturbed during childhood, but is basically the same across cultures (i.e., puberty has the same physical effects and consequences regardless of where you live); and the *social model*, which emphasizes sexuality as a social construct containing normative (culturally appropriate) and non-normative (culturally unacceptable) behaviors. Both approaches have

their strengths and their limitations, as does the entire field of child sexuality study, since empirical knowledge about child sexual behavior is almost never gathered by speaking to those most qualified to give cogent answers — the children themselves. Alfred Kinsey was the first sex researcher to gather primary-quality study data about the sexual behavior of children, and he was also the last. Current methodologies of study involve observing children being treated for problematic sexually aggressive behavior, the recollections of adults and the observations of caregivers. The nature of "normative" sexual behavior in children is therefore an extremely problematic thing to define, is often different from culture to culture, and subject to intense and conflicted feelings in most adults, who generally don't want to believe that their children become interested in sexual behaviors as early as they manifestly do.

This is not to suggest, of course, that childhood sexuality needs to be a theme in your chronicle. Most adults are uncomfortable with the notion that little kids have *anything* resembling sexual feelings, and exploring that notion in a roleplaying game might understandably make the players squirm. We're including this information solely as a way of helping the player see a more complete mindset for a child.

Some generally accepted normative behaviors for this game's target age group include, but are not limited to:

In early childhood (ages four, five, six):

- Curiosity about where babies come from
- Exploration of their own, other children's and adults' bodies, out of curiosity
- Significant attachments to an opposite-sex parent or parental figure
- A developing sense of modesty
- Increased genital touching, for pleasure or comfort

In early school age (ages five, six, seven):

- Increasing awareness of gender differences, and a general preference for friends of the same sex
- Increasing attachment to a parent or parental figure of the same sex
- Increased awareness of social mores regarding sex, nudity and privacy, particularly among girls
- Awareness that all things reproduce themselves, live and die
- Awareness that people experience sexual pleasure in a number of ways and that sexual thoughts and fantasies are normal

Middle childhood (six, seven, eight, nine):

- Preference for same-sex friends progresses into disparagement of the opposite sex ("Girls have cooties!")
- By this point, some children may have attempted coitus

Later childhood (nine and above):

- At this stage, most children receive some type of formalized sexual education
- Most children know that sexual contact with others is pleasurable
- Most children have some knowledge of sex in society, such as the nature of prostitution, rape and other sexually exploitive relationships
- Most children have learned how to protect themselves from pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases, or have received some form of abstinence training in an effort to achieve the same effect

SCHOOL

Children spend roughly 900 hours a year in school, and so it's worth examining what "school" consists of, both in the United States and, for the sake of contrast, the United Kingdom.

EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES

In the USA, children start school in kindergarten (age five), though most attend a pre-school program before this. Pre-school helps kids adjust to social groups, structured schedules and being apart from their parents for longer periods of time, as well as exposing them to books, arts and crafts and various other school-related activities and objects. Elementary school begins with kindergarten and is usually considered to extend through eighth grade, although sixth, seventh and eighth grade are often called "middle school."

During these formative years, children in the US are, ideally, taught how to read, write and perform mathematical computations, as well as having special classes in art, music and physical education. In practice, though, many states focus more on teaching children to pass standardized "achievement" tests, most of which focus solely on math, reading and writing (some states have achievement tests in science and social studies as well). What a child learns depends heavily on the school district in which he lives. Rural or inner-city school districts don't have much incentive, monetary or otherwise, to attract good teachers, and as such, the kids are stuck with whomever the district can find (many inner-city districts are especially hard up for male personnel).

A child who has special needs — because of a medical condition, a learning disability, an emotional disturbance, or anything else that presents an adverse effect on education — can receive special education. Special education can include accommodations for test-taking (extra time to complete work, for example), placement in a smaller class, or related services such as speech, physical or occupational therapy. A complex system of laws exists at the state and federal level governing parent and school district rights on the subject of special education. In practice, most educators *want* to help their children, but are spread quite thin; especially, once again, in rural and inner-city areas. Some kids have enough support from their school districts *and* from their families (which is really what makes the difference) to overcome their prob-

lems and reach their potential, whatever that might be. Many fall short in one area or another. Some schools are little more than warehouses, holding kids until they are old enough to move on to high school.

In high school (ninth through 12th grades), kids learn higher-level skills to prepare them for college or for the workforce, depending on the school in question. Again, a well-funded public school is safe, clean and has top-notch educators, but not many schools are truly well funded. Special education services continue into high school, but at this level more than ever, much of the onus is on the student — if the pupil isn't interested in pushing himself, no progress is made.

All of this, of course, deals with public schools, but other options exist. Private schools can be, but are not necessarily, religious in nature. Even when they are, some parents send their kids to attend religious (often Catholic) schools, because the alternative is to enter the public school district in a badly funded or unsafe area. Most schools don't turn away students on the basis of religion (it's another tuition check, after all), though some of the stricter ones do. In some of these schools, the curriculum doesn't differ much except that students take religion classes in addition to their normal coursework. In others, the students are taught outright false information, religious dogma presented as scientific fact.

Some parents, of course, choose to homeschool their children. The requirements for being allowed to do so vary state by state. Some states require that the parent who will be responsible for the homeschooling of the child have a particular degree in education, while others put little or no restriction on the matter. Many parents who homeschool do so for religious reasons, but the practice is gaining popularity in the mainstream, too, as some parents feel that they can provide a better and more intensive education for their children than the school systems can.

All in all, education in the US is almost down to the luck of the draw. Consider, for your character, where she goes to school and what the teachers there are like. Do the schools get funding, or has the state all but forgotten your character's district? Can your character skip schooling without anyone kicking up a fuss, or would your school secretary be on the phone to the truant officer inside an hour?

EDUCATION IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

In the United Kingdom, or in England and Wales at least, children have to start school in the year they turn five. This is known as the Infants class, the Reception class. Kids can go to nursery school on a part-time basis before that (usually from when they're three), but it's not compulsory. When they turn 11, and they have been in reception and five years of primary school, they move up to secondary school. Until about 15 years ago, it was traditional to number the years from scratch: first, second, third, up to fifth. Nowadays, most schools number the years consecutively from primary school, from year seven through to year 11.

In year 11, which is the year kids turn 16, they do the GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) exams, which usually encompass between eight and 12 subjects (although some pupils do fewer, or more). Kids pass a GCSE with a grade of “C.” Kids can leave school at the end of year 11, or can opt to stay on in the Sixth Form for two years. In Sixth Form, they specialize, taking on between two and four subjects.

In the UK, public schools are the ones people have to pay to get into, and state schools are free for all (which is a survival from the days when all schools required money to get in, and the public ones weren’t limited to particular families or individuals). Until the 1980s, all state primary pupils had to take an exam called the 11-Plus. If they achieved a good grade on that, they’d go to a Grammar school, and gain a better standard of education than the other kids, who got to go to a Secondary Modern school. Kids who went to a Grammar School got trained for office jobs. If they went to a Secondary Modern school, they could hope to end up a mechanic, a cleaner or a bricklayer. Nowadays, very few Grammar Schools remain. Most schools are called Comprehensive schools, which supposedly give the same standard of education to everyone, although some are better than others.

Public school pupils still get better jobs, better university placements, and, well, better everything. Some public schools still run boarding houses, and create a kind of “house spirit” only slightly exaggerated in the “Harry Potter” series. Some public schools, whose fees are usually prohibitive, grant scholarships to especially deserving pupils. Scholarship pupils rarely thrive, given a hard time by the kids who are paying to be there and an equally hard time by their contemporaries. Class still runs deep in Britain.

State school kids and public school kids don’t get on, as a rule — but then, school tribalism is pretty rife. Wear the wrong school uniform (and yes, you have to wear school uniform until you’re 16 in nearly every British school) in the wrong part of town, and you’re asking for a beating.

TELLING TALES

Storytelling in terms of roleplaying games is not the same beast as sitting down to write a story, or even a play, though many of the same basic structural elements are used to help give a basic shape to individual games. Most games are divided into segments: chapters, stories and chronicles. This section discusses these segments in detail and offers general suggestions for structure and specific suggestions for types of stories, themes and moods, appropriate to child characters. These terms were introduced in Chapter Six and are discussed in more detail here.

Chapters are the shortest parts of stories, representing single game sessions. Most stories are made up of multiple chapters whose events build on one another sequentially, in the same manner as a book or a serialized movie. Chapters should be long enough to establish one or more key storyline points and allow the players to engage with those points in a manner that personally affects their individual characters.

“...AND I WOULD HAVE GOTTEN AWAY WITH IT, TOO, IF IT WEREN’T FOR THOSE MEDDLING KIDS...AND THEIR GUIDANCE COUNSELOR!”

One of the easiest ways for a kid to get in trouble is at school: there are nearly boundless opportunities to transgress against some rule or other, deliberately or accidentally. It’s also one of the easiest ways for a child character to encounter a character inserted into the story for the purposes of offering her assistance. Not all adult characters the players encounter should be irredeemably hostile to them, and this is also particularly true in the case of school. Very few people who have any sort of deep-seated dislike or distrust of children go into teaching. A good place to insert an adult character whom the child characters can trust and confide in is, in fact, the principal’s office, the guidance counselor’s office, the speech therapist’s office, the classroom, or behind the wheel of the school bus.

Stories introduce and resolve single plot arcs, and can be as simple or as complex as the Storyteller and the players desire. A simple plot might be introduced and resolved in a single chapter, or dozens of sessions might be required to address grand, sweeping plots. There can be many individualized subplots geared toward particular characters and their dramas, but all stories contain a major focus, the resolution of which dominates the main action of all the characters.

Chronicles are a series of interrelated stories that build toward the resolution of an overall theme and contain a cast of mostly recurring characters. Stylistically, chronicles can be compared to long-running television series, or serialized movies or books. Some chronicles have extremely complex plots. Others are less densely structured, with story arcs that adhere to the overall themes and moods of the whole but involve different plot elements in each story.

Theme is one of the fundamental organizational principles of Storytelling — nearly every story ever written or told has some sort of theme. Usually, this theme is referred to as the “moral of the story,” and such morals can cover a wide range of dramatic options, depending on what kind of story is being told. Players can make hay of even the most tightly designed plots with the vagaries of individual action, but the theme is usually something to which they can be brought back with a little effort from the Storyteller. The overall theme of the story or chronicle should somehow underscore the plot elements of every chapter or story.

Mood is the tone or atmosphere of an individual chapter. This is usually established through the use of recurring symbolic elements: sensory elements such as sounds, tactile sensations, smells, visual images or the calculated and de-

liberate exclusion of the same. Consistent mood is harder to attain and maintain than consistent theme.

Plot is what the characters do. Simply put, it is the overall sequence of events with which characters are involved and the actions they take in response to those events. No such Storyteller is completely in charge of all elements of his plot at all times. The basic rule to keep in mind is that no plot, no matter how tightly or loosely constructed, survives contact with the players.

Conflict is what almost invariably happens to characters during the course of individual plots. It is also the absolute essence of drama. Plots completely devoid of some form of conflict — physical, mental, emotional — are extremely dull plots, indeed, though not every plot needs to involve every possible form of conflict for all the characters involved in it.

Setting is the locale in which the chronicle takes place and can be as important an element as the characters themselves. In general, the World of Darkness is similar to our world, but presented through a twisted and disturbing lens. Invocation of this strange and unsettling world can be accomplished in a number of ways, through the use of elements of real-life horror culled from the newspapers, urban legends resized for the particular community the characters occupy, or mythic elements borrowed from fairy tales.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF STORYTELLING

- **Involve the Players Whenever Possible:** Incorporate their ideas and the specific details of their character backgrounds into the chronicle wherever possible. Doing so involves them immediately and viscerally in the action, enriches the setting, establishes and maintains lines of Storyteller/player communication, and has the potential to forestall conflicts before they begin. After all, the players' characters are the most important ones in the story and it should, in fact, revolve around them and their actions, experiences and growth. Working with players to develop their characters even between sessions is a rewarding idea, since the brilliance of your players can recharge your own creative energies.

- **Be Aware of Players' Expectations:** Nothing can send a game south faster than ignoring the desires and expectations of your players — the game is, after all, supposed to be fun and entertaining for everybody. That said, don't be afraid to occasionally turn those expectations on their heads, mix things up, toss in plot curveballs, or otherwise make your players guess. Nothing bores players faster than a predictable story.

- **Work Things out in Advance:** An ounce of planning is worth a pound of frantic extemporaneous winging it around the gaming table. Don't feel it necessary to plan out every minute detail of action and motivation and require your players to adhere to that plan (i.e., "railroading"), but prepare at least a general outline with notes about important events that should occur and important player character/Storyteller character motivations and past plot elements that might come into play.

- **Story First, Rules Second:** The rules are there to be tools, not a straightjacket. If they interfere with the flow of the story, feel free to change them or ignore them as you see fit. That said, if you're going to change the rules of the game, inform the players. If, for example, you're going to ignore the stun rule (p. 153), the Tough Merit is useless, so there's no reason for a player to take it for his character.

- **Description, Dialogue and Action:** Intense, well-described imagery and interesting dialogue can hook your players within moments of a story's opening. Maintaining a constant, interesting and exciting pace of action will keep them hooked and wanting to see what happens next.

- **Avoid Over-Reliance on Stereotypes:** Stereotypes can be useful starting points for character development or action, but can quickly become stultifying and boring if never developed any further.

- **Be Fair to Your Setting and Your Players:** Don't reward your players for the sake of rewarding them. If they behave intelligently, make good decisions, propel the plot in interesting directions with their actions, and rise to meet the challenges you put before them, reward their hard work commensurately. The easiest way to reward good roleplaying is with experience points (see p. 185).

- **Don't Tell Them Everything:** Yes, your story is your baby and you love it dearly. But resist the urge to tell the players everything, or even more than they need to know. Part of the pleasure of playing is discovering things during the natural course of play. Some things might never be uncovered. Use them again.

- **Don't Abuse Your Power:** "Rocks fall, everyone dies!" is not really a fair response to things not going as you expected them to in-game. Remember roleplaying games are collaborative. Guide the direction of the story, but don't try to force them or their characters to act the way you'd prefer. Respect them and your control over the situation and their characters.

- **Don't Panic:** Unless you have the power to read the minds of your players and perfectly predict their every action, they *will* eventually pull the rug out from under you. Don't be afraid to call a break so you can reorganize yourself and your thoughts. By the same token, don't be afraid to wing it and run with what they're giving you (but it's not a bad idea to take some quick notes, so you can build on what they're doing). And don't forget: in the end, it's all about having fun and there's no One True, Correct Way to Play. There is no such thing as a "mistake" at the gaming table, beyond failing to enjoy what you're doing. (Mathematical errors don't count.)

BUILDING A STORY

Chapter Eight of this book gives specific examples of **Innocents** stories for the Storyteller to adapt as best suits her purpose. This section, however, deals with generalized advice concerning stories set in the World of Darkness and how those stories can be structured. This advice is not meant to be exhaustive or absolute, but merely a guideline to which Storytellers can refer for the purposes of getting started.

THE PREMISE

The core premise of the entire World of Darkness is that it is our world, but that world is *wrong* at the core: infested with supernatural entities that prey on the common run of humanity to greater or lesser degrees, and that the horrors and dangers in fairy tales and scary novels are neither fictional nor anywhere as distant as most people would generally prefer. Introducing this premise, especially to child characters, requires a bit of delicate handling, though not as much as would be required for adult characters. Child characters are almost always more credulous, more willing to trust the evidence of their senses, and more willing to believe the “impossible” than an adult character would be. In the real world, this is because they lack the experience and context necessary to tell fact from fiction, and lack the deductive and inductive logic skills to analyze what is in front of them. That’s true in the World of Darkness, too, but something more insidious is also at work. Adults in the World of Darkness have learned over their lifetimes to *ignore* the supernatural. It’s there, and adults know that on some level — why else do they still knock on wood or throw salt over their shoulders? But those vestigial superstitions are all that remain, for most people, of a greater understanding. Adults in the World of Darkness don’t see the supernatural because they deliberately turn away. Looking at the darkest parts of the shadows can cost someone his blood, soul, family, mind or life. Adults have learned this (though not usually consciously), and when faced with something that goes against their understanding of the world, they find a way to make it work and still keep going to work every morning. Kids don’t know to do that.

Keep this in mind when designing the initial “hook” meant to catch the characters and draw them into the story. Possible initial premises include:

- The character’s parent or parents encounter, and are subsequently endangered or victimized by, the supernatural elements of the World of Darkness. This can range from a parent becoming enthralled to a supernatural entity, being employed by a supernatural entity by entirely mundane means and being drawn more deeply into that world by association, or falling afoul of a supernatural element’s schemes and becoming endangered as a result. A character’s parent comes home in the wee hours of the morning, pale and bedraggled, the victim of a vampire’s attack. Stranger, though, is that it happens every few nights. Why does the parent keep going back? Why isn’t the parent’s spouse, if any, doing something about it?

- There’s some wrong in the characters’ neighborhood. It might be as simple as a haunted house, or it might be a local vagrant everyone tells stories about. Maybe there’s a restaurant that some of the local kids *swear* is home to something big, scaly and hungry. Just hearing about this story can be enough to pique a character’s interest.

- The children themselves can draw the attention of the supernatural. Perhaps the creature in question is interested because of the characters’ youth, or for some other quality that even the characters haven’t identified yet. Maybe one or more of the characters are (unbeknownst to

EXCEPTIONAL PEOPLE

Of course, not everyone wears blinders. Some people see that the supernatural preys upon humanity and are driven to *do something* about it. These people might become priests, doctors or teachers, or try to help the general run of humanity in some other service-oriented profession. Some take the fight to the streets, becoming cops, soldiers or firefighters. And some leave normal life behind entirely and become monster hunters.

When playing **World of Darkness: Innocents**, think about your character and what her response might be as she grows up. If you consider what kind of adult she might become, it will inform your decisions on what her childhood “was” like, which, in turn, helps you approach decisions on how to portray her as an **Innocents** character. It might seem like a backhanded way of getting into a character’s head, but if you think about it, it’s not far off from what you as a player are doing, anyway — using childhood experiences, as an adult, to take on the role of a child.

them) kin to werewolves. Maybe they’re the next in line for an ancient family curse. Or maybe it’s more personal than that. Maybe that vase that the kids broke at a yard sale was holding something old, malevolent and powerful...and now it wants to thank them.

INITIAL ENCOUNTERS

Once the initial premise has been decided upon, the Storyteller can begin designing events. Initial encounters with the unknown should start out small — and, even so, child characters might leap to the sorts of conclusions that would take adult characters a good deal longer to achieve, simply due to the high credulity threshold of children. By that same token, you shouldn’t make your initial encounters so subtle that the characters won’t rise to the bait. The first time characters see the supernatural, it should be the kind of event that their parents can easily rationalize, and that the characters *might* accept as natural. But things escalate, of course, and the more the characters look, the more they should find.

- Loved ones begin behaving oddly. Mom is found one morning asleep on the garden bench, having apparently walked out there in the middle of the night without remembering doing so. Dad keeps getting home later and later from the office, and his excuses keep getting vaguer and vaguer. Older siblings spend most of the daylight hours sleeping or completely lose interest in fixing their cars, gossiping with their friends, or hanging out at the mall.

- Weird stuff begins happening around the character or her friends. Lights flicker whenever they enter the room. All the fish in the classroom aquarium keep dying for no reason. Someone keeps writing non-Euclidian geometric diagrams on the English teacher’s blackboard. Geese attack whenever the gym class goes outside for archery practice or kickball.

- Someone or something snatches, or tries to snatch, a member of the character's class. A kidnapping in the area, though, is going to kick up statewide or even nationwide attention, especially if the victim is upper or upper-middle class or if she or her parents are locally important figures. If a child disappears and no one reacts, *that* is unusual. Likewise, what if the being that snatches the kid doesn't do it in a van, but swoops down on leathery wings and the only ones to see it are the characters? Adults won't believe them, and that means they have to be the ones to search.

EXPLORATION

Child characters are almost always willing to admit that something weird is going on long before an adult character would. That makes setting up the exploration phase of a story a bit easier: the characters won't be spending a lot of time navel-gazing when they could be searching for clues, actively hunting out danger, and getting themselves in trouble with your plot, their parents, and, in all likelihood, any local authorities and/or supernatural elements.

- It seems a lot of people's parents are having the same problems — especially the ones whose folks work for the same company, that big place that just opened up outside of town and hired up as much local talent as they could. Kids are hardly seeing their dads or moms anymore, since they rise before anybody's even up for school yet, and don't return until almost bedtime.

- A lot of the older kids are hanging out at the new club downtown, the one that was built on top of the lots

where that old row of warehouses burned down a couple of years ago, or at the arcade/game store in that same little strip mall. The place caters to people aged 16 and over, unfortunately, so they may need to recruit a patsy/volunteer to help with the investigation...

- The curfew that's been in place since somebody tried to snatch that girl from Miss Kinneas' class is a little hard to get around without somebody older being willing to be dragged along to act as chaperone/camouflage. But it's doable since the girl who was snatched has an older brother, and he's just as frustrated as anybody by the police's inability to find his little sister.

HINTS OF THE SUPERNATURAL

Until now, the events going on around the character should be weird and disturbing, but not overtly supernatural in nature. At this stage, it becomes important to begin leavening those elements into place, bumping the tension and action up to the next level. Note: the gore level of an **Innocents** chronicle will generally be low, but that doesn't mean it should be entirely devoid of horror, and certainly not devoid of fear. For even the most intrepid characters, this part should be out and out *scary*. Just remember that fear is different from flesh-crawling discomfort. The hint of pain or violence is often more terrifying than witnessing the real thing, especially in an entertainment medium, where none of it is real, anyway.

- Mom or Dad (or possibly both) is hospitalized after a car accident or other seemingly normal event that oc-





curs while going to work. In the hospital, the characters overhear the doctors talking in low voices about anemia, blood loss, or other trigger indicators of supernatural involvement, like physical injuries inconsistent with the relative severity of the accident. Maybe one of the doctors even elbows his colleague and makes a joke about a vampire being on the hunt “again” — he’s probably kidding, but what does he mean?

- An older sibling goes missing for a whole night and day, perhaps several days, and when he returns, he has no memory of where he was or what he was doing, and all he wants to do is sleep. Mom and Dad are afraid of drugs, but the characters should notice that he hasn’t randomly decided to dye his hair again — something actually *made it turn white*. He’ll freak out about this, too, once he wakes up.

- That little girl’s older brother sure is acting strange. Not only does he walk her to school every day, he sits up guarding her window all night (or at least the part of it that the characters get to witness), and he won’t even leave her alone with his parents. It’s almost like he doesn’t trust them to protect her properly, or something. The characters realize he’s perfectly right when they see his folks sneaking out late one night and meeting with someone who fits the description of the would-be child-snatcher.

CONFRONTATION

This is another story stage that needs to be handled delicately. Ideally, in an initial story, the characters should not have a direct confrontation with the supernatural forces at work in their lives or their communities. Instead, they should achieve a certain resolution to the immediate story elements but in a manner that allows for the greater plot of the chronicle to continue unfolding. In short: Mom and Dad’s boss might be a vampire, but Jimmy and Rebecca shouldn’t find that out until the end of Act Two and shouldn’t be in much of a position to do anything about it until the middle of Act Three, at the earliest.

- Mom or Dad has to spend some time off from work after the accident. Once this happens, their behavior begins returning to something resembling normal, and they seem troubled by how strange it became in the first place. The characters know that something is still wrong, but not precisely what — especially if the parents of their friends are still behaving in similarly weird and inexplicable ways.


- The older sibling dyes his hair back to its original color and swears the characters to secrecy — but he won’t promise not to go back to the club, and so they have reason to feel he’s still in danger and is too stupid to get himself out of it.

- The characters find their classmate and her older brother hiding out at the tree fort in the local kids’ hangout near a public park — they’ve got clothes and blankets and food and it’s pretty obvious that they’re trying to hide until they can get away for good. They won’t say why they’re trying to run away, exactly, but the characters can guess it’s for a good reason. The question is how are they going to help?

RESOLUTION

Bringing an **Innocents** story to a satisfying end is, perhaps, more complicated than doing so in other roleplaying games, simply because physical combat isn’t an easy option. If the characters discover that the secret club for teens is, in fact, a spawning ground for tiny goblins that feed on the tears and sweat of their older siblings, but that cannot harm anyone wearing yellow, the kids can don yellow shirts and go to the club with baseball bats. But if Mom and Dad really *do* work for a vampire, violent confrontation probably isn’t in the characters’ best interests. What, then, is the “end” of an **Innocents** story? How do the characters win the day?

When designing a story, you should consider from the beginning how the characters might bring about a satisfactory conclusion. Be aware, of course, that players have a tendency to change the story drastically, but if you’ve got some idea about how things *could* end, then you have



a foundation to build from. Below are some suggestions about general conclusions for **Innocents** stories.

- **Get Help:** The characters don't need to beat the monster, they just need to get to safety. They might need to escape the possessed counselor at their summer camp and get to the gas station a few miles down the road, or they might need to hide from their pursuers long enough for someone to find them. The assumption here is that the threat isn't going to chase them after they've gotten to "safety," or that if the characters can make contact with the adult world and bring proof of what they're facing, the adults can handle it. This type of resolution might feel lazy or even cheap if done wrong — the characters, after all, should be the stars of the show. If the goal is escape or refuge, however, achieving it can still feel like a victory. As a possible aftermath, of course, you might describe the man from the summer camp walking down the road toward the characters' hometown, thumb outstretched.

- **Solve the Problem:** This is an appropriate ending for ghost stories, or for stories involving monsters that, while capable of inflicting harm, also have specific weaknesses. A ghost might move on when a certain action is performed — a note delivered, a door unlocked, or a house burned down — and that action might be well within a child's capabilities (see *Ghosts*, p. 199). Likewise, though vampires are physically powerful and deadly, they also burn in sunlight, and many vampire films end with someone pulling down a curtain or breaking a window and letting the light in to vanquish the enemy. Solving the problem might also be a temporary fix. Maybe the characters find a chant that puts those creatures at the club asleep for 10 years, meaning that they won't bother anyone for a whole decade (of course, that means they'll wake up about the time that the characters become eligible for entry into the club).

- **Survive:** Maybe the characters don't need to save the day. Maybe they just need to make it through the night. The little girl's older brother isn't going to live through the story. He'll guard his sister with his life and die so that the characters can get her to safety. The characters aren't necessarily going to kill or defeat the supernatural entities they've met, and unlike *Getting Help*, in this conclusion no one will ever really know what happened. The characters might make up a story to cover any incidental damage, and through repeating it over and over, come to believe it. This is the kind of story that makes for a good follow-up game: in five or 10 years, the characters reconvene and ask, "What *really* happened the night Hector died?"

- **The Continuing Story:** Some of these endings might make it seem like once one story is over, the chronicle is over, too. This isn't at all true — once one story is over, the characters are primed for more excitement in the *World of Darkness*! Yes, they're a little more knowledgeable (and perhaps a little scarred), but the supernatural has many faces, and the characters might wind up seeing more because they know what to look for. After a story, consider what the characters have learned and what

their attitudes are, and use that to structure the agendas and events for future chronicles. For example, consider the stories presented in Chapter Eight. "With a Song in My Heart" features an antagonist who isn't obviously supernatural, though certainly monstrous. This might make for a good introductory story, a way to get the characters together and make them trust one another. Follow that story with something slightly more overt, such as "The Forever Club," which highlights the occult without showing the characters a real monster. After those events, the characters might be ready to venture into the country (perhaps to recover from the traumas of the first stories) and meet "The Mountain Mother," or get sent away to boarding school ("What are Little Boys Made of?") or, if they've garnered too much attention, to a detention facility ("High, Sweet, Evil Laughter").

STORIES FOR INNOCENTS

Not all types of stories are appropriate for all sorts of games. **Innocents**, being a game geared toward child characters, has certain inherent differences in terms of suitable story types, themes and moods. The **World of Darkness Rulebook** (in which players take on the roles of adults in this setting) uses a gritty crime melodrama with film noir undertones, for example, when discussing story structure, themes, mood and setting. For obvious reasons, this particular genre of story is deeply inappropriate for an **Innocents** game: there's no such thing as film noir for the prepubescent set. Fortunately, a number of opposite genres do exist for use in conjunction with **Innocents** and the *World of Darkness* in general. Below is a sampling of examples.

DARK MODERN FAIRY TALES/ TRADITIONAL FAIRY TALES

Fairy tales are, by their very nature, one of the most proper dramatic settings for child protagonists. For many years, the only place to find adaptations of fairy tales and their themes were in the films of Walt Disney, and those works had a habit of downplaying or outright ignoring the more disturbing aspects of the stories on which they were based. And, make no mistake, real fairy tales have edges on them: they are, after all, cautionary tales meant to teach children moral lessons and the unpleasant, life-altering, sometimes fatal consequences of transgressing against community mores, social expectations and basic common sense. Traditional fairy tales and their themes have recently been revisited by a series of talented authors working with those stories by retelling them within a modern context, or developing modern stories that echo the themes, tone and structure of the older tales, without replicating particular plot elements. Examples of this genre include:

- The works of Neil Gaiman, who has written a number of young adult novels whose themes fall firmly within the "modern fairy tale" genre. His novel *Coraline* is a perfect example of the form, in which a young girl must rescue her parents from a danger in which she has inadvertently embroiled them through her own recklessness,

curiosity and boredom, while simultaneously outwitting a malignant supernatural entity who wants Coraline for her own daughter — or possibly a snack.

- The “His Dark Materials” trilogy by Philip Pullman, a dense, richly imagined young adult fairy tale set in near-modern times, in which a young girl (Lyra Belacqua) and a young boy (Will Parry) from two different worlds must navigate the plots and schemes of their elders while engaging with the most primal of all the fairy tale themes: that growing up is hard to do, and painful besides.

- The mythopoetic works of Ellen Datlow and Terri Windling. These two folklorists have compiled and published a number of influential “fairy tales for adults” anthologies, but they have also written reams on the stories themselves and are an invaluable source of research on fairy tales, both common and obscure.

- The original works themselves, which have been written down in assorted forms by various folklorists and cultural anthropologists, as well as literary enthusiasts, dozens of times over the years. Pick your favorite version and run with it.

YOUNG ADULT HORROR NOVELS/ SHORT STORIES

In the mid-80s to mid-90s, authors such as R.L. Stine and his many imitators and contemporaries flooded the young adult fiction market with dozens of books released under series titles such as “Goosebumps,” “Fear Street,” “Dark Forces,” and “Twilight,” as well as standalone novels like *I Know What You Did Last Summer* and its many knock-offs. Some of these series are even still in print, and many more are available cheaply through used bookstores, and were the first taste of the horror and thriller genres that many young people ever had. This isn’t saying that the books were well written — many of them weren’t — but the genre is immanently mineable for themes, moods and hints on how to handle the introduction of supernatural elements, such as vampires, werewolves, witches, and ghosts, to child characters within the target age group for an **Innocents** chronicle.

- R.L. Stine’s “Goosebumps” series of YA novels was targeted at the younger end of the **Innocents** age spectrum and featured stories with supernatural antagonists and “light horror” themes in which the juvenile protagonists usually came out on top. The “Fear Street” imprint was marketed toward the older end of the **Innocents** age spectrum and ramped the horror/danger factor somewhat higher, as well as introducing certain elements of the “thriller” genre, such as non-supernatural antagonists menacing plucky babysitters and their young charges.

- The “Dark Forces” and “Twilight” series of novels were aimed at a somewhat older age group — young teens — but the stories themselves were by no means as sophisticated in terms of theme or characterization, or as dangerous to the protagonists, as an adult horror novel, though some were fairly gory. (For example: the novel *Blood Red Roses* dealt with an antique mirror inhabited by a demonic spirit that drove the supporting female

character it possessed to kill her parents with a butcher knife, complete with a fairly graphic series of descriptive paragraphs detailing the results and an extremely disturbing “children’s rhyme” to underscore the horribleness of it all.) Like the books for younger readers, these long-out-of-print series can offer considerable inspiration.

- The late 90s/early 00s saw a sudden spate of female YA horror authors, who were barely older than the protagonists of their stories, turning out stand-alone novels and whole trilogies featuring children and young teens engaged in supernatural escapades, often tinged with at least a hint of romance. Books like *Silver’s Kiss* (notable for its extremely creepy child-vampire villain) and *Blood or Chocolate* (notable for its treatment of supernatural children; in this case, werewolf children) deal with supernatural themes, as well as that awkward transition between being a child and being a teenager.

YOUNG ADULT (SEMI) MODERN FANTASY

You can probably blame it all on the wild success of the “Harry Potter” books and movies: YA fantasy is to the 2000s what YA horror was to the 80s and 90s. As of this writing, the YA section of just about every bookstore and library in the country is awash with novels of young people, many of them within the age range of an **Innocents** chronicle, involved in some sort of fantastic goings-on complete with repulsive, possibly supernatural villains, magical threats to the world, and age-old prophecies to which they may or may not be the fulfillment. Most of these stories are a bit lighter in tone than the *World of Darkness*, but not by much.

- Susan Cooper’s “The Dark Is Rising” sequence of seven books recently came back into print after a number of years, ahead of the first live-action film based on the series. A (relatively) modern fantasy, it deals with the adventures of a number of different children (many of entirely mundane nature, one the supernaturally empowered heir to a line of immortal guardians of humanity) as they’re caught up in the midst of an ages-old war between the forces of Dark and Light, enriched by its poetical evocation of traditional Welsh myths and Arthurian themes.

- “The Spiderwick Chronicles,” written by Holly Black and illustrated by Tony DiTerlizzi, is the contemporary successor to works like the *Weirdstone of Brisingamen*, in which a group of children discover the truth about the existence of the world of Faerie and the threat it poses to the “real” world they inhabit. Also slated to become a major motion picture.

- Lemony Snicket’s “A Series of Unfortunate Events” chronicles the woeful life of the Baudelaire orphans, who lose their parents, gain a traumatically nasty “uncle” whose desire to possess their not inconsiderable fortune far outstrips his desire to protect them and their interests, and promptly become embroiled in a series of... unfortunate events...with supernatural and *World of Darkness*-style unseen conspiracy overtones. If you saw the movie, you saw bits and pieces in the first three books of the series.

CHILD PROTAGONISTS IN HORROR FILMS

Cinema can serve as superb inspiration for **Innocents** chronicles. Below are a few horror films that feature children as protagonists or childhood as a strong thematic element.

- *They* (2002). Horrible creatures that live in mirrors steal children, mark them and then return to collect them later in life. It's not a great film (beware of any movie with more than one ending; it usually indicates the filmmakers didn't really know what story they were telling), but it has some genuinely frightening moments.

- *The Sixth Sense* (1999). A young boy can see ghosts and turns to his psychologist to help him cope with this ability/curse. If you haven't seen it yet, you probably know the "secret," but on the off chance you haven't, we won't spoil it for you. Haley Joel Osment, who plays the young medium, was nominated for an Oscar for his performance in this film, and deservedly so.

- *The Night of the Hunter* (1955). Robert Mitchum plays a serial killer before the serial killer genre of films really existed. The children in the movie, who lose their mother to this latter-day Bluebeard, spend much of the movie on the run. A good illustration of the fragility that we've tried to underscore in **Innocents**; note especially how the little girl, even after running from the killer, still runs to him toward the end because she recognizes him. This movie was the primary inspiration for the "With a Song in My Heart" story in Chapter Eight, incidentally.

- *Aliens* (1986). It's not about children, but it does feature a memorable child character. Newt is strong and resourceful, but she survives by regressing and living like an animal. A good depiction of a child in a horrible circumstance who has lost many of her social graces in order to remain alive.

- *Stand by Me* (1986). Four friends walk along the railroad tracks to find the body of a dead boy. Add in a ghost, or change Kiefer Sutherland's thuggish buddies into a pack of werewolves, and you'd have a perfect World of Darkness story. Just make sure to keep the coming-of-age fragility that permeates the kids' interactions, because that's really the good part.

- *Monster House* (2006). Animated, sure, but what a perfect **Innocents** story! The neighborhood bully gets eaten. The mean ol' man in the ancient house really needs some help. And the "haunted house"...well, let's just say that escape isn't as easy as running home when the home can run, too.

These suggestions are not meant to be exhaustive. Every Storyteller needs to design a story that appeals to her own sensibilities and that of her players and there are, of course, more than three genres of stories in which child characters play an important part.

THEMES AND MOODS FOR INNOCENTS CHRONICLES

As with genre, some themes and moods that generally fit the World of Darkness are not necessarily appropriate for use in an **Innocents** chronicle. The thematic sensibilities of a gritty crime drama or, for that matter, a gory splat-

terpunk horror novel, would be starkly out of place in a story starring the prepubescent protagonists of this game. Storytellers should tailor the chronicle's theme carefully to coincide with the conventions of whatever genre of story they choose to tell. For example:

COMMON THEMES IN FAIRY TALES, MODERN OR OTHERWISE

Fairy tales have a complex literary and dramatic background — many theorists posit that such stories were the original method of transmitting cultural mores from one generation to the next in preliterate societies and, as such, were as much for the adult audience as the children. Many fairy tales, in their original forms, don't shy away from themes of sexuality, violence and cruelty, usually because they're teaching some lesson or making a cautionary comment on the darker side of the human condition. Easily the single most common recurring theme in fairy tales is that *every choice and action has a consequence*, even, and perhaps especially, for children. *Coraline* is, again, an excellent example of this convention: out of boredom, the protagonist opens a door into another world and meets an entity whose malice is strong enough to snatch away Coraline's parents and force her into a dangerous adventure to rescue both them, and the souls of three other children who have been trapped in that world since their own deaths. Simply closing the door again wasn't enough to make right what she did wrong — her actions had consequences that weren't simple, easy or painless to redress, and which required her to discover depths of cleverness and courage that she might otherwise never have realized she possessed. Yes, she has assistance (in the form of an unreliable feline advisor and a stone with a hole through which she can see things she otherwise might not), but without Coraline's willingness to take responsibility for her own actions and their consequences, there would have been no story.

COMMON THEMES IN YOUNG ADULT HORROR

Many young adult horror novels borrow their major thematic conventions from the bits of fairy tales that several generations of folklorists in the 19th century spent sanitizing away — the parts that pertained to violence and sexuality and the more unpleasant aspects of the human condition. Other reference sources have also been classic sci-fi/horror films, television shows like *The Twilight Zone* and *Tales from the Dark Side*, and adult horror novels re-imagined for a younger audience. One of the most common themes in young adult horror, much like grown-up horror novels, is *don't call up something you can't put back down*. This is easily one of the easiest hooks to embed in an **Innocents** chronicle, due to the very simple fact that children are curious by nature, and often do things that they're told not to do for any number of reasons, good, bad or rankly foolish. In an adult horror novel, behavior of this nature would almost invariably result in a high body count. This is not necessarily appropriate for a story starring child characters, though the dangers they face should be real and challenging.

COMMON THEMES IN YOUNG ADULT MODERN FANTASY

Young adult modern fantasy crosses over with and borrows themes from both traditional fairy tales and myths and from certain horror conventions, as well, tingeing these themes with aspects of the otherworldly and romantic (“romantic” as descriptive of “impossible and amazing adventure”). One of the most common themes to be found in modern fantasy is that of *children growing up in the midst of terrible things*. The World of Darkness is, to put it mildly, a horrifying place — there, the monsters are real, after all — and very few things are morally unambiguous. Growing up itself is a morally ambiguous undertaking, much less while trying to deal with a supernatural menace. This is a theme to use for chronicles specifically revolving around how the protagonists change in accordance with the weird and fantastic circumstances in which they find themselves embroiled and how those changes propel them forward or hold them back from becoming the people they ultimately will be in the future.

While we’re on the topic of themes, there are, of course, themes that do not derive from fictional sources. Real-life horrors involving children occur every day, in just about every country of the world, and those happenings can easily be inspirational of stories set in the World of Darkness and backgrounds for **Innocents** characters. It is, however, advised that stories based on real-life situations be treated with sensitivity and tact. One of the most re-

pellent aspects of our modern media culture is its habit of rendering any horrible situation involving children in the most salacious manner possible. Such methods may garner ratings, but they are also supremely tasteless, extremely disrespectful to the anguish of their subjects, and generally loathsome besides. If the Storyteller, or a player, wishes to use real-life elements of childhood dangers or harm done to children to emphasize, underscore, or help establish a theme in keeping with the supernatural elements of the World of Darkness, it should be discussed beforehand, and the plot threads and how they will be revealed worked into the story from the initial planning stages.

CHILD CHARACTERS AND THEIR DEVELOPMENT IN THE STORY

Children grow up — this is, in fact, the single most defining element of being a child. It should also be one of the most important elements of many **Innocents** chronicles. The characters introduced in the first chapter of the first story will not be the same characters who see the chronicle’s completion. The things they experience during the course of the chronicle will change them, mature them and, in many ways, strip or carve away at the very innocence that defines them in the beginning. Some characters naturally prove to be more resistant to these changes, just as some people are



ONLINE RESEARCH RESOURCES

If you, as a Storyteller, want to use real-life situations involving the risks, dangers, and abuses children face, a number of resources are available online to help in the development of characters and their stories. A selection of those resources is provided here.

- <http://www.isaccorp.org/> — International Survivors Action Committee, exposing abuse, civil rights violations, and fraud perpetrated by privately owned “juvenile care” facilities.
- <http://www.missingkids.com/> — The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, a private, non-profit organization that functions under a US Government mandate to assist in the recovery of missing children and the prevention of child abduction and sexual exploitation.
- <http://www.ethicaltreatment.org/> — The Ethical Treatment for All Youth Committee, dedicated to opposing adult-oriented treatments and punishments for “child sex offenders,” many of whom fall within the age grouping covered by the rules of this supplement.
- <http://www.neoflux.com/content/horrible/> — Our Horrible Children, a clearinghouse website for information on school district Zero Tolerance policy impacts on children, elementary to high school aged.
- <http://www.aacap.org/> — The American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry.

more resistant to those changes in real life. Some characters will be more susceptible to change wrought by their circumstances or by forces from outside themselves. These dramatic processes and character exploration issues should be encouraged, as well as whatever group dynamics develop, to produce a group of characters that complete the transition from innocents to adults within the World of Darkness. Their adventures may continue past the point of their childhood. Examples of individuals who have experienced strange and supernatural things as children and who have grown into adults shaped and, in some cases, distorted by those experiences are legion in film and literature.

This doesn't necessarily mean that the child characters of **Innocents** grow up to join the legions of the supernatural in adulthood. In the World of Darkness, so replete with the paranormal, it stands to reason that many or even most children have some brush with it. But growing up in the World of Darkness means that these characters have to decide what to do about that knowledge. Do they pursue it? Try to hide from it? Maybe they try to become it (the Appendix discusses transition between **Innocents** characters and supernatural characters in more detail).

Not all **Innocents** chronicles will, of course, lead to continuations featuring adult versions of the characters,

but the option to do so certainly exists, should the Storyteller and the players wish to pursue it. This, of course, requires a certain degree of preparatory plot and character development: the child may be the father of the man, but very few adults are exactly the same people they were as children. Character development issues to keep in mind include but are not limited to:

• **Management of Personal Trauma:** Children manage and process traumatic experiences differently from adults. Many children who experience the sort of traumas associated with supernatural events in the World of Darkness could very well suffer from such psychological difficulties as post-traumatic stress disorder, which is characterized in children by reenactment of their experiences during play or through nightmares lacking any specific or recognizable content. If the underlying trauma is not diagnosed or uncovered — or if it is, in fact, uncovered but disbelieved by the therapeutic authority to whom the child or her parents turn — the results can be a life-long battle with post-traumatic stress and its associated spectrum of disorders, or an improperly managed diagnosis/therapy combination heavily predicated on the use of drugs to control symptoms that can otherwise not be dealt with effectively.

• **Children Grow Up and Away:** How many friends do you have in your adult life who have been your friends since elementary school? Middle school? Even high school? Most people don't begin forming emotionally and psychologically enduring friendships until late adolescence at the earliest, and most often in early adulthood, once they've gone away to college or entered into the workforce, and begin encountering adult peers with whom they have things in common, such as shared interests or work. It's not impossible for people to know each other from early childhood and remain lifelong friends, but in the modern world, with its career-oriented moving patterns, apparently random school district partitioning, high incidences of divorce and remarriage, very few people successfully do so. Even with modern technological advances like cell phones and email and instant messaging to facilitate communication, many people can't be bothered to keep in touch. Adult characters who were friends as children, re-encountering one another after years apart for higher education or random family moves, should probably have a pretty compelling reason to become close again for a story to work. Shared supernatural trauma, perhaps?

• **People Change:** It's an unalterable fact of life. Most people are not interested in exactly the same things they were interested in when they were children. The inevitable process of becoming an adult wears away at everyone, taking with it innocence, the naïve beliefs that we forged as children, our friends, our families and, in some way, our selves. Adult characters derived from the child characters of an **Innocents** chronicle should contain at least some of the same aspects of personality and characterization they possessed prior, but there should also be significant and fairly rational differences from the characters they used to be, as well. Some changes will be significant — little pig-

tailed Jenny is now a single mother whose fiancé bailed when their son was born “special.” Jason, the boy who wanted to be a football star like his heroes, grew up to be a CPA after he hurt his knee in high school. Others will likely echo aspects of the children they used to be. Jenny has a nightlight in her room, too, and a flashlight or two stashed under her pillow because she never really got over her fear of the dark. Jason’s always been good with numbers, remembering them, recognizing the patterns in them, and can still quote chapter and verse on football statistics for players who haven’t touched a pigskin for years.

Systems for converting child characters into adult characters can be found beginning on p. 186.

EXPERIENCE POINTS

Characters grow and change over time, learning new things and either getting better at things they already know or discarding those old skills for new interests. This is particularly true for child characters who, even if they possess a ranking of 5 in an Attribute or Skill, have not achieved their full adult potential in that trait. The phenomenon of learning/discarding/learning is represented in-game by the acquisition and use of experience points to improve existing traits and acquire competence in new areas of study or endeavor. Experience points become ever more important over the course of a chronicle, particularly a long-running chronicle, as they allow characters to become more capable over time and capable of taking on greater and more difficult challenges.

AWARDING EXPERIENCE POINTS

The Storyteller decides how much experience to award at the end of stories, chapters and, if applicable, during downtime between chronicles, should the characters continue on as adults. She judges awards based on a variety of factors, from how well a character performed a particular task to whether the character really learned anything from the adventures in which they became embroiled to how well the player actually roleplayed their character.

- **After a Chapter:** At the end of each game session, the Storyteller awards between one and four experience points to each character. Every character who takes part in the chapter gets one point of experience automatically just for being there, no matter how well or poorly they might have fared during the course of said chapter. Make use of the following guidelines when determining how many points of experience to hand out to each character thereafter, adding one point for each category that applies. Some characters naturally accumulate more experience than others, but points should be awarded based on merit, not favoritism.

1 point — Automatic. Each character gets one point for having participated in a chapter.

1 point — Learning Curve. Ask the player what his character learned during the course of the chapter. If you agree with his response, award a point accordingly. A hint: today’s learning curve should lead to tomorrow’s shining moment or crushing defeat (see below).

1 point — Roleplaying. The player did a good job of portraying his character during the course of the chapter, either entertainingly, appropriately, or both. Characters who diverge too far from their character’s stated concept might not deserve this award, but don’t be too harsh with people who are just learning the roleplaying ropes. Similarly, players who did a truly excellent job with their roleplaying may deserve more than one point.

1 point — Heroism. Characters who rise to the occasion, particularly when the dangers are real, and act in a genuinely impressive manner deserve recognition. Note: a suicidal glory-hog is not the same thing as a hero.

- **After a Story:** Once a story has come to a conclusion, the aftermath is a time of reflection and consideration that might warrant experience points beyond those awarded during the final chapter.

1 point — Shining Moment or Crushing Defeat. Ask each player what moment, during the previous story, stood out as his character’s greatest success *or* as the flub-up that nearly killed everyone (or so it seemed). If you want to award more experience, allow a point for both.

1 point — Plot Advancement. The character acted in such a manner as to advance the plot, rather than stifle it. If the player decided that her character sat in her room and didn’t answer her cell phone, forcing the other players to make a detour to her house to fetch her so the adventure could continue, the player doesn’t deserve this point. Yes, that decision might be “in character,” but going along with the group and acting as a voice of reason or a constant reminder about the danger the group was in would have been “in character,” *and* would have helped move the story along.

1 point — Interaction. Ask each player what her character learned about another character. What event in the group would make for a good anecdote or in-joke later on down the line? What moment will inspire the words “remember when” among the characters in the lunchroom on Monday? What secret will the characters take to their graves? The point of this award, of course, is to encourage the players to *interact*, to make the story about all of the characters together, rather than each of the characters separately.

Additionally, if you want characters to advance more quickly in between stories, feel free to award sufficient experience points to bring them to the desired level of competence.

SPENDING EXPERIENCE POINTS

Players can spend experience points to purchase Attributes, Skills, Specialties, Merits or Morality for their characters. Normally, players spend experience between stories, but if the Storyteller is amenable, there’s nothing wrong with a character developing a trait *in media res*. After all, if a character has been struggling with overcoming his naturally cowardly nature (a low Resolve rating) for several chapters, it’s entirely appropriate for him to find a reserve of courage he never knew he had in the final confrontation with the undead teenager in the story’s final

EXPERIENCE POINT COSTS

Trait	Experience Point Cost
Attribute	New dots x 5
Skill	New dots x 3
Skill Specialty	3 points
Merit	New dots x 2
Morality	New dots x 3

chapter. The Storyteller is, of course, free to deny raising a trait if she doesn't feel the character has been played in such a way as to warrant it (a character who's never thrown a punch isn't going to spontaneously develop the Fighting Style: Karate for Kids Merit). As such, players should keep Storytellers informed about what they are saving experience points for and how their characters are working toward those goals.

Traits cost "new dots" times a set multiplier. For instance, Skills cost (new dots x 3), which means that a player who wants to buy the first dot of Skill for his character, raising his rating from zero to one, pays three points. Buying the second dot would cost six, and so on. Normally, players should only purchase one dot at a time, but if the Storyteller decides to take a large amount of downtime in between stories (for example, the characters go their separate ways over summer break and meet up again in fall for school), raising a trait by two or more dots at once isn't unreasonable.

Remember that when buying Merits, players must purchase each dot, even if the Merit doesn't have a variable rating. The Danger Sense Merit, for instance, costs six points (two for the first dot and four for the second), even though the Merit doesn't have a one- or two-dot "version," the way Merits like Fast Reflexes do.

CONVERTING CHILD CHARACTERS TO ADULT CHARACTERS

As was previously discussed, **Innocents** characters have the potential to continue their stories as adult characters in the World of Darkness. For Storytellers and players who wish to take this option, a certain degree of character maturation is necessary in order to advance the **Innocents** characters to adult levels of competence. One way to accomplish this is simply to create the characters anew, using the system found in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. For those who would rather have adult characters with higher traits (representing the characters' youthful activities), or who don't have access to that book, we offer a conversion system.

STEP ONE: CONCEPT

Consider how your character has changed during the intervening years. Pay special attention to whether the characters have kept in touch. As mentioned earlier, very few

people have close friends from their childhoods, but experience with the supernatural might just be a strong enough impetus to keep a group in contact, at least occasionally. Also, if the characters are all family friends (or just family), they have a good reason to stay involved with each other.

Then again, it might be interesting for each player to decide individually how her character has changed, and then present this new adult version to the other characters without much in the way of explanation. Describe the character as she is *now*, with no reference to how she was *then*, and let the other players figure out what's changed.

Beyond the question of contact, think about experiences. Depending on how many years have passed, characters might have college degrees, careers, spouses, children, homes and many, many formative experiences to share. They might also have buried parents, friends or lovers, suffered injuries and terrible losses, and be at the end of their metaphorical ropes when the characters all find one another again.

And, of course, consider the supernatural. Have the characters seen anything strange in the years since their last meetings? Have they continued to pursue the unexplained, or do they just ignore it, like most of the adults in the World of Darkness? If that's the case, seeing the other characters will almost assuredly rattle the characters terribly. How will they cope with that?

If you have access to the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, change Asset and Fault to whichever Virtue and Vice the player finds appropriate. If you do not have access to that book, Asset and Fault stay as they are or change to different Assets or Faults to reflect the maturation process.

STEP TWO: ATTRIBUTES

Attributes do not change. If you wish to "shuffle" your character's Attribute ratings, however, you may do so. An athletic kid might grow up and lose some of his physical prowess, but become a practiced socialite. A child who had a tough time in school (low Mental Attributes) might just be a late bloomer.

STEP THREE: SKILLS & SPECIALTIES

Subtract one dot from *each* Skill your character possesses, to a minimum of 1 dot. This isn't to suggest that children lose ability as they get old; it merely simulates the growing complexity of information that Skills represent for adults and the effort that adults must put into maintaining their Skills. Note, however, that characters keep the basic knowledge and ability they had in their youth. Specialties don't necessarily change, though they can if the player wishes (it's often appropriate; our interests change as they grow more sophisticated).

If your troupe has access to the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, then Study should be removed entirely. Any dots in Study should be put into Academics and/or Science.

STEP FOUR: MERITS

Any Merits that are no longer applicable are lost. Deep Pockets, for instance, disappears once a character is no longer dependent on his parents. Pets probably don't



survive with a character into adulthood. The childhood Fighting Styles are lost, but if the character has kept up his training, he can use experience points to purchase dots in the Brawl Skill to reflect this.

STEP FIVE: MORALITY & TRIGGERS

Morality doesn't necessarily change, though it can be bought up with experience points (new dots x 3) or traded in for more experience points (5 experience per dot lost, to a minimum Morality rating of 5). Triggers are assumed to have faded, though they can be converted to derangements if the troupe has access to the **World of Darkness Rulebook**.

STEP SIX: UPDATE TRAITS

If the character's Skills total less than 11/7/4 with three Specialties, add dots to the appropriate categories to bring them up to this total, and Specialties to a maximum of three. It's not critical that the integrity of the primary/secondary/tertiary division for Skills be maintained (unless the Storyteller prefers it that way), provided that the character winds up with 22 dots in Skills. If the character has fewer than seven Merit dots, choose Merits to bring the total to seven.

If your troupe has access to the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, remember that Study is removed from the sheet and the Mental Skills of Academics and Science replace it, Physical Skills now include Drive, and Social

Skills now include Persuasion. Even if you don't have access to this book, adults should have access to the Drive Skill (see p. 60).

STEP SEVEN: EXPERIENCE POINTS

Add experience points to your character using the following formula: 20 *plus* the number of years that transpire between the age of the characters at the end of the **Innocents** chronicle and the age of the characters at the beginning of the new, adult-oriented chronicle. These points can be used to buy up any trait that that player wishes.

STEP EIGHT: UPDATE ADVANTAGES

Depending on which traits have been raised or altered, Speed, Health, Willpower, Defense and Initiative might have changed. In addition, Size increases to 5, even if the character was Tiny (characters with the Giant Merit do not change in Size; the Merit dots spent for Giant are reassigned in Step Five).

EXAMPLE OF MATURATION

Matt has decided that after several stories, he's going to move his **Innocents** chronicle forward seven years. This means that the characters, including Jess' character Olivia (whom we met on p. 167), move past the range of **Innocents** and into adulthood. Olivia, 12 years old in

The Value of the Credulous Adult, or, Why It's Sometimes Good to be Friends with Somebody Over the Age of 12

by Myranda Sarro

One of the most common tropes of the horror genre in general, and the kids-in-danger subset of horror specifically, is the completely oblivious adult who won't admit that something weird is going on until it almost rips his head off, and sometimes not even then. Horror novels and movies are densely populated with such characters. They are, in many ways, the plot engines that drive such stories, and without a significant supply of adults who act and react stupidly when faced with situations beyond their ken, some stories would never happen. I offer no disparagement on this particular genre trope, since its utility has been well established by writers far more talented than me, and I've personally written more than one character who probably should have been eaten by a Grue instead of surviving her explorations more or less intact. Rather, I'd like to talk to you about this trope's opposite number: the credulous adult.

Credulous adult characters in fiction are often somewhat hard to come by. I can only think of a handful right off the top of my head: Uncle Red in the film *Silver Bullet* (based on Stephen King's novella *Cycle of the Werewolf*), reluctantly convinced by his niece and paraplegic nephew that the murderer stalking their small town isn't a random weirdo but a werewolf, and acts to protect them when the creature comes to kill them for their meddling. Peter Vincent, the washed-up Hammer films star turned so-late-it's-early horror flick program host from the movie *Fright Night* (of course, the "children" in that film are actually young adults, but Vincent still provides adult support), and Miss Sprink and Miss Forcible, the aging stage actresses from Neil Gaiman's *Coraline*, who first tell the eponymous heroine that she's in danger by reading her tea leaves before she's even encountered the supernatural. These characters are the sorts of adults who, for whatever reasons, have not allowed the rigors of the "real world" to completely strip them of understanding the danger that can come to children from sources other than bad test scores, nasty people trolling playgrounds with bags of poisoned candy, or failing to wear one's helmet while biking. They're also the sorts of adults who, when approached by a child in danger, listen to what that child has to say first and make up their own mind about it second, instead of presuming that children can't possibly know what they're talking about because they're too young, too inexperienced, or too flighty. On a more mundane note, they can also be the sort of people who deliberately choose to go into

professions geared specifically toward helping children in danger: social workers, therapists specializing in the care and treatment of children, teachers, pediatric doctors and nurses. In a world where most adults remaining willfully ignorant of the supernatural, these people keep their eyes open, or at least are *willing* to do so if asked.

In real life, children are often in a position where they cannot seem to do anything right. Some commentators have called the current social and political attitude towards kids "the war on children," and that's not far wrong. Nowadays, it's far easier for a child to do wrong just by virtue of being a child than it's ever been before: most malls, for example, have specific rules governing the precise number of kids who're allowed to walk together, and the same is true for public parks in many places. Kids can have their education permanently stunted by virtue of someone else's tattling. A kid can get a juvenile criminal record by talking about a video game too loudly or kissing his girlfriend if her parents don't approve. Children are rarely extended any benefit of the doubt by our culture at large — just look at the current enthusiasm for charging kids too young to drive, vote or drink as adults for "crimes" that are misdemeanors in one state but felonies in another. The attitude among many adults is that anyone under 18 should be grateful not to be maximally punished for any infraction, no matter how minor. These things are real, and they're horrible, and they can make good background fodder for roleplaying game characters and stories.

It would also, however, be perfectly okay to take the opposite tack, and let some adult in the story you're constructing actually trust the kids and believe in them. A drunken uncle. A washed-up old actor or actress. A cranky old man living in a house full of stuffed roadkill taxidermy. A social worker who knows from bitter personal experience that the world isn't exactly as it seems. These characters can also work well in World of Darkness games, and help propel the story forward. They can be the fitfully burning match held in someone's trembling fingers, the one person the freaked-out, runaway **Innocents** character calls just before she does something stupid and desperate, or the individual willing to take random action when they see an endangered child. Think about it. It's not as impossible a fit as it might sometimes seem, and such characters can enrich a story immeasurably, just like their real-life counterparts enrich our world and make it a better place for kids.

Matt's original chronicle, will be 19 as the new one starts. As such, Matt instructs Jess to use the maturation system to make Olivia into a woman. For the sake of space, we'll assume that Matt and Jess do *not* have access to the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, and thus this example does not use rules or traits from that book.

- **Step One: Concept** — Jess talks with Matt and with the other players about what Olivia has been doing. Olivia, Jess decides, graduated from high school in the middle of her class. She's never been a slacker, but she's more motivated to be social than to study. As such, Olivia was active in drama club and spent a season as a cheerleader, and moved on to college to major in English (though she's thinking of switching to Pharmacy — what's she going to *do* with an English degree, after all?).

Jess decides that Olivia is still Friendly (her Asset doesn't change), but she's not as egocentric as she was in her youth. She still has trouble being considerate of others, and her experiences with the supernatural awakened a Cruel streak within her.

Over the course of the **Innocents** chronicle, Olivia has improved her traits. She's added a second dot of Stamina, single dot of Occult, Investigation, Weaponry and Subterfuge, a second dot of Stealth, and a dot of the Fast Reflexes Merit. Unfortunately, Olivia has also lost a dot of Morality during an unfortunate incident involving bats and a car accident, and developed a trigger along the way (Insomnia — sometimes, when she tries to sleep, she still hears the horrible shriek of those bats).

- **Step Two: Skills and Specialties** — Jess looks over Olivia's character sheet and reduces the Crafts, Stealth, Expression, Intimidation and Socialize Skills by one dot (her other Skills are already at one dot, so those don't change). She leaves the Crafts Specialty in Sewing (Olivia has kept up with this hobby), but decides that Olivia has lost her knack for Intimidation with younger kids — she's just not around them that much anymore. Jess decides to wait to replace that Specialty until she knows what she's doing with her adult Skills.

- **Step Three: Merits** — Olivia doesn't live with her parents anymore, so Deep Pockets is no longer applicable. Likewise, her Contacts Merit represented her friends in elementary school. Her Team Player and Danger Sense Merits can remain as they are, and Jess decides that Olivia still pays attention and still works well with others.

- **Step Four: Morality and Triggers** — Olivia's Insomnia has been reigned in over the years, though Jess decides that Olivia sometimes needs medication to get to sleep at night (though she isn't so dependent as to justify a Flaw). Her Morality remains at 6, and Jess doesn't wish to reduce it further.

- **Step Five: Update Traits** — Presently, Olivia has seven dots in her Social Skills, six in Mental Skills and four in Physical Skills. Matt isn't particular about Jess sticking to the 11/7/4 spread, especially since she'll be able to raise these traits with experience, so Jess has five Skill dots and two Specialties to spread around. She adds dot to Study, a dot to Computer, two dots to Politics and one dot to In-

timidation. She gives herself a Specialty in Intimidation (Cold Stare; this plays into the Cruel streak that she discovered during the **Innocents** chronicle) and one in Study (Chemistry; she's found she has a real knack for it).

Olivia has two dots of Merits unaccounted for (she lost three dots, but has a total of five, counting her Fast Reflexes). She puts them into Striking Looks — Olivia has blossomed into a lovely young woman.

- **Step Six: Experience Points** — Since seven years have passed since the end of Matt's **Innocents** chronicle, Jess has 27 experience points to spend on Olivia. Jess decides that Olivia has kept in shape and has learned a bit of self-defense, and so spends six experience points on a second dot of Athletics, and three more on a dot in Brawl. She spends nine on a third dot of Socialize (Olivia fits in quite well with the college party scene), and three more on a Specialty in Occult (Urban Legends; Olivia likes to scare her friends with spooky stories). Jess spends the remaining six experience points on Merits. She buys a dot of Contacts, representing the faculty in the Pharmacy department (two experience points), a second dot of Fast Reflexes (four experience points).

- **Step Seven: Update Advantages** — Olivia's Size is now 5, meaning her Health increases by one. Her second dot in Fast Reflexes increases her Initiative Modifier by one. Her Speed, Defense and Willpower do not change.

Olivia is now an adult character, ready to re-enter play and experience the World of Darkness through a different set of eyes.

ALLIES AND ANTAGONISTS

If conflict is the essence of drama, the essence of conflict is the mettle your enemies (and your friends) are made of. This section details a number of human and inhuman Storyteller characters for you to customize for use in your **Innocents** chronicle and is broken into four sub-sections: Other Kids, Adults, Animals and Supernatural Creatures. Each section includes example characters with complete traits, for use as inspiration or as-is in your chronicle.

OTHER KIDS

Kids aren't cruel by nature, despite what some people think, but they certainly *can* be cruel by inclination. As the essay on p. 70 points out, bullies aren't always the weak-willed brutes that television makes them out to be. Bullying is (or, rather, can be) a highly sophisticated social interaction.

Then again, not every kid in the class is a jerk. Some kids aren't friends, but aren't enemies, either. It might be that the quiet kid in the class, the one no one really talks to, is the first one to notice when the strange stuff starts happening. Maybe he keeps a journal about it, and your characters *need* to see that journal to make heads or tails of what's happening. You could just ask him...or you could try to get his locker open.

The role of a Storyteller-controlled child in an **Innocents** game can go from ally to antagonist and back

again very quickly. Some kids talk a good game about being tough or mean, but they're actually shy and would really love some positive attention. Some are friendly, but completely egocentric and will not honor any agreement or promise they make. This isn't because children are sociopaths, or "cruel," or even inconstant. It's because between the ages of seven and 12, the child is still figuring out *who* he is. Inconstancy isn't a character trait for these kids; it's the lack of fixed character traits that leads to the inconstancy.

What does that mean for you as Storyteller? Only that a child's role among the supporting cast shouldn't be as firmly fixed as an adult's. That's a good thing for you, though — it means that you have a great deal of flexibility when portraying these characters, and if the players' characters are having too hard a time, you can have a kid they've had trouble with before show up to give them a hand. He might never let them live it down, of course, but in a pinch, any aid is good. Likewise, "allies" might flippantly tell their parents about the "Ghost Club" at school and how they're planning on sneaking out tonight, not necessarily out of malice, but perhaps out of concern (and just a *bit* of envy).

THE BULLY — CHARLES MABRY

Background: Charles isn't terribly bright, but he's very, very big. He's always been the big kid in the class, and folks think that makes him dumb. They also think he should be the one throwing smaller kids around, and so they teased him about his size, and he figured out that if he shoved smaller kids, they laughed instead of teasing him...and he's grown to like being bigger and stronger. He's not, at heart, a mean kid, and he doesn't like seeing smaller kids cry, but he lacks the social skills to deal with these feelings and either runs away or gets violent when things get too intense. Sooner or later, Charles is going to really hurt someone. His parents are indulgent and they make a half-hearted show of talking to Charles when he gets in trouble at school. It doesn't sink in, though, because they don't do anything to reinforce the punishment or to model any good behaviors.

Description: Charles is only 10, but he's bigger than some ninth-graders. He's got sandy brown hair that falls around his ears and dull-looking brown eyes. His clothes are either a little too loose or a little too tight; nothing ever really *fits* him. His mouth usually hangs open and he stares for entirely too long.

Storyteller Hints: Charles could fill several roles in an *Innocents* story. He could make a good recurring nemesis for the characters in the schoolyard. He could be an erstwhile ally; maybe he's a nice kid when his parents are together, and it's just when they're on the outs that he acts up. He could be a kid's embarrassing (but useful!) older brother, or he could be the first victim of the creature that's moved into the area.

THE QUEEN BEE — ELISE CORRY

Background: Beautiful, beautiful Elise. All the boys have crushes on her; all the girls are fiercely jeal-



THE BULLY
CHARLES MABRY

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Computer (Video Games) 2, Crafts 1

Physical Skills: Athletics (Chasing) 2, Brawl 3, Stealth 1, Survival 1, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Empathy 1, Intimidation 3

Merits: Fighting Style: Playground Dogpile 3, Fleet of Foot 2, Giant

Willpower: 7

Morality: 6

Triggers: Berserk (kids crying)

Asset: Honest

Fault: Dull

Defense: 2

Initiative: 6

Speed: 12

Size: 5

Health: 8

ous. She once said, out loud, that she didn't *need* to be smart because nobody would ever tell her "no" anyway. That was in third grade. Her teachers still trade that story around the lounge, because no matter how jaw-dropping it might be that she said it, it's true. Elise



THE QUEEN BEE ELISE CORRY

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2,
Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2,
Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3,
Manipulation 3, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Computer 1, Politics
(Cliques) 3, Study 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Larceny 1

Social Skills: Expression 2,
Intimidation (Subtle Bullying) 2,
Socialize 3, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Deep Pockets, Ego Boost, Fast
Reflexes 1, Striking Looks

Willpower: 4

Morality: 6

Triggers: Self-Destruction (bulimia)

Asset: Calm

Fault: Egotistical

Defense: 2

Initiative: 5 (with Fast Reflexes)

Speed: 8

Size: 4

Health: 6

frustrates people, students and teachers alike, because of how easy she has it. Her parents are rich, she's lovely and athletic, and she's not *dumb*, so she passes her classes without any problem.

Of course, Elise doesn't see it that way. She has no friends, no real ones. She hates the way the boys (and some of the teachers) stare at her chest. She looks in the mirror and sees flab, and just recently she's started to think that if she doesn't keep her food down long enough to digest it, she won't put on any more weight. She interacts with everyone, even her clique at school, with a sneer and a "whatever," and it's made her a social force to be reckoned with. It's miles from what she wants, though.

Description: Elise is 12 years old but is developing into a beautiful young woman. She has thick, curly blond hair that she refuses to wear long, and even in her school's uniform, she manages to stay at the height of fashion. She usually wears a snide look, but once in a while, a teacher catches her looking confused or sad. They usually figure she's just being hormonal — what does the Queen Bee have to be sad about?

Storyteller Hints: Elise might be an opportunity to introduce a creature that could lure her into a Faust-like bargain, or she might simply be a character the players' characters love to hate. Maybe after several stories of dealing with "that bitch," someone catches her in a moment of vulnerability and learns about her eating disorder. Maybe the characters hear the teachers talking about her and learn that teachers gossip about kids just like kids gossip about teachers. And, of course, Elise might be the secret love of a character's life.

THE SPOOKY KID — MYRON BENEDICT

Background: For the past couple of years, Myron's classmates have been watching him to see if he's going to snap. Myron wears black, he listens to weird music, he reads those strange books about vampires and ghosts, and sometimes he says the strangest things in class. Even the teachers look at Myron nervously — he's a little kid, sure, but he's probably going to be one of those kids who brings a gun to school someday.

Myron's getting really sick of this kind of attention, though. He's *fine*, really he is, as long as he takes his medicine. He's not a violent kid, anyway, but he does have a thing for horror movies and first-person shooters. Heck, maybe he does fit the profile, but he doesn't hate anybody. Except maybe those bastards who shove him in the lunch line. And that teacher who singles him out when he wears his favorite t-shirt. And that librarian who won't let him check out books about true crime. OK, so there are a *few* people he hates.

Description: Myron is small for his age (nine years old). He's skinny and wears huge glasses; his parents can't afford the stylish ones. He wears black t-shirts and usually carries a book about the occult. If he's taken his meds, he's quiet and polite. If he hasn't, he can't sit still, no matter how hard he tries, and he keeps his hands clasped tightly together to stop himself from grabbing things around him.

Storyteller Hints: Myron isn't necessarily going to fly off the handle, but the Storyteller can certainly *hint* that he is. Depending on the needs of the story, he might

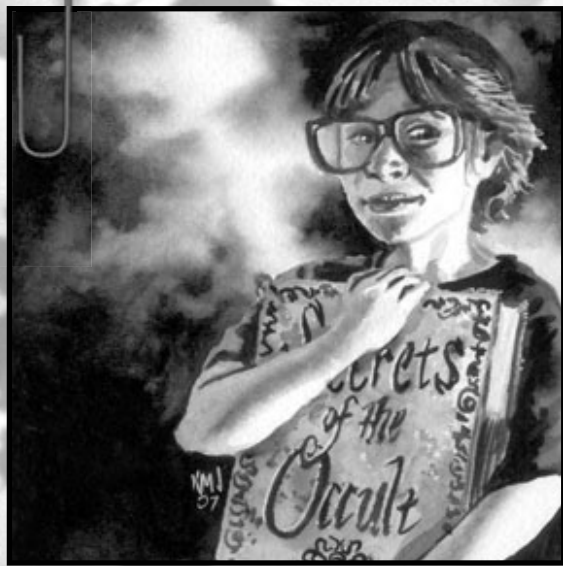
ADULTS

As has been explained elsewhere in this book, particularly in the essays in Chapter Four and earlier in this chapter, adults can be a child's salvation or spell his doom. Adult characters in *Innocents* chronicles might include people like characters' parents and teachers, older siblings, favorite aunts and uncles, neighbors (creepy and otherwise), local business owners and, of course, unpleasant folks who drive plain-looking vans around and vagrants who stare just a *bit* too long at the kids in the schoolyard.

Before we present some examples of adult characters to use in the chronicle, we need to consider game mechanics. Adults have the same Attributes as children, and apart from having access to the Drive Skill (p. 60), they use the same Skills. The scale on which these traits work, however, is different.

There is no easy conversion from child to adult, unfortunately. The *World of Darkness*' dice mechanic doesn't allow for an easy "three dots as a child=one dot as an adult" conversion. Instead, consider that two dots in an Attribute should always be read as "average," no matter how old the character is. As such, if a child of 12 with Strength 2 arm-wrestles an adult with Strength 2, the adult will win, even if they have the same rating in the relevant trait.

Skills can equalize this somewhat. An adult character with Computer 1 and a child with Computer 1 probably know some of the same things, but the adult's knowledge is still more sophisticated. A child with Computer 3 assuredly knows more than an adult with Computer 1, however. In such a case, the winner of a contest between them would have more to do with their comparative Intelligence ratings; the child is more knowledgeable, but the adult has a better grasp of critical thinking and can improvise better.



THE SPOOKY KID MYRON BENEDICT

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 1

Mental Skills: Computer 1, Occult (Monsters) 2, Study 4

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Larceny 1, Stealth 2

Social Skills: Intimidation (Creepy) 1, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Mental Prodigy, Tiny, Trivia Hound

Willpower: 4

Morality: 7

Triggers: None

Asset: Friendly

Fault: Hyperactive

Defense: 2

Initiative: 4

Speed: 9

Size: 3

Health: 5

befriend a ghost or another, more malevolent entity, or be the one kid in school who's really well read on all that geeky superstition stuff. If the characters ask for his help, he'll probably be thrilled and follow them around like a lost puppy for the rest of the year.

ADULT ATTRIBUTE SCALE

DOTS

TALENT

- Poor. Unexercised, unpracticed or inept.
- Average. The result of occasional effort or application.
- Good. Regular practice or effort, or naturally talented.
- Exceptional. Frequently applied, tested and honed, or naturally gifted.
- Outstanding. The peak of normal human capability. Continuously exercised or naturally blessed.

ADULT SCALE: LIFTING/MOVE OBJECTS

One specific point of difference between children and adults that is likely to be useful in **Innocents** chronicles is that of Strength. Use the following chart to determine how much an adult can lift or move, but the dice system for doing so (found on p. 37) is identical.

Strength	Feat	Lift
1	Lift a chair	40 lbs
2	Lift a large dog	100 lbs
3	Lift a public mailbox	250 lbs
4	Lift a wooden crate	400 lbs
5	Lift a coffin	650 lbs
6	Lift a refrigerator	800 lbs
7	Overturn a small car	900 lbs
8	Lift a motorcycle	1,000 lbs
9	Overturn a mid-sized car	1,200 lbs
10	Lift a large tree trunk	1,500 lbs
11	Overturn a full-sized car	2,000 lbs
12	Lift a wrecking ball	3,000 lbs
13	Overturn a station wagon	4,000 lbs
14	Overturn a van	5,000 lbs
15	Overturn a truck	6,000 lbs

ADULT MERITS

Adults can have many of the same Merits as children; use common sense to determine which ones are appropriate. A few specific differences are noteworthy.

- The Giant Merit puts an adult's Size to 6, conferring +1 Health but no other bonus.
- Adults have no analog for the Tiny Merit.
- Instead of Deep Pockets and Odd Jobs, adults can have a Merit called Resources. The higher the rating in this Merit, the more money the adult has access to. Note that an adult without this Merit isn't unemployed, he's just barely making ends meet. An adult with Resources 3 has enough to have kids with the Deep Pockets Merit. An adult with Resources 5 is a multi-millionaire.
- Since adults are not subject to the Stun rule, they have no need of the Hard Head Merit.
- Adults can take Skills at any rating without the Prodigy Merit.

ADULT SKILL SCALE

Dots

-
-
-
-
-

Talent

- Some training or marginal natural ability.
- Strong natural ability or considerable schooling.
- Regular, intensive practice — the adult could use this Skill professionally.
- A leader in the field, someone others seek out to learn from.
- Years of professional training, incredible natural ability. One of the world's best.

ADULT ADVANTAGES

Advantages are computed for adults in much the same way as for children, with the following exceptions:

- Adult Speed is computed as follows: Strength + Dexterity + 5.
- Adult Size is 5, therefore Health is, on average, higher than for children.

ADULTS VS. CHILDREN

All of this in mind, simulating contests between adults and children is complicated, in part because of the vast difference in the age range of **Innocents**. When children and adult characters interact, the Storyteller should implement the following systems:

- All unarmed combat attacks made on adults by children receive a negative modifier equal to the adult's Stamina.
- Adults are not subject to the stun rule (p. 153).
- Adults receive 8-Again (p. 127) on all contested rolls made against children, *except* on rolls to find children who are hiding (see p. 65) or to spot children who are running for it (p. 143).
- Adults do not suffer wound penalties until they have only three open Health boxes. At that point, they suffer a -1 penalty, then -2, and finally, with no boxes open, -3. Adults never lose 10-Again or the ability to take heroic effort from wounds.

ADULTS IN THE CHRONICLE

Like children, adults can fill a number of varied roles in a **World of Darkness: Innocents** chronicle. Below are a few examples of adult characters, with game traits and suggestions for use in your stories.

MILITANTLY CHILDFREE — ETHEL MINER

Background: The decision to have, or not have, children is an extremely personal one, and isn't a choice to be made lightly. Not everyone decides that having children is the appropriate choice. Some people choose to put off



MILITANTLY CHILDFREE ETHEL MINER

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3,
Wits 2, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2,
Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2,
Manipulation 3, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Computer 3,
Investigation 2, Occult 1, Study
(Literature) 2

Physical Skills: Brawl 1, Drive 1,
Stealth 1, Survival 1

Social Skills: Animal Ken (Cats)
2, Expression (Nasty Diatribes) 2,
Intimidation 2, Socialize 1, Subterfuge
2

Merits: Ego Boost, Resources 2,
Trivia Hound

Willpower: 5

Morality: 6

Triggers: Aversion (Children and
parents)

Asset: Creative

Fault: Cowardly

Defense: 2

Initiative: 4

Speed: 9

Size: 5

Health: 7

having children, or choose not to have children at all, for a variety of reasons financial, medical, or otherwise individual to their own lives. Most such people continue

with their lives, interacting peaceably and sanely with those who've made the opposite choice. Ethel is not one of those people.

Obnoxiousness is Ethel's core defining trait. Not content to simply make her own decision and live with it, she wants that decision to be continuously validated by the universe at large. She comes across as both extremely bitter that she is not being continuously congratulated for her decision not to reproduce, and deeply insecure over the specifics of that decision. She covers this insecurity in bluster about how perfect the world would be if every parent raised children like she would — not that she'd ever *have* kids, of course.

Ethel spends much of her time online, ranting to other, like-minded people about how the world has gone to Hell since everyone decided to bow down to parents. She uses horribly degrading language to refer to parents and children, often loud enough for people to hear her, but never frequently enough in the same conversation to be challenged. For all her talk, she's terrified of parents, and has been known to leave restaurants when she starts getting angry glares from the targets of her ire...which, of course, just reinforces her view that parents and children are self-centered and intolerant.

Description: Ethel is in her mid-30s. She is slightly overweight, wears her hair at shoulder length and keeps her face set in a scowl or a mean smile. She usually wears t-shirts with crude slogans on them and tight blue jeans. She wears a brace on her wrist (carpal tunnel from constant typing).

Storyteller Hints: What happened in Ethel's life to make her hate children so? Who can say? It might be that she was a middle child, ignored for the firstborn and later the baby. It might be that her parents weren't exactly abusive, but were so strict, or so smotheringly sweet, that she regards the whole concept of child-rearing negatively. Or maybe she's just an ugly person.

Using a character like Ethel in an **Innocents** story takes some thought. What role can she fulfill and still be a meaningful character, rather than a caricature? She might serve to teach children that life isn't fair, that bullies grow up and become bigger bullies, or that monsters can be monsters by virtue of attitude as well as action. Then again, she might be someone the characters can educate. She might never want kids of her own, but if she were to become trapped somewhere with the characters, perhaps while something horrible screeches for blood outside, she could learn that children *aren't* the soul-sucking monsters she believes them to be.

NASTY OLD MAN — MR. WIRZALOW

Background: There's one in just about every suburban community or urban neighborhood: that twisted little old man or withered little old woman, the one who lives alone in that ramshackle old house with the overgrown yard, or that little flat where the curtains are always drawn, who stalks about with a permanent scowl etched into place, hating everyone and everything, but reserv-



NASTY OLD MAN MISTER WIRZALOW

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4,
Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 1,
Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3,
Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Crafts (Metal-working)
3, Investigation 2, Medicine 1, Occult
2, Politics 2, Study (Law, History) 4

Physical Skills: Drive 1, Firearms 2,
Stealth 3

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Intimidation
4, Subterfuge (Lies) 2

Merits: Resources 4, Unseen Sense

Willpower: 6

Morality: 7

Triggers: None.

Asset: Fair

Fault: Violent

Defense: 2

Initiative: 5

Speed: 8

Size: 5

Health: 7

ing particular venom for the neighborhood children. Mr. Wirzalow is one such man.

No one seems to remember his first name. Even the characters' mothers and fathers call him "Mister" and remember him from when *they* were kids. He's older than dirt, and he's got no time at all for kids, especially on his

property. Heaven help you if your dog runs into his yard or your baseball lands on his roof. You might see your dog again, but any toy that touches his property is forfeit.

And it's too bad, really, because his house is so *cool*. It's the oldest one in the neighborhood and he keeps the grounds immaculate. Rumor has it that he's actually got a cemetery in his backyard — but that's just rumor, because none of the kids can see over his high fence. The house looks like something out of a horror movie, and around Halloween, the neighborhood association asks him to at least *consider* giving out candy. He just gives a dry chuckle and says, "I don't want them damn kids all over my lawn."

Description: Mr. Wirzalow is in his 80s (if you listen to the kids in the area, he's over 100). He goes around hunched, glaring out at the world with a disturbingly fierce intensity. He's skinny as a rail and walks with a cane, and he's not above giving dogs a rap on the head if they come too close. He's never actually hit a kid, though rumors say otherwise.

Storyteller Hints: Mr. Wirzalow's primary defining characteristic is bitterness. Something in life has deeply disappointed or hurt him, and now he lashes out at the world and everything in it as a means of assuaging his pain. He focuses on children, because he perceives children to possess something he lacks: youth, (relative) physical health, a sound mind, a loving family. If he could come to appreciate the value of his own life and what he does possess — experience, knowledge and security — he could become the best friend a young person can have, because his nastiness would transform into protective ferocity directed in defense of his young friends.

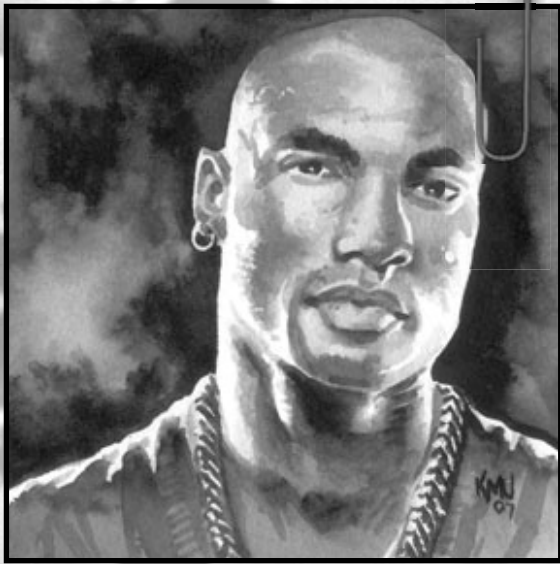
What was it that made Wirzalow so bitter? He's probably a widower, and may also have lost his own children. Who's buried in that cemetery? What secrets does his old house hold? Answers to any of these questions might be the hook that draws the characters in.

LOCAL THUG — DARIUS SUMMERS

Background: Darius was suspended once a month when he was in elementary school and expelled from the local high school. He ran with a gang for a while, and as far as the local kids know, he's in charge of it now. Whether that's true or not, Darius is trouble. He carries a gun (that's what they say, at least), and he'll beat you up if he finds you on his turf after dark.

The truth is that while Darius is a punk and probably a criminal, he won't go out of his way to beat up smaller kids. He knows a lot of the kids in the neighborhood — they're younger siblings of his friends — and he actually keeps an eye on them. He'd never let them know it, of course, and he's still got a lot of growing up to do himself, but he is absolutely opposed to kids turning out like him. In fact, the few kids he *has* beaten up were kids on the road to doing just that.

Description: Only recently 21, Darius is a tall, muscular man of mixed black and Latino descent. He wears stylish clothes and expensive jewelry, but closer inspec-



LOCAL THUG DARIUS SUMMERS

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Computer 1, Investigation 2, Politics (Gangs) 2, Study 1

Physical Skills: Athletics (Lifting) 2, Brawl 2, Firearms 1, Larceny 3, Stealth 2, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Intimidation 3, Socialize 2, Streetwise (Black Market) 3

Merits: Allies (Gang) 3, Fast Reflexes 2, Resources 1, Strong Back

Willpower: 5

Morality: 5

Triggers: None

Asset: Generous

Fault: Irresponsible

Defense: 3

Initiative: 7

Speed: 11

Size: 5

Health: 7

tion reveals him to be sallow and unhealthy — bad teeth, bad skin and poor nutrition.

Storyteller Hints: Darius can be a set of “gangsta” traits if you need them, but he’s also a potential ally. Of course, if Darius solves your problem, you might be an accessory to assault, or worse, so maybe he’s not the first choice. Then again, if the “problem” is a supernatural threat, and the characters have a way to motivate Darius, he might be a way to even the odds against a creature like a werewolf or a sorcerer. He might also sell out to such a creature if he saw an advantage, or he might die nobly, depending on the needs of the story.

Darius would also make a good Guardian for a character who wanted to invest the points. In that case, he’s probably family, or he owes a great debt to the character’s family.

ANIMALS

Animals, in an **Innocents** chronicle, might be pets, minions of the supernatural, mundane threats or just set dressing. The following specimens are animals commonly found in urban or rural environments. Note: unlike humans, the Defense trait for animals is determined by whichever rating is *greater*, between Dexterity and Wits. Animals can expend Willpower for heroic effort just as human characters can, and suffer wound penalties as adults do (see p. 193).

Many animals inflict lethal damage by biting. While most animals only fight to escape, we’ve included each animal’s attack dice pool after its traits.

Children tend to have anthropomorphized views of animals — predators are “mean,” dogs and cats are cute or loving or smart, and so on. While those assessments aren’t usually true, many animals don’t have ratings in certain Attributes, and thus fail any rolls that would normally require them. Animals with Intelligence 0 can’t problem-solve, animals with Resolve 0 flee at the first sign of danger (provided they aren’t under external control) and most animals have Manipulation 0.

BAT

Description: Bats are small, generally nocturnal animals that hunt for food using a sophisticated means of echolocation. Though unintelligent, they are swift, agile fliers. While most bats feed on insects or fruit, a few species in Latin America are known to feed on the blood of animals.

Some people keep tamed bats, and so a bat could represent a one-dot version of the Pet Merit.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 0, Wits 1, Resolve 0

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 1

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 0, Composure 1

Skills: Athletics (Flight) 4, Brawl 1, Survival 3

Merits: Fast Reflexes 2

Willpower: 1

Initiative: 7

Defense: 4

Speed: 15 (flight only; species factor 10)



Size: 1
Health: 2
Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	1 (L)	3

Willpower: 3
Initiative: 9
Defense: 5
Speed: 13 (species factor 7)
Size: 2
Health: 5
Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	0 (L)	3
Claw	0 (L)	3

CAT

Description: Cats are feline carnivores that stalk and pounce on prey, killing it by snapping its neck with their jaws. Cats are intelligent animals and clever hunters, but difficult to train. They have exceptionally sharp hearing and keen night vision, plus well-developed senses of taste and smell. Cats, of course, are common pets, and can be used to represent either level of the Pet Merit.

The following traits are typical for a medium to large cat (nine to 12 pounds). A cat's teeth and claws inflict lethal damage, but receive no damage bonus (its attack dice pool is Strength + Brawl).

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 4, Resolve 1
Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3
Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 0, Composure 2
Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 2, Stealth 3
Merits: Fast Reflexes 2

DOG

Description: Dogs are pack-oriented carnivores that are capable of hunting and killing prey many times their size through teamwork and persistence. Dogs come in a wide range of shapes, sizes and intellect, and are generally loyal and can be taught a wide variety of tasks. Dogs have highly acute senses of smell and taste, powerful jaws, and are tireless runners. Obviously, dogs can be either one- or three-dot Pets.

The traits listed below are representative of a large guard dog (80 to 100 pounds). A dog's bite inflicts lethal damage, and adds a damage bonus of 1 to the roll (attack pool is Strength + Brawl + 1).

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 4, Resolve 2
Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3
Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 0, Composure 3
Skills: Athletics (Running) 4, Brawl 3, Intimidation 3, Stealth 1, Survival (Tracking) 3
Merits: None.
Willpower: 5
Initiative: 6
Defense: 4
Speed: 13 (species factor 7)
Size: 4
Health: 7
Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	1 (L)	7

HORSE

Description: Horses are large herbivores with a long history of domestication by humans, serving as draft animals, farm workers and fighting mounts for thousands of years. Horses vary considerably in size, weight and temperament, but are generally intelligent and easy to train. A horse can act as either a one- or three-dot Pet, though in many situations, it's difficult for a horse to accompany a child.

The traits listed below represent a medium-sized riding horse (725 to 1,000 lbs).

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 3
Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5
Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 0, Composure 2
Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 1, Survival 2
Merits: Strong Back
Willpower: 5
Initiative: 5
Defense: 3
Speed: 19 (species factor 12)
Size: 7
Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	1 (B)	6
Hoof	3 (B)*	8

* Special: Knockdown (see p. 147)
Health: 12

RAT

Description: Rats are small rodents that can survive almost anywhere. In cities, they lurk in subways and live in the walls of apartment buildings. In rural areas, they nest in the barns and basements. They are usually very clean animals, but can spread disease quickly. Rats make superb one-dot Pets.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 0

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 1
Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 0, Composure 2
Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 1, Survival 3
Merits: None
Willpower: 2
Initiative: 5
Defense: 3
Speed: 10 (species factor 6)
Size: 1
Health: 2
Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	0 (L)	2

RAVEN

Description: Ravens are large, omnivorous birds related to crows, and are common in rural areas (particularly farmlands). They are very intelligent, inquisitive animals with a penchant for stealing small, brightly colored objects such as earrings or other pieces of jewelry. Hand-raised ravens can be domesticated and trained, and are capable of mimicking human speech. Such a bird might be one-dot Pet, or *possibly* a three-dot Pet for an extremely intelligent, well-trained specimen.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 2
Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2
Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 0, Composure 3
Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 1, Intimidation 2, Survival 3
Merits: None
Willpower: 5
Initiative: 6
Defense: 3
Speed: 14 (flight only; species factor 10)
Size: 1
Health: 3
Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Beak	1 (L)	3

SWARMS

Animals of Size 1 or 2 are generally best recorded in swarms, flocks or other groupings of the animal, as they are most effective in such groups. This includes not just insects, but also most birds and smaller creatures, such as rats.

Swarms are measured by their size in yards radius. A swarm inflicts one point of bashing damage (or lethal, for larger animals like rats) to anyone within its radius. A swarm can inflict more damage by condensing. Every time the swarm condenses to cover half of its full area, it inflicts one additional point of damage per turn.

Therefore, a swarm of eight yards in radius inflicts two damage per turn if it constricts down to a four-yard radius, three if it halves that again to a two-yard radius, and four

damage per turn if it condenses itself down to a one-yard radius. Though condensing doesn't usually happen all that often in nature (save in the case of creatures such as killer bees), it is an easy enough thing for most supernatural powers that command animals to bid them to do.

Armor is effective against a swarm only if it covers a character's full body, but even then, it provides only half its rating. In addition, targets are distracted by the swarm, suffering -2 dice on Perception rolls and any rolls that require concentration while they are within the radius, even if they're not specifically attacked. Being covered in a swarm is often enough to require a trigger roll.

The swarm cannot be attacked with fists, clubs, swords or guns. Only area-affect attacks such as a torch affect it. Each point of damage inflicted by a flame or other applicable attack halves the swarm's size. Once the swarm is reduced to below a one-yard radius, either all animals are dead or the few remaining disperse.

SUPERNATURAL BEINGS

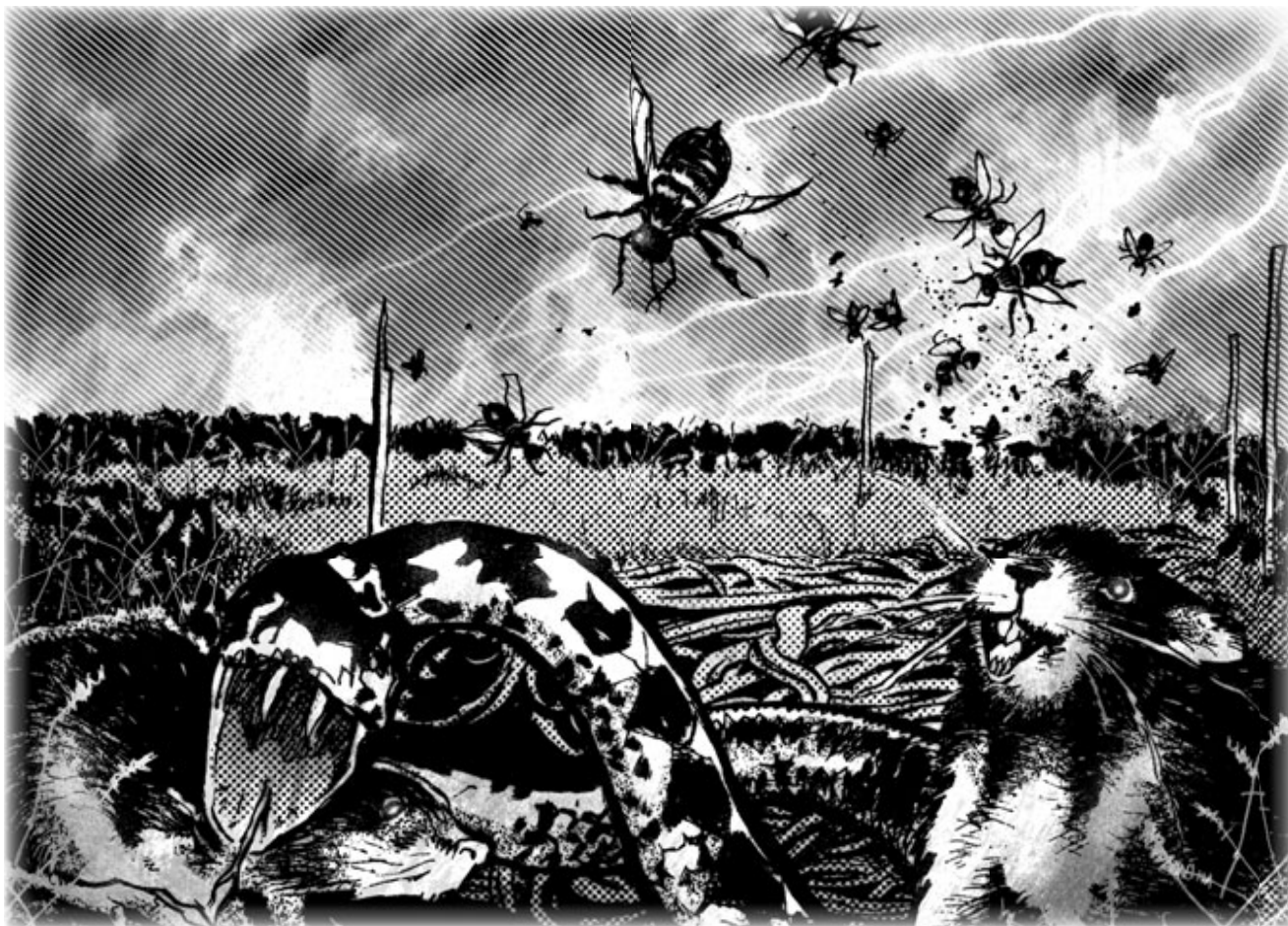
The supernatural is nothing if not diverse. The spirits of the unquiet dead haunt old, rickety houses. Warty, gray-skinned goblins live under beds and grab for young feet. Huge, snake-like things burrow through the earth, smelling for summer sweat.

This section presents the *real* antagonists of **World of Darkness: Innocents**, the ones the adults and the other kids don't want to believe in but your characters are going to see up close. The first creatures that we present are ghosts and spirits (they're similar, but have fundamental differences). Following these apparitions, we present a collection of oddities, strange creatures with diverse needs and reasons for stalking your characters.

Some creatures that you *won't* find here, however, are the classics: vampires, werewolves and sorcerers. This is because the World of Darkness includes whole game lines about them, and **World of Darkness: Innocents** would be remiss if it didn't acknowledge these games and the characters therein. General rules for vampires, werewolves, mages, changelings (human beings stolen away by the inscrutable Faeries) and Prometheans (human-like creatures cobbled together from dead flesh and given life) can be found in the Appendix to this book.

GHOSTS

Ghosts are the spirits of mortals that linger in the physical world. Some are mere echoes of the dead, the residue of a soul repeating a simple pattern of actions over and over again like a looping videotape. Others are true spirits that have become "lost" after death. Unable to continue on to whatever award or punishment awaits them, they haunt their old homes or workplaces, growing ever more lonely and frustrated with each passing decade. Still others cling



to the physical realm through sheer force of will, unable to leave behind unfinished business or an unsolved crime.

Ghosts see the world in a way reminiscent of children. They are fundamentally egocentric (many don't realize that they have *died*), and are incapable of seeing beyond their own needs. Ghosts that are self-aware enough to realize their own nature are either on the verge of resolving their last anchors (see below) and passing on, or are extremely dangerous beings indeed.

This section provides basic rules for including these different kinds of ghosts in your **Innocents** chronicles, detailing their natures, goals, abilities and powers. The methods that children can use to combat these shades or lay them to rest are also covered, as well as a selection of sample ghosts ready for use.

GHOST TRAITS

Ghosts do not have Skills or Merits, but they do retain some of the knowledge they had in life. The Storyteller should apply bonuses to a ghost's roll to reflect any such lingering knowledge, based on who the ghost was in life and how much it remembers. For example, while the ghost of a soldier doesn't have dots in the Firearms Skill per se, it does know what a gun is, how to clean it and even how to fire it. If such a ghost were to use the Telekinesis Numen (see p. 208) to fire a gun, the Storyteller might roll Power + 2 + the damage modifier for the gun, to represent the memories of marksmanship the ghost retains.

The traits that ghosts do possess are described below.

Attributes

Ghosts have Attributes similar to living characters, but they are abbreviated to the three general categories of Power, Finesse and Resistance. Power represents a ghost's ability to affect its environment, from throwing objects to opening and slamming doors. Finesse represents a ghost's capability for interacting with or manipulating elements of its environment, from noticing the intrusions of trespassers into its "home" to terrifying someone with horrifying illusions. Resistance represents a ghost's ability to withstand forces that could banish or destroy it, from prayers to exorcisms to physical attacks with blessed objects. These Attributes range from 1 to 5, and use the adult scale (p. 192), even if the ghost in question is the ghost of a child.

Size and Corpus

Ghosts do not have Size or Health traits in the conventional sense. A ghost is a being of ephemera, a sort of spiritual matter. As such, it has a "body" of sorts, but one that is insubstantial to material beings and things. For the purposes of forming this spiritual body, or Corpus, a ghost's Size is the same as it was at the time of death (5 for an adult human, 4 for a child). Rather than Health, a ghost has Corpus dots that represent its spiritual essence. Corpus dots = a ghost's Resistance + Size. The only weapons with which a mortal can affect a ghost's Corpus are blessed or enchanted. Enchanted or blessed items inflict bashing or lethal damage as appropriate for their type. A weapon of the same type

that killed a ghost (pistol, shotgun, baseball bat, kitchen knife) can damage a ghost, whether it is blessed or not, and the wielder adds three dice to the attack. The *exact* weapon that killed a ghost receives this bonus, and inflicts aggravated damage, as well. Ghosts regenerate Corpus in the same amount of time that living people heal damage (see p. 153). If a ghost suffers lethal or bashing damage in excess of its Corpus rating, it disappears, merging with its anchor until it heals at least one point of Corpus. If a ghost suffers as many points of aggravated damage as it has Corpus dots, the ghost is destroyed.

Defense

A ghost's Defense trait is equal to its Power or Finesse, whichever is *higher*.

Initiative

A ghost's Initiative is equal to its Finesse + Resistance.

Speed

A ghost's Speed is equal to its Power + Finesse + 10 (species factor).

Morality, Assets and Faults

Ghosts have a Morality score and Assets and Faults, just like living characters do. Ghosts are subject to degeneration just like mortals (see p. 81), but unlike mortals, they cannot increase their Morality scores. A ghost cannot grow or improve, only decline over the course of time. A ghost with Morality zero is completely mad, existing only to follow its passions in an exaggerated, often violent manner.

Willpower

Ghosts also possess a Willpower score (Power + Resistance), and Willpower points may be used for them just as they are for mortals. Ghosts regain Willpower by acting in accordance with their Assets and Faults, just as living characters do. Additionally, they automatically regain one point of spent Willpower at the start of each day.

Essence

Finally, ghosts have a new trait called *Essence*. Essence is a measure of spiritual energy. It does not have a permanent rating and is instead a pool of points that can be spent to activate Numina. Ghosts have a maximum Essence rating of (10 + 1/five years of existence as a ghost).

THE NATURE OF GHOSTS

A ghost is an intangible spirit that exists in a state called "Twilight." Twilight isn't a place or a dimension. It's better to think of Twilight as a frequency, a state of being that is just slightly "off" from the rest of the world. Most people cannot see beings in Twilight (which include some spirits as well as ghosts; see p. 204), though some are blessed or cursed with the power to do so. Likewise, though, a ghost's perception of non-Twilight objects and people is limited. A ghost with Finesse 1 or 2 is only aware of the area around its anchor (see below), while

those with Finesse 3 or more can perceive the rest of their surroundings much as a mortal does.

Ghosts cannot be seen or felt by mortals unless a spirit makes a special effort to manifest (see below). Even when manifested, a ghost is an ethereal, insubstantial presence. Ghosts with a Power of 1 to 3 often appear as little more than an eerie, glowing mist or ball of light. Ghosts with a Power of 4 or 5 might seem as real and substantial as a living mortal — until someone tries to touch them. Ghosts pass effortlessly through solid objects, even when manifested. By the same token, they can't physically touch or manipulate physical objects unless they possess a specific power to do so (see Numina). They are immune to all types of mundane damage and can see and hear clearly, regardless of environmental conditions, whether in total darkness, fog or a raging storm.

When ghosts engage in combat, they deliver bashing damage (unless they have Numina that allow them to inflict lethal or aggravated damage). Roll Power + Finesse for a ghost's attack. Each success delivers one point of bashing damage to the target's Corpus (or, if the ghost has Manifested, Health).

ANCHORS

Ghosts linger in the physical world because something anchors them there, preventing them from continuing on to whatever awaits (and even the oldest and most self-aware ghosts don't know what that is). Every ghost has at least one anchor rooting it to the physical world. Some powerful spirits may have more. The number and nature of a ghost's anchors depends on the individual and the circumstances surrounding its death. In most cases, an anchor is a physical place or object that held great emotional significance to the ghost during its mortal existence. An elderly woman who spent her last years largely confined to her bed might be anchored to the bedroom or to the bed itself — the bed that your 12-year-old character now sleeps in. A man who carried a valuable pocket watch wherever he went might be a ghost anchored to the watch, haunting those who come to possess it. Occasionally, ghosts can be anchored to *people* rather than to objects. A father whose last thought was for the welfare of his children may be anchored to them, watching over them in death as he did in life. The characters' classmate who died out behind the school on that stormy day last June might haunt *them*, trying to tell them something important but unsure of how to do it.

Ghosts must remain close to their anchors at all times, whether they manifest or not. A ghost can travel up to 10 yards from its anchor per point of Power that it has. Thus, a ghost with 3 Power can travel up to 30 yards from its anchor. Ghosts anchored to a place instead of a person or object measure this distance from the spot where they died or from where a structure ends. A ghost with 3 Power whose anchor is a mansion can travel anywhere within the mansion, but only up to 30 yards away from the exterior of the building.

Anchors also make it easier for a ghost to manifest in the physical world. If a ghost is within one yard of its anchor, it can manifest automatically with no roll required (see "Manifestations," below).

If a ghost has multiple anchors, it can jump from one anchor to another with the expenditure of a single Willpower point, regardless of the distance between anchors. So, the father who lingers in the physical world to watch over his kids can jump from one child to another, even if they are on opposite sides of the world.

If a ghost's anchors are altered (subjected to sanctification or exorcism — see "Dealing with Ghosts") or destroyed, the ghost can no longer remain in the physical world. It passes on and cannot return.

MANIFESTATIONS

When a ghost wishes to interact with mortals or the physical world, it must manifest, focusing its energies into a form just substantial enough to allow it a discernible presence. A ghostly manifestation doesn't necessarily have to be visible. A sentient ghost can choose to manifest invisibly if it wishes, but its presence still leaves traces that mortals can detect. Examples of invisible ghostly manifestation include cold spots, strange or intense odors and heightened magnetic fields.

Some areas are more conducive to supernatural energies than others. The basement boiler room is a fairly easy place for a ghost to manifest, as is the guidance counselor's office. The school science lab doesn't lend itself as well to manifestation. These are just generalizations, of course. If, over the years, the chemistry teacher has developed a reputation as being out-and-out cruel to kids and keeps the room dark and depressing, a ghost might have a very easy time manifesting. As a rule of thumb, locations where mortals frequently express powerful emotions — love, anger, sadness, fear — create conditions that allow a ghost easier access to the physical world. It is very difficult for a ghost to appear in sterile, emotionless places, or remote areas that have experienced little or no human emotion.

Curiously, the presence of mortals creates a cumulative effect that actually inhibits the manifestation of ghosts. The more people gathered in a particular location, the harder it is for a ghost to manifest. Occult scholars debate the reason for this phenomenon, citing possibilities such as the modern insistence that ghosts don't exist or large numbers of people interfering with a ghost's already fragile sense of self. Kids, however, generally just accept that ghosts don't appear to a whole room full of people because "that's the way it works."

Manifestation requires a successful Power + Finesse roll. Positive or negative modifiers may apply, depending on the location (see chart). If more than one mortal is present, each person after the first imposes a -1 modifier to the roll. (This last penalty does not apply to other supernatural beings or creatures in the ghost's locale. Their numbers do not affect a ghost's ability to manifest.) If the roll succeeds, the ghost can manifest for the duration of the scene if it wishes. It can make itself visible or invisible at will, and can de-manifest at any time. If the roll fails, the ghost does not manifest and loses one Willpower point. The ghost can continue to attempt to manifest as long as it has at least one Willpower point remaining. If it exhausts all its Willpower, it cannot attempt to manifest again until the following day.

MANIFESTATION MODIFIERS

Location	Modifier
Graveyard	+3
Battlefield	+3
Church	+2
Hospital	+2
Historic building (100+ years old)	+2
Old building (50–100 years old)	+1
Handmade structure (wooden bridge, shed, fort)	+1
Parking lot	-1
Modern commercial building (grocery store, mall)	-1
Modern industrial building	-2
Modern laboratory	-3

Once a ghost has manifested, it can attempt to interact with the physical world by communicating with any mortals present (see “Communication,” below), or by drawing on its Numina.

COMMUNICATION

Interaction with the living is difficult for ghosts, even under the best of conditions. Without the proper Numina, a manifested ghost has no voice. It can form words with its mouth and hope a mortal witness can read lips, or it can try to get its message across with gestures. Complicated gestures like sign language are very difficult for ghosts to perform, as they have a hard time translating their thoughts into “physical” motion. Make a Finesse roll for any such attempt with a -1 modifier for each decade that a ghost has been dead. If the roll fails, the spirit is simply unable to envision the right signs and gestures to get its point across. Simple gestures (motioning a mortal to follow, pointing to a hidden object) do not require a Finesse roll.

Ghosts with the proper Numina can communicate with mortals in a variety of ways, from speaking directly to writing on objects to imparting visions.

NUMINA

Ghosts have a number of powers at their disposal with which to interact or manipulate the physical world. These powers, called Numina (singular: Numen), range from terrifying auras to outright possession of living bodies. The type of Numina a ghost has depends on its nature and personality, its goals and on the circumstances of its death. Its number of powers depends on its age. As a general rule, a ghost has one Numen per 10 years since its death. Thus, a ghost that has been dead for 30 years can have up to three Numina. Of course, exceptions are possible in the case of exceptionally potent or willful spirits.

When designing your own ghosts, assign whatever Numina you feel are appropriate to a spirit and to the kind of story you want to tell.

Since spirits make use of Numina as well, the list of example Numina begins on p. 206. Some Numina are more appropriate for ghosts than others, and these are noted in their descriptions.

DEALING WITH GHOSTS

As antagonists, ghosts are difficult beings to confront or thwart. They are immune to virtually all forms of physical damage, can travel through solid objects and, if pressed, can literally dematerialize beyond mortal reach.

Generally speaking, the only way for mortals to deal with ghosts is through the people, places and things that anchor them to the physical world. By addressing the ties that

bind ghosts to the Earth, it's possible to lay them to rest — or send them to the judgment they richly deserve.

SEVERING ANCHORS

The simplest (but not necessarily easiest) method of dealing with a ghost is to locate its anchor(s) and destroy them. The trouble is, anchors are not immediately obvious. Often, a ghost itself isn't aware of what ties it to the physical realm. Discerning what object or objects anchor a spirit requires observation, research and careful investigation. Determining the identity of the ghost is the first step; then comes investigating the circumstances of its death. If the ghost's death does not provide sufficient clues to suggest its anchor, more research is required to identify any personal effects that could possibly act as a fetter.

Once an anchor is identified, all that remains is to destroy the object, which is sometimes easier said than done. The anchor must be damaged to the degree that it no longer exists in the form that the ghost knew it. The stone of a diamond ring has to be separated from the band, the band melted down and the stone split. For more details on damaging objects, see Chapter Six: Dramatic Systems, p. 131.

If a ghost's anchor is a physical location rather than an object, the destruction process can be difficult or even impossible. If the spirit haunts a particular hotel room, how can one completely destroy a single room and leave the surrounding building intact? Such situations require extraordinary measures, such as an exorcism.

FULFILLING UNFINISHED BUSINESS

If a ghost exists to fulfill some obligation or desire that it couldn't complete in life, it's possible to lay the spirit to rest by identifying what the ghost wants and resolving the



situation. Doing so can involve considerable detective work, identifying the ghost and researching its past, or it might require attempts to communicate directly with the spirit to learn what it wants. Once the ghost's needs are met, its anchors disappear and it departs the physical world forever.

ABJURATIONS

Abjurations are rites, objects or even circumstances with the power to banish a ghost from an area, disrupting its manifestation and keeping it at bay for a short time. Abjuration calls for a contested Resolve + Composure roll versus the ghost's Power + Resistance. Ghosts do not receive 8-Again when engaging in this contested action against child characters.

Not every ghost responds to every abjuration. The ghost of a Muslim man is unlikely, for instance, to respond to a rosary. Some abjurations appear to be fairly universal. Many ghosts do respond to iron nails, impassioned and angry condemnations, and soulful, weeping cries for mercy. To perform an abjuration without suffering any penalties, a child character must have a minimum Morality of 8 or a minimum Occult of 2. The Morality score reflects the character's purity of thought and intent, while the Skill dots reflect a minimum degree of knowledge in the performance of the rite. For every dot of Morality below 8, the abjuration roll suffers a -1

penalty. Attempting to perform an abjuration with an Occult score of 1 imposes a -1 penalty, and attempting it with no Occult score imposes a -3, just as if the character were making an unskilled Occult roll (see p. 48). By the same token, every dot of Morality above 8 or Skill above 2 offers a +1 modifier, reflecting the character's extraordinary focus.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: Your character is utterly overwhelmed by the sheer force of the ghost's drive and determination. He loses one point of Willpower and the player must make a trigger roll.

Failure: Your character's faith or capability is found wanting, and the ghost is unmoved by the abjuration. Your character can attempt it again if he wishes, but suffers a -1 penalty.

Success: Your character's faith or capability drives the ghost from his vicinity. The ghost is forced to de-manifest and cannot manifest again within the character's line of sight until the following day.

Exceptional Success: The ghost is completely over-awed by your character's faith or capability. The ghost is forced to de-manifest and cannot manifest again anywhere until the following day.

EXORCISMS

Exorcisms are special rites of sanctification that popular myth has relegated to cases of demonic possession, but in fact, they can be used to uproot and banish any ghost from the physical world. Like an abjuration, an exorcism is more about the person who performs the rite than the words spoken and is primarily a contest of wills between mortal and ghost. The trait requirements and penalties are the same for exorcisms as for abjurations.

An exorcism is a contested and extended action, with each roll representing five minutes of incantation, prayer, insults to the ghosts or admonishment for it to leave. Unlike most extended rolls, an exorcism isn't a race to see who gets a certain total of successes first; it's a game of endurance. Roll Resolve + Composure for the character performing the exorcism, and the ghost's Power + Resistance. On each roll, the side with the *fewest* successes loses one point of Willpower. The exorcism rolls continue until the character voluntarily abandons the attempt or one side runs out of Willpower.

If neither side gets any successes or both sides get the same number of successes in a roll, the battle continues for another five minutes, with no one losing Willpower.

If multiple people participate in an exorcism, treat the effort like teamwork (p. 127). One participant is the primary actor, and all secondary actors may or may not contribute bonuses to the primary's roll at each stage of the rite. The primary loses all Willpower for his "side."

Nothing stops a ghost from using Numina to try to disrupt an exorcism, of course. A group of characters would be well advised to find a way to keep a ghost at bay while one of them exorcises it, perhaps using an abjuration.

Roll Results:

Dramatic Failure: The ghost *appears* to flee — windows break, the bed rattles and other dramatic effects occur. However, the entity is still anchored the physical world and can reappear whenever it wishes to.

Failure: The ghost's roll garners successes in excess of the exorcist's. The exorcist loses a point of Willpower. If this was his last Willpower point, the exorcism is over as the character collapses, drained and emotionally broken.

Success: The exorcist's roll garners *more* successes than that of the ghost. The ghost loses a point of Willpower. If this was the ghost's last Willpower point, its connection to this anchor is broken. If it has another anchor within a number of yards equal to (Power x 10), it can flee there and dematerialize. It reappears in 24 hours with one point of Willpower. If not, the ghost disappears into the Great Beyond, never to return.

Exceptional Success: Either the ghost or the exorcist garners more successes than the other *and* achieves an exceptional success. The loser is stripped of two points of Willpower instead of one. If this event wins the exorcism for the character, the ghost is immediately and permanently banished, even if it does have another anchor nearby.

BLESSED OR ENCHANTED ITEMS

Blessed or sanctified objects that are infused with faith can be used to physically disrupt a ghost, damaging or destroying it utterly. Blessed or enchanted items are among the only means by which a physical attack can harm a manifested spirit. Damage comes from the faith and emotion invested in the object, rather than from the force of the swing.

An object isn't necessarily "blessed" because a person of the cloth says a prayer over it. A mundane object can become blessed for purposes of dealing with ghosts if it is invested with enough emotion over a long period of it. A child who flings his favorite toy at a ghost might strike it, driving it off. Likewise, some "blessed" items only work for one particular ghost. The ghost of a young boy might find that the belt his father used to beat him stings just as much now that he's dead.

Blessed items have a ranking from 1 to 5, representing the weight of belief imbued in them. Such items cannot be crafted intentionally. It is entirely up to the Storyteller to determine if an item is blessed or not, and it's hard for mere mortals to know whether or not an object is infused with power until it's tested against the supernatural. Certain supernatural creatures can sometimes sense the aura on these objects, but mortals normally have no such capability. A character with the Unseen Sense Merit might be able to tell if an object is blessed or not, at the Storyteller's discretion.

To use a blessed item on a manifested ghost, make a normal attack roll as you would with a mundane weapon, but instead of adding a damage rating as bonus dice, add the item's blessing rating to your dice pool. If the attack hits, each success inflicts a point of aggravated damage.

Example: *Graham finds an antique hammer in a haunted barn and swings it at the blood-soaked ghost with the leather apron. He doesn't know it, but the hammer is a blessed object. His player rolls Strength 2 + Weaponry 1 + three dice for the blessed power of the item. The apparition's Defense of 2 is subtracted from the dice pool, leaving four dice. The result is 4, 6, 8, 9 — two successes, inflicting two aggravated wounds to the apparition.*

Blessed items that aren't made to be used in combat do not suffer the usual -1 penalty that improvised weapons do (see p. 130).

SPIRITS

Spirits are similar to ghosts and use many of the same traits. Unlike ghosts, though, spirits were never human. They don't come from the world as we understand it, but from a bizarre, animistic mirror of our world, sometimes called the Shadow. While it is possible for human beings to enter the Shadow, doing so is difficult, and fortunately so — the Shadow has its own ecology, and intruding humans are on the *bottom* of the food chain. It happens sometimes, however, that spirits from the Shadow slip across barriers into our world, sometimes to watch, sometimes to feed and sometimes to possess the inhabitants.

Spirits are only slightly more self-aware than ghosts, and they have limited or no free will. That is, a spirit of

murder isn't capable of choosing *not* to kill if it has the chance. A spirit of dogs can't choose to act in a manner other than that of a dog. Spirits are simplistic, but the rules by which they live can be arcane and obtuse (especially for powerful spirits). The beings presented in **World of Darkness: Innocents** are spirits that are especially appropriate for **Innocents** chronicles, but a myriad of other spirits also exist.

When using spirits in the chronicle, try to keep in mind that they are predictable and act in a manner that, given the specific spirit's mindset, is entirely logical. The Night Terrors are spirits that feed on fear, and so it makes perfect sense that they lurk out of sight of parents, cause children nightmares and drive away pets (since pets could soothe fears). But to the child victimized by such an entity, the spirit is a monster with no rhyme or reason to its attacks. Discovering that spirits have a plan and a purpose should be a major component to defeating it.

SPIRIT TRAITS

Spirits use Power, Finesse and Resistance as their Attributes, just as ghosts do. They do not have Skills or Merits. Since they lack human understanding and the freedom to choose their own actions, for the most part, they do not have Morality ratings, nor do they have Assets and Faults.

Corpus

Like a ghost, a spirit has Corpus dots that represent the resiliency of its ephemeral form. Corpus equals a spirit's Resistance + Size. Spirits regenerate Corpus in the same amount of time that mortals heal damage (p. 153). If a spirit loses its entire Corpus, it is discorporated, meaning that it disappears from Twilight until it can heal. If it loses all its Essence *and* Corpus, the spirit is destroyed.

Essence

A spirit's maximum Essence depends on how old and powerful the spirit is. As a rule of thumb, a weak spirit has a maximum Essence of 10, while a moderately powerful spirit has a maximum Essence of 15 or 20. Truly godlike spirits might have as much as 50 or 100 Essence, but those spirits almost never emerge from the Shadow to bedevil the human world (and if they did, hopefully it wouldn't be a group of children that had to deal with it!). Any given spirit may have any amount of Essence up to its maximum. The lower a spirit's Essence is, the more desperate it grows for sustenance.

Spirits use Essence in the following ways:

- A spirit must spend a point of Essence per day to survive. This expenditure usually takes place at moonrise. If the spirit has no Essence to spend, it falls into slumber until it manages to gain Essence somehow, such as by being immersed in a new flow of Essence. For instance, a Night Terror (p. 213) that fell into slumber in a small room in an empty house might remain there until a new family moved in, and a child had a (completely normal) nightmare while sleeping in that room. The spirit regains Essence as described below, and is now awake and active again.

- Spirits can use Essence to temporarily boost their Attributes on a one-for-one basis. They cannot boost a single Attribute by more than three. Each such boost lasts for one scene. (Remember to update the spirit's Advantages.)

- A spirit that has fled into the physical world, including Twilight, must expend one point of Essence per hour as long as it remains ephemeral (which is to say, without possessing a host body or using the Numen: Fetter). It cannot regain this lost Essence until it either gains a fetter or crosses back into the Shadow. If a spirit loses all its Essence while in the physical world, it passes into slumber and is drawn back into the spirit world, losing a point of Corpus from the rough transition.

- As long as a spirit still has some Essence, it isn't destroyed when reduced to zero Corpus, but rather discorporated (see above).

Spirits regain Essence in the following ways:

- They gain one point per day by being in proximity of the thing they reflect. For example, a Night Terror gains a single point per night when it stays near a frightened child. Obviously, a spirit can earn only as much as it needs to stay alive in this fashion.

- Once per day the spirit may try to draw Essence from an appropriate source in the physical world by rolling its Power + Finesse. (It can sense such a source automatically up to one mile away.) The number of successes indicates the number of points of Essence gained. The spirit must be in the physical world (which includes Twilight, remember) in order to do so.

- The spirit may barter for additional Essence from beings that possess the trait or with other spirits.

- The spirit may attempt to steal Essence from another spirit by making a contested roll of its Power + Finesse against the target's Power + Resistance. If the attacker wins, the number of successes indicates the number of points of the target's Essence that are siphoned off by the attacker. If all of the target's Essence is stolen, the victim spirit falls into slumber. If the target wins, the attacker loses a number of points of Essence equal to the successes scored by the target.

Willpower

Spirits have a Willpower trait equal to their Power + Resistance. A spirit's very existence necessitates a certain tenacity to survive and grow. Spirits regain spent Willpower at the rate of one point per day.

Initiative


Initiative is equal to Finesse + Resistance.

Defense

A spirit's Defense is equal to its Power or Finesse, whichever is *higher*.

Speed

Speed is equal to Power + Finesse + a "species factor." Spirits that take human or animal form have a species factor equal to their earthly counterpart. Spirits of inanimate objects usually have a species factor equal to 0, while spir-



its of more abstract items (fear, grief, murder) generally have a species factor of 10. Vehicle spirits have Acceleration traits equal to their material cousins, rather than a Speed trait (p. 135). To find their Maximum Speed, add the spirit's Power + Finesse to their physical counterpart's Maximum Speed.

In Twilight, all spirits (even spirits without apparent appendages) are considered able to move in any direction. Even those without “wings” or association with the concept of flight (bird-spirits, air-spirits) can hover in any direction — though without a clear connection to the concept of flight, they must hover within their Speed (in yards) off the ground. For the most part, they are not bound by gravity, nor do they suffer its effects — you can't “push” a murder spirit in Twilight down an elevator shaft.

Materialized spirits, however, are quite solid. They are affected by gravity, for example. They can still move about as per their Speed trait, but unless they have “wings” or some such, they cannot fly.

Size

A spirit can generally be of any size, depending on what it represents and how powerful it is. Exceptionally strong spirits are often larger than their weaker kin. Spirits usually have a Size trait comparable to their material counterparts; the spirit of a dog, for instance, might have Size 4. Some spirits take on humanoid shapes (Size 5 for adults, 4 for most children), while some appear as nebulous, ill-defined clouds (Size can range from 2 on up).

SPIRIT BANS

One important trait that ghosts do *not* possess, but spirits do, is a ban. A spirit's ban is something quite personal to it — one fear-spirit might be forced to flee the gaze of a man protecting his child, while another suffers one point of aggravated damage per turn of exposure to bright light. A ban is a way to repel, damage or defeat a spirit, and they should be highly personal, sometimes obscure, but when revealed make perfect sense. Just as discovering the identity of a ghost and the circumstances of its death are essential to defeating it, discovering a spirit's ban is crucial to exerting any power over it.

The more powerful the spirit, the more obscure and complicated its ban might be. Powerful spirits, though, tend to have bans with more pronounced effects. For example, a weak spirit might be forced to flee when its ban is enacted, but a powerful spirit might be outright destroyed should the characters manage to confront it with its ban.

Since **Innocents** characters lack any easy means of finding out a spirit's ban, the Storyteller should seed hints in the encounters with the spirit that lead the characters in their research or strategies. For instance, the Skeleton, one of the Voices in the Dark (see p. 234), loses one point of Essence per turn if confronted with children eating. In an initial encounter with this spirit, the characters might see the Skeleton angrily knock a plate of food off a table — the Skeleton starved to death, and seeing food infuriates it.

The spirits presented in this chapter and in the scenarios in Chapter Eight have example bans listed. The Storyteller should use these as inspiration to design bans for any spirits she wishes to create for her **Innocents** stories.

NUMINA

Ghosts and spirits both use Numina. Unless otherwise specified, using a Numen is an instant action and requires a roll of Power + Finesse. Sometimes a Resistance trait is subtracted from the user's Numen roll, and sometimes the target is required to make a contested roll to resist. If this is the case and the spirit uses a Numen against a child, the spirit does *not* receive 8-Again on the roll.

The Numina listed here are just examples. The Storyteller should feel free to come up with other powers for her spirits. Although the text below refers to Numen users as “spirits,” any of these powers are usable by both spirits and ghosts.

- **Animal Control:** The spirit is able to exert its will over an animal, controlling it completely. Spend one Essence and roll Power + Finesse, subtracting the animal's Resolve from the dice pool. Success means the spirit is able to command the animal to perform any task the spirit desires, to the limit of the animal's physical abilities. The spirit can control the animal for the duration of the scene. A spirit can control a number of animals simultaneously (as long as it has sufficient Essence) equal to its Finesse trait, but must make a separate roll for each animal, with one exception. A spirit can control a swarm of animals (see Swarms, p. 198) as though it were one entity.

This Numen is especially appropriate for ghosts. Animal spirits often have this Numen, but are limited to controlling the animals they represent.

- **Blast:** The spirit is able to strike opponents at a distance. An electricity-spirit might hurl small thunderbolts at its foes, a fire-spirit might summon flame, or a pain-spirit with this Numen might conjure razor blades. The range is equal to 10 yards per point of Power, and the spirit suffers no penalties for range. The spirit rolls Power + Finesse to hit and may add two dice to the roll for every point of Essence it spends to fuel this power. The damage is lethal.

- **Clasp:** This Numen allows the spirit to lock a target in a crushing embrace. The Numen functions like any close combat attack. If in the physical world, the spirit must be materialized to affect a material target. Otherwise, this Numen can only be used on other spirits in Twilight. Roll Power + Finesse when grappling instead of Power alone. (This takes the place of any Strength + Brawl rolls; see p. 144). If the spirit spends one Essence, its grappling attacks inflict lethal instead of bashing damage for the rest of the scene.

- **Compulsion:** The spirit is able to exert its will over a living person, commanding him to perform actions like a puppet. Spend one Essence point and roll Power + Finesse in a contested roll versus the victim's Resolve + Composure. If the spirit fails to exceed the victim's successes, the victim is unaffected. If the spirit wins the roll,

it seizes control of the victim and can command him to perform any acts the spirit desires, within the victim's capabilities. The victim can attempt to throw off the spirit's control each successive turn with another contested roll. Use the victim's own dice pools to determine the outcome of his actions. The spirit can compel a number of victims simultaneously (as long as it has sufficient Essence) equal to its Finesse trait.

This Numen is especially appropriate for ghosts.

- **Commune with the Flesh:** The spirit can speak to mortals through the body of another living person. Roll Power + Finesse, with the subject's Resolve subtracted from the dice pool. If the victim is a willing participant, no roll is necessary. If the spirit fails, no communication is possible. If the spirit succeeds, it can speak using the victim's voice for a single turn. At the end of the turn, the victim suffers a single point of bashing damage due to the strain of contact. If the spirit wishes to continue speaking through an unwilling medium, a further Power + Finesse roll must be made each turn. The medium continues to suffer an additional point of bashing damage at the end of each turn of communication, regardless of whether she is willing or not. If the medium is rendered unconscious, no further contact is possible.

This Numen is especially appropriate for ghosts.

- **Drain:** This Numen enables the spirit to steal Essence or Willpower from a material being, much as spirits can attempt to siphon Essence from one another (see p. 207). The spirit first decides which trait it is attempting to drain, then the Storyteller makes a contested Power

+ Finesse against the subject's Stamina + Resolve. If the attacker wins, the victim loses one point of Essence or Willpower. The attacking spirit gains these points. The spirit must "touch" the target to use this Numen, and must manifest or materialize to do so as normal.

Some spirits, such as the Night Terrors (p. 213), can drain Willpower from their victims but gain Essence by doing so.

- **Fetter:** This Numen secures a spirit inside an object once it has crossed into the physical world. Rather than materializing, the spirit remains its ephemeral self in the material world. Normally, it would be sucked back into the Shadow within a few hours, but once fettered, it can remain in the physical world almost indefinitely. Once in the physical world, the spirit activates this Numen by spending a point of Essence. It must choose an object within five yards of its current position and spend an additional Essence point to fetter itself to the object. The spirit can stay fettered in the material world for as long as it likes, unless the fetter is destroyed, in which case the spirit immediately reincorporates and starts to reform back in the spirit world.

The spirit is invisible and intangible while in the material world. It can be seen by werewolves (see p. 253) and other spiritually sensitive creatures only. The spirit may never move more than five yards from its fetter, lest the link be lost, forcing the spirit back through into the Shadow. A fettered spirit may materialize, if it has that Numen. While in material form, it may move more than



five meters from its fetter, but it must be back within that radius when its materialization ends.

Ghosts never possess the Fetter Numen, as they have permanent fetters (their anchors).

- **Freeze:** The spirit can rob the heat from a radius equal to its Finesse in yards. The Storyteller spends one Essence and rolls Power + Finesse minus Stamina (if more than one victim is within range, use the highest Stamina rating). Victims suffer the spirit's successes as bashing damage. Insulating clothes can provide some protection for a limited period of time. A character dressed for cold weather ignores two successes' worth of damage on the spirit's roll on the first turn, one on the second, and none on subsequent uses of the Numen. Prolonged use of this Numen can send a character into hypothermia. See *Temperature Extremes*, p. 161.

- **Ghost Sign:** The spirit is capable of creating messages or images in malleable forms of media. Spend one Essence point and roll Power + Finesse. If the roll fails, nothing happens. If the roll succeeds, the spirit can create a single message or image. A sentence can be written in the steam condensed on a mirror. A soft, ghostly statement can be heard amid the static of an audio tape. Or an image can be superimposed on a frame of camera film or videotape.

As the name suggests, this Numen is especially appropriate for ghosts.

- **Ghost Speech:** This Numen applies to ghosts only, since spirits don't normally have a problem communicating with mortals, provided they can materialize. The ghost is capable of speaking directly to mortals when it manifests. Spend one Essence point and roll Power + Finesse. If the roll succeeds, the ghost can utter a single sentence.

- **Gremlin's Touch:** This Numen temporarily disables a specific technological object, such as a cell phone, computer or an automobile engine. The malfunction has no apparent external cause. The spirit expends a point of Essence and touches the object to disable it. The object ceases to work for a number of turns equal to the successes rolled. If the object is carried by another who seeks to avoid the spirit's touch, a roll is required to make contact (see *Targeting an Object*, p. 132). Valid pieces of technology that can be overcome include anything manufactured by industrial means, with at least three separate parts; a gun is valid, but a hinge or syringe is not. The object cannot be larger than the spirit, but a discernible part of a complex machine may also be targeted. A man-sized spirit can affect the engine of a car, but not the entire automobile.

- **Materialize:** This Numen allows a spirit to change its form from ephemera to matter, dropping it abruptly into the material world. The spirit's physical form appears in the material world just as it did in the Shadow, and all its Numina function as normal. All rules for spirit traits in the spirit world apply equally to a materialized spirit. Spend three Essence and roll the spirit's Power + Finesse to allow it to reshape itself into matter. The number of successes indicates the number of hours that it can remain in the material world before reverting to ephemera. The spirit must then choose between remaining in the material world (and either anchoring itself or losing a point of Essence every hour) or slipping immediately back to the Shadow.

This Numen applies to spirits only; ghosts can always attempt to manifest.

- **Phantasm:** The spirit has the power to create illusory images. Spend one Essence point and roll Power + Finesse. A negative modifier may be applied to the roll, depending on the size and complexity of the illusion. Mimicking a person's voice alone or creating a distinctive smell (like perfume) doesn't incur any negative modifiers, but creating the illusion of a person might be subject to a -1 penalty. Creating the illusion of a specific person (down to patterns of speech and mannerisms) that a witness knows might call for a -2 penalty. Creating a complex illusion that seems to have physical substance (the witness is convinced he can "touch" the illusion and it feels solid) incurs a -3 or more severe penalty. Small, subtle illusions are generally much more effective than large, overt ones. This power can work on only one victim at a time. Other mortals in the subject's vicinity do not see what he does. When a subject witnesses an illusion, roll Wits + Composure (or the Storyteller may allow Composure to be replaced by Occult if your character is aware of ghostly activity). If the roll generates as many or more successes than were achieved in the phantasm roll, the victim recognizes that the image can't be real. If the Phantasm roll wins, the subject believes the illusion is genuine, but another Wits + Composure (or Occult) roll is made for him in each successive turn to attempt to see through the power. A spirit can maintain only one illusion at a time, and each illusion remains for the duration of the scene unless dispelled.

This Numen is especially appropriate for ghosts.

- **Possession:** The spirit may attempt to possess a living human being and control his or her body for a short time. Spend one Essence point and roll Power + Finesse in a contested roll versus the victim's Resolve + Composure. If the spirit wins, it gains control of the victim's body for the duration of a single scene. Use the victim's available traits (except Willpower points, which are equal to the spirit's current Willpower points) and dice pools for any action the spirit wishes to take. If the mortal wins or ties the roll, the spirit fails its Possession attempt. As long as the spirit has Essence points remaining, it can continue to make Possession attempts against a target. If a possessed body is killed or knocked unconscious, the spirit is forced out and must possess another victim if it still wishes to act.

Attacks using a blessed object against a ghost in possession of a living body damage the spirit's Corpus as well as that of its physical host.

- **Telekinesis:** The spirit can manipulate physical objects as though it had a pair of physical hands. It can pick up objects, throw them, open and close doors and windows, write messages — basically anything a mortal can do with his hands.

Spend one Essence point and roll Power + Finesse. The number of successes rolled determines the spirit's relative Strength when attempting to lift and/or move an object (see p. 193, for the adult scale on lifting/moving objects). If the successes rolled are equal to the Strength needed to lift an object, the spirit can move it up to one yard. Each extra success allows the spirit to move the object an additional yard. If the spirit wishes to hurl an object at someone and enough

successes are rolled to lift the object (and reach the target), the total number of Telekinesis successes + the object's Size or Durability (whichever is lower) is rolled as a dice pool in an attack against the target. Alternately, the spirit can make a direct attack on a victim, using its raw power to inflict cuts, bruises and bites on the victim's body. Treat this as a normal attack with a -3 modifier. The attack ignores the target's Defense trait, any available cover and any armor worn (unless the armor is supernatural in nature).

This Numen is highly appropriate for ghosts.

- **Telepathy:** Spirits with this Numen can reach out and link their minds with others — allowing instantaneous and reliable communication. The Storyteller rolls Power + Finesse. If telepathic contact is resisted, subtract the target's Resolve. This experience is rarely pleasant for a mortal. Being that intimate with an alien mind is profoundly disturbing and might be cause for a trigger roll in the case of truly repulsive spirits. Communication lasts for a number of turns equal to the successes rolled.

- **Terrify:** The spirit has the power to strike terror in the hearts of mortals who witness its manifestation. Roll Power + Finesse in a contested roll against the Resolve + Composure of each mortal who witnesses the spirit's manifestation firsthand. (If a crowd witnesses it, roll the highest Resolve + Composure in the crowd for the whole group.) If the spirit loses or ties, mortals in the area are unaffected and are immune to uses of this power for the remainder of the scene (that doesn't mean they aren't frightened, of course, just that they don't necessarily succumb to their fear). Mortals who lose flee from the spirit and will not return to the area for at least one day.

EXAMPLE GHOSTS

Following are three ghosts for use either as-is or as inspiration in your **World of Darkness: Innocents** chronicles.

LITTLE KATIE

Background: Little Katie died when she was just seven years old. She doesn't know how she died. All she remembers is a sharp pain on her head, and everything went black. She knows that she's supposed to have show-and-tell tomorrow, and she wants something cool to bring with her, so she has a habit of swiping small objects when people aren't looking. Characters investigating Katie might learn that she died accidentally — a metal bookend fell from a high shelf and struck her on the head while she was looking through a cabinet for something to take to school the next day.

Description: Katie has long, black hair and big blue eyes. She doesn't smile much, but if she finds something she thinks is "cool," she'll break into a grin so wide it's positively unnerving. She doesn't notice, but the back of her head is caved in and a thin trickle of blood constantly runs from the wound, soaking her hair.

Storytelling Hints: Katie isn't hostile, and has the potential to be a nuisance and a good scare more than anything else. If the characters help her find the perfect show-and-tell item, she might pass on. If they reveal to her that she's dead, she might pass on or go berserk and



LITTLE KATIE

Attributes: Power 2, Finesse 1, Resistance 2

Willpower: 4

Essence: 10 (max)

Morality: 7

Asset: Friendly

Fault: Greedy

Initiative: 3

Defense: 2

Speed: 13 (species factor 10)

Size: 4

Corpus: 6

Numina: Telekinesis

Anchors: The room in which she died

attack them with flying objects, depending on how gently they break it to her.

If you need Katie to have a somewhat darker story, she might have been *murdered* with that bookend. If that's the case, she'll pass on once her killer is brought to justice.

Katie is anchored to the room she died in, which might just be a character's new playroom. Or maybe Katie died at school, and the object that killed her was a heavy sculpture (art room), a medicine ball (the gym) or the aforementioned bookend (the principal's office).

MRS. HARROW

Background: Years ago, there was a teacher named Mrs. Harrow. Some kids think she taught fifth grade, some kids say it was kindergarten, but they all agree that she was a great teacher and a nice lady...right up until March 1st.



MRS. HARROW

Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 3, Resistance 2

Willpower: 6

Essence: Maximum varies based on how long she's been dead

Morality: 4

Asset: Calm

Fault: Violent

Initiative: 7

Defense: 4

Speed: 17 (species factor 10)

Size: 5

Corpus: 7

Numina: Freeze, Ghost Sign

Anchors: Wedding ring, teaching certificate

On that date, she turned cold. The older kids say it was because her husband “jilted” her, but they don’t usually know what that means. But she spent a week being the meanest, cruelest teacher anyone had ever seen. When parents complained that their kids were coming home crying, the school administrators forced her to take some time off.

There was an unseasonable blizzard that March, and she walked right out into it. The police found her three weeks later when the snow melted off. She’d frozen solid, clutching her wedding ring so hard it had frozen right to her hand.

Description: When she manifests, Mrs. Harrow looks like she did in life, except that she has icy tears running

down her pale face and you can always see her breath. Even if she’s not manifesting, she causes little cold spots when she’s in a room.

Storytelling Hints: Mrs. Harrow is bitter and hostile. Furious at her husband for leaving her (perhaps for the mother of one of her students, who, depending on the time frame, might also be the mother or grandmother of one of the characters), she takes her anger out on children, the other objects of her devotion. She is anchored to her wedding ring, which is probably in the possession of her next of kin, but also to her teaching license, which is still on school property somewhere.

If Mrs. Harrow’s husband is still alive, he might be able to set her free by asking her forgiveness. If he’s not, the characters might banish Mrs. Harrow by showing her that he died alone and unmarried. Getting an entire class of students to ask her to leave, one by one, might also do it.

RED DAN

Background: They call him “Red Dan” because when they caught him, he was covered in blood. It happened a long time ago, long enough that he’s become more legend than fact, and so kids like to tell each other stories about Red Dan and his big, long knife at parties, to scare one another. But Red Dan, though he died by the hangman’s hand, isn’t gone. He’s still around and he likes nothing better than to jump into the bodies of young children and make them do terrible things. He doesn’t normally make them kill, but he’s not above making them pull knives from drawers and sit quietly at the ends of their parents’ beds. Red Dan had his fill of blood when he was alive. Now he just wants to watch people break down.

Description: Red Dan rarely manifests, but when he does, he is a large man with bulging muscles and a smooth, shaved head. He still wears the flannel shirt he was in when the police caught him, but his pants resemble prison fatigues. His arms are bloodstained, and he’s almost always whistling — when he possesses a victim, he makes that victim whistle, too.

Storytelling Hints: Red Dan isn’t the kind of ghost that’s going to vanish down a tunnel of light. He knows exactly what he is and has no desire to pass along, because if there’s any justice in the universe, he’s going straight to Hell. Getting rid of Red Dan would require destroying his anchors, but that’s difficult, because his anchor is the van he used to use to find victims. That van has been fixed up and has changed owners several times in the ensuing years, but it just keeps running (Red Dan was an accomplished mechanic and sometimes possesses the owner of the van to help with its upkeep). This makes Red Dan surprisingly mobile for a ghost.

EXAMPLE SPIRITS

Below are several spirits, some helpful, most decidedly not, for use in your **Innocents** chronicles.



RED DAN

Attributes: Power 5, Finesse 4, Resistance 5

Willpower: 10

Essence: Maximum varies based on how long he's been dead

Morality: 1

Asset: Creative

Fault: Cruel

Initiative: 9

Defense: 5

Speed: 19 (species factor 10)

Size: 5

Corpus: 10

Numina: Compulsion, Possession, Terrify

Anchors: Van

BAD DOGS

Many children love dogs, but somewhere in their minds is the knowledge that dogs are predators. Small puppies don't usually call this feeling to the forefront, but large dogs — especially mean-looking ones like Doberman Pinschers — can scare kids. And the problem is, as children are often told, dogs can smell fear.

Bad dogs are a specific type of dog-spirit. They are the spirit of a dog's unpredictable, predatory nature. They are the dogs that snap without warning, perhaps because they feel threatened, perhaps because they "smell fear" and wish to taste it. These dogs usually lurk around other, natural dogs, and sometimes Materialize to be around their canine cousins. Occasionally, a child goes to an ani-

mal shelter or a pet store to pick out a new friend, only to wind up with a long-term fear of dogs after the spirit's teeth sink home.

Description: These spirits look like large dogs. They are usually dark in color, and never exhibit any playful or friendly behavior. They might wag their tails, but have an unnervingly intense stare while they do so.

Storytelling Hints: Bad dogs aren't necessarily malicious, just unpredictable. Such a dog might even help a group of characters for a while, and then bite for no reason. These spirits might also have intentions of making other dogs in the area into "bad dogs," driving them mad with fear when people are trying to pet them. This, of course, is more likely to result in the dogs being destroyed than anything else, but the spirits don't know that.



BAD DOGS

Attributes: Power 3, Finesse 3, Resistance 3

Willpower: 6

Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Speed: 13

Size: 4

Corpus: 7

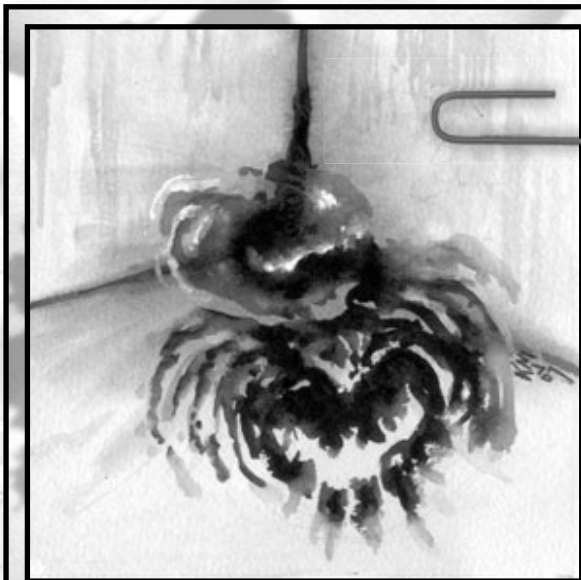
Numina: Materialize, Terrify

Ban: An adult speaking in a loud, unwavering voice can often repel a bad dog. A dog that can resist the spirit's Terrify Numen once might be able to see and even bite the spirit thereafter.

CHOKESHADOWS

Many children know what it's like to run out of air. Sure, some kids are asthmatic and have come close to dying, but any child who's ever horsed around in a swimming pool knows that horrible second when the lungs want to breathe, but there's no air to be had. Some kids experience this when they try to swallow something too big for their throats, and some truly unfortunate kids have felt fingers around their slim necks. Whatever the cause, in the moment that asphyxiation begins, a chokeshadow might be born.

These spirits lurk near the place of their creation and wait for someone else to choke. Since they can't absorb Essence unless someone starts to choke to death, they often die or enter slumber before too long. Those that dwell in nursing homes, hospitals or near large bodies of water



CHOKESHADOWS

Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 2, Resistance 2

Willpower: 6

Initiative: 6

Defense: 4

Speed: 16

Size: 2

Corpus: 4

Numina: Clasp, Telekinesis

Ban: If a choking victim remains calm (which usually requires a Resolve + Composure roll), the chokeshadow must cease its attack and cannot strike that victim again for one full day.

might grow powerful enough to travel, and they gain the power to reach out to human beings and start the choking process themselves.

Chokeshadows don't need their victims to die in order to gain sustenance, but the longer the victim chokes, the more Essence the chokeshadow absorbs. As such, their victims don't usually survive the attack.

Description: Chokeshadows are formless, resembling clouds of black smoke or animate shadows. They are usually seen as inky tendrils reaching out from a darkened corner or up from a lake's bottom.

Storyteller Hints: A chokeshadow might start following an asthmatic child around, eagerly awaiting the day he needs his inhaler but cannot reach it in time. These spirits are simple creatures and might serve as a way to introduce characters to the concept of spirits or to a ghost created by their predations.

IMAGINARIES

Just about every kid has one: that special friend no one else can see, be it human or animal, vegetable or mythological, small or tall or capable of changing its size at will. The imaginary friend is one of the almost universal aspects of childhood the world over, little boys and girls everywhere creating new ones every day and a world just beyond sight in which they dwell when their children aren't awake or around to play with them. Contrary to the beliefs of parents around the world, imaginary friends aren't just the products of their children's active young minds and wild flights of fancy — not solely, anyway. The minds and wills of children give the Imaginaries their shapes, set the template for their forms and abilities, grant them fur or scales, wings and thousands of legs, huge jewel-toned eyes and voices that purr like those of giant cats. The desires of children for playmates, for friends who won't ever leave, give the Imaginaries the spark of life that allows them to come into existence in the first place. But once they live? Then the life of the Imaginary is its own. *Puff the Magic Dragon* tells the truth, but not all of it: children may outgrow their Imaginary friends, but that's not necessarily the end. Those lives, once begun, don't simply dissolve back into the ether. They sleep, they attach themselves to younger siblings and younger friends, they seek out the other children in the world who dream dreams similar to themselves and take up residence among them.

Imaginaries love their children fiercely and, while attached to a child, exist almost solely to bring those children joy and happiness, using their abilities to create vast, lifelike illusions to bring the worlds their children imagine to life, if only briefly. When a group of Imaginaries comes together with a group of likeminded children, these illusory worlds created by their thoughts and dreams can easily overtake the reality of the physical world, obliterating it entirely for whole hours at a time, if not days. Usually, this is accidental, but in some cases, Imaginaries can deliberately wrap their children in illusion for the purposes of protecting them: from abusive parents, from schoolyard bullies, from supernatural entities of a more malignant nature. In even rarer cases, an Imaginary uses



IMAGINARIES

Attributes: Power 5, Finesse 5, Resistance 5

Willpower: 10

Initiative: 10

Defense: 5

Speed: Variable, equal to Power + Finesse + appropriate species factor

Size: Variable

Corpus: Variable, equal to Resistance + Size

Numina: Ghost Sign, Telekinesis, Telepathy

Ban: Imaginaries leave their children, never to return, if the child commands them to do so or claims that the Imaginary does not exist.

its innate ability to manifest in order to put the sort of terror that only a small child's mind can cause into the tormentor of its child.

Description: Imaginaries are wildly diverse in appearance. Some Imaginaries resemble creatures from popular children's entertainment — giant purple dinosaurs, child-sized talking animals, tiny creatures from ubiquitous Japanese cartoons and the like — while others hew closer to classical myth (dragons, unicorns, etc.). Some even take on the form of people the child knows or knew.

Storyteller Hints: Imaginaries are a form of spirit that only coalesces in the presence of small children. They are intelligent, generally benevolent and capable of a great deal in defense of their children. Not every imaginary friend in the world is an Imaginary. They generally only manifest themselves for children in genuine need of a friend, who

either lack physical friends to associate with or who are endangered by their loneliness in some way. An Imaginary could easily be a child's Guardian Angel (see p. 108).

NIGHT TERRORS

Background: They are the things that make children wake screaming, blind with fear, in the middle of the night. They are the things that slip through the cracks under bedroom doors, the things that stir the curtains over bedroom windows, the things that turn the knobs of bedroom closets and push them open with agonizing slowness, while the children cower under their blankets and pray that the old stories about monsters not being able to touch them through their sheets are true.



NIGHT TERRORS

Attributes: Power 4, Finesse 5, Resistance 2

Willpower: 6

Initiative: 7

Defense: 5

Speed: 19

Size: Varies; some are small as rats, some are larger than adults

Corpus: Varies by Size

Numina: Drain, Ghost Sign, Phantasm, Telekinesis, Terrify

Ban: Different Night Terrors have different bans, but most of them prevent the spirits from attacking children. Many cannot harm a child who is completely covered by blankets, while others cannot enter a room with a light on (even a night-light).

They aren't.

Night Terrors can be found the world over — entities that hunt and haunt the dreams of countless children for their forms and then stalk those children for the succulent taste of their fear. Unlike the Voices in the Dark (see p. 234), whom they sometimes superficially resemble, the Night Terrors rarely kill their victims or even do lasting harm. Much like the Imaginaries, whom they also resemble, they can be outgrown, cast off, and must depart in search of other children susceptible to their particular breeds of fear-giving. They lick the fear-sweat and tears off the faces of their victims, chuckling softly, and use that fear to anchor their own existence in the physical world. They have to feast while they can. Unlike the Imaginaries, they have little to offer the children to whom they batten beyond stories to tell other children on the playground, and their depredations frequently hurry the maturation of a child beyond their ability to reach. In some cases, however, they latch onto a child so deeply that he never fully rids himself of the Night Terror that haunted him as a child, and it remains attached permanently, returning again and again even into adulthood to plague his dreams and taste his fear.



BLACK GOBLINS

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Investigation 1

Description: Often, these beings take the forms of classic childhood terrors — the Monster in the Closet, the Slimy Thing under the Stairs, the Chest-Sitter (particularly common among asthmatic children), the Glowing Eyes Outside the Window — since those forms are classic for a reason and have been a source of nameless fear for countless generations of human children. Sometimes, however, they take on the shape of extremely specific fears belonging to particular children, often children who have suffered abuse that has shaped their understanding of what fear really is. It is these children who almost invariably suffer the attentions of the Night Terrors, until either they outgrow the entity's manipulation attempts or they receive some form of treatment that renders them more capable of resistance.

OTHER CREATURES

The monsters presented here aren't ghosts, spirits, or any of the easily recognizable beasts that populate our folklore, such as vampires. They serve to remind us, in fact, that those distinctions are arbitrary, labels that human beings invented to classify what cannot be classified. Children name the creatures from the shadows, too, but they give them simple names. Under-dwellers. Sweat-worms. Black Goblins.

Physical Skills: Athletics (Flight) 4, Brawl (Grappling) 3, Stealth 4, Survival 3

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Empathy (Anger) 4

Merits: Direction Sense, Fast Reflexes 2

Willpower: 3

Morality: None

Asset: None

Fault: None

Defense: 4

Initiative: 9

Speed: 18 (species factor 10; flight only)

Size: 4

Health: 6

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	1 (L)	8
Claw	2(L)	9

Supernatural Powers:

- **Keen Hearing:** Black goblins receive a +4 on all hearing-related Perception rolls. Unfortunately, this means that loud noises are painful for them. They have learned to shut out the sound of frightened screams, but they haven't gotten used to the immense noise output of stereos or TVs yet. Loud enough sounds drive them away.

BLACK GOBLINS

Background: It doesn't happen as much anymore, but there was a time when a parent would say, hands thrown up in exasperation, that she wished the goblins would come and take her children away. And sometimes, those goblins answered.

It still happens. Most of the black goblins have died off or fled to places in the world where children aren't looked after too carefully, but they can live anywhere. They roost like bats in caves or in high trees, sometimes even in abandoned buildings, and with huge ears they listen for a very special combination of words — "I wish the goblins would take you away."

That's what kids tell each other, anyway. The truth is that black goblins exist, but they don't understand human languages. What they listen for isn't specific words, but anger and frustration. When they hear that tone, preferably with a child's voice screaming somewhere in the background, they take flight, homing in on the sound until they reach the dissonant home. And then they wait until the child sets foot outside or near an open window, swoop in and grab him, and carry him away.

What do black goblins do with their captives? No one is really sure. They might eat them, of course, and that would explain why no one ever claims to have *survived* a black goblin attack (though some kids do claim to have *seen* one). Kids from

religious families say the goblins take their prisoners away to Hell. Some legends say the goblins sell the children to stranger and crueler creatures yet, and some say they turn the children into black goblins. Whatever the case, the only way to avoid this horrible fate is for the child to receive a heartfelt expression of love from the parent who summoned the goblins, and that means the child had better get on his best behavior and *fast*.

Description: Black goblins stand just over five feet tall. They are thin but rippled with sinewy muscle. Their legs and arms are connected by leathery patagia-flaps, and they have immense, batlike ears. Their mouths are small and doglike, and they chirp to each other in a whistling, lilting language.

Storytelling Hints: Depending on the needs of the story, the black goblins could be the servants of some sinister mage, collectors for the Others (see p. 258), or just hungry monsters that have learned to sense when someone isn't going to be watching a child for a while. A story involving them might require the characters to save their kidnapped friend, escape from the goblins' roost, or convince the adult who damned them to take it back before the goblins arrive.

NIGHT GUARDS

Junkyards, quarries, schools, old abandoned buildings, graveyards — it's amazing how much more interesting these places become after dark. Even a public park



NIGHT GUARDS

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Investigation 2, Occult 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Stealth 4, Survival 3

Social Skills: Intimidation 4, Streetwise (Protected Area) 1

Merits: Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Fleet of Foot 3

Willpower: 7

Morality: None

Asset: None

Fault: None

Defense: 4

Initiative: 6

Speed: 15 (species factor 8)

Size: 6

Health: 9

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	2 (L)	10
Claw/Beak	2(L)	10

Supernatural Powers:

- **Area Sense:** Night guards can automatically tell when someone has entered their protected area.

- **Hidey Hole:** When night guards aren't on duty, no one can find them. They disappear into the ground somewhere in their areas, and no form of magical or mundane detection methods work to uncover them.



SNATCHERS

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 0, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Investigation 2, Medicine 1

Physical Skills: Athletics (Running) 3, Brawl 3, Larceny (Quick Grab) 3, Stealth 3, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 1

Merits: Fast Reflexes 2, Fleet of Foot 3, Fresh Start 3

Willpower: 5

Morality: None

Asset: None

Fault: None

Defense: 4

Initiative: 9

Speed: 12 (species factor 5)

Size: 5

Health: 7

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Punch	0 (B)	6

Supernatural Powers:

- **Vanish:** Once out of sight, a snatcher can disappear, provided it has one full turn to do so. It reappears back in its lair, but it can only use this power if it is less than 100 yards from the lair. As such, snatchers don't tend to hunt *too* far from home.

- **Purposeful Stride:** Snatchers don't suffer penalties from crowds or environmental conditions when in Foot Chases (see p. 57).

can be a fascinating place once no one is allowed in. But people can get wandering around after dark (that's why people aren't allowed in, after all), and sometimes it takes a night guard to remind folks of that.

No one can say where night guards come from. They might be spirits that somehow manage to stay in material form. They might be guardian angels of a particularly fierce sort. Whatever the truth, they take safety very seriously. They will not allow anyone to get hurt in the area they protect, but they won't let people stay, either. They chase intruders away, snarling and grasping with clawed hands, but once the interloper is out of the protected area, the night guard lopes back into the shadows.

Despite the name, night guards do occasionally appear during the day, but never when the legitimate owner of the property is around. Perhaps out of deference to these revered souls, they only appear to their targets.

Description: Night guards vary in shape, but they always look vaguely animalistic. Most are quadrupeds, though occasionally one appears that walks on two legs like a great bird or ape. They are almost always black or gray in color, and sport fangs, claws and sometimes wings.

Storytelling Hints: Night guards are a change from the usual guardian creature, because they are in no way interested in hurting anyone. They want to keep their areas safe, but they also want people to *be* safe (which is why they guard dangerous places). It's not impossible that a group of children might befriend or at least gain an understanding of the night guard, especially if they run the risk of being injured if they leave the protected area. A more malicious creature that chases a group of kids into a junkyard or deserted building might have a fight on its hands once the night guard arrives.

SNATCHERS

Parents try to shield their kids from the worst of the urban legends, but they spread like mold through a loaf of bread. By third grade, they've heard about the man in the attic ("Have you checked the children?"). By fourth grade, they've heard about the drug smugglers who steal kids, kill them and hollow them out to hold narcotics. And by fifth grade, they've heard about the kidnapers who swipe children in amusement parks, drug them, dye their hair and walk right out of the front gates.

Another urban legend, though, is about the "snatcher." He grabs up a kid and just walks away, purposefully

but quickly. He doesn't stop for anything, not the kid's parents, not a cop, nothing. If people don't physically grab him, he'll disappear with that kid, and you'll never see either one of them again.

Snatchers aren't people, though they mimic them. They steal pets and objects as well as kids, but that doesn't kick up nearly as much attention. They aren't *successful* in stealing kids very often, because although most people might mind their own business, a "man" carrying a screaming child down the street garners attention. But if one manages to get out of sight with a child, even for a split second, it vanishes without a trace, and so does its captive.

Description: Snatchers look like human beings, but their faces aren't visible. They wear hooded sweatshirts, wide-brimmed hats or even ski masks to conceal the fact that they have no faces at all. Where a face should be is merely a smooth, fleshy surface. They don't have fingerprints, and if their clothes were stripped away, no hair, blemishes or even genitals would be visible.

Storytelling Hints: Snatchers play on some of the same fears as black goblins, but whereas the black goblins steal kids who might deserve it, the snatchers come from nowhere with no rhyme or reason. Their faceless, featureless bodies suggest that they absorb their captives somehow — perhaps they can become truly human for a short time by taking on the features of another person. But why, then, do they steal pets and objects, too? They might be creatures born of some obscene magical experiment, constructs trying to build their own society, complete with offspring (which they themselves can't produce).

Stories involving snatchers should involve the chase through a crowded area and then the horror of realizing that the snatcher, and the child, have gone missing. How can the characters track something that leaves no trace? Maybe the snatcher *does* leave a calling card of some kind, or maybe it has stolen other people and things in the area, and the characters can figure out an epicenter of the attacks. If they do find the snatchers' lair, though, what horrors await them? Is their kidnapped friend even now being stripped of his face?

SWEATWORMS

With summer come soccer, Little League and glorious games of tag, hide-and-peek, touch football — and all that means sweat. Outdoors in the sunshine, romping with dogs and friends, charging through fields or playing ball on the blacktop, kids (boys especially) come home sticky and stinking. That's if the sweatworms don't get them.

These creatures are noxious, slimy horrors. They burrow through the earth with enough force to disrupt concrete (though the urban species prefers to slither through pipes and sewers, which is why they avoid being discovered). They pop out of the ground and wrap around their prey like lampreys, slurping delicious, salty sweat from the terrified child's body.



SWEATWORMS

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 0, Wits 4, Resolve 1

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 0, Manipulation 0, Composure 1

Mental Skills: None

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl (Grappling) 2

Social Skills: None

Merits: Direction Sense

Willpower: 2

Morality: None

Asset: None

Fault: None

Defense: 4

Initiative: 4

Speed: 10 (species factor 5)

Size: 3

Health: 5

Supernatural Powers: None

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	1 (L)	5

Sweatworms don't prey exclusively on children, but the creatures aren't very strong by adult standards and so they prefer weaker prey. They don't eat human meat but subsist mainly on rodents and other small game — they

find human flesh too laden with chemicals. But the salts in human sweat, mixed with those same toxins from processed food, carbonated beverages and air and water pollutants, are irresistible to the worms. The worms don't harm their prey unless the child screams...which, of course, they tend to do. At that point, the sweatworm bites at the child's throat (the source of the noise), and this, of course, can result in the child bleeding to death or suffocating. If the child manages to stay still while the worm wraps itself around him, tiny tongue-like appendages removing the sweat from his skin, he'll go home without a scratch on him.

Description: Sweatworms are roughly four feet in length, and have mottled gray and brown skin. The texture of their flesh is much like a snake's, but they are covered in a thin layer of mucous. Their underside is covered in what appear to be scales, but when they grapple a target, these scales move and wriggle, "licking" the sweat from the target's body. The sweatworm's mouth is circular and filled with needle-sharp teeth.

Storytelling Hints: Sometimes, it's fun to go for the gross-out. Sweatworms are a good way to do it. They

don't want to hurt anyone and they regard human children as tasty treats. Of course, the real story involving sweatworms might take the kids into a cavern where the *adult* creatures are nesting, getting ready to go hunting for larger game. Or it might involve finding who bred these horrors in the first place.

UNDER-DWELLERS

Background: The under-dwellers are atavisms: creatures left over from an earlier stage in humankind's development, or things that devolved from what they once were after centuries, if not millennia, of dwelling in the lightless realms below the hills, under the mountains. They can be found wherever there are natural caves or the remnants of old mines bored into the ground, or skulking in the flooded pits of old stone quarries. In urban environments, they can be found in deep, old sewer culverts that never come near the surface or tunneling into the mountainous sides of garbage dumps.

In general, they prefer to avoid contact with humanity unless provoked by encroachment into their habitats of choice: in such cases, they can often be driven to kill inter-



UNDER-DWELLERS

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 4, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 1

Mental Skills: Crafts 2, Medicine 1

Physical Skills: Athletics (Climbing) 4, Brawl (Grappling) 3, Stealth 4, Survival 3, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Intimidation 2

Merits: Danger Sense, Ambidextrous, Direction Sense, Fast Reflexes 2, Fleet of Foot 2, Iron Stomach, Natural Immunity, Toxin Resistance

Willpower: 3

Morality: None

Asset: None

Fault: None

Defense: 5

Initiative: 8

Speed: 16 (species factor 5)

Size: 5

Health: 9

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	2 (L)	9
Claw	0 (L)	7

Supernatural Powers:

• **Rat Head:** Under-dwellers can squeeze into openings as small as six inches in diameter with a Dexterity + Athletics roll.

• **Wall-Climbing:** Under-dwellers can climb sheer surfaces, provided the material either has handholds or is soft enough to dig their claws into (steel is too hard, but most rock is not). See Climbing on p. 56.

lopers and consume the corpses. They don't feed exclusively on humans, but meat is meat. Mostly nocturnal, they emerge from their dens by night to hunt small game and scavenge what they can. They can occasionally be encountered raiding dumpsters located in particularly dark alleyways. Bright lights blind them and prolonged exposure can permanently damage their delicate eyes. Loud noises can deafen them and permanently damage their extremely sensitive hearing. Sudden exposure to either can trigger flight or fight, depending on how aggressive the individual under-dweller might be. Dogs, from the fiercest guard dog to the smallest puppy, are almost preternaturally sensitive to the presence of these creatures and will immediately attack them if allowed to do so. At the very least, a dog will attempt to drive the under-dweller away from its family. In rare cases, under-dwellers can emerge from their lairs specifically to snatch away human children — not to eat, but to add those children to the creatures' own community, if one exists, or to satisfy the instinctual imperative to nurture young of its own, if the under-dweller is female and lacks a mate.

Description: The under-dwellers are roughly humanoid in appearance — one head, one trunk, four limbs.

They often look attenuated, their limbs and fingers too long and too slender, their necks too skinny to hold up the weight of their misshapen heads. Their pale skins are often spotted with various lichens and molds; their eyes and ears are disproportionately large for their heads; their teeth and nails are longer, sharper, and thicker than human. They can bend and twist and contort their bodies through gaps in walls and grates and stone faces that nothing completely human could traverse.

Also, the under-dwellers possess a rather distinctive aroma: a scent compounded of some nearly bestial musk admixed with a musty hint of molds and mildews.

Storyteller Hints: The under-dwellers are only minimally intelligent by human standards. More than anything else, they're driven by instinctual imperatives such as the need to eat, the need to conceal themselves from predators, and the need to mate in order to reproduce their species. They have only the barest rudiments of language, but that language has a certain haunting quality to it: it does not consist solely of gutturals but contains within it lyrical hints of something older, or something that it might be developing into.





The girls leaned closer into the circle of candlelight as Sarah's voice dropped to a fearful whisper. They hugged one another or drew their nightshirts down over their legs and wrapped their arms tight about their knees. Even the ones who'd first rolled their eyes at the suggestion of a ghost story now listened with rapt attention, flinching each time the huge old mansion creaked and groaned around them.

"When Old Man Whittaker saw what his son had done to the serving girl he dragged the boy kicking and screaming up the stairs to the attic," Sarah murmured. Her gaze swept over the younger students – and surreptitiously checked the tall window at the opposite end of the room. Maddie had drawn the short straw this year, and had the task of climbing out on the ledge with the mask on. It was a tradition that went all the way back to the earliest days of the Chatham School for Girls. The teachers had long since learned to ignore the shrieks from the seventh-grade students' room on the first night of school.

"Up the stairs Whittaker went, roaring curses at his dead wife and at God Himself for the monster he'd been given in place of a son." Sarah pointed to the ceiling. "Right above us, Whittaker threw the malformed boy into a small room at the end of the attic."

Sarah leaned close to the candle flame. "Whittaker locked the door behind his son and threw the key down the well behind the house," she said. "It's said the monster in the attic howled and screamed for eight days straight. After the first day the servants wouldn't come up here to the third floor, because they swore they could hear the boy clawing at the walls of his prison."

Shivers and frightened glances passed among the young girls. Sarah tried to keep a straight face as she launched into the final part of the tale.

"After the eighth day the howling stopped, and Whittaker thought he was free of the beast at last. He went to bed that night and slept better than he'd had in years – but the night maid swore she still heard faint scratching coming from the attic above.

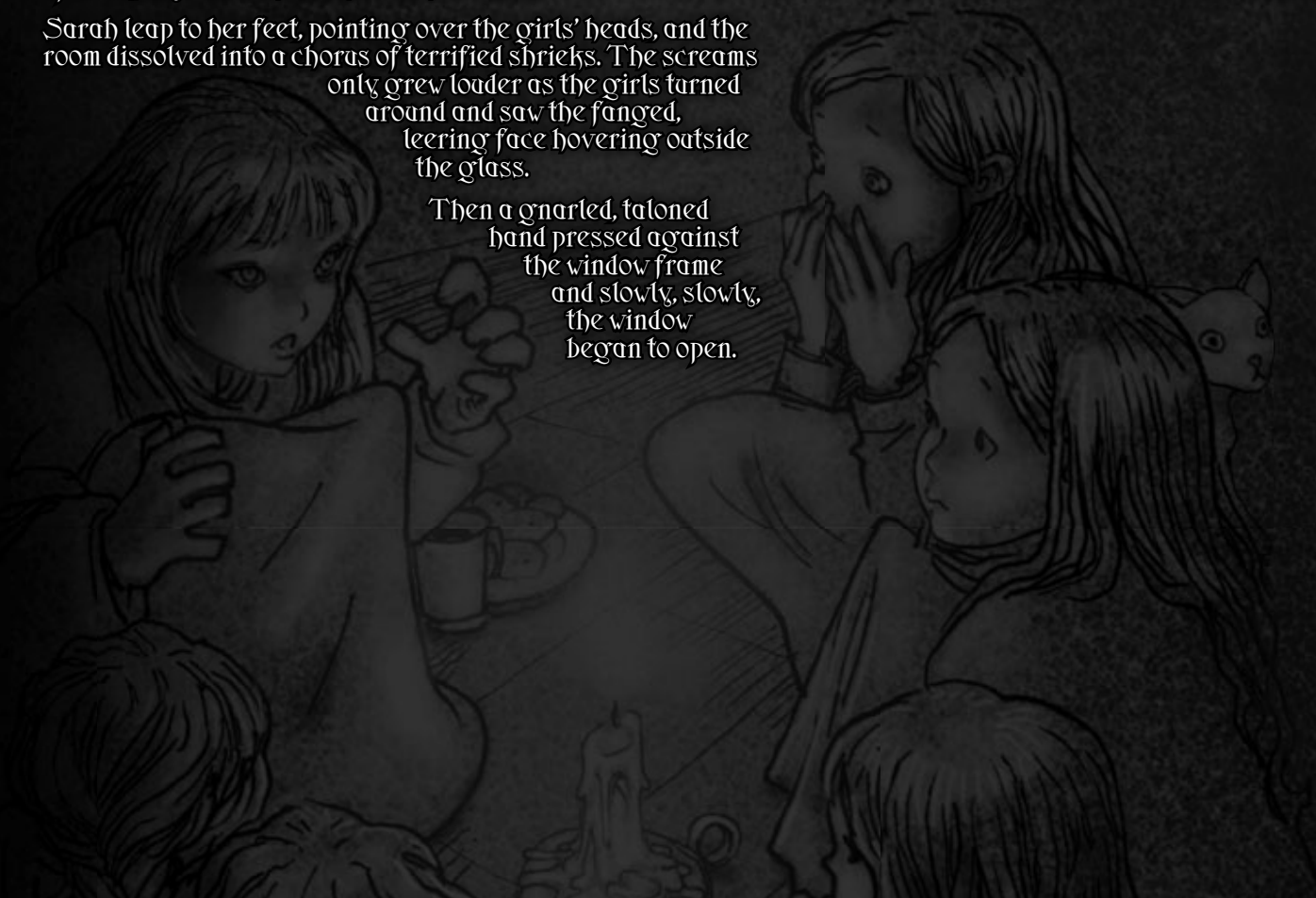
"The next morning, Old Man Whittaker didn't come down for his breakfast. When the butler broke down the door to his room – this very room we're sitting in – they found him torn limb from limb. His organs had been torn from his living body and scattered like toys all across the floor."

She pointed over the squirming girls' shoulders. "That window there was standing open, stained with blood and bits of skin. Old Man Whittaker's monster had escaped his prison and taken his revenge."

There was a faint sign of movement at the window. Maddie was right on cue. Sarah pitched her voice even lower, until the girls had to strain to hear. "To this very day, they say he still comes back to the house in the dead of night and climbs the walls like a spider, peering in through the window of his father's room and looking for fresh blood to spill. Oh, my God! What's that at the window!"

Sarah leap to her feet, pointing over the girls' heads, and the room dissolved into a chorus of terrified shrieks. The screams only grew louder as the girls turned around and saw the fanged, leering face hovering outside the glass.

Then a gnarled, taloned hand pressed against the window frame and slowly, slowly, the window began to open.



Chapter Eight: Stories

Children can have adventures. Any number of TV shows and movies tell you that. But the adventures they have are different from the adventures adults have. Tied to parents, school and home, they can't just go off and pursue wrongdoers or get lost on the mean streets of the city for weeks on end. They're more fragile than they can know.

In this section of the book, we present a number of stories for child characters in the World of Darkness.

"With a Song in My Heart" pits the characters against a relentless, vicious hunter tracking them across hills and countryside, murder on his mind.

In "What Are Little Boys Made Of?", a terrible evil threatens to suck in the kids' school, teachers and pupils alike. It's the age-old story: the kids know something is going on, but the adults don't believe them.

"High, Sweet, Evil Laughter" puts the characters in the middle of a supernatural conflict — a foundation designed to brainwash them versus spirits born of the deaths of children. Neither of these forces has the characters' best interests in mind.

"Mountain Mother" asks the characters to track a missing boy into the nearby caves, and shows them a creature from their nightmares.

"The Forever Club" makes the characters the targets of an old lady's scheme to cheat death — by stealing their youth.

WITH A SONG IN MY HEART

The new music teacher is a homicidal maniac. He's not interested in killing children specifically, but he does tend to fixate, and he's become obsessed with the players' characters. More than anything else, he loves to hunt his prey over distances, a long, languid chase that eventually ends with him standing over his exhausted quarry, pulling out his knife and closing in for the kill. He's had plenty of time to perfect this technique. The new music teacher is well over 200 years old.

This story assumes that the characters all have the same music teacher, which probably, but not necessarily, means they all attend the same school. With a little tweaking, though, Mr. Clerk could be a choir director or a director at a local community theater. The important thing is that he is someone who has access to the kids and would reasonably be trusted to take them on a field trip. His status as a music teacher could even be changed; it's not unthinkable that Clerk is just the bus driver. His position as a teacher, though, makes his betrayal that much more horrifying and dramatic.

THEME AND MOOD

The themes of this story are patience and betrayal. Clerk is old, possibly immortal, and even he isn't sure how many people he's killed over the years. He's watched as people have become more paranoid over time, but they are still so easily fooled — every person believes himself to be a good judge of character. He lives for the moment when his victim realizes Clerk's betrayal, when that look of shock and anguish crosses someone's face.

The mood of the story is exhaustion. Clerk will run the characters ragged if they let him. He chases them through woods, he charms (or kills) anyone they run to for help, and he tries to back them into a corner. In the end, they will probably have to fight him, and he knows that, but he wants it on his terms. That is, he'll fight when his victims have been awake for three days and three nights, are hungry and half in shock, and he's still fresh as a daisy.

Quietly, Libby turned to Harriet for a long moment, and her watery old eyes were steady and compassionate. "It's awful being a child," she said, simply, "at the mercy of other people."

— Donna Tartt,
The Little Friend

Real Monsters

by Matthew McFarland

On October 1, 1993, 12-year-old Polly Klaas was having a slumber party with two friends. As they played a board game at the Klaas home, a man with a knife broke in, tied the girls up and took Polly away. After a search that garnered nationwide attention, Polly's kidnapper — her killer — was arrested in December and led authorities to her body.

Polly Klaas had had a lifelong fear of the dark and of a “bogeyman” coming to steal her away. In October of 1993, it happened. At his sentencing, her killer claimed that Polly had begged him not to “do [her] like [her] dad.” Polly's father, quite understandably, had to be removed from the courtroom in rage and grief. Polly's killer was sentenced to death.

Never mind the vampires, werewolves and other predators of the World of Darkness for a moment. There are *real monsters* in the *real world*. While men like Polly's killer (whom I refuse to humanize by naming here) aren't terribly common, they're common enough to send a chill down the spine of any parent.

When I was an undergraduate, I took several courses in playwriting. During one course, I started writing a play about fear, and I would often ask my acquaintances what they were afraid of. When I asked parents that question, without fail they said that they were afraid of something bad happening to their kids. I didn't really get that until my own daughter was born, years later. Now I get it.

Almost every single word of **World of Darkness: Innocents** was written by parents. Some of us have adult children, some of us are just starting our families, but we all understand the fear I mentioned. So how is it that we can write a game like this?

Because we're not writing about the real monsters. We're not writing a game in which children are in danger from career criminals and sex offenders. The characters in this game are in danger from the supernatural creatures of the World of Darkness, and sometimes those creatures do horrible things to the children they capture. But it doesn't compare with reality, precisely because it *isn't* reality. That kind of disconnect between the monsters of the World of Darkness and the real monsters of

our world is necessary. It allows us to keep **Innocents** in the context of entertainment — shadows that come alive to choke us aren't real. The walking bodies of the dead don't slither into our homes to drink our blood. The spirits of the dead don't linger to cause us harm. These are horrifying notions, but they are fantastical and in that, we can find entertainment — even fun.

Innocents characters are fragile and the stories you tell about them are probably going to deal more with escaping and outwitting the forces of darkness than with standing up to them and fighting them off. In the writing of this book, we've shied away from visceral, direct horror and focused more on terror, on the adrenaline of what *would* happen if the monsters caught up with you. That's a design decision, and it's one that you're certainly free to ignore, but I do want to make it clear why we're approaching the game in the way that we are.


To play a child character in a roleplaying game is to remove much of the empowerment that usually comes with such a game. In **Vampire: The Requiem**, you play a sleek, dangerous predator — the vampire. The word alone has the power to command fear; the concept of the vampire is deep-seated and recognizable enough that the appeal of the game is obvious. In **Mage: The Awakening**, you take on the role of a person with the power to reshape the world. Even in **Changeling: The Lost**, where the characters have suffered terribly at the hands of the alien Others, those characters aren't powerless. Indeed, it is their strength that enabled them to escape and become the protagonists of the story.

But in **Innocents**, the characters don't have magic or feral might or stolen blood or ancient oaths to help them. They have only the strength and wit and knowledge that they can summon...and they are only children. Every victory is hard won. Every loss is devastating. Every moment of terror is the worst moment of the character's young life.

With all these extremes, it should be easy to see why we've ignored the “real” monsters of the world. Let the real world have its real monsters. Here in the World of Darkness, we'll stick to the supernatural. Those monsters might be vicious and inexplicable, but we'll never have to meet them in our own daily lives, and neither will our children.

Note: this story is grim in outlook, but the horror in the story does *not* come from Clerk grabbing kids one at a time and slashing them open. “With a Song in my Heart” is not meant to be a slasher story (though you

could certainly play it that way, hopefully with older protagonists). The horror in this story comes from hearing Clerk's slow, gentle song echoing off the trees, seeing his shadow catching up with the kids and, most of all, watch-



ing adults greet Clerk as though he's their oldest friend... when the kids know the truth about their teacher.

ALLIES AND ANTAGONISTS

The most important supporting character in this story is Mr. Clerk, the music teacher. His traits are provided below. The children meet up with other characters who might help them during the course of this story, but most of them wind up dead under Clerk's knife.

JOHN CLERK

Quote: (*sung*) *Leaning, leaning, safe and secure in my arms...*

Background: John Clerk doesn't remember being a child, a teen, a young man...as far as he knows, he's always been his present age. He doesn't remember how he started to kill, nor does he remember a time when he thought it was wrong. He *does* remember different eras, though. He remembers the Great Depression, when people could just disappear and no one would be the wiser. Whole families, in fact. He remembers the Second World War, when women would take any risk for a hint of news about their sweethearts, and what hunts he had then with nothing but a government uniform to aid him. He remembers Woodstock and the thousands of people too stoned to know any better.

Whatever the truth about Clerk, he can charm just about anyone. Over the years, he's learned that in every age, there are people who hold keys. They dispense licenses, they hire employees and they sign checks. Those are the people Clerk works hard to charm, because once he convinces the key-holders of his pure intentions, he can get to whatever they are protecting. Charm a priest: get access to the congregation. Charm a secretary: get access to her records. Charm a principal: get access to the students.

Description: Clerk appears in his early 30s. He wears his hair short, but not short enough to suggest a military cut. He dresses in crisp, white shirts and dark slacks and wears a gold ring on his left hand (he finds that people trust him more if they assume he's married). He usually has a wide smile on his face and speaks in a beautiful, warm, deep voice. If he's not talking, he's singing, even just walking down the street, and observers notice that passersby sometimes fall into step with the rhythm of his song. He always carries a switchblade knife in his pocket.

Storyteller Hints: Was John Clerk ever really human? It's impossible to say. He might be the unholy merger of some dark spirit and a human body, or he might be a creature that has become more human (in appearance) over the decades. And of course, it's just possible that Clerk doesn't *really* remember all the things he thinks he does. He could just be mad.

It doesn't make any difference to him. He hears music everywhere he goes. The music gets louder and more beautiful in the moment that a victim realizes he has been betrayed, and it gets fainter the longer Clerk goes without killing. Clerk loves the music, and he hates silence (which is why he sings all the time).

Clerk hates to fight; he prefers to trade on his charm. Anyone who spends time alone with him sees his cordial demeanor unravel. Anyone who touches his hand, accidentally or otherwise, sees a little shard of the madness within — Clerk *hates* being touched, and responds harshly (if not violently) to it.

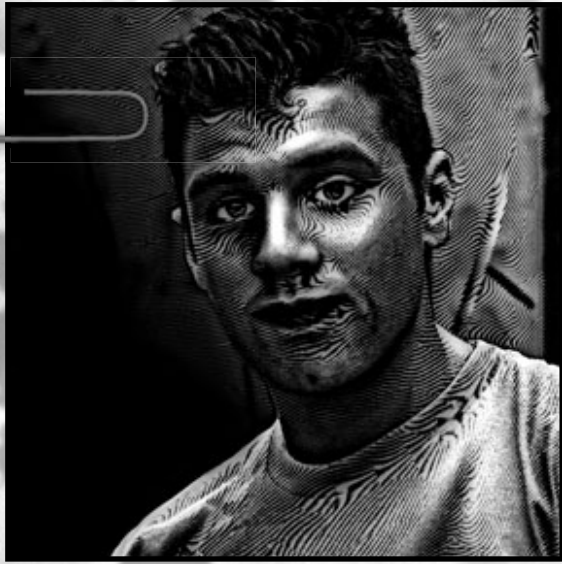
THE BEGINNING

Before beginning the story, have each player roll Wits + Empathy. The players cannot spend Willpower on this roll, but Specialties like Judge of Character or Recognizing Danger apply. You roll Clerk's Presence + Socialize (eight dice, and remember that as an adult, he gets 8-Again against child characters) and compare each player's successes with yours. Any characters whose rolls turn up less than or as many successes as yours are charmed as described above, but don't feel the need to tell the players that. Instead, describe to them how *cool* Mr. Clerk is. He knows the latest bands, even if he's not a fan. He might have come to the aid of a nerdy kid being bullied, or allowed kids to do homework in his class so that they could have a long weekend free. Plus, he has such a great voice, soothing and inspiring all at once, that it's impossible not to like him. Female characters might have little crushes on him, in fact.

Of course, it's possible, if not terribly likely, that a player manages to beat your roll. In that case, take the player aside privately *after* giving the general speech about what a great guy Clerk is and tell that player that his character isn't all that crazy about Clerk. In fact, his character finds him a bit creepy. He's too intense, has too wide a smile, stares too long at people's eyes when he talks to them (avoid any hint of sexual innuendo, though; that's not what Clerk is about). One thing that this perceptive character has noticed is that Clerk keeps his left hand in his pants pocket almost all the time (this is where he keeps his knife).

The story proper begins with all the characters at a concert. Rather, it begins with them being kicked *out* of a concert. Ask each player why her character got ejected. This gives the players a way to examine how their characters operate in social settings, and a chance to play to their Assets or Faults. An Honest character might own up to talking during the show. A Hyperactive character might get caught trying to sneak backstage, and so on. Whatever the reason, the kids end up outside the show with Mr. Clerk.

Clerk informs them that he needs to take them "back." What that means depends on the backdrop you've created for the story. For instance, if all the kids attend the same school, "back" means back to class. If they're all part of a church choir, it might mean "back" to the church or to their homes. Whatever the case, in crafting this story, you need to make sure that the kids would realistically get into a van with Mr. Clerk. The concert takes place in late afternoon or early evening, and it's just starting to get dark as the characters climb into the car. Ask the players if their characters buckle up (Clerk, for the record, doesn't remind them). Characters with the Irresponsible Fault can recoup a point of Willpower if they don't.



JOHN CLERK

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Computer 1, Crafts 2, Investigation 2, Medicine 1, Occult 3, Politics (Bureaucracy) 3, Study 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Larceny 3, Stealth 1, Survival 2, Weaponry (Knife) 3

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Expression (Singing) 5, Intimidation 3, Socialize 4, Subterfuge 1

Merits: Ambidextrous, Eidetic Memory, Multilingual (Storyteller's choice of languages) 5, Striking Looks, Trivia Hound

Willpower: 4

Morality: 0

Triggers: Berserk (being touched on the hand).

Asset: Calm

Fault: Violent

Defense: 4

Initiative: 6

Speed: 12

Size: 5

Health: 7

Supernatural Powers:

- **Inhuman Constitution:** Clerk doesn't need sleep. He never gets tired, no matter how far he walks, and he doesn't suffer wound penalties, no matter how injured he becomes. He does not need food or water, though he can and does eat to keep up appearances.

- **Charmer:** Upon meeting people for the first time, Clerk has a chance to charm them beyond all reason. Roll his Presence + Socialize in a contested roll against each observer's Wits + Empathy. If Clerk's successes equal or exceed the witness, she believes that Clerk is fully trustworthy, charming and impeccable. If the witness wins, she feels disturbed by Clerk — he's creepy, a little too intense, and certainly not someone to be alone with. Once Clerk charms someone, that person makes all manner of excuses for anything Clerk does. Only when confronted with direct, physical evidence (usually witnessing Clerk kill someone) is the charm broken.

- **Sudden Strike:** If Clerk charms someone, he can, at any point in the future, make an immediate attack against the victim. If he manages to surprise the target (see Reaction to Surprise, p. 34), he can strike a killing blow, inflict damage equal to his dice pool. Note that his attack dice pool with his knife is eight, which is enough to fill most adult's Health bars with lethal damage and thus incapacitate them (see p. 153).

Clerk gets on the highway and starts driving. At this point, characters with the Direction Sense Merit might notice that they aren't headed back the way they came (players roll Wits + Composure). If someone calls Mr. Clerk on this, he says it's a shortcut. A successful Intelligence + Streetwise roll indicates this isn't the case, provided that anyone cares enough to think about it (don't ask a player to make this roll unless the player asks if this direction is, in fact, a shortcut). If a character points this

out, Clerk sighs and says that he *was* thinking about taking the kids for ice cream, since they have some extra time before the concert lets out, but if they're going to be pushy about it, they'll just head back. Any charmed kids, of course, probably shout down a dissenter (you might refer to the system for bullying on p. 71).

Clerk drives the kids away from the city and into a rural area. Have the player whose character is riding in the front seat make a reflexive Wits + Composure roll. If

CELL PHONES, GUARDIANS AND OTHER PROBLEMS

Depending on when this story is set, the characters might have cell phones or other gadgets that make navigation and rescue easier. Likewise, a player might have purchased Merits like Allies, Guardian or Pet for his character and be annoyed if the character doesn't have access to those advantages.

How to handle this as a Storyteller depends on the particulars of your chronicle. If you are running this story as a one-shot, it's probably quicker simply to tell the players not to take those Merits. If this story is part of a larger chronicle, inform the players that while those Merits aren't of immediate benefit, that won't be the case for every story (and make sure that in the next story, those traits *are* of use).

As for cell phones and other trinkets, you have several options. One is to fall back on a horror movie trope — the phone doesn't get reception way out here. Another is to state that another teacher collected all of the cell phones before the concert, and so they're still back at the music hall. Finally, you could allow the characters to keep their phones and call for help. It'll be a long time in coming, and if Clerk manages to flag down a cop car before the characters do, he'll kill the policeman and take his gun, making him that much more dangerous.

this roll succeeds, the player notices Clerk jerk the wheel to the right. The van leaves the road, rolls down an embankment and crashes into a tree. The van is going about 40mph when it crashes, so if you want to figure out how much damage the van suffers when it hits the tree, roll 19 dice. Any successes over three are applied to the car's Structure as damage. Roll dice equal to the successes on that first roll as damage for people inside the car. Anyone wearing a seatbelt takes bashing damage, while unprotected passengers suffer lethal damage. This includes Clerk (who is indeed wearing a seatbelt). If you don't want to leave the damage to chance (that's a lot of dice, after all), assume that everyone in the van takes three levels of bashing damage — probably enough to cause some wound penalties, but barring further injury, everyone will be fine in less than an hour.

After the crash, let the characters check their surroundings a bit. They are in the middle of nowhere and their teacher is, apparently, unconscious. They can search the car, but Clerk knew that he was going to make his move tonight and removed most of the items that the characters would find helpful (like flares). What the characters find, if anything, is up to you. If you think the characters are going to be too outmatched in a physical confrontation, let them find a tire iron. If a character is

afraid of the dark and will be useless walking through the woods at night, let him find a flashlight.

The characters are out in the middle of nowhere, in the woods, and they haven't seen another car for a while. Stress how spooky being in the woods at night is — there aren't any streetlights here, and if the characters listen, they hear night sounds (owls, crickets, rustling in the leaves). An Intelligence + Survival roll gives a character a vague idea of the distance to town, but the characters haven't seen so much as a gas station in at least five miles.

If the character riding in the front seat noticed Mr. Clerk drive off the road, take that player aside and explain that, now that he thinks of it, Clerk has *always* been a little strange (if the character wasn't charmed to begin with, don't bother). The charm on the character has been broken.

When the characters aren't looking, Clerk disappears into the woods. He waits for them to start walking, and then he follows.

When the characters have started walking away from the crash or have decided to stay put, move on to the middle section of this story.

THE MIDDLE

The main body of this story should involve the characters' long walk from the crashed van toward civilization. Which way they walk is up to them, of course. If they walk back the way they came, they'll come to a gas station in about five miles. If they keep walking in the direction the van was heading, they'll come to a farmhouse. They might also stay where they are, waiting until morning (which would normally be the safest bet, but not with Clerk around).

The most important thing to establish in this part of the story is that Clerk is the villain, and that he intends to kill the characters. Some suggestions for doing so follow:

- The characters discover the body of one of Clerk's previous victims, rolled in a blanket and stuffed in a hollow log. If you choose to follow this thread, it might be a good idea to seed the knowledge that someone in the community has gone missing, ideally someone with a connection to the characters' school. If you wish to inject a more overt supernatural occurrence into this story, you might consider having the ghost of the victim show up and warn the characters about Clerk.

- Characters who are no longer charmed, or never were, can think back to strange things they've seen Clerk do. These might include pulling his hand away when touched; carrying a knife that he claims he confiscated from a student; laughing at something that was not only inappropriate but downright disturbing. Charmed characters might, over time, come to acknowledge that Clerk isn't as great as they thought, but the charm still lasts until they see him attack someone.

- The characters arrive at the gas station or the farmhouse and find carnage. The inhabitants are dead, their throats slit wide open (trigger rolls are appropriate here). The phone lines, too, have been cut. As the characters

search the area, they hear Clerk's song echoing from somewhere nearby.

- If the characters wait at the van, they hear a car approaching. If they run to the road to flag it down, they see it swerve and then stop. A man gets out of the driver's seat and stumbles toward the characters, gasping, and then falls over dead, his throat cut. Clerk gets out of the backseat of the car and starts to walk slowly toward the characters, singing a slow, haunting tune.

Clerk wants the characters to run, and so he doesn't chase after them at high speeds. If they stand still and let him catch up, for whatever reason (they're still charmed, perhaps, or playing to the Optimistic Asset or the Dull Fault), he attacks, but only to wound. If the characters attack *him* and manage to do any real damage (two points or more), he flees into the woods, beginning a game of cat and mouse. He doesn't attack, but tries to lead them on, run them ragged and force them closer to fatigue.

THE END

The final stages of the story should begin when the characters can no longer run, or refuse to do so. They must deal with Clerk somehow. That might mean making a stand in the middle of the road, setting a fire in the woods to attract attention, setting a trap for Clerk or just chasing *him* down and beating him senseless (difficult; he's fast and he doesn't get tired). In any event, the characters need some way of proving to whatever help or authority they find that Clerk is the monster they say he is. Impassioned stories and physical evidence can provide bonuses on a witness's Wits + Empathy roll to avoid Clerk's charm, but the best way to reveal him is to touch his hand. In the moment of rage that this provokes, Clerk is not a bit charming, and that loss of control can save lives.

CONSEQUENCES

"With a Song in My Heart" might end with Clerk being shot by policemen, led away in handcuffs, or driving off in a newly acquired car with the owner's blood cooling on the seat. If he escapes, he'll remember the characters forever and fully intends to pay them a visit someday, but not anytime soon. He's got time.

If the characters manage to kill Clerk, they might suffer degeneration for it and almost certainly come away from the experience with a trigger or two. If they get him arrested or drive him away, they might feel proud that they've saved some lives. But if they are expecting rewards or acknowledgement, they have another think coming — everyone at the school still loves Clerk and can't believe that he did what they're accusing him of. In fact, finding a jury who will convict him is almost impossible. In all likelihood, John Clerk will once again be free to wander the world in search of victims, a song in his heart.

WHAT ARE LITTLE BOYS MADE OF?

It's late October, but around the grounds of the local high school, it's eternal summer. Flowers bloom, trees are

green and a plague of oddly colored slugs and snails seems to get everywhere.

Under the grounds of the school, something ancient and terrible sleeps. An unhappy student named Ben Birkett found a journal belonging to a teacher who, long ago, led a cult worshipping the creature under the school. They called it a goddess. The boy and his friends dabbled in the book's secrets, and the goddess appeared to them. It rose from the ground, a mass of flesh that swallowed them where they stood.

The goddess transformed Ben and two of his friends into something not quite human. In turn, Ben and his friends, Tom Bray and Larry Seymour, have begun to settle scores against teachers and other pupils. Like Samantha Hocking, a senior girl who once laughed at Ben; she would have been warped by the goddess, but escaped. Pursued by the goddess, she broke her neck on the stone steps behind the sports pavilion. Ben, Tom and Larry tried to hide the body, but as the story begins, she is about to be found. Samantha's death hasn't concerned the boys at all. They're going to try teachers next.

The only thing that can save the children and teachers of the school is to burn the school down. The atmosphere of eternal summer over the school is unnatural, and as time goes on, the flora and fauna of the school, particularly the slugs and snails, begin to grow into weird and disturbing forms. The key to stopping the evil that threatens to engulf the school is a girl with psychic powers. But Ben Birkett and his friends aren't the only ones in the way of the characters: the goddess is mobile, aware and posing as one of the teachers.

THEME AND MOOD

Isolation is the theme of this story: the isolation of kids from uncaring parents, the isolation of the school itself and the isolation of different groups from each other. As time goes on, and teachers fall prey to the goddess, it becomes harder and harder to escape. Something must be done.

The story's mood is one of disgust and mounting fear: teenage boys love a good gross-out, and it's multiplied by the plague of harmless but strangely deformed slugs and snails that's beginning to envelop the school.

ALLIES AND ANTAGONISTS

There isn't space in this story to populate a whole school. The best thing to do is to use pupils and teachers from your own school experience. Teachers follow the same patterns as teachers the world over. Some gain the loyalty and admiration of their charges. Some only elicit loathing or ridicule. Some are the objects of crushes. Some know how to teach, some don't. Some might be willing to help a group of concerned kids find out what's wrong with the school. Others might refuse to believe that there is anything wrong. Others still might report the kids to school counselors or to the principal if they think they're acting strangely.

Likewise, imagine the school's student body to contain the usual population of sneaks, bullies, popular kids,

nerds, losers, jocks and outcasts. Base them on the kids and teachers in your own high school. The best stories are often those influenced by the stuff you know.

MISS TREGARDIS

Quote: *I think you'd really benefit from joining Homework Club. Come talk to me after school?*

Description: The light always seems to benefit her: it shines through her hair; it illuminates her fresh, white skin. Her eyes are iridescent green. Her smile is wholesome and bright. She is beauty itself. Whole classes of teenagers listen rapt to her musical voice. Since she's been running Homework Club, attendance has tripled. The other teachers all seem to like her immensely.

None of it is real.

Background: There is no Miss Tregardis. She's the personification of the goddess.

The goddess herself — or at least the infinitesimally small fragment of her that appears in the grounds of the school — appears as a massive sheet of snailflesh protoplasm that covers the cellar underneath the principal's office. It grows mouths and tentacles seemingly at random and can absorb and swallow living flesh, but it cannot move.



MISS TREGARDIS

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Medicine 1, Occult (Obscene Truths) 5, Politics 1

Physical Skills: Brawl 1, Stealth 2

Sometimes it produces living beings, animals that slough off its edges, made of spliced flesh. One of these is Miss Tregardis. She is simply an extrusion of the goddess' will, the goddess' eyes and ears in the world above.

The creature that lines the cellar floor shouldn't exist, by rights. Over a century ago, the then-headmaster, Mr. Joy, used the school grounds as the scene for his experiments in communing with the vast inchoate entities he believed governed the universe. During one ritual, he contacted one of these entities and accidentally shocked a fragment of this utterly alien being into consciousness. Mr. Joy could tell no one. He had gone quite mad.

Meanwhile, the force slept under the ground, occasionally reaching into the minds of pupils and staff in the school in a small way. It did very little, until Ben Birkett and his friends went looking for a safe place to smoke and found Mr. Joy's cellar, underneath the principal's office.

They began to mess around with Mr. Joy's old magical paraphernalia. Doing that, they disturbed the thing's consciousness. It absorbed the boys and spat them out, only slightly changed but willing servants. Drawing images of teachers, swimsuit models and porn stars from their minds, it created a puppet with which it can explore the

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression 3, Socialize (Persuasion) 3, Subterfuge (Innuendo) 3

Merits: Allies 3+, Striking Looks, Tough 2

Willpower: 8

Morality: None

Asset: None

Fault: None

Defense: 2

Initiative: 5

Speed: 9

Size: 5

Health: 7

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Punch	0 (L)	3

Supernatural Powers:

- **Cloud Minds:** Miss Tregardis can make people ignore things they really shouldn't be ignoring. Roll her Manipulation + Expression, but apply a -2 against children (and this roll does *not* receive 8-Again, though other contested rolls she might make against children do). Players can contest the roll with Resolve + Composure rolls. She finds it easier to affect adults. It's not because kids have stronger wills; it's because she doesn't fully understand them.

grounds and gain more material to absorb and transform. That was Miss Tregardis.

Now, Miss Tregardis only exists to absorb and recreate. She won't stop until she has changed the whole school into a single gestalt entity, a vast protoplasmic grotesque.

Storytelling Hints: Miss Tregardis intends to draw everyone in the school into her embrace, leading the pupils and teachers one by one into the cellar and re-making them, as she did with Ben Birkett and his cronies, and even more so with the vanished Mr. Jordan and Mrs. White.

She's not sane, not remotely, and her plan doesn't make any real sense — she exists to evolve, but she's been separated from her original whole. No longer able to exist as the idea behind a natural principle, she can only be a freak. Miss Tregardis can only ape the Perfect Teacher and search for more biological material to take to the cellar.

She doesn't sleep. Every night after the beginning of the story, she contrives the abduction and replacement of one more person, and every day, she teaches Biology and clouds the minds of the teachers, parents and authorities so that they either notice nothing or come up with explanations they think are plausible for the vanishings and deaths. The goddess doesn't generally bother with the pupils, thinking them immature and unlikely to understand, or be believed. She will get to them eventually.

Miss Tregardis isn't physically adept. If she's killed, the goddess will just make another Miss Tregardis from the genetic material of the slugs and snails, and she behaves as if nothing happened the following morning. Imagine the shock of a group of kids who force themselves one night to do something awful to Miss Tregardis and discover that she's not human, that she doesn't bleed. Then imagine the added horror that they go to lessons the following morning, only to find her there, smiling and teaching Biology as if nothing had happened.

The main body of the goddess, the creature in the cellar, doesn't move — a character actually has to be thrown into its body. The three boys were engulfed when they called the goddess to appear on top of them, while the two teachers were unconscious when the boys fed them to the creature.

The only things that can defeat the goddess are salt and fire. A sack of salt thrown into the cellar causes the creature to shrivel up and lie dormant for a week or two.

BEN BIRKETT

Quote: *You didn't see anything.*

Background: Ben's not from a bad family, nor has he been through anything particularly tough in his life. He's just a kid who isn't too smart and who likes beating up other kids. His parents never really impressed on him why this was a bad thing. He was raiding the principal's office for things he could sell one night a couple of months ago and he found Mr. Joy's journal.

Although not really a big reader, he figured out that he was looking at a book of magic. So the following night, Ben and his friends, Tom and Larry, went down into the



BEN BIRKETT

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2,
Wits 2, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2,
Dexterity 2, Stamina 7

Social Attributes: Presence 2,
Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Computer 2,
Investigation 2, Occult (Pop Satanism) 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 2,
Larceny 3, Stealth (Sneaking) 3

Social Skills: Intimidation 2,
Streetwise (Contraband) 2,
Subterfuge 1

Merits: Iron Stomach, Tough 2, Toxin
Resistance

Willpower: 5

Morality: 0

Asset: Calm

Fault: Brash

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2


Speed: 8

Size: 5

Health: 12

cellar and tried out one of Mr. Joy's magic spells. And then the goddess rose out of the floor and ate them.

When she spat Ben and the others out, they weren't wholly human anymore; the goddess had mixed the boys' biological makeup with the nearest animal life, the slugs that infested the damp, moldy cellar.



Description: Ben's about 14, but he's suddenly shot up. He's big, as big as some of the teachers. He's all greasy hair, hunched shoulders and hooded eyes. He glowers at everyone, laughs when people fall over or fail, mutters under his breath at teachers who are slightly scared of him.

Storytelling Hints: The boys do what Miss Tregardis tells them to do, which mostly means trying to find teachers to feed to the goddess beneath the school.

They don't talk as much as they did before. Where before they'd play stupid pranks on their regular victims, now they don't; in fact, eventually they might be seen in the company of people they might once have hated — nerds, jocks, all together, all under Ben Birkett's leadership. They used to smoke in the toilet block every lunchtime, but they don't anymore.

Storytellers can use the traits below to represent Tom Bray and Larry Seymour. There used to be differences in strength, speed and even height between them, but the goddess remade them in a similar mold.

THE CHILDREN OF THE GODDESS

Miss Tregardis, the boys and any other people the goddess swallows have the following special characteristics:

Stamina and Damage

All of the goddess' children are very hardy. They don't bleed — cut one of them, and he just leaks slime before the wound closes up. Each has a superhumanly high Stamina (typically 6 or 7), can't be stunned and can spend a Willpower point to heal one lethal or two bashing wounds, and two Willpower points to heal a level of aggravated damage. The exceptions to this are fire and salt.

Because so much of their flesh has been remodeled along the lines of mollusks, salt is deadly to all of them. Even a handful of salt makes one shrivel up and die, screaming piteously. Throwing a handful of salt (or more) requires a Dexterity + Athletics roll (minus the character's Defense). Even one success means death for the goddess' spawn.

Fire, meanwhile, causes aggravated damage. The creatures cannot spend Willpower to heal damage caused by fire. Miss Tregardis is even more vulnerable. Her body, because it's not even partially human like the others, collapses and melts away the moment any flame large enough to cause even one point of damage comes into contact with her.

The main body of the goddess, in the cellar beneath the principal's office, is invulnerable to ordinary damage but is highly flammable. If a reasonably sized flame comes into contact with it, it goes up like dry kindling, probably taking the building with it. When it dies, its children shrivel up and die also.

Telepathy

The boys, Miss Tregardis and any other people the goddess has swallowed are in telepathic contact. They know exactly what all their new brothers and sister are experiencing. As more people are re-made by the goddess, it becomes more pronounced. The school goes quiet. People stare at each other, seeming to know what everyone else is thinking.

Weird and Distressing Things

The following aren't so much characteristics of the children of the goddess as examples of how their condition comes to the fore:

- Ben Birkett leaves a shiny snail-slime handprint behind on a door, window, locker or desk.
- Someone spills some salt across the table at lunch and one of the goddess' spawn recoils, leaping up and back so quickly that his chair flips over.
- One of the spawn has an accident of some kind — maybe he cuts his hand, or falls hard against the ground. He leaks snail-slime instead of bleeding. The wound knits itself and vanishes in seconds.
- One of the boys extends a hand, a finger or his neck in order to get something or see something, in the way a snail extends its antennae.
- One of them looks slightly ill. Retreating just out of sight — behind a bush, maybe — he doubles over, and for the next 30 seconds or so, vomits out a stream of huge, oddly colored, live slugs and snails.
- The characters see Ben Birkett reaching into his pocket and discarding his once-prized cigarette lighter, just dropping it in the school quad. They see the school caretaker doing the same.
- There's a Science lesson. The teacher gathers the kids around and turns on a Bunsen burner. One of the kids the goddess has replaced screams and runs for the door as soon as the flame lights up.

THE BEGINNING

The story begins with everyone going to class. Before class starts, one of the characters stumbles across Samantha's inexpertly hidden body. If any of the players make successful Wits + Composure rolls, their characters see Ben Birkett lurking near the scene of the crime. If they call him out, of course he'll claim he didn't see anything — unless he thinks he can lure a lone character away to be enveloped.

Later on in the day, another character sees Ben with a mobile phone he knows to be Samantha's. If the kids tell a teacher or adult in any kind of authority, the adult doesn't believe them, or dismisses it, or says he'll do something and doesn't.

If the kids have any sense, they'll tell an adult, and an adult will call the police. The police call it an accident. A policeman stands in a school assembly and patronizes the kids about how Samantha won't be there anymore. Everyone forgets about it. No one seems shaken or disturbed. Everything goes back to normal. The kids should know that this is very wrong.

THE MIDDLE

A teacher the kids really like comes back the following morning looking slightly clammy and behaving strangely. He avoids the salt at lunchtime.

Every day, the goddess swallows and replaces a few new people. They, in turn, try to get more people down into that cellar, without being noticed.

With each new day, more slugs and snails appear. They're a by-product of the goddess' influence over the grounds of the school. They're all huge, oddly shaped and strangely colored. Some are iridescent; some are sickly shades of orange, green, purple and yellow. Some appear to have two heads, or have three, four or five antennae. Some of the snails have weirdly shaped bifurcate or trifurcate shells, or leave trails that glow an ultraviolet blue-white when light shines on it. The plants in the school are strange, too, developing odd blossoms and seemingly moving under their own power.

There's no hot water in the school showers now — the caretaker (also recently brought into the fold) has extinguished the pilot light in the school boiler.

As the kids start investigating what's going on, consider introducing these events into the story:

- A character steps on a giant slug while walking through the school grounds, or through a corridor on the way to class. Although mashed into the treads on his shoe, it's still moving as he tries to scrape it off.

- The characters walk past a bush on the way to a lesson. On their way back, the bush is in full bloom, covered with huge, beautiful and alien flowers in odd shades of orange, purple-green and pink. Kids who try to find them in books on flowers in the school library can't.

- A character taking a shower finds the stall suddenly full of slugs, falling off the ceiling, onto her head and shoulders and getting tangled in her hair.

- A character opens her locker to find that the door, inside surfaces and contents are covered with huge, strangely colored mollusks.

- A bed full of freakish flowers outside the principal's office (the school groundskeeper swears he never planted them) moves: the flowers turn to follow passing people.

- A character wakes up in the morning to find his bed crawling with mutant slugs and snails — they've followed him home.

- A character on his way to school opens the front door of his house to find an army of slugs and snails, piled on top of one another, seemingly waiting for admittance. The pile slowly collapses into the room as they begin to come in.


THE END

The characters have started learning the truth — perhaps they have followed Ben Birkett enough to know that he's taking people into the cellar. They've heard the screams; they know that people come back out *changed*. They should also be aware that the goddess' creations are afraid of salt and fire.

The characters start losing their friends to the goddess. Miss Tregardis tries to get them to stay late for "Homework Club." Ben Birkett and his growing number of friends want them to be next. Perhaps they try to corner the characters. *It's not so bad, they say. It's a feeling of belonging. You don't ever have to be sad, or lonely, or happy, ever again. You're part of the world. The land and you are one.*

Whatever happens, the Storyteller should instill in the players the idea that fire and salt are deadly to





the goddess and her spawn (the gas boiler is without a flame; the spawn are scared of lighters and Bunsen burners, and so on).

Eventually, the kids may get the idea of burning the infection out. But they'll have to get past an army of the goddess' children first.

CONSEQUENCES

The kids might try to escape (and if they do, what are their parents going to do when they try to tell them? They'll just send them right back again). Getting caught at the scene of a school that obviously fell victim to arson may look bad. If they're not careful, the kids could end up in juvenile court. Either way, even if the kids stop the evil, they're not going to get out if it unscathed. The weird, distressing events that end in fire and death — and the people the goddess consumed are gone forever — affect kids badly. They'll be having nightmares about this sort of thing for a long time to come, if they don't end up in a juvenile detention center.

HIGH, SWEET, EVIL LAUGHTER

Something strange is going on at the DeFontaine Foundation, a small and extremely exclusive private religious school located just outside a small town. The school, known to the locals simply as “the Foundation,” markets itself as an establishment for children with special educational needs, such as particular learning disabilities, difficulty fitting in at schools too secular to meet their religious requirements, and for troubled young people who require a stricter environment in which to overcome past histories of abuse, bullying, or assorted juvenile behavioral/psychiatric disorders, such as ADHD or depression.

In truth, the Foundation is a privately owned and operated juvenile detention facility whose “residents” have been remanded to the care of its operators by parents who no longer know how to deal with their children and the things their children have experienced. It is an open secret among the full-time therapeutic staff of the DeFontaine Foundation that the vast majority of the child-residents of the school have all been victimized in some way by the unnatural and generally unseen forces of the World of Darkness. A certain number of genuine special-needs cases or highly religious students are admitted every year to act as window-dressing for the school's real purpose: the systematic “elimination” of problematic child-witnesses via psychological “reorientation” procedures designed to make these witnesses/victims doubt themselves and their own true memories, and come out the other side young adults completely capable of denying the reality of their own experiences. The general psychological malleability of children makes this a far more attractive “disposal” option for several of the Foundation's secretive benefactors than just killing off large numbers of children. Unfortunately, the concentration of psychic trauma at the Foundation has begun to attract the attention of forces outside anyone's control.

This is a story intended for the higher end of the **Innocents** character age-range, from about the ages of 10 to 12, and who are fairly recent arrivals at the DeFontaine Foundation. Prior contact with the supernatural is not, strictly speaking, necessary, since such contact is likely to occur as part of the story itself. In fact, a mixed group of characters with a wide and varied selection of background traits and experiences is preferable. Whatever their backgrounds, the characters have all been through the Foundation's basic intake procedure. This includes several interviews with the school's administrators (one with their parents in attendance and once without), an initial consultation with one of the school's resident psychologist-counselors, a medical examination including a drug screening, a meeting with the Dean of Students and the Departmental Chair of the character's favorite educational subject (Math, History, Language Arts, etc.), and a group orientation meeting with the Residential Students Coordinator, their parents, and any other new students. These meetings and examinations are designed specifically to allay the anxieties of concerned parents who may very well have heard horror stories about the abuses that take place behind the walls of such establishments for troubled children. The Foundation has borrowed a page from watchdog web sites and moves swiftly and decisively to address and disarm concerns whenever they arise. Once those parents depart the grounds of the school, however, the only protection the residents have is each other.

Unknown to the parents of the school's residents, unknown even to the administrators of the school itself, the DeFontaine Foundation is under assault by supernatural forces. This is something that should quickly become readily and undeniably apparent to the characters themselves, whether or not those characters have actually had any prior contact with the numinous elements of the World of Darkness. Unfortunately for those characters, the supernatural forces in question almost invariably show themselves wearing the faces of other children. These entities, called the Voices in the Dark, feed on the fears and agonies of children of all ages, but particularly covet the pain of children who have already suffered some form of abuse and children who are on the verge of crossing the boundary between normal, entirely human existence and the supernatural. The students of the DeFontaine Foundation are a nearly perfect buffet for these creatures and merely need to be properly manipulated into serving themselves up.

THEME AND MOOD

The theme of this story is desperation: the desperate situations that brought the students of the DeFontaine Foundation to the school in the first place; the desperation that results when the children realize that they're trapped inside a place that's more prison than school; the desperation of learning that that prison is someone else's funhouse and how few avenues of help and escape actually exist.

The mood is one of gradually rising fear and the smothering, nearly claustrophobic inevitability of something terrible happening that no one can stop — only survive.



ROBERT AND DAWN DEFONTAINE

Robert DeFontaine

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Computer 1 (Data Retrieval), Investigation (Finding Threats) 4, Occult 4, Study (Religion) 2

Physical Skills: Brawl (Grappling) 3, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Empathy (Motives) 3, Intimidation 4 (Veiled Threats), Socialize (Sales Pitches) 3, Subterfuge (Lies) 4

Merits: Allies 4 (other members of the cult), Contacts 3 (Academia, Law Enforcement, Elementary Education), Natural Immunity, Quick Healer, Resources 3, Strong Back,

Toxin Resistance, Unseen Sense (messengers of the patrons)

Willpower: 7

Morality: 2

Asset: Optimistic

Fault: Cruel

Defense: 3

Initiative: 7

Speed: 11

Size: 5

Health: 7

Supernatural Powers: None

Dawn DeFontaine

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Computer (Altering Records) 3, Crafts 3, Investigation 2, Occult 4, Study (Childhood Education) 4

Physical Skills: Stealth 1, Weaponry (Knives) 3

Social Skills: Empathy 4, Expression (Written) 3, Intimidation 4, Socialize 3, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Allies (other members of the cult) 3, Ambidextrous, Contacts (Juvenile Detention, Law Enforcement, Academia) 3, Resources 3, Unseen Sense (messengers of the patrons)

Willpower: 8

Morality: 2

Asset: Creative

Fault: Brash

Defense: 3

Initiative: 7

Speed: 8

Size: 5


Health: 7

Supernatural Powers: None

ALLIES AND ANTAGONISTS

The DeFontaine Foundation is populated by the usual assortment of adult authority figures that you'd find in just about any high-end residential school: teachers, janitorial staff, food prep staff, several nurses and an on-site medical doctor, administrators and an unusually large selection of counselors with a wide degree of specialties in the area of child psychology. The vast majority of these individuals

are exactly what they appear to be and are thoroughly out of the loop as far as the Foundation's more outré activities are concerned: good, bad or indifferent, their entire purpose is to teach classes, sweep floors, serve lunches, or dispense ice packs and allergy meds. They can, in short, be whatever is required to help the story along. The administrative and counseling staff, on the other hand, is hip deep in a hideous conspiracy to deny the existence and extent of the supernatural.



The student body is similarly diverse and discussed in greater detail below. It's safe to assume that it contains the usual population of cliques and cliqueless, considerably complicated by the fact that a good portion of the student body is incarcerated at the school under assorted forms of duress.

DAWN AND ROBERT DEFONTAINE

Quote: *I assure you, your children are entirely safe with us and we are willing to do whatever it takes to convince you of that fact.*

Description: The DeFontaines are a pleasant couple in their mid-to-late 40s: he is a tall, genial, avuncular fellow you'd expect to see co-starring in a TV movie as someone's heroically supportive husband, all thinning blonde hair and straightforward blue eyes. She is a willowy wearer of broomstick skirts and artistically patched sweaters, and has graying dark hair down to her waist and a face creased with the remnants of too many smiles to count. Neither comes across as the ironhanded type upon first or even second meeting, and there are very few people indeed who ever sense the subtle wrongness that lies beneath their extremely polished, everyperson facades.

Background: The DeFontaines are, to put it mildly, not what they seem. To the staff of their school and the parents of their students, they present themselves as a married couple deeply personally dedicated to the care and well-being of others' children, lacking as they do any children of their own; it is a generally suspected, but never precisely confirmed, aspect of their cover that some medical issue prevents them from conceiving naturally, and that they are generally opposed to the use of reproductive technologies for deeply held religious reasons. The precise nature of their religious convictions is not something they wear on their sleeve, but many highly conservative religious parents come away with the distinct and comforting impression that the DeFontaines are of similarly conservative nature and will not lead their children astray.

To a certain extent, this impression is true: the DeFontaines are, indeed, extremely conservative adherents to their particular religious denomination. They are, in fact, half-brother and sister, their marriage arranged according to the precepts of their faith and the dictates of their sect's elders. Dawn DeFontaine was 13 and Robert DeFontaine was 15 when they were united, and together they produced the three children who were their tithe to the faith before they turned 20. A model young couple, they were of the perfect age and temperament to assist their sect when the unthinkable happened in the 1980s: the near-exposure of several congregations following an outbreak of ritual abuse panic in California that spread across the country. The patrons of their sect required a place to send the children who had served their needs to be educated and monitored while their minds were reshaped by specially trained experts, and thus was the DeFontaine Foundation born. The DeFontaines see their governance of the school as both a great responsibility and a reward for their own unflagging faith. Every year, the patrons send at least one student whose family is no longer a matter of concern for them to do with

AND WHO ARE THE MYSTERIOUS PATRONS?

Who runs the cult to which Dawn and Robert DeFontaine belong? It might be an ancient vampire, sending the children that he uses to feed his own undead spawn away to be "re-educated." It might be an unholy sect of mages, searching for their Messiah and trying to get rid of those who come up wanting. Maybe the cult is composed entirely of mortals, and the magic fled them years ago.

Or perhaps the cult's patrons are creatures from beyond human understanding, powerful spirits that occasionally reach into our world to spawn creatures like the snatchers (p. 216). It's up to the Storyteller, if she wants to nail it down. It might not be important for the story.

as they see fit. In return, the DeFontaines have turned out hundreds of properly readjusted children over the years. It is, all told, an arrangement of great spiritual and practical edification.

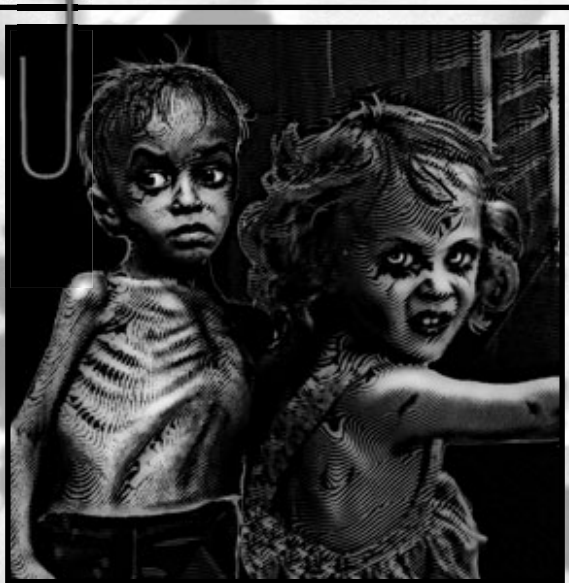
Storytelling Hints: The DeFontaines are very much like taking a bite from a perfectly polished, delicious-looking apple, only to find it completely rotten at the core. They come across as the perfect parents-in-absentia: competent, caring, authoritative, inclined to listen to the concerns of their staff and students. In truth, both were twisted at an early age to lack any sense of compassion for their "inferiors" (i.e., anyone outside their own particular religious sect), and if sufficiently pressed by circumstances, they can be provoked into revealing this total lack of human empathy.

THE VOICES IN THE DARK

Quote: *Would you like to come out and play?*

Background: The Voices in the Dark are spirits that exist to cause suffering to the innocent and the vulnerable and to feed on that suffering to strengthen themselves. No one knows precisely what they are or where they came from. They are not limited to a single geographic location and seem to be capable of traveling from one place to another when they must in order to seek out new victims. Attempts to investigate their precise origins almost invariably end badly for the investigators, but some survivors seem to think that they may be the spiritual embodiment of defiled innocence, compelled by some perverse quirk of nature or supernature to perpetuate the abuses committed against them.

The Voices in the Dark love children. Children are their meat and drink: the fears and agonies of children are ambrosia on their lips. They are particularly fond of those few children on the verge of discovering the supernatural, but when such children aren't available, they hunt for their food, for the perpetuation of their purpose, among the poor, the desperate, the neglected, abandoned and abused. The



THE VOICES IN THE DARK

Attributes: Power 3, Finesse 5,
Resistance 5

Willpower: 8

Initiative: 8

Defense: 5

Speed: 18 (species factor 10)

Size: 3

Corpus: 8

Numina: Compulsion, Ghost Sign,
Materialize, Phantasm, Telepathy,
Terrify

Ban: Each Voice in the Dark has its own personal ban, relating to the death of the child it impersonates. Usually this ban drives the Voice back into the Shadow for a day. The Cold Twins can't abide warmth — fire used as a weapon has no effect, but a warm, soft blanket causes them to disincorporate. Also, as mentioned above, all Voices must flee before a display of genuine compassion. Someone who suffers harm or death to protect a child can even destroy the odious spirit. Roll the character's Morality in a contested action against the Voice's Power + Resistance. If the Voice wins, it disincorporates and cannot reform for a month. If the character wins, the Voice vanishes, screeching in pain.

Voices batten like lampreys onto the minds and souls of these children, ferret out their deepest fears and pains and torment them without mercy, every waking and sleeping moment.

The Voices are limited in what they can accomplish by their own power in the material world and require tools that can both feed them the pain they seek and carry out tasks that would otherwise be beyond their reach. Most of their victims are willing to do these little things for the Voices in exchange for a moment's peace, an hour without nightmares, a day without a Voice lurking just at the corner of their eye. And the Voices are very scrupulous about upholding these bargains. They tend to extend the lives of their victims, who otherwise rapidly go mad, drown out the Voices in drugs and alcohol, take their own lives rather than continue suffering interminably. Some of these become Voices in their own right, in due time. And thus do their numbers never grow smaller.

The Voices in the Dark are not ghosts, though they resemble them. They are spirits that take on the forms of dead children, and therefore it is possible for a character to meet the ghost of a dead child *and* the Voice in the Dark taking its form. Since Voices are spirits that linger in Twilight, it's even possible for a ghost to confront and battle the Voices in the dark. Voices seem to know this, and stay well away from the ghosts they mimic.

Description: The Voices in the Dark invariably appear to their victims in the forms of dead children, whether killed through accidents, abuse or illness. A Voice called the Drowned Boy appears pale and bloated, with wet skin and hair, and leaves behind the smell of stagnant water. A Voice called Crooked-Neck is a lynching victim, his neck bent at an impossible angle, tongue too swollen to speak clearly. The Yellow-Eyed Girl appears gaunt and sickly, eyes crusted with yellow pus and skin glistening with the sweat of a deadly fever. The Skeleton, mentioned briefly in Chapter Seven, is a little boy no more than three, so emaciated he looks like a famine victim.

Storytelling Hints: The Voices in the Dark are purely malevolent in nature and intent — nothing about them could be considered remotely redeemable. While individual Voices can be appeased, the forces that created them are ineradicable, and so they will probably always find a way to worm their way into our world. Repelling them, however, can be accomplished. Genuine compassion repulses them. Personal sacrifices arising from compassionate motives are especially repugnant.

JUANITA MAYES

Quote: *Wear this next to your heart. Don't let anybody see you with it, though.*

Background: Juanita is the head of the school's custodial staff. She knows far more about the weird and unwholesome nature of some of the school's activities than can possibly be good for her. She protects those she can, instructing certain students on how to avoid negative attention, how to get out with their minds and skins intact. Recently, she was contacted by Dr. Richard Kalloway, the current therapist of one of "her kids," who was taken out



**JUANITA
MAYES**

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Crafts 3, Investigation 3, Medicine 1, Occult (Folk Tales) 3, Study 2

Physical Skills: Drive 1, Firearms 2, Larceny (Locks) 2, Stealth 3

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Empathy 4, Intimidation 2, Streetwise 3

Merits: Language (Spanish), Strong Back, Team Player, Unseen Sense (spirits)

Willpower: 6

Morality: 9

Triggers: None

Asset: Kind

Fault: Brash

Defense: 2

Initiative: 4

Speed: 9

Size: 5

Health: 7

Supernatural Powers: None

of the school before anything too bad could happen to her. Juanita has since been smuggling photocopied docu-

ments about the school's treatment procedures and the files of certain kids off the school grounds to Dr. Kalloway. They haven't uncovered anything completely damning yet, but it's only a matter of time.

Description: Juanita is a grandmotherly woman in her 60s. She is of Puerto Rican descent and sometimes serves as the school's translator (neither of the DeFontaines has ever bothered to learn Spanish). She wears gray coveralls, like the rest of the custodial staff, and keeps her huge pockets full of small candies, cheap silver crosses and iron nails — protections for the children against the evils of the place.

Storyteller Hints: Juanita is kindly, but not gentle. She's spent too many years working with her hands to be soft. She's in good shape for her age and doesn't take disrespect from anyone, not even the "problem" kids. The students at the school might be afraid of being locked in dark rooms or deprived of food, but they *all* know not to mess with Juanita. That respect isn't born of fear, however. The children know, on some level, that she is probably the only adult here who really cares about them.

Juanita would make for a superb mentor for the characters. She can teach them abjurations and even how to perform an exorcism (see p. 204), but her most appropriate role in a story is the martyr. She would gladly sacrifice herself if she could bring the Foundation down, or destroy a Voice in the Dark.

DR. RICHARD KALLOWAY

Quote: *Something really isn't right here.*

Background: Dr. Kalloway came to the field of child psychology by a fairly roundabout route: in his late teens, just as he was about to go away to college, he worked at his family's daycare facility as a handyman after school. He liked the kids and the kids liked him, though he didn't have any particular inclination to go into the field himself, like his mother and both his sisters had. Then the "daycare Satanic panic" struck, and he and his whole family found themselves swept up in the mess, and before all was said and done, he and just about every member of his immediate family were accused of being cultists who ritually abused the kids they looked after. They were all exonerated, eventually, but the damage had already been done. His mom died in prison, waiting for her name to be cleared, and both his sisters changed their names and moved out of the country with their families to escape the relentless media attention. He moved away, too, though he didn't change his name, and eventually the world moved on to the menace of rap music and video games.

Richard never quite got over what the investigators did to extract stories of abuse, and eventual accusations, from the kids. It was worse than a zealous pursuit of justice. It was the willingness to abuse a child to make him say what the investigators had already decided was true. He decided to do something to help fix what he thought was most wrong about the psychological treatment of children. He became a clinical psychologist, and along the way, after he went into practice, he came to realize

that some of what these kids were saying — the outlandish accusations, the stuff that could in no way happen in real life — was actually true. There *were* things out there that were preying on children, things worse than any ordinary abuser, things that existed outside the laws and boundaries of the world he'd always known. And he became determined to do something about *that*, too.

Description: Dr. Kalloway is one of those people who *seems* older than he really is — he's only 40, but he's got a look in his eyes that suggests he's gone farther and seen more in those years than somebody twice his age. He's got graying brown hair, which he wears cut extremely short, and intensely bright blue eyes; when he moves, he looks a bit like an awkward stork, all long legs and arms. He should probably eat more often than he does, but he usually forgets.

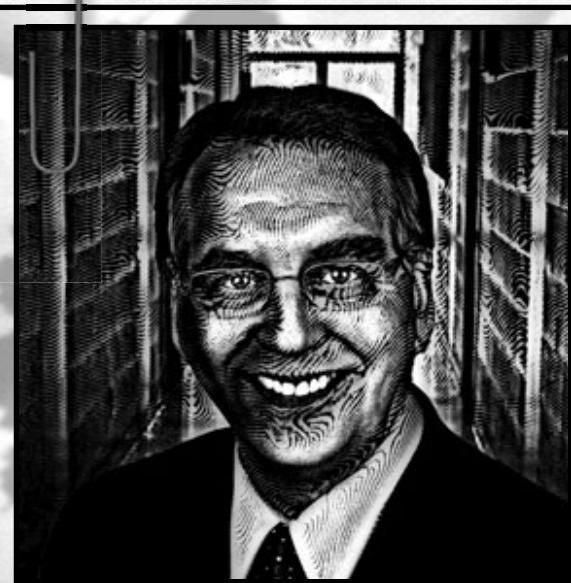
Storytelling Hints: Dr. Kalloway is everything the DeFontaines pretend to be and more: he has, over the years, successfully resisted the temptation to become bitter over the way his family was treated, and turned his outrage into a desire to help others. He's genuinely kind and compassionate, he's smart and caring, and he's about to step in way over his head with his amateur supernatural sleuthing. Fortunately, he might also be smart enough to survive.

On some level, though, Kalloway realizes that what he's facing goes far beyond a conspiracy. On some fundamental level, there is evil in the world, and combating it in any meaningful way means giving his life to that fight. In that profound simplicity, Kalloway is childlike himself. The world isn't black and white, but if he is to make the difference he wants to, he can't afford to lose himself in nuance. Seeing what Kalloway is willing to do should be a major eye-opener for the characters, especially as they fight to escape a place populated by adults who *want* to hurt them.

THE BEGINNING

Residents of the DeFontaine Foundation generally endure lives of strict regimentation while they're incarcerated at the facility. All residents rise at the same hour, eat at the same hours, attend nondenominational chapel services at the same hours and return to their dormitories to sleep at the same hour. In between, depending on the precise details of the "offenses" (or lack thereof) that landed them in the Foundation, daily activities vary.

Residents who come to the Foundation for strictly educational reasons, or for the treatment of education-affecting developmental disabilities, have the most "normal" schedule of daily activities. They still get up and eat meals and go to bed at the same strictly controlled hours as the rest of the student body, but in between are normal, age-appropriate classes taught by highly paid and motivated teachers, special education classes for students with developmental issues, regular meetings with school counselors to address particular interests, intramural sports and extracurricular activities, such as advanced music or art classes, occasional field trips to local sites of particular



**DR RICHARD
KALLOWAY**

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 3, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Computer 2, Investigation 4, Medicine 3 (Psychological Pharmacology), Occult 2, Study (Child Psychology) 4

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Stealth 1

Social Skills: Empathy 4, Intimidation 2, Socialize 4, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge (Spotting Lies) 3

Merits: Allies (supporters from his time in prison) 3, Contacts (National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, Academia, Occultists) 3, Language (Spanish), Iron Stomach

Willpower: 9

Morality: 8

Asset: Fair

Fault: Brash

Defense: 2


Initiative: 6

Speed: 9

Size: 5

Health: 8

Supernatural Powers: None



cultural interest — in short, all the expected advantages an extremely expensive, strict private school has to offer its students. Initial encounters with the supernatural for characters of this nature could include:

- “Classic” supernatural indicators, such as cold spots in otherwise warm rooms, doors and windows that seem to open and close themselves, disembodied footsteps and voices — i.e., all the sorts of things that could easily be dismissed or otherwise explained away by a trusted adult authority figure.

- A classmate or individual from their own peer group/cliq̄ue begins behaving oddly after exposure to one of the above phenomena or appears unwilling to simply believe what they’re told and leave the matter alone.

- An encounter with one of the children in the “acute” class.

Residents who come to the Foundation for treatment of behavioral issues (i.e., “problem kids,” or children who are incarcerated at a private facility rather than a state-run juvenile detention center) follow much the same schedule as the “educational” residents — classes, meetings, special education for any aggravating developmental issues they might have — but with many more restrictions, fewer perks, and considerably more group and individual counseling. Access to intramural sports, advanced extracurricular activities and field trips are not rights but privileges to be earned during the course of successful treatment of whatever behavior needs correcting. Initial encounters with the supernatural for characters of this nature could include:

- “Classic” supernatural indicators, such as cold spots in otherwise warm rooms, doors and windows that seem to open and close themselves, disembodied footsteps and voices — i.e., the sorts of things that would cost a kid already considered to have a “behavior issue” quite a lot if they talked about it.

- A group counseling session turns into a group freak-out session when several different attendees start complaining about weird, possibly supernatural events they’ve witnessed, triggering a general avalanche of complaints that otherwise might never have come out.

- An encounter with one of the children in the “acute” class.

For residents who come to the Foundation for treatment of what the program administrators delicately call “acute emotional and psychological distress with complicating factors” (that is, children who have already been victimized by the supernatural), the school’s regimen is at its strictest. This population is segregated from the rest of the student body, having its own dormitory building on the school campus, its own classrooms and counseling center in a specially constructed annex of the main educational complex and severe restrictions on all daily activities. Education, for this population, is secondary to the intensive therapies required to psychologically reorient them in a manner designed to erase, or permanently inhibit access to, any knowledge of the supernatural. “Acute” residents are, for example, never permitted

to leave the campus on field trips, and only particularly compliant individual cases are permitted to take part in intramural sports or extracurricular activities that bring them into contact with other parts of the student body. Since characters of this group have already had initial contact with the supernatural, contact in this particular setting is far more likely to be acknowledged for what it is, and to include:

- “Classic” supernatural indicators, such as cold spots in otherwise warm rooms, doors and windows that seem to open and close themselves, disembodied footsteps and voices — i.e., the sort of thing that would cause a kid who is already “in the know” to freak out even more.

- An actual face-to-face encounter with one of the Voices in the Dark.

- An encounter with one of the children outside the “acute” class who has nonetheless noticed the weird stuff going on at the school.

THE MIDDLE

Children are innately curious. Child characters, unless they have a very good reason otherwise, ought to be even more so. Whatever hooks used to catch them, subtle or gross, eventually they come to a point where the only possible course of action is to investigate further. Possible events include:

- The Voices in the Dark are hunting and have likely already selected victims. These victims begin behaving oddly: sleeping badly, having weird dreams when they do sleep, having visual and auditory hallucinations when awake. These victims can be either players’ characters or Storyteller characters to whom the players’ characters have become attached.

- The adults, particularly the counseling staff, have begun to notice the sudden spike in strange goings-on. The counselors are all tense and question any student they meet with regularly if they’ve noticed anything odd this term.

- The head janitor, Juanita, resorts to folk charms — drawing lines of salt across the thresholds of doors and the dorm windowsills, tucking little bags of herbs under the bed pillows — in an effort to protect as many of the kids as she can. When the kids find these items, she’ll tell them it’s for their own good, without further elaboration.

- On a shopping field trip in town, one of the kids encounters Dr. Kalloway, who chats with her in a friendly fashion about the school (he’ll claim he noticed the insignia on the school uniform she’s wearing). A savvy kid will realize that he’s fishing for information. During the conversation, he answers his cell phone, which will allow the character to catch his name. If that character can get to a computer, an Intelligence + Study roll reveals Dr. Kalloway’s checkered history (extended roll, dole information out gradually — see Research, p. 55).

- Juanita sneaks Dr. Kalloway onto the school grounds late one night to conduct some investigations with “ghost-hunting equipment” in his possession on the same night that the kids sneak out of the dorm after lights-out to do some snooping of

their own. An exchange of information between the two groups should clue Dr. Kalloway in to the presence of the Voices: he has encountered them and their handiwork before.

- An acute student notices what the characters are up to and warns them to quit while they're ahead. The school administrators will transfer them up to "acute" to be "reoriented" if they're not careful. The acute student gives the impression that this is probably a fate worse than whatever else is already happening, anyway, but can't elaborate (he's heavily medicated).

THE END

The characters and any outside assistance they have acquired now know that the threat facing the children comes from both inside and outside the school. The DeFontaines have also come to the realization that something is preying upon their students and are not amused by the "poaching" behavior of the interloper(s), but think they know what will suffice to end it: the sacrifice of this year's gift from their patrons to the appetites of the Voices. This will emphatically not help the situation, but make it worse.

The characters should have discovered by now that the Voices are averse to anyone trying to help someone else. They might have discovered this through trial and error, some Internet research, conversations with Juanita and/or Kalloway, or advice from a Guardian Angel. They may well have run the Voices off at least one victim already. Consequently, the Voices concentrate their attention on the most vulnerable of their victims: the ones with no potential protectors among the other students or the faculty.

The endgame comes down to a race between the Voices breaking their victim — and causing horrible things to happen not only to that victim, but many other innocent people as well — and the characters saving that person, or people, from themselves and the DeFontaines. The final confrontation might take place anywhere on campus, but tailor it to fit the Voice in the Dark you have selected for this story. The Cold Twins can't abide warm temperatures, so they should only be used in cold climates in winter. The Drowned Boy calls for water, while the Crooked-Neck Boy needs an appropriate tree (and an air of racial tension injected into the whole affair).

CONSEQUENCES

There is almost no way for any scenario to end well for the DeFontaine Foundation. The school stands an excellent chance of being exposed for the horror show that it really is, no matter what happens to the DeFontaines themselves. Whether this includes the exposure of the supernatural influences on the school, or the more mundanely horrible nature of the abuses it inflicts on its students, is for the Storyteller to determine. In all probability, though, the "patrons" of the DeFontaines allow them to take the fall long enough to be publicly held responsible and then have them killed. The reach of the supernatural is long indeed, and it's only determined people like Kalloway who dare to try to find where that reach begins. Maybe the characters, as they grow up, would like to carry on his work?

The students who survive the assault of the Voices and their treatment/education at the school will never be the same again, regardless of specific outcomes. They have been exposed to one of the dark truths of a very dark world: they may turn away from the darkness; they might seek it out, to further understand it and fight it; they might be consumed by it. Only time will tell.


MOUNTAIN MOTHER

It's pretty much an ordinary small town: one main drag through the middle that's part of the larger state road system, lined with shops and houses, one bank, one bar, one diner. The neighborhoods to either side spread out across the bowl of the valley. The older parts are in neat little grids of single-family homes with spacious yards backing up onto the woods covering the hills, the newer subdivisions sitting in the middle of what used to be farmers' fields, circles and boulevards of identical cookie-cutter houses cluttering up the landscape, full of people trying to escape the urban sprawl by creating more of it. There are kids, of course, most of them in the new developments. The older parts of town belong to the old-timers, and the only kids they usually see are their grandchildren, visiting from out of town on holidays and birthdays. The hills rise up all around the town, green and lush in the summer, bright with color in the autumn, sere and barren and snowy in the winter, riddled with caves and the boarded-up remnants of old iron and copper mines, the water-filled pits of old stone quarries.

Two months ago, a handful of spelunkers went missing up in the hills. Their cars were found, parked near the trails that led up to one of the old copper mines, but not them nor any of their gear. The state game people searched the mine and the woods around it, but even the corpse-sniffing dogs borrowed from the state police K-9 unit couldn't find anything down the mineshaft. Eventually, the search was called off.

Then other things started disappearing, too. At first, it was only the old ladies who noticed it: the squirrels all seemed to be gone — or, at least, they weren't raiding bird feeders at quite the same rate they had previously. All the dogs in town started getting edgy. They didn't want to be let out at night, and they didn't want their kids to be let out after dark, either. They'd bark at nothing all night long and sit guard over the doors to their kids' bedrooms when they weren't patrolling the house: even the youngest puppies, even the most cowardly lapdogs. Eventually, it got into the cats, too, and they'd fluff themselves up and hiss at floor vents and mail slots and pet doors the minute the sun went behind the hills.

Little Charlie Baker went missing just before school let out for the summer. He was three, playing in the yard at the woody edge of one of the larger developments toward twilight, while his mother got dinner ready on the patio only a couple feet away. One minute he was there, and the next his puppy was trying to claw his way through the patio screen door and he was gone. All the neighbors, the state police and the state game forest rangers beat the



every inch of the woods and hills around his house, but never turned up a trace of him. *Some freak snatched him* was the general feeling in the development. His mother had a nervous breakdown and had to be taken down to the state hospital. *Not some freak*, was the opinion of the oldest of the old-timers, but they kept their own counsel and warned their neighbors to keep a close eye on the grandkids who came to visit over summer vacation.

The local kids poured out of the schools for the summer and many of their cousins from the City came upstate to visit aunts and uncles and grannies, too. Now there are lots of children to pick from, lots of little ones for the Mountain Mother to take down under the hills. The Mountain Mother, who's lonely now that all of her own brood are grown, and who's long past the time she might have more. The old-timers know, and they do their best to keep the kids out of the woods once the sun starts going down.

THEME AND MOOD

Creeping dread is the theme of this story: the feeling that something's just a little bit off, just slightly not right. The woods are a little too quiet, when there ought to be birds chirping, squirrels chattering, a thousand different bugs humming and droning. The shadows behind that giant boulder are just a little bit too long for a trick of the light. There's no wind, so why are those bushes moving, and what was that flash in the corner of my eye?

The mood is one of slowly escalating tension: *what's not right* might be outside, might be in the hills, in the woods — or it might be hiding under the basement steps, in that old root cellar right down the hill from Granny's place, in the culverts of a new housing development.

ALLIES AND ANTAGONISTS

The little town should be populated with colorful characters, as small towns in fiction invariably are. Ms. (never Mrs.) Ginn lives in the trailer lot furthest down the block, and collects statues of lighthouses but has never seen the sea. Mr. Leroy lives in the big old farmhouse at the edge of town and runs the local honor-system vegetable stand during the summers, but makes most of his money by selling some of the best weed to be had in the tri-state area. Mrs. Martin lives way up the hill and no one is quite sure how she manages to walk down to the market and back at her age, but she never takes anyone's offer for a lift. Of course, the characters should have family here, whether they're locals or visitors, and that should give the Storyteller some room to populate the town as necessary.

THE MOUNTAIN MOTHER

Quote: (*eerie singing in a language that hasn't been spoken in tens of thousands of years*)

Background: The Mountain Mother is an atavism, something left over from an earlier stage in humankind's development, or something that has, over countless, lightless centuries, devolved into a state that can only barely be considered human. She lives in the dark places under

the hills — in the naturally occurring caves, in the shafts of old forgotten mines and quarries — because she cannot tolerate exposure to sunlight or even bright fire or electric lights. She also cannot tolerate the loud sounds of the surface world. She emerges from the safety of her underground lair only under duress: if her local food supplies become too thin to continue supporting her physical needs, if threatened by encroachments from above and, recently, out of desperate loneliness. She is both extremely old and utterly alone, and she may be the last of her kind.

Earlier in the spring, four spelunkers used power drills and handheld excavating equipment to dig their way into the natural cave system in which she had dwelt, undisturbed, for decades, since the closing of the last of the area's copper mines. Enraged by their horrible, skull-splitting noises and eye-burning lights, she killed them all, and now their bodies are part of her food supply, curing slowly in a salt-vein that she uses to preserve meat. Their activities, however, pried open a door larger than the one she used to slink out into the forest to hunt small game and, in her curiosity, she discovered that there were more of these creatures about, including more of the small, helpless ones that she remembers from the days before her own bitter loneliness began. So she took one and fled and found that caring for a little one is as satisfying a task as she remembered.

And now she wants more.

Description: She doesn't look like anything you'd want to call Mother. Spindly spider-limbs attached to an emaciated trunk; the pendulous remains of what were once heavy breasts hanging almost to her sagging, wrinkled belly. She has a hairless skull whose shape is just a little bit *wrong* to be really human. Huge luminous eyes and ears take up most of the space on the sides of her head, and a mouth full of jagged yellow teeth snarls at intruders. Her fingers and toes are too long to be normal and tipped in ragged nails more than thick enough to be called claws. Her skin is white and almost translucent. There's not a bit of hair anywhere on her body. She's deceptively strong and eye-confusingly fast and can twist and contort her body through gaps where no ordinary human could pass. She loves children more than anything: cuddling them, feeding them, making them her own.

Storytelling Hints: The Mountain Mother isn't inherently malevolent. She's a creature primarily of instinct, driven to hunt and kill for the purposes of survival or self-defense, and some of her strongest impulses are of the maternal variety. Seeing small children, she has the desire to nurture and protect them, and these instincts, coupled with her vast loneliness, are what led her to snatch Charlie Baker and to consider stealing away more small ones.

Perceptive readers may note certain similarities between the Mountain Mother and the under-dwellers presented in Chapter Seven. It might be that these creatures are related somehow. The obvious way would be for the Mother to be the progenitor of that race, but another possibility is that the Mother was once a simple under-dweller and somehow became the creature she is today. Perhaps she discovered something in some deep cavern than al-



THE MOUNTAIN MOTHER

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Crafts (Curing Food) 2, Investigation 2

Physical Skills: Athletics (Climbing) 4, Brawl 4, Stealth (Hunting) 4, Survival 5

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Intimidation 5

Merits: Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Fast Reflexes 2, Fleet of Foot 3, Iron Stomach, Natural Immunity, Strong Back

Willpower: 6

Morality: None

Asset: None

Fault: None

Defense: 4

Initiative: 8

Speed: 17

Size: 6

Health: 10

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	1(L)	10
Claw	2(L)	11

Supernatural Powers:

- **Keen Senses:** The Mountain Mother receives a +4 on all Perception rolls. Sudden bright lights or loud noises, however, are painful for her. If she is exposed to such stimuli, the Storyteller rolls her Resolve. If this roll fails, she is stunned (see p. 153). If she is stunned twice in the same scene, she flees the area or attacks.

- **Wall-Climbing:** The Mountain Mother can climb sheer surfaces, provided the material either has handholds or is soft enough to dig her claws into (steel is too hard, but most rock is not). See Climbing on p. 56.

tered her, made her more intelligent and stronger than her fellows, but also gave her the capacity for loneliness.

THE BEGINNING

The story begins with summer vacation arriving in the small town and surrounding countryside. Weird things have been happening all spring, and many of the locals are slightly on edge. The disappearance of Charlie Baker has made most of the parents leery about letting small children out at all, even if adult or elder sibling supervision is to be had.

- Local kids notice that something is wrong with the native wildlife. Earlier in the spring, it was almost as though an epidemic went through the local squirrel population, and almost none are to be seen even now. Whatever caused the squirrel die-off has spread to other small creatures: groundhogs, raccoons, chipmunks and field mice, even some of the local birds. (The Mountain Mother is storing up food for her children.)


- The domesticated animals all continue to be high strung. Dogs are extremely protective of the children they

belong to in general, but here they hardly stray from their masters' sides, except to patrol the house at night. Cats have also begun mimicking this behavior and are particularly inclined to hiss and be aggressive at night.

- Little Charlie Baker's puppy, Shadow, got away from the house and is regularly seen patrolling the edge of the woods where he vanished, whimpering and growling and pawing at the ground.

- A certain amount of loss occurs in pretty much every honor system, but Mr. Leroy, the owner of the largest, has been complaining that not only are people taking produce and not paying by day, but someone broke into the storage shed behind the stand one night and made off with several bushels of fruits and vegetables.

- Mrs. Martin, the old lady whose property lies furthest up on the hills near the old mines, keeps shooing kids away from the woods, when she never had a problem with them walking through her property before. If the kids are really persistent, she goes around to their parents



to complain, and she's been heard more than once talking about the Mountain Mother.

- An older child (preferably someone related to one of the characters) is nearly snatched but gets away, scratched up and terrified and babbling about a monster. Her parents and most of the local people think it was probably a weirdo wearing a costume. Curfews and close watches result.

THE MIDDLE

Eventually, the characters are going to want to figure out what's going on, especially if they managed to talk to Charlie Baker's father or the child who was almost snatched. The second victim is firmly convinced that it wasn't a weirdo in a costume, and a look at her injuries would probably go a long way toward convincing the characters: the Mountain Mother didn't mean to do any harm, but her claws are sharper than human nails.

- Scholastically inclined kids might hit the local library or historical society to do some research about the old copper mines. They find that one of the major precipitating factors in the closing of the mines, some 60 or 70 years ago, was the disappearance of several work parties. If they research further, they find out that this pattern continues back as far as the opening of the mines.

- Talking to Mrs. Martin gets them the story of the Mountain Mother, which was an old story when she was a small girl: a wild woman who lived in the caves under the hills, whom some said was a ghost and others called a witch.

- Something begins killing any dogs let out at night for any length of time, tearing them open and leaving them to die. The only dog that stays out at night that hasn't been caught is Charlie Baker's half-wild puppy.

- The Mountain Mother is glimpsed on her nightly hunting expeditions by local farmers coming in late, teenagers coming home from dates and assorted other nocturnal humans not governed by the curfew. Stories begin to spread that there's something *not right* out there in the woods.

- Getting anywhere near the mines takes some serious sneaking around or the recruitment of a teenaged accomplice/supervisor in order to evade parental concerns.

- Mr. Leroy has found a weird burrow dug into the root cellar where he stores some of his produce: a roughly triangular aperture beyond which appears to lie a short tunnel and from which emerges a horrible, dank smell, mixed with a scent not unlike rot. It's far too small for an adult to fit through, and he's planning on sealing it up with concrete as soon as possible. If you wish this story to take a darker turn, the characters might find Mr. Leroy's house empty and traces of blood around this hole — he was too big to fit down that hole, but the Mountain Mother managed it.

- The sound of a small, frightened child crying can be heard in the woods behind Charlie Baker's house. It appears to be coming from somewhere underground.

THE END

In the end, the characters are going to have to venture into the Mountain Mother's lair. They should come

to realize that Charlie Baker is still alive and that the Mountain Mother has him. They probably also want to make sure that no other children are taken.

- Shadow's excavations in the woods behind his master's house have uncovered the crevice out of which the Mountain Mother came when she first started stalking Charlie. Shadow now knows her scent and can lead the characters to one of the larger entrances she uses when bringing in food.

- While an adult probably won't believe in the Mountain Mother (except maybe Mrs. Martin), one might listen to the characters if they explain that Shadow has a scent. Charlie's parents, especially, are willing to grasp at any hope they can. Of course, the Mountain Mother loves children and hates light and loud noises, so if an adult and four kids come barging into her lair and the adult is carrying a flashlight, the kids are likely to be on their own in short order.

- Watching for the Mountain Mother by night (with flashlights, for instance) shows the characters that she is afraid of or angered by bright lights. Screaming at the sight of her shows them that she is similarly discomfited by loud sounds.

- Getting into the underground is the hardest part of rescuing Charlie Baker: the little boy is scared, filthy, and wants his mommy and daddy and his puppy, but is otherwise physically unharmed. He can run fast when he has to, though he needs help climbing, and doesn't object to being carried by strangers if they promise to take him home.

CONSEQUENCES

The Mountain Mother's lair has dozens of entrances riddling the hills around the town. Some can be blocked with concrete plugs, some can be dynamited shut, some can be blocked with heavy metal mesh or steel grates. Some, however, probably can't be closed effectively at all, and there's nothing to prevent new ones from opening up with time and erosion and carelessness on the part of outsiders. Taking any action at all assumes that the characters have some proof that the Mountain Mother exists, and it's much more in-theme for the World of Darkness for them to bury her in a cave-in than for them to expose her to the world. The Mountain Mother isn't necessarily immortal or even all that hard to kill, but you as Storyteller should consider the impact you are willing to have her make upon the world.

Charlie Baker returns home and, besides being a lot sore and a little dehydrated and undernourished, he seems fine. As he grows older, he is quiet and odd, but being the subject of so much strangeness so young does that to a kid.

THE FOREVER CLUB

The members of the Carnegie Middle School AP Japanese Study Group meet each weekday afternoon and some Saturdays in the local library. Officially, they gather to study for their Japanese class' Friday test, help each other with their vocabulary and practice their conversational skills. Unofficially, they call themselves "The Forever Club" after a favorite manga series. Their discussions

tend to be about anime, manga, power-ups, martial arts and all things “Japanese.” They consume enough Pocky, rice crackers and wasabi-flavored potato chips to fuel a very small, unhealthy army. They also occasionally study.

Just down the street from the library is a quaint Victorian two-story surrounded by roses and azaleas. Talitha Johnson has always lived there — at least as far as anyone can remember. She lives alone. Everyone knows she was married once and they call her “Mrs. Johnson,” even if no one ever knew her husband. He died a long time ago, and her children, if she had any, have long since moved away. She keeps no pets and never entertains, living a quiet, restful life, just her home and garden.

The one social outlet Mrs. Johnson has is the library. She volunteers there once or twice a week at least, working in the children’s section and helping any of the young patrons who need assistance. During the summer, she’s there more often, helping with Story Time and any special events going on. She’s been awarded the “Most Valued Volunteer” award more than a dozen times over the last 20 years, and it’s commonly believed that the only reason it hasn’t been more often is because the library has a policy against giving it to the same volunteer two years in a row. She remembers the name and birthday of every child who frequents the library and is often described as “grandmotherly.” If there’s one thing everyone knows about Mrs. Johnson, it’s how much she loves children.

What no one suspects is why.

Mrs. Johnson has lived in that house for a very long time, much longer than anyone realizes. The house was built in 1840, when she and her late husband retired from his work overseas, looking for a small town to settle in. They lived there until his death, and she has lived there almost continuously since. She might move away for a year or two now and again, but never much longer than that. She doesn’t need to. A few well-timed years have always been enough to reset the community memory, especially nowadays, with families moving in and out, and the sense of “neighborhood” diluted thinner than it’s ever been.

Mrs. Johnson has lived several life cycles, always returning to the same house. She comes in young, grows old and eventually finds a new sacrifice — a child, full of sweet, sweet youth. She absorbs that essence and is transformed into her youthful self once more, leaving only a withered husk behind where a child once stood, her years transferred to her prey. As her own “granddaughter,” she spreads word of her “grandmother” having passed away while visiting relatives, and eventually returns to inherit the house she’s lived in for countless decades. In time, she takes up the role her “ancestor” fulfilled in the city library in preparation for her next transformation.

THEME AND MOOD

This scenario features dual themes that complement each other: the struggle of predator and prey (and the first steps of the children from hunted to hunter as their innocence is partially stripped away) and the idea of a child as a wellspring of possibility. In this case, the children literally are someone’s future, in a perverse kind of way. The

characters also have the potential to save themselves (or another child), should they rise to the challenge.

The mood of this story is fighting against a seemingly inevitable outcome. Mrs. Johnson has been going through the same cycle for years and years. Even if the children manage to keep her from taking one of theirs, chances are they will not be able to stop her (or others who are privy to the same process) forever. Discovering the secret to her longevity and the key to stopping it is within the children’s power, but challenging.

ALLIES AND ANTAGONISTS

This scenario centers predominantly on the local library, its patrons, employees and volunteers. As such, characters will likely encounter people of all ages who are interested recreationally in books and reading. Adults may also be using the library for free computer access, to do research for jobs or classes, or just as a quiet, warm place to spend time if they are unemployed or homeless. Students may also be using the research facilities or, like the Forever Club, using the community room where quiet conversation, food and drink are permitted. Young children often gather to play with the children’s section’s simple (and predominantly educational) toy selection, or to listen to adults read during Story Hour, and the library is generally thought of as a safe zone, so many parents allow their children (of all ages) to wander in the children’s area while they look for books in the main section of the library.

Outside the library, the neighborhood is typical of small-town or suburban America. Most of the young to middle-aged adults travel out of the area to work weekdays, leaving a population of predominantly young and older folks, especially during the week in the summer. On evenings and weekends, there tend to be more adults around, doing gardening and yard work.

TALITHA JOHNSON

Quote: *Aren’t you just such a dear, sweet child? Tell me, darling, how old are you?*

Background: Not long after her husband’s death, Talitha Johnson discovered a ritual in his academic papers with which she learned how to cheat death herself. Other than the rather despicable fact that she’s living on time stolen from the community’s children, she is a model member of the small town.

Mrs. Johnson has a long-standing reputation in the community and she only strikes once every few decades. She’s been around (in one incarnation or another) since at least the town’s inception. In her present “lifetime,” she’s beginning to feel the onslaught of her age again, but she has still outlasted most of the community at this point, making a transfer fairly low risk. Those who might believe something is amiss with her are also elderly. Most of the people at the library have known her for less than 10 years, given turnover and the natural shift of neighborhood populations. It’s not impossible that the children might find adult allies to whom they bring their suspicions, but it’s not likely.



TALITHA JOHNSON

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits, 4, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 5, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Computer 1, Crafts (Needlepoint) 3, Investigation (Research) 3, Medicine (Sedation) 2, Study (Japan) 4

Physical Skills: Larceny 3, Stealth 3

Social Skills: Empathy (Children) 4, Socialize 3, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Allies (Townfolk) 3, Eidetic Memory, Resources 3, Trivia Hound

Willpower: 9

Morality: 4

Asset: Calm

Fault: Egotistical

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 8

Size: 5

Health: 7

Supernatural Powers: Apart from the Hungry Longevity ritual, which is described below, Talitha Johnson might have other supernatural abilities or objects culled from several lifetimes of research. Appropriate choices include a necklace that drops anyone who wears it into immediate slumber; a whistle that, once blown, renders the one who blew it mute for an hour; an ancient chant that renders all doors in a structure unable to open; a scroll that, when read aloud, animates the statue of a small jade fox to do the reader's bidding. The advantage to giving Talitha items like this is that the characters could, potentially, use them as well.

Mrs. Johnson has been at this game for longer than anyone realizes and has built a rock-solid reputation as a harmless, helpful, grandmotherly old lady who would never hurt a fly. The kids have to keep a low profile or risk having the librarian, the principal, the cops, or their parents called on them in short order. And of course, Mrs. Johnson would volunteer to help with their community service so that they could all get to know one another better...

Description: Mrs. Johnson is a rather frail, elderly woman who appears to be in her mid-80s, although her true age is well over 200. She has thinning white hair and pale skin mottled with age spots, through which blue veins can clearly be seen. The whites of her eyes have yellowed with age and her vision is poor, so she wears antique glasses (circa 1840) for reading. She dresses modestly in dresses and flat shoes and often wears a hat when walking to or from the library. Because she is not very strong, young children (especially those who are of slight builds themselves) are the perfect target for her predations.

Storytelling Hints: With the single exception of her undeniable desire to continue her own life and youth at

the expense of others, Mrs. Talitha Johnson is a virtuous and respectable woman. She volunteers at the local library, tends her yard and flowerbeds and, generally speaking, is a sweet and kind presence in the neighborhood. She genuinely likes children and regrets the necessity of preying upon them, but has plenty of time between the ceremonies to put the harm she does in the back of her mind. Even during the ceremony, she does her utmost to make certain that the process is the least painful and frightening possible for her target child.

Hungry Longevity

Many years ago, Talitha Johnson discovered the secret to extending her own life by consuming the life potential inherent in others, especially young children. This process literally sucks the youth from the child in a profane ritual that rejuvenates her. In the process, though, it ages the victim straight from childhood to extreme old age and eventually death, leaving behind nothing but a desiccated husk. Mrs. Johnson, on the other hand, regresses a year for every year between the child's age and 60. Thus, at her

current apparent age (83), she could regress as much as 55 years (to an apparent age of 28) by completing the ritual on a five-year-old child. Teens and adults' youth doesn't transfer as well. Over the age of 12, the ritual only regresses Mrs. Johnson by one year for every two (rounded down) between the target's age and 60. Thus, the ritual cast to completion on a 16-year-old would only garner Mrs. Johnson 22 years of youth (reducing her only to an apparent age of 61).

Each time the ritual is used, the youth wears off a bit faster, resulting in Mrs. Johnson aging at an accelerated rate. While this is not obvious to outsiders, it is extremely apparent to Mrs. Johnson. This has heightened her dependence on the ritual and her desperation to perform it soon, before she is physically unable to complete it.

The ritual, which Mrs. Johnson discovered in her husband's academic papers after his death, was unearthed in his studies of ancient Japanese religious rituals. Mr. Johnson believed it to be a figurative ceremony for preparing a soul for reincarnation, rather than literally granting rejuvenation of a living body, but Mrs. Johnson, having witnessed her husband's descent into the physical ruin of extreme old age, was desperate enough to try it herself.


The ritual involves the intricate preparation of the vessel (child) from which the youth will be drawn. The vessel preparation takes a minimum of an hour, in which time the target child is ritually bathed in rice wine in which spices and rose petals have been infused, then carefully dried and dressed in white robes and laid out in a miniature shrine.

Without at least an hour of ceremonial preparation of the vessel, the ritual will automatically fail.

Once this first preparatory stage has been completed, Mrs. Johnson enters a state of extensive concentrated effort, placing her hands upon the child and chanting an ancient hymn of supplication that she found along with the ritual in her husband's effects. Transferring the vessel's youth at that point becomes an extended action (Wits + Study), with a target number equal to (30 minus the age of the vessel-child). Thus, if the child is five years old, the target number is 25. The process is easier with older children (requiring fewer successes to achieve), but the payoff in terms of stolen youth is conversely smaller as well. A successful ritual performed on an 18-year-old would require only 12 successes, but would grant her only 32 years of "youth," which would reduce her to the apparent age of 41, and make it necessary to begin ritual preparation again far sooner than with a younger child. Also, the possibility of discovery and the difficulty of tempting the target into her home and preparing him for the ritual are much higher for a teen or adult. Besides, Mrs. Johnson just *likes* children.

Each roll represents 10 minutes of continual chanting. With every success, the child becomes visibly older. Her skin gradually loses its youthful glow, turning pale and paper-thin before puckering into severe wrinkles. The smooth curves of her childlike features grow wan, first thinning as the fat and tissue below waste away. In the last stages of degradation, the target's body begins to curl up, slowly assuming the fetal position as the muscles waste





away. The skin grows dark and leathery, the hair thins and just before death, the target looks like a desiccated corpse. After death, the body collapses in on itself, becoming little more than a leather bag of loose bones. Only intense investigation (Intelligence + Medicine) reveals it to be human, and any analysis short of carbon dating indicates that the remains are hundreds, if not thousands, of years old.

At any point that the chanting stops for more than 10 minutes, the ritual begins to wane and a number of success equal to the target's Stamina + Resolve is subtracted from those accumulated in the ritual so far. For every additional 10 minutes that the ritual has not been restarted, additional successes (again equal to the target's Stamina + Resolve pool) are removed from Mrs. Johnson's accumulated total. If, at any point, this results in removing all of her accumulated successes, the ritual fails as per the dramatic failure results below.

Dramatic Failure: If at any point in the ritual, any individual roll on the part of Mrs. Johnson results in a dramatic failure, the ritual is ruined and cannot be restarted until the ceremonial cleansing process has been completed again. As well, if the ritual is ruined because of a dramatic failure, it results in a backlash wherein the child's youth is restored and Mrs. Johnson loses the youth she has stolen.

Failure: No successes are added to the ritual's accumulated total, but the ritual may continue.

Success: Successes are added to Mrs. Johnson's accumulated total for the ritual.

Exceptional Success: Considerable successes are added to the accumulated total. No additional benefit for exceptional success.

Suggested Modifiers: The target is unconscious (+3), the target is awake but drugged into complacency (+1), the target is resisting (-1 to -4), the ritual is taking place anywhere except the basement of Mrs. Johnson's house (-2), environmental distractions (-1 to -4), the chanting is interrupted and must begin again (-5).

THE BEGINNING

The story starts after school during a study session. Characters are primarily intended to be the kids in the club, but they could also be kids there to study or surf the 'net, kids using the playground outside the library who come in when it starts to rain, or children of other library patrons or staff.

Mrs. Johnson has chosen one of the kids in the study group (or a slightly younger sibling of one of the club's members who is also often present) as her target. Mrs. Johnson does not choose one of the leaders of the group, but rather someone who seems weaker and less sure of herself. She typically prefers females to males, but that's merely a cosmetic preference.

One or more of the following events happens at the beginning of the story:

- Mrs. Johnson forms an obvious attachment to her target. She goes out of her way to greet the girl, com-

pliment her (especially on physical features, such as the shine of her hair, the glow of her skin, etc.), allows her to choose the book at Story Hour if she is of appropriate age to participate, or asks her for assistance with reading to the younger children if she is older.

- A member of the Forever Club stumbles across references to a ritual similar to the Hungry Longevity rite in a manga or anime. In it, an evil witch seeks to live forever by stealing the youthful souls of village children.

- A member of the Forever Club finds references to a Mr. Johann Johnson, a native of the area, when reading an article on early Japanese cultural studies. The article quotes the then elderly man and contains a picture of him and his wife, Talitha, who are both in their late 80s. The woman looks identical to Mrs. Johnson. The article is dated 1880.

- Mrs. Johnson has begun to lay the groundwork for her eventual disappearance. She drops mention of her granddaughter into casual conversation, stating that she is looking forward to visiting the girl out of state soon, and that she hopes her beloved namesake will be coming for a visit as well. She has also begun to fake even more weakness than her advanced age is responsible for, mentioning her fears of heart trouble or the like to those who will listen.

THE MIDDLE

In the middle of this scenario, Mrs. Johnson's focus on her chosen target increases and she seeks a way to lure the child into her home to perform the ritual. She's done this before, and despite her grandmotherly demeanor, is savvy enough not to make the abduction too obvious. If the target is a member of the Forever Club, she may invite her to look at some of her husband's Japanese artifacts, asking her to keep the invitation private, as she doesn't want a bunch of "noisy children who don't appreciate the beauty of true Japanese art" nosing about. Otherwise, she may try to catch the target alone as the child walks to or from the library and ask for her aid with a simple household chore or offer some sort of treat (baked goods, etc.) to tempt her into the house. Once there, Mrs. Johnson drugs her drink or food with sleeping pills and attempts to begin the ritual. (See Poisons on p. 160.) The sleeping drug has a toxicity rating of 3 and inflicts three bashing damage per minute. This damage does *not* roll over into lethal damage — if a child's Health track fills with damage from these drugs, the worst that will happen is that she falls unconscious.

Things that characters may encounter in the middle section of this scenario include:

- Mrs. Johnson's attempts to separate her chosen target from the rest of the group or, if the target is the younger sibling of one of the members, from her family members.

- Further research into the information in the article produces Mr. Johnson's obituary from the year 1883 and Mrs. Johnson's in 1885. Later articles in the local paper show Mrs. Johnson's "granddaughter" mentioned as being welcomed to town in 1890 and again in an obituary in 1943. At various other times, the name Talitha Johnson

shows up again, at times with a variety of pictures showing the same woman at various ages. In one article, she is asked about her unusual name and is quoted as saying it's a family tradition to name women in her line Talitha.

- Research into the “Hungry Longevity” mentioned in the manga may turn up its ties to a subset of ancient Japanese beliefs based on certain souls having a hungry nature that makes them willing to consume other spirits or souls to avoid dying themselves. This process degenerates the soul, making it age faster with each spirit it consumes.

THE END

At the point where one of the Forever Club (or their younger sibling) is in Mrs. Johnson's care, things are likely to come quickly to a climax. Mrs. Johnson is anxious to perform the ritual and become young once again. The end portion of the scenario begins once Mrs. Johnson has her target child in a secluded place (preferably her home, but if attempts to get her there fail, she may use the secluded basement of the library instead, bringing the necessary ritual items there).

The targeted child, if not drugged into incoherence, is likely to begin suspecting something is seriously amiss when the ceremonial preparation begins (if not before). If she attempts to escape before the ritual begins, Mrs. Johnson cajoles her in an attempt to stay and may even fake falling and injuring herself to try to get the child to remain in the house. If the child pretends to be asleep, she may have the opportunity to escape during the ritual. If the ritual is interrupted early on, Mrs. Johnson attempts to deal with the interruption before returning to the ceremony. If, however, the ritual is nearly done, she attempts to continue it to completion despite interruptions. Depending on how far along the ritual is, the child may appear aged and Mrs. Johnson may appear youthful.

Things that might happen during the end portion of the scenario include:

- If the children investigate Mrs. Johnson's house without her knowledge, they may discover her husband's artifacts (extensive early Japanese relics and a library of pre-1840s books on various Asian academic topics). With a successful extended Intelligence + Investigation roll (10 successes needed, with each roll representing 10 minutes of searching), searchers may discover the leathery remains of 12 child-sized bundles, the remainders of Mrs. Johnson's earlier rituals.

- The basement ritual area has been prepared for the intended ceremony and explorers may discover a wooden

tub of the appropriate size to bathe a small child, a vat of rice wine in which herbs and rose petals have been steeping, a small shrine and an ornate child-sized robe of white silk.

- If the Forever Club notices the disappearance of the target child, they may be able to interrupt the ritual and stop her from stealing the child's youth. Depending on the progression of the ceremony, Mrs. Johnson may be elderly and frail or, later in the ritual, younger and stronger. (Storytellers are encouraged to add dots to any of her Physical Attributes to represent her increased youth later in the ritual).

CONSEQUENCES


If the children are successful in temporarily stopping Mrs. Johnson, they have won at least a minor victory and abated the immediate threat. Unless they are able to convince adults (their parents or the proper authorities) that Mrs. Johnson is significant threat to children, however, she simply tries again with another victim.

If sufficient attention is drawn to Mrs. Johnson to warrant a formal police investigation, they discover dozens of desiccated human remains among the other artifacts in her husband's former study. Unless they are subjected to carbon dating or similar methods of scientific testing, however, she explains them away as ancient artifacts of his days as an archeologist, and it is unlikely that anyone in the small town will raise a big enough stink to prosecute the kindly old lady for the sake of her dead husband's relics.

If they are unsuccessful at stopping the ritual, the target child dies and Mrs. Johnson “goes away.” The young Mrs. Johnson poses as the elderly one's granddaughter and comes (as she has done every time the transfer happens) to settle the affairs of her “grandmother,” who she says passed away while visiting the young woman out of state. If asked, townsfolk are told the family is having the memorial service out of state as well. In a few weeks or months, the young “Miss” Johnson settles into the same house she's lived in for years, and take her place in the community, and all will be well...until the next time.

Of course, it's possible that the characters kill Mrs. Johnson, either deliberately or accidentally. If that's the case, they have stopped the menace, probably at some cost to their Morality ratings. If they leave behind evidence of their actions, they can expect to suffer some legal consequences, too. If they get away with it, they have to spend the rest of their lives trusting that none of them will fess up.





For the hundredth time, Patrick reloaded the level and flexed his aching fingers. "How the heck are you supposed to beat this guy?" he muttered sourly as the game reloaded. "No way Mike beat this. Not unless he cheated."

The bedroom was dark, lit only by the flickering TV screen and the bright moonlight shining through the half-open window. The pale light shone off the glossy covers of comics and magazines — Fangoria and Cinematique, plus some vintage copies of Vampirella Patrick had inherited from his older brother — and glowed in the depths of the Mountain Dew bottle sitting at the young boy's side. Plastic spaceships and action figures were strewn across the floor, locked in battle with one another or shedding pieces on the old Berber carpet. Dirty clothes lay in tangled drifts across every conceivable surface. It wasn't a room so much as a nest, which was just the way Pat liked it.

The screen blinked, drawing Patrick's attention, and the level started again. He was just dropping into his groove, moving and shooting, when something heavy fell onto the bed right behind him.

Patrick let out a startled cry, clawing the headphones off his head and scrambling away from the bed. Two figures were half in, half out of his bedroom window, lurching and clawing for purchase as they tried to pull themselves through.

"Geez, guys!" Patrick yelled. "You scared the crap out of me!"

Terry made it through first, landing on the mattress and scattering toys and books in all directions. He curled into a ball, favoring his left arm and moaning in pain.

Adam came next — belatedly, it occurred to Patrick that he must have been pushing Terry inside — and nearly slid off the bed onto the cluttered floor. He threw Patrick an angry look. "We tried to text you like a million times. Have you got your phone turned off?"

Patrick glanced around the room. Truth be told, he didn't even know where his phone was. "What the heck is going on?" he asked. His gaze fell to Terry, who seemed oblivious to everything. "What happened to him?"

"He got bit by a werewolf," Adam said. "Have you got any peroxide?"

Patrick stared dumbfounded at his two best friends. "Get the hell out," he said. "Seriously. Right now."

But Adam paid him no mind. He tugged at Terry, trying to pull him upright. "Dude! Look at his arm!"

Patrick started to object — but then he saw that Terry's sleeve was damp and torn. He peered closer and saw the ragged holes, then the blood beneath. "Aw, man," he said. "You better not get that on my sheets."

Adam's eyes went wide. "Are you listening to me? He's been bitten by a werewolf! What are we gonna do?"

Patrick didn't know what to say. It had to be a joke, but the blood certainly looked real, and Terry was pale as a sheet. "What do you mean, a werewolf? How do you know it wasn't just a big dog?"

"Because it was walking on two freaking legs!" Adam said. "It was huge, and it came out of nowhere. Terry screamed like a little girl —"

"Shut up!" Terry hissed through clenched teeth. "I did not!"

"— and it just turned and chomped down on him!" Adam shook his head. "I thought we were both dead. But when Terry screamed even louder, the thing looked kinda confused and just let him go. Then it ran off into the woods."

Terry gave Patrick a pleading look. "What's going to happen to me, Pat? Am I gonna turn into a werewolf, too? You're supposed to know all about this stuff."

Patrick's mind reeled. After a few moments, he gave up trying to make sense of what he was hearing and just decided to run with it. His gaze drifted across the magazines strewn across the floor. "Well, first we need to clean out the wound. Some authorities say that lycanthropy is actually a disease, kinda like rabies."

"Rabies!" Terry cried. "Oh, man. I better not need to get any shots."

Patrick let out a sigh. "The peroxide's in the bathroom down the hall," he said, then began building a list in his head of which of his comics or magazines talked about werewolves. It was going to be a long night.



Appendix: the World of Darkness

**My Mommy always said
there were no monsters, no
real ones, but there are.**

— Newt, *Aliens*

When watching a film or reading a book in which the protagonists are children, one is sometimes given to wonder about the future of those children. When they are grown, will they look back on these fantastic experiences with pride? Will nightmares haunt them the length of their days? Will their friendships last forever, or will they, in fact, forget each other as they get older? Interesting questions, these, and it's entirely appropriate to apply them to the characters of **World of Darkness: Innocents**, especially if the players have access to the other World of Darkness game lines. This Appendix discusses those games and how to integrate them with **Innocents**, as well as how to bring **Innocents** characters forward, as adults, into the larger World of Darkness.

As of this writing, five game lines for the World of Darkness have been published. They are **Vampire: The Requiem**, **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, **Mage: The Awakening**, **Promethean: The Created** and **Changeling: The Lost**. This chapter discusses each of these games in turn and examines how characters from that game might interact with characters from **World of Darkness: Innocents**.

Unlike the rest of this book, which is self-contained, this Appendix makes frequent references to other books in the World of Darkness line, including the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. The sections on the different supernatural creatures, however, include abbreviated summaries of the creatures in question, including a sample character to be used as an antagonist in your **Innocents** chronicles. You don't need to have, for instance, **Werewolf: The Forsaken** in order to use Billy Bross in your chronicles. If you *do* have access to the appropriate books, of course, you can feel free to flesh out these characters as much as you wish.

The sections below talk about the powers and weaknesses of the supernatural creatures in general terms, but do not present game systems. This is for two reasons. First, even within the different game lines, the particulars vary (some vampires, for instance, can move at superhuman speeds, but some cannot), and so the Storyteller is best served by deciding what is true for *one particular* character for her chronicle. Second, we don't have the space here to present specific systems for five full game lines — the games themselves are available if you want all of the information.

SUPERNATURAL CHILDREN

A word before we begin: it is possible for a child to become a supernatural being. A vampire might Embrace a child, or a young person might Awaken as a mage. A child might escape the clutches of the Gentry and arrive back on Earth as a changeling, and certainly a Promethean might be fashioned from a child's body. Werewolves don't usually undergo their First Changes in childhood, but it's not impossible. So if a player wishes to play a child character in one of the supernatural World of Darkness games, should the character be played using **Innocents** rules?

If the Storyteller and the player wish to do so, there's no reason not to try it. The **Innocents** rules were written to represent children within the World of Darkness, not to create a separate reality in which children are the yardstick. The systems integrate, and applying a supernatural template to an **Innocents** character is fairly straightforward. The two areas that need to be addressed are Morality and Asset/Fault.

The “adult” **World of Darkness Rulebook** uses traits called Virtue and Vice in much the same way that **Innocents** uses Asset and Fault. The Virtues and Vices are modeled on the Judeo-Christian Deadly Sins and Cardinal Virtues, but mechanically they are similar (one Willpower back per scene from Vice, *all* Willpower back once a chapter from Virtue). Some supernatural powers assume the Virtue/Vice mechanic is in place, and so for supernatural **Innocents** characters, it might be necessary to approximate which Virtue and Vice the character possesses (a Brash character might have the Vice of Wrath, for instance). The Storyteller might find it more expedient to just drop the Asset/Fault divide for supernatural characters and use the Virtue/Vice setup, in fact, but that’s up to her.

Morality changes for supernatural beings, because supernatural beings aren’t beholden to the same standards as normal humans. In fact, Morality (which has a different name in all of the supernatural game lines) often measures something different for supernatural beings than it does for humans. Changelings, for instance, have Clarity rather than Morality, and this trait is a measure of how well they can recognize the human world vs. the trickery of their erstwhile masters. A child changeling has Clarity just as an adult one does and measures her behavior against the same “sins.” But does the child accrue triggers, as in **Innocents**, or derangements, as in the adult **World of Darkness** rules? No right answer exists, and it’s actually possible to use either or both as the mood strikes the Storyteller. But if you plan to integrate the rules from **Innocents** into the larger, established **World of Darkness**, you just need to be aware of the disparity and be ready to make a decision about it.

VAMPIRE: THE REQUIEM

Vampire is a game about blood, death and the ability (or inability) to sustain one’s essential humanity in the face of inevitable decline into monstrosity. Vampires take on many faces in the game, from sleek and seductive predators to hideous beasts born of nightmares.

THE BASICS

A vampire, in the context of **Requiem**, belongs to one of five *clans*. These clans are passed along from sire to child. That is, when a vampire turns a mortal into one of the undead, the new vampire belongs to the same clan as the one who changed (or Embraced) her. Clans determine what supernatural powers vampires have affinities for and bestow certain weaknesses and capabilities upon their members.

Socially, vampires divide themselves up into *covenants*, which are part religion and part political party. Some covenants focus on temporal concerns like dealing with mortals; others have more esoteric goals.

POWERS AND WEAKNESSES

Vampires can have a wide variety of mystical powers. They are stronger and faster than normal humans, resistant or immune to most attacks (including bullets) and they do not tire or feel pain. They can control the minds

and hearts of mortals, change into mist, or wolves, or bats and instill heart-stopping fear with a glance.

Of course, they aren’t invulnerable. A stake through the heart can destroy a vampire, as can a single ray of sunlight. They need to feed on fresh blood every night, or else, presumably, they starve to death. They recoil from crosses and garlic and some legends say that they must sleep in a bed of grave soil.

These are oversimplifications, but interestingly, vampires as presented in **Requiem** do exhibit many of these powers. What that means for **Innocents** characters facing them is that children are often better informed about vampires than adults. How to kill vampires is one of those little bits of trivia that most people probably know at one point in their lives, but forget as they grow older and start learning about their chosen career fields. A child might think of ways to beat a vampire that no adult would. The problem is that not *every* folk legend is true, and characters have no way to know which ones are accurate, except by trial and error.

VAMPIRES AS ANTAGONISTS

In a **World of Darkness: Innocents** chronicle, a vampire antagonist might menace children directly or might come after people close to the characters. Parents might be targeted for their blood. Older siblings might be seduced. And what if a character’s favorite uncle once killed a vampire long ago? Maybe that vampire’s friends or childer decide to wait a decade before taking their vengeance, just to soften him up.

The horror of vampires comes from two main sources: their diet and their undead condition. Vampires are walking corpses that drink blood, and the notion of them as sexy and seductive is relatively new. It might be appropriate to use that image of them for older **Innocents** characters, but for the younger children, it’s probably a better idea to hew closer to the old “blood-sucking grotesque” ideal. Actually, nothing says you can’t combine them. The vampire might be beautiful and suave when charming his way past the characters’ teacher or camp counselor, but then the fangs lengthen, the skin turns yellowed and wrinkled and the eyes go blood red.

Returning to the subject of the vampire’s diet, don’t neglect blood as a great source of horror. The sight of blood makes many people feel queasy and faint, and kids often perceive a wound that bleeds to be much worse than it is. Vampires *eat* blood, so it’s easy to see their horror appeal, especially to children.

VAMPIRES AS ALLIES

A vampire might watch over a particular family for a hundred years, perhaps to repay a favor that a character’s ancestor did for him. Such a vampire might be a child’s Guardian Angel, though, of course, he’s only able to protect the child at night.

But in a more general sense, vampires (as presented in **Requiem**) must work to retain their humanity. If they don’t, it slips away, night by night, as they feed on the living. A vampire might decide that protecting a group of



MARY MACK

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Crafts 2, Investigation 1, Medicine (Blood Loss) 1, Occult 2, Study 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl (Bite) 2, Drive 1, Larceny 2, Stealth 3, Survival 1

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Empathy 1, Socialize (Fast-Talk) 2, Streetwise 1

Merits: Fast Reflexes 2, Striking Looks

Willpower: 4

Morality: 3

Triggers: Obsession (families)

Asset: Friendly

Fault: Violent

Defense: 2

Initiative: 7

Speed: 11

Size: 5

Health: 7

Supernatural Powers:

- **Blood Drinking:** If Mary successfully grapples someone, she can make a bite attack. The bite itself inflicts one point of lethal damage, and thereafter she can inflict one lethal damage per turn through blood loss. Make a Resolve + Composure roll for Mary; if the roll fails, she loses control and cannot stop drinking.

- **Horrific Glare:** In the blink of an eye, Mary can go from a beautiful girl to a nightmare. Roll Presence + Intimidation (8-Again versus children). If the roll succeeds, all onlookers must roll Resolve + Composure or flee the area.

- **Undead Strength:** Mary can temporarily boost her Strength to 7. This lasts for one scene. Afterwards, she is hungry and focuses on finding a source of blood to the exclusion of all else (unless she manages to feed while her Strength is enhanced). Don't forget that raising Strength also raises her Speed.

children is a superb way to keep himself anchored, so to speak, and avoid losing his mind to bloodlust. That only works until he sees one of his charges bleed and flies into a frenzy, of course, but there's great dramatic potential in a character's undead protector struggling to hold himself back, screaming at the children to flee.

SAMPLE VAMPIRE — MARY MACK

Background: "Miss Mary Mack, dressed all in black," goes the children's rhyme. "She's got a knife stuck in her back. She cannot breathe, she cannot cry, and so she begs, she begs to die." There's a friendlier version, too, one that involves silver buttons and elephants, but Mary Mack the vampire prefers the darker one.

Mary was made a vampire in the 1950s at the tender age of 17. The man who Embraced her claimed to be a

motorist, lost in a vicious snowstorm, and Mary let him into her parents' house. Within an hour, her parents and brother were dead and she was in the midst of a painful transformation. For a time, Mary tried to remain as true to herself as she could. She didn't kill her prey and she still attended church (night services, obviously), but it's been decades, and sometimes she slips up. The first time she killed, she went to her victim's home to explain to his wife and children what had happened. His wife, terrified of Mary, stabbed her in the back with a kitchen knife, and Mary lost control and killed her. With the knife still in her back, she begged the children to kill her. They could do nothing but stare in shock.

Mary took the name "Mary Mack" in a perverse homage to her first killings, and has hunted the nights ever since. She's given up trying to die, and now she just tries to pass the time. She likes families, especially with both

parents and two children, and so often she'll stalk them for a few nights before she decides to feed on one of them. She tries not to kill, but she doesn't always succeed.

Description: Mary is a sad-looking girl in her late teens. She needed a haircut when she died and she's given up trying to change it (it always looks the same the next night). She wears oversized sweatshirts and jeans in an attempt to make herself look older.

Storyteller Hints: Mary Mack is a bit out of her mind. With a name from a child's rhyme and a weird love-hate relationship with families, she's a good antagonist for introducing the concept of "vampire as dangerous predator," but not so much "vampire as beautiful nocturnal jet-setter." She can turn on a dime from being helpful to violent, which means that she's a versatile character to use in your chronicles.

WEREWOLF: THE FORSAKEN

Werewolf is a game of savage fury, about a tribal and deeply spiritual race of shapeshifters and their wars and nightly hunts. Werewolves have a rich culture within their society. Their history states that their ancestors were cast out of Paradise for slaying their progenitor, Father Wolf. While modern werewolves might or might not believe the story of Father Wolf to be literally true, it is true that werewolves must remain apart from humanity. They are angry, violent creatures, and the wrong word at the wrong time can spell death.

Each werewolf has an *auspice*, based on the phase of the moon that was in the sky when he first changed shape. These auspices help determine the werewolf's role in the society of the *Uratha* (the werewolves' word for their race in the language of spirits). Werewolves further divide themselves into *tribes*, each of which draws upon the patronage of one of the exiled children of Father Wolf.

Werewolves make frequent contact with spirits (see Chapter Seven), and many speak their language. Spirits can bestow *Gifts* upon werewolves, but the term is misleading — spirits always want something in return, and they are not necessarily well disposed toward the shapeshifters.

POWERS AND WEAKNESS

Just as a vampire is defined by its diet, a werewolf is defined by its ability to change shape. Supposedly, werewolves can take on the form of huge wolves, but other legends have them turning into hulking, savage hybrids of wolf and man, walking on two legs but tearing at their victims with canine teeth. Werewolves heal most wounds within seconds — indeed, according to some stories they cannot be killed at all.

Werewolves as presented in **Forsaken** also enjoy the aforementioned Gifts of the spirits, which include the power to disable machines, call up fog or leap prodigious distances. What's more, given the right circumstances,

they can step into the Shadow to deal directly with spirits (though this is only slightly less dangerous for them than for normal humans).

Unfortunately for werewolves, their greatest weakness is common knowledge — silver. The lunar metal is deadly to them. Stories say that a single silver bullet is enough to fell a werewolf, and that's not far from the truth.

Werewolves also have trouble keeping themselves under control. Rage burns in their hearts, and if it consumes them, they lash out at anything moving, friend or foe. It is for this reason that werewolves that do have children don't stay to raise them. The risk is just too great. Werewolves *can* breed with normal humans, and their children have a slim chance of undergoing the Change sometime in their lives.

WEREWOLVES AS ANTAGONISTS

Werewolves are tricky to use as antagonists in **Innocents**, because they are nearly unstoppable killing machines. That in mind, if the werewolf (or werewolves, since they tend to hunt in packs) isn't interesting in *killing* the characters, he might make for a very satisfying foe. The werewolf might just want to keep the kids away from that weird old tree in the woods (a holy site for the *Uratha*, not that the kids know that) and chases them out of the forest. He might be more interested in the spirit that has taken up residence in their school, but it seems to the kids that he is following them around, hungrily.

Another option is that the werewolf is indeed out to kill, but he's not killing the characters. He starts with babysitters, teachers, pets and other people close to the characters, leaving them torn to shreds. Why? What does he hope to gain by doing this? He might just be insane, of course, mad with hunger, but perhaps that's what the characters need to figure out.

Finally, some werewolves craft objects called *fetishes*. These mystical artifacts have spirits bound into them, and they represent a great deal of work and sacrifice to the werewolf that crafted them. A character who finds one in the woods, or buys it at a yard sale or the like, can expect a visit fairly soon.

WEREWOLVES AS ALLIES

The level of involvement of werewolves with the human world varies. Some werewolves try to make a go of living a normal life, but most keep to their own kind. Even so, incursions from the spirit world might drive a werewolf to become involved with the characters.

Likewise, werewolves are often devoted to their packs, and a packmate's dying wish is almost always altered. What if he knows that one of the kids is the child of a deceased packmate, but isn't sure which one? The werewolf decides to protect the whole bunch of them for the moment, but "protection" means something brutal to a shapeshifter.



BILLY BROSS

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Crafts (Whittling) 2, Investigation 2, Occult (Spirits) 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl (Tooth and Claw) 3, Stealth 2, Survival (Hunting) 3

Social Skills: Animal Ken 3, Intimidation 2, Streetwise 3

Merits: Allies (Pack) 3, Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Ego Boost

Willpower: 5

Morality: 7

Triggers: None

Asset: Kind

Fault: Hyperactive

Defense: 3

Initiative: 5

Speed: 11

Size: 5

Health: 9

Supernatural Powers:

- **Shapeshifting:** Billy can change into a large wolf or a huge, snarling man-wolf nightmare. As a wolf, he has Strength 4, Dexterity 5 and Stamina 6. In the latter form, he has Strength 6, Dexterity 5 and Stamina 6 (but he can only stay in this form for a limited time — six turns per scene). Adjust his Advantages accordingly.

- **Quick Healing:** Billy heals one point of bashing damage per turn. He heals lethal damage at a rate of point per 15 minutes. Aggravated damage heals normally.

- **Gremlin's Touch:** As the Numen (p. 208), except it requires a point of Willpower and the roll is Dexterity + Crafts.

SAMPLE WEREWOLF — BILLY BROSS

Background: Billy Bross had four brothers and three sisters and he was right in the middle of the birth order. Born in Tennessee, Billy was always a distracted child, watching the sky when he should have been watching the road. The truck knocked him off his bike and threw him, mangled, into a ditch, but the bright moonlight shone down on him and healed his injuries. He took on the form of a wolf and charged off into the night. He never saw his family again — the official story was that the trucker (who hadn't stopped) had killed him, and the wolves took his body.

Billy missed his family terribly, especially his sisters. He joined a pack that, instead of claiming a specific territory, moves around from place to place. Every place he goes, he finds the school or playground nearest to where the pack has set up its base (usually, they break into an empty house or vacant building) and just watches the kids.

The problem is that in today's world, hanging around playgrounds and looking at kids gets you noticed. In Billy's new town (the one in which your chronicle is set, of course), the kids have noticed him, and there are all kinds of rumors about him. Kids are telling their parents and daring each other to go talk to him or to follow him. If the characters do that, of course, they might see something that will haunt them forever. Billy Bross is a nice enough guy, but he *is* a werewolf, and sometimes that means he has to hunt and kill.

Description: Billy is about 25. He's tall and lean and wears his hair long in the back. He sports a denim jacket and a t-shirt with the Confederate flag, and talks with an unmistakable Tennessee drawl.

Storyteller Hints: Billy watches kids play because they remind him of the life he left behind. He doesn't have a hidden agenda, but he's also not very bright. He hasn't considered that his enemies (and his pack *has* made enemies) might attack while he's watching a playground, using the kids as cover. He hasn't thought about what happens if he gets la-

beled a pedophile (by police or by overzealous parents). He hasn't thought about what kids might see if they follow him from the playground one night, and what he might have to do if they witness him change into a wolf.

MAGE: THE AWAKENING

In *Mage: The Awakening*, the characters are people who have reached a state of understanding and connection with strange places called Supernal Realms. This state of enlightenment allows mages (who refer to themselves as the *Awakened*) to reshape certain portions of reality in accordance with the natural laws of these Realms. Simply put — they can work magic.

Mages each walk a *Path*. Path is based on the specific Supernal Realm to which a mage's soul is connected, and it helps to define a mage's particular magical capabilities. Most mages also belong to mystical *orders* that help define their agendas and beliefs.

Mage is a game about modern sorcery, about investigating the mysteries of the World of Darkness, and about the responsible (or irresponsible) use of power. Mages, out of all the supernatural beings discussed in this Appendix, are the most human. Mages can have families, hold down normal jobs and interact with the rest of the World of Darkness (populated, of course, by non-mages or Sleepers) better than vampires, werewolves, changelings and (especially) Prometheans. Any difficulty they have fitting in is due more to the fact that the people around them lack their understanding. What must it be like to be a genius in a world full of simpletons? It would be easy to become contemptuous...and some mages do.

POWERS AND WEAKNESSES

Mages are *extremely* versatile. Some mages excel at raising the bodies of the dead as zombies; others summon up spirits and command them as slaves. Mages might command lightning and fire or possess the ability to speed up or stop time.

Beyond the grandiose displays of power, though, mages are capable of some truly amazing feats. Even the weakest mage has a host of subtle magic at his fingertips, and much of this magic can be cast without a witness ever noticing that anything happened. Consider: a mage can look into a person's soul and know if that person has ever killed, or witnessed death. What might a mage with that power and a job as a psychologist accomplish? What about a mage who can influence a simple binary choice (like the flip of a coin)? Or a mage who can skim the surface thoughts of a target's mind?

For all of their power, though, mages have one insurmountable weakness: mortality. Mages are human beings, and that means they bleed. Of course, magic affords protection, if the mage knows that an attack is coming, but if taken by surprise, a bullet or blade or car wreck can end the life of the most powerful wizard just as easily as any "Sleeper."

Mages have another weakness, one that forces them to be subtle. Magic that goes too far against the natural laws of the world can cause a Paradox. Most of the time, a mage can safely contain a Paradox within his own body, suffering nothing more than a headache or a nosebleed. But if that Paradox escapes, a spell can run wild, or the mage can go mad, or a horrible, vengeful spirit might escape from the Outer Dark into our world. Magic used properly is power unparalleled. Magic used carelessly can doom everyone in the immediate area.

MAGES AS ANTAGONISTS

Apart from the possibility of a mage's unchecked Paradox causing problems, mages can be antagonists in their own right. Mages have a habit of assuming that they are right, and that their way of solving a problem is the correct one. If a mage gets it into his head that some supernatural force is beneath a character's house, he might try to "correct" it without taking the time to figure out what to do about the people living there. Hubris is a common problem for the Awakened, and it's easy to see why.

Consider, too, that mages *are* human, and sometimes human beings are, in a word, evil. Nothing stops a killer or a criminal from becoming a mage. Nothing says that an abuser or a drunk can't Awaken. Any human antagonist in an *Innocents* story could potentially be a wizard, with all that this would mean for the story.

Finally, although it isn't common, mages are capable of sacrificing living beings and drawing power from their dying bodies. Much like Talitha Johnson (see p. 243), they can consume the life-force or soul of other people and gain strength or even longevity out of it. And, also like Mrs. Johnson, some truly reprehensible mages prefer children because they can't fight back as easily.

MAGES AS ALLIES

But once again, mages are human, and in humanity lies the potential for nobility, self-sacrifice and love. A loving father or a dedicated teacher might Awaken, and in so doing find new ways to protect the young. Mages aren't superheroes, of course, but as more than one of the Awakened has said in a crisis, "We *can* do something, so we *should*."

Of course, the World of Darkness is a terrifying place, and mages often wind up spending their time chasing down supernatural threats. Mundane ones slip through their fingers, or have their own protectors. As such, a mage who specifically takes time to look after children (especially children who don't belong to her) is a rare gem.

SAMPLE MAGE — PANACEA

Background: Panacea was born Alyssa Taylor, and from the time she was very young, she wanted to be a doctor. She read the biographies of medical giants like Jonas Salk, she studied Biology with a fervor that amazed her teachers, and after many years, she finally achieved her goal — she was a doctor.

Later that year, she was diagnosed with a terminal illness. The illness was eating her alive from inside, but it wasn't anything that she or her colleagues could identify. In desperation, she turned from modern medicine to the occult, and found her answer. The disease was magical in nature. It built up in the bloodstreams of certain carriers, and every few generations, when the carriers grew too numerous, someone died from it. As Alyssa performed her calculations, she came to a horrible conclusion. With the population growing faster than ever before, the number of carriers would increase exponentially. This disease, born of supernatural origins, would kill millions. At her moment of revelation, she Awakened, becoming a mage.

After her Awakening, she continued to pursue her goal of stopping this disease, now aided by her magic. She came to the conclusion that if a certain number of carriers died or were rendered unable to pass along their infection (which would require magically stunting their

souls), a chain reaction could be started that would cure the disease for all time. Taking the name "Panacea" for use among her own kind, she started hunting down these carriers.

The tragedy of Panacea's life, however, is that her calculations are wrong. The disease isn't based on how many carriers are alive at any one time, but on factors more complex and widespread than she has ever considered. Killing or spiritually stunting young people before they can "pass on" their spiritual disease will not help; nor will it save her own life. But no other mage that she knows of is researching this phenomenon, and so she moves blindly forward, assuming she is right.

Description: Panacea is dying, and she looks it. Her skin is blotchy and dry, her hair falls out in clumps (she usually wears a wig), and she's skeletally thin. She uses her magic to keep herself alive and relatively functional from day to day, but she doesn't know how long she can keep



PANACEA

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 2, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 1

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Computer 3, Investigation 2, Medicine (Diseases) 4, Occult 4, Study 4

Physical Skills: Drive 2, Firearms 2, Larceny 1

Social Skills: Intimidation 2, Socialize 2, Streetwise (Drugs) 2, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Contacts (Doctors) 1, Eidetic Memory, Resources 4

Willpower: 7

Morality: 5

Triggers: None

Asset: Dependable

Fault: Egotistical

Defense: 2

Initiative: 6

Speed: 9

Size: 5

Health: 6

Supernatural Powers:

- **Scrying:** Once Panacea has met someone, she can watch them from any distance. This requires a roll of Intelligence + Occult, and she can watch her target for a number of turns equal to the successes.

- **Emotional Urging:** While Panacea can't truly control people's emotions, she can send small surges or notions to a target's mind. Roll Manipulation + Intimidation minus the target's Resolve. If the roll succeeds, the target feels a burst of fear, anger, shame, guilt or whatever other simple emotion Panacea desires.

- **Healing:** While she doesn't do it often, Panacea can magically heal the wounds of others. She must touch the wounded person in order to do this. Spend a Willpower point and roll Dexterity + Medicine. Every success heals one bashing or one lethal wound (she cannot heal aggravated damage).

it up. She carries a purse full of various drugs to control the nausea, fatigue and other symptoms she experiences. She is impatient and brusque with others. After all, every minute might be her last.

Storyteller Hints: Panacea isn't evil by nature, but her actions are irresponsible in the extreme...and of course, her actions are backed by magic. She might decide that the characters in your chronicle need to be spiritually "altered" so that they don't spread the disease around, or she might try to kidnap them in order to perform some experiments.

PROMETHEAN: THE CREATED

Easily the rarest of the five creatures discussed in this Appendix, Prometheans are living beings assembled from the bodies of the dead and given life through the Divine Fire. The Created, as they are sometimes called, gather together into *throns* when possible, for only other Prometheans can keep them company for any length of time.

The Divine Fire animates and moves the Created, but it also scorches the Earth. A Promethean that lingers in one place creates a Wasteland, poisoning soil, air and water. Also, anyone who meets a Promethean becomes first fascinated, then disgusted and finally violent. This effect is called Disquiet, and it more than anything prevents peaceable interaction between Prometheans and normal human beings. Prometheans must stay hidden and keep moving while they follow their quest.

That quest is the Pilgrimage. **Promethean: The Created** is a game about humanity and what it takes to attain it. It is possible for Prometheans to become real human beings, but to do so they must fulfill certain tasks and finally perform an alchemical operation. Base lead becomes luminous gold, and humanity is finally attained.

Prometheans stem from one of several *Lineages*, which can be traced back to an original Progenitor. As they follow the Pilgrimage, they adhere to a *Refinement*, a philosophical and behavioral framework that helps them approach their Great Work. Most Prometheans follow several different Refinements during their lives.

POWERS AND WEAKNESSES

Prometheans are immune to disease and poison and they do not feel pain (rather, they feel it, but it doesn't hinder them). As their alchemical knowledge increases, they gain the ability to use the Divine Fire in various ways, from gaining inhuman strength to reshaping matter as they see fit. Electricity heals them — a strong enough current can repair almost any wound. Strangest of all, Prometheans can return from death, their inner flame flaring hot enough to reanimate their lifeless bodies.

The greatest weakness of the Prometheans — the effect of their Fire on the world and on others — has already been discussed. In addition, Prometheans burn quickly. While electricity stokes their inner power in repairing

the flesh, fire starts a chain reaction that burns them to embers in minutes.

Also, Prometheans are disfigured and hideous. Some appear to be stitched together from various body parts; others have huge rents leaking black smoke. This isn't obvious most of the time; the Divine Fire covers these disfigurements. But when Prometheans call upon their powers or heal with electricity, any onlooker sees them for what they are...and promptly begins to hate them.

PROMETHEANS AS ANTAGONISTS

Prometheans can become antagonists whether they mean to or not. Children aren't immune to the unthinking hatred that plagues the Created, and a child who meets such a creature might feel compelled to follow it... then to lead others to it...and finally to try to have it arrested or shot.

Apart from that, some Prometheans grow bitter or frustrated from long years of misery with no end in sight and take it out on the world. If a child notices that the water in his house is growing thick and syrupy, or that the air seems charged with electricity, or that strange voices keep him up at night, there might be a Promethean hiding nearby, sulking.

PROMETHEANS AS ALLIES

One of the aforementioned Refinements demands that Prometheans mingle with humanity, and some Prometheans (wrongly) assume that children won't react with hatred the way adults do. All these Prometheans want to do is interact, but interacting with kids can make people leap to the wrong conclusions.

That said, it's not a foregone conclusion that the Disquiet sets in right away. Strong-willed people can think clearly despite the intensity of the Divine Fire, at least for a while. A child who does a Promethean a kindness might find a steadfast protector...at least until the Wasteland starts to spread, and then the Promethean had best move along.

SAMPLE PROMETHEAN — TOMMY-TOM

Background: Created on the dirty streets of Cleveland, Tommy-Tom speaks with a terrible stutter. Throughout his travels, he is always struck by the fact that both adults and children notice his speech impediment, but children are much more likely to point it out and ask about it, while adults just act uncomfortable or mock him. Tommy-Tom isn't sure how he feels about that. He's not sure how he's *supposed* to feel about it. So he goes out of his way to interact with children, trying to figure out at what age they stop being overt and start being cruel.

Description: Tommy-Tom is huge, nearly seven feet tall. His chin is weak and his cheekbones are too high for his face, and his hair seems to turn different colors in different types of light. He has mismatched eyes (they came from separate bodies) and immense hands. He

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 2, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Crafts (Wire Sculpture) 3, Occult 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 3, Larceny 1, Stealth 1, Survival (Foraging) 3, Weaponry (Club) 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 3, Intimidation 2, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 1

Merits: Giant, Strong Back

Willpower: 7

Morality: 6

Triggers: None

Asset: Creative

Fault: Cowardly

Defense: 2

Initiative: 5

Speed: 11

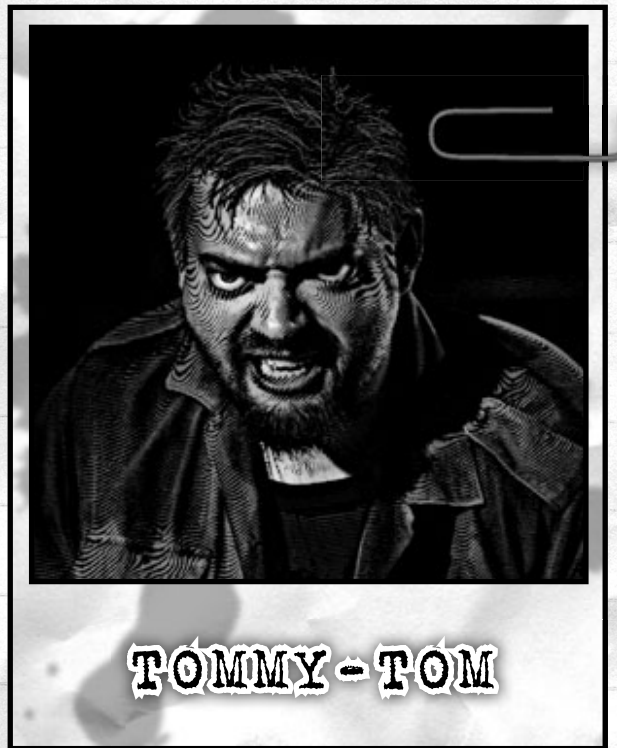
Size: 6

Health: 9

Supernatural Powers:

- **Strength Boost:** Tommy-Tom can increase his Strength to 7 for one scene. This requires the expenditure of one Willpower point.

- **Lightning Touch:** With a touch, Tommy-Tom can electrocute a target. Unfortunately, he sometimes does this without meaning to. Spend one Willpower point and roll Stamina + Occult. Every success inflicts one



point of bashing damage. To use this power in combat, he must first touch the target. This requires a successful reflexive Dexterity + Brawl roll, penalized by the target's Defense.

- **Reshape:** Tommy-Tom can render any small object (Size 1 or 0) malleable as clay, reshape it and then make it solid again. He uses this power to gain entry to locked rooms and to create his art. Spend one Willpower point and roll Strength + Crafts minus the object's Durability. The object remains malleable for a maximum of one scene.

wears whatever clothes he can steal from secondhand stores (he's never used money in his life) and stares at the ground when he speaks.

Storyteller Hints: Tommy-Tom is a simple man. He wants to know why people interact with him the way they do, and he might be gratified to know that they treat humans who stutter much the same way. He isn't interested in hurting children, but he does tend to be a bit pushy when it comes to asking questions. The questions he asks are strange ("Why are your shoes like that? Do you see televisions? How many of you are there?") and reminiscent of a young child's or a person with a cognitive deficiency. This strange behavior, combined with the Disquiet he always engenders, tends to scare kids away.

Tommy-Tom always makes a lair when he arrives in a new place. In that lair, he keeps the trophies from his past travels. Some of these are junk — paper trash, dis-

carded shoes and the like. Some, though, are pieces of jewelry and small sculptures he's fashioned himself, and if someone were to take an interest in these, he would be immensely flattered. Of course, he wouldn't have the first idea how to express such a feeling.

CHANGELING: THE LOST

Changeling is a game about the Faeries, the strange creatures from another land that steal people away. These beings, also called the Others or the Gentry, use human beings (including children) as slaves. It is possible, though, for these slaves to escape and flee through the thorny barrier that separates their world from ours, arrive home and begin life anew. But at that point, the slave is no longer truly human. She has become a changeling.

Changelings are warped by their time in Faerie. Some have animal features; some have hair of fire or glow with soft faerie light. These changes cause changelings to take on a *seeming*, and this seeming grants certain blessings, as well as levying disadvantages. Changelings usually belong to one of four seasonal *Courts*, defined by outlook, agenda and mystical bent.

POWERS AND WEAKNESSES

All changelings have powers based on their seemings. Some changelings are preternaturally swift, while some are persuasive and some have claws or can change their forms to impersonate others. In addition, changelings can make use of strange bargains that the Others made with the world untold eons ago. These bargains allow changelings to command the elements or climb up buildings like spiders, to instill fear, become invisible or change their shapes.

But the more insidious powers of changelings include their ability to enter the dreams of sleeping mortals and poison them into nightmares. Changelings can also forge pledges with humanity, just as old legends suggest, and they are bound to the letter of the law, not the spirit.

Scrupulous changelings don't try to cheat people for their own advantage, but not every changeling has such ethics. Finally, all changelings can use doorways, mirrors, shadows and other such thresholds to enter the Hedge, a strange labyrinth of thorns and horrors. The Hedge leads back to Faerie, and so changelings fear it, but it can make for a quick escape.

Changelings fear cold-wrought iron. This material, rare in modern times, can strip a changeling's magic, drive him away or kill him. Likewise, changelings often live in fear of the Others returning to claim them. They must step carefully, lest the Hedge open and the Wild Hunt ride them down.

Another weakness that many changelings share is the fetch. When the Others steal people, they often leave magical duplicates to allay suspicion. Fetches aren't human and aren't always good at acting human, but better a person acts strange than disappears altogether. The problem is that when a changeling escapes, he still has his fetch to deal with — and some of them don't like being ousted from their stolen lives.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Computer 1, Crafts (Paper-Folding) 1, Occult 2, Study 2

Physical Skills: Athletics (Running) 3, Stealth 1, Survival 2

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression (Calligraphy) 3, Socialize 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Ambidextrous, Direction Sense, Prized Possession (Gilded Pen), Team Player

Willpower: 4

Morality: 7

Triggers: Aversion (thorny plants)

Asset: Brave

Fault: Irresponsible

Defense: 3

Initiative: 6

Speed: 10

Size: 4

Health: 6

Supernatural Powers:

- **Scribe:** Jackie can read any language. This requires a successful Intelligence + Study roll. She can't speak the languages, however.



JACKIE PAPER

- **Swift Messenger:** Jackie can double her Speed for one scene with the expenditure of one Willpower point.

- **Writ of Bad Luck:** Jackie can curse a target with bad luck. The target receives a -2 penalty on his next roll. This requires the expenditure of one Willpower point.

CHANGELINGS AS ANTAGONISTS

Of course, the worst thing that a changeling can do to a child is drag him into the Hedge. There, the thorns bite at the child's flesh, and it's probably just a matter of time before the Gentry come for him. Horribly, some changelings offer up mortals (children or adults) to the Gentry in return for lenience or favors. A child who falls into the Hedge because of such a changeling (or by accident) had best find an exit quickly, or he is probably doomed to become a changeling himself.

Changelings also feed on emotion. This in itself isn't dangerous — the human providing the emotion doesn't lose anything by the changeling doing so — but some changelings prefer emotions like wrath, sorrow and humiliation. Children, of course, are often easier to manipulate into specific feelings than adults.

CHANGELINGS AS ALLIES

A changeling stolen as a young child has good reason to protect other children from the same fate. Likewise, since time passes strangely in Faerie, a man might be stolen away while his wife is pregnant and return in what to him feels like decades, but find that his child (who he has never met) is now just turning 10. As far as his wife knows, he is dead, and he can't endanger her by reappearing to her, but he swears that nothing will harm his daughter.

Also, changelings must work to retain their sense of reality. The supernatural exists, yes, but the human world beckons also, and if changelings can't keep track of which is which, they run the risk of going completely mad. Being around children can sometimes help keep this in perspective, especially if they can help the children discover the world — the natural, human world — for the first time.

SAMPLE CHANGELING — JACKIE PAPER

Background: Jacqueline was stolen from her school when she was nine years old. She snuck into a storage closet to get out of taking a Math test, and something grabbed her in the dark. It threw her into a sack and took her back to Faerie, where she spent untold months carrying messages from household to household. Over time, she found that it was faster just to let the scribes write the messages on her skin, and she became an embodiment of the message, Jackie Paper.

One day, she had a brilliant idea. No one ever stopped her when she was delivering a message, so she wrote one on her arm addressed to her old school. And away she flew, back through the Hedge, until she reached the land of her birth once more. She found that only a few days had passed, and she was all ready to reclaim her life, when she realized that apparently she hadn't left. There was another Jackie, and this one was living her life (and had even gotten an A on that Math test!).

Description: Jackie is a nine-year-old girl. To mortal eyes, she is a light-skinned black girl with curly hair and a bright smile and a strange, whispery voice. To those who can see her changeling features, her skin is crisp and papery in texture, and her eyes are deep and black, like pools of ink.

Storyteller Hints: The characters might attend Jackie's school and notice the strange shift in personality when Jackie is replaced by her fetch. If they notice and they talk about it, the real Jackie might approach them for help. Alternately, Jackie might have a message written on her that indicates that the characters are the next ones to be snatched — who is the message supposed to go to? Is Jackie even now delivering it, without meaning to?

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I SAW THOSE THINGS AGAIN.

Outside my window last night,
I saw thing holding on to the edge of the house.

I THINK THEY WERE LAUGHING.

I told Mom and Dad about it.
Mom just told me that all kids see monsters
because our brains don't know any better,
or something. I started crying because I know
that should be true, but these monsters
are different.

But Dad just looked at me and then he hugged me,
and he went upstairs to his office. And what really
scares me is that I think he knows I'm right.

I THINK HE REMEMBERS.

I THINK HE USED TO SEE THEM, TOO.

World of Darkness: Innocents is a variant on the Storytelling System, designed around younger protagonists. It is a stand-alone game, and is compatible with the other World of Darkness® rulebooks, including Vampire: The Requiem®, Werewolf: The Forsaken® and Mage: The Awakening®.

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