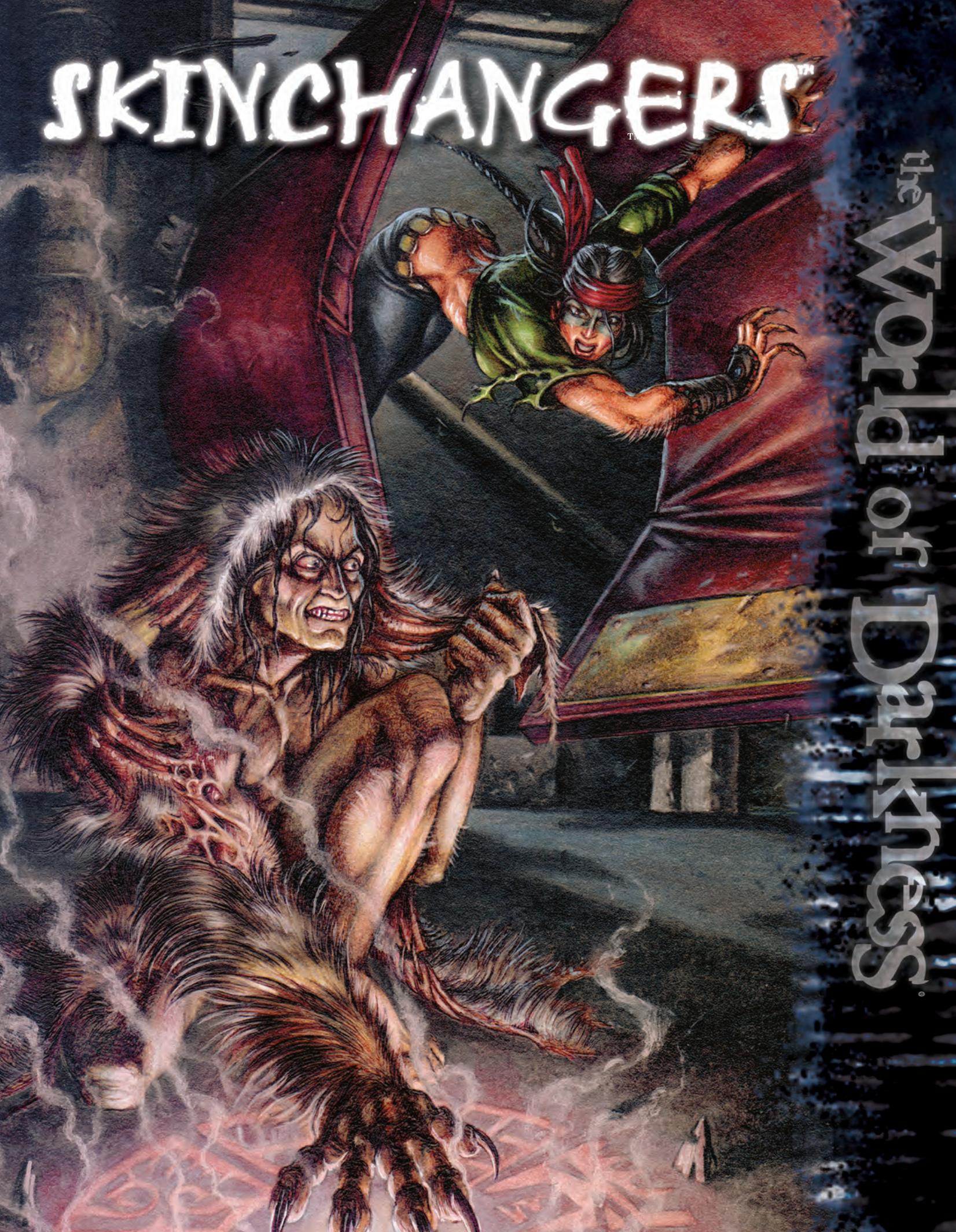


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"Ahahaha! You, too? I knew I wasn't alone!

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# SKINCHANGERS™



BY CHRIS CAMPBELL | JESS HARTLEY AND PETER SCHAEFER

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WORLD OF DARKNESS® CREATED BY MARK REIN•HAGEN

# Face in the Crowd

Eventually, you just stop thinkin' of yourself as a monster.

Most of us know, the first time we shift, that we aren't what we used to be. We aren't people. We aren't *right* any more.

But somewhere along the line, you leave your old life and your old buds behind — if you're lucky, not in pieces — and you start running with folks who understand, ones you don't have to lie to. Pretty soon, you almost forget that most folks aren't like you. That even you weren't always like you. And somewhere in there, you might stop thinkin' of yourself as some sort of shapeshifting half-spirit freak, at least for a little while.

But then something happens, and it reminds you. Reminds you that, no matter how long you've

been Uratha, you don't know it all, you haven't seen it all. No matter what you are, what you've done, there's shit out there that will still fuck up your world.

Believe me, man. I know.

We'd been running together for most of a year the first time we saw it. It was July, maybe August, and the air was so hot and wet, it was like breathing in a shower all the friggin' time.

The guy on the radio said it was the hottest summer in 20, maybe 30 years, and we had so many thunderstorms I thought I'd never dry out.

I don't know if it was just that it was my first summer after Changing or what, but I was going a little stir-crazy. It never cooled off! It was hot clear through the night, even when it was pouring. There was just no way to get cool. It was so hot one day, we skipped out of our territory for a while, hoping those scuzzballs down south wouldn't catch wind of it, and spent the day up on Boston Road sneaking in and out of peep shows and porn shops, anywhere we could get in front of a fan for a bit without getting hassled too bad. People had a

hair trigger that summer, no one liked the heat, and folks were getting shot or stabbed just for looking at someone wrong. Course, we coulda handled ourselves, but Mako was trying to keep a low profile and didn't want any trouble with the cops.

Round about 10, the sun was going down, and business was picking up in the store we were in. The clerk woulda been a hottie if she hadn't had such crappy teeth, but she had on one of those tight tank tops with no bra and you could totally see her titty rings through it. Nuke had been drooling on the counter most of the afternoon, and she'd been grooving on it, but her boss came in and was giving us that "scram before I call the cops" look. Nuke looked like he wanted to take the guy down, but Mako shook his head and nodded toward the back door.

We cut out for the back, past the jerk booths, and when we hit the parking lot door, the heat hit back. It was like breathing in fire and water all at the same time.

"Jeezus, it's hot."

"No shit, Nuke? Damn, glad you told me, I'da missed it. You hear that, Biz, Nuke says it's hot."

Biz just shook her head at me and ignored us both. She didn't much like small talk. She didn't much like Nuke, either. Me, she was neutral on, and that's about as good as it got with Biz unless there was a knife involved. I think, if we hadn't already been following Cold-Steel when she Changed and came looking for a pack, she'd have probably just kept on looking.

Nuke shoved his hands deep into his pockets and took on ignoring me, too. Most time, he tried to follow Biz's lead when she'd let him. And most times, when she noticed, she'd smack him up alongside the head.

"Quit doggin' me."

Nuke followed Biz, but Biz followed Mako. The bunch of us did, really. It wasn't so much a choice as just the way it was. Mako was an alpha,

had been since before I'd joined the pack, probably since before he'd Changed. The pack went where Mako led, and right now it looked like he was leading us for some fun.

Way down at the end of Boston Road, past the MiniMart and the mission, the street kinda dies off. It's still there, all three lanes, but once you get past the mission there's no reason to go any further and a holla buncha reasons not to. Namely the four of us. Cuz once you get past St. Mary's, the only thing left down Boston is the big ol' vacant car place and us.

Most of the time, folks use their heads. Word gets around — you don't get too close to the place. You don't sneak over the chain link, even though the ivy's grown up and over the barbed wire at the top. And no matter how much safer it may look than the alley you been living in, you don't try to set up camp in the building. You just don't.

Apparently, no one told him, though.

"Jeezus, what's he doin'?" Nuke weaved off to the side, trying to get a better look at the guy climbing the fence.

We all picked up the pace a bit, but we weren't gonna actually run, that would have looked wrong. We just kinda quick-jogged, and by the time we got to the gate all we saw was his coat disappearing over the top of the fence.

Mako jerked open the gate that looks like it don't work, but it does. He went tearing after the asshole who was stupid enough to invade our turf, with Biz and Nuke right behind him. I took a sec to jam the gate shut behind us. I didn't want whoever it was to have an easy time getting out, least not until we was done "talking" to him.

When I caught up with the rest of the pack, Nuke and Biz was standing around, looking at each other like they didn't know what was what.

"What's up?" I thought I'd find a brawl going on, but no dice.

"No clue. He was gone before we got here."

Biz stuffed her hands in the front pockets and sighed like she was deflating. She didn't look at me when I walked up.

"Where'd he go?"

Nuke shrugged and jammed his hands in his jeans all the way up to the elbows. "Don't know."

Something wasn't right. The spot where the guy had disappeared over the fence wasn't that far from the gate. And, even with the grass overgrown and the night coming on, there shoulda been no way some bum could of scooted out of there before Nuke caught wind of him. Nuke might not have been the sharpest guy, but he had a nose for tracking like you wouldn't believe. Nobody got away once Nuke got his trail.

"Where's Mako?"

I glanced around, but there wasn't nothing moving 'cept for an old, patchy-coated tomcat slinking 'long the edge of the building. The cat froze when it caught me looking, like it thought I couldn't see it in the dark. Stupid-ass cat. Looked like I wasn't the only thing it'd tried to out-sneak, cuz it had big ol' patches of bald spot, like someone had pulled handfuls of its fur out. I watched as it turned the corner and high-tailed it off into the dark.

"You know Mako." Biz flicked her butterfly knife out and started cleaning under her nails. "He got some wild hair up his butt and went to sniff around. Said we had to stay here and wait for you."

"Well, that sucks —"

From behind the building, somebody screamed, and we was running before we thought twice about it.

Nuke took point. You didn't want to count on him for making plans, but man, that boy had cahones. He lit out on all fours, shifting while Biz and I were still hoofing it on twos. By the time we rounded the first corner, the screaming had died out, but it went on long enough for us to tell it was Mako doing it.

Nuke tore around the corner to the back. We threw it in high to keep up, and had just hit the back lot when we saw him screech to a stop, backpedaling as fast as his hind legs would go. He shifted back up, and turned to puke on the ground just about the time Biz and I caught up with him. Nasty shit. Tacos and cheap beer make for some gross ass puke.

"Jeezus, man, why'd you have to go and —"

"What the fuck is that smell?"

Biz still had her knife out, walking past Nuke like he wasn't hurling his guts out.

I followed her, and got a good whiff. Nuke musta got a snoutful of it when he came running up but with me and Biz still walking on twos, we had to get almost right on top of it before it hit us.

Turns out, it was Mako.

He was dead. His guts were hanging out of his shirt like some big ol' worms, and he looked like he'd tried to stick them back in, from the shit all over his hands. Mako had always been pretty damned proud of his clothes, enough to get ribbed about it by the rest of us now and again. Nothing to be proud of now, he was blood and guts all over. His throat was slit clear through, and it looked like if you moved his head it woulda rolled right off. I looked closer and wanted to puke myself.

Wasn't the first time I'd seen somebody dead. It happens. Wasn't even the first time I'd seen one of mine laid out and getting cold. But it was the first time I'd seen anyone with no face.

I mean, none. From his skin to his hair, there was nothing but meat and bone. Whatever had ripped it off had done it quick, but they'd taken it all.

He wasn't breathing, which mighta been a good thing. I'd seen some of us recover from some pretty nasty shit, but I wasn't sure I wanted

to watch anyone, even Mako, try to grow back their whole damned face.

Biz started scouting around, and Nuke was still puking, which left me to check over Mako. He was dead, there wasn't any real doubt on that. I grabbed his wallet, slipped the chain off and stuffed it in my back pocket. Did the same with his Gnowdowser. No sense letting it go to waste.

Nuke pulled his shit together, wipin' his mouth on the back of his hand, but he wasn't getting too close to the body.

"Who the fuck did that?"

"The bum?"

"Hell no. No bum coulda took out Mako."

"Scalpers?"

I shook my head, but I wasn't completely sure. Taking someone's face would be just like those fucked up 'Pure.' 'Cept I thought if it was them, they'd have stuck around for a fight. Unless this was some fucked-up way of them trying to warn us off or take our turf. Fuck. I didn't know. This wasn't my thing. I patched us up and kept us straight with the spirits. Mako made the decisions. Mako woulda sorted it out. If he hadn't been the one bleeding out into the dirt.

Biz came back. Her knife was put away, and she looked pissed as hell.

"What'd you find?"

"A whole lot of nothing. Whatever did this is gone now."

She and Nuke was both looking at me like I knew what to do next. I guess that made me the alpha.

"We gotta bury him."

It wasn't much, but it was something to do while I figured out what we were supposed to do next.

By the time we'd covered him up I'd made a decision. "We aren't stayin' here tonight."

Nuke looked like he was gonna argue, but Biz just nodded and he shut right up. We flopped

under the overpass out by the highway. It was hot and noisy, but it didn't matter much. None of us slept for long. I kept seeing Mako's bloodshot blue eyes, the lids all gone, staring up at me, and I was pretty sure I wouldn't be sleeping much for a long time to come.

Next morning, we searched our turf, expecting to maybe find some other pack trying to set up camp. But there was nothing. Other than the pile of junk we'd pulled over to make sure nothing fucked with Mako's grave, it was just like it had been since we'd started calling it home.

Round 'bout noon we headed uptown, hoping to catch wind of who'd done Mako. I took lead with Biz and Nuke flanking, one on each side. We walked like we'd always been just the three of us, but all of us knew it just wasn't right.

Nobody seemed to know nothing, even when we put a bit of muscle on the questions. We'd hit the mission, the park — nobody was talking. Biz had just finished asking the enforcer of one of the local sets about it, and was folding back up her butterfly when Nuke started making noises like he was choking on his own tongue.

"What the fuck's wrong with you?"

The banger made a break for it while Biz and I was trying to figure out what Nuke's problem was.

Now, Nuke's as tan as me, but his don't fade, not even in winter. 'Cept for now. Now he was pale as a friggin' ghost, and he couldn't even talk. He just points.

Biz and I look, and I think she's gonna fall over, too. Hell, I'm not sure I'm not gonna, for a sec.

'Cuz standing there, picking through a garbage can is Mako.

I shit you not. And he's got his face back.

Nuke goes tearing over to him, and Mako doesn't even notice. He just keeps picking through this can like there's gold at the bottom or something.

"Mako!" Nuke's practically yelling in his ear, and Mako's still ignoring him like he wasn't there.

Biz sidles up to him. "Hey, bossman."

But me, I'm hanging back.

'Cuz something just isn't right.

First off, I know we buried Mako last night. Now, stranger shit has happened, but for the most part, when we bury someone they pretty much stay buried. No way he oughta be up and walking around now.

And second, he was wearing the most godawful fucked-up coat you ever seen. It hung almost to his feet and looked like someone sewed it together outta roadkill. No way Mako'd ever put on something like that, not even if he was freezing to death, and it was go degrees easy that day.

By now, he'd looked up, and Nuke and Biz was chatting away at him like it was all back to normal. But there's no one home, if you know what I mean? It was like they was talking to a wall, for all the attention he was paying.

So I look closer. And then this shiver runs up my back like someone sliced it open with a cold knife. 'Cuz, Mako's eyes had pretty much kept me up all night the night before. There's no way I was gonna forget them, all blue and staring up at me with no lids.

And one of this thing's eyes was brown.

"Guys."

They just kept at it, trying to get him to tell them what the hell happened.

"Guys."

Now, they still aren't paying me no mind, but this Mako-thing is. He's looked up and caught me looking, and he's starting to back away. And I'm looking at him and that f-ed up coat he's wearing and I realize it's not just slapped together outta bits and pieces of skins and fur.

It's all faces.

I'd thought it was full of holes, but they aren't just holes.

They're eye holes and mouth holes and those little nose holes you breathe through. There's cat faces and dog faces and coon faces, all kinda colors of fur just gaping open, like they were trying to see and talk and breathe again.

And not all of them have fur.

The coat is falling apart, and it looks like some of it's old as fuck and some of it's still so new you'd think it would be smelling to high heaven. Thankfully, most of the skin bits are old and browned up, like worn-out leather.

But one of them is looking pretty fresh.

Like... last-night fresh.

The Mako-thing sees me staring at the Mako-patch on his coat, and it bolts. Just turns and runs like there's no tomorrow. Biz and Nuke just stand there, looking, and I grab them as I take off after the thing.

"Wha —"

"Just come on!"

Whatever it was, it was fast as hell. It disappeared down an alley, and I thought we'd lost it. But when we turned the corner, the alley didn't go nowhere. It was a dead end. No doors, no street out, no nothin'.

But the Mako-thing wasn't there.

The buildings on each side were two to three stories tall. It couldn't have gone up, and it sure as hell didn't come back out past us. Warn't nothing in that alley but this big ol' mutt, snub nosed and scarred to hell, with half its fur all mangy and gone.

We looked at it. It looked back at us.

Any sorta normal mutt, he'd either be snarling at us by now, or he'd have his tail between his legs and piss himself outta fear. This one's just looking at us. Looking at us with his one blue and one brown eyes.

Biz and Nuke must have thought I was crazy, trying to get the jump on some flea-bit street mutt. I couldn't help it though. I knew whatever it was, it had something to do with Mako biting it, and I wasn't going to let it get away.

I jumped, but by the time I hit the ground, it was gone.

Biz and Nuke just stared at me while I was knocking over trash cans, and checking out the dumpster. "Damn it! Help me find it!"

But whatever it was... it was gone.

"Where'd Mako go?"

Nuke clucked an empty wine bottle at a mangy rat that squealed and made for safer territory. A mangy-assed, patchworked rat.

It took me about two seconds to connect the dots. Or in this case, the squares.

But two seconds was long enough for the rat to get itself well and truly gone.

"That wasn't Mako."

I kicked the wall the rat-thing had disappeared through.

We went back home, just to make sure, but the junk we'd piled on his grave was still there. I still don't know who — or what — the hell we saw that day. But I'm sure it wasn't him.

It's been almost a year now. We're still here, me and Biz and Nuke, and we're making it okay.

But we still check every once in a while, to make sure the junk hasn't moved.

And we still keep an eye out for that Mako-thing wearing our alpha's face.

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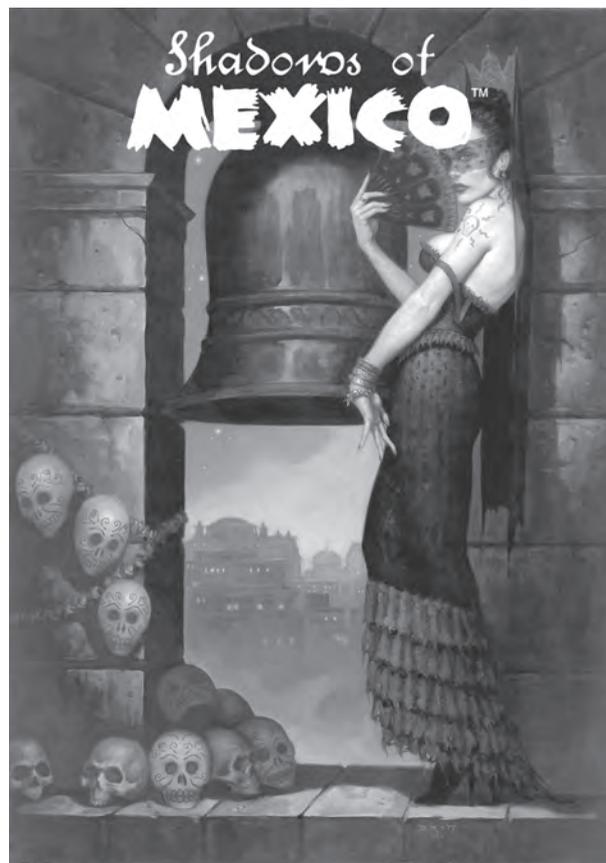
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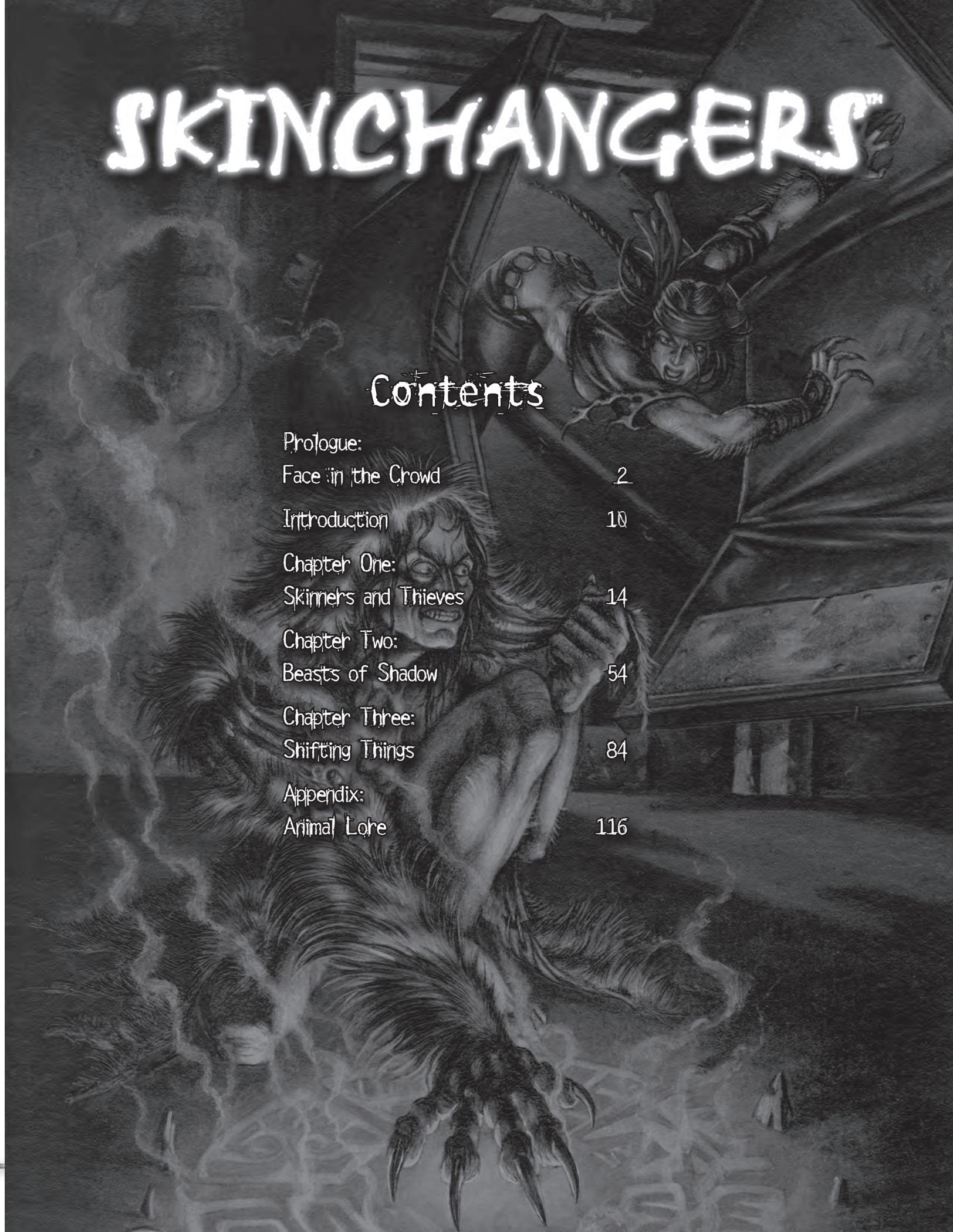
This book uses the supernatural for settings, characters and themes. All mystical and supernatural elements are fiction and intended for entertainment purposes only. Reader discretion is advised.

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# SKINCHANGERS™



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# Introduction

**“We must be willing to get rid of the life we’ve planned, so as to have the life that is waiting for us. The old skin has to be shed before the new one can come.”**

**— Joseph Campbell**

Transformation is a current that runs deep within the river of human beliefs. Literal and figurative transformations from human to animal and back play an important role in legend, mythology, folklore and religion throughout history, and the theme can be found historically in one form or another in every major culture across the globe. And in the World of Darkness, at the heart of this legendary theme lies a cold gem of truth.

Before humankind moved out of the cradle of civilization, werewolves — the Uratha — walked among human villages and cities, patrolling the borderlands, taking mates from among the human population. Those who encountered the lycanthropes and lived to tell about it passed along their stories, or what the Lunacy allowed them to remember. These half-believed tales became the basis for the legend of King Lycaeon, the story of Romulus and Remus, the outbreak of medieval lycanthropy victims and countless other stories of those who, by birth, disease or curse, transform from their human form to that of a wolf.

In areas where wolves were unfamiliar to the native population, were-foxes, were-jackals, even were-bears were an understandable interpretation of those who had encountered Uratha in their beast or near-beast forms, especially when the effects of Lunacy are figured in. While these tales may or may not have been believed as strict fact, depending on the time and culture, the stories that humanity wove around them gave humans a way to explain the unthinkable, to dress the feral reality of werewolves in morality plays or superstitious ritual that distanced the humans from a truth they simply were not capable of coping with.

But not all of the stories of human transformation are so easily explained, even by the lycanthropes who know they and their ancestors are the basis of many of them. While a wolf could easily be mistaken for a fox by a terror-stricken Japanese maiden, it seems unlikely that even the most frightened individual would mistake any of the Uratha’s forms for a were-dolphin or were-serpent.

Among the Uratha themselves, it is largely assumed that these tales are purely fictional. Those who are willing to give them credence — including the rare werewolf who has encountered them firsthand — are quick to explain away these other shapeshifters are some sort of strange victim of spirit possession or perhaps a minion of one of the Hosts, weaving rationalizations that fit within the shapeshifters’ own particular cosmology.

In truth, however, it seems that humans are not the only beings who are unwilling or unable to accept the reality of the strange and often-frightening beings they encounter.

## We Are Not Alone

In the forests, in the cities, the rest of the skinchangers gather in small groups or walk utterly alone. They share almost nothing with the werewolves; nor are they humans or undead who number shapeshifting as one of many supernatural powers. Many skinchangers have no knowledge of the spirit world. Most have never heard of Father Wolf or Mother Luna.

And yet, they are skinchangers: not wholly human, not completely animal.

Some have sought this status, some have had it thrust upon them. Some consider themselves blessed, while others bemoan the curse that has befallen them. Born or bred or conjured into being, the product of sorcery or science,

the skinchangers are a diverse collection of individuals who may know no more about each other than the Uratha know about them.

But they exist. On lonely prairies, atop remote mountains or in the dark corners of a neighborhood nightclub, the skinchangers walk amongst us. They are the Unknown.

As your troupe is about to find out.

## Fear of the Unknown

Perhaps more than any other thing — more than darkness or danger, even more than death — humanity fears the unknown. In fact, the majority of our fears of other things are, in fact, largely due to the unknown quality inherent in them.

Darkness scares us. But why? We deal with darkness every time we close our eyes, every time we sleep. But darkness around us has the possibility of hiding things, thus turning even a familiar room into a space of indefinite potentialities. Therefore, it is not the darkness so much that we fear but the unknown which it may be hiding.

Danger frightens us. And, in truth, dangerous situations may bring the rational fear of physical harm. But not knowing what will happen creates a large portion of our fear of dangerous situations. Will it harm us? How much? Will it hurt? How badly?

Even death — one of humankind's greatest fears — scares us in part because of our underlying terror of the unknown. That is not to say that the loss of life is not a common, very valid fear. But often death is feared as much for the uncertainty which may precede and certainly follows it, as it is for the transition of life to death itself.

## Dealing with the Unknown

Our first instinct when encountering the unfamiliar is to assess and define it, to make it fit within the comfortable compartments of our reality. Floating lights in the night sky are mentally compared first to a star, then when they move, to an airplane, as our mind considers one possibility after another to make sense of what the mind perceives. When the lights move in a way that we logically cannot justify aircraft moving, our sense of curiosity is piqued, and, at the back of our mind, the seed of fear is planted. We continue to examine the lights, and when we hear the familiar chopping of helicopter blades, we relax, perhaps not even aware that the unfamiliar had begun to sprout discomfort in the back of our minds.

As soon as we can put a label on something unknown — even if it is only tangentially related to something familiar, it becomes something we can begin to try to understand. And, at the moment we begin to understand (or think we understand) something, it loses much of its potential to frighten us.

## The Unknown in Game

If this is true in reality for people, it is even more so for players in chronicles, where the potential for danger is imagined at best. If players were to — in real life — witness a human being changing into an animal, their reality would likely be shaken to the core. Whether it inspired fear, curiosity or awe, it would certainly hold their interest.

However, when their characters encounter a human where there was a wolf a moment before, the probable reaction is not fright, confusion or amazement. Being supernatural entities themselves, perhaps even shapeshifters, they will likely begin to assess the situation, making assumptions about what the creature is or is not. And if allowed to feel comfortable in those assumptions, the players will likely, by virtue of having an understanding of the newly encountered shapeshifter, lose much of their fear of it. It becomes “just another shapeshifter,” perhaps an ally, perhaps an enemy, but a known quantity all the same. This familiarity will, inevitably, detract from the darkness and horror of the game.

However, even in a game with clearly defined realities, not everything is knowable. There are, as Shakespeare's Hamlet proclaimed, more things than most of our philosophies can dream of explaining fully. The encountered creature may indeed be a werewolf, a Gangrel vampire, a shapeshifting mage — but it might also be a skin-walking shaman or an animal-spirit that has taken over a human body.

Or, if the Storyteller is creative, the creature may be some unique being that the characters (or the players) have no clue even exists.

## Unique Skinchangers

Not every paranormal creature that exists in the World of Darkness belongs to one of the greater “races.” Yes, there are werewolves, vampires and mages. There are humans and non-humans and some things that seem to walk the line between the two. There are sorcerers and spirits whose influence reaches across the Gauntlet into the Shadow Realm.

But there also exists a potentiality for the unknown — for things that defy strict explanation. Unique creatures — some in the sense of “not standard,” and some that are truly the only one of their kind — that are as different from werewolves, vampires and mages as they are from normal human beings.

These creatures fill in the cracks between the mundane wall of humanity and the building blocks occupied by the “standard” World of Darkness creatures. The skinchangers are the mystery in a world of shadow, the unknown and the unknowable. They add a level of depth to the characters' world — and to that of the player — and can be used as tools for inspiring curiosity, awe and fear, even in normally jaded characters and players.



Take, for example, our earlier encounter: characters witness a human being changing into a wolf. What happens if, rather than a wolf, the human transforms into a house cat? The standard assumption of the human being another werewolf goes out the window, and — rather than limiting the possibilities — with the rejection of that one assumption, an entire world of uncomfortable possibilities open up. And, when the creature then transforms into an eagle and takes flight, or speaks in a human voice or disappears before the characters' eyes, those possibilities flood over the characters, leaving them confused, intrigued and possibly terrified.

Is a house cat more inherently frightening than a wolf? No. But the unknown is.

## How to Use This Book

When traditional knowledge is challenged, the results can be confusing, frightening or awe-inspiring, but they are always interesting. That, at its heart, is the purpose of **Skinchangers**: to provide Storytellers and players with another facet of the World of Darkness that can be used to make their games more interesting.

**Chapter One: Skinners and Thieves** presents shapeshifters who, because of a deep and personal connection to a certain creature, are willing to sacrifice at least a portion of their humanity to gain the ability to take animal shape. Not even the wolves are safe — a “werewolf” haunting a local area might not be an Uratha after all. This chapter also contains a complete set of character generation instructions for skinthief player characters and a fleshed-out variable shifter template system.

**Chapter Two: Beasts of Shadow** pulls back the curtain between the human world and the spirit world. Willing or no, humans often serve as tools to those who dwell in the Shadow Realm, and this chapter offers an in-depth view of those interactions, from members of fanatical human cults who are gifted with the ability to shapeshift in order to fulfill their sacred duties to reluctant victims whose bodies are possessed by animal spirits against their will. This chapter may be of most use to those who implement **Werewolf: The Forsaken** or **Mage: The Awakening**, though many of the changers within don't require knowledge of the spirit rules to use.

**Chapter Three: Shifting Things** gives insight into the world of unique skinchangers: weird items, supernatural diseases, horrific curses and creepy scientific experiments gone bad. Also here are tips for customizing the unique profiles offered, to aid Storytellers in creating their own unique skinchanging creatures.

And finally, the **Appendix: Animal Lore** presents a distillation of information about animals in both reality and folklore, a quick-start reference for more skinchanger ideas from around the world.

## Useful Sources

The roots of **Skinchangers** sink back through history, tangled up with a millennia of lore and legend. A vast multitude of modern and ancient resources were tapped to produce this book, and while it would be impossible to reference all of them, the following are some of the most useful. These additional sources may be of use to Storyteller and player alike, when viewed as inspiration for skinchangers in World of Darkness games.

### Nonfiction

Brad Steiger's *The Werewolf Book: The Encyclopedia of Shape-shifting Beings* is a must-have for those who want to begin exploring the vastly diverse world of shapeshifters. It spans the entire history of shapeshifting creatures, from pre-history and ancient legend through the werewolf crazes of the Middle Ages and right up to modern literature and movies.

*The Beast of Bray Road: Tailing Wisconsin's Werewolf* details one reporter's real life adventure investigating reports of a werecreature in modern Wisconsin. Linda S. Godfrey does an incredible job of presenting the balance of skepticism and growing paranoia that happens when modern people are faced with the possibility that something supernatural is going on around them.

*Half Human, Half Animal: Tales of Werewolves and Related Creatures* is a notable collection of skinchanger stories, but has been included in nonfiction for the insight Jamie Hall presents about the cultures where these stories originated. *Half Human* also includes an extensive (but not in depth) review of many of the books, internet sites, television shows and movies which are available to those interested in shapeshifters in modern culture.

### Fiction

Jim Butcher's *Fool Moon* (*Book Two of the Dresden Files*) is a strong read, featuring werewolves of differing origins. The series is a recommended read for those interested in a world populated with more than a single kind of skinchanger.

For those interested in animal-born shifters who can take human shape, *The Fox Woman* by Kij Johnson is a poignant example of the world seen through a kitsune's eyes.

While classic folklore is full of examples of shapeshifting creatures, many collections seem to be variations of the same story over and over. By virtue of capturing tales from around the globe, Andrew Lang's extensive fairy tale collection (*The Blue Fairy Book*, *The Green Fairy Book*, etc.) offers an uncharacteristically broad range of origins, motivations and profiles for skinchangers.

In C.E. Murphy's *Urban Shaman*, Jo Walker discovers that even reluctant shamans may find interaction with Coyote to be a transformational experience. The modern setting is particularly appropriate for inspiration for spirit-focused shapeshifting.

Charles de Lint's Newford Series, especially *Medicine Road*, includes many fabulous portrayals of the amalgam of modern settings and shapeshifters.

## Movies

*The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1996) is, although a muddled movie in its own right, one of the most pointed examples of chimera in a modern setting. Purists may prefer the 1977 version by the same name, which was itself a remake of the 1933 *Island of Lost Souls*. All three movies are, of course, adaptations of H.G. Wells' 1895 novel, which can be found online in its full text at Project Gutenberg: <http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/159>.

Disney's *Brother Bear*, while animated, portrays a surprisingly well-rounded example of humans being transformed into animals through their ties with animal spirits.

## Lexicon

**Animera:** Animals whose brains have been injected with human neurons, resulting in pseudo-human brain development.

**Artifact:** A general profile for any skinchanger that gains its shapeshifting ability from an item. Some Artifacts, rather than bestowing this power on a being, are the actual skinchangers themselves.

**Aspect:** A specific supernatural power, such as a spirit's Numen.

**Chimera:** A scientifically created being wherein human and animal cells have been merged to create an artificial hybrid, includes Animera and Humera.

**Demonkin:** A general name for a creature that, similar to legendary demons, appears when summoned.

**Humera:** The result of merging animal cells with a human zygote.

**Lobison:** An Argentinian Seventh Son-profiled skinchanger.

**Seventh Son:** A unique skinchanger profile wherein the skinchanger changes into a monstrous animal form as the result of a family curse tied to lineage order.

**Skinchangers:** Things that change shape from human to animal or visa versa. These transformations can be one time or ongoing. Uratha are one type of skinchanger.

**Spawned:** Assumedly hybrids between humans and supernatural beings of a demonic nature; those who fall in this skinchanger profile may not know their heritage.

**Territorial:** A skinchanger profile in which the skinchanger is directly tied to a particular location.

**Zoonotics:** Humans who have been infected with viruses that alter their bodies to take on more animal aspects.



She was lost in the forest. Each tree seemed another shadow-giant, reaching to hug her until her bones jellied and throw her in the kettle for pudding. Her stumbling feet betrayed her over and again, until she was brown as a groundhog because of the dirt smeared on her face and hands. She began to cry.

"Hush, hush! Child, do not cry!" came the voice of the black-eyed toad that watched her. The girl drew back in fear, but the voice of the toad was so surprisingly sweet that she forgot her parents' warnings: "Ware the words of the strange." She leaned toward the toad.

"Why should I not cry? I am lost and in the forest, and without friends, and my grandmother will be worried!" She still wept as she spoke, and the toad's long tongue lashed out to catch the falling tears.

The toad's black eyes winked, one after another, and the toad said, "You are not without friends," its sweet voice pleasing to her ears, "for I am here, and I will help you along. The path to your grandmother's house lies between the white-barked trees. Walk always with one to your right and left, and you shall arrive safely."

She thanked the toad, and began to walk through the forest with renewed hope. She did as the toad said, always keeping between the white-barked trees, and the warm light spilling from her grandmother's windows soon welcomed her.

Grandmother was in bed when the girl arrived. "Come closer, my granddaughter," the old woman croaked, "and tell how you come here so late." The girl told of her journey, and how she became lost and in the woods, and of the black-eyed toad who gave her guidance.

"Yes," the grandmother wheezed, "the toad is a friend of mine. It has given me a gift this day, and I shall repay it in kind." With that, the grandmother reached beneath her breast and pulled, tearing the thin human skin it wore until the wolf beneath it was free. Then, it ate the girl. "My, what a full stomach have I," the wolf said, and it left the house on its four feet.

The black-eyed toad found the wolf in the forest. "If you enjoyed your treat, then you owe me a favor," claimed the toad, its black eyes gleaming in the moonlight.

"Yes," agreed the wolf, "and here is the favor!" And it fell upon the toad, biting it once so hard that its two black eyes fell onto the ground, then swallowing the rest. "Ware the words of the strange," the wolf said, then left.

The two black eyes lay there, shining, until some time later when a man crawled upon them and returned them to his head.

# Chapter One: Skinners and Thieves

## When Wild Minds Want for Wild Bodies

Dissatisfaction with one's lot in life is not an unusual feeling. Children want to be older, elders want to be younger, men want to be stronger, women want to be prettier, the poor want to be rich and the rich want to be richer. Feeling discomfort in one's body is also common. Prepubescent children cannot control their bodies or their voices, tripping awkwardly over their too-long feet; some men realize they are women in the wrong body, or vice-versa. Youths eventually outgrow that age, and today there are procedures for the transsexual.

But there are some for whom few options exist. These people feel great identification with wild cats, or with wolves or with reptiles. Such people do not just want to be among these animals, or be like them — they want to *be* them. There are no surgeries to help them in this endeavor. And such people fit poorly into “normal” society: they want to act like the creatures as well as be like them, and such savagery has little place in a human world. This drive so takes some people that they go to great lengths for that kinship: they may sharpen their teeth to become like cats or wolves, or pay for colorful tattoos to make tiger stripes or a lizard's scales.

Such extremists have the urge to take on the forms and minds of creatures other than themselves, and come very close to tapping one of the world's secrets. The power, the shapes and the forms of the creatures they want to be, are there to be had, if one can but see how. Forms cannot be had for free; they must be given, which is rarer than rare, or *stolen*. Only someone with the proper mindset of her victim can manage to steal the identity of another, and then she must still know the methods. One creature might give up its tooth and claw with its skin; another's bark and bite might live in its blood. But this is how the wild men, those who do not want to be men, earn their freedom: taking skins and stealing power.

## What Makes a Thief?

One of the defining characteristics of skinners and thieves is that their power of transformation is not innate. If one's imbued skins are denied her, or if the living source of her power is somehow released from its bond, the shapeshifter is at a loss until she can renew her rituals or create new skins. For this reason, and the creatures' natural inclinations, this type of skinchanger is rarely seen outside its animal's natural habitat; it is usually too difficult to find a poison dart frog in North America for a skinchanger with that affinity to reside in the United States.

Even if the skins or donors of animal blood are not stolen, the skins do not last forever. A thief of flesh must don the skin of an animal in order to become it, submerging her humanity beneath the flesh and fur of the beast. Over time, the skin rots and falls to pieces, and the skinner must find another to take its place. A thief of power finds in himself some ability to draw the identity of the creature from it, whether by drinking its blood, consuming its breath, taking its seed or some other dark art. Eventually, the animal will have no more

*Beauty is only skin  
deep./Though she may  
be a beauty, it is but  
one layer of skin.*

— Anonymous  
proverb/Anonymous  
Japanese proverb

power to give. The donor may simply die of old age, but more often the constant drain of vitality kills the animal slowly but surely.

As with werewolves, skinchangers who die while wearing their alternate forms return to their original shapes, usually that of filthy humans wearing tattered garments cut from the appropriate type of animal. A few skinchangers do not return to their original shape, usually because they are borrowing a living animal's flesh for their transformation.

When in the animal's form, a skinthief acquires all the creature's Physical Attributes but keeps her own Social and Mental Attributes. Despite keeping her Social Attributes, she may not be able to use them effectively on either humans or animals, depending on the Aspects that are a part of her transformation.

## Totem and Talisman

Every skinchanger has a totem animal. The animal is whatever creature that the shapeshifter associates with his own nature. A nocturnal fellow who looks at other people as “smaller” and “prey” while desiring classical wisdom clearly idolizes the owl. The woman who roughly maintains her position at the head of her group of friends might consider herself the “bitch” alpha of her pack. These associations are what develop into skinchanger-totem animal relationships, though these associations are often even more pronounced.

Note that, unlike the Totem Merit in **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, a skinthief has no agreement with the spirit of her totem animal. A cat-based skinthief doesn't talk with Cat or Languid Cat or any of the many cat-spirits that roam and hunt in the spirit world, and those spirits almost certainly pay the skinthief no attention. A totem animal is simply the creature the skinthief emulates. If a spirit representing her totem animal ever *does* get in touch with her, the skinthief should probably be honored and worried. Mostly worried.

Nearly every skinthief has a talisman. Talismans are the tools that contain the skinthieves' powers of transformation. For skinthieves, the talisman is absolutely necessary. Usually a specially-treated hide from the appropriate creature, the talisman is created by the skinchanger through a special and specific ceremony; the skinchanger must have and use the talisman in order to shapeshift. When a talisman is stolen or lost, the skinchanger cannot change shape until he creates and attunes a new one — a truly significant effort.

A skinthief's talisman is entirely personal in nature — though the talisman may be stolen, it can never be used by anyone other than the skinthief who made it. Even another skinthief with the same totem animal and mystical tradition cannot use it. Still, talisman-skins are stolen, both to rob the skinthief of the power to change and for the connection they hold to the skinthief — some shamans know how to use such a tool as a weapon against its owner.

Most talismans supernaturally withstand the rigors of time. Most, in fact, lose the potency of their magic before

they begin to rot, even when the enchantment process does not involve traditional curing. Still, many talismans derive some measure of their power from the energy released by the totem animal's death, and that eventually fades. As such, most skinchangers know how to create a new talisman to replace an older one whose strength is flagging. Performing that ritual scatters to the winds any power in the old talisman, and weakens (though does not sever completely) the connection between the skinthief and the last talisman.

More rare are talismans that never need to be replaced. Magic prevents them from degrading into nothing, though most such talismans are cured or otherwise treated to help stave off natural decay. The power they hold for their skinthieves does not diminish with time, eliminating the need to hunt and re-enchant a talisman every month. Though skinthieves with this sort of tradition are able to create a new talisman to replace an old, doing so represents a significant expenditure in time and resources (magical *and* financial). Most skinthieves would rather spend at least a token effort to recover a stolen talisman before writing it off. Skinchangers rarely have a surfeit of money or essence, after all.

Skinthieves who operate without talismans are rare in the extreme. To steal the power and essence of a beast and bind it into oneself, rather than what was once a portion of that creature, is a nearly unknown skill. It is rarely shared in the manner of a master to a student. Instead, it is usually found only by the most inquisitive and intuitive, who learn how to perform the appropriate ritual through soul journeys, inspired experimentation, observation of mystical patterns in nature and occasionally ancient writings (usually not in books). Their talismans are themselves, and they cannot lose their talisman and power of shapechange to ill luck or ill intention.

## Lost Talismans — the Penalty

No skinthief wants to lose her talisman or worse, have it stolen from her. It's more than an inconvenience, it's somebody else holding in his hands a piece of her soul and keeping her from communing with her second (or true) nature. While nearly any skinthief would feel both outrage and impotence in such a situation and then proceed to attempt a recovery, they can't all succeed. When the skinthief can't find his stolen talisman, he ends up having to make a new one.

Those skinthieves whose talismans are never any more permanent than the moon have little trouble. They can simply go out, hunt down a new creature and steal its power as cruelly as they stole it the first time. Skinthieves with permanent talismans are less fortunate — when they need to replace a stolen talisman, they go through a truly draining process.

Dedicating a new talisman requires great effort. The skinthief must hunt and kill his totem animal in order to create it. At the height of the ritual, he spends a **dot** of

Willpower to seal a bit of his soul into the talisman. Such expenditure is extreme, and explains why most skinthieves would prefer to retrieve a talisman rather than create one from scratch. The skinthief must spend eight experience points in order to regain a spent dot of Willpower.

## Creating a Skinthief Character

Create a mortal character as described in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 34–35. In human shapes, skinthieves are no more remarkable than their mortal neighbors.

In Step Five, add the Skinthief supernatural template:

Add one point of Supernatural Tolerance.

Reduce Morality to six. Becoming a skinthief is a process that tends to shake the once-human's world. Even when this is not the case, the unavoidable cruelty in claiming skins makes it difficult for an established skinthief to maintain a high Morality.

Choose a totem animal to define your skinthief.

Choose Aspects (see pp. 30–36), including a type of talisman and a thieving method.

Continue on to Steps Six and Seven, choosing Merits and figuring out the character's advantages in his human and other form(s).

## Step One: Character Concept

Though it often seems easier to begin by assembling a set of Aspects for your player or Storyteller characters and then figuring out how to fit them into the chronicle, working this way can make it harder to fully flesh out the character without putting in extra work to justify this ability or that. Instead, begin with a look at the person behind the skinthief — who is he, and what motivates him? You can figure out the cool powers later. Besides, like saving dessert for last, anticipation heightens the enjoyment.

First, think about what kind of person actually becomes a skinthief. This manner of skinchanging isn't one that a character just falls into. A rogue medical experiment turns a researcher into a shifting lizard-man and some shamans may be chosen by spirits, but nobody can force a thief to cut off that skin and slip it on. Unlike experiencing the First Change, something determined by blood, becoming a skinthief is a choice. (Even "the Stray," p. 47, though portrayed as an unwilling skinthief, could choose to die rather than kill other dogs on the street.)

To actually want the power to shapeshift and leave his human side behind, a skinthief must have some motivation. Power is an easy start — everybody can see the benefit to becoming a magpie and flying off with unguarded valuables or becoming a bear and shredding those who have done you wrong. But even simple power needs momentum behind it. One skinchanger seeks out the raw, violent strength of an animal so he can avenge himself on those in his family who abused him when he was young. The scion of a lost fortune takes on the cunning and flexibility of the monkey in order to regain the life to which she was once accustomed.

Secrecy is a strong reason for a character to become a skinthief. Like putting on a new set of clothes, wearing something else's shape can make a character entirely unrecognizable to his friends and acquaintances. Some skinthieves might need this secrecy to maintain their human identities. A city detective pulls on the form of a wild dog so he can hamstring and kill the scum that he can't keep in jail without fear of losing his job, and a celebrity becomes a mouse so she can sneak away from the paparazzi and privately indulge in her vices.

But there is more to secrecy than just keeping one's activities unknown. The need for privacy is a feeling that runs deep in many, and can drive otherwise ordinary people to the extraordinary lengths necessary to become a skinthief. Even when there's nothing particular to keep secret, a character may just have the very powerful need to *get away and hide*. There are few more secure places to hide than in an entirely different body, and whatever inspires this strong desire for privacy — parents who instilled their child with an inherent sense of shame, overwhelming guilt over a past action or simply intense paranoia — it can be incredibly potent.

Finally, there are ways to accomplish all of these things through different means. Hewing the hide from a creature and treating it with occult concoctions and rituals that alter one's very nature isn't most peoples' first instinct when they want revenge, concealment or privacy. People who take the grueling and mysterious first steps to become skinchangers almost inevitably already feel some form of brotherhood with the animal of their totems. They are the people who already see life as a kind of dog-eat-dog setup, whether they are the eaters or the near-eaten. Most skinchangers have powerful *wants*: he wants to fly like a hawk, with the freedom and power that encapsulates; she wants to be as invisible as an ant, never noticed but everywhere.

But there's more. Many who have such strong feelings for certain creatures idolize and respect them. These follow and watch birds in their natural habitats, read scores of books on wolves or become zoologists. They don't become skinthieves. To associate oneself so closely with a creature and still make the *choice* to kill it, desecrate its skin in a messy ritual and then *wear* that skin so you, rather than the beast, can have its power requires a special, self-destructive frame of mind. There are some skinchanging traditions, handed down through the ages, that involve respect for

the animal and manage to avoid killing the creature for its power — but these are rare. Most skinthieves must have the obscene mindset that allows them to harm the beast that they will become, or that they already are.

The last step in consummating a character's transition from mortal to skinthief is the obsessive pursuit of that animal form. Something about the way skinthieves perceive the world makes them certain that such a transition is possible, and all they need to do is find out how. Because of their instinctive natures, few skinthieves ever commit the processes that they learn to writing — though the ink-stained journal of a lonely taxidermist is the perfect place to find some clues.

Instead, a blooming skinthief more often gets her inspiration by painstakingly extracting common details from myriad disparate urban legends or old, backcountry traditions. Such research sometimes ends in the logical and pseudo-scientific execution of a method, or with a successful ritual inspired by obsession and fever-dreams. Some skinthieves actually hand their secrets down from generation to generation, much like a tribal shaman might pass down the secrets of medicinal plants, exorcising demons and treating with spirits.

However skinthieves learn the process, through tradition, deduction or pure inspiration, the learning process always ends with the ritual. For some thieves, it is short and jarring, for others, long and harsh, but the ritual binds them with an animal, gives them the ability to change shape and irrevocably changes their natures to something more — or less — than human.

## Steps Two, Three and Four: Select Attributes, Skills and Skill Specialties

In human forms, skinthieves have no especial advantage over the mortals they appear to still be. They have the normal spread of Attributes that every human develops, and they acquire no more or fewer Skills and Skill Specialties than any other person who has had a lifetime. Above and beyond the base dot in each Attribute, a skinthief gets five, four and three dots to place in her primary, secondary and tertiary Attribute sets. She has 11, seven and four dots for her primary, secondary and tertiary Skill categories. Buying the fifth dot in any Attribute or Skill costs two dots, as normal, and she chooses three Skill Specialties to describe as she wishes.

Still, just because skinthieves have the same number of Attributes to spread around doesn't mean that skinthieves don't have any special motivations or trends. A small, weak man, bullied all his life, may entertain elaborate fantasies about being an enormous and physically-powerful lion, until he gains the real ability to change into one. Likewise, a large man, bulky but clumsy, may dream of being a flex-

ible, gymnastically-infallible monkey or bird, freed from his human limitations. Motivation is something that can easily influence and be influenced by a skinthief's Attribute set.

Skills are similarly influential. One who seeks to hide may have a high Stealth rating — or she may be completely inept at the area, that being why she needed to become as a mouse. The Skills that most skinchangers have are Animal Ken and frequently some form of Mental Skill — usually Academics or Science — that applies to their research on the topic of their chosen totem animal. People who yearn to connect with some creature outside themselves must first learn what creature is right for them, and all of them feel some measure of empathy with the animal kingdom.

Skill Specialties vary. Young skinthieves often focus their Animal Ken and their Mental Skills on their totem creature. After they become older and more experienced, they may develop Skill Specialties of use in their other forms: Brawl (bear form) or Investigation (scent), for example.

## Step Five: Add Skinthief Template

It is a new life, of sorts, to become a thief of skins and power. A human who experiences this change is no longer quite human. In her own mind, she has surpassed her mortal limitations to find her true soul, the animal within her. To others, she has regressed, retreated from the nobility of humankind to seek refuge behind the shelter of instinct. Blessing or curse, the first time a ritual lets the skin settle on the shoulders and make a human something else, the spirit is changed. There's no going back.

Note that a character cannot possess multiple supernatural templates, and some Merits are not available to supernatural characters. Skinthieves, specifically, cannot possess the Wolf-Blooded or the Unseen Sense Merits. While a wolf-blood could theoretically find some means of becoming a skinthief, the Merit would be lost upon the assumption of the template, as the Merit would be if it had been added to any other supernatural template.

## Supernatural Tolerance

When skinchangers first change form, they touch a little bit of the spirit animal deep within them. Though their connection to the spirit is weak and barely comparable to that of a werewolf's Primal Urge, the connection exists. This nature that drives the skinthief manages to bond an animal's skin and soul to his own, and the act of doing so for the first time releases and reinforces that supernatural nature.

Skinchangers cannot increase their Supernatural Tolerance with Merit dots, or spend experience points to strengthen it. Their Supernatural Tolerance is very like an atrophied form of the werewolves' Primal Urge, a connection to the world of the human-spirits where the skinchang-

ers trespass. Supernatural Tolerance serves only as a meager defense against the depredations that supernatural creatures can bring to bear, adding to Resistance traits any time when Primal Urge would (i.e., in contested rolls). Supernatural Tolerance serves no other purpose.

## Essence

Skinchangers often have a meager supply of Essence that they can use to fuel some of their Aspects. They do not need Essence to change shape, and many Aspects do not need Essence — which is good, because just as skinthieves steal their skins, they must steal their Essence. They have no auspice moon's gift of power, and they are almost never strong or savvy enough to capture and hold a locus. Instead, their stores of Essence come from the life energy of their totem animal, usually as a part of the ritual that creates their talismans.

## Choose Aspects

As werewolves have Gifts that allow them to perform wondrous feats and talk with the spirits, skinchangers have Aspects. A skinthief's Aspects determine the shape of his power, how his second shape is bound to him and what special Abilities he has while in that form. A skinchanger has nine points to distribute among his Aspects. See "Aspects," p. 30.

## Step Six: Select Merits

Skinchangers have seven dots to distribute among the various Merits at character generation. Some Physical Merits are more common than others among skinthieves. Direction Sense simulates the ease with which animals find their way around their homes. Older skinchangers with smaller totem animals learn Fighting Finesse, to attack more effectively with birds' talons or small animals' teeth. Fleet of Foot, Iron Stomach, Natural Immunity and Strong Back all help a skinthief be fast, hardy or strong like his ideal animal. Many skinthieves learn Danger Sense as a Mental Merit.

Social Merits usually have no direct connection to a skinchanger's animal life. They are thus rarer, because many skinthieves try to distance themselves from the human world. Still, that's hardly the rule. Skinthieves might have Contacts among other animal enthusiasts, people who share the feeling of affinity with this or that creature. Some skinthieves might break off contact with such groups after their transformation, seeing them as fakes, but others could continue the relationship, searching for clues that there might be others like them.

Some skinthieves follow ancient traditions, handed down from generations past. They often have the Mentor Merit. Because skinthieves are often rather solitary in nature, the Merit's rating rarely rises above one or two dots,

and many sever their connections with their old teachers completely.

Resources is a Merit that skinthieves may have but usually lose or forsake as they degenerate into animals, and it is the same with Retainers and Status.

New Social Merits, not limited to skinthieves, follow.

## Animal Affinity (● to ●●●)

One particular animal species never seems to mind your character's presence and reacts with remarkable favor when he tries to interact with them. Cats are always friendly, or wolves accept him as one of the pack.

Each dot in this Merit adds a +1 modifier to all Social rolls made to influence or understand the chosen species of animal. Characters may purchase this Merit multiple times to affect multiple species.

**Special:** Skinchangers who take this Merit for their totem animal treat the one-dot version as the two-dot version and the two-dot version as three dots. They cannot purchase the three-dot version of this Merit.

## Predator's Bearing (●●)

Something about your character reminds people and animals of the predators that hunt them. A human feels a base fear in his reptilian brain that catches his breath or causes hairs to stand up on the back of his head. Animals stand stock still, watching the character out of the corner of an eye, ready to run should she step close.

This Merit adds +1 die to any Social roll that would benefit from such unease. Intimidation benefits most directly from this Merit, but some forms of Expression (reciting black, actually frightening poetry or appearing to be a "dangerous" rock star), Persuasion (fear can make for an exciting seduction) and Socialize (the cool kid who gathers the crowd can be disturbingly scary at times) are all viable Skills. The bonus from Predator's Bearing can apply to animals, if appropriate.

Skinchangers who emulate carnivorous or impressive animals commonly take this Merit.

**Drawback:** This isn't something that a character can just turn on or off. Many other Social rolls suffer a penalty because of the character's nerve-wracking habits. Any Social action that such a demeanor would make more difficult suffers a -1 penalty. The character's efforts to sing a sweet song or act the waif must first overcome her natural "hungry" tendencies. People are often reluctant to deal with someone who frightens them (not everybody's turned on by the thrill of dangerous partners). And creepy people receive more scrutiny, which they can ill afford when trying to lie.

**Special:** Creatures that are already top predators in their regions (such as lions on the savannah) are unafraid of other predators. Character with this Merit cannot apply it against such creatures. This includes supernaturally-enhanced predators, such as vampires or werewolves.



## Socially Small (•••)

Whether natural or carefully cultivated, your character is easy to overlook. Socially, he's ignorable or of negligible importance. He's not necessarily forgettable. People are apt to remember him as they are anyone else, if they even notice him in the first place. Even when they do look at him, he usually weighs in as "unthreatening."

Mechanically, the character gains a +1 modifier to Subterfuge and Stealth rolls, since people are paying less attention to him, and thus his lies and his attempts to go unnoticed. Some other Skills may also benefit from this Merit, at the Storyteller's discretion. There are times when being small could benefit a player in Politics or someone using Streetwise.

More generally, people with this Merit register as someone whom people don't need to pay attention to. The character gets chosen last for kickball, but the police don't pick him up while looking for the usual suspects. Shopkeepers who are strict about loiterers consider him a non-issue. People and creatures who get nervous around others feel a little less so when it's just him. Even prey animals react a little less to his presence. This amounts to a -1 penalty to the Wits + Composure rolls to notice this character as a detail.

Skinchangers who emulate small or prey animals commonly take this Merit.

**Drawback:** Even when the character *wants* to be noticed, he's still overlookable or unimportant. Waiting

with others to get customer service's attention, everyone else successfully shouts over him. No one really takes his threats seriously, even when he means them. This applies a -1 penalty to Expression, Intimidation and Socialize rolls, as well as any other actions the Storyteller deems appropriate.

## Den (••••)

Indulging one's need to change form and spend time as an animal can be... difficult, especially for an urban skinchanger. Unless your character lives in the middle of nowhere and all by himself, there's still the chance that someone will be in the wrong place at the wrong time and see him change, and in the city it's near impossible to find real privacy.

This Merit represents a place that your character knows about where no one else ever goes. It might be the shack Old Man Grezny used for moonshine back during Prohibition, or the ancient and abandoned Allied Products factory down the street. Whatever this hidden place is, the character can access it in near-absolute secrecy and squirrel away her little trinkets without fear of detection. A skinchanger can also shapechange there and head out to experience her animal side, confident that no one's watching.

When someone tries to track her back to her den, in animal or human form, that person suffers a -2 penalty to all relevant rolls.

## Step Seven:

### Determine Advantages

Calculate the skinchanger's physical advantages and Willpower as described in Chapter 4 of the **World of Darkness Rulebook**. Use the guidelines in that chapter to also figure out the appropriate physical advantages for the character's other form(s). Birds have smaller Size and Health but decent, often better Speed, whereas a bear has greater Size and Health and Speed about equal to a man.

Once that is done, turn to the remaining advantages: Morality, Virtue and Vice. Each deserves some special consideration for a skinthief character.

### Morality

Many skinchangers wish to be the animals whose identities they steal, preferring to have been born a cat or boar rather than human. "Be careful what you wish for," one might say, but they would not listen. When the changer wears another form, the spirit of the creature is in the changer. Her mind is much like that of her totem creature, though her base human cunning always shines through. Such dissociation from common social mores is hard to bear, and she may begin to lose her grasp on her human self.

Unlike werewolves, for whom shapeshifting into their wolf and wolf-related forms is natural, a skinthief's practice is something of an aberration. Skinchangers do not have Harmony, but they do have an altered sense of Morality. When a skinchanger commits an offense against her Morality in animal shape, she tastes the freedom that life as a beast offers. If she fails to rationalize her action to herself, she is more likely to associate her loosened morals with her skinthievery, and some part of her likes it. She does not roll for the sin until she returns to human form and is beset again by conscience, and if the act causes degeneration, subtract one die from the subsequent Morality roll to determine whether or not she suffers a derangement.

Skinchangers with high Morality manage to balance their human roots and their animalist nature; even if they are mischievous as animals, they are not far distanced from their human empathies. As the skinchanger loses Morality, she acts more and more like the beast she emulates, losing not only her human morals but, eventually, her human intelligence.

**Morality 10:** Skinthieves with perfect Morality are rarer than rare. Not only do the methods necessary to be a skinchanger usually preclude such saintliness, remaining true to the human ethical ideals is harder when the blood of a beast runs through your veins. Those who manage to maintain perfect Morality do so not by dissociating their animal "habits" from their human life, but by reconciling the two and realizing that shapeshifting is just another aspect of their humanity, and the instincts and urges shapeshifting gives them are another challenge.

**Morality 9:** Very nearly without peer, shapeshifters with this level of Morality have learned not just how to control their bestial urges but how to use the natural instincts to be a more moral person. Some skinchangers at this level sought out their powers in order to do more good or better prove themselves, but most by far have worked hard to rehabilitate themselves from what they once were.

**Morality 8:** Becoming an animal does not excuse one from human obligations and ethics. This is the very clear realization of a skinthief at Morality 8. She has worked hard to reach this understanding, forcing herself to leave behind her old, immoral habits and move on to use her shapechanging just as she would any other tool — for living her life cleanly, not without merit.

**Morality 7:** At this level, most skinthieves mentally separate the two parts of their lives. Living as a human is boring and restrictive, not least because it is the place where ethics and morals matter. As a beast, the most wonderful things are possible. One can run free, unrecognized and unbound by mortal obligations. Still, memory is a blessing and a curse. Learning what she did during her wild hunt strikes her as she resumes her human shape and may drive her into despair. It is much more common for skinchangers of this Morality to lose it before they gain it (if they ever do), and it is often a downward spiral from there.

**Morality 6:** The life of a beast is a thing to envy, and a shapeshifter eventually begins to let his longing for that life infect his human life. And it's only worse for the knowledge that he could be there, now. He finds himself staring at a coworker's neck or hamstrings with hunger, looking at the fly on the wall and licking his lips or wanting to dig his way into the ground for warmth. He can shake off the urge easily, but such urges are impossible to perfectly hide.

**Morality 5:** Habits that fit the animal more than the human begin to show through. A skinchanger might snap (literally) at her friends unconsciously or freeze in a car's headlights for a moment before shaking it off. He wants to spend more time in his borrowed skin, and he neglects the human aspects of his life. Relatives hear from him only erratically, or not at all. Bills often go unpaid for at least a month. His employer might grow nervous about him, possibly even putting the skinthief on a probation of some sort or encouraging him to take a vacation.

Additionally, the life of an animal is a free one, and such freedom is hard to willingly give up. At this level of Morality and below, the expenditure of a Willpower point is required in order for a character to return to her natural shape.

**Morality 4:** Skinchangers begin to forget about the human aspects of their life entirely. They're unlikely to go to work without a strenuous effort to remember the obligation (meaning that, soon, few have such an obligation). If she was tidy before, she now organizes her home (nest, burrow, den, etc.) more animalistically, having separate places for sleep, food storage, waste disposal and shit and not much else. She drops spare food on the floor of her den rather than using the refrigerator (if her instincts involve keeping extra



food). Her bathroom may soon become a place of great filth, since she often doesn't think to use the toilet, unless she is tied to a naturally fastidious creature. Not that using either matters, since the utility companies probably shut her off some time ago. Rousing herself to interact with the human world, while difficult and annoying, may be worth it as the only way to protect her "territory" by paying her rent check three months late or cooperating with the authorities so that she is not jailed.

**Morality 3:** Even paying rent is beyond a skinthief at this Morality. He wants nothing more than to *be* an animal of his totem. He knows that he is also human, but he hates it. He keeps away from that side of himself when he can, wearing his second skin as often as possible. When in human form, he acts very clearly like an animal, chasing other creatures, running from humans and other predators and doing whatever hunting-gathering necessary to live. If he must talk to another human, he does so reluctantly. At Morality 3, a skinthief's maximum effective Intelligence is 4.

**Morality 2:** For all purposes, the skinchanger acts like her totem animal all the time. She does little but indulge her animalist urges, taking only a few occasions to satisfy her human selfishness. She takes human form only when necessary to communicate with another human (something she does only if forced) or to renew her shapechanging talisman. At Morality 2, a skinthief's maximum effective Intelligence is 3.

**Morality 1:** Only the threat of death or losing the ability to change form will force a Morality 1 skinchanger to return to his human form. He wants nothing more than to live as a beast, forgetting his human nature completely if possible. At Morality 1, a skinthief's maximum effective Intelligence is 2.

At **Morality 0**, a skinchanger believes herself to be the creature completely. She forgets that she was ever anything but a raven or bear and acts as one for the remainder of her life. Moreover, she forgets the rituals necessary to create her talisman, or that she even needs one. If she has a permanent talisman (see the Permanent Talisman Aspect, p. XX), she may still be able to use her animal shape. Otherwise, her skin rots or her source of power runs dry, and she eventually becomes nothing more than a human with a particularly irrevocable delusion. Morality 0 skinthieves have maximum effective Intelligences of 1. Only in extraordinary circumstances can one be brought back from crossing this boundary.

## Derangements

People who answer their animalist urges with magic and thievery — rather than the usual repression — tend toward some derangements more than others. The following are the most common derangements and how they may manifest.



**Depression and Melancholia:** Skinchangers who suffer from depression usually do so because they have trouble finding the opportunity to change their forms and feel trapped. It took so long to find a way for escaping their prosaic human lives, and now it's useless. The stupid office or boring wife keeps them busy all the goddamn day, so there's no chance to even take a breather in the woods with that lovely, lovely skin. No room to do anything the way they want to, because everything and everyone is so close and the neighbor would scream and call the cops if he saw the skin; he's even complaining about pets in the building.

It can be torture.

Depression develops early in a skinchanger's career and is a result of not being able to realize one's base instincts rather than any overwhelming sense of them, unlike other derangements skinchangers commonly suffer.

**Suspicion and Paranoia:** In the animal world, awareness is survival. Suffering from undue suspicion is a survival instinct, and skinchangers have two worlds to survive — the animal world they love and the human world they never quite fit. Human society, in fact, doesn't want people to get out; it needs everyone, even the outcasts, in order to make it what it is. Slipping on that skin and getting into the wilderness, with the animals and beasts that don't care about anything beyond getting their next meal (or becoming one), is an affront to humanity, an insult, and there are people who Don't. Like. That.

Suspicion is usually a mid-term affliction for skinchangers. It develops after the animal survival instincts have some time to seep into a shifter's personality and become applied to the human side of things.

**Fixation and Obsessive Compulsion:** Just as animals care most for their security — vigilance is the price of their survival — skinthieves begin to worry in the same way. The human world, especially, is a dangerous place, and their territories must be made safe. Marking territory in the hallway to make sure no one comes near the apartment. Hide extra meat from the last kill under the rug, or the stairway, whichever's safer. A warning growl should be enough to keep the more timid creatures away. Having a second exit from the den can be a boon.

These are good derangements for a skinchanger with low Morality. The fixation is on something she sees as important to her safety, but from an animal perspective. One who wears a cat's skin might seek out sandy ground for her bathroom breaks and an owl-wearer could only leave his nest at night, when he is harder to see.

## Vices

Virtues and Vices are at the heart of any character's actions. While it is no easier for a skinchanger to indulge her Virtue for an entire chapter, which would completely replenish her Willpower, giving in to her baser urges is easier. Scents and abilities usually beyond her tug at her will, and an animal's instincts try to overwhelm her human reason. Moreover, many skinchangers seek out that power

in the first place so that they may have a way to safely or more effectively loose their more shadow desires.

The most common Virtues for skinthieves are Fortitude and Hope. As people who suffer the pangs of being born to the wrong bodies, they feel sharply the need to *be* their totem animal. Pain, separation and regret fill a life spent before; with the first enactment of their ritual, they become able to fulfill that need. To remain mentally sound before then, they must have the strength necessary to weather that misery, or be buoyed by the hope that they may eventually find a remedy; for this reason, many skinthieves hold high the Virtues that embody what kept them alive. Prudence and Temperance are the least likely, since few skinchangers believe in the depths of their soul that what they do is safe or natural. Of course, skinthieves display all manners of Virtues, just as any other person might.

For Vices, skinthieves tend toward Lust or Gluttony. Both can represent different aspects of the character's draw toward the animalist life. Lust is *really* wanting one's other shape, wanting the sensation of running through the woods unimpeded by traffic lights or foot traffic or the feel of red blood running over lathered hide into one's mouth. Lust is when a changer chooses to draw his skin over him rather than go to work or visit his daughter. Gluttony is less about needing to shift form to *have* the experience than it is about not wanting to leave the form behind. If rummaging through the neighbor's trash in the form of a raccoon is delicious and vicariously informative, then why stop? Gluttony is what makes a character sit there in his animal shape and watch a robbery rather than retreating, changing shape and calling the police or acting as an animal would in the face of an obvious murder rather than act more human and help. There are no Vices particularly unloved by skinthieves, and all have some adherents.

## Step Eight: Spark of Life

You now have a skinthief, ready to shortchange her human life for the freedom, the lack of cares she has as a member of the animal kingdom. With her newfound skill, she can hide from her fears, try to take revenge on the people who wronged her, root out the secrets that she needs to learn or otherwise be the skinthief she wants to be. But who is she, really?

Take a look at your character sheet. You have 22 points of Skills on there, and three Skill Specialties. What drove your character to learn those skills? Was she self-motivated or did somebody urge her to learn them? Which of them does she use often, maybe weekly or daily? Which of them has she let fall into disuse, and why? Do these Skills connect with her animal life at all? Did she learn them in order to get closer to or feel more like her chosen totem, or did she learn them after she began to shapechange for specific uses as an animal? Think up a few short scenes in which your character uses her skills, in both human and animal forms.

What does your skinthief look like? Is she tall, short,

chubby or bean-pole thin? Or is she perfectly average? What does she usually wear, and what does she do with her clothes when she changes shape? Speaking of changing shape, what does she look like in animal form — is she small for her species, or large? Does she have any distinguishing marks? Does she have any habits unique to either form, or do those habits carry over from one to the other?

Once you've given these some thought, move on to the prelude.

## All Hail the Thief (the Prelude)

While any sort of prelude is a good idea to help you get a grasp of the character, try a three-tier prelude for your skinthief characters. The idea is to take a peek at three different scenes in the character's life, exploring not just his current demeanor but also his past history, how he became the thief he is today.

First, begin with a prelude that introduces you to the character. He is already a skinthief, already has the power to change his form and, as an animal, enact any of his secret hopes or naughty little whims. Figure out what the skinthief might be doing on any given day, or pick a special, post-change event in his life that you want to experience, and play it. Don't bother much with dice, and the prelude shouldn't kill your character or rob him of any of his advantages. If you spent Merit points on Resources or a Retainer, the prelude shouldn't change any of that by crashing all your stocks or killing your servant. The prelude is just something that you're doing as a skinthief.

Now that you've "met" your character in person and have a better idea of who he is, take a moment to make sure the character sheet still mechanically represents him. He might have surprised you by being a devoted pacifist (at least in human form), so that dot in Firearms might be misplaced. Is he living more hand-to-mouth than you expected? Reduce his Resources. Once that's done, you can move on to his "origin story."

Take some time to think about how the skinthief learned the necessary rituals, or the day on which he actually killed his totem animal and changed for the first time. He might have stumbled upon the secret in an ancient book, or maybe he killed the animal he loved and unknowingly curled up in its flesh out of sorrow. Learning what to do and actually doing it may be two separate events, or they could happen almost simultaneously. If they're separated by a decent length of time but you want to play through both, consider cutting from one to the other, or describing a quick learning montage before playing through the moment at which the skinthief permanently separates himself from humanity.

Finally, imagine a scene from *before* the skinthief's change, and play through that. Choose an event that was important in driving him to become a skinchanger, or

choose something that gives you an idea about his pre-skinthief personality. Feel free to skip this step of the prelude, especially if you have a solid impression of your skinthief at this point, but playing your character as a human can help round him out in your mind.

You might want to run through these preludes backwards — human, becoming a skinthief, skinthief. If you want to get an idea of what he was like before he changed and work up to "now" that way, that's perfectly viable. It might shift your perception of the character more than doing it the other way, but that's not altogether a bad thing.



## Experienced Skinthieves

Not every skinthief is a stripling who's just cut his first hide. Some have been living the double life for some time, years even, and have learned enough to know a thing or two about keeping alive. If you're playing in such a game, take a look at the chart below.

First, though, consider this. The older a skinthief gets, the more likely that he'll be missing some tacos from his combo platter. It's hard for skinthieves to hold on to their Morality. Unless you really just want a powerful game, we recommend that you reduce the skinthief's Morality trait by one (from the starting position of six) for each age/experience category. If you'd prefer somewhat more moral skinthieves, give them less experience to represent the effort they must expend to keep their priorities straight.

Seasoned skinthief: 35 experience points, Morality 5 or 20 experience points

Old-hand skinthief: 75 experience points, Morality 4 or 40 experience points

Extreme skinthief: 100 experience points, Morality 3 or 60 experience points



## Changing Shape

Shapeshifting is at the core of every skinthief's life. The need to connect with and become her totem creature was a strong enough influence in her life that the skinchanger sought out or was willing to learn a strange, undoubtedly disturbing occult ritual involving the blood, skin and life of the animal she so adored. Now, her connection with her totem animal is concrete, instilled inside her soul. She doesn't need to feel *off* in her human body any longer, because she can pull on her new body, her *true* body when that feeling gets too strong.



Taking on her other shape is not an innate talent. The skinthief has a hide she must don, a medallion that must be the focus of her momentary concentration or an animal she must touch in order to activate the change and release the other shape of her soul. This is an instant action that needs no roll, but almost always requires a physical effort — sweeping the skin cloak over one's shoulders or eating the creature's enchanted tongue. Not only is this visible to people nearby (giving them an idea of the source of a character's power), but someone who wants to prevent the transformation can immobilize the skinthief with a grapple maneuver.

More than just a motion, whatever a skinthief does to change his shape is part of a ritual he must perform. Every change is an effort of will, an exercise in self-control. The human body doesn't want to change, and the animal spirit must be *made* to consume one. To take on his bestial shape, the skinthief must spend a point of Willpower.

When returning to human shape, a skinthief often makes some appropriate motion: the dog-thief, for example, turns and nips at his shoulder as if doffing a hide shirt or coughs for a moment, hacking up the tongue he swallowed earlier. If prevented from taking this action, the skinthief can still return to his natural form but must make a Resolve + Composure roll in order to marshal his strength of will without panicking and change shape without the normal procedure. Shapechange in this direction does not require the skinchanger to spend a point of Willpower (except at Morality 5 or lower), though he may in order to add three dice to the Resolve + Composure roll as normal.

Most skinchangers return to human form naked, any clothes they may have been wearing destroyed in the transformation or lost to the ritual's mysteries. For this reason, a skinthief usually chooses to doff her clothing before shifting, as long as she has the privacy to do so without attracting attention. If at all possible, she also resumes her human shape someplace equally private, hopefully where she has cached some suitable clothing ahead of time. For this, the Den Merit (see p. 21) is particularly useful. Those few skinchangers whose methods allow them to carry clothing with them metaphysically (see the Bare Necessities Aspect, p. 31) prize the freedom the ability allows them.

In animal form, the creature's Physical Attributes replace the skinchanger's, but he retains his Social and Mental Attributes. His skills remain the same. A good measure of instinctual drives and motor control kick in, but skinchangers new to the art have to spend some time acclimatizing to the nuances of their new shape — it isn't all that obvious how to use one's Expression or Brawl Skills as a hawk or dolphin. Play assumes that characters have been skinchangers long enough to figure out the basics of using any Skills that apply in both forms. Certain Skills, such as Drive, may be unusable in large part no matter how experienced the skinthief.

## Optional Play: Inexperienced Thieves

Some players would like to explore the world of a new skinchanger, one who has just performed his first skin-claiming ritual and is still learning the ropes. Here are a few optional rules for representing his entrance into the world of the skinchanger:

- **Unreliable shapeshifting.** Even though the first ritual changes the shape of her soul irrevocably, the skinthief's connection to her animal form is still weak. She must roll her Resolve + Animal Ken to tease out her bestial side. She must spend the point of Willpower to change shape whether or not she successfully changes. This doesn't affect the skinthief's ability to return to her normal form.

- **Weak soul.** Because her soul will not settle completely after its initial upheaval until the talisman-forging ritual has been performed a few more times (or, in the case of skinthieves with permanent talismans, after several months to a year), the skinchanger has a Supernatural Tolerance rating of zero until she comes into her own.

- **Conflicting reflexes.** In her animal body, the skinthief will always have the urge to act as the animal. Unfortunately, her human reflexes fight constantly with these new instincts, making it hard for her to act at all. She suffers a -2 penalty on all Physical and Social actions as her mind and new body interact confusedly. The strange instincts also interfere with her ability to focus on a train of thought, applying a -1 penalty to any Mental actions. Some skinthieves have powerful instincts (see the Strong Instincts Aspect, p. 35). They may use any Skills the animal has naturally without penalty, but if they try to use Skills based on their human learning, they suffer the above penalties.

- **Difficulty communicating.** Until the skinthief grows accustomed to the body and its natural modes of communication, other animals recognize her as an interloper. Likewise, she doesn't know how to interpret their social cues. As a result, animals react almost universally with hostility. Mostly a roleplaying concern, the character can make a Wits + Animal Ken roll at

–1 die to interpret animals' cues and a Presence or Manipulation + Persuasion (or potentially Intimidate) roll at –2 dice to placate an animal.

These difficulties should be worked out during play and incrementally reduced. The Storyteller can choose to eliminate a penalty if it came up during play and the player successfully weathered the consequences or otherwise learned from the event. A skinchanger in fox form, for example, engages in combat, getting a hard lesson in how to fight as a vulpine. After the session, the Storyteller removes the –2 penalty from the Brawl Skill, or lessens it to –1.

Alternatively, the Storyteller can treat these penalties as Flaws, per the optional rule in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, pp. 217–219. When the above penalties seriously inconvenience a character, give her a point of experience. This does mean that players of inexperienced characters will likely earn greater experience reward penalties. Ideally, this experience should be spent on reducing the penalties that cause them, but some people refuse to learn from their mistakes (and instead spend the experience in other areas). If this is a source of contention for other players, the Storytellers may insist that experience earned from this source be spent on reducing the penalties of beginning skinthieves.

Recommended experience costs: one experience point to reduce the penalty on any one Skill by one, two experience points to learn proper bestial communication, three experience points to mature one's control over shapeshifting and five experience points to develop the single point of Primal Urge. Learning to control one's change in shape can be done in parts. Each experience point spent on it increases the dice pool to change by one, until the third point spent eliminates the need for a roll whatsoever. Note that this never affects the roll for a skinthief to return to his natural form when constrained. Likewise, spending one point of experience on animalistic communication reduces both penalties by one and the second point eliminates the difficulty altogether. Getting that point of Primal Urge, on the other hand, is all or nothing.



When in animal form, other animals of the skinchanger's type treat her as they would any other animal of their species. Depending on the animal (and the time of year), the skinthief may have to deal with territory-defend-

ing assaults, invitations to join one of the animals' social groups and invitations to mate. Skinthieves in animal form can naturally understand animals' communicative efforts — when a cat arches its back or a skunk lifts its tail, they know what it means as easily as any natural animal of their type. Similarly, they can communicate in the same manner. The animal noises, postures of threat or submission and exuded scents come without especial effort. Some skinthieves have the ability to speak with animals (see the Animal Speech Aspect, p. 31) and can more easily get along with them.

For most skinthieves, their shape changes as they take new skins for new talismans. If the skinthief used to look like a young red fox but kills an older, graying beast when the time comes, that is how the skinthief will now appear. Skinthieves with permanent talismans change rarely, but even those occasionally wear out or must be replaced. Some skinthieves have the Static Beast Shape Aspect (see p. 35), and the appearance of their beast shapes truly are imprinted on their souls — even if they have impermanent talismans and must change often, their appearance is always the same.

## Quiet Consciences

Animals do not feel the same compunctions or suffer pangs of conscience as humans do, and just as a skinthief's animal form is freedom from his human life, the animal form is a freedom from the burden of human ethics. Skinthieves in animal form do not make degeneration rolls. Instead, the Storyteller and the skinthief's player should work together to record and remember any sins the character commits in animal form. When the skinthief returns to his natural form, he realizes the enormity of what he has done and suffers accordingly.

When the skinthief returns to human form, roll for degeneration for all his sins, beginning with the worst offenses. A skinthief who kills a man as a wolf but also ransacks an empty home for jewelry is struck much more strongly by his manslaughter than his burglary. If, at any time during the process of rolling for all his sins, his Morality drops beneath the level necessary for him to care about a later sin, do not roll for that sin.

*Example: Cavanaugh has been spending nights as a monkey for a couple of months now. For the most part, he's used his talisman to spy on a promiscuous coworker he's had his eye on and enjoy the peep show. When he sees her with his best friend, who knew about Cavanaugh's lust, Cavanaugh loses control and kills them both. After his tunnel vision fades, the monkey realizes he should make it look like a burglary, so he completely wrecks the place and leaves with the valuables. Later, safe and sound, Cavanaugh returns to his human form. The full impact of the atrocities he has committed hits him.*

*Cavanaugh rolls first for Morality degeneration for manslaughter. He rolls three dice twice, one for each of*



his victims. One succeeds, but the other fails. As a Morality 6 skinthief, he drops to Morality 5. He does not roll for degeneration from the grand theft, as that is a Morality 6 sin and he no longer cares about such deeds. He must still roll for degeneration from arson, a Morality 5 sin. If he had rolled successes on both of the Morality 4 sins, he would have had to also roll for the burglary. He might also have rolled failures on both murders, which would have reduced his Morality to 4. Then he would not have to roll for degeneration from the property damage or the grand theft.

Had Cavanaugh possessed a higher Morality (whatever level would make creepy voyeurism a sin), he would have been rolling that in the previous weeks when he came out of his animal form.

Furthermore, derangements that a skinthief character earns for her deeds represent the lure of becoming more animalist and freer of human concerns. When a skinthief suffers Morality degeneration from actions performed as an animal, subtract one die from the roll to determine whether or not she acquires a derangement. Skinthieves tend toward certain derangements, especially when they commit Morality infractions in animal form. See “Morality,” on p. 22, for more detail.

*Example: Cavanaugh is going a little bit crazy. He killed both the object of his sexual desire and his best friend, and once he realized what he'd done he couldn't really deal with it. Upon failing the above manslaughter roll, he rolls four dice instead of five. When the roll fails, he begins to worry that he left some trace in the apartment. The cops are going to notice the monkey hairs or drops of monkey blood, he's sure, even though he can't find a cut on himself. So, naturally, he needs to be more careful about concealing his actions from the people around him, and when in his animal form he's always on the lookout for authorities who might be aware of a monkey loose in the city. When someone walks in on him when he's planning to change shape or when he hears a child shout, “Look, a monkey,” Cavanaugh believes the worst. Cavanaugh picked up a form of suspicion.*

There are some skinthieves whose methods for changing form are particularly violent or immoral. (See “Vicious Skintaker,” p. 30.) In this case, make the degeneration roll for shifting shape as it happens rather than waiting for the thief to change back.

## Harming a Skinthief

There's no special tool necessary to hurt or kill a skinthief. Skinthieves have none of the werewolves' connection to Luna or curse with respect to silver, but it really doesn't hurt that some people assume they do. It's saved more than a couple of skinchangers from severe injury — not that getting shot with silver doesn't still hurt.

Wounds in either form translate to an equal number of wounds in the other after changing shape. Because animal forms are often larger or smaller than a skinthief's human

form, with more or less Stamina, attempting to change when wounded can be foolish, even deadly. Skinthieves generally have only a guesstimate at how extant wounds will affect their other form. Between that uncertainty and the skinthief's often overpowering need to taste the freedom of her animal side, a thief is not always the most cautious.

Injuries show up in the same location on the animal and the human form, regardless of which the skinthief was in when she suffered the wounds. A crushed paw becomes a broken hand, and losing an eye marks both forms forever, even after chasing down a new skin from a new creature. Getting wounded in animal form has other dangers: identification. Blood spilled in animal form is animal blood, and hair lost in that form is animal hair. Though skinthieves who make totem animals of common animals (dogs, pigeons or rats in a city, for example, or coyotes or mice in a rural area) might have little to fear unless they paint the walls with their blood, but bear hair appearing in a New York condo is the sort of mystery that attracts too much attention.

**Unconsciousness and Death:** Unlike werewolves, who reflexively return to their most familiar form (human) when they lose consciousness or are killed, skinthieves do not reflexively return to human form. While some do have that trait, the majority (and thus the standard) is for a skinthief to remain in animal shape — once unconscious, the thief cannot act to remove his cloak of skin, or otherwise remove his talisman. In most cases, since the transformation is never perfect, unconscious or dead skinthieves can be identified as unnatural through reasonably thorough medical or scientific examinations (as partially detailed above).

There exists a special case — some skinthieves have second shapes with fewer Health boxes than their natural shape. In this case, when the damage the skinthief has suffered in his smaller shape is enough to kill him (with his decreased Health), he immediately returns to his natural shape and suffers one lethal wound. This may kill him, or it may just leave him wounded enough to curse the day he changed the shape of his soul.

The opposite case — in which the skinthief's animal shape has more Health than his natural shape — provides the opposite danger. Shifting back to natural form while carrying more injuries than that frame can stand immediately wraps all extra wounds around, as if the skinthief had just suffered every point of damage that “fell off” his Health chart. If enough wounds upgrade to fill in his last Health box with an aggravated wound, he is dead.

## Scents

Skinthieves' changes are never quite perfect. They are, after all, pulling the spirit of a once-dead animal out of their talisman and using it to conceal their flesh behind the costume of their totem animal. Visually, at least, and physically, most are indistinguishable from a normal creature of their type. But skinthieves have a hell of a time getting the smell of death out of their talisman and their transformation, and

there's usually a little bit of that human smell that some animals know to fear left over. Most skinthieves get too used to the scent to recognize it on themselves, believing that they smell natural, but those few who interact with other thieves recognize it on them.

What this means is that, unless the skinthief has the Scentless Transformation Aspect (p. 34), animals or entities using scent to pick them out of a crowd (of other animals) or track them (with a source of the smell to start from) gain two dice to all such rolls. Note that the scent is not exactly the same as the skinthief's scent in human form. A bloodhound or other creature who gets a whiff of the skinthief's socks doesn't consider the shapechanged skinthief's scent the same as his human scent, and so won't follow it, or follow a changing scent in the other direction. Intelligent creatures using scent to track (such as a werewolf or another skinchanger) might notice that when the human scent disappears, a totally foreign scent seems to take its place. An object touched all over by the animal-form skinthief (such as the animal bed where he sleeps in his den) can be used to let a scent-tracking creature get his trail.

Furthermore, when a skinthief's talisman gets old and begins needing to be replaced, it typically begins to fall apart. Since most talismans are skins, this means that they are rotting, and the smell of decay lies heavily on them. Skinthieves take this as an indication that it is now time to kill the totem animal again and renew one's talisman, but they don't always have the opportunity to do so before they have the need (or overwhelming desire) to change shape again. When they do, creatures using scent add one die to the attempt to track or detect them, and natural animals of any sort are more likely to react with hostility to something that is obviously not natural.

The smell of decay typically sets in when there are only three or four days left before the talisman should be replaced. If the skinthief still refuses to (or cannot) replace the talisman, the scent bonus increases by one die for each week. At +2 dice or greater, it's evident to anyone nearby, even those with unremarkable senses of smell.

For skinthieves who draw their strength from a bound creature instead of a talisman, the smell begins in the victim's last two weeks of life. Trying to draw on the creature's nature after its death increases the bonus at the same rate as for a talisman.

## Hybrid Form

Though uncommon, some skinchangers take on a shape that is neither theirs nor that of their totem animal. Instead, these skinthieves use their talismans to combine elements of both their human and animal sides. Hybrid forms are larger and more physically powerful than either human or beast. They tend to be war forms of a sort, a shape most skinthieves learn and don for the purpose of pursuing some combative goal. The barsarks (see p. 50) are exemplary in this respect. Few skinthieves have both a natural and a hybrid form — it's usually one or the other.

Hybrid forms are inherently unstable. It's often a struggle of will to keep from reverting to human form against the skinthief's wishes. In order to remain in hybrid form for longer than one hour, the thief must spend a point of Willpower, and again after every additional hour. A skinthief with a hybrid form may avoid this necessity, but only through extreme, life-altering practices. He may spend a dot of Willpower instead of a point to change, in which case he may remain in his hybrid form as long as he desires without spending additional Willpower points. He may regain this dot at the expense of eight experience points.

Skinthieves in a hybrid form *do* make degeneration rolls as the actions that trigger them occur. Furthermore, they lose *two* dice to Morality rolls to avoid derangements because their half-human, half-animal minds are easier to unbalance. This can reduce the most immoral skinthieves to a chance die to avoid derangements.

Hybrid blood and hairs are problems — to the skinthieves, to the authorities and to science. Hybrid DNA is a strange mixture of human and animal DNA. With the availability of and proof from DNA testing these days, it is almost inevitable that a hybrid skinthief's blood or hair end up subject to telling (if often bewildering) forensic analysis. The hairs don't match the human (or even humans in general) or the animal's type of hair or fur. Instead, the hairs share qualities (typical width, length and texture) of each, sometimes even changing along the length of a single hair. Genetic tests return confusing results as a single sample of blood or hair contains both human and animal DNA. Most labs end up with the conclusion that the samples were contaminated. In a way, the lab results are right.

Occasionally, such findings can spur hunters of the mystic and the occult onward, but that's a different bag of worms.

## Essence

Skinthieves steal not just skins from the victims they make of their totem animals, but also Essence. As the life ebbs from a dying creature, the skinchanger performs a fast ritual that supposedly prevents the beast's spirit from leaving its skin and draws some measure Essence into the skinchanger's soul. This empowerment is valuable to the skinthief, so some tend to use it quickly while others prefer to save it for later. Those who run their Essence reserves dry before it is time to create a new talisman (or for those with the Permanent Talisman Aspect, see p. 31) can hunt and kill a creature of their totem for Essence alone, performing an hour-long ritual that frees the animal's spirit but drains it of power. Killing a totem animal for Essence in this way is a Morality 4 (three dice) sin, and provides three points of Essence. The skinchanger's pool cannot rise above three without an Aspect.

Unlike werewolves, who can devour any human or wolf for Essence or (more pleasantly) receive Gifts from their auspice moons and perform ritual hunts, skinthieves do not have this option. They can regain Essence *only* by

killing their totem creature or visiting a locus — and they rarely have the knowledge or strength to draw Essence from a locus.

## Aspects

Once you have the basic idea of what traits you'd like your skinchanger to have, go ahead and go shopping. Each Aspect listed below has a simple point cost listed in parentheses after its name. Some costs are zero, meaning that they are either mostly stylistic choices or that they have benefits *and* detriments that roughly balance out. Some Aspects have a negative cost, indicating that taking them makes life for this skinthief a little bit more difficult than for the average. They add points back to your total.

You must choose one “thieving Aspect” and one “talisman Aspect” to choose crucial qualities of your skinthief's nature, and only one of each. Skinchanger Aspects, the category into which all others fall, is free to take. And always remember that you can create new Aspects if these don't fit or aren't quite right. Just talk 'em over with your Storyteller first.

You have nine points for Aspects. Now go spend 'em.

### Too... Many... Aspects...

So, you have your perfect skinthief all thought out in your head, and all the Aspects you'd want are there, but you just *can't* find a place to spend all your Aspect points?

Dump 'em. You don't need the extras, and you've already created your ideal skinthief, so why bother with the leftover points? Ignore them, use your character as it stands and have a good time.

Well, maybe you're in a group of skinthieves, and you're a little worried about balance. Or maybe your Storyteller is. If you really feel the need and your Storyteller okays it, you can trade in up to three Aspect points for three experience points, usable during character creation.

### Choose a Thieving Aspect (one)

#### Humane Harvest (••)

However he does it, a skinthief with this Aspect uses only the most kind and painless methods for taking the lives and abilities of his totem animals. He need not roll as if he had sinned when he creates his talisman.

This Aspect can also apply to creatures so utterly fiendish or inhuman that they have no Morality.

#### Hunter/Killer (0)

Taking a creature's life is an unkind act, and doing it to an animal the skinthief associates so strongly with herself is even more distressing. Some hold the life of the animal close to the importance of the human's life. For others, it is simply the recognition that doing this takes them further from being human. Each time the shapeshifter refreshes his talisman or creates a new one, he makes a degeneration roll as if he had committed an impassioned crime (Morality 4; three dice).

#### Vicious Skintaker (-•)

Something about the skinthief's method for taking skins or donning her alternate shape is particularly foul. She might have to painfully kill something with each shapeshift, or perhaps the foul memory of her meticulous torture washes over her each time she puts on her skin. Whatever the specifics, the skinthief risks degeneration (three dice) each time she changes her form. This is a Morality 4 sin.

### Choose a Talisman Aspect (one)

#### Bound Totem (0)

Somewhere, the skinchanger's totem animal is trapped and bound, constantly being drained of its life and spirit to power the thief's unnatural abilities. Though bound totem animals usually last longer than impermanent talismans — it sometimes takes as long as six months for the captive to die under optimal care and conditions — this method has its own problems.

Totem animals are still alive and, for all that they are weak and trapped, can occasionally escape. An escaped creature takes with it all its power, and the skinthief must then find a new one to take its place. He would have had to do so anyway, but now it is without the benefit of having an animal already bound. A skinthief's enemies can release its totem animal if they know where it is, just as they can steal a talisman. Finally, some totems are smarter than mere animals; if the totem escapes captivity, the totem may desire some form of vengeance. When a totem disappears (rather than dies), the skinthief's power to change shape fades over the next 24 hours. He is aware that the source of his power is gone, and he has only a limited amount of time to retrieve it before his powers fade completely. A skinthief in an alternate form when the day runs out automatically returns to his natural shape, as the ability to veil himself in another form leaves completely.

After a bound totem dies, the skinthief must capture and bind a new totem animal within one month before he can no longer change shape. During this period, he fuels his changes with residual death energy left over from the totem's death, and his animal shape begins to emit a foul odor reminiscent of the rot that accompanies death.

Without the corpse of his bound totem, or a barely living totem to kill, the skinthief must perform the hardest part of his nature-stealing ritual again. Renewing his connection

to his totem (by binding a new creature) then requires that he also spend a Willpower dot. Dots of Willpower can be repurchased for eight points of experience.

### **Talisman (0)**

Most talismans are impermanent, requiring the skinthief to periodically seek out a new creature of his totem and perform the appropriate ritual again. Usually, the necessary animal is not particularly difficult to find, and the skinchanger should have the abilities required to hunt and kill it. A skinthief's talisman remains useful for one month before he must make another and perform the ritual to endow it with power and bind it to his soul. He may delay making another talisman for up to one month, but he begins to emit the smell of death when he is in his animal form, and he now requires two instant actions to fully change shape.

As described under "Totem and Talisman," p. 17, a skinthief must have his old talisman in order to instill his new one with the same power. Otherwise, he must perform the original ritual again and expend a dot of Willpower, which can be regained by paying eight experience points.

### **No Talisman (••••)**

Binding the skinchanger's totem animal to her is a method that some thieves learn. This obviates the need for any physical talisman, such as an animal's skin or a necklace of teeth, for the skinthief to change form. The thief must still take the life of her totem animal once, when she takes her first real step into the supernatural, to bind the creature's energy to her soul.

A skinchanger with no talisman cannot have her ability to shapeshift stolen from her except by powerful hostile magic.

### **Permanent Talisman (•)**

The skinchanger's talisman does not wear out. This prevents him from having to cut a new skin every time or bind another animal every so often; perhaps he found one of the rare rituals that can imbue a cured hide or channeled the essence of his totem creature into an object he keeps on his person.

If the talisman is destroyed or otherwise lost forever, it cannot be remade without spending a dot of Willpower (recoverable for eight experience points) and performing the relevant ritual again.

## **Choose Skinchanger Aspects (any)**

### **Animal Speech (• or ••)**

Speaking the language of the beasts does not come naturally to the skinchanger. This Aspect allows one to speak directly with animals of his totem's type and understand them in turn. Animal Speech in no way ensures that other animals will obey the skinchanger; he must treat with them as he would with any human, though their motiva-

tions are more instinctual and simple than a human's. In order to activate this Aspect, the skinthief must spend a point of Essence. He need not be in the animal form to do so, and the effect lasts for one scene.

Taking the two-point version of the Aspect allows the skinchanger to understand and communicate with all beasts, rather than just his totem animals.

### **Bare Necessities (• or •••)**

Nudity is the order of the day for many skinchangers, who cannot successfully transform if their skin-cloak is worn over clothing or anything else. Those with the Bare Necessities Aspect do not have this limitation, for whatever reason. The clothes on their backs and other things close to their skin transform as well, though they are inaccessible until the changer returns to human form. The three-point version of this Aspect allows the skinchanger to take other things — a backpack and its contents, for example, or a holstered sidearm — with him when he changes form. Such things are effectively nowhere until he changes back.

### **Enchanting Affinity (••)**

A skinchanger may feel great affinity for the animal she emulates, but the animals rarely feel a similar affinity for her. After all, she smells and acts too oddly to be one of them, whatever her looks. This Aspect makes the skinchanger unnaturally attractive to other animals of her type. For the most part, they treat her as they would a friendly member of their species. If she desires, however, she can exude an aura that incites the animals to react in a certain way. She can draw them to her (if they are close enough to detect her normally) and make them peaceful or violent. Exerting control in this way requires a successful Presence + Animal Ken roll.

She cannot cause them to obey explicit orders unless they can understand her (see the Animal Speech Aspect).

### **Extraordinary Specimen (•)**

Most skinthieves draw their talisman from and transform into an average example of their totem's species. Skinthieves with this Aspect have hunted down the greatest, most powerful members of that species, the monsters among their chosen totem animals. Increase the Strength and Size of the skinthief's animal form by one.

A skinthief with this Aspect often also has the Static Beast Shape Aspect, allowing her to renew her talisman with any specimen she chooses to hunt without worrying that it will change her animal shape. Those without must only hunt the mightiest of their chosen species, else they lose the benefit of having this Aspect.

### **Fast Healing (••)**

Perhaps the skinchanger has a little bit of werewolf blood, released or somehow triggered by her unique supernatural change. Or maybe the ritual accelerated her body's



metabolism and chemical reactions to the point where she heals more quickly. Whatever the cause, the skinthief heals twice as quickly as a normal human, but only when her special nature is active and evident — that is, when she is in a non-human shape.

This Aspect stacks with the Quick Healer Merit. A skinchanger with both qualities heals at four times the natural rate while in animal form.

### Fast Skinner (•)

Despite the physical and mystical effort necessarily involved in creating a new talisman, the skinthief with this Aspect is able to go from skinning an animal to wearing and becoming it in minutes flat. Usually, the remainder of the ritual to make the talisman permanent or useful in the longer term must be performed later, once the thief has time to spare.

Chasing a skinchanger with this Aspect can be a real frustration, especially if it's a long-term chase that gives the entity a chance to change her skin over more than once to throw off the scent. This method works well for skinthieves who take the form of common animals (such as dogs or horses; see "The Stray or Scavenger Wolf," pp. 47 and 38), because they are easiest for humans to tell apart. When the animals have clearly different markings, the tactic can also be effective (changing from a red to grey wolf). Some skinchangers are not so blessed; their totem animals are so rare in a given area, or generally indistinguishable to human eyes, that no amount of host- or skin-switching helps them get away.

Skinthieves with the Static Beast Shape Aspect (see

above) won't gain such an advantage from the ability to use a talisman without a long ritual, but the Aspect can still be useful.

### Hybrid Form (•• or •••••)

When a skinchanger has this Aspect, he may change into a human-animal hybrid that shows increased strength and fierceness similar to that of the Uratha's Gauru form. When in this form, the skinchanger has a Strength equal to the greater of his human or animal Strengths plus one and has a Size equal to his human Size plus one. The balance of human and animal minds is also harder to maintain in hybrid form; reduce any Morality rolls for degeneration made in hybrid form by *another* one die, in addition to the penalty usually earned for being in animal shape.

The two-point version of the Hybrid Form Aspect means that the skinchanger *only* has a hybrid form and cannot don the shape of the normal animal. This is, by far, the more common option. At five points, the character has both a hybrid and an animal form.



## Gaining Aspects

The rules as presented here assume that you will use your nine Aspect points to create a static *type* of skinthief — one whose supernatural side will remain static, even as the human side learns and evolves. But you may feel the need to change the character's supernatural As-

pects over the course of a game, for whatever reason. Perhaps she learns a ritual that deepens her store of spiritual power, or perhaps she just starts practicing her shapeshifts until she can change much more quickly. So, just in case you do want this, and the Storyteller is agreeable, here are some guidelines.

- You can't change your character's "thieving" or "talisman" Aspects. These represent the core of what sort of skinthief he is and how he wields his power, and they remain constant throughout a skinthief's life.
- Other Aspects cost five experience points per point. Increasing an Aspect with variable levels is increased in the manner of other Merits; you must buy each dot separately, i.e., taking a point in Imitate Gift costs five experience points, but changing a skinthief who has Rejuvenating Change 2 to Rejuvenating Change 4 costs 35 points (15 for the third dot and 20 for the fourth). You cannot half-buy Aspects or Aspect increases. Note that Imitate Gift counts as one Aspect for purposes of increasing by experience; learning a second Gift emulation would count as raising from one to two dots (or more, if imitating a higher-dot Gift), not as learning a new one-dot Aspect.
- Aspects with negative point costs are free. Perhaps it is a negative quality of the skinthief ritual that doesn't become evident for a while, so it's only kicking in now. Taking them grants you no extra experience points.
- You cannot "buy off" detrimental Aspects.



### Imitate Gift (•+)

Use this Aspect for the skinthief to have a power similar to that of an existing werewolf Gift. When imitating a Gift, the skinthief must pay any Willpower or Essence cost just as a werewolf, and must make any roll necessary to activate the power. Not all Gifts are appropriate for skinthief Aspects; a short list follows, but the Storyteller is invited to use her discretion for additional or custom Gifts.

Remember that a skinthief does not use a Gift in the same way that a werewolf does. Instead of a learned method of manipulating Essence and coercing the spirits, a skinthief's Gift is a supernatural ability that stems from its nature, like any other Aspect.

Gifts of four or greater dots cost two Aspect points to add to a skinthief character.

Suggested Gifts: Corpse Witness, Warning Growl, Loose Tongue, Sand in the Eyes, Playing Possum, Father

Wolf's Speed, Sense Malice, Omen Gazing, The Right Words, Know Name, Traveler's Blessing, Know the Path, Sense Weakness, Slip Away, Feet of Mist, Running Shadow, Crushing Blow, Mighty Bound, Savage Might.

Full details on these Gifts can be found in **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, Chapter 2.

### Increased Essence (••)

Instead of a maximum Essence of three, the skinthief can keep six points of Essence at a single time. She can still only use one point per turn, and she still only gains three points during her rituals or by sacrificing her totem creature.

### Injurious Change (-•)

The skinthief's method of changing shape is painful, and probably deleterious to her health. Perhaps she must cut the skin of her chest and insert the token that is her talisman, or maybe she has to swallow a burning ember in order to effect her transformation. Whatever the cause, she suffers one lethal wound whenever she attempts to change out of her natural shape. Some skinthieves do not suffer this damage in their animal shape, only realizing the wound once they return to human form.

### Long Life (• or ••)

Some aspect of the skinthief's transformation from mortal to supernatural has extended her normal lifespan. She may cease to age, appear to be ageless or even age beyond comprehensibility, but the effect is the same. For one point, this Aspect adds 50% to the skinthief's lifespan (about 40 years for the average human); two points double her allotted "natural" term.

Adding this Aspect to a character who has already used most of her extended lifespan is really a matter of color, and might, at the Storyteller's discretion, be allowed at no cost.

### Out-of-Body (•••)

Not all skinchangers draw a creature's skin or power over their own bodies to take its shape. Some, instead, force their essence into the body of such a creature, and indulge their inhuman urges while there. The rituals necessary to enact this aspect usually ensure that the animal dies after a short while, but some skinchangers can keep their "bodies" alive for extended periods.

The benefit to this method of changing skins is that there is little danger to the shapeshifter as he explores the world in his other skin; if it is harmed or destroyed, he usually escapes with little harm. If he is inside the creature when it dies, he generally suffers one level of lethal damage and becomes disoriented (-1 to all actions) for an hour. Less advantageous is that the changer must leave his body behind, empty of thought and vulnerable, in order to become his chosen animal. If some harm befalls his body, he feels it only when he returns there; if the body is destroyed, he is



trapped in his animal skin until it dies, which may be a long or short time, depending on the skinchanger's methods.

Out-of-Body Aspect can also represent those skinchangers who leave some aspect of themselves behind their transformations as insurance. It may be a small tooth around which his flesh reforms or the diary that will contain his essence until he can claim a new body. But just like leaving a full body behind, this item represents a vulnerability. If an enemy gets a hold of this object, she may be able to harm or control the skinchanger.

### Rejuvenating Change (•• or ••••)

Injuries suffered in animal form carry over into human form, serving as indication that the two creatures are actually the same beast and hindering the skinthief's ability to escape from whatever hunter did the damage.

Skinthieves with this Aspect gain a small respite from that curse. Part of their ritual, or some aspect of their will, binds the damage taken in animal form to the skinthief's talisman, where it remains. When the skinthief shifts from animal form to his natural form, he change one lethal wound on his Health chart into a bashing wound. Make a note of it, though. When the skinthief returns to animal form, the lethal wound is still there. It heals normally over the course of two days without affecting the skinthief, but he must spend those two days either in human form (giving the spirit in his talisman time to recover) or in animal form (healing the wound normally). Changing form resets the time necessary for the wound to heal.

In human form, the skinthief's wound becomes a scar, so it does not completely eliminate the possibility that someone might recognize him based on that wound. Until the affected wound heals, Rejuvenating Change does not affect any new wounds suffered by the skinthief, nor does it affect wounds suffered in a hybrid form — only a natural animal form has a distinct enough spirit to lock wounds into it.

For four Aspect points, the skinthief can spend points of Willpower on a one-for-one basis to lock additional wounds into his talisman. These still appear as scars in his natural form, and they still heal as mentioned above. The skinthief need not pay Willpower each time he changes out of his animal form to keep those additional wounds safely away from his natural body. They remain bound to the talisman or spirit until they heal, and he may actually spend additional Willpower to bind more wounds at a later date.

Wounds from the Injurious Change Aspect (see above) cannot be affected by Rejuvenating Change.

### Resilient Form (•+)

Many skinthieves take on the form of smaller creatures, taking advantage of small sizes and other modes of transportation (such as flight or creeping through walls) to accomplish their varied goals. The immediately apparent disadvantage to these forms is that their smaller Size and

often reduced Stamina produces a weaker frame, one that is less able to suffer the arrows of ill fortune.

This Aspect allows a skinthief to have somewhat more confidence in her ability to withstand damage in her smaller shape. Each Aspect point spent on Resilient Form adds one to the skinthief's Health in her alternate form, to a maximum of the skinthief's natural Health. Because of this limit, this Aspect has no effect for any skinthief whose alternate form has more Health than her natural form.

### Restricted Change (-•)

No skinchanger has the freedom to change shape at will, but some cannot transform even if their talismans are handy. A skinthief with this Aspect requires some additional condition to be met before she can take on her bestial form. She may only be able to change shape underwater, beneath the visible moon, during sex or with the proper kind of animal blood on her hands.

Some shapechanging conditions are particularly restrictive and may, at the Storyteller's discretion, be worth -2 Aspect points. Examples might include only changing on a certain football field within an hour of practice, only after kissing one's mother goodnight or while menstruating.

### Scentless Transformation (•)

No animal smells exactly right after having its belly slit open and its innards scooped out. Likewise, few skinchangers can avoid leaving some scent of themselves on the outside of the creature as they prepare and don the skin. Those with the Scentless Transformation Aspect have found a way, meticulous or mystical, to completely avoid these identifying scents. When a skinchanger with this Aspect puts on a new skin, he smells only as the animal did before he killed it. This does not avoid the scent that accompanies death rot.

### Sense of Familiarity (••)

It's a strange thing when a dog follows you from street to street or when you see a black bird sitting outside your window, apparently looking in, for hours on end. And it's downright impossible for a rat to speak to you, everyone knows that.

But magic is real. On some level, people know that, too. This Aspect plays on two parts of the human mind: First is the one that ignores things that are there every day, like that busted car that's been in Sammy's driveway for three years and the slight crack in your windshield. Second, this Aspect enhances that sense of wonder, that subtle knowledge that "real" things aren't all that's out there, and it makes the unreal seem natural. Familiar, even.

Skinthieves with this Aspect have an easier time going unnoticed in their animal form. At the beginning of any scene in which the skinthief is doing something worth noticing, roll Wits + Subterfuge - Resolve (subtract the highest Resolve of all targets the skinthief wants to affect). On a success, nobody notices anything out of the ordinary

from the skinthief. They barely notice him at all, in fact — he doesn't quite register, and even when he does it's as something that's always there.

They also have a chance to act strangely — magical, really — without freaking out the people around them. He makes the same roll as above, but he doesn't get to choose who's affected. He subtracts the highest Resolve of everyone who could possibly be affected by his strange act. This includes changing shape, talking a human language or anything else that looks flat-out impossible. If the roll is successful, the people treat the skinthief as just another thing that's going on, and possibly something to pay attention to. It's sort of like a fairy tale. Certain actions will be remembered no matter what — if a skinthief attacks a person in animal form, they won't brush off the attack or forget it. They may assume the animal was rabid rather than “unusual,” but they won't behave as though the attack never happened.

Afterward, victims of the Sense of Familiarity never realize that they encountered something strange. It was so familiar that they just forget about it. Most such memories remain buried forever, but some people sense them more sharply after a related event that brings it to mind. Effects vary.

### **Sense of Self (••)**

Skinchangers with the Sense of Self Aspect recall their human identity and nature in the shapechange, using the kinship they feel with the animal as a method to keep themselves in control. When these skinchangers commit heinous acts in their animal form, they do not subtract one die from the Morality roll to determine derangements.

This has no effect on skinthieves in a hybrid form. Such creatures still subtract two dice from Morality rolls when they commit atrocities in that form.

### **Skillful Change (•)**

Forcing one's shape to become that of another creature is not easy. Doing so requires a specific frame of mind that draws out the animal instincts and submerges the human skin beneath the power of a more bestial shape. But some skinthieves are better at the practice. One might have the specific mindset conducive to the shift. Another's ritual might make the animal essence particularly unrestrained and eager to become a physical form again. These and other differences can make the effort necessary to shapechange less of a strain.

Skinchangers with this Aspect can shapeshift as a reflexive action.

### **Static Beast Shape (0)**

In most cases, if a skinthief catches a new member of his totem species and takes its skin for a talisman, his animal shape becomes like that of the animal he just killed. But some are bound to a certain shape and appearance, usually by the nature of their skintaking rituals.

The decision to take this Aspect is binding once character generation is complete, even though it has an Aspect point cost of zero. His beast-shape is bound to him, and he cannot choose to change it.

### **Strong Instincts (•)**

The character is well-connected to his animal side, and when he dons his skin he has complete access to the creature's bestial instincts. Whenever he is in animal form, the skinthief uses the Skills, Skill Specialties and Mental and Social Attributes (except for Intelligence) of the natural animal instead of his own, even if these are worse than the character's. Skills that only the character has (Politics, as a likely example), do not conflict with the animal's instincts, so they do not drop to zero and can still be used normally.

Additionally, while in animal form, the skinchanger calculates Defense as an animal does: using the *greater* of either Wits or Dexterity.

By spending a point of Willpower at any time while wearing the other form, the skinthief can achieve a perfect blending of instinct and cogent thought, allowing him to use the better of any Mental or Social Attribute (but he always uses his natural Intelligence rating), Skill that both animal and man have and the Skill Specialties from both forms.

This Aspect can change a character's Resolve and Composure, and thus his Willpower. When the skinthief changes form, any Willpower points spent in one shape have also been spent in his other shape. For example, if you spend two Willpower points in a form with five Willpower and then change to a shape that has four Willpower, you have two left to use. Changing back to the first form, you have three points left to use. This cannot drop a character to “negative Willpower.”

### **Spirit Affinity (••••+)**

For whatever reason, presumably some sort of spirit origin, some skinchangers are closely related to spirits of the Shadow Realm. This Aspect allows the skinchanger to choose one Numen from the list in **Werewolf: The Forsaken** (p. 276) or **Mage: The Awakening** (p. 321). For every additional point spent on this Aspect, the skinchanger possesses another Numen.

This, unlike the Imitate Gift Aspect, isn't one to take in order to fill out powers appropriate to a skinthieving style. Instead, this Aspect is specifically for those skinchangers who steal, borrow or somehow possess spirit Numina. They have these powers because they are taking something from the Spirit Realm. Similarly, these powers should be appropriate to the situation: see Scavenger Wolf, below, who has the simple, common Numina of Chorus and Wilds Sense, and the sample spirit-skinner, who has captured a Wolf-Brother and has stolen that creature's Numina.

The most common Numina for a skinthief are Chorus and Wilds Sense. Many of the others don't quite fit, since

skinthieves are naturally material and in the physical world, and powers such as Blast don't tend to originate from an animal ability.

As skinthieves don't have the three spirit statistics of Power, Finesse and Resistance, the player and Storyteller must choose appropriate attributes to roll when activating a Numen — usually Intelligence for Power, Dexterity for Finesse and Resolve or Stamina for Resistance.

### Sweet-Voiced Fiend (•)

Your character may or may not be a fiend, but she's certainly a silver-tongued devil. Something about her transforming ritual made her voice melodious and pleasant to hear, and that makes it hard to resist. Reduce any penalties to Persuasion and Subterfuge by two, as well as appropriate Expression rolls.

### Tell (-•)

Some skinchangers have a trait that can betray them, something that is evident in all her forms. It must be evident enough that those who meet her may, with an intuitive leap, use to identify her, regardless of form. Such marks, sometimes called tells, usually appear during the first ritual that makes a human a skinthief. Tells can be anything reasonably subtle: a classic example is the lock of white hair that appears in both forms or the birthmark that becomes a peculiar coloring on a coat of fur. Other tells might be a light odor of musk or blood that hovers about the character in all her forms or flecks of a unique color in the eyes.

Whatever form the tell takes, it triggers a reflexive Wits + Composure roll (-2 dice) when anyone meets the skinchanger for the first time. Success indicates that he notices the smell or visual distinction. If he meets the skinthief in another shape and again notices the tell (another Wits + Composure roll), he may draw a connection between the two creatures. People who fail to notice the tell may make another roll when someone points out the strange feature to them.

The tell is always an *immediate* perception. Slightly mystical in nature, it doesn't leave lasting impressions. Tells that are scents or light drips of preserving liquid fade quickly once the skinthief leaves, and cannot be used to aid in tracking her.

### Twisted Tongue (•)

Most animals can't speak human words, or the First Tongue, for that matter. Not all skinchangers are satisfied to give up speech to attain their animal nature. Rather than becoming mute, they learn the Twisted Tongue Aspect. This Aspect gives a skinchanger the ability to speak in animal form any language she knows in her normal form.

Skinchangers who don forms that can normally speak other languages, such as parrots or ravens, do not need this Aspect. Without it, however, they will speak as the birds speak; only with the Twisted Tongue can they speak normally.

### Unhealing (-•)

The spirit bound into the skinthief's skin or talisman isn't vibrant, isn't *alive* enough to heal on its own, and when it's wrapped around the skinthief, *he* doesn't heal either. Bruises suffered in the skinthief's second shape never fade, and open wounds never close, though they may stop bleeding if bound. When the skinthief returns to his natural shape, he heals normally, but when he dons the shape again, the wounds reopen as if they had never healed.

There are two ways to eliminate these wounds. They disappear when the skinthief replaces his talisman, as the new shape or fresh spirit comes free and clear of those injuries. Alternately, the skinthief may perform a half-hour ritual and spend a point of Essence to invest each wound with some of his vigor, a portion of his life. For each half-hour and point of Essence, he endows one wound with the capability to heal. Any wounds so treated heal normally.

## One Way to Skin a Cat

Sometimes a skinchanger needs to acquire a new skin in a hurry. Perhaps her old skin is rotted beyond use, she needs a different appearance for her other form or she just wants to impress a strange guest. In any event, finding a new skin takes two distinct steps: finding the animal and skinning the animal.

Neither of these should be difficult. Although the statistics may not always represent it well, one should presume that a skinthief knows well how to locate, capture and skin a member of its totem species. The inexperienced may not, but they are the exception rather than the rule. Finding the animal in question may take as few as five minutes for an exceptionally common animal (a stray cat or pigeon in New York City) to an hour for something that requires hunting (deer in the wild) or an indefinite length of time for incredibly rare animals (coelacanth).

Once found (assuming the skinthief has no trouble killing it), the skinning process can take as little as a five minutes for a small animal and an expert skinner can do it in even less. A practiced skinthief can skin, for example, a deer in a little more than 15 minutes. After that, some skinthieves need to treat it with some ritual, but others can drape it over their shoulders and immediately take on another shape.

# Thieves of Flesh and Spirit

Skinthieves come in myriad flavors and forms. The Aspects above, while serving as a good guideline for creating such creatures, cannot convey the vast range of possibilities contained in the category of those people who steal the essences of beasts they wish to emulate. The several examples may serve as inspiration for skinthieves of your own construction, or become dangerous predators in your game as presented.

In the statistics, numbers in parentheses indicate a trait's value in the skinthief's alternate form. If there is no parenthetical trait, the two values are identical.

## Scavenger Wolf

*"Please, do not judge me by the color of my... skin."*

Not all skinthieves are human, though the vast majority are. Long ago, perhaps before Pangaea was destroyed by the Forsaken, one of the Uratha's many wolfish cousins looked upon them and questioned, "Why is it only they who can change shape?" Scavenger Wolf, as he was called, tried many things to be able to change as the Uratha did, each attempt a failure. Only after 100 such failures did Scavenger Wolf look upon the humans of the age and say, "I have seen them club a wolf over the head, then strip off her skin all in one piece and wear it as a shirt. Why can I not do the same?"

And so he did. Scavenger Wolf caught a young man alone one day, choosing him for his youth and slender nature (for Scavenger Wolf's ribs show through his skin) and tore out his throat. The wolf-spirit then cut the skin open carefully and wriggled inside. Once he had sealed it up behind him, he found that he could walk and talk as a human, and as long as he was careful to cover the scar, he could pass undetected. At least until the skin began to rot over the next week.

Doing this became the spirit's joy. He trod among men unnoticed, especially after he killed and cured a wolf hide of his own to conceal the damage done to the skin. Tribes danced, and Scavenger Wolf danced among them without detection. Made ecstatic by his discovery, he went among the Uratha one day as a human, and addressed them as a whole. When he stripped off his skin and revealed his true self, the Luna-spawn cursed him for a manslayer and a wolfslayer and a betrayer of their common progenitor, Father Wolf. They cursed him in their father's name, then stripped him of his status as a great spirit. Tail between his legs, Scavenger Wolf fled back into what would soon become, or perhaps already was, the *Hisil*.

Since then, Scavenger Wolf has grown bold once again. He steals into the human world, sometimes aided



by his Pure allies, and takes his pleasure of the people he finds there. Donning their skins, he walks around in their clothes, performs their jobs (if he chooses) and sleeps with their lovers. Certain herbs and preparations preserve the human skins longer than they used to do, but he rarely walks in another's shoes for longer than two or three weeks before his ruse becomes evident. At that point, Scavenger Wolf likes to fool someone close to his victim one last time and then devour her.

One surprising characteristic of Scavenger Wolf is that, though he is a spirit, he is nothing less than solid in the physical realm. Some Pure who know him whisper that it is the result of spending too much time as a human, but the wolf-spirit chose to place the blame squarely on the Uratha who originally cursed him, and he blames the Forsaken. Any time he can throw a small wrench in their plans, he does so, but only if he is nearly assured of escape. He has not yet forgotten their first punishment.

Forsaken run into Scavenger Wolf when that ignoble relative impinges on their territories, stealing the lives of their humans to provide him with his fun. Though he has been caught using his skins to sabotage the workings of the Forsaken, the Tribes have never killed Scavenger Wolf. Many let him live under the edict, "The People Do Not Murder the People," as Scavenger Wolf is family. They chastise him, beat him mercilessly, but never do more than run their cousin off their lands and watch against his return. Howls circulate about a pack that moved to strike off his head only to be challenged and stopped by Rabid Wolf, who some suggest is the human-skinner's sire. Scavenger Wolf would surely be safer amidst the Pure, but he always returns to plague the Forsaken.

## What Gives?

Yup, Scavenger Wolf is a spirit and not a human. So, what right does he have to be listed here, under the skinthieves, and constructed using normal character generation?

First, he is clearly a skinner and a thief of those skins, despite that his prey is human rather than a beast. Second, Scavenger Wolf is here to serve as an example of how not every skinthief has to be a human with a twisted soul — they can be other kinds of twisted souls as well. The character creation advice above are biased toward humans, but Scavenger Wolf follows all the skinthief construction rules and shows that they work just as well in this instance as they do for more traditional examples, such as the barsarks (see p. 50).

Consider this an invitation to be creative with your skinthieves, though you still may not want to allow players to make inhuman characters. Part of the fun and horror of playing a skinthief is the near-inevitable transition from vaguely immoral human to hulking beast-man.

### Scavenger Wolf

**Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 1, Presence 1, Manipulation 5, Composure 2

**Skills:** Animal Ken (Wolves) 1, Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Empathy 2, Investigation (Victims) 2, Occult 2, Persuasion (In Disguise) 5, Socialize 2, Stealth 2, Subterfuge 5

**Merits:** Quick Healer, Predator's Bearing, Natural Immunity

**Willpower:** 4

**Morality:** 3

**Essence:** 3 (maximum of 6)

**Virtue:** Fortitude

**Vice:** Pride

**Health:** 6

**Initiative:** 4

**Defense:** 2

**Speed:** 14 (11)

**Size:** 5

**Aspects:** *Thieving* — Vicious Skintaker; *Talisman* — No Talisman; *Skinchanging* — Rejuvenating Change 2, Restricted Change, Spirit Affinity 5, Twisted Tongue, Unhealing Restricted Change: Scavenger Wolf must spend at least an hour torturing a victim to death before he can don its skin, and he can only use each skin once.

**Spirit Affinity:** Scavenger Wolf's Numina are Chorus (roll Presence + Manipulation) and Wilds Sense (roll Wits + Resolve).

**Twisted Tongue:** Scavenger Wolf uses this Aspect to speak the First Tongue in human form and human languages in his natural form.

**Vicious Skintaker:** Scavenger Wolf uses each human skin only once, meaning that he must kill another human before he can change again.

### Weapons/Attacks

**Type**    **Damage**    **Dice Pool**

Bite        3 (L)        10

**Notes:** Scavenger Wolf has been tooling around in human bodies so long that he's become more human than spirit, but he won't believe that. He's material in the physical world without spending Essence, and he no longer has any Rank among true spirits. His store of Essence has diminished and his mastery over Numina faded. In the end, he blames the Forsaken.

So human is he, Scavenger Wolf has unconsciously accepted the human Morality, and his constant denial of it has driven him slightly mad. He suffers from Suspicion that the werewolves are coming, and from Narcissism. He firmly believes that the Forsaken want to curse him yet again and unfairly diminish him yet further, and both his Virtue and Vice drive him to screw with them in retribution.

In his natural shape, Scavenger Wolf has sharp teeth, perfect for tearing scant leftovers from the bones of prey. Though he's a more effective fighter in that form, he prefers to fight as a human first.

**Storytelling Hints:** Scavenger Wolf loves tormenting humans, so his typical modus operandi is to check into the details of one man's life (he hunts usually men), and then kill him and take his skin. He then lives the man's life for a while and does his level best to act *just enough* out of character to make everyone else in his victim's life miserable. Before the game ends, he usually eats someone.

When confronted, Scavenger Wolf tries to bluff his way free. If he can't, he uses Wilds Sense and Chorus to plea for help from any nearby wolf-spirits. He can sometimes convince one to run off and bring one of his big cousins. If all else fails, he burns most of his Willpower using Rejuvenating Change to leave his wounds behind as he sheds his stolen shape and flees.

### Black-Eyed Toad

"Squat like a toad, close at the ear of Eve."

— Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Toads are always watching. Still as a lump on a log and twice as hard to see, a toad looks upon you whenever you think you are alone. She learns everyone's secrets and shares those that no one wants to hear, croaking them in the night. Secret things that others wish to know are worth a price.

Softly-Croaking Toad long ago learned a secret about the nature of the animals she represents. She claims no origin for this ritual outside herself, but any who associate with her for long know that she steals and sells ideas but is not herself an innovator. The process of dousing one's eyes in a mixture of castor oil and tannins may not have been hers originally, but none other claims it now. Today, she gives this recipe to select humans in exchange for their agreement to share with her what they see.

The process turns the color of a man's eyes permanently dark; they are not actually black, but close enough for government work. From that point on, when the man wishes, he may capture a toad and perform a brief ritual upon it that includes removing its eyes with a flat-bladed knife. Any species of toad will do. He then pulls his own eyes from their sockets, which come with little resistance, and places them in the still-living toad. His consciousness enters the creature, and his human body lies behind him, vulnerable.

He may then explore the world in relative secrecy, for who notices a lonely brown toad? Black-eyed toad wanders around, black eyes bright, spying hidden intentions and listening to secrets. Once he returns to his body, which his mind can do in an instant but his eyes cannot, he plucks the eyes from the toad and wears them again in his own sockets. He then closes the ritual by eating the toad, which would soon die a sightless death anyway. If the toad dies before it can return to the skinchanger, the unfortunate must blindly seek the eyes he can still see through; the eyes themselves have a rare sort of luck, and survive destruction of the host toad surprisingly often.

Softly-Croaking Toad escapes from the Shadow Realm when she can, tracking down her students and taking from them her part of the bargain: all the secrets their toad-eyes see or toad-ears hear. These secrets are still the black-eyed toad's to sell, but keeping them from his mentor is unwise. Softly-Croaking Toad has sold many secrets over the centuries, and many spirits owe her favors; killing a mere human would be an easy and pleasant way to execute such a favor.

Black-eyed toads (for Softly-Croaking Toad has approached more than one interested mortal) are scheming creatures. Few mortals yearn for the ignominy of becoming an unremarkable toad; only those who see the value in being the bump on a log usually accept the spirit's offer. Few love the feeling of being within a toad's skin, and men rarely lose themselves completely within their totem animal. So black-eyed toads still bear the motivations of a normal, red-blooded human. Their desires are predictable, however clever the person behind the toad may be, so cunning Uratha may be able to manipulate black-eyed toads they meet.

Still, even the wisest Uratha may occasionally be forced to play the toad's game, giving the toad what it wants in order to earn from it a secret. If Softly-Croaking Toad is

about, she may undercut her disciple's price, because she owes her disciples no allegiance and earning a boon from the fearsome Forsaken is good for her. The tables may also turn: if werewolves may have to play to the toads' tune, they can also make the toads dance to the wolves'. When a black-eyed toad learns an Uratha's secret, it may be a race to kill the toad before she can sell the secret to the Pure — or give it to her mentor, who would spread it for free if it bought her life.

### Toad

**Attributes:** Intelligence 0, Wits 2, Resolve 1, Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 1, Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

**Skills:** Athletics (Hopping) 2, Survival (Finding Food) 3

**Willpower:** 4

**Initiative:** 5

**Defense:** 3

**Speed:** 6 (species factor 2)

**Size:** 1

**Health:** 2

### Black-Eyed Toad

**Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2 (1), Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

**Skills:** Athletics 1, Drive 1, Empathy 2, Expression 1, Firearms 1, Investigation (Finding Secrets) 2, Persuasion (Selling Secrets) 4, Politics 2, Stealth 4, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge (Keeping Secrets) 3

**Merits:** Danger Sense, Eidetic Memory, Fleet of Foot 2, Socially Small

**Willpower:** 5

**Morality:** 6

**Essence:** 3 (maximum of 3)

**Virtue:** Temperance

**Vice:** Greed

**Health:** 7 (2)

**Initiative:** 6

**Defense:** 2

**Speed:** 11 (8)

**Size:** 5 (1)

**Aspects:** *Thieving* — Vicious Skintaker; *Talisman* — Permanent Talisman; *Skinchanging* — Imitate Gift (Loose Tongue, Sense Weakness) 2, Injurious Change, Out-of-Body, Sense of Familiarity, Tell, Twisted Tongue

**Injurious Change:** To change shape, the skinthief must cut the eyes from himself and his toad, and exchange their places.

**Out-of-Body:** The human shape suffers the one lethal wound from Injurious Change, but the toad-form begins a change at full Health. If the toad is killed, the changer's eyes usually survive and escape notice — only an exceptional success on the attack actually harms the eyes (and then rarely destroys them outright), and only an exceptional success lets someone find them. The black-eyed toad himself



can always tell the direction to his eyes, and he can find them on a simple success.

**Sense of Familiarity:** Few people notice a toad. They notice that this one is talking to them, but it rarely seems odd.

**Permanent Talisman:** The black-eyed toad's talisman takes the form of the creature's eyes. Someone with the desire could remove them (from the human or toad) with little fuss or muss, if they know what they're after. Replacing these as talismans is a strange ritual that involves growing new eyes over a base of rock crystal.

**Tell:** No matter the form, black-eyed toads always have (unsurprisingly) preternaturally black eyes.

**Vicious Skintaker:** The black-eyed toad must capture a toad each time he wants to change shape, and he typically stays in one for a night.

**Storytelling Hints:** The black-eyed toad rarely wants confrontation. Really, all he wants is to learn a little something and sell it to whomever's willing to pay. Still, the process of becoming a toad is unpleasantly painful, so black-eyed toads tend not to do it nightly. Weekly excursions are more common, or particular dates, such as political conventions.

If confronted, the black-eyed toad is very good at excusing itself and worming its way out of trouble. When that doesn't work, the toad uses its surprising speed to get to a hidey-hole or take some other path that its pursuer is too large to utilize.

## The Coalblacks

*"Quoth the raven," said the bird. "Fuck you."*

Cincinnati, Ohio, is still one of the world's largest distributors of coal, but the business has been on the decline for decades. Back in the '70s, when the changeover to petroleum began to hit the coal industry harder than it ever had before, the Coalblack family was one of the first to lose both its grasp on the business and its fortune. Emil Coalblack, once a powerful figure in Cincinnati, faced his company's bankruptcy sourly. His grandfather had founded the company, and Emil was angry with the world for cursing him into the poorhouse.

When the legal and financial dust settled, the Coalblacks retained their mansion and grounds 20 miles out of the city along I-74 and enough money in stocks to subsist, as long as they did nothing extravagant. Accustomed to a less restricted life, Emil's five children were as upset as their father. Coalblack Distribution closed its doors, and Coalblack Manor closed its gates and became a very dark and gloomy place. After a few short years, it became known as Crow House, because of the many dark birds that made their nests in the mansion's towers and windows or elsewhere on the grounds.

During this period, while the five Coalblack children despaired at ever regaining their earlier life, Emil Coalblack grew gaunt. His already-sharp nose appeared even more beaklike in contrast with his thinning frame, and

he always had coal dust on his hands and face; it even got in his meals without him noticing it. Then, one day, his children found him wearing a great big smile, and he gave each 1,000 dollars for spending money. Mary, the eldest, was curious enough to follow him while her siblings were drunk with the pleasure of having money again. She saw him capture a crow from one of the towers and feed it a strange mixture of seed and some odd sludge. After it had consumed the disgusting treat, her father bit the crow's head off and proceeded to devour the bird, feathers and all. Feeling sick, Mary retreated to her rooms to think about what she'd seen.

The next day, when she next saw her father, he gifted her with another several hundred dollars, pleased with himself and his secrets. That night, she confronted him about it. Nervous when cornered, Emil revealed the concoction he had created from coal dust, crows' eggs and a few drops of his blood. Then he demonstrated: feeding it to a bird from the grounds, he then consumed the bird. Mary's eyes widened as she watched her father shrink into a small, black bird with unusually bright eyes. Her crow-father then flew out through an open window into the darkness. He returned within the hour with an emerald necklace, and Mary then knew how her father had tried to reclaim their fortune. She approved.

She could not, and would not, keep it a secret from the rest of the family. Instead, she inducted her siblings, (from oldest to youngest) Karina, Sharon, Emanuel and Osmund, into the secret of stealing the crow's feathers. They all took great joy in it, and the Coalblack family once again had money to spare, though they spent it quietly.

Today, the youngest of the Coalblacks is in his 30s. Three of the children have married and had children, but they all still live in Crow House with their brood. Their spouses are not averse to a few nighttime excursions as crows, and the Coalblack children are growing up with a strange set of ethics. Most are already learning to make the mixture for themselves. Mary, now the matriarch of the family, is unmarried. She runs the family, including Emil, strictly, ensuring that none steal from the same place too often. Mary spends a great deal of time in crow-form among the real birds, and it seems at times that she prefers their company to her family's.

Other supernaturals may or may not get along with the Coalblack family in any given encounter. The Coalblacks have, over the years, acquired the gloomy, scavenger nature of the crows: they steal from others, primarily wealth, to get on. Most members of the family are reticent and would rather leave than face conflict, more crow and less human than they once were. But Mary Coalblack retains her social nature, and she is more likely to deal with "outsiders" than not. She is also the most likely to hatch a plan that attracts the local characters' negative attention, such as stealing Essence from a Forsaken's locus or nicking fetishes from his territory.

## Crow

Use the statistics for a raven in the **World of Darkness Rulebook**, p. 203.

## Young Coalblack

**Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 2 (3), Resolve 2 (4), Strength 2 (1), Dexterity 4 (3), Stamina 2, Presence 2 (3), Manipulation 3 (1), Composure 2 (3)

**Skills:** Animal Ken 2, Brawl 3, Firearms 1, Intimidation 2, Investigation (Casing the Joint) 3, Larceny (Locks) 3, Occult 1, Stealth 4, Streetwise (Fencing Goods) 2, Subterfuge 1

**Merits:** Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Fighting Finesse (Beak), Resources 2

**Willpower:** 4 (7)

**Morality:** 6

**Essence:** 3 (maximum of 3)

**Virtue:** Fortitude

**Vice:** Gluttony

**Health:** 7 (4)

**Initiative:** 6

**Defense:** 2

**Speed:** 10 (14)

**Size:** 5 (2)

**Aspects:** *Thieving* — Vicious Skintaker; *Talisman* — No Talisman; *Skinchanging* — Bare Necessities 1, Fast Healer, Rejuvenating Change 2, Strong Instincts  
*Vicious Skintaker:* In order to change shape, the Coalblack must feed a crow a disgusting concoction (which the crow strangely seems to adore) and then consume the creature.

*Strong Instincts:* Young Coalblacks often lose themselves in the nature of their animal forms. Only when they really need to focus do they spend the point of Willpower.

**Storytelling Hints:** A young Coalblack has grown up on her family's scavenged fortune. She doesn't really see anything wrong with that, and she actually thinks it's kind of odd that others would. If they leave their things just lying about, then of course they'll get taken. Because she's still young and relatively new to the whole shapechanging thing, she hasn't yet run down the road of Morality degradation. But just wait.

In confrontation, this skinthief uses Father Wolf's Speed to flee as quickly as possible, if in bird form. In human form, there's nothing for it but to get away if possible and hope the family can help.

## Mary Coalblack

**Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 2, Resolve 4, Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 2





**Skills:** Academics 2, Animal Ken (Crows) 3, Brawl 1, Expression 3, Firearms (Self-Defense) 3, Investigation 1, Intimidation (Family) 2, Medicine 1, Occult 2, Persuasion 2, Science 1, Socialize 1, Subterfuge 2, Weaponry 1

**Merits:** Animal Affinity (Crows) 2, Contacts (Local Socialites), Resources 4

**Willpower:** 5

**Morality:** 5

**Essence:** 3 (maximum of 3)

**Virtue:** Prudence

**Vice:** Pride

**Health:** 7 (4)

**Initiative:** 5

**Defense:** 2

**Speed:** 9 (14)

**Size:** 5 (2)

**Aspects:** *Thieving* — Vicious Skintaker; *Talisman* — No Talisman; *Skinchanging* — Animal Speech 1, Bare Necessities 1, Enchanting Affinity, Rejuvenating Change 2

**Animal Speech:** Mary can speak with her crows directly, at the cost of one point of Essence per scene.

**Enchanting Affinity:** Through practice and patience, Mary Coalblack has managed to develop some sort of connection with the crows of Coalblack Manor. She cares for them even as they fuel her family's occult power, and they protect her.

**Storytelling Hints:** Mary is the mortar that holds her family together. She recognizes that there are forces out there that would probably prefer that she and hers not practice the arts that they do, and she means to protect the family at all costs. While other Coalblacks, with less foresight, spend their time maintaining the family's fortune through petty theft, they don't notice Mary sacrificing herself to keep the family together. They probably don't know about the dead inspector moldering in what now serves as

the aviary, mostly eaten and covered in bird shit by now.

When confronted, Mary isn't one to run — at least not for long. She's more likely to try to lose her pursuers before returning to Coalblack Manor if in bird form. Otherwise, she makes a strategic retreat to her home so she can call upon a swarm of crows, all willing to die on her behalf.

## Tusk-Runners

*Long ago, before the sun dawned on the world with any regularity, the elephant lord ruled over all the land. His size was great and his strength was unequaled, so none could deny his commands for fear of being crushed. But his demands were selfish and benefited none but him. The other animals gathered in secret and fear to seek freedom from the elephant lord.*

"How are we to free ourselves?" asked Man.

"I shall challenge him to a race," said Cheetah, "for I am the fastest creature alive."

So Cheetah challenged the elephant lord to a race, and the elephant lord agreed. But the path was to be to the center of a grove of oil palms that had grown together since the first days and was impassable. The start was called, and Cheetah became as the wind, dashing into the maze of trees to find the center. The elephant lord yelled contemptuously, and trampled down the strong oil palms, rushing straight to the center before Cheetah could find his path. On his way, the elephant lord crushed many fruits of the oil palm, and their sweet oil landed on Cheetah in many spots. In embarrassment, Cheetah vowed to never wash them away, and this is how he got his spots.

Once again, the animals met to seek freedom from the elephant lord.

"How are we to free ourselves?" asked Man.

"I shall challenge him to eat from the top of the tallest tree," said Giraffe, "for none is taller than I."

So Giraffe challenged the elephant lord to eat from any height that Giraffe could not, and the elephant lord agreed. Giraffe first went and ate from the second-tallest mangrove, sure that the elephant lord could do no better. The elephant lord approached the second-tallest mangrove and declared, "The second-tallest is too short for the elephant lord." He proceeded to knock down the tallest mangrove and consume the topmost leaf.

Once again, the animals met to seek freedom from the elephant lord.

"How are we to free ourselves?" asked Man.

"You are always asking how we are to free ourselves, Man," cried Mouse, "but you do not stand up to the elephant lord yourself."

"I am not the fastest, as is Cheetah, or the tallest, as is Giraffe, or the smallest, as you are," replied Man.

"Nevertheless," said Mouse, "It is your turn to challenge the elephant lord."

Man was nervous, but he was also clever. "Very well," said he.

Man and the animals went to the elephant lord, who laughed and asked, "Who is to challenge me today? Is it Pangolin, who wishes to challenge me to fear? Or the bulbul challenging me to sing?"

"No," said Man, "it is I."

"And what is your challenge?"

"To find me." And at that the elephant lord laughed.

"You are soft and hairless," said the elephant lord. "You do not appear as the birds, hard to see in the savannah or against the sky, and you do not share the dark hair of the gorilla to conceal yourself among the trees."

"Nevertheless," said Man, "you will not find me, for I am too clever. In three days, the search will begin." And the elephant lord agreed.

The elephant lord left to wait through the three days, and Man followed close. The first day, Man found a sharpened stone but stayed near the elephant lord. "What will you do with that," asked the great creature, "dig out a hiding place?" But Man did not answer. The second day, Man picked certain herbs from the ground but stayed near the elephant lord. "I will find you most easily if you do not hide," cried the elephant lord, but Man remained silent. The third day, Man gathered some thread from tree bark. "There is no hope, Man," spoke the elephant lord. "You squandered your three days to hide, and I will find you easily come morning!" And with that, the elephant lord slept.

After he awoke, Man was nowhere to be seen, and the elephant lord assembled the animals. He was eager to thwart Man, who had a reputation for being clever. The elephant lord looked within the great forests for Man, but Man was not there. The elephant lord peered across the great savannah, but Man was not there. Everywhere the elephant lord looked, Man was not, and the animals began to whisper that the elephant lord could not find Man. It was only as the earth swallowed the sun and the sky went dark that the elephant lord gave up, but Man still did not appear. The animals and the elephant lord slept.

When the sun again rose, Man was there. "Where did you hide?" demanded the elephant lord.

"With the sharp stone, I cut your belly," said Man, "and with the herbs I made it feel as little more than a bug's bite. With the thread, I sewed your belly after I crawled in. That is where I hid."

The elephant lord admitted defeat and acceded to Man's demands that the elephant no longer command the animals cruelly. To ensure the elephant did not lie, Man told one of his many sons to enter the elephant as he had, and his son after him, and to prevent the giant creature from rampaging.

*The tradition continues.*

In Africa and Asia, there are small tribes or clans of people who worship the elephant's strength and endurance. Some still tell the above legend of their origin; others have their own myths or see their practices solely as a manhood ritual. Regardless, these tribes continue to remember the ancient practice of "tusk-running."

After a ritual preparation of the self that involves bathing in elephant's milk and oils from local plants, the tusk-runner approaches the sleeping elephant. Using a very sharp knife, usually stone, coated with a numbing agent, he cuts into the elephant's belly and crawls inside. Once inside, some sew the cut closed, some use organic epoxies and others simply let it be. At that point, the tusk-runner has the knowledge necessary to *become* the elephant, entering its mind as he entered its body and taking the elephant's existence for its own.

Some tusk-runners make it a point to only live as an elephant for a short while, seeing it as a spiritual experience, and leaving the elephant whole as they depart in the night. Others use the elephants for work, toppling trees and moving heavy loads for the village, considering it their right after besting the elephant lord in such a magnificent challenge. The last tusk-runners don the elephant skins for war, trampling enemies and crushing villages beneath their feet.

Tusk-runners are rare on other continents, but not impossible. People emigrate from their native homes every year, and some who move to lands without elephants have the urge to perform this ritual in their blood. Luckily for them, there are zoos everywhere throughout the world that keep elephants, giving tusk-runners the opportunity to indulge their spiritual needs without flying to another continent. Tusk-running does require illegal entry into the zoos (and the animals), but the practice does little harm to the great creatures themselves, making it much easier than if a tusk-runner needed to kill an elephant each time.

But some tusk-runners cannot content themselves with that spiritual sense of oneness. For some, joining the elephant in war, or in its natural habitat, completes the bond. Most of the latter never leave their native lands, because one will never find the natural habitat in the United States or Britain; if they try, they eventually return or give up tusk-running, because doing it in a zoo gives them no satisfaction. Those who tusk-run for war have another solution: rampage through the zoo. Sometimes they manage to escape the zoo before wildlife control finishes them, other times they are shot down before they ever escape the grounds. Very few out of those who try (already a tiny number) escape into the "wilderness" around the zoos and disappear for a while. Still, a rogue elephant is very hard to hide, and most are eventually caught.

Careful examination of a tusk-run elephant's body with the runner inside reveals a couple of distinguishing traits. The very faint scar of the runner's entry is visible to those who look closely, for one. Blood tests, likely to be run on

elephants who rampage, reveal human blood mixed in with the elephant blood. Few ever find the tusk-runner, though. Some tribes suggest that he is absorbed into the elephant upon death, to be with the creature forever in some manner that fits the tribe's beliefs. But it may be that people simply do not look, assuming the thin belly scar to be mishandling early in life or a symptom of the elephant's habitat. And nobody orders x-rays for an elephant.

Rampaging elephants most often incur North American supernaturals' wrath. When a group's territory includes the zoo, or is near it, they will not be content to let a skinchanger take the local elephant and rage across the landscape. If a group really needs to acquire some "heavy artillery," the characters may be able to deal with a tusk-runner, promising it a section of their territory, or protection from the authorities, in exchange for the great power it brings to a fight.

### Elephant

**Attributes:** Intelligence 1, Wits 2, Resolve 3, Strength 7, Dexterity 2, Stamina 7, Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 3  
**Skills:** Athletics (Running) 2, Brawl 3 (Tusks), Intimidation 3, Survival 3  
**Willpower:** 6  
**Initiative:** 5  
**Defense:** 2  
**Speed:** 15 (species factor 6)  
**Size:** 15

#### Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Tusk	1 (L)	12
Trample	2 (B)	12

**Health:** 22

### Tusk-Runner

**Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Strength 4 (7), Dexterity 2, Stamina 2 (7), Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 3  
**Skills:** Animal Ken (Elephants) 2, Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Crafts 1, Expression 2, Medicine 2, Occult 1, Persuasion 1, Socialize 2, Stealth 2, Survival (Savanna) 2, Weaponry (Spear) 3  
**Merits:** Holistic Awareness, Iron Stamina 1, Iron Stomach, Status (Tribe) 2  
**Willpower:** 5

**Morality:** 6

**Essence:** 3 (maximum of 3)

**Virtue:** Faith

**Vice:** Wrath

**Health:** 7 (22)

**Initiative:** 5

**Defense:** 2 (3)

**Speed:** 11 (15)

**Aspects:** *Thieving*—Humane Harvest; *Talisman*—Permanent Talisman; *Skinchanging*—Imitate Gift (Savage Might) 2, Out-of-Body, Scentless Transformation

**Humane Harvest:** Tusk-runners take on control over their

totem animals without causing the creatures any actual harm. The process is nearly painless and heals quickly.

**Out-of-Body:** When a tusk-runner leaves the elephant's body, ignore the elephant's first 15 Health boxes. The seven that are left are exactly what damage the tusk-runner has suffered from his internal post. If the elephant dies with the tusk-runner inside, the runner also dies, but he is never found.

**Permanent Talisman:** A tusk-runner, upon entering his first elephant, claims a small trophy from within

the creature — traditionally a

small portion of its heart. He must have this talisman in order to properly possess an elephant.



### Horned Hunters

*"I wrested these horns I wear from a bull elk that weighed one ton and stood taller than two of me! I spent over a month hunting that monster. You cannot escape me!"*

Sometimes, hunters return to civilization after a few days out in the woods stalking deer, shaken by some unknown event. After being plied with a few (or many) drinks, some of them are willing to share what they saw. "A monster deer! It charged at me, and when I shot it, it kept coming! It was *this* big!" is the most common answer, but only because it's harder to coerce the stranger sights from them. Some, if approached with liquor and kind words, the hunter will say, "The beast was twice as tall as me. Its

antlers towered over everything, but — but it had a gun, and it shot at me!”

These poor souls encountered horned hunters, humans who steal the horns and skins of the deer or elk they hunt and wear them, stealing the creature’s essence to become a monstrous combination of the two. Horned hunters continue to hunt, as it is their calling, but they display a very possessive and protective nature of the area where they hunt, much in the same way that werewolves claim territory. Other hunters, horned or not, who enter this territory cause the horned hunter to threaten them, hoping to chase them away. If the human hunters do not leave, the horned ones are rarely afraid of killing and claiming them as another trophy.

Werewolves can easily come into conflict with horned hunters, as both claim and fiercely protect territory. In Urhan or Urshul form, werewolves incur no wrath from the hunters; the horned ones do not concern themselves with the natural animals in their territory. Hunters unafraid of using any means available to them, horned ones fight more often with rifles or compound bows than they do with hoof and horn.

Few werewolves worry overmuch about the hunters’ origins, accepting that there are strange things out there that defy explanation. Horned hunters were once human, they think. Some Cahalith and Ithaeur believe, after re-learning ancient howls and demanding history of spirits, that the hunters come from a sect from Eastern Europe that has since migrated to wherever members of the deer family reside. Beyond that, werewolves only know what they find when the horned hunters are dead: an unkempt man or woman, wearing nothing more than a deerskin, with blood pulsing out of the head wounds where two deer horns were pushed into the skull.

### Buck

**Attributes:** Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 3, Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

**Skills:** Athletics (Running) 3, Brawl 3, Intimidation 2, Survival 2

**Willpower:** 6

**Initiative:** 6

**Defense:** 3

**Speed:** 14 (species factor 8)

**Size:** 6

**Weapons/Attacks:**

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Horn	3 (L)	9

**Health:** 9

### Sample Horned Hunter

**Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Strength 2 (5), Dexterity 3, Stamina 3, Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

**Skills:** AnimalKen2, Athletics 1, Brawl 1, Crafts 2, Drive 1, Firearms (Rifle) 4, Investigation 2, Medicine 2, Occult 1, Socialize 1,

Stealth 2, Subterfuge 1, Survival (Tracking) 2, Weaponry (Knife) 2

**Merits:** Allies (Hunters) 2, Danger Sense, Quick Draw (Firearms), Strong Back, Resources 1

**Willpower:** 5

**Morality:** 5

**Essence:** 3 (maximum of 3)

**Virtue:** Hope

**Vice:** Wrath

**Health:** 8 (9)

**Initiative:** 6

**Defense:** 3

**Speed:** 10 (13)

**Size:** 5 (6)

**Aspects:** *Thieving* — Hunter/Killer; *Talisman* — Permanent Talisman; *Skinchanging* — Extraordinary Specimen, Fast Healing, Hybrid Form 2, Scentsless Transformation, Static Body Shape, Twisted Tongue

**Extraordinary Specimen:** Horned hunters hunt the most fearsome bucks in the forest to take their antlers and power.

**Hybrid Form:** By taking the prize antlers and *pushing* them through the skin and bone of his forehead, the horned hunter takes on the aspect of his prey. He can change back simply by removing them, leaving no lasting damage beyond small sores that quickly heal.

**Twisted Tongue:** The horned hunter uses this Aspect to speak his native human language despite having a head half-like that of a deer.

**Storytelling Hints:** Always fond of the sport of kings, the horned hunters take it to the next level by becoming like their prey. With this transformation, they become the kings of the forest, and they hunt in a most free fashion. They can’t use the antlers for long, however, so they typically go out for a few hours of ruthless, carefree hunting on a weekend.

In hybrid form, horned hunters are terribly territorial. Not only do they not want anyone to interrupt their short period of perfect hunting, they also consider the forest where they hunt to be *theirs*, whether or not others have better claim to it. Confrontations tend to escalate into violence rather quickly.

Some horned hunters become so enamored with their life of hunting that they choose to never go back. These are the ones who spend Willpower dots to remain in hybrid form forever. They tend to go mad quickly.

### Spirit-Skinners

“There’s a tree in my basement.”

“Yeah, so?”

“It gives me magic powers.”

“Yer nuts. Gimme another beer.”

Animals are not the only victims of skinthieves. Others, dark in mind and purpose, learn how to find and trap



the natives of the Shadow Realm. Spirits that enter the physical world are in danger from these half-madmen, the spirit-skinners. Most are only slightly unstable, endowed with an inkling that not only does the invisible walk among them, they can be sources of great power, but others, more keen of sight (or simply more mad) follow their instincts further. They figure out how to find spirits that trespass into the “real” world. Then the spirit-skinners trap those spirits.

Only the most knowledgeable and mystically daring humans have the wherewithal to actually become a spirit-skinner. Of those who try, most fail spectacularly, ending up as the hosts and puppets of those they wanted to abuse. To be a successful spirit-skinner means that one been clever and lucky: he has figured out the proper ritual to steal a spirit’s powers, found sources that are not false or misleading about the identity of at least one spirit and its ban and, when he went to find a spirit, he found the right one — instead of any other that would laugh at his attempt and punish him for his presumption.

Of all the skinthieves, spirit-skinners are the most likely to learn their techniques from a library, albeit only one that caters to supernatural tastes. Learning from these books, a spirit-skinner uses focused tools to trap specific spirits. Usually, these are based on the spirits’ bans anyway. Bans that include the inability to conceal oneself from a mortal wearing hollyhock and being forbidden to cross a line of pure salt are those that lead skinners to use such tools. Once the skinner knows enough to capture a spirit indefinitely, he can bargain with it for its power. Though few spirits know how to freely endow mortals with their powers (at least without possessing them), the ritual that the spirit-skinner has hopefully studied is what allows that transfer.

Much more rarely, a spirit-skinner uses general tools to find and capture spirits. Spirit-skinners may spy unmaterialized spirits with the irises of a particularly attentive deer placed over the eyes or by looking through a clear diamond stolen from an ancient cult. Capturing one might involve a net woven from the hairs of 30 weeping virgins. Keeping them captive involves some form of prison. Spirit-skinners using tools of this sort, that don’t exploit a specific spirit’s ban, are abnormalities among skinners, occult scientists among laboratory engineers.

A spirit-skinner may try to kill her prey instead of capture it. Once the spirit is dead or as it is dying, the hunter can skin it before it dissipates and treat the ephemeral skin with her ritual to make it useful. Though the method is different, the end result is about the same: the spirit-skinner (much more literal in this form) gains some of the spirit’s powers.

Eventually, the source of power runs out. The captive spirit dies, runs completely out of drainable magic or escapes, or the treated skin loses its potency. Either way, a spirit-skinner is always eventually forced to return to the hunt, seeking another spirit to fuel her desired abilities.

Spirit-skinners almost always hunt only one type of spirit, usually denoted by its general domain — a fire or storm spirit, for example. It’s difficult to learn dependable information on more varied spirits, so they stick with the spirits and bans that have worked in the past. Some very few have no such restriction, hunting whatever spirit grabs their attention at a given time. The latter have more varied abilities, since they tend not to stick with spirits that give them fire powers or the ability to encourage plant growth. They also face much greater danger and have shorter lifespans.

One power common to all spirit-skinners, regardless of the Numina that they steal from their victims, is the ability to enter the *Hisil* through the Gauntlet. They may not, however, be able to find their way back to the material world. Spirit-skinners steal only some portions of their victims’ powers: spirit-skinners always get their victims’ Influence, usually at one fewer dots than the spirit had it, but they take only three or four Numina. If the skinner fails to extract the Numen: Gauntlet Breach, then he may be trapped in the Shadow Realm.

People become spirit-skinners for various reasons. Some wish retribution on the alien creatures that once possessed (or stole) the bodies of their close friends or relatives. This doesn’t imply great learning. The skinner may in fact never know that it’s a “spirit” she is chasing, much less anything about the true nature of the Shadow — to her mind, she may have just stumbled across some unique supernatural thing similar to the Jersey Devil. Even so, most spirit-skinners have simpler motives: personal gain. One skinner might want knowledge into the hidden paths of the world; others might want to use the spirits as a method for escaping their troubles or believe that there are great treasures and power hidden wherever these . . . things came from. This may even be true, but a spirit-skinner is unlikely to ever find whatever is there.

These are quite similar to the transgressors against whom Father Wolf once guarded the borderlands between the physical and the spirit. Today, the Uratha who uphold Father Wolf’s legacy do the same, and spirit-skinners are as guilty of breaking the world’s natural order as the spirits who hollow out human bodies for their own purposes. Some werewolves may find a reason to temporarily ally with a spirit-skinner, but such alliances rarely last long or end well for the skinner.

### Sample Spirit-Skinner

**Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 2, Resolve 3, Strength 2 (4), Dexterity 2 (4), Stamina 2 (3), Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 2

**Skills:** Academics 1, Brawl 1, Crafts 2, Drive 1, Empathy 3, Firearms 1, Intimidation 1, Investigation 2, Occult (Spirits) 2, Persuasion 2, Socialize 1, Stealth 1, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 3

**Merits:** Barfly, Contacts (Occult Groups), Fast Reflexes 1, Resources 2, Striking Looks 2

**Willpower:** 5

**Morality:** 6  
**Essence:** 6 (maximum of 6)  
**Virtue:** Charity  
**Vice:** Envy  
**Health:** 7  
**Initiative:** 4 (6)  
**Defense:** 2  
**Speed:** 9 (18)  
**Size:** 5 (4)

**Aspects:** *Thieving* — Hunter/Killer; *Talisman* — Bound Totem; *Skinchanging* — Animal Speech 1, Increased Essence, Spirit Affinity

**Hunter/Killer:** When the spirit-skinner's captive spirit runs out of juice, the spirit-skinner must go ahead and find a new one. This spirit-skinner doesn't have to stick with only one sort of spirit, so his Spirit-Affinity powers might change when he begins draining a new spirit.

**Bound Totem:** Currently, the spirit-skinner has a Wolf-Brother (see **Werewolf: The Forsaken**, pp. 244–245) bound amidst occult trappings in his basement.

**Spirit-Affinity:** The spirit-skinner's accessible Numina are Chorus, Materialize and Wilds Sense. He uses all Numina as a Wolf-Brother would, with the spirit's natural Attributes.

**Animal Speech:** For a point of Essence, the spirit-skinner can speak and understand the First Tongue for one scene as though he were a spirit.

**Notes:** When the spirit-skinner takes on his "animal" shape, he becomes an immaterial spirit on the physical side of the Gauntlet. He may sink through into the spirit world, or else he is forced to spend one point of Essence each hour to remain in the physical world. If he allows himself to sink into the *Hisil*, he cannot return to the physical world without finding a locus of the appropriate type or using his Materialize Numen. He does *not* need to spend a point of Essence each day to survive, but he does need to be in the physical world before he can return to human shape.

He uses the spirit's Corpus for his Health while in spirit shape, and he uses the spirit's Speed as written. The spirit's Power, Finesse and Resistance Attributes become the spirit-skinner's Strength, Dexterity and Stamina Attributes, and the spirit-skinner continues to use his Skills, Skill Specialties and Merits, even though spirits do not have these traits.

**Storytelling Notes:** This spirit-skinner is primarily an explorer. He has a fair amount of experience in the occult, and his studies of the spirit world have borne especial fruit. Despite his advanced understanding of spirits and the spirit world, he doesn't really consider spirits to be creatures capable of *feeling*, so he feels no remorse for capturing and painfully binding a wolf-spirit in his basement. He just sees the spirit as a tool, a mechanism for enabling his further exploration of the spirit world.

While in spirit form, the skinner constantly uses the Wilds Sense Numen, using it as his guiding exploratory

tool. He has not used Chorus since the Wolf-Brothers that arrived at his call sniffed him out as an imposter and chased him out of the spirit world, though if he were truly in trouble he might try it. He's not bad at lying his way out of things, so he uses that as his primary method of surviving the spirit-eat-spirit world. He realizes that he has a degree of physical power there (something he's rather unused to), but he's still more likely to run from trouble than he is to stay and fight.

## The Stray

*"You've heard my bark ev'ry night you've lived here.  
Please don' make me use my bite."*

At night in the city, when the people want to sleep and the only lights are from the streets and the moon, that is when the strays sing. They join their voices to make a chorus that lifts to the heavens above, and perhaps one day the heavens will hear it. Because, some say, those unwashed and unloved hounds are led in their song by one creature more pitifully damned than all the rest. This is the story some whisper.

Alan Donning was not an exceptional man but in love. He loved two creatures with all his heart, one his wife and one his loyal dog. When he returned early from work one day to find the former panting in another's arms, he would have broken completely were it not for the latter, his *faithful* companion. The two of them left together, never looking back.

Nights grew longer and days grew colder as Alan and his only friend wandered the streets. Half-broken, Alan never thought to seek a new apartment or return to his job; that life was shattered. Discarded boxes were home to him now, and finding another rotten scrap of food his only calling. But the air froze at him, turned his skin pale and crisp, and he almost died.

His dog died instead. It tore at its own belly with weathered teeth and cut a jagged strip from its groin to its neck. Blinded by grief, Alan Donning could not betray his only loyal friend's last wish any more than he could have cut the dog open himself. He crawled inside.

When he awoke, he was somebody new. He was a large dog, larger than his friend had ever been, and hungry. And lonely. When the flesh of his companion rotted and sloughed off him, Alan had no choice but to claim another stray's body. It is almost as if the city's free hounds offer themselves to him, and Alan could not bear to let them die in vain. Alan roves the city still, gathering a pack of strays around him wherever he goes and howling out of grief for his lost friend, and all the dogs that followed.

Listen to the nighttime howls. They aren't just grief anymore. They're misery. He *wants* to die — but the dogs don't let him.

What few werewolves who have encountered the Stray don't do much. Alan has little to offer them, and the Forsaken are too kindhearted to slay him for any transgression



they find of him. He is nearly a relative, and, much as the werewolves, he never chose this life. Sometimes, when a werewolf has the free time and resources, she may give Alan a small helping hand.

### Dog

Use the statistics for a dog in the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 203.

The Stray

**Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 4, Strength 2 (4), Dexterity 2 (3), Stamina 2 (3), Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

**Skills:** Academics 2, Animal Ken 3, Brawl 3, Computer 2, Drive 1, Empathy 2, Larceny 2, Stealth 2, Streetwise 2, Survival (City) 4

**Merits:** Allies (Bums and Crazies) 2, Animal Affinity (Dogs) 1, Fleet of Foot 3, Iron Stomach, Natural Immunity, Socially Small

**Willpower:** 7

**Morality:** 6

**Essence:** 3 (maximum of 3)

**Virtue:** Fortitude

**Vice:** Envy

**Health:** 7

**Initiative:** 5 (6)

**Defense:** 2

**Speed:** 12 (17)

**Size:** 5 (4)

**Aspects:** *Thieving* — Hunter/Killer; *Talisman* — Talisman; *Skinchanging* — Enchanting Affinity, Fast Healing, Long Life 2, Sense of Familiarity, Strong Instincts

**Hunter/Killer:** Though the Stray does not actually hunt or kill his totem animals (they come to him and cut themselves open), he still feels guilt and regret over each one.

**Enchanting Affinity:** This ability is almost entirely non-voluntary. Dogs come to the Stray and take pleasure in

hanging around him. The closest he ever comes to *using* his Enchanting Affinity is when something angers him (a rare event). In such cases, he unconsciously invokes anger in the dogs around him.

**Fast Healing:** As he uses the skins that dogs bestow upon him to remain warm and alive in the cold nights, their spirits also cure his harm.

**Long Life:** Sadly, the Stray is doomed to endure this life for a long time.

**Sense of Familiarity:** People rarely, if ever, notice that the Stray is sitting on the street corner, draped in rags with the skin of a dog on his lap. They notice the feral beasts crowding around him, but rarely him. This Aspect is not voluntary, either.

**Strong Instincts:** When in dog form, the Stray does whatever it is dogs do to survive the cold nights. He remembers them reasonably clearly, but doesn't think of them often. He almost never bothers to spend a Willpower for his Skills and Attributes, but should he happen upon some facet of his former life, he might.

**Notes:** Alan takes what he gets, and only then because he can't dishonor the dog by letting it die for nothing. Sometimes, he is given the skin of a feral lap dog, and sometimes the skin is of a great husky. As such, his statistics in animal form occasionally change.

**Storytelling Hints:** Alan truly is miserable. He doesn't want this life — without the old friend that he loved so much, he doesn't want a life much at all. But he can't end it, because it would make the sacrifices of so many dogs pointless, and he can't bring himself to do that to them or their memories. As such, Alan really is the Stray, wandering about the city aimlessly, eating what he can find to eat and occasionally fighting with other strays and bums.

There's really no confrontation that would upset the Stray. He's almost more dog than man now, and he fights pitifully to defend territory as much as any other canine, even when in human form. If obviously up against a superior opponent (such as a werewolf in Urshul form), the Stray will put his tail between his legs and take off like any other dog. But when he does get into fights, he has a small horde of stray dogs to back him up, making him more dangerous than even he believes.

### Doctor Ape

*An ape is ne'er so like an ape/As when he wears a doctor's cape.*

—Anonymous

Modern African legends tell of an American doctor who came to the continent as part of a relief program in the late '50s. They say only good things about his intentions and efforts, but all agree that eventually the madness came upon him, and he was forced to leave for home. Some of those who claim they knew him (and there are many, for it makes a good story) also mention how he must have been bitten by one of the many venomous vermin in the area, for

his skin was somewhat mottled and covered with untoward bumps and uncomfortable-looking creases. As if, some add, it didn't quite fit him any longer.

The doctor, who was a skilled physician and surgeon, did indeed have an accident during his tenure in Africa. He had a traumatic run-in with a violent chimpanzee. All agreed it was solely his own fault for aggravating the animal, and it only caused superficial damage to the doctor — though a little more harm to his pride, perhaps. The incident gave the doctor an interest in the chimpanzee lifestyle. Books on the subject came from America at his order, and he spent increasing amounts of his spare time pulling a Goodall.

One day, when a victim of severe burns wound up in his office, the doctor needed to graft on some new skin but had no source that would do. With a flash of inspiration, he had a chimpanzee brought to him and killed, and he grafted on skin from humans' closest relatives. The experiment intrigued him greatly, and the doctor began to neglect his duties in order to more closely explore the similarities between his own species and the chimps. The next thing his patients and the program directors knew, he announced that he was returning to America. He looked and acted oddly. And then he was gone.

Doctor Ape, as some began to call him after his disappearance, never showed up in America. One native who examined the home he left behind in Africa found two curious things: First, his medicine bag was missing, though several of the doctor's medicines were strewn about. Second, a completely skinned chimpanzee was cunningly hidden beneath the floorboards and found only after it began to smell. Those who talked about it immediately afterward, and many didn't out of fear or respect, suggested that he had perhaps appeared as if his skin had been wearing a too-thick skin. He had scratched at it often, they said, as if growing accustomed to wearing something new or growing a new beard — though he remained as clean-shaven as ever.

To this day, certain villages in Africa near the heavy jungles sometimes notice a chimpanzee watching them from nearby. Some rumor that, if the chimpanzee sees an important injury or a sickness in the village, a white doctor with strange, lumpy skin and recently-sewn wounds behind his ears appears from the jungle to help the hurt and cure the ill. The white doctor, some add, asks the villagers to spread word that he is looking for an apprentice.

Doctor Ape is secretive and private. The most likely event in which a werewolf encounters him — if the werewolves haven't heard of the mysterious surgeon and gone in search of him — is one in which they or one they care for need emergency medical assistance. Few Forsaken would condemn the doctor after that.

### Chimpanzee

**Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 4

**Skills:** Athletics (Climbing) 3, Brawl (Bite) 3, Intimidation 3, Survival 3

**Willpower:** 6

**Initiative:** 8

**Defense:** 4

**Speed:** 13 (species factor 6)

**Size:** 4

**Weapons/Attacks:**

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	2 (L)	6

**Health:** 7

### Doctor Ape

**Attributes:** Intelligence 4, Wits 2 (3), Resolve 2, Strength 1 (3), Dexterity 3 (4), Stamina 2 (3), Presence 2, Manipulation 1 (2), Composure 4

**Skills:** Academics 3, (Athletics 3), Brawl 1 (3), Drive 1, Empathy 3, (Intimidation 3), Investigation 1, Medicine (Surgery) 4, Persuasion (Bedside Manner) 2, Science 3, Socialize 2, Survival (Chimpanzee Habitats) 2 (3)

**Merits:** Allies (Tribesmen) 1, Fame 1, Holistic Awareness, Language (Hausa, Swahili)

**Willpower:** 6

**Morality:** 6

**Essence:** 3 (maximum of 3)

**Virtue:** Charity

**Vice:** Sloth

**Health:** 7

**Initiative:** 7 (8)

**Defense:** 2 (4)

**Speed:** 9 (13)

**Size:** 5 (4)

**Aspects:** *Thieving* — Hunter/Killer; *Talisman* — Talisman; *Skin-changing* — Fast Healing, Imitate Gift (Know the Path) 2, Long Life 1, Scentless Transformation, Sense of Self, Strong Instincts

**Imitate Gift:** Doctor Ape uses Know the Path instinctively to find his way around the jungles on a day-to-day basis. This costs nothing. He occasionally uses the full version of this Gift to find people or animals that need his medical aid.

**Long Life:** Though something about his medical regimen has extended Doctor Ape's life, he has already been around a while. Perhaps that's why he's looking for an apprentice.

**Notes:** In chimpanzee form, Doctor Ape cannot be recognized as the strange American doctor. His Fame is only effective in human form.

**Storytelling Hints:** The good doctor always wanted to help people — and that's still his goal. He just found the means to an alternate way of life while in the process. Now, he enjoys living a life among the chimps of Africa. He tends to end up somewhat low on the chimp totem pole, but that's part of the allure, for him. He's also spent some time helping the indigenous apes medically, and some of them have begun imitating his practices. Monkey see, monkey do.

Still, he's never managed to just leave well enough alone among humans. He still has a goodly number of his medical tools, and he puts them to good use. At least once a month, Doctor Ape finds an African village that needs his assistance — whether because of a rash of injuries or a disease. He's still an expert doctor, and he refuses to let his skills go to waste.

If encountered in animal form, the doctor will probably just act the fool and run off with his chimpanzee community. Unless it means his life, of course, in which case he'll run to wherever he needs to go so he can change into his human shape. As a human, his looks are a little off, but most people accept it since he's a very good doctor who is willing to help for free.

## Barsarks

"Rrraaagh!"

Up in the mountains, away from the lights and streets and noises of people, bears wander sleepily and peacefully through their lives. As outdoorsmen know, a bear is a quiet animal that doesn't like disturbances — it would rather head away from an obnoxious human than toward, and all it really needs it to find its next, usually vegetarian, meal.

But they also know that bears are massive and strong, and implacable when roused to fury. Threatening such a creature's cubs is one well-known way to accomplish that. Getting between it and food or appearing to threaten its well-being are others. And while there are some bears, mostly grizzlies, that will attack humans without extreme provocation, it's nothing different. The bear's just making sure it gets some food.

Infinitely more frightening, and infinitely less known, are the creatures that look human but wear bear shirts, calling upon the beasts' spirits to give them potent strength, resistance to pain and a limitless source of rage to apply to *their* passions — often similar in nature to that of a true bear, but better defined.

Barsarks, as some call them in the northern European countries where their legends are most prevalent, prove themselves in a month-long ritual that requires them to hunt their totem creature in its natural habitat and overpower it alone. Traditionally, they reject dozens of potential prey during their month in the field until they find the great bear, the largest and fiercest specimen in the woods. After that trial by nature, the hopeful eats the bear's heart and cuts off its skin for curing.

Once the introductory ritual is complete, the barsark does as he wishes. In the past, the barsark earned a respected position as his king's honor guard for his triumph. It was his strongest urge to protect something he could consider his family, and his second strongest to remain fed. Today, this tradition survives only in the more distant communities of northern Europe, and there are no more kings. Those who still learn the ways of the barsarks typically live alone, out of the way of humanity

so they can practice their ways in peace. When disturbed, their ire and might can be matchless.

Youths of the barsark tradition have, over the last couple of centuries, left the Old World for the New, and there are some barsarks in North America. They have kept the legends alive from the untamed wilds, giving rise to the American image of the giant mountain man, wearing a massive, tangled beard and swathed in cured hides. Most of them today live near the Rockies, the Cascades or the Appalachians. Over time, some of them have migrated to the cities. They usually remain loners, choosing out a territory and guarding it as they would guard cubs. This habit can bring barsarks in conflict with werewolves who claim the same or nearby territories, as the barsark sees the world more bestially than the Uratha, not understanding that there are spirits that would inflict depredations on the physical world.



## Bear

**Attributes:** Intelligence 1, Wits 2, Resolve 4, Strength 5, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4, Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 4

**Skills:** Athletics (Climbing) 3, Brawl 4, Intimidation 3, Survival 3

**Willpower:** 5

**Initiative:** 6

**Defense:** 2

**Speed:** 13 (species factor 6)

**Size:** 7

### Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	3 (L)	7
Claw	1 (L)	9

**Health:** 11

### Sample Barsark

**Attributes:** Intelligence 1, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Strength 3 (6/7), Dexterity 2 (2), Stamina 3 (4), Presence 4, Manipulation 1, Composure 2

**Skills:** Animal Ken 2, Athletics 1, Brawl (Bear Forms) 4, Empathy 1, Intimidation (Bear Forms) 3, Investigation 2, Medicine 2, Socialize 1, Stealth 1, Survival 2, Weaponry (Axe) 3

**Merits:** Brawling Dodge, Giant, Iron Stamina 2

**Willpower:** 4

**Morality:** 6

**Essence:** 3 (maximum of 3)

**Virtue:** Justice

**Vice:** Wrath

**Health:** 9 (12/10)

**Initiative:** 4

**Defense:** 2

**Speed:** 10 (14)

**Size:** 6 (8/7)

**Aspects:** *Thieving* — Hunter/Killer; *Talisman* — Talisman; *Skinchanging* — Extraordinary Specimen, Fast Healing, Hybrid Form 5, Static Beast Shape, Twisted Tongue

**Talisman:** The barsark takes the hide of the biggest bear in the woods and claims its power. Ever after that, he must rely on the power of lesser bears to maintain his strength and fury. Should he lose the chain of skins he wears, he loses the approval of the spirits and must go on a harrowing vision quest and slay another bear in order to remain a barsark.

**Fast Healing:** When in hybrid form only, the barsark heals at a prodigious rate, making him a ferocious enemy.

**Hybrid Form:** Already huge in bear form, the barsark looks just as enormous and almost as bear-like in his hybrid form. The greatest difference is that he has a human aspect to his bear face, and he can wield any weapon not a firearm in his hands.

**Imitate Gift:** The barsark may only use this Gift in hybrid form, and he may spend no more than one point of Essence on it. After activating it, he may make a single attack at that increased Strength.

**Static Beast Shape:** Even though the barsark repeatedly hunts and takes the skins of lesser bears to constantly prove his worthiness to the spirit, the shapes he takes are always of the king-of-bears that he slew on his first vision quest.

**Twisted Tongue:** The bear shape is used for communing with the barsark's personal spirits and demons, so he need not speak then. This Aspect only allows the barsark to speak when in hybrid form, and even then his voice is gruff and growling.

**Storytelling Hints:** Shapechanging is the barsark's way of getting in touch with his inner self, and it was once sacred. Today, only some keep to the "old ways," and many others use their strength to get what they want. Some just keep people off their property, but others use their forms to trash their rivals or just get back at those who've annoyed them. Some who seek to become barsarks start out wanting to effect some form of just end — they will defend their streets from the punks who make it unsafe, perhaps — but it is the rare skinthief who can keep that promise.

In person, the barsark is gruff and immediate. He doesn't want to chat or lollygag, and if someone talking to him doesn't get to the point he'll just ignore her. When someone gets in his way, though, especially on purpose, he can easily lose his temper. He's not likely to run from a fight, even when he knows he's losing. It's something of a test, for him.

## The Invisible Man

*"It is not enough to be busy; so are the ants. The question is: What are we busy about?"*

— Henry David Thoreau

Some creatures are beneath the notice of humans. In fact, some might say that all creatures are beneath the notice of a human until he is bitten, or until the human gets hungry. But not every creature takes the time to either bite or look appetizing. Some creatures do nothing but scurry, eat their tidbits and hide. After all, humans don't kill what humans do not see.

What humans don't see, therefore, is invisible. And what is more invisible to humans than the lowly ant? It eats little, bites rarely and is small enough to escape nearly all attention. Humans only kill it when it steals from a human's pantry, so ants can live outside without trouble for ages and ages — and they have.

It is this philosophy that an unnamed man from Nicaragua took to heart after an unfortunate run-in with local drug-runners that left him almost (and certainly intended to be) dead. Following the method he learned from the old madman who nursed him back to health, the survivor began to travel out into the local jungles all by himself, and, alone, he would look at the native fire ants. Just watching them, as the old man, said, made him feel small, like them, and he liked very much the sensation of being nothing, small enough to easily crush but easier to just ignore.

Then — perhaps it was inevitable, the man thinks now — one of the ants bit him. The bite stung greatly, and it scared him away from the ants' nest. It was several weeks before he missed the feeling of invisibility enough to return. It took perhaps two weeks before he made another misstep, his foot breaking through the thin crust of the ground into the midst of the ant activity. He couldn't walk for a week, and he stayed at home for a month before the urge brought him back. He might have even known it was coming — despite the care he took and the distance he kept between himself and the ants he liked to watch, he eventually fell completely into the nest, and the small, vicious fire ants swarmed over him.

Amidst the pain, through the burning venom that each bite injected into his veins, the Nicaraguan felt released. He closed his eyes and waited for his death, but it didn't come. Instead, the pain stopped. His skin no longer tingled with the patter of little insect feet, and his racing heartbeat vanished completely. Instead, he felt nervous, and angry, and defensive, but he didn't know why.

Opening his eyes, he saw a new world. Mountains everywhere, and an enormous, ruined structure that was home, and a foe that needed to be destroyed. And he saw it out of a thousand eyes, all capturing only a small portion of what there was a building it into an accurate amalgam that was foremost in his perception.

That was the beginning. Now, the invisible man has learned how to control the ants after he settles into their consciousness, and he has begun exploring his world through their eyes. He finds that he can hear, with a little concentration, and understand his native language, and his ability to be an ant on the wall has allowed him to discover some secrets that might be worth more than his life.

His only problem is the biting. The biting never stops stops, even when he says for it to stop. And he needs the biting to get to his freedom — he can't become the ants without it, but he hates it. The ants crawl on him and bite at his skin, and they crawl into his ears and his mouth, and sometimes when he brings the swarm back to the nest he just wants to tear that big intruding body apart for his young. Sometimes, he's not sure if it's the ant swarm or his hatred of being human that's talking.

Normally, the invisible man remains beneath most people's notice. Who really cares about a coot who spends all his time out in the wilderness with the bugs? But he's learned some very strange things as a swarm, and it's only a matter of time before he learns at least some of the truths of the Uratha and the local Forsaken. And they ought to be concerned about who might hear what he's learned.

### Ant Swarm

**Attributes:** Intelligence 0, Wits 2, Resolve 2, Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3, Presence 1, Manipulation 0, Composure 4

**Skills:** Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Survival 2

**Willpower:** 6

**Initiative:** 8

**Defense:** 4

**Speed:** 10 (species factor 5)

**Size:** 4

**Weapons/Attacks:**

Type	Damage	Dice Pool
Bites	1 (B)*	6

**Health:** 7

**Notes:** Because the ant swarm can only attack if it is already crawling over its target, its attacks ignore Defense. Ants and an ant swarm can climb obstacles without any roll, and at their normal movement rate.

### The Invisible Man

**Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 2, Resolve 3, Strength 2 (1), Dexterity 3 (4), Stamina 2 (3), Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

**Skills:** Empathy 2, Firearms 2, Investigation 2, Larceny 2, Medicine 1, Persuasion 4, Science 1, Stealth 3, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 3

**Merits:** Allies (Secret-Mongers) 2, Danger Sense, Fleet of Foot 2, Socially Small

**Willpower:** 6

**Morality:** 6

**Essence:** 3 (maximum of 3)

**Virtue:** Prudence

**Vice:** Greed

**Health:** 7

**Initiative:** 6

**Defense:** 2

**Speed:** 10

**Size:** 5 (4)

**Aspects:** *Thieving* — Humane Harvest; *Talisman* — No Talisman; *Skinchanging* — Imitate Gift (Feet of Mist), Injurious Change, Out-of-Body, Restricted Change, Scentless Transformation

**Humane Harvest:** Since he steals the ants' powers by lying in their nest and letting them swarm over him, the invisible man doesn't actually harm the creatures overmuch.

**Imitate Gift:** The invisible man can use Feet of Mist only when possessing a swarm, and the Gift allows him to make the ant trail undetectable by others (though the ants of his swarm, who use it for orientation, still pick it up).

**Injurious Change:** In addition to taking one lethal wound when he changes, the invisible man also takes one additional point of lethal damage for every hour he is an ant swarm, as ants that remain at the nest continue to bite at his skin.

**Out-of-Body:** No wounds that the invisible man suffers while in animal form apply to his human form, but he does suffer lethal wounds for every hour he is in that shape. If the ant swarm is completely killed, the invisible man's consciousness snaps back to his body and he suffers one bashing wound, instead of the usual lethal wound.

**Restricted Change:** Naturally, the invisible man must seek

out an active mound of red ants before he can use it to change shape.

**Storytelling Hints:** What the invisible man really wants is not to be seen. Any benefit he gets from that, such as learning a few secrets that he's then able to sell, is just a side benefit. He's starting to enjoy the power of being small more and more, but he's not yet gone overboard. If he does, though, it wouldn't be that hard for the people whose secrets he's selling to find him.

When encountered in animal form, there's nothing for the invisible man to do but pretend to be an ant. He travels

in thin lines, similar to ants that have found a source of food, and if someone "attacks" him with poisons or sprays, he avoids them and that spot. He rarely needs to defend himself, and he can if he must, but he'd rather remain inconspicuous, pretending to be a mere ant or just hiding in various holes in the ground until his pursuer disappears.

To date, no one's ever found his real body in the anthill. The invisible man's not sure, but he imagines he might look dead from a human perspective. He's also not entirely sure what would happen if his body were taken from the anthill prematurely.







*Josh didn't like to think of himself as a cowardly man. He didn't like to think of himself as prejudiced, either. And although he was loath to admit it to himself, he didn't come downtown at night to hand out sandwiches to the homeless out of pure compassion. He did it because he wanted to be able to think of himself as someone who wasn't scared of the city at night, or who was repulsed by people on the streets. He'd gotten mugged once, but he felt a lot better the next morning than he had for the couple of weeks he and Stacy had thought she was pregnant.*

*Still, you never knew. The old guy he only knew as "Sergeant Cody," who claimed to be a veteran of some war or another — the Sarge had a knife. Josh had seen it. So there was always the same tickle of fear when he moved by Cody's alley, because Cody was pretty lucid most of the time. You just never knew.*

*When Josh stopped at the alley's mouth, the tickle was worse than it had been. "Sergeant Cody?" he called, and he was immediately furiously ashamed of how tentative he sounded. "Hey, Sarge, it's Josh. You know? I got a ham and cheese for you tonight."*

*There was a little metallic clatter. Josh clenched up, and squinted. Something shiny on the alley floor. Under... the fire escape.*

*Something told Josh not to look up. But he hated to think of himself as a coward.*

# Chapter Two: Beasts of Shadow

Claiming a human host is easily one of the most monstrous acts a spirit can take, but what happens when the Claimed is more than it appears to be? This chapter examines both the Claimed and the spirits that Claim them through the lens of a number of real world myths and legends, tying those legends to the World of Darkness and addressing the question of why spirits would choose to make monsters even more monstrous than they were before. It builds upon the rules for the spirit world and its denizens found in *Werewolf: The Forsaken* and *Mage: The Awakening*.

The Claimed presented here are given with a Synthesis trait, which is used to reflect the degree to which a spirit has managed to successfully Claim a host. This trait is roughly equivalent to the possessing spirit's Rank, and Synthesis functions as the Claimed's "power" stat in much the same way as Blood Potency, Primal Urge or Gnosis. Specifically, Synthesis adds to rolls made to resist another supernatural entity's powers in all cases where a werewolf would add Primal Urge or a mage would add Gnosis.

*Be sober, be vigilant;  
because your adversary  
the devil, as a roaring  
lion, walketh about,  
seeking whom he may  
devour:*

— 1 Peter 5:8

## Beasts of Shadow and Predators

Many of the creatures described in this chapter are *duguthim*, or at least creatures that function in much the same fashion. As such, they may be represented using the rules found in **Predators** if the Storyteller so desires. This is by no means mandatory, however, as this book can be used independently of **Predators**. All of the powers unique to the skinchangers in this chapter are described herein, and the Storyteller may use these powers as presented or in tandem with **Predators** as she sees fit.

## The Black Flock

Raven. The Morrigan. The Tengu. All of these and more are legendary figures, and all are based on the character of one bird: the raven. Raven-spirits are a clever lot, and they can also be surprisingly vicious. Nowhere is this more true than with the grandchildren of Raven himself, the creatures known to the Uratha as the *Thar Akuru*.

### Legendary

The *Thar Akuru*, also known as the Black Flock, are truly bizarre entities, due to the fact that they have ceased to exist as spirits and now survive only as Claimed. They are descendants of the raven-spirit *Nam Uha*, who was himself a child of *Uha*, known to the Uratha simply as Raven. *Uha* is a trickster-spirit, and in the time before the Great Betrayal, he enjoyed nothing more than engaging Father Wolf in battles of wit and skill. The wolf father was an ideal opponent in

this regard, for his natural cunning was part of what made him the greatest hunter in all the world. While he found Raven's constant challenges irritating, Father Wolf's ire was tempered by the fact that the trickster knew his place — his thirst for knowledge and excitement had limits, and he rarely challenged Father Wolf's authority directly. Sadly, not all in *Uha's* brood inherited their sire's natural temperance. So it was that *Nam Uha*, the child of fate, ran afoul of the Shadow World's greatest hunter.

It started innocently enough: *Nam Uha* harassed Father Wolf at inopportune times, and stole the great wolf's memories of important events. This was no great burden, as the hunter's memories always returned in time. But as time went by, *Nam Uha's* tricks became more and more outrageous: he ran amok in the physical realm, blatantly defied Father Wolf's authority and ultimately wreaked such havoc that the great wolf had no choice to put him down once and for all. This was easier said than done, of course, as *Nam Uha's* black coat and crafty ways made him a difficult target. But wolves are patient hunters, and *Nam Uha* soon discovered that his pursuer was an implacable foe. He chased the errant spirit through the depths of the *Hisil* and beyond, and ultimately cornered *Nam Uha* in the world of flesh and bone. *Nam Uha* was no match for Father Wolf's speed and strength, and the great wolf-spirit consumed *Nam Uha* utterly.

The problem with ravens, though, is that they're damnably clever birds. Once *Nam Uha* recognized the gravity of his plight, he hatched a desperate plan to save himself (or, rather, a part of himself) in the physical world. Under ideal circumstances, he would have Claimed a human host, but he didn't have the time he needed to undergo that arduous process. Instead, he invested a portion of his spirit in a human female, hoping that his essential being would live on even if Father Wolf tore him to pieces.

The results of the plan were mixed at best.

*Nam Uha's* spirit egg hatched as he intended, but the being that sprang forth was not what *Nam Uha* had in mind. The hungry raven child consumed the soul of *Nam Uha's* last bedmate, Claiming her body as its own in the process, but the being knew nothing of who or what it was. It was, in effect, a perfect copy of *Nam Uha* with no sense of identity or purpose to guide it. It didn't even know how to leave the body it now occupied, or how to behave as either a spirit or a human. There was little for the being to do, then, but try to build a life for itself and forge a sense of identity as best it could. After some time, the raven child began to unlock the Numina trapped within its body, and after speaking with the spirits of *Uha's* brood, the spirit began to understand a bit about who and what it was. There was one thing it could never escape, however, and that was the fact that *Nam Uha's* last trick was fundamentally flawed. The spirit's memories never returned, and it was inextricably bound to the body it currently inhabited; indeed, even death could not free it from its prison of flesh.

As the spirit began to understand its heritage and grasp the implications of its ultimate fate, the spirit began to panic. All spirits, after all, are driven by two cardinal motivations: a thirst for Essence and a need to survive. Finding Essence was not a problem, but the prospect of death — well, that was another matter. If the spirit's body died, the spirit would die along with the body, and the implications for *Nam Uha* and perhaps even *Uha* were too frightening to contemplate. It was essential, then, that the spirit find some way to survive. Ideally this would entail freeing the spirit from the confines of a mortal body, but, in lieu of that, the spirit would just have to settle for finding a way to duplicate *Nam Uha's* last trick. The spirit's current existence may not have been optimal, but it was far and away better than nothing.

Fortunately, the spirit found that investing a portion of itself in another human being was simpler than expected. It was not, however, a pleasant experience; the process required that the spirit devote a substantial portion of its energy to the creation of the spirit egg, and the rituals involved left the spirit weak and vulnerable for months afterward. The spirit had hoped that the human host would survive the drain placed upon it, but as fate would have it, she succumbed to disease before the spirit could fully recover. The spirit was destroyed as a result, and the process of growth and discovery had to begin anew in the new host. The spirit's offspring was not as blind as the spirit itself was, however; the offspring had the accumulated lore of *Nam Uha's* child to guide it, and while the process of discovery remained arduous, it nonetheless rolled along much more quickly than it did in the spirit's previous incarnation.

In modern times, several millennia after *Nam Uha's* final battle with Father Wolf, the process of death and rebirth has unfolded many, many times. The *Nam Uha* lineage is not unlike a succession of human generations, save for the fact that the spirit's hosts are not limited by race or creed or even geography. The spirit of *Nam Uha* has traveled the world, and the spirit has become every sort of human imaginable. Some of these incarnations have even managed to generate multiple spirit eggs during the course of their lifetimes, all in the hopes of finding some way to free the spirit from its mortal prison so that the being might return to the life it once knew. It is quite possible, however, that the spirit might have outsmarted itself once again; each incarnation of *Nam Uha* is unique, and each is different from the original in some way. If any of them ever managed to break free of their mortal prisons, the spirit that would result would be very different from the one known to Father Wolf as *Nam Uha*. Perhaps that is as it should be.

## Systems

The *Thar Akuru* are Claimed, and are treated as such in all major respects. The *Thar Akuru's* power is expressed via Synthesis, they have and make use of Essence, they can step sideways in a locus' area of influence and so on. They

do differ from most other *duguthim* in several key respects, however. To begin with, the *Thar Akuru* are not formed via the slow gestalt of a spirit with its host body; rather, they are “born” via a spirit egg created by another *Thar Akuru*, and their birth is both painful and confusing. The spirit of the host body is completely destroyed during the birthing process, used to nourish the nascent *Thar Akuru*, and while this makes possession of the host body somewhat easier to manage (no extended roll is necessary, as possession is automatic), it also means the young spirit is utterly at a loss when it comes to figuring out how to live as a human. It would not be inappropriate to treat the spirit as a *nanutari* during this time, as the spirit faces many of the same limitations.

Unlike most *duguthim*, the *Thar Akuru* do not gain their first dot of Synthesis immediately; rather, they exist as helpless amnesiacs for the first 24 hours of their existence, and during this period they are all but helpless. Fortunately, the *Thar Akuru* are well aware of the trials their offspring will face, and so the *Thar Akuru* typically remain in the area to help their “children” find their way in the world during their first weeks of life. Once the hatchling gains its first point of Synthesis (some 24 hours after the egg hatches), the hatchling begins to access the thoughts and memories of her host. These are muted, of course, since the host’s spirit is no longer in its body, but the child learns enough to function effectively in human society. After this point, she develops an intense thirst for knowledge, and learns everything she can both about the former life of her host and about the world around her. It is at this point that the elder *Thar Akuru* takes his leave, allowing the child to find her own way from this point forward.

The *Thar Akuru* suffer from one other major limitation in comparison to other *duguthim*: the *Thar Akuru* cannot leave their host bodies. The birthing process that gives life to the new spirit binds it irrevocably to its host,

and this means the spirit is destroyed when the host body dies. Some of the *Thar Akuru* learn the secrets of longevity to forestall their inevitable demise, and all learn the art of procreation. Because of this, they are eternal as the spirits are eternal, even if they are no longer as the spirits are.

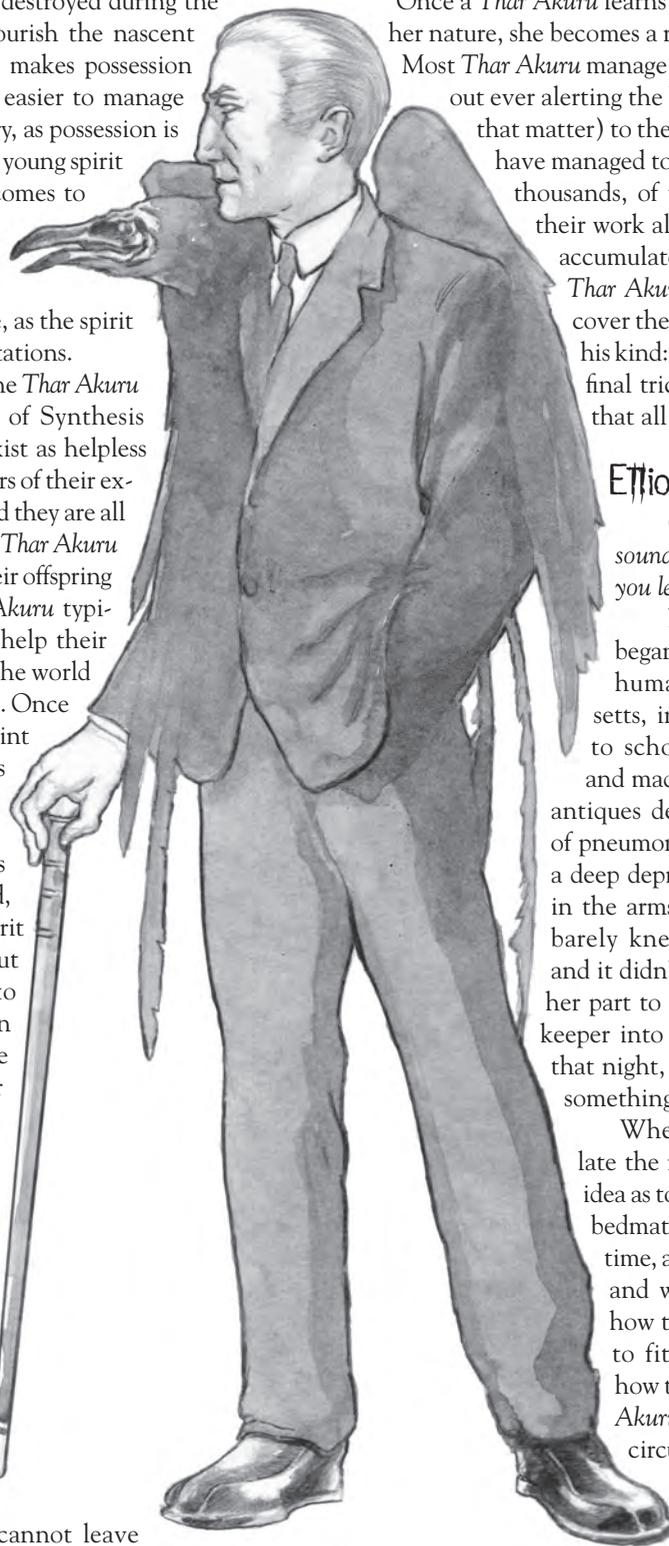
Once a *Thar Akuru* learns to master the intricacies of her nature, she becomes a remarkably stable *duguthim*. Most *Thar Akuru* manage to live out their lives without ever alerting the Uratha (or anyone else, for that matter) to the spirits’ presence, and a few have managed to persist for hundreds, if not thousands, of years, quietly going about their work all the while. For all of their accumulated knowledge, however, no *Thar Akuru* has yet managed to discover the one secret that drives all of his kind: the way to undo *Nam Uha*’s final trick, and regain the freedom that all spirits take for granted.

### Elliot Nash

**Quote:** “Hold up now, that sounds interesting. Wherever did you learn about that?”

**Background:** Elliot Nash began his life as a rather ordinary human in Boston, Massachusetts, in the year 1807. He went to school, grew up, got married and made a name for himself as an antiques dealer. When his wife died of pneumonia in 1835, Elliot fell into a deep depression, and found comfort in the arms of a beautiful woman he barely knew. She was intoxicating, and it didn’t take much prompting on her part to lure the despondent shopkeeper into her bed. Elliot Nash died that night, only to be replaced by . . . something else.

When the *Thar Akuru* awoke late the next day, the spirit had no idea as to who or what it was. Nash’s bedmate remained with it for some time, and told it something of who and what it was. She taught it how to wear a human body, how to fit into human society and how to behave as one of the *Thar Akuru*. The spirit adapted to its circumstances surprisingly well, and soon discovered that it had considerable power at its disposal. The spirit used this power to extend the life of its host body, to shape



it into various forms and to heal it of even the most grievous injuries. The spirit could not, however, break free of its body's limitations, and this frustrated the spirit immensely. The body was a weight upon its soul, a prison of flesh and bone, and the spirit cursed its limitations even as it exulted in the reality of its existence. Still, the spirit was adaptable; it learned to cope with this as it had with everything else, and thenceforth began a lifelong quest to free itself from its prison so that it might partake in the freedoms that other spirits take for granted.

The man who was Elliot Nash has led a peaceful life ever since that fateful night, using his status as a trader in fine antiquities to help him uncover the secrets of the past. He hopes to one day discover the secrets behind *Nam Uha's* greatest trick, but until that day he contents himself with learning as much as he can about the world around him.

**Description:** Elliot Nash is a tall, thin man who appears to be in his mid-40s. He is a man of staggering intellect, leavened by a sort of wry humor that he has developed to put others at ease around him. His Aspect Abilities allow him to take the form of any corvid, including jays, rooks and magpies, but his favorite form is that of a large raven. He uses this form to spy on others, as well as to briefly escape the limitations of his human form.

**Storytelling Hints:** Elliot Nash tends to keep a low profile, and he detests fighting. There is nothing worse in his mind than wasting time fighting with others when he could be putting it to use searching for a way out of his current predicament. He has had more than a few run-ins with the Uratha over the years, however, and the sword in his cane is not just for show — he can use it with deadly efficiency, and more than one werewolf has the scars to prove it. Still, Elliot Nash would rather resolve a dispute with words than with blades, and he uses his keen mind and quick wit to do so whenever possible.

**Mental:** Intelligence 2 (6), Wits 3 (6), Resolve 2 (5)

**Physical:** Strength 2 (3), Dexterity 2 (6), Stamina 2 (4)

**Social:** Presence 3 (5), Manipulation 3 (5), Composure 2 (4)

**Mental Skills:** Academics (Ancient Knowledge) 4, Investigation 3, Occult (Spirits) 4

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 2, Stealth 2, Weaponry (Swords) 2

**Social Skills:** Animal Ken (Birds) 3, Expression 2, Persuasion 4, Socialize 4

**Willpower:** 4 (9)

**Health:** 7 (9)

**Initiative:** 4 (10)

**Defense:** 2 (6)

**Speed:** 12 (17)

**Merits:** Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Eidetic Memory, Fighting Finesse (Sword Cane), Fleet of Foot ●●●, Resources ●●●

**Synthesis:** 4

**Essence:** 15 (maximum of 20)

**Aspects:** Longevity, Omen Gazing, Sand in the Eyes, Shapeshifting, Spirit Egg

• **Longevity:** Elliot Nash is a very old bird, and there's no telling how long he might stick around. He appears to be in his mid-40s, and has for decades; he will probably reach nearly three centuries if he isn't killed first.

• **Omen Gazing:** As the werewolf five-dot Insight Gift.

• **Sand in the Eyes:** As the werewolf two-dot Evasion Gift.

• **Shapeshifting:** Nash is well-acquainted with his inner bird, and can take the form of any avian (most often a raven or other corvid) as an instant action. The dice pool to do so is Stamina + Survival, just as with the Uratha, and similar to werewolves, he may spend a point of Essence to change shape reflexively. Nash's shapeshifting is limited to avian forms; he cannot, for example, assume any sort of hybrid form. If this power is purchased using the system described in **Predators**, the power has a cost of two Synthesis points.

• **Spirit Egg:** This Aspect has no cost, and is a power that all *Thar Akuru* possess. Most will use it only once during their lifetime, as Spirit Egg is such a taxing power that it often destroys the host. To use Spirit Egg, the *duguthim* uses all of its Essence to form a spirit egg within a sleeping human. Forming the egg is an incredibly arduous process, and once the task is complete, the raven immediately loses one Synthesis point per Rank of the offspring (along with any powers they might have provided; the offspring's Rank may not be higher than its parent's Rank). If the spirit's Synthesis is not high enough to pay this cost, the ritual fails, the spirit disincorporates and the host dies. If the spirit's Synthesis is identical to the offspring's Rank, the parent loses all of the benefits of Synthesis, up to and including basic control of its host (which leaves the host in a vegetative state until the spirit and host regain at least a single point of Synthesis, a process that takes approximately 24 hours). At this point, the spirit has to begin the process of merging with its host all over again, reclaiming all of the power the spirit lost while creating the spirit egg.

If the egg is successfully formed, it will hatch after a week or so. During this time, the host looks and feels completely normal, and will until the egg hatches (at which point her soul is devoured and her feelings on the matter become a moot point). The egg can be destroyed with a timely application of the Banish Spirit rite (or other, similar magic). Naturally, doing this will greatly annoy the *Thar Akuru* that created the spirit egg, but in all honesty the bastard probably had it coming anyway.

### Story Hooks

• Ever since Nash discovered the secrets of longevity some years ago, he's seen little need to create others of his kind; the whole enterprise lost its appeal once his death was no longer imminent. He is not the only Black Flock in the world, however, and, as the players soon discover, one of his siblings has bitten off a bit more than he can chew. The raven tried to create another of his kind, but did so before he was fully up to the task — he is in a coma as a result, recovering from the trauma of creating the spirit egg, and



his protégé is wandering around the characters' territory wreaking havoc. It is nothing the players cannot handle, but Nash fears for the youngling's life; Nash will try to protect the youngster if possible, while simultaneously trying to locate and resuscitate the one who created him. In the meantime, the characters have decide how they feel about a runaway *duguthim* that doesn't seem to play by the rules, an antiquities dealer who shows them no fear and knows far more about the situation than he lets on and anything else stirred up by the youngster's activities.

- While seeking a bit of obscure lore, the characters discover that Nash might hold some of the answers they seek. They don't know much about him, but they soon discover that he is a very complicated man. They also discover that he knows a great many things, including some things that no human should know. If the characters keep their cool and don't ask too many questions, he will address their inquiries to the best of his ability. His services do not come without price, however; the characters will have to pay their debt in kind, and knowledge is the only currency that holds his interest.

## Clever Foxes

Fox-spirits are a common sight in the Shadow, owing to the fact that foxes themselves are found all around the world. They are, for the most part, rather innocuous creatures, but in some areas the cultural influences of the human world transform them into something far greater than the sum of their parts. These spirits are the Kitsune, a powerful choir of fox-spirits that have done much to shape the spirit history of South and East Asia.

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### Tanuki

The shapeshifting Tanuki (or raccoon dogs) of Japanese myth often fill a similar role in legend to the Kitsune. In general, Tanuki legends tend to be either comical, uplifting or both, but they occasionally take a turn for the worse, as in the case of one who clubs an old woman to death and serves her remains to her husband as "old woman soup." While generally more light-hearted creatures in myth than the foxes are, the Tanuki could well be simulated by tinkering with the fox-Claimed archetype for those so inclined.

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### Background

Fox-spirits, or so it's told, began their lives in Pangaea, much as most animal-spirits did. Fox-spirits, similar to their

wolf cousins, were predator-spirits, but where the wolves were strong and powerful, the foxes, by contrast, were comparatively weak. If they were to survive in the wilds of Pangaea, then, they were going to need an edge, and that edge was blatant trickery. So it was that fox-spirits, to a fox, also became trickster-spirits, and in no time at all, this survival trait became a bane as well as a blessing. For you see, the fox-spirits were indiscriminate about the targets of their jests, and many were quite cruel. Further, many could not resist the lure of the physical world, and traveled there often to play their jokes upon humans and beasts alike.

Needless to say, Father Wolf did not care for this state of affairs. In fact, it vexed him greatly. Some modern Kitsune say that Father Wolf, who they know as Hakken, the wolf god, was angry because of a trick the Kitsune played upon him. The Uratha dismiss this as nonsense, claiming *Urfarah* would never have fallen prey to such trickery, but the Kitsune tell the tale anyway, undeterred by the Uratha's indignation. Tricked or no, Father Wolf soon decided he had had enough of the tricksters' foolishness. He tracked down Inari, the Eternal Fox, the most powerful of the fox-spirits, and told him that the foxes' antics must stop. Inari had the option of stopping them himself, or watching them fall prey to *Urfarah's* claws. Naturally, Inari chose the former option.

And so, that very evening, Inari invited every fox-spirit in the land to attend a feast in his home, and they told stories and rejoiced for much of the night. He explained Father Wolf's demands and the dire consequences should they fail to obey, and the foxes were outraged. The wolf father may be mighty, they said, but he had no right to demand that they deny their true nature! They were tricksters, after all, and they could hardly be so if they did not play tricks on others. But Inari had anticipated this, and he had a plan. He would change their ban, he said, such that they could only play tricks on those who had harmed them. If a mortal (or a spirit) gave them a boon, they would have to repay the kindness tenfold. If the mortal (or spirit) slighted them, they could repay the insult however they wished. The foxes could thus continue to play tricks, but only on those who had visited unkindness upon them.

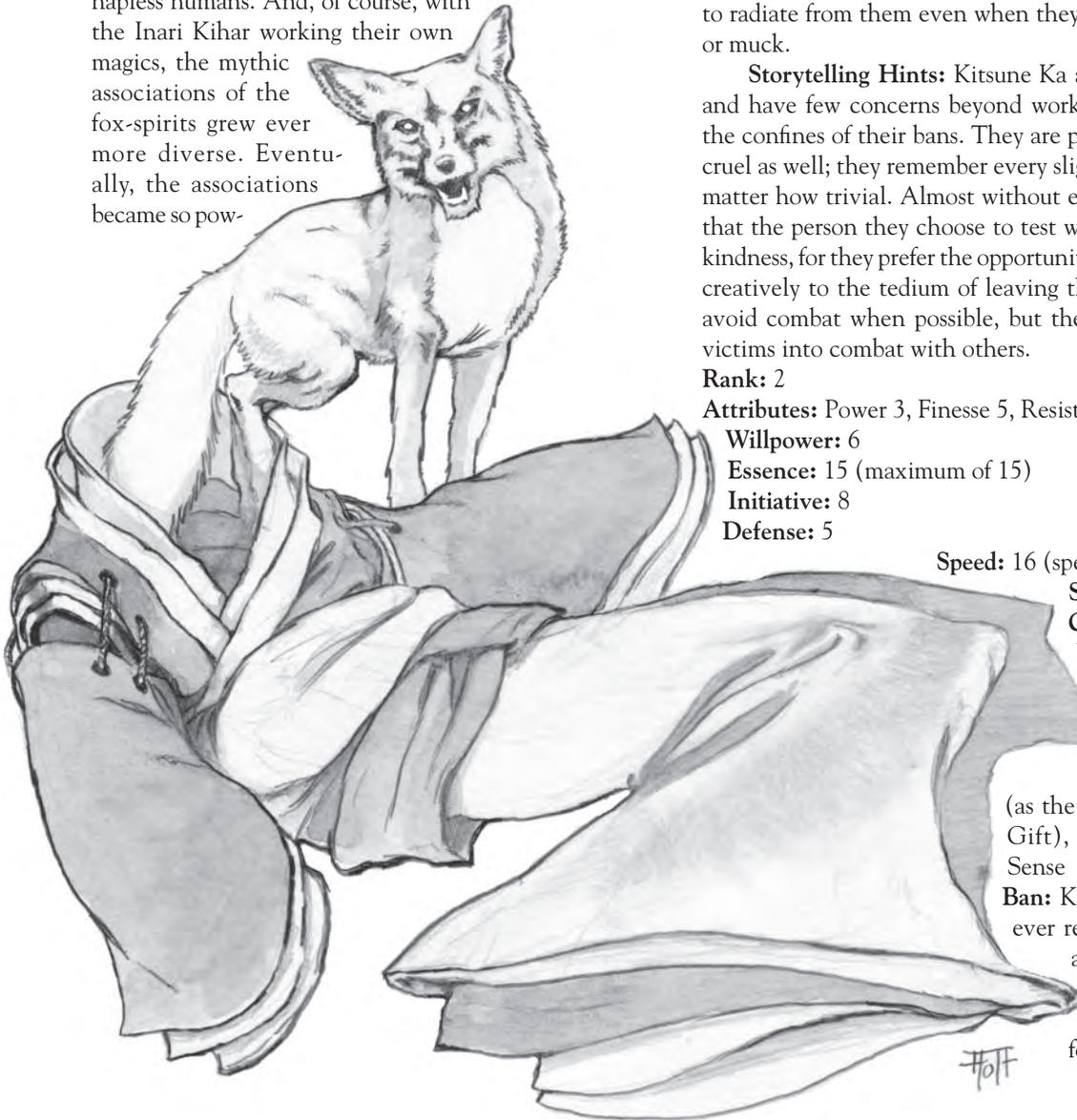
The foxes considered Inari's plan, and were divided on the issue. Some thought it was reasonable, and, fearing Father Wolf's wrath, agreed to do as Inari asked (though they wondered how he could change their ban, and grew concerned once more). Others rejected Inari's plan, and left his home, never to return. This saddened Inari greatly, but the next day he told Father Wolf what had happened, and the wolf god was pleased. He marked the spirits that had agreed to obey their lord's edict and dubbed them Inari Seha, the obedient foxes of Inari, and Father Wolf and his children left them in peace from that day forward.

The foxes that abandoned Inari did not fare nearly as well. Thenceforth called the Inari Kihar, the foxes that abandoned Inari, Father Wolf hunted them until the end of his days. Many of the Kihar fell to his claws, but they were

very good at hiding. It is likely he would have destroyed them all if not for his murder, but the terrible act created enough confusion that the Uratha soon forgot all about the Inari Kihar. They have been hiding in the distant reaches of the spirit wilds ever since, working their magic on anyone and everyone they can find.

## The Birth of the Kitsune

With the death of Father Wolf and the advent of modern civilization, the fox-spirits began to grow and change over time. Their fox natures didn't change: these were essentially fixed, as the foxes themselves were well defined-creatures whose natures did not change over time. The foxes were, however, defined to an ever-greater extent by their interaction with human cultures. Some foxes became agents of possession, expressing their trickery by Urging and perhaps even Riding human hosts. Other foxes spent a great deal of time in fox form, spawning legends of fox magic. And still others took on human form and tricked or seduced hapless humans. And, of course, with the Inari Kihar working their own magics, the mythic associations of the fox-spirits grew ever more diverse. Eventually, the associations became so pow-



erful, and defined the foxes in the modern era so strongly, that the foxes became a spirit choir unto themselves. They became the Kitsune.

## Fox Kitsune (Kitsune Ka)

**Quote:** "Kitsu!"

**Background:** Generally the weakest of the Kitsune, Fox Kitsune spend most of their time in fox form. They trick humans as a clever dog might trick its master, and while Fox Kitsune are reasonable clever and capable, they are not terribly sophisticated. The tricks of the Inari Seha tend to be simple tests to determine whether or not a person is good or bad; good people are rewarded, and bad people are punished. The Ka never stop to wonder if the bad people might have merely had a bad day or the good people just got lucky; the Ka cannot see beyond their ban, and to them the world is pretty black and white.

**Description:** Kitsune Ka typically manifest as ordinary foxes, though the stronger Kitsune Ka might have more than one tail. They are very fast, and their magic seems to radiate from them even when they are covered in mud or muck.

**Storytelling Hints:** Kitsune Ka are simple creatures, and have few concerns beyond working mischief within the confines of their bans. They are playful creatures, and cruel as well; they remember every slight against them, no matter how trivial. Almost without exception, they hope that the person they choose to test will not respond with kindness, for they prefer the opportunity to punish someone creatively to the tedium of leaving that person be. They avoid combat when possible, but they are happy to lure victims into combat with others.

**Rank:** 2

**Attributes:** Power 3, Finesse 5, Resistance 3

**Willpower:** 6

**Essence:** 15 (maximum of 15)

**Initiative:** 8

**Defense:** 5

**Speed:** 16 (species factor 8)

**Size:** 3

**Corpus:** 6

**Influences:** Foxes 1, Trickery 1

**Numina:** Chorus, Discorporation, Distractions (as the werewolf No Moon Gift), Materialize, Wilds Sense

**Ban:** Kitsune Ka, for whatever reason, often become attached to small items, such as the balls children use for play. It is said that

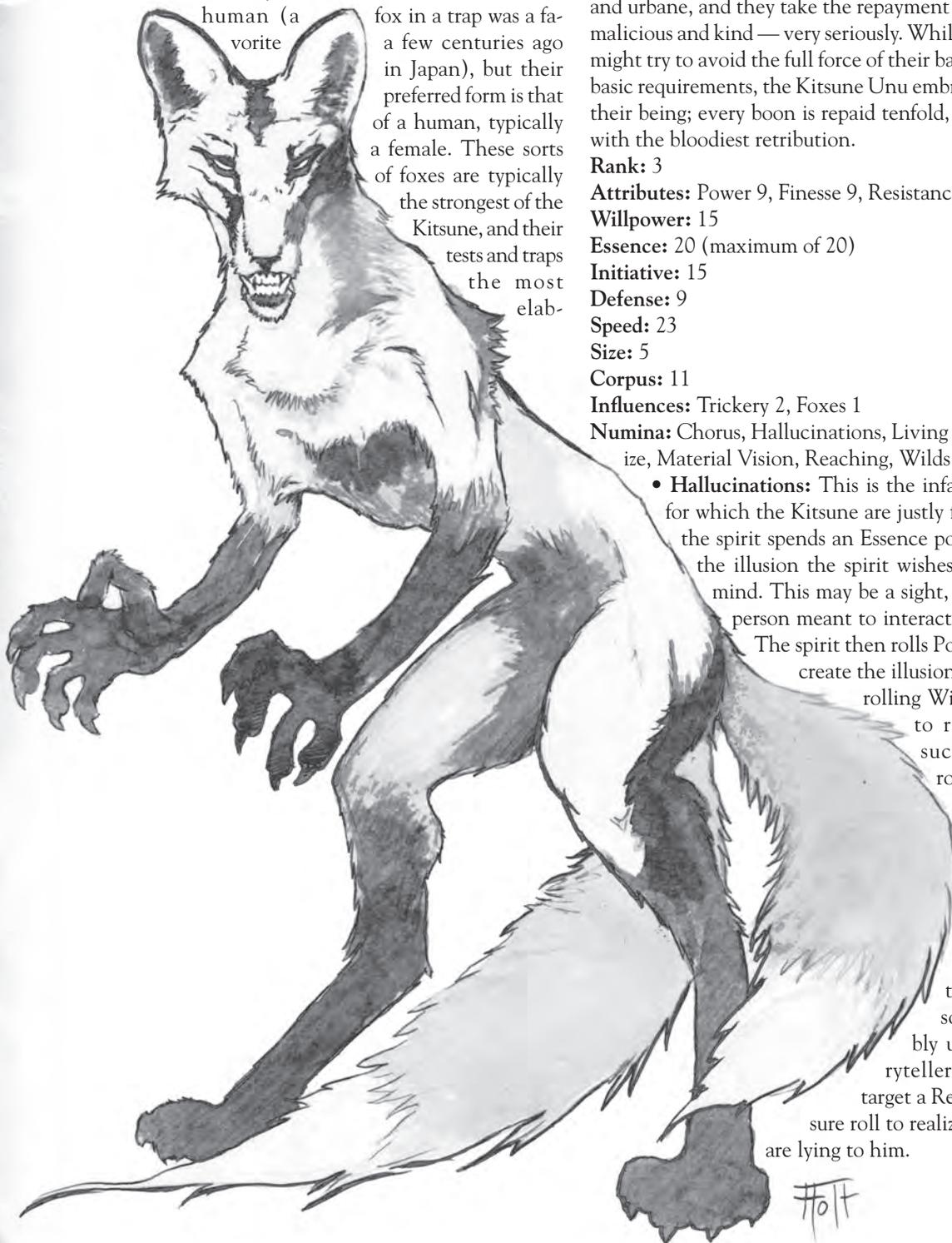
if anyone gains possession of a Kitsune's ball, she will be able to compel the spirit to grant her a boon (presuming it is within the Kitsune's power to do so).

## Human Kitsune (Kitsune Unu)

**Quote:** "Sir! Sir! I'm sorry to bother you, but I'm in a terrible bind. I hope you can help me out..."

**Background:** The Kitsune Unu are fox-spirits that prefer to spend most of their time in human form. They will occasionally take the form of a fox to test a

human (a favorite fox in a trap was a favorite a few centuries ago in Japan), but their preferred form is that of a human, typically a female. These sorts of foxes are typically the strongest of the Kitsune, and their tests and traps the most elaborate.



orate. They have even been known to live out entire human lifespans in human form, either as repayment of a debt or simply because they enjoy the hustle and bustle of human culture.

**Description:** As humans, the Kitsune Unu invariably take the form of either an old man or a young woman. They are theoretically capable of taking on any form, of course, but since maidens and the elderly seem to elicit the best and worst humanity has to offer, these are their favored forms.

**Storytelling Hints:** Kitsune Unu are sophisticated and urbane, and they take the repayment of debts — both malicious and kind — very seriously. While the Kitsune Ka might try to avoid the full force of their ban by fulfilling its basic requirements, the Kitsune Unu embrace it with all of their being; every boon is repaid tenfold, and every slight with the bloodiest retribution.

**Rank:** 3

**Attributes:** Power 9, Finesse 9, Resistance 6

**Willpower:** 15

**Essence:** 20 (maximum of 20)

**Initiative:** 15

**Defense:** 9

**Speed:** 23

**Size:** 5

**Corpus:** 11

**Influences:** Trickery 2, Foxes 1

**Numina:** Chorus, Hallucinations, Living Fetter, Materialize, Material Vision, Reaching, Wilds Sense

- **Hallucinations:** This is the infamous fox magic for which the Kitsune are justly feared. To use it, the spirit spends an Essence point and pictures the illusion the spirit wishes to create in its mind. This may be a sight, sound or even a person meant to interact with the target. The spirit then rolls Power + Finesse to create the illusion, with the target rolling Wits + Composure to resist. For each success the spirit rolls in excess of the target's, the illusion affects one of the subject's senses. The illusion is utterly compelling, but if the illusion does something notably unusual the Storyteller may allow the target a Resolve + Composure roll to realize that his senses are lying to him.

**Ban:** Kitsune Unu cannot bring harm to children under any circumstances, even if the children slight them in some fashion.

## Spirit Kitsune (Kitsune Sedu)

**Quote:** “Ah, humanity. Such wonderfully inept creatures.”

**Background:** Typically members of the Inari Kihar, the Kitsune Sedu are frightfully powerful fox-spirits with a penchant for possessing human beings. While this behavior occasionally results in Claimed victims, this is rare; the Sedu would much rather fetter itself to a human and use its influences to wreak chaos in the human’s life, the better to soak up Essence and increase its own strength.

Though rare, there are times when an Inari Seha will adopt the path of the Sedu. In this case, the spirit fetters itself to a human being and uses its influences to test, and then punish or reward, the human, which allows the Seha to remain incorporeal and still abide by the strictures of its ban.

**Description:** When manifesting at all, Kitsune Sedu appear as wiry fox men with hate-filled eyes and savage expressions painted across their muzzles. They can take the form of a fox or a human, but they rarely choose to do so. Inari Seha that choose the path of the Sedu appear much the same, though their features tend to have a mischievous instead of malicious cast to them.

**Storytelling Hints:** The Kitsune Sedu are malicious, cruel and utterly ruthless. They resent their ostracism from the Pangaea and all it represented, and the fact that it’s gone now has done nothing to mollify their battered egos. Inari Seha, for their part, try to avoid taking part in a story directly, and will likely abandon their victims if the Inari Seha draw too much supernatural attention to themselves.

**Rank:** 3

**Attributes:** Power 9, Finesse 6, Resistance 6

**Willpower:** 15

**Essence:** 20 (maximum of 20)

**Initiative:** 12

**Defense:** 9

**Speed:** 20

**Size:** 5

**Corpus:** 11

**Influences:** Foxes 1, Confusion 2

**Numina:** Chorus, Discorporation, Gauntlet Breach, Harrow, Material Vision, Reaching, Possession

**Ban:** Inari Kihar are spirits of cruelty, and cannot resist acts that would cause others to suffer. The Inari Kihar may not, however, act directly in such a fashion; rather, they must engineer situations (via Influences or other machinations) so that their victims bring injury upon themselves. Inari Seha that follow this path suffer from a similar ban, though it is tempered by their more general ban (i.e., that the Seha must repay every kindness and slight visited upon it tenfold).

## Siten Uzu

Sometimes, a Kitsune’s tricks go too far. Perhaps a man she annoyed turned out to be an Uratha, or perhaps that pesky mountain-spirit finally decided to unleash its wrath on the offending fox. Whatever the cause, there are times when a Kitsune finds that it has to escape its pursuers, and it doesn’t have a lot of time to do the job. It is in these cases, under the most desperate of circumstances, that a *siten uzu*, a fleshwalker, might be formed.

The *siten uzu* are, in simplest terms, Kitsune trapped in the bodies of mortals. They are not Claimed — they do not merge with the body as spirits do in such cases. Rather, the *siten uzu* are the exact opposite of Claimed; instead of merging with and Claiming a human body, they take refuge within a human and surrender their fate to that human’s whims. This is because a Kitsune in *siten uzu* form has no access to its Numina, cannot leave the body and cannot even communicate with the host. A Kitsune is trapped within that body until it does, and only then is the Kitsune free to go on about its business. The flip side of this, however, is that the Kitsune cannot be detected by any means while in human form. And since spirits are effectively immortal, spending a time — even a lifetime — in human form isn’t as much of a burden as it might seem. The tactic is still a desperation measure, to be sure, but it is not a death sentence for the spirit; rather, spending time in human form is more of a long vacation over which the Kitsune has no control.

*Siten uzu* are, to the fox, Inari Seha. This is true for one very simple reason: an Inari Kihar would rather Claim a victim than imprison itself within a human body (as would any spirit who was given a choice in the matter). In the case of Inari Seha, however, they are forbidden from Claiming a human host thanks to the nature of their ban. Even the act of creating a *siten uzu* requires the host’s permission, but acquiring said permission is generally much easier than convincing a human it’s a good idea to yield control of his body to a spirit. When seeking such permission, the fox crawls atop the human’s sleeping form and speaks to her in a dream. He tells the human of his plight, and offers the human considerable power should she choose to help the fox. If she refuses the fox’s offer, he must find another human or accept the fate his pursuers have in store for him. If she accepts, however, the fox invests his power within her, creating a unique form of *hithisu* that remains entirely under the control of the human host.

## Creating Siten Uzu

In most ways, *siten uzu* are treated exactly as *duguthim* are. The *siten uzu* have a Synthesis trait, they can gain Aspects and their Abilities can be greatly enhanced, at least in theory. The primary differences between the two lie in how the traits are acquired. A *duguthim* acquires its enhanced Attributes at a set rate, combines with its host in a predictable fashion and gains Aspects based solely on

its Synthesis score. By contrast, a *siten uzu* gains very little upfront; rather, the host must actively tap into the Kitsune's hidden power, and use that power to effect the changes that other *duguthim* take for granted.

To create a *siten uzu*, begin by creating a mortal character normally. Next, build the fox-spirit meant to inhabit the character, following the rules in Appendix One of **Werewolf: The Forsaken**. Finally, make the following alterations to reflect the emerging power of the fox-spirit within the host:

- **Enhanced Abilities:** As with *duguthim*, the fox-spirit may eventually use its power to augment the Abilities of the host. However, this change does not come automatically, even during the course of time; rather, the host must learn to tap into the Kitsune's power for this purpose, and this requires the expenditure of experience points as normal. The costs for buying certain traits are reduced, however, and the upper limit to the host's Abilities is determined by the traits of the spirit and its synthesis with the host, not the host alone.

- **Skills, Influences and Merits:** The *siten uzu* uses all of the host's normal Skills and Merits. The character may use the points spent on Aspects to manifest the Kitsune's Influences as well; the cost is two points per dot of Influence.

- **Calculate Advantages:** Advantages are calculated normally. Note that *siten uzu* do in fact track Morality, just as normal human characters do. The *siten uzu* are also immune to the Lunacy, just as *duguthim* are.

- **Synthesis:** The character gains one dot of Synthesis at character creation, along with five points to spend on Aspects. Synthesis is increased via experience point expenditure, and does *not* increase over time as that of a *duguthim* does. The maximum Synthesis rating is limited to the Rank of the possessing spirit +1.

- **Essence:** The *siten uzu* gains the Essence pool of the spirit, but she cannot tap into its full strength without considerable practice. The size of the pool is limited to five Essence per dot of Synthesis. The *siten uzu* may use this Essence to fuel Aspects or to heal wounds as Uratha

do, at a rate of one lethal or two bashing wounds per point of Essence spent.

- **Stepping Sideways:** Unlike the *duguthim*, *siten uzu* cannot automatically step sideways. They may, however, learn to do so via an Aspect.

- **Aspects:** The *siten uzu* gains Aspects just as the *duguthim* do, but the *siten uzu* does not gain them automatically. Rather, whenever she gains a new point of Synthesis she also gains access to new Aspect Abilities, and may buy them using experience points. Each point of Synthesis allows the character to purchase up to five new points of Aspects.

## Experience Point Costs

Trait	Cost
<i>Siten uzu</i> Attribute	New dots x 3
Standard Attribute	New dots x 5
Skill	New dots x 3
Skill Specialty	3
Merit	New dots x 2
Morality	New dots x 3
Synthesis	New dots x 8
Aspect	Dot cost x 6
Willpower	8 per dot

## *Siten Uzu* Aspects

The *siten uzu* base form is that of an ordinary human, and each Aspect purchased allows the host to draw on one quality of the fox-spirit within him. Each Aspect has a Synthesis requirement associated with it, as well as a rating that governs the power's experience point cost. The Aspects described here are only a sampling of the Kitsune's vast powers; the Storyteller is encouraged to invent others as the need arises.

### Avatar of Inari (●●●●●)

**Prerequisite:** Fox Transformation, Inari's Swiftmess, Step Sideways, Synthesis ●●●●, Wits ●●●●

## Effects of Synthesis

Synthesis*	Trait Limits**	Attribute Dots	Max Essence/Essence Per Turn	Social Penalty
1	5 dots	5–8	5/1	–1
2	5 dots	5–8	10/1	–2
3	7 dots	9–14	15/2	–3
4	9 dots	15–25	20/2	–4
5	12 dots	26–35	25/3	–5

\*While it is theoretically possible that any spirit might be trapped in human form, the Storyteller is encouraged to avoid the use of Incarnae in this fashion. These characters are powerful enough as it is.

\*\*This represents the maximum *total* number of dots that may be added to the *siten uzu's* Power, Finesse and Resistance traits. For example, a Synthesis 1 *siten uzu* might add two dots to her Strength, two dots to her Intelligence and one dot to her Presence; she may divide these up as she sees fit, and must purchase each point individually using experience points.

**Effect:** The *siten uzu* who learns this Aspect is a true paragon of the Kitsune, for he has learned to tap into the primal majesty of none other than Inari, the Kitsune prince. Inari is a being of considerable power, and while his martial skills might not be comparable to those of Father Wolf, Inari remains a force to be reckoned with. Those *siten uzu* who are lucky enough to acquire this power draw upon it only in times of dire need, for Avatar of Inari brings with it a loss of self that might well destroy both the host and the fox-spirit who resides within him.

Activating the power requires the expenditure of an Essence point, as well as success on a Stamina + Survival + Synthesis roll. If successful, the character assumes the form of a huge, silver-furred fox with nine tails. In addition to all of the traits of a normal fox, this form has the following additional characteristics:

- The form's dot modifiers are: Wits +2, Strength +2, Dexterity +6, Stamina +2, Manipulation -3, Size +2, Health +4, Initiative +6, Speed +8. The character is treated as having +2/+1 Armor due to the form's thick hide.

- The character gains a vicious bite, which adds two bonus dice to the appropriate dice pools. Damage inflicted is lethal, and the character need not grapple successfully to make a bite attack.

- The character causes Lunacy per an Uratha in Gauru form.

- The character reflexively heals one level of lethal damage at the beginning of each turn. Essence may be used to augment this healing normally.

- The character can cross the Gauntlet without the aid of a locus, just as spirits do.

Powerful as this Aspect is, its drawbacks are even more potent. Once activated, the Aspect's effects last *at least* until the end of the scene. At that time, the character must make a successful Resolve + Composure roll with a -3 penalty to return to his humanoid form. If the roll is successful, the character loses three Willpower points and cannot use the Aspect again until the next new moon. If the roll fails, the character disappears across the Gauntlet as Inari takes possession of him for an indeterminate period of time. During this time, the character is no longer in control of his actions, and there is no telling what sort of havoc Inari might wreak before the character regains control of his faculties. He may attempt to do so once every three days, using the mechanics described above. Note that Inari is under no obligation to remain in his avatar form; he may take the form of the character and sow chaos as an ordinary human as well. This might naturally create all sorts of complications for the character once Inari's wickedness has run its course.



## Fox Transformation (••)

**Prerequisite:** Synthesis ••

**Effect:** This Aspect allows the *siten uzu* to take on the form of an ordinary red fox. The form's trait modifiers are: Strength -1, Dexterity +2, Manipulation -2, Size -2, Health -2, Initiative +2, Speed +3. At the Storyteller's discretion, the character's fox form might have signature traits of one sort or another; the fox form might have multiple tails, for example, or perhaps silver fur.

## Illusion (•••••)

**Prerequisite:** Synthesis •

**Effect:** This is the infamous fox magic for which the Kitsune are justly feared. To use Illusion, the character spends an Essence point and pictures the illusion he wishes to create in his mind. This may be a sight, sound or even a person meant to interact with the target. The character then rolls Manipulation + Subterfuge + Synthesis; the target rolls Wits + Composure to resist. For each success the character rolls in excess of his opponent's, the illusion affects one of the subject's senses. The illusion is utterly compelling, but if the illusion does something notably unusual the Storyteller may allow the target a Resolve + Composure roll to realize that his senses are lying to him.

## Inari's Swiftess (••••)

**Prerequisite:** Fox Transformation, Synthesis •

**Effect:** With this aspect, the *siten uzu's* fox form becomes astoundingly fast. The character spends an Essence point, and his Speed is doubled until the end of the scene. In addition, the character subtracts two dice from opponents' Firearms dice pools. Unlike most Aspects, this one may be purchased multiple times — up to once for every dot of the character's Synthesis trait. However, the penalty to opponents' Firearms dice pools never exceeds two dice.

## Mimic (•)

**Prerequisite:** Synthesis •, Wits •••

**Effect:** With a successful Wits + Composure roll, the character can mimic any sound he has heard at least once. Simple sounds require only one success to sound convincing, while more complex sounds, or specific sounds, require more. At the Storyteller's discretion, some sounds may be beyond the character's capabilities (imitating a person is reasonable; imitating a jet engine is not).

## Spirit Sight (••)

**Prerequisite:** Synthesis •

**Effect:** Kitsune are creatures of spirit first and foremost, and with this Aspect a *siten uzu* learns to tap into that power. The fox rolls Wits + Occult, with success allowing him to see into the Shadow Realm for the duration of the scene.

## Spirit Speech (•)

**Prerequisite:** Synthesis •

**Effect:** This Aspect allows the *siten uzu* to see, hear and speak with spirits, so long as they are on the physical side

of the Gauntlet. Doing so requires a successful Presence + Socialize roll. If the spirit is actively trying to conceal its presence, the character's successes when activating this power must exceed those of the spirit's attempt to hide.

## Step Sideways (•••)

**Prerequisite:** Synthesis •

**Effect:** The *siten uzu* can step sideways, in exactly the same fashion as the Uratha.

## Shuichi Kurama

**Quote:** "I'm sorry, I don't have time to play around. Perhaps some other time."

**Background:** One year ago, Shuichi Kurama had never given a thought to things such as fox-spirits, or, for that matter, anything related to the supernatural. Rather, his thoughts focused mainly on pleasing his father, helping his friends survive their crazy schemes and doing well enough in school that he could land a good job once he got out. In truth, these are still his primary concerns; his life has simply been complicated by the addition of an element he never could have anticipated: a fox-spirit named Yoko.

It all started some six months ago, when Yoko appeared to Shuichi in a dream. The fox explained that its life was danger, and that it would reward Shuichi with great power if he helped the spirit to escape its current circumstances. Naturally, Shuichi thought this was absurd, a product of the bad stew he'd eaten the night before. But he saw no harm in appeasing this figment of his mind, so he agreed to help the fox. And so he slept, dreamlessly, for the rest of the night. The next morning, Shuichi felt — different. Not bad, necessarily, but odd. He felt something, something powerful, deep in the pit of his stomach, and he knew in an instant that his conversation with the fox was no ordinary dream.

That's about the point where he really began to panic.

In the weeks and months since, Shuichi has come to terms with the events of that night. He has learned to harness and control the power within him, at least to a limited extent, and he has learned a bit about the foxes and their role in the world. Yoko has spoken to him a few times since that night, explaining who and what he has become and why it's important. The fox also told him about its enemies, and warned that they may be coming, even now. Shuichi doesn't know if that's true, but he plans to be ready regardless.

**Description:** Shuichi is a teenager of Japanese descent with long, black hair, a pleasing face and a friendly demeanor. He dresses in traditional clothes when he can get away with it, and school uniforms when he can't. He has lately begun to supplement his normal wardrobe with fox accents — a pin here, a scarf there and so on. His friends have noticed the change, but assume it's simply a quiet affectation.

**Storytelling Hints:** Shuichi is mainly concerned with understanding the fox-spirit within him and protecting

himself against its so-called enemies. He does not know who those enemies might be, but he does know they're dangerous. He thus views all supernatural beings as potential threats, and will avoid them whenever possible.

**Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2, Presence 3, Manipulation 2 (4), Composure 2

**Skills:** Academics 3, Computer 1, Politics 1, Science 2, Athletics 3, Drive 1, Empathy 3, Expression 2, Persuasion 3, Socialize 2, Subterfuge 3

**Merits:** Direction Sense, Eidetic Memory, Striking Looks ••••

**Willpower:** 4

**Morality:** 7

**Virtue:** Charity

**Vice:** Wrath

**Initiative:** 5

**Defense:** 2

**Speed:** 9

**Health:** 7

**Synthesis:** 2

**Aspects:** Illusion

**Essence:** 10/1

### Story Hooks

- Shuichi knows little of the spirit world, and even less about things not related to the Kitsune. Should he cross paths with other supernatural beings, then, he would naturally think them the enemies of which Yoko speaks and act accordingly. This might be extremely dangerous for the characters, especially if they stumble upon him while fighting, pursuing or investigating something else. He will likely use his “magic” to confuse and mislead them, and that could cause them all sorts of trouble.

- The flip side of the idea above, this story hook begins with Shuichi trying to learn more about his nature and the spirit world in general. His investigations have brought him to the characters' territory, and now the players have to decide what to do with him. He is clearly more than a normal human, but is he possessed? Claimed? It's not clear. The characters will be hard-pressed to decide whether they want to leave him be, exorcise him or simply kill something they don't quite understand.

## Spirits of Vengeance: The Kanaima

The Kanaima, known in the First Tongue as *Umamu Suhi*, the beasts of vengeance, are a specialized descant of the Vengeance spirit choir — one that has pledged its loyalty to a powerful Incarna named Ka'an Balam. The Kanaima are savage spirits, equal parts vengeance and predator, and

they are found exclusively in the jungles of South America. While they are intriguing spirits in their own right, they are of note here because they have one peculiar, if not unique, habit — they possess the bodies of the dead, and in the process transform them into instruments of vengeance.

### Kanaima?

So, if these spirits are known as the *Umamu Suhi*, what does Kanaima mean? In the tongue of the natives of Guiana, “Kanaima” refers to a physical or spiritual manifestation of the law of retaliation. In most other parts of the world, such an idea would give rise to a conceptual-spirit. Due to the pervasiveness of the jaguar motif in South American mythology, however, the concept of retaliation became grafted to the image of the cat. The spirits of vengeance in South America are closely identified with the spirits of the jaguar, and they are treated as a single class of beings here.

### Legendary

Long ago, when the world was young, the people of the Middle Kingdoms lived in peace. Back then all was as it should be; *Urfarah* patrolled the Border Marches, the gods of the sky watched over the world and Ka'an Balam, the Jaguar God, ruled over the Middle Kingdoms with strength and wisdom. He was not alone in this, of course; in those days, many spirit lords made pacts with the tribes of humans, and *Urfarah* allowed this so long as the spirits remembered their place. He allowed them to guide and protect, and to influence humanity's beliefs, but he forbade them to become as humans are. The worlds of flesh and shadow must remain separate, he said, lest all of Creation fall to pieces. Most of the spirit lords saw the wisdom in this decree, and they abided by *Urfarah's* wishes in this as in all things.

Ka'an Balam was a demanding ruler, but none could say he was not fair; so long as his people followed the paths he laid out for them, all was well, and even the gods of the sky were impressed with his rulership. He taught his people to live lives of faith and piety, and to live with full hearts. If they loved, they were to love unconditionally. If they fought, they were to fight with all of their might. If they toiled, they were not to rest until their work was done. And so it was that the people accomplished amazing things, and crushed their enemies in war and loved their wives and children. Their lives were dangerous and brief, but they were very much worth living.

Such was not to last. As *Urfarah's* strength faded during his final days, spirits of malice and corruption invaded



the world more and more often. Ka'an Balam, galled by their impertinence, raged against them with all of his fury, and for a time he was able to keep them at bay — but only for a time. As time went on, however, the great jaguar's foes overwhelmed him by sheer force of numbers, and the great cities of the Middle Kingdoms began to fall one by one. And then it happened — as Ka'an Balam snarled in defiance at his foes, the death howl of *Urfarah* shook the world. Spirits and mortals alike fell to the ground, weeping, and even Ka'an Balam was shaken by the sound. What manner of being could destroy the god of wolves? What terrible future did his death promise for the world? Ka'an Balam pondered these things, and for the first time in his existence the Jaguar God knew fear.

In the years that followed, the world that was fell to pieces. Ka'an Balam and his brood could no longer enter the world of humans at will, and the land itself seemed to rise up against all who lived. But Ka'an Balam had taught his people well. If he could not save them, they would somehow save themselves, and they would use any means necessary to accomplish that goal. And so they took up arms against their neighbors, destroying all who stood before them, all the while seeking some clue as to the whereabouts of their lord. Sadly, such clues were not forthcoming. As desperation set in, the Jaguar God's followers turned to ever darker arts in their struggle to survive, and soon their piety was corrupted by bitterness and hate. The people Ka'an Balam knew were dead.

Eventually, the Jaguar God managed to find his way back to his people. What he found disgusted him; he had taught his people to live lives of purity and fortitude, and they had become disciples of decadence and corruption. When they prepared a feast to honor his return, they served him human entrails. During the Festival of the Sun, a joyous occasion under his rule, he watched as his priests sacrificed a boy and offered his heart to the heavens. What had become of his people? This madness was intolerable! In an instant, Ka'an Balam's rage consumed him, and he slaughtered his priests and their followers to the man.

If Ka'an Balam had hoped to teach his people the error of their ways, his display had exactly the opposite effect. Indeed, all they could do when they saw him now was run in terror, so confused were they by his actions. In their minds, their sacrifices had become a symbol of purity; was that not what he wanted from them? Was that not what he had taught them, all those years ago? The world had changed so that they could not see the corruption in their hearts, and Ka'an Balam soon realized that he had nothing more to offer them. With bitterness and regret his only companions, he slunk off into the forest and never returned.

With Ka'an Balam gone and his priesthood destroyed, the people of the Middle Kingdoms once again found themselves adrift. This time, however, they were not the only ones. This time the Jaguar Lord's brood was also left at a loss, as all of their efforts up until now had focused on reuniting their lord with his people. How were they to

proceed without him? In the end, they found that their options were limited. They could not lead as their lord had, and they could see no real need to destroy the people who remained. The only option left to them, then, was to act as their lord had — they would punish those who fell to corruption, and act as spirits of vengeance on behalf of the slain. So were born the Kanaima.

## Bloody Retribution

In the modern era, the Kanaima are spirits of vengeance, and are associated with the descendants of the Olmec peoples in Central and South America. Ka'an Balam's idealism still resonates within the Kanaima, but these days it manifests more as a thirst for retribution than as any sense of piety or filial devotion. They have, in essence, become a fusion of their father's idealism and the imagery that the Olmecs associated with ferocity and rulership. As such, the children of the Olmecs rightly fear the Kanaima, as they are truly terrifying beings to behold. It is perhaps surprising, then, to learn that they are not terribly influential in the spirit politics of the region. This is due in large part to their ban: even today they are bound by Ka'an Balam's edicts, and they cannot prey upon a human being unless they are avenging a wrong. Moreover, they *must* answer the call of one seeking revenge, no matter the reason. This focus gives them terrifying power, but it also limits their ability to dominate the other spirits in the region.

Getting a Kanaima's attention is fairly simple, as one need merely be spiritually aware and have some means of communicating with the spirit world. Ordinary humans generally have to hope that one of the spirits is listening as they plead for intervention, though several Kanaima do keep an eye out for humans attempting to call them with a properly respectful ritual. Supernatural beings may also call the spirits in any number of ways. Once called, the summoner simply names her target and his crime, and the spirit will strike if the summoner speaks true. If she does not, however, the Kanaima will turn on the summoner instead, and she will discover that the Kanaima's wrath knows no bounds. No matter the target, the Kanaima slakes its thirst for vengeance in the form of a massive jaguar, a form chosen to honor the memory of the lost Ka'an Balam.

It is worth noting that the Kanaima do not particularly care about the magnitude of the crime, or about the character of the summoner. They do, however, tailor their punishment in some cases: if the summoner asks that the victim's life be spared, the spirit will haunt his dreams instead of stalking him physically, forcing him to change his behavior or go mad. This is an extremely effective intimidation tactic, but it can backfire if the spirit is called for petty reasons (and the spirit's vengeance manifests only as death).

## The Vengeance of the Slain

Similar to most spirits, the Kanaima apply their influences as they see fit in order to generate and consume

Essence. In most cases, this amounts to urging the victims of violence to seek vengeance against their oppressors, or in some cases to answer the call for retribution as described above. There are times, however, when those deserving of vengeance are no longer able to seek it (a murder victim, for instance). When a victim dies in such cases, his hunger for revenge dies with him, leaving the Kanaima out of luck. Distressed by this wasteful loss of Essence, the Kanaima learned to do something that most spirits cannot do: the Kanaima learned to possess the dead. This is odd behavior, since most spirits have nothing to gain from mucking around with a body (well, apart from spirits of death and decay, but even they don't possess the body's remains). The host's spirit is gone, after all, and so is everything he had to offer the spirit.

So why do the Kanaima bother? Simply put, they cannot possess a ghost, and the nature of their ban forbids them from seeking vengeance on behalf of souls alone. The wronged party must be involved in the transaction at some point; whether he takes vengeance on his own or does so by summoning the Kanaima is immaterial, but he must take action of some sort before the Kanaima can act. Unfortunately, the souls of the dead cannot act in this fashion. They cannot seek vengeance on their own (unless they become ghosts), and they cannot summon a spirit to aid them. They can, however, agree to loan their body to a spirit so that it can seek vengeance on their behalf, and this is exactly what the Kanaima offer them. Riding the bodies of the dead is a means of sidestepping the limitations of their ban, and is a process that grants them intoxicating rewards.

Apart from the Essence gained from the act of vengeance itself, Kanaima benefit from the process of Claiming the dead in yet another fashion: the process of Claiming can rekindle a spark of the corpse's consciousness, which effectively allows a fragment of the deceased's intellect to Ride the body as a passenger while the Kanaima seeks vengeance on his behalf. The Kanaima thus gains exclusive access to a rich source of Essence for the duration of the spirit's quest, which is supplemented by the climax associated with successful completion of its task.

## Systems

Since the intelligence of the body's host is not resisting the spirit's efforts to control it, the act of Claiming a host runs much more smoothly for a Kanaima than it does for most other would-be *duguthim*. The actual possession takes a mere hour, and once complete, the Claimed gains a point of Synthesis and a number of rudimentary Aspects. Full Synthesis comes shortly thereafter, during which time the Kanaima is usually stalking its victim. Most Kanaima never experience the full height of their power, however, as their lust for vengeance is strong enough that they seek bloody retribution as soon as they are able.

In contrast to most Claimed, the Kanaima's investment in the corpse of its host is temporary; once the spirit

has claimed vengeance for its victim, the spirit releases the host's body, after which both parties go their separate ways. The payoff is well worth the effort, however, as the host's body becomes a spiritual reservoir once the spirit's task is complete. If the spirit chooses to draw Essence from the host after it has achieved its goal, the Essence gained is exceedingly rich. In game terms, the spirit gains two points of Essence (using the standard Power + Finesse roll) for every point drawn from the host's body.

While the Kanaima's claim on the dead is task oriented, there is no strict timetable involved; if the spirit needs days or weeks or months to achieve its goal, then so be it. The dead's hunger for vengeance is eternal, and they are generally a patient lot. Sooner is better than later from the spirit's perspective, though, as the payoff once the task is complete becomes less and less attractive with each day that passes.

## Carlos Rivera

**Quote:** "Stay outta my way, man. I got things to do."

**Background:** Carlos Rivera grew up in a small town in Brazil. His friends and family knew him to be a clever and inquisitive child, and thanks to a number of U.S. aid programs, he was lucky enough to receive schooling in the United States. Here, he studied the history of his people and their interaction with foreign interests, and with some effort managed to reconcile the things he learned with the things he knew as a native of Brazil. Once he understood the true scope of the United States' corporate interests in the Amazon basin, he became an advocate for native rights and corporate responsibility. Some corporations read his works with great interest, and used his ideas to develop more environmentally friendly approaches to making money in the region. Some, however, found Carlos to be an irritant, and arranged for an "accident" to get him out of their hair — permanently.

All other things being equal, Carlos' story should have ended there. He would become a half-remembered statistic, and that would be the end of it. As it happens, however, Carlos was not the sort of individual to die so easily. He no longer cared about his work; his life and his death had done their part for the world, and he was confident his writings would continue to influence corporations and environmentalists for some time to come. But what really annoyed him, and what he could not let go, was the fact that the people who had murdered him had gotten away with it. There was nothing the law could do to touch them, and his thirst for vengeance strengthened by the day. At this point, a spirit named Ghost Hunter came to him and made him a most unusual offer. "Show me your body," it said, "and I will revive it. Together, we will claim the vengeance you seek."

Carlos never even considered turning down the spirit's offer. Not even for a minute.

**Description:** In life, Carlos was a young Brazilian man of mixed ancestry. He dressed in casual clothes much of the time, even while teaching, and he sported a big, bushy

mustache and dark shaggy hair. He had a friendly demeanor that was positively infectious, and he could inspire anyone to do just about anything (which is part of the reason he was killed to begin with). In death, his eyes burn with a cold fire, and his dedication has been turned to vengeance.

**Storytelling Hints:** In life, Carlos' passion was the environment and the protection of Brazil and its people from greedy corporate interests, but that passion died with his physical body. Now, Carlos wants nothing more than revenge on the people who killed him. That seems to suit his possessing spirit just fine.

**Attributes:** Intelligence 3 (6), Wits 2 (5), Resolve 3 (5), Strength 2 (8), Dexterity 2 (5), Stamina 2 (7), Presence 2 (5), Manipulation 2 (5), Composure 3 (5)

**Skills:** Academics (History, Research) 4, Crafts 1, Investigation 2, Athletics 2, Survival 2, Empathy 3, Expression (Journal Articles) 4, Persuasion 2, Socialize 2

**Merits:** Inspiring, Language (English; Portuguese is native)

••, Language (Mayan) •

**Willpower:** 6 (10)

**Health:** 7 (12)

**Initiative:** 5 (10)

**Defense:** 2 (5)

**Speed:** 9 (18)

**Synthesis:** 1

**Essence:** 25 (maximum of 25)

**Aspects:** Natural Weaponry, Shapeshift

• **Natural Weaponry:** Carlos has the claws and teeth of a jaguar, but only in his jaguar form. When he wants to attack a target while in human form, he uses this Aspect. The claws inflict +1 lethal damage, and can be used as an aid in climbing checks (+2 to appropriate Athletics pools to climb).

• **Shapeshift:** Carlos can take the form of a large jaguar as a standard action.

This animal has the following trait modifiers: Strength +2, Dexterity +2, Stamina +1, Manipulation -3, Health +1, Speed +7

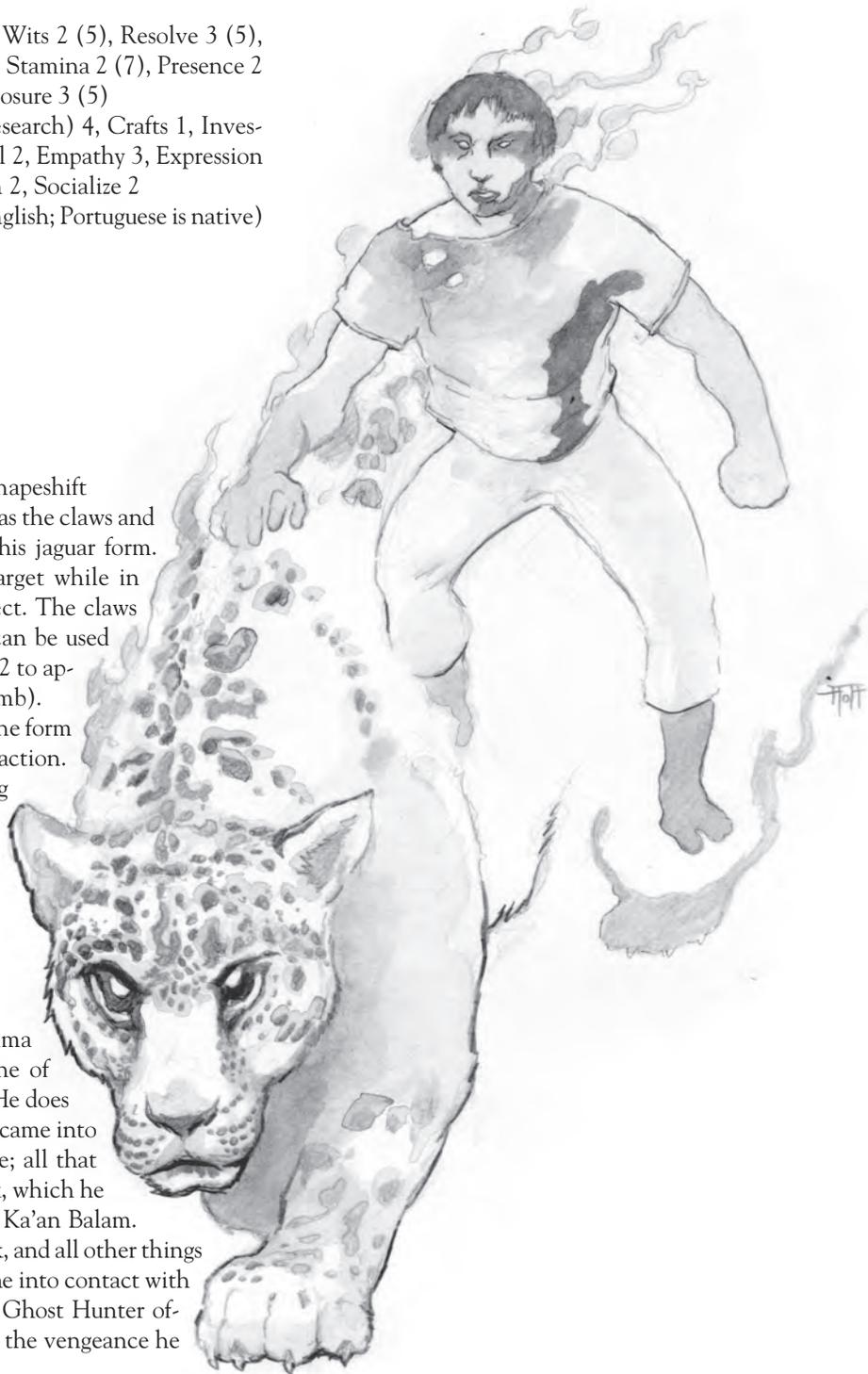
## Ghost Hunter

**Quote:** "Time to atone."

**Background:** The Kanaima known as Ghost Hunter is one of the most powerful of his kind. He does not remember exactly when he came into existence, and he does not care; all that motivates him now is the Work, which he defines as enforcing the will of Ka'an Balam. Vengeance is his meat and drink, and all other things are secondary. Recently, he came into contact with the soul of Carlos Rivera, and Ghost Hunter offered the man a chance to gain the vengeance he

sought. Rivera accepted, and Ghost Hunter Claimed his body. Now, he must move carefully; Carlos' foes are many, and Ghost Hunter must plan his movements carefully if he is to slay them all before his body begins to deteriorate. Still, it shouldn't be too difficult. His foes are, after all, only human.

**Description:** When Ghost Hunter is called to serve, he materializes as a massive jaguar whose spots give off a faint smoke. He doesn't make a sound when he walks. His demeanor is extremely focused, and he cares nothing for



the niceties of polite society (or even the niceties of spirit society). Such is the way of the Kanaima.

**Storytelling Hints:** Ghost Hunter is motivated by nothing more than revenge. He is neither polite nor rude to those he encounters along the way; they simply aren't important to him. He is quite intelligent, however, and he is more than willing to make alliances if he can be convinced that doing so will further his goals.

**Rank:** 4

**Attributes:** Power 12, Finesse 9, Resistance 9

**Willpower:** 18

**Essence:** 25 (maximum of 25)

**Initiative:** 18

**Defense:** 12

**Speed:** 29

**Size:** 5

**Corpus:** 14

**Influences:** Vengeance ••, Jaguars •, Piety •

**Numina:** Chorus, Corpse Ride, Fetter, Gift: Command Fire, Gift: Plant Growth, Harrow, Materialize, Material Vision, Wilds Sense

• **Corpse Ride:** This Numen allows the spirit to Claim a body as other spirits would Claim a living being. The body's soul is not Claimed, however, meaning that a contested roll is not necessary. The spirit simply spends three Essence points and Claims the body automatically during the course of a single hour. The host's attributes increase as normal, but at a drastically accelerated rate: the *duguthim* gains points at a rate of one per hour instead of one per week. Thereafter, the host gains a point of Synthesis every three days until her maximum Synthesis rating is achieved. This power comes at a price, however; while most *duguthim* can last for years, if not centuries, the corpse is not so lucky — once it achieves full synthesis with its Riding spirit, the corpse begins to deteriorate, losing one Attribute point every three days as the spirit's power consumes the body. Once any of its Physical Attributes reach 0, the body disintegrates, shunting the spirit and the body's soul alike into the Shadow Realm. Fortunately, this fate is typically a theoretical one; most such spirits have completed their business long before such a fate becomes an issue.

• **Harrow:** Ghost Hunter's use of this Numen manifests as a deafening shriek. If the attack is successful, the target is overwhelmed by a sense of panic, and must flee the area by whatever means necessary.

**Ban:** As with other Kanaima, Ghost Hunter may not take vengeance upon a human unless bidden to do so by another human. Moreover, the spirit must answer the call for vengeance of any human who has been wronged in a grievous fashion (though the human must have some way of communicating with the spirit, either via magic or an object of some sort).

### Story Hooks

• Ghost Hunter's travels have brought him to the United States, and one of the targets he seeks works for a

firm in the characters' territory. Ghost Hunter will not act in ways that will draw the attention of the characters, or rile up the locals in the Shadow Realm. In an ideal world, then, the characters would never know of his existence. There's just one tiny problem: his target happens to be tied to the characters in some way (an acolyte or wolf-blood, perhaps), and that means his actions become the characters' business. This hook can be handled in many different ways: the target might be kin to one of the characters, in which case she will feel obliged to defend him. Or, alternately, the target might be Claimed by a rival group, or even the Pure. In this case, Ghost Hunter's attack on the man might trigger an incursion into the characters' territory by their rivals, and in the process create one helluva mess.

• If the group has been harassed by a troublesome rival (werewolf, mage or vampire) of late, the characters might find that the fellow has his fingers in many different pies. He was involved in the conspiracy that ended with Rivera's death, and now his chickens are coming home to roost. Unfortunately, he's much more powerful than Ghost Hunter anticipated, and he managed to survive the Kanaima's initial attack. If the players learn of this, they might approach Ghost Hunter of their own accord. Alternately, he might learn of their own involvement with his target, and come to them for aid. Either way, joining forces might benefit both parties (presuming the characters can get over the idea of working with a *duguthim*, that is).

## Leopard Men

*We do not know how it began. With leopards, presumably, since they are the most prevalent motif in the group, but these things, these terrible things — these are not the work of leopards. Leopards are hunters, yes. Predators, yes. Killers, yes. But these things — leopards do not mutilate their prey. They do not gain sustenance or pleasure from listening to their victims scream. They do not consume the flesh of humans in preference to all other things. No, these things are the works of humans, not beasts. Humans are the ones who feed on the terror of the weak, humans who justify their atrocity with the icons of beasts, humans who kill and do not consume. Humans are the ones who are responsible, of that there can be no doubt.*

*And yet...*

*As Uratha, we must recognize the fact that there is more at work here. Humans are clearly responsible for these atrocities, but is it not so that spirits feed on the Essence of terror? Is it not so that they tempt the weak, so that they might drink their fill? Is it not so that spirits drive humans to become more as they are? It is wrong to blame spirits for the acts of humans, but it does appear as though spirits are involved. But if so, what manner of spirit are they? Why do they presume to be leopards, when they do not act as leopards do? It is anathema to us, and yet we cannot deny the truth of its existence. There must be something else in play.*

## Background

There are people on this Earth who do not live in the modern world. In their isolation, they become vulnerable to the influences of the world beyond. In West Africa, European colonialists discovered several groups of these people, and found that they were being moved to acts so heinous as to defy description. The Leopard Men are one such group, and it possible that they exist even today — perhaps in the world that was, perhaps in the world that is and perhaps, just perhaps, in the world that is yet to be.

What drives a man to acts of unspeakable terror? The Uratha do not know. In the case of the Leopard Men, however, the Uratha suspect that it began with the leopard, and with that animal's reflection in the Shadow. A leopard is, in essence, nothing more or less than a large cat. A leopard is a predator, and it leads an existence that is, for the most part, solitary. Leopards are superb hunters; they are strong, and quick and powerful, and, for this reason, they are the very essence of the cat family. Naturally, the spirits the leopards generate are similarly skilled, a perfect blend of power and finesse that makes them terrifying foes in the spirit world. But while a leopard's form in the physical world, the world of flesh, is immutable, the same is not true in the spirit world. The activities of human beings can change the way spirits act, and this is what happened in the case of these horrible beasts.

In the early days, perhaps before the fall of Father Wolf and perhaps after, humans began to hunt leopards. This was not unusual, of course, since humans tend to hunt anything and everything they can. They usually hunt for food, of course, but sometimes they hunt for other reasons: perhaps a marauding beast is causing trouble, or perhaps a predator has taken a liking to humans and must be dispatched. Usually, humans try to minimize the occurrence of these unusual cases, as these are very dangerous hunts. But, sometimes, a tribe gets it into its collective head that hunting particularly dangerous animals is a good idea. It is a badge of honor for them, you see, and for that reason dangerous hunts can become quite popular in a very short period of time. This is foolish, of course, and the tribe may even realize this, but the thrill of victory and the prestige the hunt might bring is too intoxicating to resist.

And so, at some point, humans hunted leopards. The leopards killed a few of the humans, but the humans always, eventually, managed to prevail in the end. Now some of these humans, certainly the most arrogant of the breed, gradually came to realize that, in killing the leopard, they had literally managed to conquer terror. The leopard was their greatest foe, greater even than the lion or the crocodile, and they had managed to find and kill it. This, they reasoned, made them unstoppable, untouchable, and gave them the right to rule everyone around them. By killing the mighty leopard they could steal its power, make it a part of them and in so doing use it as an instrument to dominate their fellow humans. They would act as the leopard acts:

they would kill, they would consume, they would destroy and they would do so with the intelligence of a human and the power of a beast.

At first, these miscreants were mere thugs. But what they did not realize, could not realize, was the fact that they were not the only ones who had changed. The spirits in the world beyond were changing as well, adapting to suit the new circumstances the humans were forcing upon them. As the humans destroyed the leopards and stole their power, the leopard-spirits consumed the humans' bloodlust and avarice, and in so doing became something more than mere bestial spirits. The leopard-spirits became *nemur sakar*, the terror cats, and they fettered themselves to their foolish hunters and urged them on to acts of greater and greater depravity.

Eventually, the witch doctors of the prideful hunters learned of the spirits' interest in the hunters' activities, and the humans grew afraid. Would the vengeful ghosts of the leopards consume them? Would terrors from beyond Claim what all the beasts of the world of humans could not? Sadly, such was not to be. Rather, the *nemur sakar* bade the humans continue with their activities, the better to feed the leopards' hungry reflections. In time, a number of the terror cats even came to walk the Earth, Claiming the bodies of the hunters' greatest warriors. These fell warriors claimed leadership of the tribe, and their great power allowed them to rule for centuries at a time. These are the Leopard Men, the scourge of Liberia, the prideful hunters who consumed their neighbors and gave their children to the greedy whites. These are the men whose greed and avarice destroyed them utterly, and damned their families to hell. These are the men who survive even today, murdering the unwary in an effort to slake the thirst of the hungry ghosts that dwell inside of them — ghosts the men themselves helped to create.

## Description

The *nemur sakar* are leopard-spirits that have fed extensively on the pain and suffering of human victims. The leopard-spirits would arguably be magath, but are in fact closer to those other spirit choirs of multiple aspects, such as those Lunes that represent both moonlight and trickery. Rather, the human hunters who transformed the spirits did so over a large area, and thus unwittingly created an entirely new spirit choir. The *nemur sakar* are the result.

The *nemur sakar* are content to fetter themselves to human hosts and Urge them using their Influences, but as time went by, the terror cats found they wanted more substantial representation in the material world. Periodically, then, one of the magath will pass through the Gauntlet and appear before the hunters, indicating in ritualized fashion that the magath has come to Claim a host. The cat passes by each hunter, appraising it in some fashion, and when the cat makes its selection, it stops and stares keenly at its chosen victim. To be chosen in this fashion is considered a great honor, even though few hunters know what serving

in this capacity truly entails. If the victim accepts the spirit, the cat leaps upon him, disappearing within the victim to begin the process of Claiming. If the victim shows fear, or denies the spirit in some other fashion, the cat instead tears him to pieces, thereafter offering his dismembered body to the assembled throng as the night's repast. The cat then chooses another potential host, who invariably agrees to serve as the cat's mount.

Once the spirit has attained a host body, the spirit takes its position as ruler of the tribe. The leopard-spirit then coordinates the tribe's activities from that night forward, seeking new ways to terrorize the neighboring villages and thus feed both the spirit's own hunger and that of the others in its choir. Naturally, the terror cats are not particularly unified in this endeavor; while they recognize the need to establish permanent ties with their subjects, they do not act in a coordinated fashion, and sometimes competing tribes of Leopard Men compete with or even go to war with one another, with each tribe being led by a different *duguthim* chieftain. This is the way of the spirit world; the strong devour the weak, but even the strong are not safe from predation.

### Greater *Nemur Sakar*

**Quote:** "More, give me more! I hunger!"

**Background:** Though the *nemur sakar* began their existence as leopard-spirits, the *nemur sakar* are now something altogether different. They are, in effect, a fusion of leopard traits and the essence of horror and pain, and thus magath

of horrifying potential. The *nemur sakar* have all of the predatory instincts of the great cats, all of the intelligence of human beings and all of the bloodlust that makes both frightening. These are some of the most frightening spirits on the planet: powerful, hungry and utterly ruthless.

**Description:** *Nemur sakar* appear as leopards with muzzles and feet soaked in blood, and a murderous intelligence behind their eyes. All of these spirits are Jagglings, and it is possible that some of the most powerful are even greater. The *nemur sakar* have learned to take on human form, but few care to do so. It lacks the weaponry the cats take for granted, and is generally something they consider too — civilized.

**Storytelling Hints:** *Nemur sakar* revel in nothing short of mass murder, and they take great delight in making sure their victims suffer until their lives finally die out. The *nemur sakar* radiate fear and terror and, as a result, attract more than their fair share of like-minded spirits; this seems to suit the *nemur sakar* just fine. They tend toward silence most of the time, letting their actions speak for them (and they could hardly drink in the screams of their victims if they were blathering on themselves).

**Rank:** 4

**Attributes:** Power 12, Finesse 12, Resistance 9

**Willpower:** 21

**Initiative:** 21

**Defense:** 12

**Speed:** 32 (species factor 8)

**Size:** 5

**Corpus:** 14



**Influences:** Leopards 1, Terror 3

**Numina:** Chorus, Claim, Harrow, Gift: Primal Howl, Living Fetter, Materialize, Material Vision, Possession, Wilds Sense

• **Primal Howl:** This Numen functions as the Father Wolf Gift: Primal Howl, but manifests as a roar instead of a howl.

**Essence:** 25

**Ban:** There is a medicine, known to the tribal elders in the wilds of Liberia and its neighboring countries, that is harmful to the terror cats. If a human drinks the medicine and the cat is fettered to him, the human will become sick. If a human who has been Claimed by a cat drinks the medicine, the cat will be cast out and the human may die (per the usual rules for violent *duguthim* separations). If weapons are coated in the medicine, they destroy a part of the spirit every time they strike; wounds to the spirit's corpus by such weapons do not heal.

## Leopard Man Chieftain

**Quote:** "You may submit to me, or you may die. I leave the choice to you."

**Background:** The chieftain is a hunter of great repute, one who has done great things, killed many people and revealed in their terror. This is what draws the *nemur sakar* to him, and it is why he accepts the cat's dominance. There is no hint of frailty in such a man, no sense of emotional weakness. The very concept of compassion or mercy is alien to him, and it was so long before the cat Claimed his soul.

**Description:** Leopard Men chieftains are immensely powerful beings, and they know it. They are tall and well muscled, and they dress well whenever they can manage it. Every emotion they have is perverted by lust, ambition or a thirst for mayhem, and their cruelty knows no bounds.

**Storytelling Hints:** Leopard Men chieftains love to kill, and it shows in their every action. Their smiles are terrifying to behold, for they mean the man is indulging his basest impulses and thoroughly enjoying himself all the while.

**Attributes:** Intelligence 2 (6), Wits 2 (6), Resolve 2 (4), Strength 3 (8), Dexterity 2 (6), Stamina 3 (8), Presence 3 (6), Manipulation 2 (6), Composure 2 (4)

**Skills:** Crafts 1, Medicine 1, Occult 2, Politics 3, Athletics (Climbing and Leaping) 3, Brawl (Claws) 4, Stealth (Prowling) 4, Animal Ken (Leopards) 1, Empathy 2, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 4, Socialize 3, Subterfuge 2

**Merits:** Allies (Leopard Men) ●●●, Fleet of Foot ●●●, Iron Stamina ●●●, Status (Leopard Men) ●●●●●, Striking Looks ●●●●

**Willpower:** 4 (8)

**Initiative:** 4 (10)

**Defense:** 2 (6)

**Speed:** 13 (22)

**Health:** 8 (13)

**Synthesis:** 5

**Aspects:** Twilight Vision, Great Leap, Primal Fear, Shapeshift, Sharp Senses, Thick Hide

**Essence:** 25

• **Twilight Vision:** This Aspect allows the Leopard Chieftain to see normally in low-light conditions (but not in absolute darkness; he needs at least faint starlight to see without penalty). This Aspect is always active.

• **Great Leap:** As the two-dot Strength Gift: Mighty Bound.

• **Primal Fear:** The Leopard Chieftain is cloaked in an aura of palpable cruelty and, as a result, is terrifying to behold despite his charming demeanor. He inflicts the Lunacy on ordinary human onlookers as though their Willpower were four points higher than it actually is.

• **Shapeshift:** The Chieftain may assume the form of a leopard as a standard action with a Stamina + Survival + Synthesis roll, or reflexively with the expenditure of an Essence point. The leopard has the following trait modifiers: Strength +2, Dexterity +2, Stamina +1, Manipulation -3, Health +1, Speed +7.

• **Sharp Senses:** The Chieftain has especially sharp senses, and gains a +2 bonus to all perception rolls. He may also track by scent. The senses are always active, but may be dampened as a reflexive action. (He may reduce his hearing threshold to normal levels to avoid being deafened by a gunshot, for instance.)

• **Thick Hide:** The Chieftain is a veteran of many battles, and his skin is thick and leathery. It acts as a single point of armor, but only against bashing attacks.

## Leopard Man Thug

**Quote:** "First, you will bleed. Then, you will die. I expect it will take a very long time."

**Background:** Most in the Leopard Man tribes are simple thugs, beings urged to acts of violence by the terrible spirits that influence their actions. For the most part, these are acts they'd be inclined to take anyway; they are, after all, the descendants of the people who created the terror cats to begin with. The spirits simply give the tribe members a nudge now and then to ensure that they always act in accord with their true natures.

The Leopard Men are not a group unto themselves; rather, they are a secret society of hunters that exists within the greater context of other large tribes (or, in modern times, even cities). The Leopard Men gather on holy nights, using blood rituals to strengthen their ties to one another and the spirits that guide them, and then proceed to track down and murder one or more human victims in an orgy of blood and violence. Leopard Men favor claw-like tools when hunting, and have been known to feast upon the flesh of their enemies.

**Description:** Leopard Men tend to look like everyone else in their town or village, and they come from all walks of life: some are farmers, some missionaries, some governors, some militia. The Leopard Men membership is almost entirely drawn from native African tribes, though it is not

inconceivable that a foreigner might be inducted into their ranks, or that an immigrant might take the tradition out of Africa. When hunting, the Leopard Men dress in leopard skins and arm themselves with wickedly curved cutting implements shaped to resemble a leopard's claws.

**Storytelling Hints:** For the most part, the rank and file of Leopard Men society are bloodthirsty thugs, simple beings who revel in the idea of causing pain to their fellow human beings. The Leopard Men Thugs are aggressive, but may be cultured or crude depending on the local environment. They handle captivity poorly; some Thugs have been known to inflict serious harm, or even death, upon themselves by crashing into walls in an effort to escape their captors.

**Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2, Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2, Presence 2, Manipulation 3, Composure 2

**Skills:** Crafts 2, Occult 2, Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Stealth 2, Survival 1, Weaponry (Claws) 3, Animal Ken (Leopards) 1, Empathy 2, Intimidation 3, Socialize 1

**Merits:** Any, but must have Status (Leopard Men) • or higher.

**Willpower:** 4

**Morality:** 2

**Derangements:** At least one; the typical Thug might easily have two or more, and one or more might be severe.

**Virtue:** Fortitude

**Vice:** Gluttony

**Initiative:** 5

**Defense:** 3

**Speed:** 11

**Health:** 7

### Story Hooks

- While it is true that the Leopard Men got their start in West Africa, it is also true that this is the region most affected by the slave trade in the mid- to late 1800s. It is possible, then, that some of the Leopard Men, or at least, some of the spirits associated with them, made their way to the United States or Europe. If so, they would attempt to recreate the culture of murder they found so comfortable back home.

- In the modern era, many people from Liberia and other parts of West Africa have been trying desperately to make their way to the United States, so that they might make a better life for themselves. Most are turned away, but some are successful. One such person happens to be a blood relative of one of the Leopard Men, but one of the reasons she left was so that she could escape that life and the madness associated with it. Now she has ties to the characters — as a girlfriend, perhaps, or possibly a co-worker — and she starts talking about the fact that her family is coming to take her home. She's obviously terrified. What is so horrible about her family, and how might they react to the Uratha?

## The Bouda

There is a place, in the land that once was known as Abyssinia, where a tribe of humans known as the Bouda dwell. They are known far and wide as blacksmiths of great skill, and because of this, their name carries some weight among the locals. But the Bouda are known for something else as well, something far more sinister. It is said that the females among them can take the form of hyenas, and that they use this power to terrify their foes. The truth of such reports is unknown, but they are pervasive enough that they cannot be dismissed easily. What goes on in this place, and how might it be related to the World of Darkness?

### Background

The World of Darkness is home to many dark things, and this is the story of one such thing. The tale begins with the hyena, a strange creature unlike any other in the world. A hyena is neither dog, nor bear nor cat, but rather something uniquely its own. There are three sorts of hyenas: some are brown, some have stripes and the last bear spots. These last that interest us, because in those days they vexed the Bouda to no end. But the humans were strong and unified, and they managed to fend off the hyenas and claim their human birthright as masters of their domain. But of course, in the World of Darkness, matters are not always settled so easily; virtue and resolve have their price, and that was as true for the Bouda as it was for anyone. The manner of the hyena's vengeance, then — well now, that was a costly affair indeed.

It was not the hyenas' fault, really, or at least, not directly. Like all things, they cast a reflection in the Shadow. Occasionally, these reflections become twisted parodies of the things they were. There are many possible reasons for such an occurrence; perhaps the reflection is consumed by that of something else, or perhaps the ideas of others shape it in some unexpected fashion. No matter the reason, the hyenas' reflections were twisted in some fashion, so that they became powerful and aware. Every time the Bouda used their steel to slay a hyena, the reflections grew stronger, to the point where the reflections grew independently of the animal that had first cast them. So it was that these simple hyena spirits became the *im iri*, the rainmakers, the diseased runners, the ones that bring sorrow to all they encounter.

For a time, a very long time, the *im iri* plagued the Bouda, raping their wives and stealing their children. But the humans were not foolish, ignorant apes; some among them knew the ways of spirits, and they knew the ways of magic as well. The Bouda also knew that if they could learn of the rainmaker's ban they could ward him off, if not destroy him altogether. And so they began to search, and to learn, and after much time they managed to discover the *im iri*'s weakness: the spirit could not refuse a gift, and had to repay the gift with a boon of equal value.

Naturally, the Bouda were distraught; they had little of value, and nothing of interest to spirits such as the *im iri*. What, then, could they offer the spirits to quiet them? At this, the elders despaired. Soon, however, they learned more about their foes. They learned that some spirits, those that wanted to escape the world of Shadow, sometimes roamed the world in bodies of flesh and bone. Indeed, some spirits did this merely in hopes of experiencing the world of the material as mortals do. Seizing upon this knowledge, the elders sought out the *im iri* and bade them accept the elders' offerings: "Walk the world in our bodies," they said, "and leave our tribe in peace."

The *im iri* pondered the humans' offer, and then they laughed. "Your offer is tempting," they said, "but we cannot accept. For you see, we yet remain the shadows of the *kir*, and they walk the world as females. Offer us your women instead, and then we will leave you in peace." The Bouda were angry at this; it seemed that, while the hyenas were bound to repay the gifts they received, they were not obliged to accept any particular gift. And so the Bouda returned home and discussed the matter, trying to determine a way to get the best of the wretched spirits that plagued them.

Finally, they returned to the *im iri* and said, "We will accept your terms under one condition: if you accept the gift of our women, you must grant any request we desire so long as it is equitable." The spirits, bewitched by the notion of Claiming the elders' daughters, accepted their terms. The spirits leapt upon the children like starving animals, subjugating their wills, merging with them body and soul. When it was done, they stood up and moved to wreak havoc on the world. But the elders reminded the spirits of their promise, and demanded payment for their sacrifice. The spirits scoffed, and bade the elders name their price. What did they want? Slaves? The bodies of their enemies? It mattered not, as the spirits would enjoy themselves regardless. They were quite surprised, then, when the elders did as they asked, "As we have given you our children, we demand that you give us yourselves

in return. You will slay our enemies, protect us from others like yourselves and walk the world freely in return. And should a child die before her natural time, we will provide you with another, and another and another, until your debt to us is repaid in full."

Naturally, the *im iri* were incensed at this contract, but they had to agree that it was fair. Some tried to leave the bodies they had acquired, but it was no use; they had accepted their gift, and were now bound by the terms of their ban. And so it was that the Bouda became known as people of the hyenas, as well as people with great smithing skills. The *im iri* will complete their payment one day, and on that day the Bouda will suffer greatly. But until then, the hyenas are as the Bouda are, and are free to walk the Earth.

### Description

Bouda are malicious hyena-spirits that have Claimed human hosts in what has become a long-standing tradition. Because of the agreement with the Bouda tribesmen, the hyena-spirits are bound to serve as guardians and protectors until such time as the terms of their pact have been fulfilled.

They are, of course, extremely unhappy about this state of affairs, but since they tend to go through hosts rather quickly they have no real choice in the matter.



The structure of Bouda society is worthy of comment. To the outside observer, their culture appears to be matriarchal. The women in the tribe are clearly beings of great power, and they instruct the men and the children on matter of protocol, defense and general interaction with the spirit world. This is an elaborate façade, however, meant to cover up the fact that the Bouda elders have, for all intents and purposes, made a deal with the Devil. The true power among the Bouda is their witch doctors and chieftains, and all of these individuals are male. They defer to the hyenas in their midst on matters of a practical nature, however, since the hyenas are bound to use their strength and intellect in an effort to serve the tribe. Also, by giving the hyenas power, the humans strengthen the spirits' debt to them; by the original terms of the agreement, the hyenas should have been freed from servitude centuries ago, but by offering the spirits gifts (both material and human), the terms of the agreement have been extended multiple times. By the advent of the modern era, the Bouda and their spirit allies/tormenters have become as intertwined as the *duguthim* the hyenas create; spirit and human alike maintain the arrangement because they don't know of any other way to live.

In terms of game mechanics, the Bouda have no special rules governing their activity. They are ordinary *duguthim* in every sense, and only differ from their fellow spirits in the fact that the Bouda have an entire culture supporting their activities. The spirits themselves are, for the most part, Greater Gafflings, with the stronger members being Lesser Jaggings. None have yet advanced to the status of Greater Jaggling, and few if any Lesser Gafflings remain among their ranks.

## Other Hyenas?

It appears that the Bouda are not the only hyena-shifters in the world. Reports have surfaced over the years of werhyenas running with werewolves in parts of Turkey and the Middle East, and werhyenas have also been spotted across the reaches of North and East Africa. For the most part, these are not Bouda spirits; rather, these are bona fide werhyenas, or, more accurately, werewolves with the appearance of werhyenas. Africa is a place with very few native wolf species, after all; the only native wolves are from Egypt, and they are very small. The Uratha of Africa, then, have adapted their wolf forms to take on the coloration of the hyenas and wild dogs (and to some extent, the build), and these serve as the basis for the above legends. There is no difference whatsoever between ordinary wolf Uratha and these regional variants; their culture, strengths and limitations

are all exactly the same, and they identify themselves as Uratha to anyone who asks.

## Typical *Im Iri*

**Quote:** "My my my, how tasty! You should make an excellent meal."

**Background:** The *im iri* are the hyena-spirits bound to serve the Bouda, but not all of the *im iri* walk the world of flesh at once. Many simply prowl the spiritscape of the Bouda's homeland, looking for intruders and a way to vent their anger. Other humans are the *im iri*'s favored prey, but Uratha certainly make for a nice treat.

**Description:** *Im iri* appear as feral, even rabid forms of ordinary spotted hyenas. The spirits' lips are pulled back in a perpetual scowl, and their muzzles are often coated in blood. They are quite articulate, but typically so crazed with hunger and madness that they never bother to speak.

**Storytelling Hints:** *Im iri* are chained spirits, and the reality of their situation galls them. To be tricked so easily, and by humans no less — how humiliating. The *im iri* have made the best of their situation, and they did manage to make the humans pay for their victory, but the *im iri*'s defeat remains an open wound. They are sullen, bloodthirsty and very, very angry.

**Rank:** 2

**Attributes:** Power 5, Finesse 4, Resistance 5

**Willpower:** 10

**Initiative:** 9

**Defense:** 5

**Speed:** 17 (species factor 8)

**Size:** 5

**Corpus:** 10

**Influences:** Hyenas 1, Terror 1

**Numina:** Chorus, Claim, Harrow, Materialize, Reaching  
**Essence:** 15

**Ban:** *Im iri* may refuse gifts, but if they accept one, they must repay the giver with a gift of similar value.

## Hyena Claimed

**Quote:** "It has been so long since I have been allowed to feed. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to feast!"

**Background:** The woman who would become Bouda began life as a simple girl, born to a family of some prestige. She never knew who the powerful women were who played such an active role in her tribe's affairs; she only knew that a small number of girls such as herself were chosen to become such women, and that they protected the entire tribe. She considered it an honor when she was chosen, and didn't understand the reason for her parents' sorrow until much later.

The transformation was a horrifying process. Some being, some alien thing had entered her and consumed her, and now she had become something that was not altogether

human. It frightens her, or at least it would if she still had a will of her own. As it is, however, she no longer worries about such things — or, indeed, about anything at all.

**Description:** The typical Bouda is a tall, powerful woman whose features have a slightly feral cast to them. Her eyes glint with malice and laughter, and she all but glows with predatory confidence. Like all Bouda, she has dark skin and hair, and dresses in all the finery her tribe has to offer.

**Storytelling Hints:** The Bouda are chained spirits, and they aren't happy about it. The fact that it cost a tribe its soul to manage this is beside the point; the spirits cannot act as they will, and this offends them. They are thus happy to take out their frustrations on any target that presents itself. If this involves a good scrap, then so be it. There are plenty of other girls waiting to be Claimed, after all.

**Attributes:** Intelligence 2 (3), Wits 3 (4), Resolve 2 (3), Strength 2 (5), Dexterity 2 (4), Stamina 2 (5), Presence 3 (4), Manipulation 3 (4), Composure 2 (3)

**Skills:** Crafts 1, Investigation 1, Occult 2, Athletics 3, Brawl (Grapples) 4, Larceny 2, Survival 2, Animal Ken (Hyenas) 1, Empathy 2, Intimidation (Subtle Threats) 4, Persuasion 3, Subterfuge (Lying) 3

**Merits:** Allies (*Im Iri*) •, Iron Stomach, Natural Immunity, Strong Back, Toxin Resistance, Status (Bouda) •••

**Willpower:** 4 (6)

**Initiative:** 4 (7)

**Defense:** 2 (4)

**Speed:** 9 (14)

**Health:** 7 (10)

**Synthesis:** 3

**Aspects:** Death Grip, Mimic, Shapeshift, Sharp Senses, Tough Skin

**Essence:** 15

• **Death Grip:** As the three-dot Full Moon Gift of the same name.

• **Mimic:** As the *siten uzu* Aspect described above.

• **Shapeshift:** This Aspect allows the character to take the form of a hyena, which has traits similar to those of an Uratha in Urhan form.

• **Sharp Senses:** As the Leopard Man Chieftain Aspect, described above.

• **Tough Skin:** As the Leopard Man Chieftain Aspect, described above.

### Story Hooks

• In a weird twist on the Leopard Men hook given above, the characters encounter a seemingly normal girl who soon proves to be Claimed by an *im iri*. In stark contrast to the behavior of most Claimed, however, the spirit *wants* the characters to exorcise it. In fact, it'd be quite happy if the characters warded the Bouda so that the *im iri* could never approach the area again, as that would effectively release the hyena-spirits from their noisome burden. But will the characters figure out what's going on before it's too late? And assuming they do, how do they want to proceed?

• Not all of the *im iri* have been chained to the Bouda for all eternity. At least one of the *im iri* has fulfilled the terms of its agreement, and is looking to exact vengeance on the people who caged it — the Bouda and all of their descendants. The people in modern Ethiopia are largely out of its reach, but those who have left the country are fair game. One such person happens to live in the vicinity of the characters' territory, and might even be an acquaintance of theirs. Said descendant might even be one of the characters! The Claimed is not terribly strong by Uratha standards, but it is very crafty. It is also patient, and willing to bide its time until it finds the perfect opportunity to strike.

## Serpent Guardians

*They have always been here.*

*They bore witness to the rise of the modern age, to the Great Betrayal that destroyed the Border Marches, to the birth of Pangaea, to the creation of the universe. They gazed in wonderment at the promise of the world when it was young, roared in triumph at the birth of Father Wolf and trembled with despair when his murder shattered the world that was. They are the great sages, the Afhal Usum, and in the here and now they do as they have always done — they watch, and they wait and keep the greatest secrets in the world safe from prying eyes.*

*But they are not alone. Time and change have taken their toll, and the sages have found that they can no longer accomplish their goals unaided. So it is that they have created the Hal Usum, the Serpent Guardians, to act as the Afhal Usum's agents in the mortal world. These beings represent the only means by which one can tap into the knowledge of the great sages, as the Afhal Usum do not grant audiences and have no patience for the young. But be warned; the Hal Usum are beings of great power, and they will destroy anyone who threatens the secrets they guard. Such is their sacred duty, and such is the ban that binds them to this world.*

## Background

There are tales, found around the world, of beings that lived in the world before the time of humans. The Hopi speak of the Sheti, the Snake-Brothers; the Zulu preserve stories of Chitahuri. The Naga of Indian myth may be a reflection of these entities, and many Aboriginals of Australia know them as the servants of Mangar-kunjer-kunja, the creator of all life. All these myths seem to point to an ancient and powerful choir of spirits charged with guarding the oldest and most powerful secrets in the world.

No one knows how the choir got its origins; they were said to be born even before the time of Father Wolf. What is known is that they are almost timelessly old, insular and very, very powerful. *Urfarah* is said to have known of these spirits, but paid them little mind; they were, after all, tasked with guarding the esoterica of the Shadow, and hence had no reason to cross the Border Marches into the world of humans. So long as these spirits knew their place, the wolf

god had no interest in them. And so they remained in the shadows, never interfering with the politics of the spirit world, sharing knowledge with others when it suited their purposes.

When *Urfarah* died, however, the *Afhal Usum* grew concerned. They knew that, with the collapse of the Border Marches, the Shadow Realm and the material world alike would fall into chaos. It was possible, then, that miscreants on both sides of the Gauntlet might discover or, worse yet, destroy much of the knowledge the Guardians had accumulated over the years. They felt it imperative that they take steps to guard against such loss, and it was to this end that they established a number of societies around the world dedicated to the task of finding, preserving and occasionally dispensing critical knowledge about the world, the Shadow and the ties binding them to one another.

At first, the serpent societies were small and tight-knit. They were composed of humans and the spirits that guided/Urged them, and these societies proved to be quite adept at locating and guarding the various bits of ancient lore that found their ways into the material realm. Different descants of the *Afhal Usum* handled matters in their own way, of course; the Naga took an active role in human society, for example, while the Sheti were much more reserved in their efforts. As time went by, however, each group ran into similar problems: humanity was growing, the knowledge of the *Afhal Usum* was becoming scattered and difficult to find and their minions found it more and more difficult to operate unimpeded. If the great sages were to perform their tasks effectively, then, they were going to have to enter the material world themselves.

Naturally, entering the realm of flesh was no small matter. The sages knew that, sooner or later, their activities would draw the ire of Father Wolf's children, and this meant that the sages had to handle the situation very carefully. To that end, they first invested a considerable amount of time and effort in absorbing and strengthening another spirit choir, one consisting largely of guardian-spirits. The original name of this choir is unknown, but after a great deal of spirit politicking, they elected to become a descant in the *Afhal Usum* choir. They then became known as the *Hal Usum*, the Serpent Guardians, and they have been acting as the sages' guardians ever since.

## Absorbing a Spirit Choir

The notion of one spirit choir absorbing another is not unheard of. Usually, it occurs at the culmination of a very long running war or feud. Uratha lore finds it difficult to pinpoint specific instances of this happening, largely because it's hard to tell when a particular choir started taking on its new Aspects and Influences. Sometimes, however, the absorption is less violent.

The legend of the Serpent Sages points to one such instance.

As the story runs, the Serpent Sages conferred with one another and realized they had shared goals in the material world. Many of their goals were exclusionary — that is, they were in competition with one another — but that was a matter for another time. The important thing was that they couldn't operate on their own without getting killed by the Uratha. And so, the Serpent Sages coordinated their efforts to woo a large number of guardian spirits, all of them having serpent motifs (and thus something in common with the Serpent Sages). Some spirits refused the Serpent Sages' offers, but many more accepted; over time, the number of guardian spirits that allied with the Serpent Sages grew to the point where they could be labeled a descant within the Serpent Sage choir, and so many Uratha simply say that the one choir absorbed and diminished the other.

With the loyalty of the *Hal Usum* secured, the great sages could gradually begin their inroads into the material world. Sages and Guardians alike first Urged and then Claimed selected humans, carefully orchestrating their activities so as to avoid the attention of the upstart werewolves who thought it their place to govern spirit affairs. Each of the beings Claimed in this fashion is supported by a number of human subordinates, all struggling to keep their society's affairs safe from prying outside eyes. The Serpent Sages have, to date, been largely successful in this endeavor, but the Sages live in fear of the time when someone will make a mistake — or, worse, when the Sages themselves will find that they need to call upon the wolf shifters for aid.

## Description

While the Serpent Sages speak of their history as though it were a singular entity, the truth is that the Serpent Sages are scattered about the Shadow, and are largely ignorant of one another's activities. They are tight-knit as spirits go, but that isn't saying much; the Sheti have little to do with the Naga, for example, and neither has much interest in the activities of the Chitahuri. They know of one another's existence, and they do exchange envoys on occasion, but that's as far as their interaction goes.

That being said, the cooperation between the Serpent Sages and the Serpent Guardians seems to be universal. Typically, the Serpent Sages remain in the Shadow, while the Serpent Guardians split their time between the Shadow and the material world. The Guardians are also the ones most often Claim human hosts (though the process is by no means exclusive to the Guardians; several Sages have

found reason to Claim human bodies over the years, and some Sages have been in the physical world for a very, very long time). Examples of both are provided here.

### Typical *Afhal Usum*

**Quote:** “If I thought you worthy of my knowledge, I would have shared it with you long ago. Leave this place.”

**Background:** The Serpent Sages are powerful spirits that have taken it upon themselves to discover and protect all of the world’s lost and forbidden lore. They are ancient spirits, said to be rivaled in age only by the most powerful of the elementals, and the Sages have little patience for the inquiries of the younger choirs — including the Uratha. The Serpent Sages are loosely grouped into a number of choirs that were once based on regional affiliation. In the modern era, however, when their human agents can move around freely, the divisions between choirs are less strict than they might have been in times past.

The motivations and areas of expertise of individual *Afhal Usum* vary wildly, and they clash frequently over territorial issues. In stark contrast to the Uratha, however, the territories of the Serpent Sages are conceptual rather than geographical. One Sage might consider matters of fate and destiny to be its exclusive domain, while another Sage might favor topics of life and rejuvenation. This conflict is not merely academic; ideas are raw currency for the *Afhal Usum*, and the essential truths each adopts as its own do much to shape the nature and extent of the Sage’s abilities. At present, the Uratha only barely understand how this process works (it is not clear to them how you can possess an idea, since any number of people can share it), but they recognize the fact that it is important to the Sages and has real and tangible effects.

**Description:** Serpent Sages rarely manifest as any sort of concrete form. Rather, the most people typically see of them is a vaguely serpentine bit of ephemera, with limbs occasionally added in as needed. The Serpent Sages do have piercing eyes, however, and their gaze is unnervingly intense. Some have commented that it seems as though the spirit is staring straight into their souls, and that might not be far from the truth.

**Storytelling Hints:** Every action *Afhal Usum* take is measured and deliberate, and the concepts of panic and frustration are utterly alien to them (indeed, it is said that nothing save Father Wolf’s death has ever rattled them). They are not emotionless beings, but they have experienced enough that very little can actually surprise them these days. The Serpent Sages’ primary goal in all things is the pursuit and preservation of knowledge; all else is secondary to them, up to and including the lives and existence of spirits and mortals alike. Life is fleeting, the Serpent Sages reason, but knowledge is eternal.

**Rank:** 4

**Attributes:** Power 12, Finesse 12, Resistance 9

**Willpower:** 23

**Initiative:** 21

**Defense:** 12

**Speed:** 29 (species factor 5)

**Size:** 5

**Corpus:** 14

**Influences:** Knowledge 2, Snakes 1, Warding 1

**Numina:** Chorus, Claim, Discorporation, Gift: Double Back, Gift: Omen Gazing, Gift: Soul Read, Materialize, Material Vision, Wilds Sense

• **Double Back:** As the four-dot Evasion Gift of the same name.

• **Omen Gazing:** As the five-dot Insight Gift of the same name.

• **Soul Read:** As the four-dot Insight Gift of the same name.

**Essence:** 25

**Ban:** The *Afhal Usum* must pursue knowledge ceaselessly, and must guard it against all who are unworthy (exactly what constitutes “unworthy” varies considerably from sage to sage).

### Typical *Hal Usum*

**Quote:** “LEAVE! NOW!”

**Background:** At one point, in the distant past, the Serpent Guardians were part of the Serpent choir and behaved accordingly. They were, for the most part, simple snake-spirits, albeit ones with a strong protection motif. At some point, however, the Serpent Sages convinced the *entire choir* to abandon its status as serpent-spirits and become a descant within the Serpent Sage choir. This represented a massive coup for the Serpent Sages, as it is one of the few times a mass migration of this sort is ever known to have occurred within the politics of the Shadow.

Since they joined the choir, the Serpent Guardians have taken to guarding the accumulated lore of the Serpent Sages. For the most part, they do this via direct alliances with individual *Afhal Usum* spirits; in much the same way that spirits within a brood lend assistance to the more powerful spirits holding the brood together, the Serpent Guardians lend assistance to the elites of the *Afhal Usum* (and, indeed, it might be more appropriate to view the *Afhal Usum* as a highly complex brood rather than as a choir per se). Politics aside, the Guardians’ basic tasks are simple: protect the lore of their masters, and destroy any who threaten it. It is a task to which they are well-suited.

**Description:** Guardian serpents normally appear as huge vipers or cobras, spanning some 30 to 40 feet in length and normally coiled around whatever it is they happen to be guarding. Their serpentine features vary greatly; some have hoods, others have head pits in their snouts, others have horns above their eyes. Color varies as well; those inspired by cobras tend to be darkly colored, but the bright greens of mambas and other, vibrant colors are just as common. The one constant, of course, is their personality: they are quiet and reserved, and utterly implacable. They have no interest in matters that do not directly threaten their

charges, but once such a threat manifests, they are swift and violent hunters.

**Storytelling Hints:** Guardian serpents are deadly foes, and they know it. They also know that they are tasked spirits, and as such, they are quite talented when it comes to controlling their urges. They are intelligent, determined and focused, and they are extremely patient; tricking or baiting one is all but impossible. Happily, they are not particularly aggressive, and tend to mind their business when they are not busy guarding anything of note.

**Rank:** 3

**Attributes:** Power 9, Finesse 9, Resistance 7

**Willpower:** 16

**Initiative:** 16

**Defense:** 9

**Speed:** 23 (species factor 5)

**Size:** 5

**Corpus:** 12

**Influences:** Warding 2, Serpents 1

**Numina:** Chorus, Claim, Harrow, Materialize, Material Vision, Reaching, Spirit Venom

• **Spirit Venom:** This Numen allows the spirit to inject its opponent with a form of spiritual venom after a successful bite, causing damage and befouling the target's own reserve of spiritual energy. After a successful bite attack, the spirit may spend one to three Essence to inject a supernatural venom into its foe. The venom inflicts an additional point of damage for every point of Essence spent. In addition, the victim must make a Stamina + Primal Urge roll to avoid losing one point of Essence for each point of Essence spent by the spirit when activating the Numen.

**Essence:** 20

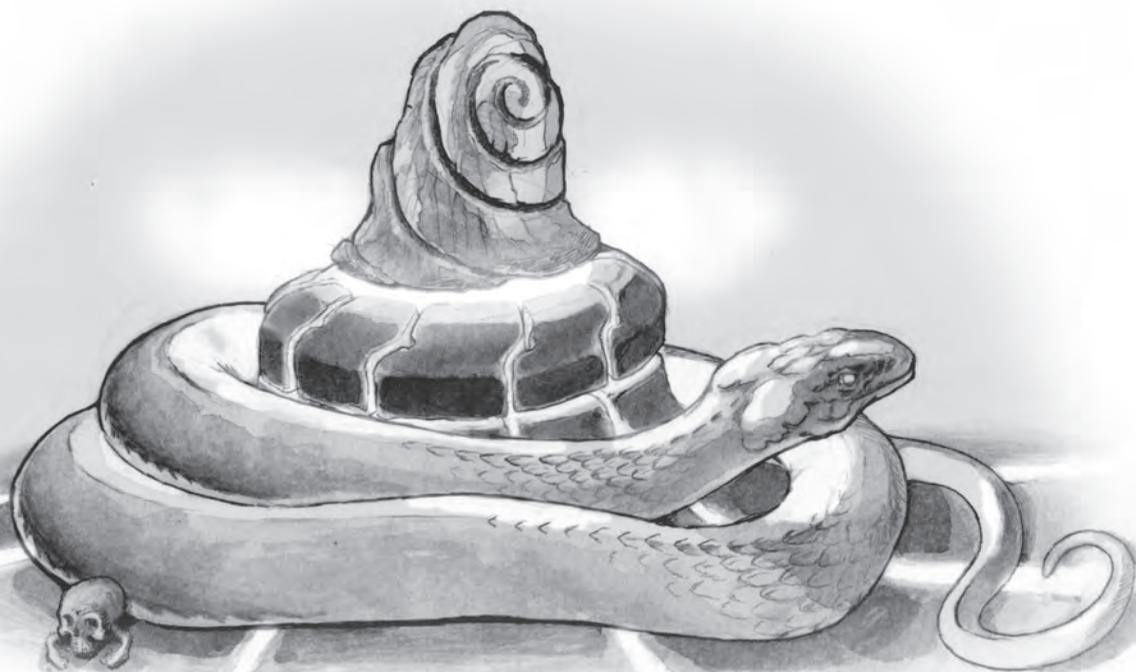
**Ban:** Guardian Serpents are normally tasked to guard a specific item or place. The task did not necessarily originate with a figure of authority; such spirits are self-appointed guardians about as often as not.

### *Afhal Usum Claimed*

**Quote:** "Is that all you seek? Such a trivial matter. Help me to find this book — a harmless trifle, nothing at all — and the knowledge you desire shall be yours."

**Background:** Most who join the *Afhal Usum* serpent cults are scholars and seekers of knowledge, and are drawn to the cults because of the promise they represent. An unlucky few, however, manage to be clever enough and skilled enough to attract the attention of one of the Serpent Sages themselves. Some of these poor souls are so enamored with the Sages and their goals that they actually welcome the prospect of being joined with one of their gods. The reality, of course, is far more than they ever could have bargained for.

Once the process of Claiming is complete, the Serpent Sage begins to establish a power base for itself in the material world. The Sage uses the structure of the serpent cult as a foundation, drawing upon the cult's membership for aid when acclimating to life as a mortal, and then expands its influence in the hopes of accumulating an ever-expanding storehouse of lore in the material realm. The concept of requiring books or computers to store this lore strikes the Serpent Sages as peculiar, but once they understand the limitations of the physical, they quickly adapt and move on.



TOF

Most *Afhal Usum* Claimed are very old, and haven't changed bodies in centuries; they normally tend to prefer extending the lifespans of the bodies under their control so that their research isn't interrupted by the hassle of Claiming a new one. Because of this, many of the Serpent Sages have vast libraries (or, in the case of the more forward thinking, computer databases) in the physical realm, all locked away and kept safe from prying eyes.

**Description:** Despite their great power, the Claimed forms of the *Afhal Usum* are surprisingly unimposing. They look for all the world like ordinary human beings, of the sort you'd normally find in forgotten libraries filled with dusty, old books. The Claimed's true power manifests only when they are threatened, or when they wish to make a point so that they can get on with their work. If the Claimed chooses, it can take on a serpent form, becoming any of a thousand different snakes in the blink of an eye. The Claimed normally do this to rest, as they find it more comfortable resting as a serpent than to sleep on the ground in an awkward human form.

**Storytelling Hints:** As with the spirit that Rides the Claimed, the only thing that matters to the Claimed is the pursuit of knowledge. This does not mean the Claimed hold other activities in contempt, naturally; they have soaked in enough of the knowledge they seek to realize that art, culture, entertainment and even combat have their place. This is well and good for the humans (and werewolves, and vampires and . . .) of the world, but such things do not concern the Serpent Sages.

Drawing information from a Serpent Sage is, of course, a difficult matter. Most spirits are reluctant to cooperate with the Uratha even during the best of times, and in the case of the *Afhal Usum*, matters are complicated by the fact that they are inclined to hoard knowledge rather than dispense it. Lore, then, is the only currency they value, and a werewolf who wants their aid had best be prepared to pay for it (though this can be harder than it looks; it's not unlike trying to bribe the Louvre with Impressionist artwork).

**Attributes:** Intelligence 3 (9), Wits 2 (6), Resolve 3 (6), Strength 2 (5), Dexterity 2 (6), Stamina 2 (5), Presence 2 (5), Manipulation 2 (6), Composure 3 (6)

**Skills:** Academics 5 (History, any two additional Specialties), Investigation 3, Medicine 2, Occult 5 (Shadow Realm), Science 2, Athletics 2, Survival 2, Animal Ken (Snakes) 1, Expression 3, Persuasion 4, Subterfuge 2

**Merits:** Allies (Serpent Society) ●●●, Contacts (Academia, Archivists/Librarians, Occult Circles) ●●●, Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Status (Serpent Society) ●●●●●, Toxin Resistance

**Willpower:** 6 (12)

**Initiative:** 5 (12)

**Defense:** 2 (6)

**Speed:** 9 (16)

**Health:** 7 (10)

**Synthesis:** 5

**Aspects:** Fangs, Heat Pits, Longevity, Omen Gazing, Rev-

elation, Shapeshift, Thick Hide, Venom

• **Fangs:** *Afhal Usum* Claimed typically have weak fangs that add +1 lethal damage to Brawl dice pools. The fangs are small, but they still allow the Claimed to make bite attacks without the need for grappling.

• **Heat Pits:** As with many New World vipers, the Claimed can see in the dark by detecting heat patterns in the living things around him. The Claimed suffers no penalties to Interaction rolls (including Combat) due to darkness, or even blindness. Note that this sense only applies to living things; the Serpent cannot navigate in darkness unaided, and some beings (such as vampires and spirits) do not register on the sense at all.

• **Longevity:** *Afhal Usum* are extremely long-lived as *duguthim* go; many *Afhal Usum* have been around for centuries, if not millennia. The exact nature and extent of the creature's history is left to the Storyteller's discretion.

• **Omen Gazing:** As the five-dot Insight Gift of the same name.

• **Revelation:** This Aspect is similar to the Knowledge Gift: Traveler's Blessing, save for the fact that Revelation allows the character to understand any written or spoken language. Revelation grants no bonus to Social rolls, however. Activating the Aspect requires the expenditure of a Willpower point. This Aspect costs three Synthesis points to learn.

• **Shapeshift:** With this Aspect, the *Afhal Usum* can transform into a snake. Doing so requires a successful Stamina + Survival + Synthesis roll, or the expenditure of an Essence point (in which case the transformation becomes reflexive). The snake has the following traits: Strength -1, Dexterity +1, Stamina -1, Initiative +1, Speed -3, Size -3, inflict lethal damage with bite attack. The *Afhal Usum* can use its poison in snake form.

• **Thick Hide:** As the Leopard Man Chieftain Aspect described above.

• **Venom:** After a successful bite attack, the Claimed may inject the target with a Toxicity 4 poison. The poison inflicts four levels of lethal damage immediately if the target fails a Stamina + Resolve + Primal Urge roll, and goes inert soon thereafter. The *Afhal Usum* may also choose to spit the poison at a target, using a Dexterity + Athletics roll to hit. The poison is harmless if it hits anywhere other than the target's face, but if the poison hits the eyes (doing so imposes a -3 penalty to the attack), the attacker takes two levels of lethal damage and is blinded. The blindness persists until the damage heals.

**Essence:** 25

## *Hal Usum* Claimed

**Quote:** "You do not belong here, little wolf. If you value your life, go someplace else."

**Background:** The Serpent Guardians are concerned first, last and only with guarding the lore of their masters, the Serpent Sages. To this end, the Serpent Guardians sometimes find it necessary to Claim physical bodies in the material realm, so that the Guardians might guard a place

without leaving it vulnerable while they feed and re-manifest. They are not particularly picky about choosing their hosts; the Guardians do expect their hosts to have a certain level of physical ability, of course, as their business in the physical realm has a strong physical component to it, but beyond that the details are utterly trivial to them.

Once a host is Claimed, the Guardian selects an item or area to guard and binds itself to its subject via pact and ritual. From that point forward, the Guardian has food brought to it via servants, sleeps and defecates and necessary, but otherwise never leaves its post (if its subject is a living being, of course, it moves as its charge does. Most people would find the Guardian an intrusive being, as it is certainly noticeable, but the Serpent Sages don't seem to mind a bit).

**Description:** Serpent Guardians are notable for the fact that they do not make any effort whatsoever to retain their host's human appearance. Rather, they look like a humanoid being with thick, scaly skin, a serpentine head with powerful jaws and sharp fangs, clawed hands and feet and a long, powerful tail. If they are forced to travel outside, they have to dress in flowing robes with generous hoods (or, alternately, learn the Shapeshifting Aspect so that they can become a serpent of some sort).

No matter their charge, Serpent Guardians favor huge great axes as their chosen weapon, and rarely travel without them. They wield these axes to devastating effect, and even werewolves had best be on their guard when facing one.

**Storytelling Hints:** Serpent Guardians are notoriously single-minded. They are so focused on the object of their protection that nothing can bend their resolve, and they are next to useless if asked to do anything unrelated to their duties. The Serpent Sages value the Guardians' loyalty and dedication, but marvel at the fact that such powerful spirits can manage to be such simpletons. This assessment is somewhat misleading, as no Juggling attains said status without diversifying its nature somewhat. In the case of Serpent Guardians, however, that diversity is often difficult to detect.

**Attributes:** Intelligence 2 (4), Wits 3 (6), Resolve 2 (4), Strength 3 (8), Dexterity 3 (6), Stamina 2 (5), Presence 2 (4), Manipulation 2 (5), Composure 2 (4)

**Skills:** Investigation 3, Medicine (First Aid) 1, Athletics 3, Brawl (Bite) 4, Survival 2, Weaponry (Great Ax) 5, Animal Ken (Snakes) 1, Intimidation (Overt Threats) 4, Subterfuge (Spotting Lies) 2

**Merits:** Allies (Serpent Society) •, Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes ••, Iron Stamina •••, Quick Healer, Status (Serpent Society) •••, Toxin Resistance

**Willpower:** 4 (8)

**Initiative:** 7 (12)

**Defense:** 3 (6)

**Speed:** 11 (19)

**Health:** 7 (10)

**Synthesis:** 4

**Aspects:** Extra Limb (Tail), Fangs, Heat Pits, Thick Hide, Venom

• **Extra Limb:** Serpent Guardians have a long, thick tail, which provides balance and is remarkably flexible. The tail adds a die to rolls involving balance, and can be used to trip opponents in combat. Doing so requires a Strength + Athletics check, inflicts no damage and leaves opponents prone if the roll is successful.

• **Fangs:** Sharp fangs give the Guardian a +2 lethal bite attack, and allow such attacks to be made without need for a grapple.

• **Heat Pits:** As the *Afhal Usum* Aspect described above.

• **Thick Hide:** Thick scutes cover the Serpent Guardian's skin, acting as remarkably effective armor. They provide 3/3 protection against melee and ranged attacks, and are considered bulletproof.

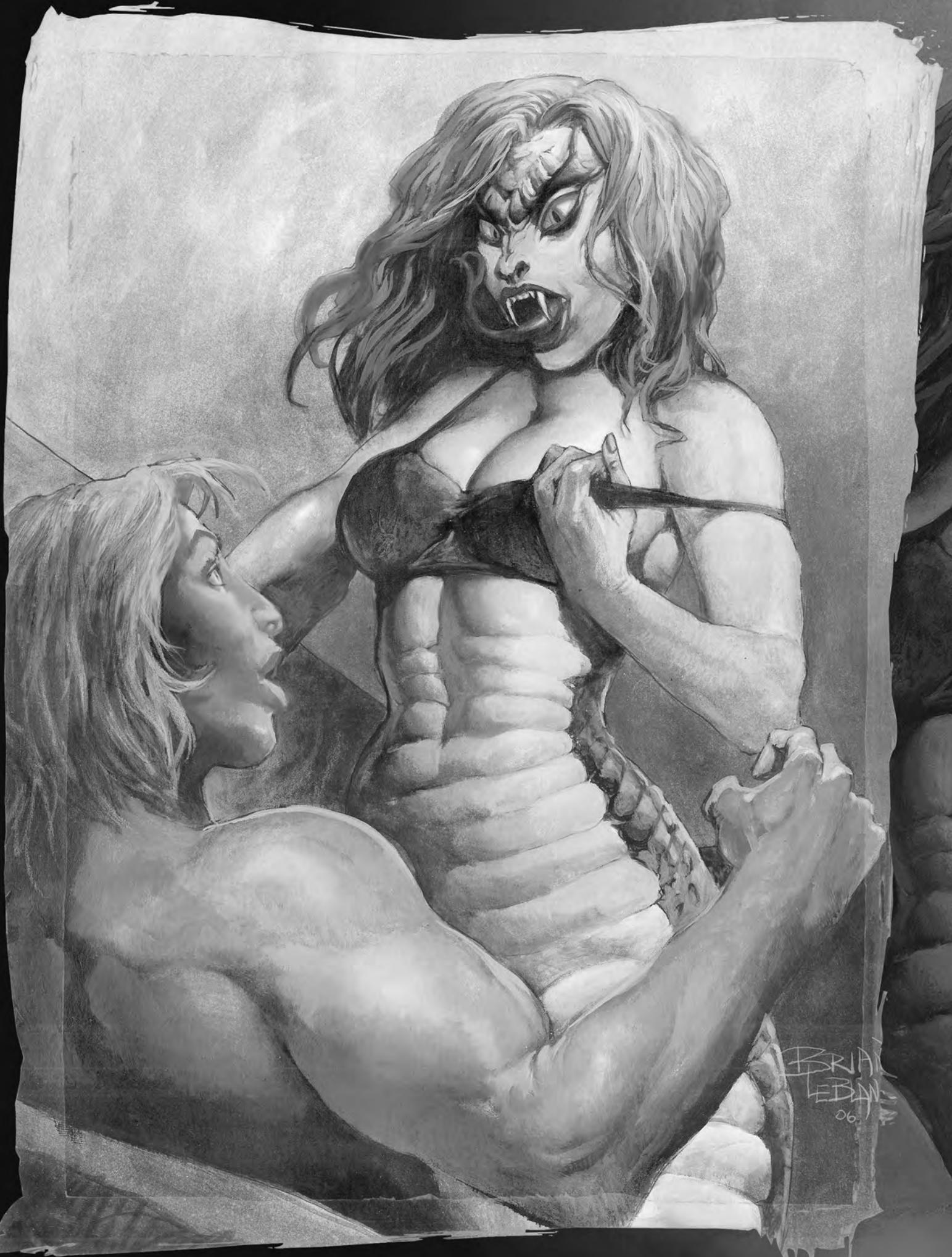
• **Venom:** After a successful bite attack, the Guardian may spend an Essence point to inject the target with a highly toxic venom. The venom has a Toxicity rating of 6, and inflicts lethal damage unless the target resists the effect with a successful Stamina + Resolve + Primal Urge roll. The venom inflicts its damage only once.

**Essence:** 20

### Story Hooks

• The characters, searching for a lost ritual or some other bit of long-forgotten information, are told that the only ones that might have the answers they seek are the Serpent Sages. Finding the Sages is an adventure in itself, as they generally don't want to be found. Once the characters find the Sages, however, the characters will find their trials are only beginning; the Sage they speak to wants knowledge in return, and finding this knowledge sends the characters on a quest around the world. Naturally, pursuing such a quest will make maintaining their territories difficult, and it also might lead to all manner of other side trips. Hope that ritual is worth it.

• Turn the above scenario on its head. This time, the characters are the ones who found the lost lore (perhaps on a journey through the spirit wilds), and the Serpent Sages want it. Badly. They will go to any lengths short of attacking the characters outright to get it, and they won't take no for an answer. This hook works best if the characters' find is something they really want to keep for themselves; they're left with the option of giving it up (perhaps for a substantial reward) or offending an incredibly powerful choir of spirits. No one ever said life was easy.



BRIAN  
EBAN  
06



The doorknob ground into the base of his spine as she pressed him hard up against the motel room door. Her lips ground just as hard against his mouth, pinching his lips between her teeth as her tongue flickered against his. It hurt, and he tasted blood mingling with the whiskey and cigarette flavor of her, but he didn't complain.

She pulled away, and it was like being in the eye of a hurricane, silent calm before another onslaught. He struggled to catch his breath as she slid the keycard into the slot and drew it out again with practiced grace. The lock light blinked green once, and then they were inside. Her mouth was on him again as the door shut out the neon motel sign and the darkness enveloped them.

He was used to being in charge, but he could barely keep up with her. Her nails raked him, first through his clothes and then against bare skin, and her violent kisses threatened to knock the breath from him.

She shed her leather dress before he could move for the zipper, and his hands slipped instead against cool, smooth flesh. In the darkness, her muscles undulated sinuously beneath his touch. Damn.

She pushed him away. The edge of the bed hit the back of his knees, and he sprawled out onto his back with a grunt. He started back up, but she stopped him with a hissed whisper.

"Stay there. I want to show you something."

He grinned as she stepped into the silver of light that cut into the room through a tiny gap in the curtains. She'd left on her boots. The leather was the same color as the shadows around them, the same color as the tiny bits of cloth that strained to cover her, and her skin gleamed white in contrast. She twined her hands over her head, stretching toward the ceiling as she began to slowly writhe. Her hips ground toward him, and his jaw dropped, transfixed.

The space between them melted under the heat of her smile, and then she was over him, pressing him back against the mattress. She kissed him hard, then bit his lower lip, gently at first, then painfully, nipping down his neck as she ground against him.

His eyes rolled back in his head as she settled atop him. She hissed in pleasure, rocking hard against his hips before leaning down across his chest so heavily it was difficult to inhale.

And then heavier still.

His eyes flew open, as he struggled to breathe. Her smug gaze met his panicked one and she grinned, fangs gleaming in the dark.

Confusion swept over him, warring with the lust that had held him since they'd met an hour ago.

As her form slowly changed, lust turned tail and ran, giving way to pure panic. He struggled, but the giant viper held him firmly to the mattress. She leaned down, her tongue flicking delicately across his lips before her serpentine mouth ground against his in an obscene parody of their earlier kiss.

# Chapter Three: Shifting Things

## Storytelling Unique Skinchangers

There are things that don't fit the general assumptions that we make about how the world works. Things that we can't explain simply and logically; things that simply shouldn't be. Even within the specific category of "skinchangers" there are things that don't seem to fall into any of the larger groups detailed previously in this book. In truth, some of these unique skinchangers may be the only ones of their kind, brought into being as the result of completely unusual situations and circumstances.

Using these unique skinchangers is an opportunity for Storytellers to personalize their worlds to another degree. However, before one starts running amok and populating the world with so many "unique" non-player characters that players never encounter the "standard" ones, there are a few things to keep in mind about unique skinchangers.

**Scarcity:** Unique skinchangers are rare. Many are unique in the singular sense, and those that are not are some of very few of their kind in the world. Not all of these unique skinchangers may exist in every chronicle, but even if all of them do, they should not (without a significant reason) be encountered gathered in one place at one time. If nothing the characters encounter is "normal," their players will begin to assume everything around them is unique, which, unfortunately, can have the opposite of the desired effect.

**Reality:** Although unique skinchangers are distinctive and unusual, they are not random. There is some method to the madness behind them, some reasoning or logic governing their behavior. Even if the reason for the creature's existence flies directly in the face of modern science and what the laws of "reality" say is possible, in order for a creature to feel real to players, it must be more than a random amalgam of characteristics and abilities. Some of the unique skinchangers found in the Freak Gallery below (Chimera and Zoonotics) are based in scientific truth (with some exaggeration and license taken, as appropriate for the genre), while other skinchangers draw on the rich cultural belief systems of ancient or modern peoples. Not all unique skinchangers will have such deep-seated roots, but at their hearts, skinchangers must ring "true" in order to hold any real capacity for creating emotional reactions. Press the bounds of the believable, but beware venturing too far. If skinchangers are too outlandish, they will only evoke amusement or, worse yet, boredom from those who encounter them.

**Depth:** If Storytellers expect characters to react to unique skinchangers as something more than two-dimensional, cardboard-cut-out monsters, the unique skinchangers must be more than two-dimensional, cardboard cut-outs. Every creature has its own motivations, needs and goals. Storytellers should know what they are, and how the skinchangers the Storytellers bring into their worlds will go about achieving the creatures' goals. In order for characters to feel as if the creatures they encounter are three-dimensional, the Storytellers should know not only what they will do in certain situations, but why they are doing it.

*There are more things  
in heaven and earth,*

*Horatio,*

*Than are dreamt of in  
your philosophy.*

*— William Shakespeare,  
Hamlet, Act 1 scene 5*

# The Freak Gallery

The collection of creatures presented in the Freak Gallery represent eight very different skinchanger profiles. It goes without saying that the unique beings detailed here are by no means the only ones that exist in the World of Darkness. These skinchangers are intended only to showcase some of the sorts of distinctiveness that can exist in the game world, drawing on only a small portion of the mythology, superstition and legend (and the sometimes more freakish reality) of our world. Use them as is, tweak them to fit your situation or ignore them completely and create your own, as best fits your game needs.

Evert profile in the Freak Gallery includes a detailed background for that stereotype as well as a description of the creature's physical appearance. Where appropriate, general attitudes and motivations have also been provided. Each of the profiles also includes a description of possible origins for that creature. For some of skinchangers, Storytellers can decide from amongst the offered origins and allow the players to slowly attempt to uncover the "truth" behind the creature's nature and origin as part of the story. Other unique skinchangers, such as "Patches" and "Graemalkin," will likely remain mysteries beyond the reach of almost all characters to solve. As with every other aspect of these profiles, Storytellers should feel free to utilize any of these origin suggestions, or to create their own as best suits their game scenario.

As well, at least one specific example of each type of unique skinchanger profile is detailed out with full game stats, to allow Storytellers to drop the skinchangers easily into their games with a minimum of prep work. These stats include new and unique Aspects that, along with the background and description, will flesh out these distinctive creatures into three-dimensional beings that will keep players intrigued as they attempt to deal with the Unknown.

And, finally, at the end of the Freak Gallery, suggestions are given for customizing each type of unique skinchanger profile. These suggestions will supplement the fully detailed examples given, offering suggestions on other types of skinchangers that might fall within that profile and offering ideas on how Storytellers can develop into their own unique versions of skinchangers.

## The Artifact — "Patches"

*He shook his cup at her. "Spare some change?" His words made a cloud of frozen breath between them.*

*She didn't look like she had any to spare. Her clothes were in worse shape than his, and she was way underdressed for the weather, but you never knew. Sometimes the ones who were facing the cold themselves gave more than the ones in the thick winter gear.*

*She just looked at him, though, with that mismatched stare. One blue and one brown eye, like some sort of husky or something. It was just — weird.*

*More out of habit than hope, he shook the cup again, the quarters he'd collected muffled by the dollar he'd seeded the cup with before coming back out for his "evening shift."*

*She looked down at the cup, then back up at him before moving past him into the alley.*

*When she hadn't come back out a while later, he got to his feet, tucked his "Homeless Vet. Please Help. God Bless" sign under his arm and shuffled back there himself. The snow had cleared the streets, mostly, and those who were still out in it weren't slowing down long enough to dig through their layers for a donation. It was dark before its time, the snow clouds hanging across the tops of the buildings like a tent that blocked out what little sun might be left for the day. Might as well call it a night.*

*The center of the alley was painted with a strip of white, where the buildings on either side had channeled snow into the middle. At the entrance to the alley, the snow caught the streetlights, but lost its glitter as it slid back into the darkness.*

*As he walked, the flakes turned to sleet, and he ducked his head to keep the worst of it out of his eyes. Her boot prints were the only ones marring the virgin snow. Head down like a hunter, he followed them toward the darkness near the back of the alley.*

*Halfway there, he stopped. A couple of feet in front of him, the tracks changed. The boot prints, snow still crinkled from her step, ended. From there on, there were only the paw prints of a dog heading further back into the darkness.*

*He blinked, but the tracks stayed the same.*

*Boot, boot, boot, boot. Paw, paw.*

*The dog's prints picked up right where hers stopped, mid-stride.*

*He looked up. In the shadows at the back of the alley, something looked back at him. It growled low and glared at him. Slowly, two eyes blinked, gleaming in the darkness — one blue eye and one brown eye.*

*His heart in his throat and feet slipping in the snow, he turned and ran back out into the haven of the city street.*

**Background:** Every day, millions of people walk past Patches, or someone like her, and never blink an eye. A generous few shove a handful of change or maybe a dollar bill in her direction, but they walk away insulted when she stares blankly at their offering. "Not quite right," they whisper to themselves as she watches the tidal flow of human traffic swirl around her on the sidewalk. "Not quite right" is an understatement.

The earliest reference to something similar to Patches dates back to Celtic folklore, where, after chasing a shape-



changing demon on All Hallows' Eve, a brave soul finally catches the demon by the scruff of its cloak. The cloak jerks loose from the fleeing imp's shoulders and flutters to the ground empty, leaving the confused pursuer to wonder if the demon was ever truly there.

Since then, there have been tales of such creatures scattered here and there. In some, a lost child follows a guide, sometimes a hooded figure and sometimes a white dog, through a heavy fog. In some stories, the child is led to safety, in other stories to his demise, but when the figure is thanked (or captured), the hood and empty suit of clothing falls empty to the ground. In other tales, a greedy woman follows a striking lamb or calf out into the wood, hoping to claim the animal as her own. She watches in amazement as the young animal changes to a child, but continues undaunted when it returns to animal form. When the creature is captured and its throat is cut, the disappointed woman finds the pelt is filled only with straw.

The stories vary, but one attribute runs true. The "proof" — an empty piece of clothing — is rather unremarkable and all information about the creature is purely anecdotal. But, regardless, such creatures exist to this day, and although modern folk are more skeptical (and perhaps less likely to admit to their part in such things), the stories still pop up now and again.

**Description:** No one is absolutely certain what Patches looks like, perhaps not even her. On different occasions, she's been described as an aged black woman, a tattooed and pierced punk girl, an obese and disheveled housewife and even a strangely dressed but otherwise very proper businessman. She's often mistaken for a vagrant or a bag lady; however the truth is much more sinister.

One thing that remains consistent from description to description is the long, tattered, patchwork coat from which she derives her nickname. Were the coat to be removed (forcibly, as she would never divest herself of it willingly), perhaps her true form might be discovered. Or perhaps it would be revealed that there is nothing "real" to her, save for the distinctive garment itself.

And what a garment it is. At first glance, it appears to be a crudely crafted trench coat made of haphazardly sewn-together patches. Upon closer inspection, however, the "tatters" are revealed to be the eye slits, nostrils and gaping mouths that once allowed the faces' former owners to experience the world. Now, expertly skinned and permanently crafted into Patches' greatcoat, the faces' hollow expressions seem to silently bemoan their now-deceased originators' fates.

Not all of Patches' faces belonged to people. Among the varying shades of once-human leather bits are less-uniformly shaped bits of monochrome, striped or spotted fur. Each, like the leather, still bears the open eye holes and gaping muzzle of its former owner.

Not possessing the skill or patience for tanning, Patches' coat is constantly in a state of disrepair, old "patches" rotting, ripping and falling away on a regular basis, requir-

ing the acquisition of new bits to keep the garment from disintegrating altogether.

Patches can take the form of any creature or person whose face she's harvested and added to her garment. She does not, however seem to absorb their memories, habits or knowledge, which has spawned many rumors of individuals who disappeared for weeks suddenly to turn up many miles (sometimes states away) from their hometown, strangely dressed and acting bizarrely. This also means that she will not recognize the friends or family of those whose forms she wears, and she will not have any of their abilities (supernatural or not). The coat itself does not change forms when she changes human shape.

Other than her coat, the other defining feature that Patches wears in every form is the strange colorings of her eyes: one brown, the other blue. Other than these two constants, her likeness can vary, and she seems to have no minimum or maximum size limits, being able to take mouse form as easily as bull moose.

As she does not seem to possess any inherent knowledge of (or concern for) the incongruity of appearing as an otherwise well-dressed banker in a ghetto alley, or a forest animal downtown, Patches' appearances are often accompanied by sightings of a variety of strange, mottle-coated creatures in the area. She seems to have no real preference for human form over animal. When she was spotted several years ago in a small desert town in the southwest, residents in the area also reported seeing a huge Kodiak bear, a solitary Canada goose and, perhaps most surprisingly, a fully grown male moose. All were sighted within the town limits, and all were reported to be strangely colored, their pelts (and feathers) mottled in blotchy, multi-colored patches.

She rarely speaks, and when she does it is in a gibberish that is unrecognizable as any modern human tongue. (Depending on the background origin that the Storyteller has chosen for Patches, this could be a Neanderthal proto-tongue, an alien language or a long-forgotten form of the ancient language of her original culture.)

It is possible that Patches or one of her kind could be captured "alive." But as they are very secretive about their nature, have no need for food (or even air), and seemingly no perception of pain, it seems unlikely that capture and interrogation would result in any more concrete knowledge about them.

**Possible Origins:** Many rumors exist as to the true nature of Patches. Some allude to her as a cursed individual who became enamored of magically shapeshifting to the point where she no longer knows or cares what her original form was. Others say that she is not really a "she" at all, but merely a manifestation of a powerful prehistoric fetish, a primordial remnant of the first animal pelt used to trick prey animals into believing an early hunter was one of their own kind. Perhaps the most unusual tale offered in regard to Patches' origin is that she is actually an alien being, using some sort of high-tech cloaking device to masquerade as an

Earth creature while she observes our planet. Storytellers should feel free to use any of these backgrounds for her, or to create their own as best fits their game scenarios.

## Story Hooks

- **Trading Faces:** One of the characters' wards has gone missing, only to show up across town a few days later, dazed and mute, wearing a strange patchwork trench coat. She doesn't seem to recognize or respond to any of her former friends or family, and will no longer speak in anything but a strange gibberish. All efforts to encourage her to eat, shower or change clothes are steadfastly thwarted, leaving those who discover her confused and concerned about her condition. She disappears the first time she's left alone, and a stranger is later seen downtown wearing the same coat.

- **Crossing Paths:** A string of murders lead local police to believe there is a serial killer in the area. The victims come from a wide variety of backgrounds and range from a homeless Vietnam vet to one of the mayors' top advisors. There seems to be no commonality among the deaths, save for the fact that every victim has every inch of the skin on their faces removed after death. The murders seem to take place in a path across town, a path that, if it stays on its current course, will go right across the players' territory.

- **The Panicky Herd:** At first, the appearance of a mangy coyote in downtown elicited only curious "local flavor" interest from the city's news journalists. But witnesses are now claiming to have seen this patchwork-coated canid changing into a human being, and allegations of "werewolves" are beginning to circulate in the local scandal sheets. Will characters step in before this "werewolf" becomes front page news in the reputable media as well?

## "Patches"

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 1, Wits 4, Resolve 2

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

**Social Attributes:** Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

**Mental Skills:** Crafts 2, Investigation 2, Medicine (Dissection) 3

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 1, Brawl 2, Stealth 1, Survival (Skinning) 3, Weaponry (Knives) 4

**Social Skills:** Animal Ken 2, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge 1

**Merits:** Fast Reflexes 2, Fighting Finesse (Knife), Iron Stamina 3, Quick Draw (Melee), Quick Healer

**Willpower:** 5

**Morality:** N/A

**Health:** Size +3; size varies (see Whole Cloth and Playing Possum below for Health details)

**Initiative:** 9 (with Fast Reflexes)

**Defense:** 4

**Speed:** 11 (species factor 5 — see Limited Doppelganger below for Speed details.)

**Size:** Variable

## Aspects

- **Patchwork Coat:** Patches' coat is mid-calf in length, with long sleeves. The coat fits her loosely in most of her forms. At any given time, there are between 25 and 30 "patches" comprising the coat, in varying states of decomposition and disrepair. Should combat or other destructive processes (weather, rot, becoming snagged and ripping free) destroy one of the current faces, Patches' motivation becomes singly focused on acquiring a replacement. Until this is accomplished, Patches will not resist an opportunity for obtaining a new face. Should she find herself in at least a semi-private situation with any one individual (human, animal or "other"), she will attack with the intent of quickly (and without damage to the face) slaying her target. Patches is quite adept at her work. Should she be successful, she needs only one turn after immobilization or incapacitation to remove the victim's facial skin.

The addition of new faces to the Patchwork Coat takes a minimum of one hour per face added. Patches prefers privacy for the process, although privacy is not strictly necessary. To outside observers, she appears to be simply sewing the new "patch" into a gap in the coat, although those who can sense magical processes can perceive that there is definitely creative magic involved in the process.

In human form, Patches is never seen without her coat. She will never willingly remove this garment, and is at +2 to any dice pools to prevent it from being removed from her (Social manipulations as well as Physical attacks). Should someone be successful at removing Patches' coat in either human or animal form, that person will find that the "wearer" disappears, and the person is left holding only a roughly made garment of skins and leather. It loses all magical abilities when its original wearer and the garment are separated.

- **Limited Doppelganger:** Patches can assume the form and likeness of any person or creature whose face has been incorporated into her coat. She does not, however, gain the memories, abilities or knowledge of the individual whose form she wears. She will not recognize people the individual knew, or respond to their names. She also does not gain any of the abilities (natural or otherwise) of those she imitates. For example, she cannot fly in bird form, and while she can bite in any form, she receives none of the normal animal species bonuses to do so. Because of this, her species factor is a constant 5, regardless of the form she is currently wearing.

Upon addition of a new patch to the coat, the ability to shapeshift into that form is immediately available. The process of changing from one form to another is an instant action.

- **Whole Cloth:** Any damage done to Patches' coat does damage to her actual form, and if her coat is destroyed completely, she will disappear just as if it were removed from her (described above). Conversely, as long as Patches is wearing the coat, all damage done to her is only superficial,

even to the extent of the loss of limbs or decapitation. She does not bleed, per se, when taking damage (either from injury to the coat or herself); instead, damage appears as tears and rips in her otherwise normal-appearing skin. She literally cannot be destroyed, save for the destruction of her coat. Damage that does not actually impede her movement will be ignored.

• **Playing Possum:** Catastrophic injuries (removal of a limb, decapitation, etc.) will stop her; however, this is a temporary state. Should she take this sort of devastating damage, she will drop to the ground, curl in a fetal position (to make removing the coat more difficult) and use all of her strength to assume a rigor mortis-like pose. As she has no need to breathe, distinguishing this state from death is very difficult. She will then “play possum” until such a time as she is buried or abandoned, at which time she will shapeshift to another of her available forms. Entering this “possum” state destroys the patch of the form she was in when entering it, and she can never again assume that form. Immediately upon achieving escape, she will excise the now-tattered patch from her coat and set out to find a replacement.

## The Chimera —

### “Humera and Animeria”

*My hand shook as I lifted the fifth in what promised to be a long series of drinks to my lips. I drank without tasting it, drank like the whiskey was water and five doubles into the night, I still felt straight-up sober.*

*“That sucks, man. That just sucks.” My drinking companion that evening, like most Tuesday nights, was three sheets to the wind and listing hard to the left on his barstool.*

*“So, you just up and quit?”*

*I nodded, draining my glass and gestured to the big Samoan behind the bar for another. Quit might have been the wrong word. I’d just left. Walked out, leaving my lunchbox and coat still in the office. Screw unemployment, I’d find another job. Someone was always hiring for security work.*

*“You could not pay me enough to go back. There ain’t enough money.” I shook my head, remembering the row of jars.*

*Curiosity wasn’t necessarily a vital trait for a rent-a-cop. For more than three years, I’d been patrolling the grounds of Lycian Industries, happily minding my own business. The pay was good, the benefits were good and the swing shift let me off early enough to catch a beer with the boys before the bar closed.*

*I shook my head, draining the drink in front of me and motioning for another. I hadn’t known much about what the lab coats were doing, and I hadn’t cared. Even when they worked late, I hadn’t had to deal with them much. If Dr. Anderson hadn’t died, I’d probably still be there, walking*

*those halls with no clue about what was going on behind the big, white doors.*

*I shuddered, thinking about it. Dr. Cullins had called me, her voice shaking.*

*“Joe, I need you to come down here to Blue 3. Call an ambulance and have them meet us out front. I think Dr. Anderson has had a heart attack.”*

*I’d double-timed it down to the research floor, calling 911 on the way, and found Cullins trying to haul her unconscious partner out of one of the lab rooms. Except Anderson was six foot two inches easy, and Cullins barely reached mid-chest on him. The old lady was panting by the time I’d reached them.*

*“Jeezus, don’t move him!”*

*“We have to get him up to the ambulance.” Cullins looked up at me, and then went back to pulling at the man on the floor.*

*I’d pushed her aside, checked the doc’s life signs, even tried mouth-to-mouth, but it was too late. Anderson was gone.*

*“Shit.” I’d looked up at Dr. Cullins, shaking my head. “He’s — He’s dead. I’m sorry. I tried.”*

*“We have to get him upstairs.”*

*“I think they’ll come get him.” Dr. Cullins obviously wasn’t thinking too clearly. I stood up, and she started in trying to pull the body toward the elevator. “Dr. Cullins, stop!”*

*“They can’t come down here. Help me. Now!”*

*I helped her haul him out of the doorway. She dropped her hold, like he was nothing but a bag of potatoes, and practically leapt to shut the door to the lab.*

*But not before I saw.*

*Cullins was a small woman. I’m no giant, but it didn’t take much to look over and around her, into the lab room. It didn’t look much different from what I expected, except for the jars.*

*In high school, our biology teacher had a pickled pig fetus that he kept in a big pickle jar on his desk. We used to scare the girls with it. None of us would have ever admitted it freaked us out. But it did.*

*At first, I couldn’t figure out why Cullins was looking at me that way. Then the thing in the jar moved, and I realized it wasn’t pickled. It was alive.*

*“Perhaps you should go up to wait for the ambulance, Mr. Turner.” She shut the door, but it wasn’t soon enough.*

*I downed another drink, pinching my eyes shut as the whiskey finally started to kick in. I hadn’t even slowed down on my way out the front door. I let the ambulance drivers who were waiting there in, saying, “Blue elevator. Floor Three,” over my shoulder as I left. I wasn’t going back. I hadn’t been great at biology, but I knew that whatever in that jar wasn’t no pig. It was a child, or something close.*

*I knocked back the refill, but it wasn't working. I still remembered.*

*And at that moment, I wanted nothing more than to stop seeing the jar-child's gills fluttering as it looked back at me through the glass.*

**Background:** In Greek mythology, a chimera was a mythic beast with the head of a lion, the body of a goat and a snake for a tail. The original legendary Chimera was the offspring of two terrible monsters, Typhon and Echidna. The Chimera was capable of breathing fire and reputedly wreaked destruction on an entire country. The name, perhaps prophetically, was taken by geneticists during the late 20th century when they began experimenting with splicing genetic material from one species to another. Unlike hybrids, natural or artificially created offspring of two closely related yet separate species (such as mules), chimera are solely artificial creations that combine cellular material from humans with other species, a process that epitomizes how modern scientific methods have outrun the legislation governing them.

Although many countries have outlawed genetic experimentation combining human and animal cells on an embryonic level, these experiments are far too tempting to be entirely put aside. Mainstream science admits only to the most basic of uses for these procedures: petri dish cultures using human stem cells combined with various animal cells, experiments utilizing standard lab animals (especially rats) and other low-controversy projects. Individual and privately funded laboratories around the world, however, are reported to be conducting more advanced experimentation with these modern-day Chimera, sometimes clandestinely, sometimes openly circumventing legislation by relocating modern labs to primitive countries where the laws are not yet in place, or are loosely enforced. While mainstream public aversion to the concept of combining human and animal cells into a single being prevents a great deal of these experiments from developing past a cellular level, rumors of full-bore integration projects being allowed to develop into sentient human-animal hybrids have been around since before the technology to create such creatures ever existed.

Disturbingly, the United States has not yet implemented legislation for this type of research, although the social ramifications have kept companies from publicly admitting to even the most basic of these experiments. Perhaps even more alarming are the yet-unproven rumors that many national governments may be subsidizing their own Chimera labs, which — considering the incredibly high cost of equipment necessary to perform such experiments successfully — does not seem unlikely.

**Description:** Chimera are limited in form only by their creators' amoral imaginations and the rapidly dwindling boundaries of modern science. Physically, Chimera are indistinguishable from unaltered animal species of the same kind. However, the creatures' actions and reactions may

quickly tip observers off to the fact that something unusual is going on behind the creatures' seemingly animal eyes.

By injecting human neurons into animal brains, Chimera developers (colloquially known as chimericists) have been able to nurture human brain architecture (the folded "walnut brain" created by enough surface-area cortex cells to require the brain to fold into intricate crevices in order to fit within the skull) as well as human cognitive functions in animals as small as mice and rats. These changes, while predominantly internal, create the capacity for rodent-sized animals to be taught pattern recognitions, complex instructions and other "human" thought characteristics previously believed to be solely the purview of humans and a few large-brained mammals.

The ramifications of these Animera ("animal chimera") for use to benefit humanity are almost limitless. Unfortunately, so are the potentials for disaster. In theory at least, any animal with a brain structure compatible with that of humans (i.e., not invertebrates, mollusks or the like) could be altered through the addition of human neurons to the animal's existing brain tissue. Unfortunately, while these experiments have succeeded in creating pseudo-human intellect in their subjects, these experiments have not been able to replicate the millennia of social structure on which human society is based. Animera do not possess anything akin to the human ideals of "morality" or even the Urathan concept of Harmony. Ironically, animals that were once prized for their capacity to aid humanity as domesticated service animals (dogs, monkeys, horses, elephants) seem less inclined to this service after the addition of human neurons. Some seem content to serve for a time, but then develop an independent streak that gets in the way of their tasks. Some almost immediately develop previously unheard of violent streaks and turn on their former "masters."

Animera are not the super-servants that scientists once hoped they might be. Animera are, at best, very very intelligent animals, motivated primarily by the basest of instincts.

Perhaps more disturbing than the concept of super-intelligent animals is the other half of the Chimera profile. While no legitimate scientists will admit to having successfully created a living human host indoctrinated with other animals' cellular matter, rumors of such a host exist. Once the capacity to combine animal cellular material with human embryos is perfected, chimericists would be almost unlimited in their ability to alter humans pre-birth into Humera ("human chimera"). Although this procedure was developed to create a humanoid creature that combined the benefits of humanity's morals and social structure along with specialized animal physical strengths, there is often a price to be paid for such "benefits." Humera are especially prone to mental disorders as their dual natures war internally, and — much to the frustration of those who have invested billions in the Humera's development — many Humera seem incapable of understanding or at least applying the general societal standards of human morality.

**Possible Origins:** Where once “mad science” was the bailiwick of Victorian novels, modern technology has made what would once have been considered questionable scientific experimentation more than just common — in many fields, mad science is now a vital part of big business. Patents on “intellectual property” and the end products thereof are a multi-billion dollar commercial enterprise for international research facilities such as Turner Laboratories, one of the world’s most lucrative medical research companies. Scientifically sound but morally ambiguous leaps that once might have only happened in clandestine personal labs are now protected by mega-corporations and their armies of attorneys whose only jobs are to ensure that the profit margin is protected.

Even more powerful — and thus more frightening — are the equally well-funded government laboratories. Under the guise of patriotism, but truly as much in service to power as the mega-corporations are to the all-mighty dollar, these facilities not only have the entire legal system at their disposal, but also the ability, should they feel the need, to ignore or change legislation that applies to non-military organizations — all in the name of National Security.

## Story Hooks

### • Unsound Mind, Unnatural Body:

Characters stumble across a limbless body. Closer examination reveals that the victim’s arms have been ripped from the torso with force that would rival that of a Gauru form. As the investigation continues, the characters’ path intersects with an unmarked van full of “security officers” who appear to be also searching for the perpetrator, who they claim is a dangerous escapee from a mental asylum. The characters find the apparent killer first, a muscular Humera with the body of a giant but an obviously emotionally disturbed psyche. The frightened creature asks for aid, claiming to have escaped from an abusive prison/laboratory. His scars seem to support his story, but can the characters trust him?

• **Clever Vermin:** Rats infest a building frequented by the characters, targeting very specific possessions for destruction/theft. Characters who have knowledge of the Beshilu may suspect their influence, but investigation suggests none of the other tell-tale signs of the Rat Hosts. Following one of the Animera, the characters discover a technology-based hunter group that has apparently been keeping the characters under surveillance for quite some

time, utilizing the rat Animera as living reconnaissance devices.

• **Scalpel and Fang:** Characters begin to hear rumors of experimental technology being used to “create” werewolves (without fear of the Death Rage) in a laboratory environment. If one of the characters is an Iron Master werewolf, or has ties to the tribe, they may find they are closer to the blasphemous experiments than they’d realized, as their investigations uncover a clandestine laboratory housed by a secretive lodge of Iron Masters, dedicated to “advancing” humanity without its permission.

## Animera (Rat Chimera enhanced with human neurons)

*“Is that rat... watching us?”*

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 1

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 1, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

**Social Attributes:** Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 3

**Mental Skills:** (While in theory Animera could be taught almost any Mental Skill, special provisions would need to be made for them to utilize those Skills in any meaningful fashion.) Investigation x 3

**Social Skills:** (With the exception of Intimidation, it is very rare for any Animera to possess the capacity to learn any Social Skill.)

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 2, Larceny 3, Stealth 4, Survival 2

**Merits:** Direction Sense, Eidetic

Memory

**Willpower:** 4

**Morality:** N/A

**Health:** 3

**Initiative:** 7

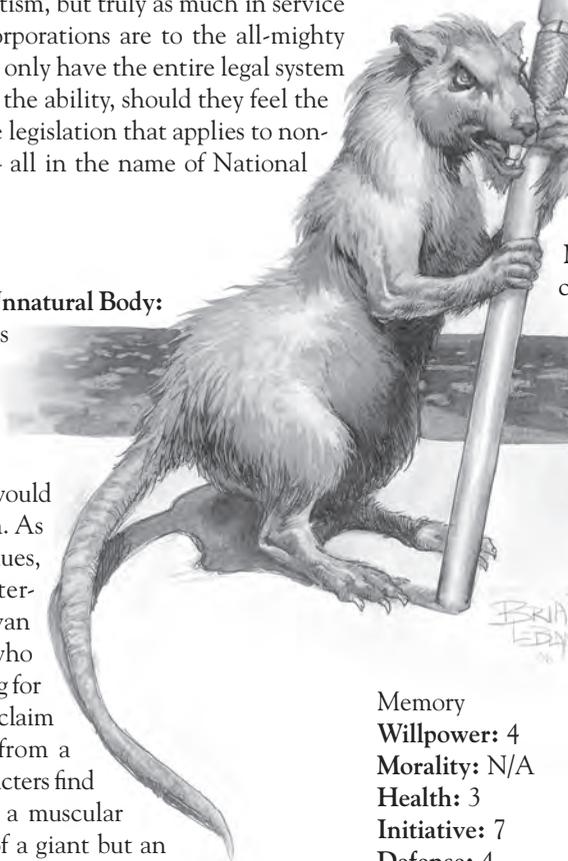
**Defense:** 4

**Speed:** 10 (species factor 5)

**Size:** 1

## Aspects

• **Pseudo-Human Intelligence:** Having been injected with human neurons, these Animera have developed human-level thought processing, although they do not possess the experience or social structure to apply this intellect in the same way a human of the same intelligence would. At heart, these Animera remain animals, just very intelligent ones. Animera can be taught to communicate through



keyboards, but do not possess the capacity for human speech unless their originating species did so (parrots, mynah, etc.).

## Humera (Human Chimera enhanced with gorilla cellular matter)

*“And so you can see that by increasing the N-glycolyl-neuraminic acid in the human plasma proteins while introducing the biosynthetic hydroxylase to the nucleotide donor, the Homo sapien fetal tissue takes on muscular cellular characteristics similar to that of Pongo abelii, the Sumatran orangutan, within a 95% margin of discrepancy.”*

*From the back of the lecture hall, one student raises his hand.*

*“Dr. Leakey, have they been able to replicate those changes in the lab, or only through the computer simulation?”*

*There is a long pause.*

*“Class dismissed.”*

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 4

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 8, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5

**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

**Mental Skills:** Investigation 1 (Other Mental Skills are possible, but unlikely.)

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 3, Brawl (Grapple) 5, Stealth 2, Survival 2

**Social Skills:** Empathy 1, Intimidation 4

**Merits:** Brawling Dodge, Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes 1, Fighting Style: Boxing 5, Giant

**Willpower:** 7

**Morality:** 7 — Due to their easily shattered psyche, after a failed Morality roll, make an additional derangement test. This can potentially give the character two derangements at the loss of each Morality.

**Health:** 11

**Initiative:** 7 (with Fast Reflexes)

**Defense:** 2

**Speed:** 18 (species factor 7)

**Size:** 6

### Aspects

- **Inhuman Strength:** Scientists disagree to the exact extent that a 350-pound gorilla is stronger than a 250-pound man, but their estimates range from seven to 27 times more powerful. Humera that have been “enhanced” to produce musculature akin to that of gorillas rather than homo sapiens may not be as strong as a silverback gorilla, but they are considerably stronger than a human and on par with a Gauru-formed Uratha. More suited for pulling arms off than bench pressing, this strength has the downside of interfering with fine motor skills, and, while they are dexterous overall, gorilla-based Humera suffer a -2 penalty to perform Skills such as Computer, Larceny and most Crafts.



### Weapons/Attacks

Type:	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	1 (L)	13
Sunder	Special	Strength vs. Strength.

If the attacker gains five successes, the grappled limb is torn from the socket, doing a number of lethal damage equal to total number of success gained. If the attacker gains fewer than five successes, but more than the victim, the attacker does as much lethal damage as successes gained. If the victim gains the most successes, he resists the Sunder. This can only be performed after a successful grapple.

## The Cursed — “Circe’s Brood”

*There’d been a time when a state patrol car pulling down the drive at the Brooks place would have had the menfolk running for their rifles. Mostly nowadays, however, things had settled out. With Old Man Brooks gone now, the place was a bit quieter. Missus Brooks kept her boys in line, ruling the family homestead with an iron hand.*

*She was coming out the side door, bucket in hand, as they drove up. She stopped, giving them a good look-over, then went on with her chores. They caught up with her as she was dumping the kitchen scraps into the pig trough, and had to wait for the squeals to die down before they could start their questions.*



"Afternoon, Missus Brooks." Winberry took his hat off, and gave her a nod of respect.

"Afternoon, Officer, how can I help ya?"

"One of the town boys disappeared, Ma'am. We're wondering if you or yours might have heard anything about it?"

Her features were a stone mask, carved deep with years and worry. "Town boys are troublemakers, Officer. Most aren't dumb enough to come up here, though."

The Brooks place sat smack dab in the middle of a V made between town and the college lands. The road up to the house was more than a mile long, full of 90-degree turns where it cut around the corner of this field or that one. No one came up, unless they had business with the Brooks.

But that wasn't what Winberry had asked.

"Now, the reason I'm asking is that it's the Jenkins boy that's gone." He watched her face for a reaction, but there was none. Jenkins had gotten off light the week before, when his long-delayed trial had finally hit the bench. College boys with wealthy parents who could afford the best lawyers rarely paid the full price for their actions, but the probation "slap on the hand" this one had received for his alleged rape of Jenny Brooks had made all the papers.

As if summoned by his thoughts, the Brooks girl ghosted out of the house, stopping on the back steps. She'd been the first of the Brooks clan to attend the local college, but rumor had it she'd stopped going after the "incident." She caught sight of the officers and turned back for the house, but not before Winberry noticed the swelling under her jumper.

Her mother brought his thoughts back round to the matter at hand. "As I said, Officer, town boys mostly aren't dumb enough to come up here. Even the troublemakers."

"All kinda boys make trouble, Ma'am, that's why I was just making sure your boys hadn't . . . Well, we all know how brothers can be."

The Brooks boys, four of them, stair-stepped from 18 to mid-20s, each one strong as a bull and just as stubborn. Mostly they stayed close, now that their daddy was gone, but Winberry wouldn't have put it past them to take justice into their own hands.

"My boys don't go making trouble. Not like some." She reached down, slapping the probing nose of a blue-eyed boar that had managed to work his head most of the way through the slat fence. The pig squealed but didn't back up far.

Winberry looked over the fence at the big pink pig that'd stayed nearby while the rest of the dark-spotted herd had scattered after their meal. The pig grunted and squealed while staring right at him. He looked away. The eyes were altogether too human, and the creature's stare gave him the creeps.

"I read somewhere that they have the intelligence of a two-year-old child."

Missus Brooks slapped at the boar's snout again. "About as smart as some town boys, then, I reckon."

"If you hear anything about the missing boys, we'd thank you to let us know, Ma'am." Winberry put his hat back on and tipped it before turning back toward his car. The boar let out a screaming squeal and rushed the fence, but the heavy boards held firm.

Almost to the car, Winberry turned back. "That one seems like a troublemaker."

Missus Brooks' mouth split in a jack-o-lantern grin. "Troublemakers make the best bacon."

Winberry climbed in and shut the door, cranking the engine, but the pig's screams were still ringing in his ears when they hit the main road.

**Background:** A great deal of humanity's earliest legends are based on the premise of what happens if you offend a god, spirit or some form of sorcerer or witch; the same is true of many works of modern horror fiction. Whether repaying wrongdoers or merely dealing with those who got in their way, a wide variety of people and creatures in the World of Darkness possess the ability to transform others into animal forms. Legends speak of saints who held the power to change those who mocked them into wolves as far back as Biblical times. When Odysseus and his men met with Circe, a legendary witch, she turned his entire crew into pigs, a fate he avoided only by divine intervention. And the infamous *Malleus Maleficarum* notes that witches "by the power of devils, change men into the shapes of beasts." A veritable gamut of potential curse sources thus exist, a boon for Storytellers, but perhaps a bane for the characters who may end up as targets for these curses.

Unfortunately for the targets, these transformations are rarely comfortable. The physical change is often described as horrifically painful with hair or feathers sprouting through the human skin and muscle and bone rearranging itself to take on an animal form. And, unlike Uratha transformations, returning to human form once cursed is almost never within the former human's control.

For some who are cursed, this is a one-time transformation, and at the end of their "sentence" they will return to human form and more than likely spend the rest of their lives wondering if what they experienced was real or some sort of temporary insanity. For others, the curse continues to strike again and again, becoming a growing burden on their ever-weakening psyches. In some cases, this reoccurrence is tied to the phases of the moon. In other cases, especially those cases in which the curse is bestowed as a form of karma for wrongdoing, the forced transformation may be linked to the cursed individual's original wrongdoing, emerging during times of anger, lust or greed, when the cursed person tells a lie or even when the cursed person attempts to enter (or leave) a particular area or proximity to a particular person.

**Description:** Cursed shapeshifters are most often very physically similar to the natural animals they are cursed to resemble. Many cursed shapeshifters lose every bit of their humanity while in animal form, leaving their intellects, their memories and their personalities behind while forced into their new shapes. These are often completely indistinguishable from a “natural” version of the same species, save for being able to be detected by those who can sense the supernatural.

Some cursed shapeshifters may retain some facet of humanity that would mark them as very unusual for a natural animal. Human eyes are very common. Rarer, but not unheard of, are those who retain other physical human features: ears, mouths, entire faces. There are even tales of half-transformations imposed by curses, perhaps the origins of the centaur, merfolk and Naga legends. However — and perhaps this is a more disturbing prospect — some transform completely into physically animal forms, but retain their human intelligence. Imagine the horror of being trapped in the form of an animal, especially a prey animal, with full retention of your human intelligence and personality. You know, both instinctually in your rabbit body and with the full extent of your logical human mind, that your chances of survival are slim. Every shadow is a hawk, every footfall is a wolf, every voice is a hunter.

You know your hours are numbered, and yet you have no way to express your predicament to those who might be enlisted to come to your aid, as one of the very rarest of human attributes for a transformed animal to retain is its ability to continue to speak human language even in the animal form.

Those who are touched by Circe (or Missus Brooks as the case may be) are, for all intents and purposes, no longer human. They are, as long as the curse remains, large farm pigs. Although they desperately strive to speak, their porcine throats are no longer capable of human speech, and even if they should retain the forethought to attempt written communication, their trotters are not well suited

for the dexterity required to scratch words into the dirt of their pen. One of the most common human characteristics of humans cursed into animal form does not appear immediately. However, when a body part (most often a paw or hoof) is cut off of the “animal,” the body part returns to human form (becoming a hand or foot). As well, in many cases, human-animals will return to their fully human shapes upon their deaths. One would hope, in this case, that Missus Brooks’ bacon comments are therefore merely bravado — but you can never tell.

**Possible Origins:** Unfortunately for the victims, there are almost limitless potential sources of transformation curses in the World of Darkness.

Mages of the Adamantine Arrow have the capability of transforming humans into animals via casting the Hour of the Wolf spell. Rumors whisper of an obscure Uratha Gift that may do the same, possibly created as a punishment rite against those who have fallen far out of Harmony and must be reminded of their non-human side. Other beings may possess this ability as well: voodoo priestesses, native shamanists, witches and Asian apothecaries all are rumored to have the potential ability to force animal forms on others against their will.

## Story Hooks

### • A Witch’s Wrath:

If one of the characters is in possession of a magical item or the group is situated in an interesting site (such as a spirit locus, verge or haunted house), the item or location becomes of interest to an unusual newcomer. Suzette Michaels’ sculptures portray scenes from Haitian folklore, and her outspoken defense of the native culture and religion have created as much of a stir as her blatant and sometimes violent art. Suzette attempts first coercion and then intimidation to gain control of the object of interest. Assuming that they do not back down and hand over control of the item/location, she then resorts to more direct means, utilizing dark rituals to transform those close to the characters.

• An “Innocent” Animal: A strangely behaving animal appears in the characters’ turf. If the characters discover a way to communicate with the animal, it reveals that it was once human, and points the characters toward



the individual who transformed it. It claims to have done nothing to warrant this punishment, but then again people in desperate situations will say almost anything.

• **Long Pork:** A new gourmet restaurant, “Fore’s,” has opened in the characters’ city, and the entire town is buzzing about the food. The owner, a regal man by the name of James Fore, has brought New Guinea cuisine to the States, with amazing results, crediting his success to ultra-fresh products, including pork and beef from his own micro-ranch at the edge of town. Several months after the restaurant opens to rave reviews, any of the characters with Contacts or Allies among the city’s transient population or homeless shelter staff, or those with two or more levels of Streetwise begin to hear that quite a few of those who live on the street have gone missing, beginning around the same time the restaurant opened. Investigation of the micro-ranch will reveal a full herd of cattle and well-stocked pig barn, but no receipts for the purchase thereof.

### Circe’s Brood (Humans to Pigs)

Cursed into the shape of a large boar or sow, these unfortunate individuals retain their human intelligence but their new forms have taken away their ability to speak in anything other than squeals and grunts.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2, Wits 2, Resolve 2

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 4, Dexterity 2, Stamina 4

**Social Attributes:** Presence 1, Manipulation 1, Composure 2

**Mental Skills:** As they have retained their former intelligence, these transformed humans still possess any of the knowledge they once had as a human. However, in their new forms, they may simply not have the ability (or appendages) to perform these Skills, or the ability to communicate their previous knowledge to anyone else. If there is a situation in which the knowledge of these Skills is pertinent, rather than the ability to perform or communicate them, transformed humans of this type may be considered to have any of the appropriate Mental Skills they might have possessed pre-transformation.

**Social Skills:** With the possible exception of Intimidation, these cursed individuals no longer retain the ability to utilize any Social Skills they once had (unless their attempted targets are pigs, in which case the individuals may attempt to utilize any of the appropriate Social Skills.)

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 2, Brawl 3, Intimidation 1, Survival 2

**Merits:** N/A

**Willpower:** 4

**Morality:** 7

**Health:** 10

**Initiative:** 4

**Defense:** 2

**Speed:** 13 (species factor 7)

**Size:** 6

**Aspects:** None. Victims of a curse of this type rarely possess any supernatural abilities whatsoever. Victims are, for all intents and purposes, transformed into animals without the

ability to transform themselves back. This transformation does not afford the victim any special powers (although the victim will have the natural abilities of that animal, such as flight for birds or breathing water for fish). The transformation does not gift the victim with any particular insights into the world of magic, either. The transformation is, for the most part, a terrifying experience that will likely result in mental instability, which will remain even if the individual regains her human form.

## The Seventh Son —

### “Lobison”

*“It’s not my fault,” Martin whispered to himself as he shoveled another scoop of the wet earth out of the grave.*

*Waist deep in the pit, he glanced over as an unfelt breeze ruffled the rolled tarp stretched out on the ground beside him.*

*It didn’t seem possible that it had come to this. A week ago, they were celebrating. Six children was a lot for some families, but he’d been one of six himself, and they’d always talked about wanting a whole houseful of little Lopezes.*

*That same night he’d felt the baby kick, although it should have been far too early. By the end of the weekend, her abdomen had swollen out like a balloon, and the frantic, almost violent, movements inside her drum-tight belly were starting to scare them both.*

*That’s when he started remembering the warnings.*

*“Seven! It was supposed to be seven!” No generation in his family had produced more than six children since long before they’d left Argentina. Six, yes. Six was fine. But never seven.*

*Martin ran one shaking, muddy hand through his hair, rubbing the sweat out of his eyes with his sleeve.*

*Something had gone wrong. Maybe the curse had changed. Maybe the Lobison had gotten tired of waiting for seven. A voice nagged from the back of his mind. “Or maybe you shoulda kept your pecker in your pocket in your younger days. Maybe there’s a little Lopez bastard out there that upped your numbers, you randy son of a bitch . . . .”*

*It didn’t matter now. What was done was done. “It’s not my fault.”*

*He looked over at the outline of Lia’s swollen body wrapped in the silver tarp. She’d never even woken up. A pillow across the face, and then they were here.*

*The tarp moved again. This time he was sure there wasn’t enough wind to stir it. Was it possible he’d not finished the job?*

*He scrambled out onto the bank, suddenly ironically concerned for his wife’s welfare, but when he pulled back the edge of the tarp, he knew it was far too late for her.*

*The inside of the plastic was coated with red-black blood, and her belly was a gaping cavern of raw meat. Incongruous amongst the carnage crouched a naked form, child sized and covered in gore.*

*The infant looked up, reaching toward him with a taloned hand that still clenched a gobbet of flesh.*

*The child shuddered, and shaggy fur began to sprout through the creature's blood-splattered skin.*

*There was a low growl and the flash of fangs as mouth became muzzle.*

*Martin backpedaled as the Lobison launched itself at its father's throat.*

**Background:** Many cultures around the world believe that there is a special significance related to the seventh child born to a family. In some belief systems, it is a blessing granting the offspring powers of precognition, magical abilities or healing powers. In most, however, the birth of a seventh child is a far less fortunate circumstance.

Among these legends are tales originating in Central and South America that say that the seventh daughter in any particular family line is destined to become a witch while the fate of a seventh son is even darker. Should a family's seventh child be male (especially if his father is also seventh in his lineage), the child is cursed to become a Lobison. While the Lobison may pass for human, it is far from it. Predestined with a taste for human blood, under times of stress the Lobison are unable to control their bestial natures and shapechange into monstrous-maned wolf-creatures capable of extreme speed and cunning. This ancient superstition, while rooted in antiquity, has persevered to the modern day. Seventh sons were so often abandoned or outright killed that, in the 1920s, the governor of the northern region of Argentina declared that he would stand as godfather to any seventh son born in his country. To this day, seventh sons are given a gold medal from the state, representing that the governor is their godfather, and they receive a scholarship that covers their education until adulthood. This has eased the fate of seventh sons somewhat, but grandmothers still warn their children against playing with those who are seventh in a family.

While the superstitions may be ancient, their basis is real. Certain families with their roots in Argentina and other South American countries bear a curse that forces the seventh son of any man of their line to transform into hideous lupine creatures under times of extreme emotion. While this shapeshifting is difficult enough to deal with, the blood lust it brings with it is enough to ensure an ironclad tradition of stopping at six offspring in most of these families. However, as political and economic pressure has increased emigration from the area, more families are losing touch with the old legends (and warnings) just as their financial situations improve enough to allow them to support larger families — a deadly combination for those cursed by the Lobison.

**Description:** Most Lobison pregnancies are fatal to the mothers. Fueled by the pent-up supernatural power of the long-denied curse, the child develops much more quickly than the mother's body is prepared to deal with. When the womb becomes too constricting for the rapidly developing Lobison, frustration triggers the beginning of his first transformation. With claws and teeth, the wolf-child forcibly frees himself from his fleshy prison, much to the detriment of his maternal parent. Lobison in their monstrous form more closely resemble South American maned wolves than any other natural species, but the semblance is not complete. While the Lobison in monstrous form have the oversized ears, long, pointed muzzles and lanky limbs of their natural counterparts, the Lobison also possess a double row of shark-like teeth designed to puncture and tear flesh and veins, maximizing the blood flow to any bite wounds they inflict.

Even newborn Lobison, in their monstrous form, possess this unusual dental work, which reverts to bare gum upon regaining their more human visage. Adult Lobison in human form have normal human teeth.

While no more intelligent per se than the average human child, newborn Lobison are possessed of a supernatural cunning that aids them in feeding their blood thirst, most often on their still-warm mother. Sated, the Lobison is free to return to a seemingly helpless state, ready for "rescue" by whoever finds his ill-fated mother's body.

Not all Lobison leap from the womb and begin wreaking havoc. For various reasons — exceptionally calm childbirth, predisposition to gentle temperament, sedation — some even manage to make it through childhood without the curse having ever revealed itself. However, these Lobison are a rarity, and when their monstrous side does emerge, it is often all the more brutal for having been repressed.

**Possible Origins:** Characters may seek to investigate the Lobison's heritage enough to attempt to break the curse, and Storytellers should consider fleshing out the Lobison's origins for their settings well enough to be prepared to deal with this possibility. Is the Lobison a genetic flaw? A centuries-old curse? Does it affect seventh sons, or only seventh sons of seventh sons? Must all of the children in the lineage be male, and what happens when the seventh child in a Lobison family is a daughter? These are questions that the characters may seek to discover and that the Storyteller should be prepared to answer.

## Story Hooks

- **Nativity:** Characters meet and befriend Carlos Palmira, a wolf-blood who is a second-generation emigrant from the Falkland Islands. Palmira invites them to the neighborhood party the next weekend celebrating his 40th birthday, where they meet his large extended family, including his very pregnant wife and his six boys, aged 19 to 28. Palmira, a modern son of modern parents, is not aware of the curse, although his grandmother, the oft-ignored and

slightly dotty matriarch of the family, is. Will the characters listen to her warnings about her soon-to-arrive grandson, and how will they react if they come to believe her?

• **Rivalry:** A recent string of savage deaths is plaguing the outskirts of the characters' city. The victims are all horribly mauled, and all signs point to a recently arrived werewolf pack being responsible for the murders. Hitchhikers, vagrants, farm workers and hunters have all showed up dead, and the murders (and body parts) are scattered across the Pure werewolves territory. The Predator King alpha, however, is being uncharacteristically recalcitrant in claiming responsibility. How will the characters deal with the situation when they discover the "Big Bad Wolf" isn't the biggest and baddest killer in the forest?

• **Unexpected Hunger:** The characters need information, and their source seems willing, if a bit twitchy. An interruption to the clandestine meeting pushes him over the border line from nervous to panicked, and the characters are surprised to watch their informant transform before their eyes into the strangest werewolf they've ever seen. He attacks, and the characters are forced to find a way to deal with a drive as strong as their own Death Rage. Only one question remains: will supernatural blood quench the Lobison's thirst?

## Lobison Traits

The following Attributes are for an adult Lobison and a newborn Lobison. Adjust stats accordingly for those in developmental stages between the two extremes.

## Adult Lobison (Nightclub Bouncer)

The following statistics are only for one example of an adult Lobison. As a Lobison can just as easily be, for example, a computer support technician as the more physical example shown here, the base stats can easily be modified to more closely represent any human-type template. Modified traits for a Lobison in monstrous form are shown as the second set of traits after the slash, and remain constant regardless of the base stats of the individual in question, even if this means a drop in a particular Attribute.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2/2, Wits 3/5, Resolve 3/4

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 3/6, Dexterity 2/6, Stamina 3/5

**Social Attributes:** Presence 3/4, Manipulation 2/2, Composure 2/3

**Skills:** An adult Lobison can have any Skill, especially those that normal humans might use on a daily basis in their normal lives and careers. Common Skills may include Computer, Drive, Persuasion and Socialize. As well, the Lobison should have Skills reflecting its inhuman side. Adult Lobison should have at least three levels each of Athletics, Brawl, Intimidation, Subterfuge and Survival.

**Merits:** Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes 2, Fleet of Foot 2, Iron Stamina, Iron Stomach, Quick Healer

**Willpower:** 5/7

**Morality:** 5 — Lobison make one Morality test upon re-

turning to human form every time they enter monstrous form. This test is against the worst of the Morality sins they have committed during their time in monstrous form. Frequently this will be a 1, to reflect the utter perversion of drinking large quantities of human blood during or after the wanton slaying of said individual. As the Lobison are not in complete control of their actions during their times in monstrous form, Storytellers may choose to apply a +1 or +2 situational modifier to this test. However, due to the Lobison's inherent monstrous nature, there should be no modifiers to the degeneration tests that will likely follow. The Lobison are on unavoidable downward spirals that can only end with their deaths.

**Defense:** 2/5

**Initiative:** 6/11 (with Fast Reflexes)

**Speed:** 12/23 (with Fleet of Foot; monstrous form species factor 9)

**Size:** 5/6

**Health:** 8/11

## Aspects

• **Uncontrolled Shapeshift (Monstrous Form: Giant Maned Wolf):** When in times of stress (anger, fear, even extreme hunger or sexual arousal), the Lobison stands a good chance of shapeshifting into his monstrous form. This shapechange is preceded by severe anxiety, a twitchy pathological frustration that begins to manifest as any one of a number of behavioral disorders (paranoia, schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorder are among the most common) but spirals quickly into extreme behavior culminating in the uncontrolled transformation. Unfortunately for the Lobison (and those around him), the only certain way for this process to be halted or reversed is by slaking the blood thirst.

• **Built for the Hunt:** The Lobison's Monstrous Form is a horrific version of the maned wolf of his ancestral homeland. The form's long legs give the creature a lanky and awkward look that is proof that appearances can be deceiving. In truth, the Lobison in wolf form rivals the cheetah for speed and dexterity. Unlike the hunting cat, however, the Lobison is fueled by his supernatural energies, and are capable of maintaining both over long periods. His oversized ears and pointed muzzle are the perfect tools for hearing and smelling his prey, and many victims of these cursed creatures believe erroneously that they have managed to elude their fates, only to find their trails still being followed hours later. While in Monstrous Form, the Lobison receives a +4 bonus to all Tracking or Perception rolls related to the hunt.

• **Blood Thirst:** Once a Lobison has succumbed to his Uncontrolled Shapeshift, only one thing will return him to his more human-appearing state. No Lobison may return to his original form without ingesting a significant amount of human blood.

## Weapons/Attacks

(Note: When the Lobison is in monstrous form, it is

not necessary for the Lobison to initiate a grapple in order to bite attack.)

Type:	Damage	Dice Pool
Monstrous Form Bite	2 (L)	(8 + Brawl Skill)
Monstrous Form Claw	2 (L)	(8 + Brawl Skill)

## Newborn Lobison

Unlike adults, newborns have very similar base stats. This newborn Lobison template should work for most of the creatures of this type, although the stats may be increased with age. Similar to the adult Lobison, the second set of numbers represent the trait levels while in monstrous form.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 1/1, Wits 1/3, Resolve 1/3

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 1/5, Dexterity 1/5, Stamina 1/3

**Social Attributes:** Presence 1/3, Manipulation 1/3, Composure 1/2

**Skills:** Unlike a human baby, newborn Lobison come into being with certain Skills solely because of their monstrous natures. These include at least one level each of Athletics, Brawl, Intimidation, Subterfuge and Survival. Consider these Skills acquired immediately upon the beginning of their first Uncontrolled Transformation, even if this trans-

formation begins before birth. Similar to a human being, a newborn Lobison also gains Skills as he grows and experience things. Feel free to add Skills to reflect both his human side and his monstrous one, as the Lobison child ages.

**Merits:** Just as the Skills listed above, consider each of these Merits to be gained instantly at the beginning of a newborn Lobison's first Uncontrolled Transformation: Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes x 2, Fleet of Foot 2, Iron Stamina, Iron Stomach, Quick Healer.

**Willpower:** 2 (5)

**Morality:** 6 (see note in Adult Lobison)

**Defense:** 1 (3)

**Initiative:** 2/6 (with Fast Reflexes)

**Speed:** 5/15 (with Fleet of Foot; monstrous form species factor 9)

**Size:** 1

**Health:** 2/4

**Aspects:** See Adult Lobison

### Weapons/Attacks:

Type:	Damage	Dice Pool
Monstrous Form Bite	1 (L)	(6 + Brawl Skill)
Monstrous Form Claw	1 (L)	(6 + Brawl Skill)

## The Spawned —

### “The Devil’s Daughter”

*Kansas in June 1939 was hotter than Hell. Some folks say that’s what made the Devil show up, while others say it was likely the desperation running rampant all over the Great Plains. There had been almost a decade of drought, and despite Roosevelt’s farm subsidies, most farmers were just on the short end of scraping by. Some, such as the Warricks, were only aspiring to do that well. They’d lived so long on almost nothing, it seemed like they’d forgotten there was any other way to be. Melvin and the older kids worked from before sunup til after dark, and Alice was up before them and after them, every day. She watered the garden from a mason jar, first thing in the morning and last at night, when the heat of the day wouldn’t bake the water off before it got to the vegetables’ roots, and what little the family had to eat was a result of her patient care.*

*Patience won’t sprout seeds, however, and what little wheat seed they’d been able to take out yet another loan for was quickly baking in the ground. They didn’t talk about it, but it was clear, if something didn’t change soon, they were all going to starve. Melvin was a desperate man, and desperate men must be careful what they wish for.*

*Most times, when the rains come in the middle of a drought, they do more harm than good. Hard rains, mean rains, tearing up the ground, beating down the plants, washing away anything that still might have a chance to grow.*





*But the morning they found him, face down in the middle of his fields, the rain was soft and gentle, at least over the Warrick farm. The rain filled the stream and the well, wet down the wheat and then went away by the time they'd sang his last funeral hymn, and the sun came back. But it wasn't the same, least not over at the Warrick farm. While their neighbors' fields shriveled and blew away, the sun seemed to caress the Warrick wheat, and, within a month, it was thigh high and the tops starting to swell, just like Alice's belly, ripe and rich and fertile. All the rest of that season, whatever happened around the Warricks, the Warrick crop seemed blessed: the sun came gentle, the rain fell soft and even without Melvin to help, the harvest promised be a memorable one.*

*The first pains started not long after the boys had gone to the field to begin the harvest. Alice, too far along to help with the reaping, fought her way through the labor alone, her child born just as the last of the grain was being cut down. But unlike the harvest, the birth went poorly. By the time the boys returned home, the house was cold and dark, and their shouts could not raise their mother. They found her in bed, surrounded by evidence of the birth, but of their newborn sibling there was no sign.*

*As they pulled the sheet over their mother's face, the serpent that had been nursing at her cooling breast slithered away. Lila, the Devil's Daughter, was striking out on her own.*

**Background:** Ancient folklore tells of gods and demons that appeared to human women and sired half-breed children who were not wholly human. Many of the Greek legends include gods siring half-human children, although perhaps the most famous divine siring is Jesus himself.

However, not all tales of this sort are from the early days of human history. In the 1700s, a group of New England witches was convicted of consorting with demons. Four of the women were executed, but the youngest was offered clemency in exchange for testifying against the older women, and — although unmarried — was later found to be pregnant. A few months after giving birth, the girl hanged herself, leaving a hastily scrawled note in which she claimed that her child was the son of “the Devil,” and that she could no longer live with the knowledge she had brought a half-demon into the world. The child disappeared the same night, and was never seen again.

In modern times, women who claim to have had sexual relations with demons, devils or gods are more likely to be sent into therapy than to be taken seriously, although that hasn't stopped the rumors from continuing. In the early '80s, a devout Catholic family was found dead in a small Midwestern town. News reports claimed the couple and their 17-year-old daughter had been killed in their home, apparently by some sort of wild animal. The daughter's one-year-old son was listed as missing, and although reporters suspected he had been dragged off by the beast, no body was ever found. Upon being interviewed, the family's priest was alleged to have claimed the child was the one who had

killed the family. The priest stated that he had suspected demonic possession or diabolic influence since the girl had claimed that Satan had sired her child. Church officials, however, later refused to confirm the priest's claims.

With one-night stands being almost commonplace, and casual sexual encounters on the rise, modern society is a perfect scenario for a mysterious sire to fade in and out of a woman's life, leaving behind only intense memories and a strange offspring. The unwitting mothers may suspect that the fathers of their children were “special,” or that their issue is somehow different from other children, but when faced with the risk of being labeled delusional, under the influence of drugs or dangerously superstitious, few women voice their suspicions.

These children do not always manifest their differences immediately at birth, although some Attributes certainly are noticeable right away. Many of these half-breeds are purported to possess special abilities: longevity, supernatural powers of manipulation, unnatural degrees of strength or healing and the like. Just as a variety of supernatural beings are supposedly imbued with the ability to change their shape, so do many of these offspring have a limited ability to change shape, often to one of the animal forms most closely associated with their mysterious parentage.

**Description:** Children of allegedly infernal parentage often appear entirely human at birth. In fact, they are often near to a perfect specimen of the human species: beautiful to behold, strong of limb, well built and intelligent to an almost frightening degree. The Devil's Daughter is no exception.

Although she was born more than 60 years ago, Lila Warrick can still pass for 25, especially in the neon light of the nightclubs she's fond of frequenting. While she has neither job nor legitimate source of income, she's never wanted for anything in her life. A combination of luck, good looks and a knack for manipulation coupled with morals that would make her father proud have managed to keep Lila exactly where she wants to be for more than five decades.

Lila's hair is jet black, and her skin is pale and unmarred by wrinkles. She's short in stature, slim but curvaceous and walks into any room as if she owns the place. She's fond of tight, revealing clothes, loud music and strong liquor, although she never seems to get drunk, even when matching drink-for-drink with more stalwart appearing companions. She's got striking features, and was once described by one of her more lyrical devotees as “the Devil, dipped in chocolate and wrapped in sex.” If only the man had known how accurate that description truly was, he might have avoided a rather messy fate.

Although she wears her human form most often, Lila is capable of assuming two other forms, and does so only when she is certain that those who witness her change will either not be believed (i.e., are very intoxicated or on mind-altering drugs) or will not live long enough to tell anyone. She revels in the confusion and fear caused by changing

in front of others, however, and will go to great lengths to orchestrate situations in which she can safely transform in front of others so that she can enjoy their terror.

Where an Uratha's transformation is often a primal, earthy change, Lila shifts between forms with sinuous grace. Her changes are accompanied by writhing, sensual convulsions, leaving those who've witnessed her transformation feeling as if they've been a voyeur to some illicit sexual act.

**Possible Origins:** Although no witnesses have lived to tell, it seems likely that Lila's conception was a result of a deal between her human "father" and whatever entity agreed to save her family's farm. Perhaps it was Satan, or one of the familiars described below, who took the form of her mother's husband and visited their marriage bed on the night he died. Or possibly her father indeed sired her, and a mage, perhaps a Thyrsus, experimenting from a distance on the effects of the Life Arcanum on the barely-sown seed that would become Lila. Or perhaps she's some sort of anomaly, a mutation or genetic freak. Lila herself doesn't know, and truly, she doesn't care. She revels in her in-human existence, without concern for how it came to be.

## Story Hooks

• **The New Girlfriend:** When the characters encounter Lila, one of them falls prey to her attentions, and the bonds of friendship are tested as the characters struggle with their friend's newly found obsession. For the time being, Lila seems content to play the innocent, enjoying the chaos as the friends struggle amongst themselves, but she's a fickle soul and it won't take long before she tries to turn her new "pet" completely against the rest of his (or her) group.

• **Unwanted Attention:** Three patrons of a nightclub or bar that the characters have ties to have gone missing, all seen in the company of a certain dark-haired barfly before their disappearances. Police are beginning to investigate, and while none of the characters are suspects, the additional

police presence could uncover other questionable dealings happening in and around the entertainment facility. Can the characters find her and turn her over to the cops before the investigating officers dig too deep?

• **Agent Provocateur:** Lila joins up with a local tribeless werewolf, and delights in tempting him over the edge into Death Rage, although he's too smitten to blame his new "love." Delighted at the destructive capability her new toy possesses, Lila seems bound and determined to use him to his full potential, sending him to kill vampires, mages and other Uratha with seemingly equal glee. The deaths seem certain to reveal the presence of the supernatural to human society, and the only question left is, which will come first? Discovery by the humans, or out and out warfare between the Uratha and the other supernaturals?



## The Devil's Daughter

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 2

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 4

**Social Attributes:** Presence 4, Manipulation 5, Composure 3

**Mental Skills:** Academics 2, Computer 2, Medicine 3, Occult 4, Politics 2

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 4, Brawl 4, Stealth 2

**Social Skills:** Animal Ken (Snakes) 3, Empathy 3, Expression 3, Persuasion (Seduction) 5,

Socialize 3, Subterfuge 5

**Merits:** Barfly, Fighting Finesse (Bite), Natural Immunity, Quick Healer, Resources 2, Striking Looks 4, Toxin Resistance

**Willpower:** 5

**Morality:** N/A. While the Devil's Daughter and other half-breed individuals may look human, they are not. They are completely self-interested, and will not hesitate to or suffer from behaving in whatever fashion best suits their needs at any given moment. They possess no empathy whatsoever for other beings, so the concept of morality is a foreign one to them.

**Health:** 9 (8 as boa, 5 as viper)

**Initiative:** 7

**Defense:** 4

**Speed:** 11

**Size:** 5 (4 as boa, 1 as viper)

### Aspects

• **Serpentine Forms:** Lila has the ability to assume one of two snake forms as a reflexive action. The first is approximately four feet long, with a flat, broad head. In this form, her eyes are slitted like a cat's, and her scales are golden-tan with darker blotches running down her back and sides. Most distinctive, however, are the multiple rattles at the tip of her tail, which, along with her two-inch-long retractable fangs, reveal her to be a venomous Prairie rattlesnake. Her second form is the size of a boa — more than 12 feet long and almost 100 pounds — although a herpetologist would be able to tell at a glance that size is the form's only boa-like feature. Boas do not have rattles, after all, and the head structure is far too angular for a constrictor. Her boa-sized form is truly a gigantic version of her viper form.

• **Venomous Bite:** While in either of her serpentine forms, on a successful attack roll, the Devil's Daughter can inject Toxicity 8 venom into her victim's body. This bite is an instant action useable once per turn. This venom does damage only once per bite. While natural snakes would run out of venom after repeated bites, her supernatural nature generates the venom, allowing her to deliver this venomous bite attack once per turn every turn, indefinitely, should she so choose.

• **Supernatural Durability:** The Devil's Daughter is surprisingly tough and healthy. Since achieving maturity, she ages at one-10th the rate of an ordinary human, and is immune to conventional sickness. She also possess one point of Armor against all attacks.

• **Her Father's Eyes:** As if her striking looks and persuasive nature were not enough, Lila possesses the ability to literally charm those who meet her gaze. After establishing eye contact, Lila can activate this power as a reflexive action. If successful, Lila's Presence and Manipulation effectively double for all further challenges against the target individual for the rest of the scene. She can only hold one person at a time in the "thrall" of Her Father's Eyes. Successfully activating the power against a second target frees the first one from the additional influence, although Lila's innate bonuses and high stats still apply. Targets who take uncharacteristic actions while under the influence of this power will explain them away to the best of their ability, unwilling to blame Lila for them.

### Weapons/Attacks:

(The Devil's Daughter strikes with her bite attack like a viper and does not need to initiate a grapple first.)

Type:	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	2 (L) + Venom	10

## The Summoned —

### "Graemalkin"

*Thirteen green candles in jars lit the edge of the circle of salt, their dancing yellow glow not extending all the way to the center of the circle. There, a patch of darkness persisted ominously.*

*"I'm not sure this is such a great idea, Marcus."*

*Jennifer fidgeted in the robe he'd given her to wear for the "summoning." At the time it had seemed like a creepy way to spend Halloween, but now she was starting to have second thoughts.*

*"Shhh. I have to concentrate!"*

*He didn't even bother to look up from the heavy book he'd hauled all the way up to the top of the bluff with them. His backpack full of "ceremonial tools" had clanked and rattled as they'd hiked the hill. Rocky Butte jutted up from the forested rise around it like a stone giant, and it had taken them what seemed like hours to get to the spot Marcus had picked out for the ritual. Jennifer's thighs were shaking from the climb and the cold. The air was chillier up here above the trees, and there was nothing to stop the breeze from buffeting against her as she stood watching her boyfriend try to read the ceremony in the candle's flickering light.*

*The words didn't make any sense to her. Whatever he was spouting off about, it wasn't English, and Jennifer quickly lost interest and began looking around. There wasn't any moon out, but the stars overhead gleamed brightly against the night sky. They had driven for more than an hour, so although she could see the lights of town in the distance, the stars were brighter.*

*Marcus' voice rose, his shouts drawing her attention back to his circle.*

*"I call you, Graemalkin, I summon your presence, familiar! By my will, I demand you appear and serve me!"*

*He waited, expectantly, as the breeze blew the last of his invocation out into the darkness.*

*Nothing happened.*

*Jennifer shifted her weight from one foot to the other, tired of standing, tired of walking, tired of this creepy ritual idea. Next year, she decided with a frown, she was going to go to the club with Lynda and Sara for Halloween. This whole wizard ceremony thing was a bore.*

*Marcus' shoulders dropped in disappointment, and he turned to face her.*

*"I... guess it didn't work."*

*No shit, Sherlock, she thought to herself. Did he really think that it would? I mean, come on. Summoning some sort of demon owl thing made good spook stories but...*

*Jennifer blinked as the shadow behind Marcus moved.*

*As the darkness rose up, she could only point, too shocked to scream. The inky cloud writhed, and for a moment the shape of a giant black owl spread its wings behind Marcus. The inky wingspan folded in on itself, and the darkness swirled, stretched, melted into an inky black human shape. Graemalkin stepped forward, extending one hand toward her, and Jennifer suddenly regained her ability to scream.*

**Background:** For millennia, learned men have dabbled in magical attempts to summon supernatural servants to aid them in their paranormal endeavors. Using ritual and ceremony, these educated ones have called forth all manner of beasts and birds to serve them. Some, despite the powers attributed to them, were merely mundane animals — messengers, companions and guard animals. Others, however were something more.

Using secret materials and incantations, these sorcerers have then attempted — sometimes successfully but more often not — to enslave these beings to their will. The practice still continues to this day. However, since the advent of mass publishing and, most recently, the Internet, information that was once held in single copies of jealously guarded tomes has now become available with a simple purchase or download click. Not all of this information is accurate, of course. By far the vast majority of summoning spells and incantations are modern affections with little power or potential for actually drawing the attention to the would-be summoner. More dangerous, however are those spells that at one time held the power to actually contact the supernatural. Most of these rare rituals have lost enough power in their multiple layers of translation to be almost as ineffective as those made up whole cloth, but some still retain enough elements of their former selves to at least cause the ears of the other-worldly to perk up. Unfortunately for those who would call the other-worldly forth, almost none of these spells remain enough intact to actually bind those whose attention the rituals may draw. Summoned near, these free “familiar” are often insulted at the ineptitude used to call them, and those summoners who get their first glimpse of a summoned familiar often find it is the last thing they ever see.

While familiars sometimes pretend to be bound to those who summon them, at best the summoning is enough to raise their attention and (hopefully) prevent them from doing any immediate harm to the one who calls them during the negotiation process. Familiars are never obligated to serve those who call them, or even to enter into a bargain with them. Once familiars have appeared (assuming the summoners have completed sufficiently adept rituals that convince the familiars the summoners may have something worth negotiating for), it is then up to the summoner to strike a bargain that will convince the familiar to serve the summoner in some capacity.

Each familiar will have its own motivations, desires and goals, and what tempts one may be of no interest to another. Some of the most common base motivations cater to a familiar’s Physical Vice (sadism, lust, substance addic-

tions). However, familiars are not always addicted to the same substances that humans find addictive. One familiar reportedly dealt extensively with a particular would-be summoner to feed his addiction to saffron flowers, etc. Other motivations, more subtle and complicated, may involve the repayment of past grudges, destruction of the substance that causes the familiar’s weakness (see “Notes in Shadow Form” below) or intricacies of politics among the familiar’s kind, a matter that few outsiders can comprehend.

Regardless of the familiar’s particular motivations, as a whole, familiars negotiate deftly — it is a matter not only of pride but survival for them. They will take any opportunity during the negotiation process to seize and advantage or work a loophole into the agreement. However, once the bargain has been struck (and normally bound with blood, or whatever passes for it in the particular familiar), the familiar will not violate the letter of the agreement. The intent, however, is entirely up for interpretation, and familiars are experts at crafty interpretation.

In those few incidences when a summoner has the wherewithal to convince a familiar that a bargain is in the familiar’s best interest, the shadowy kin make wonderful spies and investigators. They never forget anything they have witnessed or read, making them fantastic tools for researchers, and their shadow form allows them to clandestinely witness almost any conversation. And, while they cannot carry any items with them in shadow form and so make poor thieves, preventing their access to an area is almost impossible. They are the ultimate tools for use in gaining access to sequestered information. However, they are also full of guile and will use any opportunity to mislead through half-truths or incomplete answers, especially if they can trick those who hold sway over them into fatal situations without violating the letter of their orders.

**Description:** Physically, familiars in general are an amorphous breed, although they do share some common traits. Similar to Graemalkin, familiars most commonly manifest in the shape of an animal, with the more powerful of their kind often displaying the ability to assume multiple animal forms. Many familiars prefer to manifest as black-colored creatures, perhaps in keeping with their shadowy nature, regardless of the original color of the natural beast. Graemalkin’s owl form is jet black, despite the bird’s natural color. (It’s uncertain why he answers to a name that’s very close to “graymalkin,” which implies a cat; perhaps he favors the confusion, or perhaps he once was more catlike than owl-like.) Familiars aren’t limited to the natural size of the creature, either, and many — just as Graemalkin — take forms many times the natural size of the animals they are imitating, although a few familiars are prone to appearing as miniature versions of their preferred beasts. Familiars are capable of speaking human tongues regardless of the familiars’ current shapes, leading to many of the legends of talking animals throughout history.

The more powerful familiars are capable of assuming humanoid forms, although they are far from human. Most



familiars enjoy walking in and among human society and possess a favored human shape — quite often a striking specimen of masculine or feminine beauty. More than one summoner has been seduced by his “familiar,” effectively finding the tables turned as servant becomes master and summoner becomes slave to his own human passions.

Familiars’ human forms often (but not always) include some trait that is unnatural but not impossible to affect by humanity: unusual hair colors, striking tattoos (especially facial markings), unnaturally long fingernails, unnatural eye color or shape of their pupils, etc. The familiars’ skin is most often either very dark (almost black, as with Graemalkin above) or very pale. Familiars that are capable

while they are in their corporeal forms.

**Possible Origins:** Familiar is a general name for any of the supernaturally summoned beings that may be attracted to an attempt to call mystical servants. Some of the creatures claim to be demons, servants thereof or even Satan himself. Those who have studied familiars, or summoned them and lived to tell about it, have many divergent theories as to what familiars truly are. Some people claim that familiars are powerful primal spirits, perhaps those that Father Wolf chased into the furthest depths of the Shadow Realm or their kin. Other people maintain that familiars are actual fallen angels, and that an entire realm of supernatural beings

o f taking human form tend to do so at every opportunity, as a matter of pride in the potency of their powers.

Unlike most other skin-changers, familiars are not limited to human and animal forms. Familiars also can take a shadow form, a trait that only adds to their abilities to conduct clandestine investigations. When shifting between other forms (or when it is convenient for them), these familiars disperse from their corporal bodies into swirling clouds of darkness. From this shadowy form, they can decide to shapeshift into another form, Shadow Jump to another location or disappear for a time altogether.

Regardless of how large or muscular their corporeal forms may be, familiars are physically very weak and vulnerable to damage while not in shadow form. While they do not age and thus will never die of natural causes, they can be killed by physical damage — a terrifying prospect to creatures that otherwise might exist forever. Because of this, they limit the time spent in their solid forms, and prefer subterfuge to physical assault to accomplish their goals. This is also one of their major motivations when bargaining with would-be summoners. Physical beings may be able to obtain items they desire, or provide physical protection for them

exists beyond even those the Uratha and their allies can perceive.

### Story Hooks

- **We’re Being Shadowed:**

Characters discover what appears to be a spirit of shadow watching the group’s activity over a period of time. The creature tails the characters everywhere, seemingly able to manifest anywhere shadowy in the physical world, but strangely enough is never seen in the Shadow Realm. As the characters attempt to discover the nature of their observer, Graemalkin continues to watch them and report his observations to the alpha of a nearby werewolf pack — perhaps Pure, perhaps covertly a Bale Hound, perhaps even both.

- **A Friendly Offer:** Graemalkin approaches one of the more mystically oriented characters, offering choice bits of information, exactly what is needed at the time to deal with whatever problems the clique is encountering, in exchange for small favors (destroying streetlights in certain areas, arranging power outages at certain times or other things that might seem to be appropriate bans for a shadow-type spirit). In time, the group may come to rely on Graemalkin’s valuable information, leaving them torn when it is discovered that the familiar is using their “ban” activities to gain access to those locations to aid another of



his “masters” — an Azlu with a taste for flesh.

• **The Shadowy Patron:** Before a newly formed werewolf pack can obtain a totem, a shadowy “spirit” offers to mentor the packmates, tempting them each with something particularly irresistible: the location of a tome of long-lost rituals, the secret to entering an enemy’s territory without alerting the patrolling guards, legends of long-forgotten werewolf fetishes (and perhaps even the key to re-locating them). How far will the packmembers allow themselves to become entwined with their generous patron before they discover his true nature, and the price of his patronage?

## “Graemalkin”

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 4, Wits 5, Resolve 4

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 1, Dexterity 5, Stamina 1

**Social Attributes:** Presence 3, Manipulation 5, Composure 3

**Mental Skills:** Academics 4, Investigation 5, Occult 5, Politics 3

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 2, Stealth 5

**Social Skills:** Empathy (Motives) 3, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 4, Subterfuge (Half-Truths) 4

**Merits:** Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Languages (Egyptian, Greek, Latin, Old English), Striking Looks 4

**Willpower:** 7

**Morality:** N/A

**Health:** 6

**Initiative:** 8

**Defense:** 5

**Speed:** 14 (species factor 8)

**Size:** 5

### Aspects

• **Shadow Form:** Familiars are capable of taking an incorporeal form as a reflexive action once a turn. This form, while not invisible, can blend with any existing shadow to the point of imperceptibility. Characters attempting to spot a hiding familiar in this form are at the following negatives when using any sight-based Perception:

Current Condition	Dice Pool Modifier
Outdoor Night	–4
Indoor Normal Lighting	–2
Broad Daylight (Open Area)	+0
Indoor Florescent Lighting	–1
Nightclub (Dim/Strobe Lighting)	–3

Familiars must take this form before utilizing any of their other three supernatural powers. While in their shadow form, they cannot take damage; however, they also cannot inflict damage in any fashion, carry items or take any actions that would require a physical body. They are effectively in Twilight. As shadows, they can slip under doors, through minute cracks and generally enter any non-airtight space.

Familiars heal at normal human rate, and only heal while in shadow form. Wounds incurred in physical forms

will not begin to heal until the kin has taken shadow form, and will heal only during the time period they are still in shadow form. Reverting to any physical form will stop the healing process until shadow form is taken again.

• **Vulnerability:** Each familiar has a substance that will prevent the familiar from taking shadow form. If more than a minute amount exists within a three-yard radius of the kin, the familiar is unable to shift into shadow. (And, as the familiar’s other powers are only useable from the shadow form, the familiar is largely vulnerable). These substances differ among familiar: one familiar might be unable to shift near iron, while another may be vulnerable to garlic (perhaps the origin of the original vampire mythos regarding this plant). This vulnerability, of course, is each familiar’s most closely guarded secret, and familiar will do anything to prevent their vulnerabilities from becoming known.

• **Shapeshift:** From their shadow form, familiars can shapeshift between their more corporeal forms. Shapeshifting is a reflexive action that can be performed once per turn. Most familiars have at least two corporal forms, one human and one animal, although many familiars have a multitude of shapes. Graemalkin’s preferred human form is a dark-skinned, bald male with bulging muscles and eyes of silver-blue. He stands well over six feet tall, and has a tendency to affect elegant business suits when he bothers to manifest clothing at all. When it is convenient for him to take an animal form, he prefers that of a huge night-black owl, although both his human and animal forms can appear as any size (from one inch to 10 feet) he decides. Graemalkin can appear more than seven feet tall in this form, with a wingspan exceeding 12 feet wide. However, he vastly prefers his human body, and wears it most frequently when not in shadow form.

• **Shadow Jump:** Once familiars have assumed their shadow form, they have the ability to merge with a shadow near them and emerge out of any other shadow. This is a reflexive action that can be taken once per turn. There is no limit on distance, though traveling farther than about 100 yards requires the expenditure of a Willpower point and becomes an instant action. Also, travel within the shadow does not seem to consume time. Given an instant action and a quick Willpower expenditure, Graemalkin can literally step into a shadow in once place and emerge the next moment halfway around the world.

• **Other Home:** Because of familiars’ fear of destruction due to physical damage, when they are wounded, familiars tend to disappear into the Shadow and not be seen until they’ve healed. Originally, it was believed that they were simply hiding out in some remote shadow, literally or figuratively licking their wounds. However, after attempting to track one familiar after it fled, an Uratha who had tasted the creature’s “blood” found himself no longer able to sense it. This led him to the conclusion that the kin’s hiding place might not be in this realm at all, but some clandestine Shadow-pocket accessible only to them. If this is indeed true, no one (other than other familiars presumably) knows

exactly where it is that they go during this “disappearance,” as no familiar will ever speak of it.

## The Territorial — “The Devil of Deacon Hill”

“Holy shit, did you see the size of that dog?”

Toby half-turned in his seat, looking out his window into the darkness.

The headlights reflected back off of the pea-soup fog. Jake could barely see the washboard road, let alone road signs. Stupid shortcut.

“Jeezus, there it is again.”

Toby leaned over the dashboard until his face was almost pressed against the windshield, and this time, Jake did see it. At least he saw something. Just a line of dark against the fog, but it was big.

“I gotta watch the road, Toby.”

“That was the biggest dog I’ve ever seen.”

“Fog’s weird, it makes things look bigger — SHIT!”

He slammed on the brakes, and yanked the wheel to the left. The van skidded to a stop crossways in the two-lane road, the headlights blazing out over the irrigation ditch, high-lighting nothing but one fence post and some barbed wire.

Jake’s heart pounded in his chest. If the fog were lighter and he’d have been going any faster, he’d have never stopped in time. ‘Course, then if the fog were lighter, he would have seen her standing in the middle of the road.

“Shit, did you hit her?” Toby was out of the van before the question was all the way out of his mouth.

Jake threw the van in neutral and was still fumbling with the seat belt when he heard the scream.

“What the — ”

He almost pissed himself when Toby scrambled back in the van, his hands covering his face. There was blood seeping out from between his fingers.

“Drive! Drive!” Toby’s voice was garbled, but his panic was clear. He slammed the door shut behind him.

Jake cranked the already-running engine, the starter grinding in protest as his friend slammed down the lock on his door. A black shape cut across the road in front of them. Jake jumped as the panther looked back over its shoulder, its eyes gleaming emerald in the headlights.

“DRIVE!” Toby almost climbed over the top of him to lock the other door.

“What was that?” Jake shoved the shift lever into Drive just as something heavy fell onto the roof. Jake half-turned, looking back. “What is goin — ”

“Go! GO!” Toby rocked back and forth in his seat as

if his motion would make the vehicle start. Jake cranked the wheel and hit the gas. The van fishtailed and then caught and lurched forward, gravel pummeling the undercarriage.

A sound like fingernails on a chalkboard ran through an amplifier came from the roof, sliding toward the back until, with a thump, the sound stopped.

With the gas pedal to the floor, the fog raced by as if they were driving through a wall of ghosts.

Toby moaned, still clutching his face.

The gravel road became pavement, but Jake didn’t slow until they saw the lights of an all-night gas station. He whipped the van into the island, parking right in front of the neon-lit door. Toby half-fell out of his door, and Jake sprinted around the van to help him into the Food Mart.

The harsh interior light of the store revealed Toby’s good fortune. The scratches were not deep, and all three had missed his eyes.

“What the hell happened?”

The injured boy just shook his head, shaking.

“The Devil of Deacon Hill,” the attendant pronounced, wiping his hands on his faded uniform. He handed Toby a mostly clean rag for his face. “You boys were lucky. Last time, it was this foggy, they found only the car the next morning.”

**Background:** Some locations are innately tied to the supernatural. Perhaps they inherently possess a powerful supernatural energy themselves as the result of ley lines or other geological features. Perhaps the areas were the sites of some ancient (or modern) occurrences that now bind supernatural energy to those spots. Or perhaps there is “something” there that has chosen that location for reasons known only to the supernatural being. The how and the why of such places is always under conjecture, the mystery only adding to their power. What is certain, however, is that such places do exist, be they ruins, virgin forests or, as in the case of the Devil of Deacon Hill, a foggy crossroad.

Surrounded by miles of farmland and crisscrossed by country roads, Deacon Hill got its name not from a clergyman, but from the Deacon family whose timber company originally owned and logged off the then-expansive hardwood forest that once covered the hill. The company’s founder, Zachariah Deacon, was an unscrupulous timber baron whose cold-hearted tactics were the source of the company’s success. If rumors are to be believed, those same tactics may also be what raised the ire of the Devil of Deacon Hill.

There are legends that predate the coming of white settlers to the area, tales of “something” making its home on the hill that the Deacon family claimed as their own. However, before the timber companies logged the area bare, the “something” was not malevolent. It was not until the hill itself began to suffer the effects of the loggers’ ravaging that the creature on Deacon Hill began to make its devilish side

fully known. Loggers reported finding inch-thick pull chains snapped as if by some supernaturally strong hand. Unseasonably thick fogs plagued the worksites day and night, and the jumpy workers began seeing a large wild cat, puma-sized but black as sin, in the fog. Feline paw prints were found, as big around as a dinner plate, and the work mules vital to logging the hill became so frightened and skittish that productivity levels fell off by half. Deacon, believing the problem to be with the superstitious workers, ordered wages withheld until the problem solved itself. Things only got worse.

At the height of the Devil's mischief-making, Deacon built his mansion atop the hill, proclaiming dominion over it. He ensconced his reluctant bride within its whitewashed walls, much to her chagrin. Margaret, a high society belle, was ill suited to the rigors of life away from the city, or the ways of a swaggering, rough-hewed husband. Her loud-spoken disapproval of her husband, as much as the requirements of his job, kept him out overseeing the logging camps for days at a time.

Margaret Deacon was the creature's first fatal victim, or so the bereaved husband claimed. He returned one night to find the servants desperately trying to convince her to unlock the door to her chambers. It was not uncommon for their mistress to take to her bed with the "vapors" brought on by the inclement weather and foul mists that haunted the property, but this evening the servants grew worried when she would not respond to their inquiries. When Zachariah broke down the door, he found her dead in her bed.

Suspicious neighbors suggested that perhaps Deacon found a way to sneak back into the house and relieve himself of his shrewish bride, but they could not explain the giant feline footprints of timber-town mud marring her lace coverlet. The first foggy night after her death, her ghostly spirit began appearing on the hill she loathed. To this day, her form is the one that frightened witnesses claim to have

seen standing in the middle of the crossroad on Deacon Hill prior to the Devil's appearance, and some claim the Devil of Deacon Hill stole her visage when it took her life.

Regardless of how powerful the Devil appears to be while on its "home turf," the Devil will never be found outside of the general area of Deacon Hill. The Devil is inextricably tied to that location, and those who are able to escape beyond the area's foothills will find that the Devil has given up the chase.

**Description:** "When the Hill is clear, there's nothing to fear." So says local legend, and it seems to be true. But when the fog rises up around Deacon Hill, as fog is prone to do at the drop of a hat, the nothing quickly becomes a "something."

Locals on the hill know to go slowly when approaching the crossroads near the top of the hill, but several times a year those from outside the area will decide to take the shortcut between two state routes that runs over Deacon Hill, and find themselves face to face with the Devil. In a fog that cuts visibility down to almost zero, drivers approaching the crossroads slam on their brakes to avoid

striking the woman who stands in the center of the road. Regardless of which direction they approach from, the woman always has her back to them. She is dressed in an ankle-length gown that is as pale as the fog around her, and her dark hair is swept up into an elegant chignon. She turns to face approaching drivers, staring down the oncoming vehicles with a ghostly malevolence. Her eyes reflect the light of the oncoming car, shining an eerie golden-green. Although she appears completely solid until the moment of would-be impact, those who are not able to stop their vehicles in time report that they drive right through the Devil without so much as a sound. Those who do manage to pull their cars to a stop often report seeing the Devil transform before their eyes. Where, a moment ago, an anachronistic female figure stood defiantly in their headlight beams, the



shaken motorists now find themselves staring at an oversized panther. The large cat thrashes its tail in annoyance and begins stalking toward the car. Wise motorists, or those who have heard of the Devil's wrath, quickly get out of the area. The foolhardy — or those whose attempts to stop for the woman in the crossroads have landed them in a ditch or worse — rarely survive the next few moments.

The lucky few who have escaped a direct encounter with the Devil of Deacon Hill describe the encounter in tones horror writers only wish they could capture. The icy chill the survivors felt when the Devil looked at them. The fiery rake of claws against flesh. The utter despair as the night panther tracked them through the fog. The bloodcurdling hiss as the panther transformed into a woman before their eyes. Naysayers claim that it's an urban legend — a figment of overactive imaginations — even blaming the physical attacks on would-be car thieves or a sporadic serial killer. Those who've seen the Devil, however, know differently.

**Possible Origins:** Some believe the Devil of Deacon Hill to be the spirit of Deacon Hill personified, summoned by the pain of the land. Others claim the Devil is the ghost of Margaret Deacon, although few human ghosts manifest in animal forms in the consistent fashion that the Devil does. While those who bear its scars will attest to its physical form, the Devil does not appear to need to eat or breathe, gives off no body heat and has no discernable pulse, leading some to believe that the Devil is vampiric in nature. Perhaps, through some strange coincidence, she is somehow none of the above, but an amalgam of all of them.

## Story Hooks

- **Contested Ground:** As the newest arrivals in the area, pickings for territory are slim, so when the characters are offered the right to claim Deacon Hill, they may not care about the local legends of the Devil that haunts the area. Not at first, that is. However, the Devil may be a bit more particular about whom it shares territory with.

- **An Escalation of Violence:** Urban sprawl is pushing out of the city limits, and while building developers don't let little things such as urban legends influence where they put up houses, the "Devil" seems to be playing havoc with the new construction. While this may or may not be a big concern for local packs, the spirits of revenge and destruction that the Devil's presence is attracting certainly are.

- **Paranoia:** One of the characters' allies is attacked by the Devil while working for the characters. The ally worries that the characters set him up and refuses to deal with the group until the Devil is "dealt with." But how do you "deal" with something that can't die?

## The Devil of Deacon Hill

Traits given are for human form and panther form, respectively.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 2/2, Wits 4/4, Resolve 4/4

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 2/4, Dexterity 3/4, Stamina 3/3

**Social Attributes:** Presence 2/3, Manipulation 3/3, Composure 4/4

**Mental Skills:** None

**Physical Skills:** Athletics 3, Brawl (Claws) 5, Stealth 5

**Social Skills:** Intimidation 4

**Merits:** Brawling Dodge, Direction Sense, Fast Reflexes 1, Fleet of Foot 2, Iron Stamina 3

**Willpower:** 7

**Morality:** N/A

**Health:** 8/9

**Initiative:** 8/9 (with Fast Reflexes)

**Defense:** 3/4

**Speed:** 12/19 (with Fleet of Foot; species factor 9 for panther form)

**Size:** 5/6

## Aspects

- **Panther Form:** The Devil of Deacon Hill can transform into a large black panther, as an instant action. The Devil's Fighting Finesse Merit applies only while in this form.

- **Fog Walk:** The Devil of Deacon Hill has no need to summon unnatural fog — the location provides more than a sufficient supply on its own. However, the Devil does use the natural mist to its own full advantage. Day or night, in the presence of the slightest amount of visible fog, the Devil can attempt to step into any fog bank within five feet of itself and instantly step out of any other bit of fog up to 100 yards away, as if the Devil walking through a doorway. To Fog Walk, the Devil rolls Dexterity + Wits.

Fog Walk is a reflexive action that can only be performed once per turn. While Fog Walking, the Devil is not in the Shadow Realm or any other location while in the fog. The Devil cannot use Fog Walk to wait between locations. The Devil simply steps into the fog in one place and out of it in another, as if the two pieces of fog were back-to-back.

The Devil's ability to Fog Walk is modified by the current density of the fog in its area:

Current Condition	Dice Pool Modifier
Completely Clear	Fog Walk Impossible
Slightly Overcast/Hazy	-1
Light Foggy Misting	+0
Very Foggy	+1
Pea Soup	+2

- **Ghost Form:** For brief periods, the Devil of Deacon Hill possesses the ability to will itself intangible, taking on the semblance of a ghost for a moment. This power is an instant action requiring a successful Resolve + Composure roll. The Devil may remain in its Ghost Form for a number of turns equal to the successes the Devil achieved in taking the form. The Devil must fully become intangible; it may not take a partially solid, partially intangible form.

While intangible, the Devil is in Twilight, and thus takes no physical damage save for from others in Twilight. The Devil also cannot make any physical actions against those who are not in Twilight. However, if a spirit such as a pack totem or an Uratha using the Rank 5 Irraka Gift: Ghost Form were in the Twilight in the Devil's area, the two could certainly make physical actions against each other.

However, neither the Uratha's ability to sense spirits in the Twilight nor the Rank 1 Death Gift: Death Sight will perceive the Devil while it is in Twilight. The Devil is apparently neither spirit nor ghost.

- **Re-Form:** While the Devil of Deacon Hill can be dispelled for a time, the Devil is not alive, and cannot be "killed." As well, it cannot truly be permanently destroyed. It takes damage as normal and heals at a rate equivalent to a normal human. However, should attackers remove all of the Devil's Health, the Devil will transform into a shrieking wisp of fog that quickly disperses into thin air. However, the Devil can re-form no sooner than one lunar month later, with full Health (and a bone to pick with its attackers).

- **Invulnerability:** Although some believe the Devil to be a spirit, it is not vulnerable to spirit-targeting Gifts, rituals or powers. Despite the Devil's appearance as Margaret Deacon, the Devil is not susceptible to Death Gifts or other ghost-related supernatural influences. And, although some believe it is vampiric, it is unaffected by sunlight, as long as the day is sufficiently foggy, and staking does not appear to do more damage than any other type of attack. The Devil also appears not to feel physical pain, whether intangible or not; the Devil suffers no wound penalties.

### Weapons/Attacks:

(Note: The Devil of Deacon Hill will always change to panther form to physically attack. In panther form, it is not necessary for the Devil to initiate a grapple in order to make a bite attack.)

Type:	Damage	Dice Pool
Panther Form Bite*	2 (L)	11
Panther Form Claw	2 (L)	12

## The Zoonotics —

### “Phrynosapient”

*The cheap hotel pen dropped to the floor again, and he didn't pick it back up this time. His fingers no longer obeyed his commands easily, and even retrieving something from the worn carpet took more effort than he could muster. He started at the thick, horny talons that his once-manicured fingernails had become, trying to make sense of it all.*

*Slowly blinking, he read over the last things he'd written, the hotel stationary half-covered with random thoughts. "Flu? Food poisoning? Cold?" He'd been sick since shortly after he arrived here, aching, shaking and miserable. The only symptom he hadn't had was nausea. Instead, he'd been ravenous, ordering so many meals from room service that the trays were*

*stacked up in the hallway and the delivery person scanned the room every time he brought another one up, as if he expected to find a whole herd of ravenous clandestine guests hunkered down behind the television cabinet.*

*He'd cranked the thermostat up to 90 and still spent most of the morning under the steaming assault of a shower. He'd cancelled his meetings, rescheduled them once and again, until the entire week had passed and he'd not met with the clients a single time. His boss was going to be so pissed. Hotels in Mexico City might be cheap, but the airfare wasn't, and he'd likely lost the account he'd been sent down to firm up.*

*He'd thought at first it was just jetlag, helped along by a hangover. God knows he deserved it after allowing the taxi driver to recommend a nightclub his first evening in Mexico. The little cantina had been packed, mostly with tourists, swilling cheap margaritas and tequila shots like they were going out of style. He vaguely remembered a dark-eyed girl and an entire tray of shot glasses full of bright blue liquor, and a huge horned lizard, maybe the bartender's pet, that was crawling across the bar most of the night.*

*He glanced at himself in the mirror over the little table that served as a desk in the room. He'd wrapped the bedspread around him, and its floral print reflected yellow-brown on his formerly pale skin. The light reflected on the mirror hurt his eyes, and he rubbed his temples and then froze. Tentatively he touched them again, careful not to scratch himself with his now-sharp nails. Above his brow on each side there was . . . something . . . a lump . . . a series of lumps . . .*

*Cancer? Tumors? He probed, but the ridges didn't move. It felt as if they were attached directly to his skull.*

*Wide-eyed with alarm, he stood and looked at himself in the mirror, dropping the coverlet. His skin was dry, leathery and almost scaly. He looked dehydrated, his eyes bulging and his already thinning hairline seemed to have receded inches further back. As he stared at himself, an ant began to climb the faux-gilded mirror frame.*

*Without thinking, his tongue flicked out and whisked the insect back into his mouth.*

**Background:** While the medical world does not officially recognize any disease or disorder that physically transforms a human being into something else, the medical world has long recognized lycanthropy as a mental disorder, related to schizophrenia, wherein individuals believe they take on the form of an animal. Medical lycanthropes report changes to their sensory perceptions and their emotions, and they may even perceive themselves as growing fur or taking on a fully animal body shape. So great is the power of the human mind that some even experience knotting muscles that contort hands into paw-like pads or seemingly take away their capacity for bipedal locomotion, constraining them to all fours. However, the clinical definition of lycanthropy is limited to a mental disorder, a dysfunction of perceptions. Lycanthropy is not an actual transformation into animal form.



Seemingly half-human, half-animal individuals have been the subject of curiosity and speculation for centuries. While congenital hypertrichosis universalis, commonly called the “Human Werewolf Disease,” is a recognized genetic disorder that results in an overabundance of hair all over the human body from birth onward, this disease is in no way a transformation or “missing link” between human and animal forms (regardless of what sideshow barkers would like us to believe). Congenital hypertrichosis universalis isn’t a disease, either: those afflicted by it suffer its effects from birth on, and those who are not genetically predisposed to it will never “catch” it from those who are.

However, even in this day and age, modern science is discovering new questions almost as quickly as it answers the old ones. As more and more species of animal life are pressed across the border of extinction, the viruses that once had a plethora of hosts to live on have now found their host “territories” thinning at an exponential rate. Rather than fade quietly into extinction, these simple but tenacious organisms have begun to ensure their own survival.

Some zoonotic viruses, such as bovine spongiform encephalopathy (mad cow disease) or avian influenza (bird flu), have mutated to widen their range of suitable hosts, evolving into forms that can live as well in human systems as animal ones. This provides the viruses with an almost limitless supply of hosts, but the new human “territory” is often not as ideal for the infecting virus as its original animal hosts were.

These mutations, for the most part, operate within the perimeters of known science. Others viruses — more rare, and infinitely more dangerous — have taken this cross-species territory jump a step further. Although the reports are sketchy — due both to the high victim mortality rate and astronomically fast lifecycle of the virus itself — these new zoonotic viruses have developed mutations that actually begin to change their prospective hosts’ physiological systems to make them more closely resemble the viruses’ ideal surroundings, essentially altering the structure of human beings at a cellular level to something much closer to that of the viruses’ preferred animal host. These changes, unfortunately (or perhaps fortunately), most often result in illness and most often death for the host. While humans may be genetically very similar to other animals, the genetic restructuring is more than most human physiologies can survive.

However, there are unverified reports of individuals of particularly stout physiological makeup who have survived at least the initial stages of this “disease” (truly a variety of diseases, as each individual species-specific virus, while sharing *modus operandi* with those of other species, is truly its own syndrome). The end results vary depending on the original species that the infecting virus is attempting to recreate, but whatever they are, they are no longer truly human.

**Description:** Zoonotics are not true shapeshifters in that their transformation from human to animal, if com-

pleted, is a one-time process. They are not able to shift fluidly back and forth between human and animal form as supernatural lycanthropes do. However, if the viral infection is stopped early enough in the process (before stage three has been completed), the transformation is reversible. Although once the cellular structure of the infected human has begun to change, it will never be wholly human again, if the virus is stopped before the transformation progresses very far, the changes may be barely noticeable, and the human host will eventually undo much of the transformation. However, as the disease progresses and the virus’ changes begin to affect more and more of the host’s cellular structure, the effects become more pronounced and the chances of the transformation self-reversing, even if the virus is destroyed, lessens significantly.

Zoonotic lycanthropes begin take on the physical characteristics of the preferred host species of the strain of virus that has infected them. This process begins when the human is exposed to the infecting virus, although the transformation is not instantaneous and the physical changes are not immediately noticeable. The first stage of the zoonotic infection is almost always a high grade fever that begins 24 to 48 hours after exposure to the virus. Within 12 hours of the onset of the initial fever (which can rise to 104 or 105 degrees Fahrenheit), victims are struck with severe muscular pain, most pronouncedly in the back, shoulders and legs. This pain is often accompanied by a migraine-intensity headache, which is often acerbated by bright light.

Unlike in many varieties of influenza, respiratory symptoms remain fairly light for the course of the zoonotic infection — most often limited to a dry cough and severe sneezing accompanied by a burning sensation in the chest and lungs. Rather than nausea and vomiting, most victims experience a ravenous hunger as their bodies’ cells burn through their fuel reserves at an astronomical rate while the virus’ restructuring takes place. These first stages of the infection are often accompanied by weakness as the hosts cells are being attacked by the infecting virus. While the virus can spread at any stage in the transformation (even once the “infection” seems to have run its course), this is by far the most contagious stage. Ironically, it is also the stage at which it is very difficult to discern a zoonotic infection from a more general malady.

In most cases, the second stage of the zoonotic infection is the fatal one. Rather than easing into a slow recovery period as with most influenzas, after three to five days, the attacking viruses have firmly established themselves in their new host sand begin to make themselves at home, attacking the cellular structure in an attempt to improve their environments.

During the second stage, hosts’ fevers spike (sometimes as high as 109 degrees Fahrenheit) as the cells begin to attack vital systems in their new homes. Bleeding internally or beneath the skin is common as the virus attacks blood vessels causing fluid leakage. Death normally occurs as the body enters a state of shock due to the high fever or blood

loss through damaged circulatory vessels.

However, if the host survives the initial system shock perpetrated by the virus in stage two, the changes that happen next are just as hard on the host's system, mentally as well as physically, as the virus' changes begin to transform the formerly human host into something else. The specifics, of course, vary depending on the virus' preferred host species. Increased hair growth (or loss of hair, depending on the species), changes to the internal organs (for processing a diet closer to that of the preferred host species, which in turn provides the virus with its preferred ratio of nutrients) and soft tissue transformations (warping of ear, eye and nose tissues are common) are among the first changes to appear.

Skeletal transformations are slower, often preceded by muscular changes that apply pressure which wears away at the former bone-ends much in the same way children's baby teeth are worn from below by their incoming ones, freeing them to be pushed out. This erosion reopens growth centers at the bones' ends, which become "programmed" by the new virus to create slow changes to the skeleton, which can bring about non-bipedal posture.

Zoonotic lycanthropes will never become "fully" physically identical to their viruses' host species. The changes necessary for a complete transformation to animal physiology would be simply too much for even the most stalwart physiology to bear. However, the changes that can occur are enough to label the zoonotic as definitely "non-human." Loss of bipedal posture and locomotion is common in the later stage of transformation, as the musculature and skeletal structure begin to lose their bipedal nature.

**Possible Origins:** When dealing with mutations such as this, the lines between natural and supernatural become very fuzzy. The world is long overdue for a pandemic influenza breakout, and while few scientists could have ever predicted the course of this particular group of viral mutations, they also did not predict SARS, polio or many other of the "natural" viral mutations that have devastated

humankind during the past several hundred years.

However, it is also possible that scientists (industrial, governmental or military) have knowingly or unknowingly helped Mother Nature along and this new virus — perhaps intended as a cutting-edge biological weapon — has escaped from their facilities.

Some, however, believe that this "jump" from infection to transformation is more than a virus could have possibly developed through "natural" methods. Advocates of this theory believe that supernatural "tinkering" (perhaps magical, perhaps spiritual) is responsible for the virus' abilities. Storytellers who choose this origin for their version of Zoonotics should allow those with the ability to sense the supernatural to be perceive the virus (and those it has transformed) as not entirely natural beings.

**NOTE:** While Uratha are immune to conventional infection, sickness and disease and thus could be argued as immune to the Zoonotic virus if the origin is "natural" or human-made, Uratha are susceptible to illnesses that are supernatural in nature and so would certainly be vulnerable to the Zoonotic virus if the Storyteller has chosen a supernatural origin for the virus in his community. However, it is also arguable that the lines between nature and supernatural are simply one of perception rather than a hard-and-fast reality.

In this case, Storytellers should

feel free to have the virus have "naturally" mutated into a supernatural variation even without outside assistance, making Uratha susceptible regardless of the origin of the mutation.

## Story Hooks

• **Breaking Quarantine:** An outbreak of influenza with a particularly high mortality rate has struck the characters' city. The National Guard has been called in to quarantine the area, and although medical supplies are being shipped in from all over the country, human resources at local hospitals are dwindling. Two days into the outbreak, local



news reports announce that there is a “situation” at the city’s hospital (or the neighborhood hospital closest to the group if the city is large enough to warrant more than one major medical facility). Three National Guardsmen, stationed there to assist with security, have been killed by one of the patients, who has fled the hospital and is now believed to be hiding in the vicinity of the characters’ turf. Investigation reveals that the infected individual is in the throes of third stage transformation (see “Customizing the Infected” at the end of this chapter for species suggestions).

• **Sick Day:** One of the group’s allies has gone missing, at a moment when the ally’s assistance is vitally needed. Investigation finds the ally in the second stage of Zoonotic infection, and without assistance (hospitalization or supernatural healing), the ally will be dead within 24 hours. If the characters manage to get aid for their valued companion, they will find that, rather than healing, he or she transitions into the third stage of the disease.

• **Blood-Borne:** The group receives a call for assistance from an unexpected quarter. A local coterie of vampires are investigating an outbreak of virulent blood-borne disease with strange side effects, which they believe to have origins in the spirit realm. The vampires seek the characters’ aid in discovering the source of this disease and hopefully finding a cure before the entire city (and their food supply) is stricken. However, the vampires are holding back information about their deepest concern. Several vampires have contracted the virus via feeding, and their brethren have their undead hands full keeping the now-animalist vampires reined in while trying to prevent the disease from spreading.

## Phrynosapien

### (Victim of H7N1 Encephalitis Virus)

The stats for this Phrynosapien (post-third stage survivor of a virus transmitted from *Phrynosoma solare*, the Regal Horned Lizard) are typical of individuals transformed into Zoonotics of non-mammalian species. The reduction in Mental and Social Attributes represents the permanent damage done to the human brain from extensive high fever as well as the cellular restructuring caused by the virus. Physical traits will vary far more than Mental ones for Zoonotics, depending on the preferred host species of the virus infecting the individual. Very large or physically strong host species (bears, big cats, elephants, etc.) will be more rare than more common (but smaller) species, but will result in Zoonotics with much higher Physical Attributes and appropriately different Physical Skills. Their supernatural powers will also differ widely, depending on the host species’ innate abilities. See “Customizing the Infected” at the end of this chapter for more specific ideas.

**Mental Attributes:** Intelligence 1, Wits 2, Resolve 2

**Physical Attributes:** Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

**Social Attributes:** Presence 2, Manipulation 1, Composure 2

**Mental Skills:** While a Zoonotic’s actual intelligence may vary, it is highly unusual that one would retain sufficient

intellect after a full transformation to utilize any Mental Skills.

**Physical Skills:** Athletics (Throwing – see Blood Attack) 4, Brawl (Bite) 2, Stealth 2, Survival 2

**Social Skills:** Animal Ken (Lizards) 4, Intimidation 2, Subterfuge

**Merits:** Fast Reflexes 2, Fleet of Foot 3, Natural Immunity (developed as a result of virus), Quick Healer

**Willpower:** 4

**Morality:** 7

**Health:** 9

**Initiative:** 7 (with Fast Reflexes)

**Defense:** 2

**Speed:** 14 (with Fleet of Foot; species factor 6)

**Size:** 5

### Aspects

• **Intimidation:** When threatened, the Regal Horned Lizard inflates itself to attempt to intimidate its would-be predators. This bluff, combined with the creature’s harmless but dangerous-looking spikes, is often enough to chase off those seeking a lizard dinner. As the Phrynosapien’s intelligence drops, the Phrynosapien is more likely to react to potentially threatening situations by “puffing up,” gaining several inches in height and what appears to be 30 or 40 pounds of muscle mass. The gain is, in actuality, simply air, being added to bladders distributed throughout the Phryno’s body for the purpose of illusion.

This physical change is a reflexive action, and while adding nothing to the Zoonotic’s actual physical strength, does give the Zoonotic a temporary addition of +2 to dice pools for Intimidation. This action can only be taken once an hour and gradually wears off over the next two hours. At the end of one hour, the bonus reduces to +1, and by the end of the second hour, the bonus goes away completely.

• **Blood Attack:** Similar to the Regal Horned Lizard, Phrynosapiens develop a strange, but effective, method of self-defense. When placed in threatening situations, the frightened Phryno can squirt a stream of noxious-tasting blood from the sinus cavities located at the inner corners of the creature’s eyes. While not dangerous, this attack is distracting to say the least, and often affords the Zoonotic the opportunity to escape.

The Blood Attack is an instant action useable once per turn. The Phrynosapien targets a single individual within arm’s reach and must face the target. Twin streams of foul-smelling and -tasting blood squirt out of the corners of the attacker’s eyes, striking the target and coating her with this fluid. If the attack strikes the target in the face, the target is blinded for two turns while she clears her vision. During this time, the target is distracted and unable do take any actions other than attempting to clear the liquid from her eyes (and nose and mouth). The target may, however speak as normal. Even if the attack is not successful, if the target has not seen the Phrynosapien use its Blood Attack before, the target is still distracted by the attack’s bizarre nature,

giving her a -4 modifier to her next turn's Initiative.

The Phrynosapien's Athletic Specialty in Throwing applies only to the use of this Blood Attack, and cannot be added to any other forms of thrown weapon or targetry.

- **Myrmecophagy:** In the third stage of transformation and beyond, the virus' effect on the Phrynosapien's system is far enough advanced that the host body no longer processes nutrients in the same way it used to. Foods that formerly were the host's favorites now smell and taste disgusting. Due to the virus' changes, the host's system requires a precise balance of protein, carbohydrates and calcium, a mixture that is best found in a single food source — ants. Similar to the virus' original host species, the Phrynosapien begins to transition to a strong preference for insect sustenance. This may lead to some complications, as the quantity of ants needed to maintain a human-sized physique is substantial. However, with the consumption of a minimum of one pound of ants per day, the Phrynosapien's body heals all forms of damage twice as quickly as the body did while it was completely human, essentially giving it the Quick Healer Merit as long as the consumption needs are met.

#### Weapons/Attacks:

Type:	Damage	Dice Pool
Bite	0 (L)	5
Blood Attack	Special (see Aspects)	8

## Customizing the Freak Gallery

The examples given above are certainly not intended represent the only unique skinchangers that exist in the World of Darkness, but instead are meant to give Storytellers a starting place for the sorts of possibilities available. Each of the demonstrated profiles contains a plethora of means with which that specific type of skinchanger can be modified to suit the Storyteller's particular game needs. Additional examples of customization possibilities are offered below to aid Storytellers in their creative process. The animal lore given in this book's Appendix should also be taken into account; the potential combinations of unique archetype and animal can provide a massive amount of compelling skinchanger concepts.

### The Artifact

When customizing the Artifact template, care must be taken to avoid turning a **Werewolf** game into a treasure hunt. Just as Patches' coat becomes ineffective when separated from "her," it is recommended that Storytellers find some way to prevent their Artifact skinchangers from being utilized by others or replicated. Ideas might include the following:

- **The item will kill its user** — A mask that captures the dying breath of any human or animal that is killed while wearing it, and grants its owner the ability to shapechange into the dying creature's likeness. Nothing, however, is without a price, and the mask, hungry for life,

inflicts a level of lethal damage on the wearer with every transformation.

- **The item is tied to a certain person or family line and can only be activated by those individuals** — An antique tarot deck featuring half-man/half-beast figures is stolen from a local museum. Those with a high enough Occult Rating will recognize the deck as a family heirloom of a noted occult line, and investigation may reveal that the deck was stolen by the last of that line.

- **The item is bound to current owner, and useless to others** — Both the human and hawk forms of this individual wear the same copper torque around their necks. If it is removed, both forms manifest and die within moments despite any attempts at healing. The torque bound the two halves of their souls into one being, and if it is removed, neither can survive.

### The Chimera

While rats with human intelligence may make excellent investigators, they are hardly the only type of animal with potential as tools or weapons when given enhanced intelligence. Flocks of birds capable of surveying (and potentially sabotaging) remote area outposts could turn the tide of war. Already, dolphins are used by the military to locate and mark underwater mine sites. Imagine if an animal with the manual dexterity of an octopus or the destructive capacity of a great white shark or blue whale were enhanced with similar intelligence.

As for the Humera, the capacity to incorporate the genes responsible for extended lifespan from a giant tortoise may have unexpected results. Will scientists find a way to counter them, or will a doubled lifespan be worth the price? And how long will it be before military scientists convince the government that experimentation with the potential for creating amphibious or venomous humans or those with the heightened senses of a hawk or hound is more than enough justification for overriding the human genetic manipulation prohibitions?

### The Cursed

While the possible origins area and description of the Cursed profile details out some of the ways that cursed skinchangers can be personalized, another possibility available for Storyteller customization is the duration of the curse. Depending on the nature of the transformation, the curse may last as long as the originator focuses on the target, or for a set duration. Three nights and three months both seem to be common lengths of time for an enforced transformation. Or, in the case of an unfortunate few, the curse is only lifted by death — either that of the target or the originator, whichever comes first.

### The Seventh Son

Other cultures have legends akin to that of the Lobison, and Storytellers could incorporate any of the world's large predatory animals in place of the maned wolf in Argentinean folklore. While not these tales are not as wide-



spread, some North African cultures speak of the Crocuta, a horrible werhyena. The Crocuta curse, which strikes certain family lines, affecting only a particular child in the lineage (most often the seventh, but sometimes the eldest son). Much like the Lobison, the Crocuta is cursed with uncontrolled transformations and blood thirst, but their monstrous form is that of a massive hyena. Similarly, the Seventh Son template could be customized to include any large predator, from polar bears in Inuit or Yupik families to crocodiles in the Kalahari.

### The Spawned

While Lila serves as a particularly manipulative and destructive example of the Spawned skinchanger profile, other possibilities are equally as intriguing. As the Spawned are truly demi-human, most have a natural human form, and merely retain the ability to shapeshift into one or more animal forms. Depending on the creature's nature and the Storyteller's decisions in regards to the creature's origin, the Spawned's forms can be customized to reflect its non-human heritage, incorporating animal species that are most often tied to the diabolic or the deistic, as seems appropriate.

Other than shapeshifting, most Spawned have only one or two notable supernatural powers. These are, similar to their animal forms, most often tied to the nature of their non-human parentage, and may range from physical enhancements to mental manipulations as fits best.

### The Summoned

While the familiars are vulnerable to physical attack, their Shadow Jumping Ability and shadow form make them formidable enemies and valuable allies while their selfish, manipulative natures make them dangerous to deal with at all. While other summoned skinchangers could have different Attributes, Storytellers should keep in mind a balance of vulnerabilities, strengths and dangers in order to ensure that these creatures do not interfere with game balance.

Traditional supernatural strengths and Abilities that might be assigned to familiars include telepathy, teleportation, the ability to possess humans or animals and wish-granting (but always with a high cost to the recipient). Many familiars are rumored to be capable of flight, invisibility or soul-stealing as well as their shapeshifting powers.

Vulnerabilities might include a weakness to clergy and/or religious symbols or an insatiable hunger for a certain substance or sensitivity (and thus increased damage) from fire, water or sunlight. If the familiars cannot be killed, they should be limited in some fashion. Similar to the Territorial, familiars could be limited to an area, or even to a time period, able to manifest only during certain times or conditions.

Appearances can also go a long ways toward customizing the summoned familiar. Wings (of a bird or bat) are often associated with summoned beings, as are primal colors: black, white and blood red. Familiars are often portrayed as either very beautiful or horrific, sometimes

both. Some of the most common traditional animal forms for familiars include cats, snakes, bats, frogs, ravens, owls and black dogs.

### The Territorial

Any location can be utilized to create a "Devil of" unique skinchanger based on the Devil of Deacon Hill prototype. Although crossroads are often seen as a mystic place of power that might attract such a being, equally feasible are buildings with long and mysterious pasts, ruin sites, bridges (especially covered bridges) and cemeteries. But the location does not need to be human-made. Thick, foreboding forests, desert mesas, steep mountain passes or even entire villages (as witnessed by the Headless Horseman of Sleepy Hollow fame) can serve as location tie-ins for unique skinchangers. What is important, however, is that the area provides the seclusion, history and sense of mystery that will allow a Storyteller to create an atmosphere appropriate for this type of creature.

While the Devil of Deacon Hill is tied to the Deacon family and their ravaging of its "home," other Devils will have their own motivations. Some Devils may seek only to prevent intrusion on a certain area. Some may seek revenge against a certain type of person (men, children, hunters, descendents of a certain family, etc.). Other Devils may seem much more abstract in their motivations, seemingly appearing and disappearing at random in the area to which they are tied.

### The Zoonotic

The lizard profile detailed above is one of the less powerful examples of skinchangers affected by zoonotic viruses possible, and is given as an example of how not every skinchanger has to be stereotypically clawed and fanged to be creepy and intriguing. However, there is something to be said for introducing the fear of sheer animal strength and speed, especially when coupled with venom, talons and jaws full of razor-sharp teeth. Considering the diverse gamut of physical weaponry and idiosyncrasies available in the animal world, the possibilities for interesting Zoonotic skinchangers is almost endless.

Consider also the wide range of potential origins for a zoonotic virus. Although a zoonotic virus is presented as a blend of horror and science fiction, a Storyteller who prefers a more supernatural origin can easily graft it in place. A zoonotic plague might be deliberately crafted by a mage, a strange new disease passed on by the Hosts or other supernatural creatures or any of a number of other possibilities.

### Blending Ideas

Finally, consider the possibilities that can result from mixing one archetype with another. Combinations of these freaks can provide antagonists that can drive an entire chronicle. Take, for instance, a Spawned half-breed that is given a summoned familiar by the Spawned's enigmatic parent. What if the Cursed begin to pass on a zoonotic virus

to those who contact them in the wrong way — transformed strays biting victims, or transformed pigs passing on the virus to those who eat their flesh? Or if Animera begin passing on a similar virus because they were designed to do so?

This is, of course, to say nothing of the potential for blending these ideas with the skinthieves and spirit-shifters from the other chapters of this book. A zoonotic virus, added to the right skinchanger, becomes an entirely different take

on the notion of transmitted lycanthropy. The Cursed might become so because they cross the wrong tradition of skinchangers — consider if the Bouda could ritually transform some of their victims into hyenas, or perhaps even into antelopes for a gruesome ritual hunt. The potential combinations are so numerous that it should be easy to come up with something that will genuinely surprise your players — and with any luck, terrify them as well.



# Appendix: Animal Lore

Much as we might like to do so, we cannot give every animal myth in the world the coverage each story deserves, even in a book devoted exclusively to skinshifting myths. We can, however, give you ideas for handling the various sorts of animals that commonly crop up in such myths. In this chapter, we cover a variety of animal types, and address the basic mythological characteristics of each. It is our hope that players and Storytellers alike can use this information in conjunction with the examples provided elsewhere in the book to flesh out any legend they care to, whether real or imagined.

Entries are arranged taxonomically for ease of reference, and, where possible, multiple cultural interpretations are provided for each animal (along with basic information on the animal's behavior and appearance).

## Mammals

Perhaps the most familiar of all animals, mammals strike a chord with humans because they are similar to humans in many ways. Mammals are warm-blooded, hairy and intelligent, and they nurse and protect their young much as we do. It would be a mistake to think mammal-spirits are just as approachable, however. Such spirits are predatory and alien, and while they represent the essence of those animals' personas, mammal-spirits are nonetheless ruled by the minds of spirits, not mammals.

## Bears

Bears are powerful and ferocious, but they are also noted for their strong parenting skills (at least,

the females) and their curiosity. Bears come in many different varieties: black and brown bears in North America, polar bears around the Arctic Circle, pandas in China (ignore the myth that claims they are not bears), sun bears in Malaysia, spectacled bears in South America and so on and so forth. Most bears are large and powerful, but surprisingly nimble.

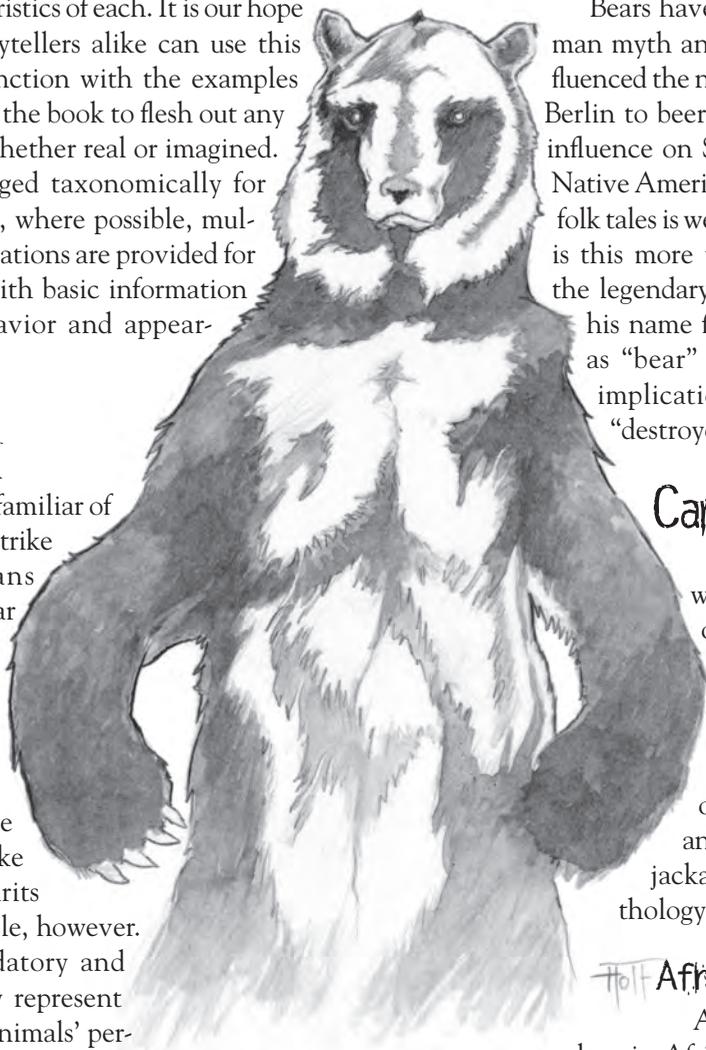
Bears have a powerful place in human myth and legend. They have influenced the naming of everything from Berlin to beer to the Arctic, and their influence on Scandinavian berserkers, Native American healers and children's folk tales is well documented. Nowhere is this more true than in the case of the legendary King Arthur, who took his name from the same root word as "bear" (which has interesting implications, as said root means "destroyer").

## Canids

It is quite possible that wild dogs, more than any other animals, have had more of an impact on human society. We domesticated wolves, transforming them into our faithful companions, and the presence of coyotes, jackals and foxes in our mythology is nigh-ubiquitous.

## African Wild Dogs

African wild dogs occupy a place in Africa's ecosystem similar to that of wolves in the Northern Hemisphere; African wild dogs are pack predators, have strong family bonds and specialize in running their prey to ground and killing it through sheer attrition. They are small, clever, ruthlessly efficient animals, and they inspire the hearts and minds of all who know of them.



Pity they're on the verge of extinction.

In truth, there is little need to delve deeply into the legendry of wild dogs, since they can be folded into that of the Uratha with little effort. Uratha might run as painted wolves in Africa instead of the more familiar grey wolves of North America and Eurasia. This is fortunate, since information on their role in African mythology seems to be fairly limited.

## Domestic Dogs

Few of us need a primer on dogs and their basic behavior, but their portrayal in an animist setting deserves some attention. Dogs are, first and foremost, loyal. Mileage can and will vary with individual animals, but the reason we tamed the things to begin with lies in their loyalty and obedience. We must remember this when portraying them in the World of Darkness. We must also remember that loyalty for a spirit is different from loyalty for a living, breathing animal. Use the devotion of a pit bull or an Akita as a frame of reference; these breeds might easily attack anything that even remotely threatens their owners — even children. This is the norm for a dog-spirit's loyalty. It is inspiring, but it is also frightening, and it is *not* comfortable — not even for the owner.

## Coyotes

Coyotes are found exclusively in North America, and the myths associated with them are similarly focused. Coyotes are seen as trickster-spirits in Native American mythology, in much the same manner as foxes in Europe and Asia and spiders in Africa. Living coyotes are not nearly so adroit, of course; they are no more or less clever than other wild dogs, but that's still pretty clever. Coyotes are also social animals, and so they are seen as friendly animals in a spiritual sense — when they're not raiding our food stores or playing cruel tricks on us, that is.

The personification of Coyote is known by many names. He is Italpas to the Chinook, Ma'ii to the Navajo, Mica to the Lakota, Skinkuts to the Kutenai, Isil to the Cupeño and simply Old Man Coyote to the Crow. Coyote is the archetypical culture hero, and can be used as a model for other sorts of trickster culture heroes; examples include West Africa's Anansi, Hare of the American Southeast and some incarnations of Raven in the Pacific Northwest.

## Where Is Coyote?

So, if Coyote is such an archetype, and a bona fide trickster-spirit, why isn't he in this book? Simply put, the "core" Coyote is an Incarna; he doesn't have a physical representation, and is powerful enough that he needn't be represented by statistics at all. The same is true of most other trickster-spirits in the innumerable mythologies of the world. The ultimate archetype doesn't need to be defined, because the strange bastard children who actually wander the World of Darkness as spirits and skin-changers are the ones that contribute to a chronicle — usually in surprising and frightening ways.

## Foxes

As with coyotes, foxes serve as trickster figures in many different myths and legends. In comparison with coyotes, however, foxes are not as limited geographically, and so they serve in many different sorts of cultural roles. European folklore paints them as sly and clever creatures, foiling hunters and working mischief at every turn. Chinese folklore gives foxes a cruel streak, painting them as magicians who delight in tormenting humanity; many of foxes' negative mythological connotations come from the animals' tendency to scavenge or hunt in places such as graveyards. In Korea and Japan, foxes are agents of karma, rewarding others in kind for the slights and boons bestowed upon the animals. The most notable foxes of myth are surely Europe's Reynard and Japan's Inari, but they are not alone.

The variable nature of fox-spirits is worth mentioning. In addition to ordinary fox-spirits, they sometimes appear as foxes with special powers, as vampiric spirits, as bewitching women or as possessing spirits. This diversity allows the Storyteller to use fox-spirits in virtually any capacity, which in turn means the Storyteller is not limited by the portrayals of the Kitsune in this book; there are many other fox legends to explore, and, indeed, many other Kitsune legends that are only barely touched upon here.



## Raccoon Dogs

Often mislabeled as badgers, raccoon dogs are canids with bandit-like masks around their eyes and thick, furry coats. As their name implies, they look very much like a cross between a raccoon and a dog. Similar to many canids, raccoon dogs live in pairs or loose family groups, and are true omnivores in that they will eat just about anything. This has done much to inform the mythology of the Tanuki, who are shapeshifter spirits capable of shifting from raccoon dog to human and back again. Their role in Japanese mythology is similar to that of the Kitsune, though the Tanuki often have a more comical cast about them.

## Wolves

Wolves are, naturally, the source of all sorts of myths and legends, and many of these are only barely touched upon in **Werewolf: The Forsaken**. Wolves are reputed to have suckled Romulus and Remus, the founders of Rome, and they are trusted friends and allies in many Native American myths and legends (usually). During the Middle Ages, it was said that sorcerers clad in enchanted wolf pelts took the form of wolves, and Norse berserkers used the same trick to become nigh-unstoppable foes in combat.

Real-life wolves may not be ferocious warriors, but they are highly intelligent beasts capable of amazing feats of stamina. They also have very strong family bonds, and spirits in the World of Darkness are likely to combine these traits with the various mythologies described above. Players might draw inspiration from the Scandinavian Fenris, the Ute's Sunawavi, and Japan's Jizo wolves, among others.

## Felids

Felids include cats of all sorts, and they seem to be rather poorly understood beasts. Some see a lion and think he is noble and majestic or, worse, cute and cuddly. Neither description is an approximation of the truth; instead, lions and, indeed, all cats are the consummate predators, the very image of the predatory instinct given form and function. In contrast to most other mammals, cats *must* kill to survive. Most will scavenge when they can, but they cannot turn to foods such as fruits and nuts to survive when times get lean. Cats are killers, pure and simple, and this is their driving characteristic in the World of Darkness.

## Jaguars

Jaguars hold a prominent place in many of the old Olmec legends, and are known variously as the creators of the world, the destroyers of humans and the personification of evil. No surprise, really, since the name for "jaguar" in the Olmec tongues is "Balam," which also means "wizard." The most prominent figures in these tales are Iqi Balam (Moon Jaguar), Balam-Agab (Night Jaguar) and Balam Quitze (Jaguar with the Sweet Smile), who were among the first humans to populate the world. Other figures, predominantly gods that could take the forms of jaguars, include the sun lord Ahau-kin (who became a jaguar at night so he might guard the underworld), Mahucateh (another of the first men to enter the world), Tezcatlipocah (the god of war) and many others.

The jaguar's reputation among the Olmecs is not undeserved; the jaguar is a powerful cat, and a savage hunter. While most cats kill by suffocating their prey, usually with a bite to the throat, the jaguar instead kills by crushing its victim's skull in its jaws. This cat's mystique is heightened by the fact that the jaguar is among the most elusive of all cats; researchers have gone months without a single sighting, and even signs of jaguars are rarely encountered. These are the traits of jaguar-spirits in the World of Darkness: powerful, elusive and utterly terrifying.

## Leopards

Leopards are not the largest cats in the world, or the strongest. But, to those who know leopards, they are arguably the most awe-inspiring. Leopards have been known to drag prey exceeding their own bodyweight into trees, to kill in an instant with nary a sound and to outmaneuver baboons in the trees they call home. Scientists and hunters alike view the leopard as the archetypical cat, the perfect blend of power and elegance. Leopards are often antagonists in folktales, and they have inspired more than their fair share of religious iconography; the leopard cults of West Africa are perhaps the best example of this phenomenon. This is not always the case, of course, and some (notably Kipling) have turned the leopard into an ally of sorts, if not exactly a heroic figure. Still, the animal remains best known for its power and the terror it inspires, and nowhere is this more true than in the World of Darkness.

## Lions

Lions are often portrayed as noble, even mythical beasts. They have made their way into European heraldry (perhaps an attempt on the part of such families to tap into the lion's cultural power), and are known as the King of Beasts by Africans and Europeans alike. The lion has even been molded into a Christ figure in the character of Aslan, the patriarch of C. S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Such noble portrayals, and all for such a fearsome beast.

In real life, of course, lions are anything but noble. They slaughter the young of their mates, battle one another for the right to dominate their pride and bully and harass anything and everything weaker than they are. They have no choice, of course; the African savanna is a harsh place, and it is not kind to the weak of heart. Still, the disparity between the lion's true nature and its mythological portrayals is striking, and well worth addressing any time lions come up in a story.

## Tigers

If lions are the "noble beasts" associated with Africa, then surely tigers fill a similar role in China and India. The Chinese consider the tiger to be a guardian of the dead, and Indian myths are filled with gods and humans wearing tiger masks and skins, and using tigers as mounts and companions. The trend continues in Indonesia, where weretigers punish those who have sinned against Allah, and even in Russia, where tigers are known as Amba — a word used to refer to God and the Devil in equal measure. The people there know the tiger as the spirit of the Taiga, and, even in modern times, the tiger is considered a symbol of the divine that must be protected.

It is no wonder that tigers are viewed with such reverence. They are the largest of all cats, some weighing up to 800 pounds, and they are built to kill. They have well-deserved reputations as predators of humans, and, even today, tigers manage to kill a staggering number of humans each year — indeed, these cats are the only large predator on Earth that kills more humans per annum than vice versa. Tigers, then, are the very epitome of savage nobility, and tiger-spirits should represent that whenever possible — murderous power fused with divine purpose, all wrapped up in one of the greatest predators of the modern age.

## Herbivores

Perhaps not surprisingly, herbivores don't get a lot of air time as shapeshifters. This may be due to the fact that shapeshifters normally represent something dangerous to humans — shapeshifters are either humans with magical powers or beasts with the powers of animals and the intelligence of humans. Small wonder, then, that deer and antelope don't make it into a culture's myths very often; while many of these creatures may indeed be dangerous animals, they are hardly predatory animals and certainly not predators of humans. On the rare occasions when herbivores do make an appearance, it is typically as comic relief as opposed to animist horror.

While it's fun to laugh at Scotland's sinister weresheep and America's equally nefarious weredonkeys (both actual legends), it's hard to deny the power of the elephant gods sprinkled through Indian myth or the awesome power of the Minotaur and his Olympian father. A bull man who eats raw meat is a scary notion, and the same is true of a humanoid stag taking retribution on all who have hunted his kind. These and other, similar ideas are quite plausible in the World of Darkness, and they can be effective images if they are handled with care. Just be sure to give the weresheep a wide berth!

## Hyenas

Apart from the Bouda described elsewhere in this book, hyenas have a number of supernatural associations in African myth and legend. Hyenas have strong connections to the dead and the things that kill them, particularly intangibles such as starvation and disease. Hyenas are also associated with spellcasters of all types, which is addressed to some extent in the legendry of the Bouda. Taken together, hyenas represent the struggle between the civilizations of humanity and the wilderness that surrounds them.

Real hyenas are no mystical beasts, but they do have some impressive natural features. Their powerful jaws and rugged constitutions allow them to eat just about anything, and this trait made early humans wonder if hyenas weren't capable of warding off death. Some hyenas are also intensely social animals, forming clans of several dozen members, and they tend to come together whenever one of their kind is threatened. Hyenas are thus a metaphor for life and death as well as civilization and barbarism.



## Rodents and Other Small Mammals

We call them vermin, but rodents and their kin are some of the most interesting and misunderstood animals on the planet. Their mythology is similarly complex, and while we can't do it justice here, there are some ways to bring the mythology of rodents into tight focus during a **Werewolf** game.

### Bats

Not truly rodents at all (or even strongly related to them), bats have managed to gain an impressive amount of bad press during the last few centuries. Bats are strongly associated with vampires and other creatures of the night, and the existence of the vampire bat (one little mistake) doesn't help matters in this regard. Bats' bad rap aside, however, they are truly amazing little creatures. Most are insectivores, and thus strong allies to all who hate mosquitoes and the like. No bats are blind (indeed, many can see quite well, thank you very much!), at least not as a matter of course, and virtually all of them are content to conduct their business far from the prying eyes of humans. Somehow, despite all of this, bats manage to make it into local mythologies surprisingly often.

The mythological associations of bats vary considerably depending on where you encounter them. The Olmec people, for instance, considered bats servants of darkness, and this was certainly true of their god, Camazotz. However, they noted that the dark lord also ate insects, and thus protected the people from swarms and famine. He was, then, a dual-aspected deity, a servant of light and darkness in equal measure. In Europe (and most of Christendom) bats are seen as servants of darkness, and many demons and other fell beasts have bat-like features to a greater or lesser extent. A quick trip across the Urals, however, shows us that bats are considered to be symbols of good luck and happiness in China (no doubt because of their relationship with Fu-xing, the Chinese god of such), and back in the United States bats are considered symbols of death and rebirth by many Native American tribes. It would seem, then, that bats can be used to symbolize just about anything, and this is undoubtedly true in the World of Darkness to an even greater extent than it is in real life.

### Rabbits and Hares

Rabbits and hares have a longstanding tradition of being trickster archetypes and culture heroes, and this is especially true of the Native American traditions of the American Southeast. Here, the Great Hare Winabojo, or Missapos to the Ojibwa or Tavvots to the Ute, fills many of the same roles as Coyote in the American Southwest or Raven in the Pacific Northwest. We see similar roles for rabbits in European myth. Who can forget our friend Brer Rabbit, who managed to outwit the sly and cunning Brer Fox (though apparently not so sly and cunning that day), or the white rabbit that guided Alice through Wonderland?

The cleverness of rabbits and hares (not the same animal!) is a figment, of course, based more on their skittishness and leaping ability than any actual clever tricks on their part. Still, these are the consummate prey-spirits, and they are well regarded because they tend to escape their pursuers more often than not. While no one will likely be playing rabbit shapeshifters in the World of Darkness anytime soon, rabbits and hares remain interesting background characters worthy of consideration.

### Rats and Mice

Perhaps justly regarded as vermin and pests, rats and mice are sorely underestimated animals. They are one of the few wild species that has learned to thrive in humanity's cities, and rats in particular are far more intelligent than most people suspect them to be. In the World of Darkness, many rat themes are explored using the Beshilu (and bear in mind that the Plague King was not a rat-spirit), but their cultural associations go far beyond the vermin the Hosts represent. The Egyptians, for example, deified rats, painting them as the personification of both destruction and, oddly, wisdom (perhaps because they often choose the best foods to pilfer!), and the Egyptians are not alone; most cultures portray rats as both blessed and cursed animals, associated with good fortune and ill in equal measure.

The key to appreciating rats and mice, both in a literary sense and in real life, is to understand and appreciate the virtues they represent. They are opportunistic scavengers, and among the most adaptable mammals on the planet. No animal anticipates trouble, adapts to its environment and knows when to jump ship quite as a rat does, and if a Storyteller

incorporates this behavior into the rat-spirits in his game, they can serve a great indicator species when trouble is on the horizon. They are not the noblest of creatures by any means, but they certainly do have their virtues.

## Whales and Dolphins

Whales and dolphins are easy to dismiss in the World of Darkness, because of their decidedly friendly reputations, but these aquatic mammals actually have a lot to offer in an animist setting. These are intelligent, sophisticated creatures with strong ties to humans around the world, and the pervasiveness of whales and dolphins in the seafaring lore of both indigenous peoples and the modern world suggests that ignoring these mammals robs us of a valuable resource. For a **Werewolf** game in particular, their potential is staggering, as they represent the classic motif of a fearsome predator with a friendly face. Their use is not mandatory, of course, and it's easy to ignore them given their dependency on water, but there are some things the reader might consider before writing them off completely.

### Dolphins

Of all the mammals on Earth, few say “friendly!” as dolphins do. They are the poster children of conservation movements, and the very soul of bleeding-heart liberalism. While it's true that many whales are gentle creatures, the same is not true of dolphins. As many are discovering in recent years, dolphins are in fact lusty creatures with a great propensity for violence, and they are the only complex species on Earth (apart from humans, naturally) that can legitimately be said to wage war upon itself. While viewing dolphins through the lens of New Age mysticism may be tempting, and thus excising them from your game, as the Storyteller, you should consider giving them a darker cast — one informed by the animal that is instead of the ideal the animal represents — and see how your players react.

Social tendencies aside, it is worth remembering that dolphins are, first and foremost, predators. They use extremely sophisticated pack tactics to hunt for food, to defend themselves against predators and to destroy others of their own kind. Dolphins are (usually) unquestionably friendly toward humans, and do very well in captivity, but that does not change dolphins' essential nature, and, with a bit of care, this can be used effectively when designing scenarios with an aquatic theme.

### Orcas

Orcas are huge, immensely powerful dolphins; in contrast with their smaller kin, people seem to have no trouble whatsoever believing they are dangerous predators. They also seem to have a somewhat stronger mythic associations than dolphins do, particularly in the Pacific Northwest; in the mythology of the region, shamans and wise men often take the form of orcas, and the same holds true of gods and goddesses who travel through the sea (e.g., Qanekelak, who appears both as an orca/human hybrid and as a normal human, and is the ancestor of the Killer Whale clan).

Orcas also have strong associations with wolves, and this, in conjunction with their strong pack behavior, gives them the moniker “wolves of the sea.” In at least one example, the Eskimo legend of Akhlut, an orca actually takes the form of a wolf and ravages the countryside, after which he transforms into an orca once again and returns to the sea.

## Birds

Birds fill a huge number of roles in myths and legends, largely because birds are such an incredibly diverse group of animals. They are symbols of levity and death and rulership alike, and they work their way into a surprising number of shapeshifting stories.

### Corvids

Easily the darkest avians in most myths, crows and ravens are known as harbingers of change and symbols of death. The mythology of the raven in particular is extremely diverse, ranging from the Tengu of Asia to Bran and the Morrigan of Europe to the trickster archetype in Native America. The cultural associations of the bird are similarly diverse: the Japanese view the raven as a tutor of warriors, the Chinese as a miscreant, the Scandinavians as an oracle and messenger of death and Native Americans as a culture hero.

While ravens are certainly the most popular corvids in mythological tales, they are not the only ones. Crows frequently appear in Native American mythology as trickster-spirits, and count among their number Chulyen of the Tanaina, Aqonidzaba of the Paviotso, Gaqga of the Seneca and Keninqas of the Nootka. Ravens are also recognized as instruments of judgment in many European myths, and play a role as minor Tengu in Japanese tales.

## Raptors

Raptors have a powerful role in many mythologies, and are often associated with the concepts of rulership and piety. The Egyptians worshipped falcons in the form of Ra and Horus Re, and eagles and owls found their way into Greek mythology as symbols of Zeus and Athena, respectively. Eagle knights warred with their jaguar rivals during the height of Aztec society, and Eagle found his way into Native American mythology as the war spirit Wambli and the thunderbird Tinmiukpuk. Eagles are also prominent in some culture hero myths, among them the Mohave myth of Mastamho (who turns into an eagle during the course of the tale).

While raptors are not noted for their great cleverness, as crows and ravens are, raptors make up for this lack with their tremendous power. They are, in many ways, the cats of the air, and they are consummate hunters. Small wonder, then, that raptor-spirits in the World of Darkness are such predatory beasts. They are righteousness and fury given wings to fly and talons to rend, and woe betide any who stand in their way.

## Cranes

Cranes have powerful associations in myth and legend, and many of these involve shapeshifting of some sort. In Asia, cranes are symbols of longevity and good fortune, and in one Japanese creation myth a hero's soul is said to take the shape of a crane once he dies. In Greece, cranes are associated with Apollo, the sun god, and he occasionally took the form of a crane when visiting the mortal world. Crane associations are not universally positive, however; both Greek and Celtic myth have stories of people who were transformed into cranes as part of a curse, and Irish myth speaks of the cranes of death — four enchanted sons of a woman known as the Hag of the Temple.

## Hérons

Hérons are quite popular in many mythologies, particularly those of Ireland, Egypt and Hawai'i. In Celtic mythology, the heron has strong associations with the sea, and the sea god Manannon-Maclair

takes the bird's form when he wants to sneak around. In Egypt, the bird's role is much more sophisticated: here, the heron is the inspiration for the Benu bird, an avian deity having strong associations with Atum, Re and Osiris. As an aspect of Atum, the heron's cry heralded the dawn of creation, while in the case of Re, the bird represented the god's *ba* (one of the souls in Egyptian mythology). The associations with Osiris are weaker, but associations with the bird are inevitable given the god's tale of death and rebirth.

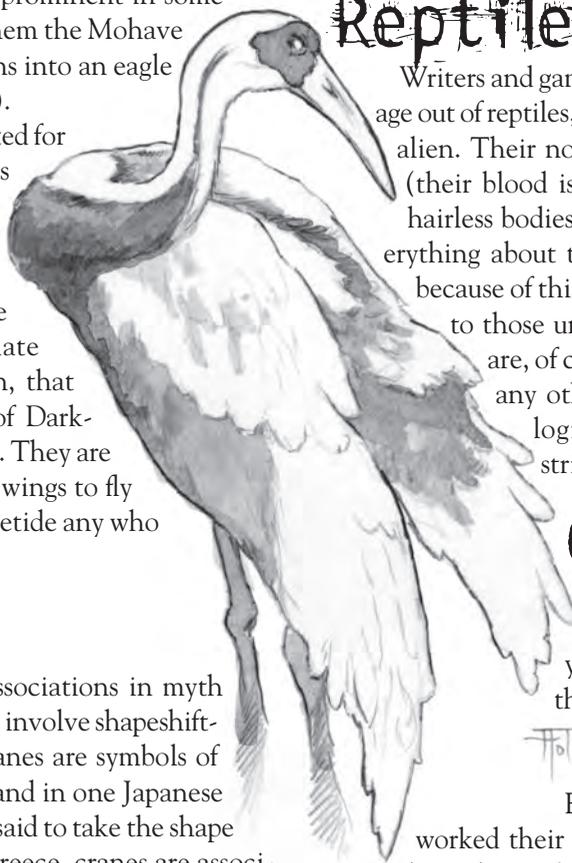
## Reptiles

Writers and gamers alike can get a lot of mileage out of reptiles, simply because they're so darn alien. Their not-quite-warm-blooded nature (their blood is in fact far from cold), their hairless bodies, their need to lay eggs — everything about them says “not human,” and, because of this, they can be very frightening to those unfamiliar with them. Reptiles are, of course, no more nefarious than any other animal, but their mythological implications are highly striking, regardless.

## Crocodylians

When it comes to ancient and terrifying reptiles, you can't ask for much more than crocodylians. These beasts got their start in mythology with Sobek, the ancient Egyptian crocodile god, and worked their way into various shapeshifter legends in Africa and India. The crocodylian mythology is fairly low-key compared to that of other animals, which seems to suit crocodiles fine. They are, after all, fairly laid-back hunters, and it's only fair that their mythology reflect that.

The main thing to remember about crocodiles and their kin, both in the real world and in the World of Darkness, is that they are full of surprises. Some of these are benign: they are surprisingly good parents, for example, and they have a rather unusual relationship with a number of wading birds (who wander into crocs' mouths to clean out excess meat and parasites, and get a free meal in the bargain). Crocodiles are also very social creatures, though you would never know it by all their basking in the sun. But some surprises



are rather scary: a crocodile can outrun a full-grown man, for instance, and a crocodile's jaw strength is truly staggering. Players had best be warned, then, that a croc's danger comes from its subtlety, and not necessarily from its teeth.

## Lizards

Compared to snakes, lizards have a pretty good reputation in Western society (or at least, their reputation isn't awful). They are quirky little predators with curious regenerative properties, and while they've starred in far more than their fair share of bad movies, they do not seem to elicit the same abject terror from people that snakes do. This is due in large part to the fact that lizards walk on legs as mammals do, and lack the penchant for flicking their tongues so prevalent in snakes. Lizards are also, by and large, much less threatening, but that doesn't mean they have nothing to offer the typical Storyteller.

The lizard's role in mythology seems to vary quite a bit with the lizard at hand. Chameleons, for example, are said by many West African tribes to steal fire from the sun, and the regenerative properties of many lizards make them symbols of rejuvenation, death and rebirth. In Australian Aboriginal myth, the lizard god Mangar-kunjer-kunja created humans, and in other myths the lizard men known as the Wati-kutjara taught shamans how to use and communicate with the Dreamtime. The lizard folk motif is fairly common in Native American myths as well, particularly in the case of the Sheti, or Snake-Brothers, as described by the Hopi.

## Snakes

Many people fear snakes, because snakes have a somewhat fearsome appearance and rather unusual behavior patterns. This fear is hardly justified, however, as snakes tend to be extremely shy animals that do their best to mind their own business — business that, on balance, helps humans far more often than it harms them. Ordinary snakes are completely harmless to humans, and even poisonous snakes will only use their venom if it's absolutely necessary to do so — that is, only in self-defense. Those who respect snakes and do their best to avoid them have nothing to fear from the animals.

Happily, snake myth tends to emphasize the positive traits more than the negative ones. Snakes have managed to find their way into the shapeshifting Naga myths of India, and many Native American cultures

paint them as symbols of fertility and bringers of rain (hence the Snake Dance practiced by many Native American traditions). The Olmec cultures revered the figure of Quetzalcoatl, the life-bringer, and the aboriginal peoples of Australia worship a similar figure in the form of the Rainbow Serpent. The renewal motif is also found in the Ourorboros, the figure of the snake consuming its own tail. Of course, snakes don't always come out ahead in the mythology game; while Egyptians worshipped the figure of Sobek, the snake god, they rightly feared Apep, the destroyer of all things. Jormangund, the Midgard serpent of Norse fame, is also a destroyer figure, and we all know about the serpent in the Garden of Eden.

## Fish

If people think reptiles are alien, fish are utterly beyond the pale. Most people can't even begin to relate to fish, but they remain interesting creatures with a great deal to offer the curious Storyteller (and not just as food).

## Sharks

There is no question that sharks are poorly understood, unfairly vilified and often completely innocuous beasts, but, at the same time, there is no denying the fact that they are quite possibly nature's perfect predators. Everything about them is dedicated to finding and killing their prey, and humans tend to respond to that on a very primal, elemental level. The only hitch with sharks, of course, is the fact that they are primarily limited to areas with a fair amount of seawater (bull sharks notwithstanding); this means they're of little use in the typical World of Darkness game — at least, until you start getting creative. There is nothing that says, for example, that a shark-spirit cannot take to the air, and they might in fact be "swimming" around a fish market miles from shore. If this is the case, Uratha who visit the docks one night might find themselves in for a nasty surprise.

Sharks and shark shapeshifters are common in the mythologies of Pacific islanders, particularly those of Hawai'i. Examples include the trickster god Kane'apua, Pele's brother Kamohoali'i, the human-turned-goddess Ka'ahupahau, tribal gods such as Kaholia Kane and Kua and the soul-eater Dakuwanga. Most such gods could appear as either sharks or men, and several began their lives as human beings before being transformed into shark gods.



## Other Fish

While it's true that most fish do not figure into human transformation tales, fish do figure into a number of unusual myths in one fashion or another. Classic examples are mermaids, sirens and their kin, as well as other sorts of humans who have acclimated to an aquatic existence. They find their way into horror stories as well, and are particularly well known as antagonists in the stories of H. P. Lovecraft; his aquatic antagonists are based in large part on the biblical figure of Dagon, who was himself half man and half fish.

Fish themselves are simple yet sophisticated creatures, having a number of physical characteristics that make them incredibly well adapted for life underwater. Some are obvious, such as gills and fins, but some are less so; of particular note is the fish's lateral line system, which can be used to detect the exact position of any moving object within the fish's general vicinity. The animist take on such a feature is unclear, but it does suggest some intriguing possibilities.

## Invertebrates

Wrongly maligned and horribly misunderstood, the invertebrates of the world are filled with staggering amounts of potential for a game of animist horror. In the World of Darkness in particular, invertebrates serve as wonderful inspiration for Hosts, predatory spirits in general, "background" spirits that form the basis of the animist food chain and even as malevolent (or perhaps not) beings of great power. It should come as no surprise, then, to learn that these creatures have a greater diversity of roles in the world's myths and legends than any other.

## Arachnids

When people hear the term "arachnid," they naturally think of spiders, but this group also includes scorpions, ticks and a number of other creatures. The legendry surrounding these creatures varies greatly from one group to another.

## Scorpions

Scorpions receive very little attention in the modern world, due to the fact that they are not particularly common in many Western societies (the southwestern United States being a notable exception). Scorpions are, however, very prevalent in the legendry of the ancient world, and for good reason; scorpions are powerful predators, with vicious claws and a debilitating poison that, in some cases, can be fatal to humans (this is rare, however; most scorpions are no more dangerous in this regard than honeybees). The spiritual counterparts of scorpions in the World of Darkness are similarly equipped, and they are very aggressive little spirits.

Scorpions in myth have fairly complex treatments, ranging from the half-human scorpion men of Babylon (who were children of Tiamat, no less) to the ancient Egyptian gods Meretsegar and Serket (also called Selket or Serqet), both of whom were guardian spirits. The Mayans recognized the scorpion's power in the form of Ekchuah, the patron of warriors and merchants, and in China the scorpion was known as one of the five venomous animals (along with toads, centipedes, snakes and spiders). Despite great power, then, the scorpion is typically recognized for its abilities as a guardian. If the Storyteller wishes, this might also be true in the Shadow Realm.

## Spiders

As with snakes, spiders are often burdened with an awful reputation that they, for the most part, do not deserve. They are considered vermin of the worst sort even by otherwise open-minded people, and the irrational fear spiders inspire is the source of many a tall tale and horror story. It is perhaps surprising, then, to find that the mythological spider is neither frightening nor unkind. Spider myths tend to focus on their role as builders and creators, and take inspiration from the spider's impressive webs and pest control rather than the animal's fearsome appearance.

The archetypical spider legend, and certainly the one that is most familiar, is that of Anansi, the popular spider god of Ashanti myth. He is a trickster figure, not unlike the figures of Raven and Coyote in Native American myths, and represents the very essence of the folk culture hero. He is said to be responsible for singing the stars and the planets and the animals and the plants into creation, and his trickery is such that he can baffle the Devil himself. Storytellers can be forgiven if they feel that Anansi's lore is a bit too

positive and uplifting for the World of Darkness, but, nevertheless, he offers a fine counterpoint to the ruthless predatory themes embodied in the Azlu (which are like unto spiders, but not spider-spirits in origin). The spider motifs of building and creation are worthy of exploration, and not all things arachnid need be tied to the Hosts.

## Centipedes

To an even greater extent than spiders, scorpions and other arthropods, centipedes are consummate predators. They are venomous, quick as lightning and incredibly aggressive, and one can hardly help but feel a quiver of fear when seeing a centipede in action. It is not a question of whether or not the centipede can harm us, really; their venom is rarely harmful to humans, and never to the same extent as comparable spider or scorpion venoms. Rather, the fear centipedes engender is tied to their innate quickness, and the feeling that nothing on Earth should move that fast.

Given their unnerving physical characteristics and their aggressive instincts, it is no wonder that centipedes find their way into many of the world's myths, particularly those of Japan. In these legends, centipedes are giant monsters that ravaged the countryside, and they are invariably slain by the tales' heroes. Their role is not always negative, however; the Egyptians worshipped the centipede as a charm against snakebites, and the goddess Sepa was patron of both the animal and its associated charms.

## Insects

Easily the most familiar of the invertebrates, insects have a great deal to offer in an animist setting. Sometimes they are background spirits, toiling away while the larger, stronger spirits take center stage. Sometimes invertebrates *are* those stronger spirits, interfering in the affairs of humans and causing no end of trouble for a story's heroes. And sometimes, on rare occasions, invertebrates are more benign spirits, dispensing wisdom and advice to help the heroes in their trials. All of these possibilities are viable insect concepts in the World of Darkness.

## Ants

Ants are, first and foremost, builders. They build nests, work together to feed and care for their queen and her offspring and use strength of numbers to overwhelm even the largest of opponents. Ants communicate through the use of pheromones, and



are capable of surprisingly sophisticated behavior despite the fact that they have no real intelligence to speak of. This behavior might manifest as aggressive movements over a large area, hive migration and even symbiotic behavior with other organisms. Ants also serve a number of roles in the world's mythologies: they are considered to be the messengers of the gods in parts of Africa, and the Hopi identify ants as the world's first animals. If this is true, how might it be reflected in the World of Darkness?

### Cockroaches

Cockroaches have a well-deserved reputation in modern societies as vermin of the worst sort, and their representation in most of the world's mythologies is fairly slim. This is not to say, however, that the creature is of no value in the World of Darkness. Indeed, the adaptability of the cockroach is its most impressive feature, and when this is applied to a spirit, the possibilities are both intriguing and frightening. Cockroaches are also an ideal choice for Storytellers wanting to develop a new Host species, and the image of evildoers dissolving into a swarm of cockroaches is a popular one in modern cinema.

### Crickets and Grasshoppers

While not as creepy as insects such as flies and cockroaches, grasshoppers are reviled due to their role as agricultural pests. This is particularly true of the species that periodically form nomadic swarms (which are more commonly known as locusts). These pests are responsible for extensive crop damage every season, and they are the bane of farmers around the world. In the World of Darkness, the idea of locust Hosts has been presented, and certainly swarms of insect-spirits ravage the spirit wilds. As in the physical world, these swarms cause considerable damage; their

presence can, in fact, lead to the creation of blights if the locust numbers are left unchecked.

Given the grasshopper's horrid reputation, it might be surprising to learn that crickets fare quite a bit better in the public mind. Their role in Chinese culture is particularly strong, as they are regarded as symbols of good fortune. The Chinese also fancy the cricket's song, to the point where nobles periodically captured crickets and held them in tiny cages so that the singing insects would always be near. While there is nothing terribly nefarious about this role, an innovative Storyteller might incorporate it into her games in any number of ways: a happiness-spirit might take the form of a cricket, for instance, and a singing cricket might attract all sorts of happiness-spirits (which, while not malevolent, might certainly be troublesome).

### Mantids

Mantids — better known by their common name of “praying mantis” — are a highly successful insect group with a prominent role in mythology and folklore. They are easily recognized by their triangular heads and curiously folded forelimbs, and are known in some circles for the fact that the female in many species will eat the male after copulating. Mantids thus have a well-deserved reputation as predators, and their predatory influences carry over into the spirit wilds. Interestingly, mantids have proven to be just as successful in mythology as they are in life. The San bushmen of the Kalahari revere Kaggen, an ancient god credited with the creation of the world, and embrace him as a trickster-spirit and culture hero. Arab and Turkish cultures also revered the mantis, since these cultures believed the insects reliably pointed the way toward Mecca.

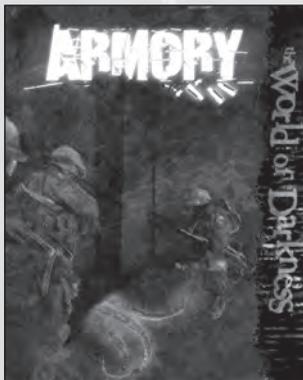


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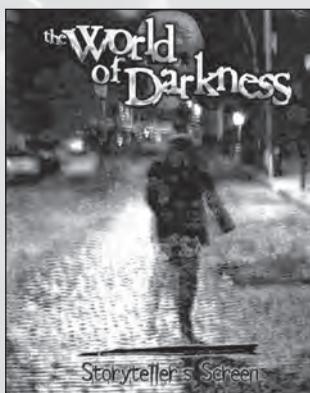
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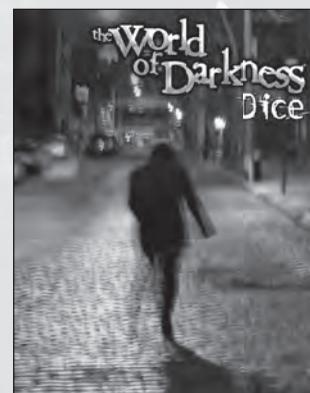
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Who shall  
conceive the  
**HORRORS**  
of my secret toil as I  
dabbled among the  
unhallowed damp of  
the grave or tortured  
the living animal  
to animate the  
lifeless clay?

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