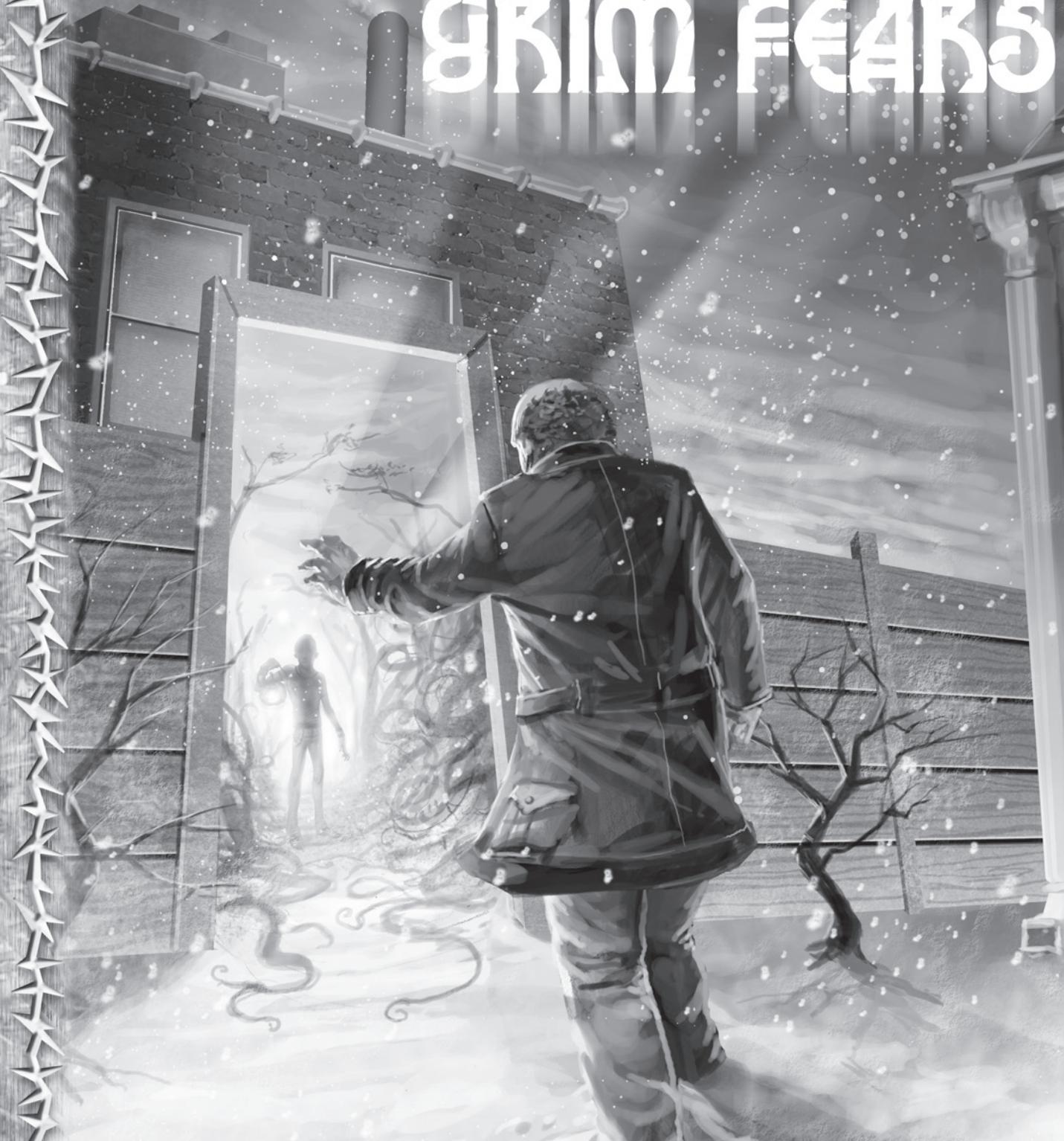


NIGHT HORRORS GRIM FEARS™



CHANGELING
THE LOST™

NIGHT HORRORS GRIM FEARS™



*By Stephen DiPesa, Matthew McFarland, John Newman, Alex Scokel,
Geoff Skellams, Ethan Skemp and Charles Wendig*

HAPPY ENDING

From the upstairs window, he could see the light, and it puzzled him.

The house was quiet. The dogs were snoring gently at his feet. The light was off in his office, and the computer monitor had changed to the wavy patterns of the screen saver. He could see from the window that the yard was quiet and the snow was undisturbed. Some nights, deer would jump the fence and poke around the yard for food, but not tonight.

The archway in the yard was beautiful during the summer, covered in grape vines and leaves, but during the cold seasons it was an eyesore. Not that he much cared. He wasn't much of a gardener, and although he seldom wished to be rich, he did wish he could afford a landscaper on a permanent basis. Work in the yard was something he wanted to do, but couldn't seem to make time for. And if he was being honest, he'd admit that he'd lost some of his passion for the great outdoors over the years.

But this summer might be different. His daughter was old enough to like playing outside, so maybe he could garden and she could romp with the dogs?

The light flickered, and shook him out of his reverie. It was only visible through the archway, that was the strange thing. The wooden archway — more of a square frame, really — stood near the end of the yard, probably 20 feet from his property line and the decaying rail fence that marked it. But if he moved his head a few feet in either direction, looking at the same part of the yard but around the archway, he couldn't see it anymore. The light was orange-yellow, like a fire, but what would be burning in the dead of winter?

He stood up and stretched. He was done working for the night. He was stuck, anyway — the characters in his novel weren't doing what he wanted them to do. He'd try again tomorrow. He opened the door and his dogs stirred, and then looked up expectantly. He reassured them that they would, in fact, be fed tonight, and shooed them downstairs to the kitchen.

Dog food clattered into bowls. The dogs sat there, looking up at him, drool pouring from their jowls. "Free," he said, and they started in, frantically gulping their food. He reached down into each bowl, moving the kibble around. Neither dog cared, but it was important to make sure it stayed that way, so that his daughter wouldn't get snapped at if she tried to move the bowls while the dogs ate.

He looked out the kitchen window, through the archway, and sure enough, the light was still there. "Will-o-the-wisp," he muttered, and smiled, because of course the notion was absurd. He remembered the books he'd read about faeries, ghosts and other legends, and the story of the faerie fire, the will-o-the-wisp, and the admonition that came with it — do not follow the light.

He put the dogs in their crates, and they flopped down, settling in for the night. He looked in on his wife and daughter, curled up together in the master bedroom. His daughter had heard

something some months back that had terrified her, and hadn't wanted to sleep in her own room since then. He didn't mind. Yes, it meant that intimacy of a more adult nature had to wait until she was at Nana's house, but that was livable. He'd heard his daughter scream in fear, and had held her close, wishing he could give her the words to explain what she had seen or dreamed that had frightened her so. Even now, as the trickle of words had become a flood of sentences, she hadn't been able to tell him or his wife what was wrong. But she wouldn't go into that room after dark.

He gathered up the cups and plates from dinner, musing that his mother would never have allowed him to eat every meal in front of the TV. As he put the dishes in the sink, he saw the light again, and again the notion occurred to him that it might be a faerie light, an unquiet spirit leading unwary souls into peril.

But what peril, anyway? There were no bogs or cliffs or wild beasts in the suburbs. He laced up his boots and pulled on his coat, figuring that it was a light from the nearby church, somehow positioned so he couldn't see it from any other angle. He debated going to get his gun, but decided against it. It might wake his wife and child, after all. Besides, he already had his boots on.

He trudged out into the snow, and was surprised to find that it came up to his calf in some places. He'd have to plow the driveway tomorrow.

He walked to the archway and looked through, and could not understand what he saw. Through the archway, he saw snow-covered bushes, brambles, and a man carrying a lantern walking between them. But on either side of the archway, all he saw was his yard. He took a step back, ready to run, but then stopped. There had to be a reason for this. There had to be something he wasn't thinking of. The man looked real enough, and so he stepped through the archway and called out. "Hey!"

The man turned. He was old, wrinkled and ugly, with an upturned nose and gnarled, curved ears. He carried a lantern, an old oil-burning thing, but it blazed with a light that seemed too bright for it. "Who are you?" the man rasped.

"Uh, you're in my yard," he said. "So who are you?"

The man with the lantern looked around, and then looked over the man's shoulder through the archway. "Oh, shit. Sorry about that. Name's Jack."

"Sure it is." This has to be some kind of prank, he thought. The bushes were real enough, though. Covered in snow, but still with visible, vicious-looking thorns.

Jack lowered the lantern, and the man could see that Jack's chest was sunken, almost concave. "Tell you what, buddy," he said. "You should turn and walk right back through that gateway. Go back to your wife, and forget you saw me."

The man wished he'd brought his gun after all. He wasn't afraid of an old man with a light, but he suddenly had the feeling he was far, far out of his depth. "Like I said, this is my house. So, if you don't mind, I'd like it if you'd be the one to turn and walk away, Jack."

Jack shook his head. "You don't want me to do that. Besides, do you even see your yard behind me?"

The man looked, but all he saw was the brambles, as far as he could see under the moonlight. No fence, no church, no streetlights...no forest. What the hell? "This is..."

"I told you, walk away. I'm not really on your property, and by the time you get back to your house, you won't see my light anymore." Jack looked annoyed, the man realized. Or frustrated. As though something was happening out of his control, something he didn't like. "But you should go."

There was a rush of wings and a blast of freezing wind, and the man was gone. And Jack 'o the Lantern, because no one was watching, allowed himself to shed a single tear. And then he walked on.



"HEY!"

An hour later, the door to the bedroom opened. A figure stepped into the room, pulled off a pair of jeans, a sweatshirt, a pair of damp socks, a pair of block boxer shorts, and a pair of glasses. He put on a t-shirt and a pair of pajama bottoms and crawled into bed alongside a drowsy woman and a three-year-old girl.

The girl woke up with the start and made a whining noise, afraid.

"It's just Daddy, honey. Go back to sleep," whispered the woman.

"That's not Daddy," said the girl.

The other figure in the bed said nothing, but simply turned over and lay still until morning.

Months passed. The snow melted away and returned several times. The basement of the house took on water, and then dried out again. The dishwasher broke and was repaired. The little girl started sleeping in her own room again, because she felt, though she could not explain why, that whatever she'd sensed that horrible night had followed her to her parents' room. And she gradually came to call the figure that had come into the room that wintry night "Daddy," though she never really believed it.

She was three, going on four, and so she played games with emotions and words and sounds. She made up songs about her mother and "Daddy." She'd tell her mother that she didn't love her, that she wanted to go stay with Nana, that she wanted her doggies to die so that she could get a new puppy. She didn't understand these phrases, not completely, but she knew that they made Mama talk to her in that serious, sad voice, and that voice gave her a feeling that she couldn't explain, a feeling that she loved and feared at the same time. It was a feeling that things were real.

When she was with "Daddy," she never got that feeling. She had memories of her Daddy singing to her, songs about stars and pigs and fish, songs about oceans and pies and other things that she couldn't place. But after "Daddy" had come into that room, he didn't sing anymore. He didn't whistle or hum, either, or even listen to music in the car. He'd read stories, but he didn't do the strange lilt of Jake the Irish Seagull or the deep rumble of the Muffin-Munching Dragon anymore. Everything was in the same voice, like Daddy's but not, and the girl found herself accepting this. Daddy had gone away. This "Daddy" looked like him and wore his clothes, but was different in so many ways.

The first daffodils poked through the ground on April the first, not that the girl understood dates or months yet. She knew, though, that those plants hadn't been there before, and she ran over to see them. They were near the big wooden square in the backyard, and the dogs were rolling on the ground, chasing either other and snapping at each other's necks. Mama was by the car, taking groceries out. "Daddy" was still at work.

She touched the slender green shoots, yellowing at the top where the flowers would appear in a few weeks, and she heard something from the wooden square. She heard a song, one that she knew, and she said "Daddy."

Her mother called for her, and she ran to her, crying that Daddy was home. Mama told her Daddy was at work, and carried her inside and made her a cup of hot chocolate.

But out in the yard, the man sat on the ground just inside the wooden archway and wept. He had thought of nothing but his daughter for so long, and he had thought that he'd never see her again. When he escaped, he thought that surely she'd have grown up and forgotten him, that his wife might have remarried, that he would find that cursed archway and someone else would be living in his house. But he looked out and saw her, and he started to sing, because it was a song that he'd used to lead himself back through the thorns to his home. And his little girl was still little, the dogs were still romping in the yard, his wife was still lovely.

But if "Daddy" would be home soon, that meant, somehow, he'd never left. And so he couldn't leave the archway just yet.

He waited for hours by the archway, staring out between the posts and into his own yard. He waited under the grape vines — thorny and thick on this side of the archway — because he was afraid that someone would see him, like he had seen Jack a lifetime ago. He waited there, too, because sunlight made his skin itch. And he sang quietly to himself, because his voice was the only thing about him that hadn't changed.

"You made it," said a voice behind him. He pulled himself out of the vines and crouched, ready to run, ready to vanish into shadow and leave no footprints. But it was Jack o' the Lantern that stood before him, not the creature that had stolen him and put him in a cage.

"You."

"*You*"

"Yeah, me. You made it back. That's good." The man tensed himself, but Jack shook his head. "Oh, don't. It wasn't my fault, and you know it. You should have left like I told you."

"What are you doing back here, anyway?" The man stepped back away from the archway, and motioned for Jack to do the same.

"Same thing I was doing that night. Figured I might find it now that the snow's gone."

"Find what?"

"What I was looking for."

"Which was?"

Jack glanced upwards, and then stepped close to the man. "Last time you wouldn't take my word for something, you wound up in servitude. So take my word for it — you don't want to know."

The man nodded. "Fair enough, Jack. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm waiting for myself to come home."

"Don't even say that," said Jack. "You're not him. He's not you. You need to remember who you are and what you were, and keep that separate."

"I know, I was just—"

"I know you like words. That's something that you and that thing pretending to be you have in common. But it doesn't get nuance like you do. It doesn't get humor. And it doesn't care about giving things their right names like you do."

The man turned back to him. "What do you know about it?"

Jack shrugged. "I felt bad about what happened to you. When that thing showed up, I thought about killing it, but I didn't know how long you'd be gone or if you'd ever get back, so I figured I'd at least make sure it wasn't going to hurt your kid."

"My...kid." The man slumped. "How do I go back? Looking like this, I mean?"

Jack sized him up. "You actually look pretty similar, all things considered. But it doesn't matter. They'll see you as you were, more or less. Maybe a little paler, sure, but you were pretty white to begin with. You get rid of that thing, and you'll be fine. It's been doing your job — not as well as you probably would, and there'll be some awkward moments at work, but you'll get through. You're a good bullshitter." He smiled, and the man gave a rueful chuckle.

"So what do I do about this thing?"

"Like I said." Jack sniffed the air. It wasn't around here after all, damn it. He'd need to move on — maybe he'd take a bus south or something. "Get rid of it."

"GET RID OF IT"

"Right," said the man. He turned back to the archway, and then shut his eyes. "I owe you, don't I?"

Jack smirked. "Yeah. You do."

"What?"

"Get rid of that thing. I'll be back later on." Jack walked off, and the man went back to waiting.

When darkness fell, the thing wasn't home yet. The nights were still early and cold, and the moon illuminated the archway just as it had on that wintry night. The car pulled in, and the figure got out. It stopped as it reached the door. Something was wrong.

The door opened, and the man stood there, holding a pistol.

"Is that mine?" asked the figure.

"Mine, you son of a bitch," said the man. "My gun. My house. My wife. My daughter."

"Right. Yours." It looked around, helplessly. The man was standing too far back for it to attack and disarm him, but if it tried to run, it knew the man would shoot him. "Now what?"

"Let's take a short walk," said the man. "Down into the yard."

They walked to the archway, and realization dawned on the figure. "Look," it said. "We could figure something out. Think what we could accomplish if there are two of us! A perfect alibi for whatever we wanted to do. We could take turns—"

"No chance."

"But this wasn't my fault," it said. Its voice broke, and the man wondered if it was afraid. Could it feel fear? It had to pretend to have feelings, at least. Did it know the difference? "I was made to be you, I didn't know any different."



"You're lying," said the man. "Stop here." They stopped in front of the archway.

"They'll hear the shot. Your wife and daughter will hear, and—"

"No, they won't. They're asleep." The man smiled. "I sang to them, from down in the basement, and let my voice carry up the vents. They're asleep, and they won't hear a thing until I wake them."

"Please," it said again, and started to turn. "They're my family, too."



*"YOU'RE
LYING"*

The man pulled the trigger. The figure's forehead burst outward, a spatter of blood flying through the archway. It collapsed forward, decaying into a mass of feathers, gravel and wax. The man put the gun into his jacket pocket, and grabbed the figure's clothes and remains. He threw them into the archway, and then picked up the chainsaw he'd set there earlier.

He cut through the archway on both sides, and watched it crash to the ground. The thorns disappeared, the gateway broken. Tomorrow he'd have a

mess to clean up, and he'd have to explain this to his wife somehow. He was still considering telling her the truth, but Jack had warned him about that. "Remember, there's things you're better off not knowing," he'd said, and the man agreed.

He put the chainsaw back in the garage, and waited on the porch for a half hour. No police cars arrived. His neighbors were under the same spell as his family, and the land passels were big enough that no one else would have heard. He went back inside and took off his shoes, and went to his living room.

His dogs roused themselves and whined a bit, but he petted them and they calmed. He wondered if the figure had smelled like him, or if the dogs had been skittish around it.

His daughter and his wife were still on the couch, fast asleep from his song. He sat down next to them, and pulled them close. His daughter stirred. "Daddy," she said. "Sing me the star song."

"OK, honey," he said, and started to sing. The girl cuddled up close and listened, glad that her Daddy was finally home.

When he'd finished the song, the man went outside. Jack o' the Lantern was sitting on his porch, sipping something from a wooden cup. "It's gone?"

"Yeah," said the man. "So what do I owe you?"

"Well," said Jack, staring into his cup, "I watched over your family for three months. I made sure that thing didn't lose your job for you, and I had to smooth over a couple of rough moments with your mom, but nothing too serious. I figure, with interest, you owe me...two seasons."

The man turned to him slowly. "Two seasons of what?"

Jack picked up his lantern. "Two seasons of work. Two seasons poking around in the dark. Two seasons singing to distract people so I can sneak in. Two seasons of whatever I want."

The man gestured to the house. "But I just got back."

"Yeah."

"I have to support my family."

"I know. You'll have to figure something out."

"Suppose I refuse?"

Jack stood up, and held up the lantern. The ember inside flared bright red, and Jack glared through the light at the man. "Suppose you do," he said.

And the man knew that he did owe Jack, and more, that it was an obligation that could destroy him if he failed to discharge it.

"You wanted to know," said Jack. "You stepped through the gateway, you didn't leave when I warned you. This is all on you. I watched your people, but I don't do anything for free. None of us do."

The man nodded. "I get it." Tears rolled down his cheeks, glistening in the moonlight. "I'll give you my summer, this year and next year," he said. "I'll figure something to tell my family." He could barely speak the words. He looked through the sliding glass door and saw his daughter shift on the couch. Had he really just been singing to her? A look in the glass, at the black of his eyes and the shadows that fell from his mouth, reminded him of what he was. He placed a hand on the glass. "I wanted this to end better."

"I WANTED THIS TO END BETTER"

Jack chuckled, and placed a hand on the man's shoulder. "Son, I've been around a long time, and let me tell you — this is a happy ending." He turned and started walking toward the road. "I'll see you on the summer solstice." The lantern flared again. "Be ready."

The man didn't turn, but merely watched the lantern's light faded in the glass door.

CREDITS

Written by: Stephen DiPesa, Matthew McFarland, John Newman, Alex Scokel, Geoff Skellams, Ethan Skemp and Charles Wendig

Developer: Ethan Skemp

Editor: Scribendi.com

Book Design: Aileen E. Miles, Jessica Mullins

Interior Art: Anna Borowiecka, Jeff Holt, Brian LeBlanc, Britt Martin, Peter Mohrbacher, Justin Norman, Jami Waggoner

Cover Art: Michel Koch

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NIGHT HORRORS GRIM FEARS

DANCERS IN THE DUSK

SWORDS AT DAWN



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NIGHT HORRORS GRIM FEARSTM

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INTRODUCTION

The sleep of reason produces monsters.
— FRANCISCO GOYA

The World of Darkness has all the same fairy tales as we do, and then some. Some children are raised on peculiar tales recorded in only a few books, passed on only within a haunted family, or whispered among children at recess when the teacher isn't listening. There's a certain strange edge to these stories — an edge that comes from their origin. Because some of these fairy tales are true.

The fairy tale and the horror story are actually very closely related. The concept of transgression drives both of them. In a fairy tale, a wicked ruler transgresses against his duties, and must be overthrown; in a horror story, man transgresses against "the natural order" and is quickly shown his place. In a fairy tale, the children who don't listen to good advice are doomed; in a horror story, the teenagers who have illicit sex or go into the basement are doomed. The two types of story share many common elements. No wonder, then, that they fuse so well together.

FAERIES IN THE WORLD OF DARKNESS

In the World of Darkness, there are many things that are fey, but "fae" has a particular meaning. The fae are the denizens of Faerie, also known as Arcadia, an otherworld far from the mortal realm. In between Faerie and the mortal world is something that changelings call the Hedge — a borderland of thorns and twisted vegetation, a labyrinth with millions of twisting paths and a few straight, paved roads where the Others ride.

From these places come the Fae — the almost demigod-like True Fae, the lesser and variegated Hedge-creatures called hobgoblins, and the abducted humans transformed by their time in Faerie, the changelings.

Night Horrors: Grim Fears is a collection of some of the most infamous and dangerous among the Fae of the World of Darkness. Many are living archetypes of some form or another. The fae are linked to many myths, and certain patterns emerge again and again — the damsel in distress, the wicked ogre, the demented mother figure, and so on. **Grim Fears** explores these archetypes as they may manifest in the World of Darkness, partly familiar and partly strange.

THEME AND MOOD

A consistent theme in fairy tales, particularly those dealing with the darker side showcased by the World of Darkness, is the question of adhering to or breaking social rules. If you stray from the path, you'll get into trouble. If you keep your word, you'll be protected. If you break your bargain, you'll be punished. Faeries are both the epitome of the trickster archetype and the ultimate contract lawyers — give a faerie your word and it'll hold you to it; trick it into giving its word and it cannot help but obey. As with many other horror stories, this implies a bit of a moral: in this case, "it's important to fulfill your obligations." And as with many other horror stories, these tales often focus on what happens when you violate the conventions established by the genre.

When dealing with the Fae, the mood is often capricious. A sense of black humor often pervades encounters with the Fae, be it their playful way of finding dark-hearted entertainment in the trials and tribulations of "poor fool mortals," or a kind of alien lack of understanding that would be comical if it weren't so dangerous. A form of irrationality saturates the beautiful, mad world of the faeries, and it would almost be amusing if it didn't turn from cheerful to cruel so abruptly.

GRIM FEARS FOR ALL

Although the antagonists found here are generally designed for use with **Changeling: The Lost**, several can be used even if you aren't familiar with that game line. Their powers are explained in self-contained fashion, and most of their Traits should be familiar.

The most consistent aspect of all things faerie is the power of the Mask, an illusion that disguises the Fae as more mundane creatures or objects. A huge fae cat might look like a puma, while an ax forged of glass and smoke seems to be an ordinary fire ax. Other fae, such as changelings, automatically see through the Mask. Everyone else will see and hear "what they expect" — a changeling looks like a human (though perhaps one in torn rags or a formal dress), for instance. Supernatural powers designed to see through

the illusion can penetrate the Mask by rolling the appropriate pool (such as Wits + Auspex for a vampire, or Wits + Composure for a werewolf in a form that grants heightened senses), contested reflexively by the target's Resolve + Wyrd. This roll invariably suffers a -3 penalty; it's possible to break the Mask, but not easy.

Most entities in this book have a Wyrd score, which is essentially used where another supernatural would use Blood Potency, Primal Urge, Gnosis or Azoth. Whenever a power requires someone to roll Wyrd, you may substitute the appropriate Trait; similarly, these creatures would roll Wyrd to resist a Gift normally resisted with Primal Urge, and so on. They also use a pool of Glamour to fuel their powers — fae energy that is often reaped from emotions or less savory sources. Other Traits should be largely self-explanatory.

It may be trickier to use the changelings portrayed here without access to *Changeling: The Lost*; their Contracts are quirky fae powers, not always easily intuited from their title. However, you generally won't go too wrong by assigning changelings appropriate powers of the sort you're used to. Physical Disciplines might make for a respectable Ogre, for instance, while someone described as an Elemental might make good use of elemental-themed Gifts. Changelings tend to be more oriented toward powers of manipulation and trickery, given to abilities that misdirect, disguise, bless and curse. If you approximate a power based on a fairy tale's inspiration, you probably won't be far wrong.

THE WICKED PROCESSION

Some of the creatures that have come from Faerie to hunt didn't do so of their own accord. **Argemone** used to be a beloved pet, until her master was slain and her orchard burned. Now this massive beast roams the mortal world and Hedge alike, venting animal frustrations on those unfortunate enough to stray into her sight.

Auntie Ally is a kindly, mothering changeling, ever willing to help out or play the caregiver. So reliant is she on that role, though, that she may be willing to stoop to dangerous means to ensure there's a need for her attentions.

At least one of the Others has managed to insinuate himself into human culture in a surprising arena: capitalism. The Free Market Dragon, **Baron Fairweather**, pursues a dream of riches and financial power with the obsession only the fae can possess. Some darker ambition no doubt lies buried beneath his draconic smile...

Some of the things of Faerie are cunning, cruel and, when they put their mind to it, adorable. The **Bunyip** is a creature that has figured out how to impersonate a helpless house pet in order to bring it closer to its favorite prey — children. The original legend is Australian, but these days a bunyip could be anywhere, nestling up to its next victim.

Some advisors raise up rulers; others cast them down. The Blind King, **Consus**, is one of the latter. He'll use every

trick at his disposal, from fae magic to underworld connections, to tear down anyone he sees as an unjust ruler. He's convinced the ends justify the means — which is perhaps the most dangerous form of blindness.

A true terror in draconic form, **Dzarûmazh** the Deathless poses a threat that can rip apart entire freeholds. The mighty Arcadian dragon seeks to create a pact where no other True Fae has succeeded — he wishes to swear an oath with Iron, removing his one potential weakness. Those who cross the path of the Conqueror Worm may learn, to their regret, that there are still dragons in the world, and they are monstrous indeed.

A modern-day Pied Piper, **DJ Hamlyn** throws the wildest and most talked-about parties; he adds something extra to the mix, though, infusing his riotous events with Glamour to reap a whirlwind of emotion. There's nothing quite like one of his parties; sometimes people don't come home afterwards. Ever.

Everett Flint has been marked by Faerie, and he rejects it as a blight. He's a fire-and-brimstone preacher, though it's questionable whether any Savior is respected in his burning heart. He riles up his congregations and sets them to work, closing down gateways between the mortal world and the roads to Faerie. He comes across as a pure straight-talker, but he's got more faces than most can count, and he'll talk out of whatever one he wants to get his way.

Those on the cusp of death may find themselves visited by **Fenghuang**, the Bird of Second Chances. The Faerie phoenix may save your life, curing you of whatever mortal wounds you've endured. But every fae blessing carries a cost. What sort of price is levied on a second chance at life itself?

People who crave more power could always use the assistance of the Clever Kingmaker, **Freddy Cloversmith**. Nobody knows where exactly cunning old Freddy came from, or what his true game is, but he can help get you into that position of power you've always dreamed of. Freddy can pull strings, you see. He's got contacts where you wouldn't think he could, including among social circles like those of the vampires. And the cost? Well, it's sure to be affordable.

Things go missing when **Gentleman John**'s in town — prized possessions, and women's hearts. The so-called Thisle Thief plies his trade every winter, stealing only things that really, truly would be missed. Not for him the banal, easily replaced target of mere money — Gentleman John wants the one-of-a-kind, from fabulously valuable art to a child's favored possession. What drives him to seduce and abandon women, to help himself to prized treasures? Simple desire, or something more fey? Included among Gentleman John's tricks is a Fighting Style available for social combat.

The fae have a deep interest in the concept of Fate. Some, like **Grandma Mara**, can apparently even read it as it stretches into the future. This wise old fortuneteller can offer insight into events yet to come, and even some assis-

tance with problems on the horizon. As usual, there might be a catch, but good advice might well be worth it.

Glamour stirs up emotion and heightens it. No wonder, then, that **Green-Eyed Gerta** is also called the Queen of Jealousy. She whirls like a tempest through society, upending relationships and raining venom on those who awaken her powerful sense of envy. She's one of the most influential Spring Queens in recent memory, but that power is held firm in a hand that trembles with madness.

There's not much of a line between fairy tale and urban legend. "Fae" can mean something like **The Hook**. Born of nightmare, antagonist of many a modern cautionary fable, the infamous hook-hand killer is not only real — it's immortal. It knows nothing of human kindness, only the madness of deep Faerie and the urge to kill.

An eternal wanderer, **Jack o' the Lantern** is cursed to walk down lonely roads until Judgment Day itself. He's seen a lot of things in that time, and some say he even tricked the Devil himself to end up in his current predicament. When the changeling who managed to outwit the Gentry themselves arrives in town, it's uncertain whether it's to light someone's way out of mortal peril, or to lure them right on in.

Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown under **Kumalo**'s gaze. The Kingslayer of the Veld was a gentle man once. Now he is the right hand of vengeance, a primal force dedicated to shattering thrones, breaking crowns and casting down entire Courts. And he has enough of a chance to succeed that no member of the Great Courts is happy to hear rumors of his arrival.

Liz Malloy isn't the dragon, the knight or the kindly dwarf — she's the damsel in distress. She does have a knack for finding trouble and spreading it around to those nearby. Some would consider it unlucky, but others suspect it's duplicitous. Sometimes the fair maiden isn't an object to be won — she's just bait.

Gatekeepers and sentinels have their place in a fairy tale, as does **Long-Tooth Tom**. To mortal eyes, he's a frightening homeless madman with a potential penchant for violence — the Lost see the full truth: he's a bridge troll for the modern age. Even changelings can be territorial, after all. Tom's bridge can provide a dangerous part of town with an old-school fae twist.

A femme fatale of the otherworldly persuasion, the **Marquise Tistresse** is a good friend to have. People who cross her wind up disappearing. Quite at home socializing with vampires or negotiating territory with werewolves, the Scarlet Widow pulls at a web of intrigue, arranging good things for her allies and an unwholesome fate for their rivals. But how far can you trust a creature with a Faerie heart and Faerie appetites?

Many Lost have heard of the living sphinx, **Maya Sharptongue** — she's a hero, they say, a trickster who has ferreted out freehold corruption and drawn True Fae into traps at great risk to herself. Maya keeps an ugly secret, though. She may be the most dangerous and successful traitor in all of changeling history, and she's not even done yet.

The eccentric old lady with a lot of cats who lives down the road isn't what she seems. **Old Middy** is one of the ancient crones of legend, a child-eater and sorceress like so many others of her kin. Her house may not walk on chicken legs, but her cats steal the breath from sleeping children, and her oven is large enough to bake quite the impressive meat pie.

When an abducted changeling's fetch is destroyed, it reverts to the inanimate material that was used to create it. But what if that material is reused to make another fetch? And when that fetch is destroyed, what if the material is used again? This is the eternal fate of **The Recurrent**: forged to replace a stolen changeling, destroyed, then remade. Growing more powerful with every incarnation, it's ready to break the cycle however it can.

Ever hear the story about the bogeyman who can be summoned to take someone away? It's true. If you know how to call **Skin and Bones**, he'll respond, and he'll ask you for a name. He'll do the same for anyone. And then he takes that name, and he goes off, and he puts that person in his sack, and he carries them away. Better hope nobody gives him your name.

When a trickster hobgoblin comes out of the Thorns, there's no telling who or what it'll set its sights on. Such is the case with the **Tikbalang**, a beast from Filipino legend that isn't so much bound by geography. It'll look like someone close to you, and it'll tell you something true about yourself — something you might not want to hear.

Wild Sam will never grow up. He's the eternal playmate, the Child King. He can make an enthusiastic and generous friend, or a spiteful and petty enemy. The trouble is that he might not hew to either. After all, the only thing more mercurial than one of the Fae is a fae child.

The tales of **djinn** and **ifrits** who will grant one's heart's desire — though with a twist — find a modern expression in the form of **Ybalashi**, the Artisan of Poisoned Desires. This bottled True Fae has the power to grant a person's wishes, and the cunning to interpret those wishes in ways that amuse her. Wherever her bottle-prison travels, chaos is sure to follow. But a wise changeling might be able to reap the singular goblin fruits grown in the bottle's inmost gardens, or even discover the key to removing this ifrit's menace to the rest of the world.

THE BEAST THAT HUNTS THE HEDGE: ARCEMONE

melancholic roar

Aliases: Pet

BACKGROUND

Getting lost in the wilderness comes with its own well-documented issues: starvation, exhaustion, exposure. One danger, though an admittedly rare one, is that a wayward hiker could get consumed by wild animals: a pack of hungry wolves, a grizzly bear, even a mountain lion with a taste for human meat.

Another danger, though, that's not documented, is that a poor soul lost in the woods (or the mountains, or the desert) may find himself hunted by something that is altogether bigger, stranger and smarter than any land-dwelling mammal on earth.

Maybe you hear a distant roar — and this roar is unearthly, a warbling howl you don't just hear with your ears; you hear it vibrating in the bone marrow. It spooks the birds: a flock of crows takes flight, an owl gets the hell out of Dodge. A whitetail deer comes crashing through the brush with only a rough grasp at grace. A cloud falls over the moon, and soon the ground starts to boom with what sounds like a low growl of thunder. But it isn't thunder, is it? And soon, on top of that booming rumble, you hear the sound of brush cracking...no, of whole trees snapping.

Maybe you see it before you die, snatched up in its jaws. Maybe you only see the braided leather collar and cord wrapped around its neck, a pink heart cut from punched metal dangling from it. Maybe you only see your lower half topple to the ground below, your entrails caught on a pine tree like gory Christmas tinsel.

It's rare that one finds oneself the prey of the monstrous Argemone, for she only hunts when she's hungry, and that's only a few times a year. But when she's hungry, oh boy is she hungry, and little can be done to stop her from filling her growling belly. She's a brutal, thundering creature. She doesn't understand mercy. Once, maybe she did. But not any longer.

MATTER OF PERSPECTIVE, MAYBE

Look at it from Argemone's perspective. This is the last real memory she has, and it's the one that replays in her primitive beast brain over and over again:

The garden was burning. All the beautiful fruit trees, aflame. The colorful birds above — the Blood Bitterns, the Black-Bellied Blue Cloaks, the Devil Fishers — fleeing their nests but finding nowhere to go. Whirling plumes of smoke spiraled toward the silver moon. The silken grass, blackening.

Then Argemone heard the noise: shouting. The retort of steel against steel. The report of a gunshot. Atop it all, her Master's voice — shrill, terrified, yet defiant.

Her tree-trunk legs carried her forward, the brush and tangle of the jungle falling easily beneath her massive feet. The river

that crossed the Faerie garden would be easy to cross for her, just a quick splashing, harrumphing gallop —

But the river, too, was on fire. How was that possible? Then Argemone saw: the waters were covered with some kind of slick, some oily residue that burned. Someone had poisoned the river.

Across the water, through the flames, she saw. Her Master, besieged. He was a demon with his two blades, pirouetting this way and feinting that way. It was for naught, though — he was handily outnumbered. Dozens of assailants — *ants*, really, just ugly little ants she'd love to crush beneath triumphant hooves — swarmed him. One with antlers. Another seemed to be made of glass or ice. They had their own weapons: knives, pistols that barked fire, torches. Argemone saw them tumble over her Master, stabbing at him, cutting out his heart and holding it aloft.

She thought to storm them, to barrel across the fiery oil-slick waters and bite them all to pieces (and let their blood and guts fill her spongy belly), but fire was and remains her great enemy, and she could not bear to carry herself across what would surely be a deadly torrent of flame.

Argemone retreated from the garden, having only been glimpsed by those who murdered her Master. The pet was without her Keeper.

STALKING THE TRODS AND PASSES

Argemone wanders the trods and paths of the Thorns. She does little besides eat, sleep and bay mournfully for her lost Master. Every few days, she finds herself hungry again, and so eats. She'll eat hobgoblins, sure, but they don't seem to fill up her gluttonous guts with any great satisfaction — though playing with their still-living bodies earns her some joy, the way a dog or cat messes with a baby rabbit before breaking its tender neck. And sometimes she'll leave the Hedge (she needs no doorways to walk between worlds, as noted below) to feed on whatever fauna she can get into her mouth.

Oh, but it's the blood and bones of man that really satisfy her hunger. The *wet crunch* is pleasing on a number of levels. Whether it's hunting changelings in the Hedge or humans lost in the wilderness, well, one way or another, she aims to slake her appetite.

DESCRIPTION

Argemone is a wild thing. A *huge* wild thing, at that. Once she was a pet, and to a degree, she was unusually domesticated for a hobgoblin. But all that's changed. Now, she's aimless. Any sense of domesticity is out the window; she's feral once more, driven as much by base needs as anything.

Except...well, Argemone wants something she doesn't really know she wants. She wants once more to be kept. She longs to be tamed, to be told what to do, to once more have someone hook

a braided rope to her leather collar and lead her around a beautiful garden deep in the seat of Faerie. It's not a conscious urge, certainly, but her soul, or whatever passes for it, longs for it just the same.

In her current state, Argemone represents the nightmarish pursuer. She cannot be harmed by mundane sources of damage, and when she's hungry, little can stop her. She'll keep coming. Maybe a character delays her. Maybe he runs faster or is ultimately more cunning. But like a monster in a bad dream, she's ceaseless, clumsily barreling forward, seemingly impossible to kill.

Of course, in a way, she also represents the ability to "tame" one's own nightmares. Just as a bad dream can be turned on its ear by the will of the dreamer, Argemone could be tamed by those willing to confront the danger and invest the time. (Mind you, this is an unlikely outcome, but a particularly strong hand — belonging to a powerful character — could make this a reality.)

Taming her when she's hungry, though — not a possibility. When she's hungry, she's driven ineluctably toward filling her guts with meat. When she's not hungry? That's when characters maybe have a shot. While she's not keen on them getting too close to her, if Argemone isn't hungry, she won't pursue food with any great interest. Like any beast, she'll stamp her feet and bite if cornered, but otherwise? She'll ignore them until they bother her — or until hunger pangs start anew.

Physically speaking, Argemone is a sight to behold. She's big. Really big. Easily the-size-of-a-city-bus big. She carries herself like a hulking dog or a brooding bull — but where those animals would have a furry hide, she has spongy flesh sprouting no end of flora: vines, moss, twisted knots of cypress wood, thorny briar and, of course, the white poppy flowers that earned the beast her name (though her eyes are reflective of the name, as well, being hidden behind gristly white cataracts). Imagine, if you will, that a large stretch of swamp or forest simply stood up one day and decided to lumber about and eat people. That's Argemone.

SECRETS

- Argemone lairs in the Hedge. Literally, *in* the Hedge. See Aspects, below.
- The beast hungers for human flesh most of all — not a secret to her, but a secret to most who encounter her. If one is to use bait to attract her, one must use a human being. Alive. And preferably wriggling.
- Argemone is vulnerable to two things: extreme heat and extreme cold. Everything else doesn't seem to bother her much. See Aspects, below.

- The leather collar around her neck (with the punched-metal heart tag) — or, at least, her "neck area" — is a sign that she was once somebody's pet. Behind that heart-shaped tag, though, is a fat, wrought-iron ring. Anybody who manages to connect a heavy rope or a heavy-gauge chain to that ring (no easy task) will gain +5 to any Animal Ken rolls made to communicate with, train and command Argemone.

RUMORS

"Dude. You get that viral video I sent you? Man, check your email once in a blue fucking moon, will you? Yeah, it's some wild shit. It's, like, a YouTube thing, but from some dude called Network Zero or something. It can't be real. Has to be special effects. Some guy was out camping in, I dunno, Montana or Wyoming or one of those square states. And he gets lost from his buddies so he sets up camp in the middle of this thick forest for the night, but it's all Blair Witch and shit because he's got a video camera and he's doing a kind of diary or something. All he's got is the light from the camera and from the fire he built, but as he's got the camera pointed at his face and he's telling his wife and kids he loves them, you see something behind him in the trees. Something big, like a, like an elephant, but even bigger. You can't make much out, but you can see its eyes, and the thing bum rushes him. The camera hits the ground and gets all fucking screwy, but you can hear the guy screaming and there's this...crunching. Then the ground shakes. Boom. Boom. Boom. Like the thing's done feeding and it's walking away, real casual-like."

It's true. This guy — a hunter, not a camper or a hiker — was out and got lost in the woods, and inadvertently captured

What Do People See?

For the most part, they don't. In the world outside the Hedge — *our* world — Argemone hunts at night. She often hunts in desolate or wild places. Rarely does a human glimpse her, though certainly it's hard to ignore her size. For the most part, the victim sees a massive shape coming through the trees or a shadow falling over him before his body is snapped up like a squeaky toy in a Rottweiler's mouth. Even if a light is shone on her, the Mask depicts something shadowy and half glimpsed.

In the Hedge, however, a human sees the full experience. Every hulking bulge, every square inch of flesh covered with moss, ivy, whispering grasses.

Argemone on his digital video camera. The camera survived and somehow fell into the hands of a ragtag bunch of monster-hunters calling itself Network Zero, whose only purpose seems to capture the "truth" of the World of Darkness on video and disseminate it for the world to see. Characters looking to investigate Argemone could do worse than tracking this group down and seeing how they got the camera, and where the "incident" happened.

"They found a temple. Somewhere northwest of Kamalapuram. It's new. But its inhabitants were nowhere to be found. They carved it out of rock. Primitive in a way, but artful just the same. Lots of skull ornamentation coupled with a sacrificial motif. No real skulls, no, all of them chiseled out of the rock walls. The centerpiece of the temple is against the far wall. It's like a doorway, an arch gateway, but gigantic. Big enough for a city bus or a blue whale. It, too, is ringed with the rock skulls, but the curious thing is how the vegetation — mayurpankhi, a kind of cypress arborvitae — grows up straight out of the rock, underground, and winds around the skulls. In front of the gateway, which isn't really a gateway at all but just a stone wall carved to look like an archway, there's this altar. A stone slab with heavy manacles. The golden rock is brown with old blood, and lots of it. Jennings found an ear in the dust, shriveled, many weeks old."

It happens, sometimes. Something escapes the Hedge or Faerie, and people see it, or glimpse it, or only *hear* about it, and they cannot help but be awed by the truly sublime. After all, believing in God requires a crazy amount of constantly tested faith, but believing in something you've *seen*, well, that's a lot easier. Argemone is no different. Enough have seen her — more specifically, enough have survived her attacks over the years — to have formed nascent cults dedicated to venerating the big beastie. (Though, it's also possible that some have formed to hunt her down, too.) Most of the cults, which are disparate from one another, seem dedicated to calling her from the Thorns and offering her some food: often livestock, but some cults have moved into "human sacrifice" territory, given that it seems to satisfy her cravings all the more.

ARCEMONE

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 1, Wits 4, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 8, Dexterity 5, Stamina 8

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Investigation 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl (Gnashing Teeth) 4, Stealth 1, Survival (Tracking) 5

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Intimidation (Eerie Yowl) 4

Merits: Direction Sense, Fast Reflexes 2, Strong Back

Willpower: 6

Virtue: This creature possesses no Virtue

Vice: Gluttony

Initiative: 9 (with Fast Reflexes)

Defense: 4

Speed: 18

Health: 13

Wyrds: 7

Glamour/Per Turn: 20/7

Armor: None (but see Aspects, below)

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Special
Gnashing Teeth	1(L)	14	Does not need to grapple first
Smashing Hooves	0(B)	12	Difficult to strike with; does not gain 10-again on attack

Aspects

• **Unyielding Flesh:** Argemone ignores damage done to her by bashing or lethal damage done by normal sources. Well, technically she doesn't *ignore* it, but her flesh regrows the damage *so fast* (vines knitting, moss swelling to fill the wound, toadstools popping up broken "skin") that the damage is already healed up within the same turn, only a micro-moment later. Two things, though. First, that means if someone can actually fill her Health boxes up with lethal damage in a single *attack*, it might be enough to put her down. Second, she suffers two major vulnerabilities: extreme heat and extreme cold. Either of those done as an attack (a jet of fire or a token sword whose blade turns to ice upon striking) perform aggravated damage that does not heal. Of course, how do the characters learn these vulnerabilities? It's possible they witness some environmental effect that causes it — if they're escaping the rampaging beast and flee onto a frozen pond, when she touches one of her hooves to the ice, it smolders and she howls. Alternatively, they can do a little research. Researching some of the urban legends (which are true, of course) of attack survivors might do the trick, as might stealing away into some True Fae's Hedge-bound library, where mad and infinite records are kept.

• **Great Hunter:** When Argemone chooses her prey, the victim will have a very difficult time shaking her. Not only does she already have a high Survival score with a Tracking Specialty, but she gains 8-again on any roll to track prey (although only when she's truly hungry; if she's not hungry, that drive just isn't there).

• **Hedge Hide:** The Beast that Hunts the Hedge can actually dwell, hidden, in the Hedge. By spending a Glamour point and succeeding on a Wyrd roll, Argemone can sidle up next

to the Thorn flora anywhere in the Hedge and *merge* with it, regardless of size restrictions. She becomes nearly impossible to see — only those actively looking for her have a shot at glimpsing her, necessitating success on a Wits + Investigation roll that's penalized by five dice. Success allows the character to glimpse parts of Argemone in the Hedge wall: yellow eyes, a hoof covered over in lichen or a briary coil, perhaps even a puff of gamy breath.

Story Hooks

- The changelings who initially destroyed Argemone's Keeper — not one motley, but several — have started to turn up dead. And "dead" isn't the half of it. They're torn asunder. Mostly eaten. Violently rendered to bones and meat, most of which has been gulped down into someone's maw — and, of course, that "someone" is Argemone the Beast that Hunts the Hedge. It's time to form a hunting party. Big glory awaits those who will go out and bring back the head of the thing that ate up those changelings. Then again, with all those changelings dead, the freehold is now home to a noticeable power vacuum — that, too, represents opportunity, does it not?

- People have been going missing. It's a small town, or a city with wilderness and rural land right at the edges, and the newspaper's been reporting odd absences for months now. It's Argemone, of course, but why so many right here? Her hunting territory is theoretically the whole world, so what's up? It's one of two things. Either, first, it's one of those cults. They've popped up locally and offer the monster worship through human sacrifice. Or the alternative story is that someone — a local changeling, most likely — has tamed the Beast that Hunts the Hedge. And he's not using her for good. He isn't hunting the True Fae with her, and he isn't using her to protect the freehold. He's using her to threaten. He's using her to hunt his secret enemies. He's *appeasing* her with food: human meat.

- Rumors of a secret relic or token ping the characters' radar: a heavy, braided leather leash. The leash (which is heavy enough that it probably needs to be carried by two or three people) is out there, somewhere, and it supposedly has magical properties: any beast leashed with the relic becomes pliable and docile to the one who leases it. This is true for a wild lion, true for a rampaging rhinoceros and true for the hobgoblin known as Argemone. *Especially* true for her, given that this is literally the leash her Keeper once had connected to her collar. Perhaps a local sovereign or individual of significance (and wealth) asks the characters to go out and obtain the leash for him, a task that will take them to wild parts of the world *and* the Hedge. Of course, there will be competition. Others want it and will do what they must to get it. Even worse, Argemone seeks the leash — not consciously, not really, but in the way a loyal hound sniffs out a beloved scrap of her dead master's clothing. Any seeking the leash will have to contend with swift competition and a rampaging hobgoblin.

- Not a story hook, not precisely, but the best thing about a story involving the tracking down of Argemone is this: it can take characters all over the world. Argemone's hunting ground is the entire globe. She pops out of the Hedge in the many strange wildernesses of this world, and characters may follow her to exotic and dangerous locales... places they might not go otherwise.

THE SMOOTHERING MOTHER FIGURE: AUNTIE ALLY

Don't worry, dear, your Auntie Ally's here to help with everything!

BACKGROUND

Alexandra Bower believed she had the perfect life before she was taken in 1969. Happily married, Ally (she preferred that spelling to "Allie") was the model housewife. She stayed home while her husband, Damon, worked as a senior engineer for the local government. Their house was always immaculate, and Ally was forever cooking or having friends over for coffee and gossip sessions. The Bowers were active in their local community and church groups as well, with Ally signing them up for just about every event that went on.

In particular, Ally doted on their 10-year-old daughter, Cindy, and was constantly pushing her to excel in all aspects of her life. Ally had not had many opportunities as a child, and she was determined that her daughter was going to do all the things she herself had wanted to do but had never managed. As so often happens, Cindy resented her mother's interference in her life and often rebelled, leading to shouting matches with her mother. Ally usually ended up in tears, doing her best to make Cindy feel guilty for not appreciating everything that was being done for her.

All that changed on October 23, 1969. Ally met a man calling himself Raul Escobane, who said he was a talent scout for an acting agency in Hollywood. He had seen Ally cheering on her daughter and thought she was the one who should have been competing in the pageant instead. Ally, full of pride, explained she had taught Cindy everything she knew and had even made her dress for the pageant.

That was all the false Escobane wanted to know. Dropping his Mask, he whisked Ally away through the Hedge to his domain and put her to work in his household.

Ally's memories of her durance are incomplete, though a little more trickles back now and again. Life there was insanely hard for her as she tended to her Keeper's household and made sure that everything Escobane wanted, he had. All that kept her going was the thought of her husband and daughter. Even then, there were times when she couldn't even remember what they looked like, as her Keeper had taken those memories to study like anaesthetized butterflies. She often begged Escobane to just let her see them again, and he would tease her by releasing bits of memories of them into her dreams, so she could at least remember their faces for a while. But those moments were few and far between, almost like a drug to Ally. She kept doing everything she was told in the belief that Escobane actually cared about her well-being.

Eventually, the desire to be with her family became so strong she managed to find a gateway into the Hedge. Whilst picking witherpears for the evening meal, she spotted an opening she was sure had not been there previously. She slipped away quietly, leaving a few clues to indicate she had been taken by some hobgoblin, rather than escaping of her own volition.

She lived in the Hedge for nearly three weeks as she evaded Escobane's patrols and the myriad fae denizens of the Thorns. All

the time, she just kept believing she was going to see her family again soon.

When she eventually emerged from the Hedge into the mortal world, she had a rude shock. The world had moved on 32 years, even though she felt she had only been gone for two. She barely recognized the world around her and quickly sank into a deep depression. All that was left was the belief that if she could only get back together with her family, she'd be all right again.

Unfortunately, even that small hope was soon ripped away from her. She learned that her fetch and her husband had died in a plane crash in 1983 in Mexico. Already stunned by the loss of her darling husband, Ally nearly gave up hope completely when she learned that her daughter had died of ovarian cancer at the age of 42, only weeks before Ally's escape from the Hedge.

Ally was nearly suicidal with grief. Every night she cried herself to sleep, trying to find a way to forgive herself for not being there for her daughter. If only she had escaped sooner and found a way home, she could have helped Cindy through her battle with cancer. She was almost inconsolable for weeks, and it took the intervention of the local Spring Court to bring her back to something resembling sanity. Through some careful manipulation of Ally's dreams, the changelings of the freehold were able to help her regain some of her lost Clarity and get her to calm down.

Ally never forgot the assistance those changelings had given her and adopted the freehold as her new family. She does everything she can to make life easier for others — she helps arrange functions, cleans houses, offers a compassionate shoulder to cry on, or whatever anyone needs. She also takes it upon herself to help any new changelings who escape from the Hedge, so that their transition back to the mortal world isn't as traumatic as hers was.

She spends plenty of time with mortals, too. Since recovering, Ally's joined a local Pentecostal Christian congregation and attends services there every week. She helps other people there, using her experiences as a way to help them through their own suffering. She's not above trying to spread the word of God into the freehold, either.

DESCRIPTION

To mortal eyes, Ally looks pretty much like your average housewife. She appears to be in her late 30s, and in good physical shape. Her dress sense is a little "retro" — she tends to dress in frocks or blouse/pant combinations that were more in fashion in the 1960s. She has long brown hair, which she usually keeps tied back with either a ribbon or a headscarf. She's also often wearing an apron, especially when she's working in the kitchen.

To changeling or ensorcelled eyes, she's on the attractive side of the Wizened as a whole. Ally is a little shorter than average,

with a slightly longer nose than normal and gently pointed ears, but still has strong, straight limbs and a perfectly erect posture.

Ally normally puts on an air of exuberance about everything she does. Even the smallest chore is a delight to her, and she waxes lyrical about how she's happy to help out in any way she can, even if it's just some menial little task. She's very good at what she does and doesn't mind doing any housecleaning or domestic duties that anyone puts her way. She also fusses after everyone she looks after, constantly asking them if they need anything or if there is anything more she can do for them. Ally is very insistent and always seems to be around. She doesn't understand the concept of personal space and is forever picking bits of lint off people's clothing or straightening their tie. She's always in motion, never sitting still for more than a couple of minutes before she's off cleaning up again.

Helping others really isn't enough for her, though. Although she doesn't think of it in this way, she needs to be needed. Unless someone is calling on her to do something for them, she feels depressed. When she stops working, the guilty feelings about not being there for her husband and daughter come back. She seeks to keep those feelings at bay by staying busy all the time, no matter how annoying she becomes to those around her.

If people don't want her to be around — particularly if they are blunt and tell her so directly — she takes it as a personal affront and bursts into tears. She is an old hand at the guilt trip, compelling others to feel bad about how they're treating her. *"I was only trying to put them before myself and make sure they had everything they need."* If that doesn't work, she can get bitterly angry and start launching personal attacks, trying to regain the upper hand. She's an expert at manipulating people's emotions and doesn't think twice about saying things that deliberately hurt people's feelings, if it makes them apologize to her and gets them to ask for help once more. After all, if they are feeling down, she

can help by making them feel loved and cared for, even if it means she's stifling them in the process.

SECRETS

So desperate is Ally to make sure that people need her, she occasionally takes drastic action. She spends a lot of time in the Hedge, harvesting obscure goblin fruits that she uses to poison people she's "caring for."

She usually mixes the fruits in with whatever it is she happens to be cooking. She's very careful not to pick something that's directly deadly — merely something that's going to make the recipient very sick indeed. Once they fall victim to the poison, Ally is there to tend to them, nursing them back to health; at least until she feeds them the next dose of the poison, which just puts them right back where they started.

Ally typically uses different sorts of poisons for different people, in an attempt to make sure there's no pattern of sickness forming that can be traced back to her. She's got deals going with several hobgoblins in the Hedge to provide her with exotic fruits — usually in exchange for Glamour — and she's quite adept at harvesting strange fruits and herbs on her own. She even cultivates several varieties of poisonous fruits in her private Hollow.

She doesn't do this all the time, knowing that if it happened to everyone, people would start to get suspicious. She is prone to poisoning people who have rejected her assistance in the past, knowing if they really had a problem, they would call on her for help again. If someone is already getting help from her, she'll nearly always leave them alone.

She often feels bad about doing it. Her mind is haunted by the guilt she feels whenever she hurts someone, but she tries to justify it to herself by saying she's doing it for their own good and it was necessary to make them see they really did need her help. She also tries to repress the feelings by busying herself with helping still more people.

Dreams terrify Ally, especially her own. She suffers from bad nightmares, although she likes to pretend she doesn't. Her Keeper messed around with her subconscious mind so much that even the memories of her family are now tainted and often appear before turning into some nightmare creature — including her Keeper.

Although she is grateful for the dreamscaping done by the Spring Court after she found out her family was dead, Ally is fiercely protectively of her privacy and refuses to let anyone help



her with the symbols of her subconscious mind. She's terrified that someone else crafting her dreams would be tempted to inflict the sort of torture her Keeper used to do.

Ally also knows that if someone were to start messing around in her dreams, they would recognize the symbols of guilt there. It wouldn't be a big leap to then realize she is poisoning some people because she is so desperate for people to need her help. She's so paranoid about people fooling around in her dreamspace and learning her secrets that she tries to avoid sleep as much as possible. When she is forced to sleep, through sheer exhaustion, she doses herself up with sleeping pills or special goblin fruits (see below) and only sleeps in her secret Hollow. She doesn't trust sleeping in the mortal world, as she believes someone is going to start playing around in her subconscious again.

In order to get some privacy, she maintains a secret Hollow in the Hedge. It's not particularly large — only a single room, about 12 feet by 10 feet — and sparsely furnished. Ally keeps it this way as it reminds her of the living conditions of her durance, and she finds it comforting. Even though she was effectively a slave, she was happier then, because there was always someone who needed her.

The Hollow is also a shrine to her dead family. She's scrounged a few photos and newspaper clippings of her dead daughter and husband and these are pinned to a board in one corner. Every night, Ally lights candles there and studies the lines on their faces, hoping to replace some of the memories of them that were taken from her by her Keeper. Alas, she cannot remember most of their times together and usually cries herself to sleep as a result.

Her Hollow is also a place where she cultivates several types of goblin fruits (see below). One type she grows because she likes to eat them herself, but there are two other varieties she uses for her secret projects.

Ally makes sure no one else ever finds her secret hiding place. She maintains several secret entrances into the Hollow and uses a different one every night, to make sure people don't follow her in there. To date, she's been lucky in keeping her hiding place a secret and she's forever worried that someone else — especially her Keeper — is going to discover it one day.

RUMORS

"Something weird is going on with Ally. A friend of mine met her at a church function a couple of weeks ago, and he said she had a weird facial tic thing happening. She said it was nothing, but later that evening, she apparently had an epileptic seizure. She came good after a couple of minutes and a lie-down, but he said it was still freaky to see."

Ally is actually quite sick. It's something she pretends isn't as bad as it really is, because she knows it will stop her from helping others, and she thinks she needs to be doing that.

However, it's not epilepsy she's suffering from; it's a brain tumor. The stress of living in Arcadia and the repeated removal of her memories by her Keeper have left real physiological symptoms. The mental stress she's been under for the past few years has resulted in a malignant brain tumor growing. At the moment, the symptoms she's suffering from are only minor, with the occasional seizure that's been misdiagnosed as epilepsy. However, as time goes on — unless something serious is done about the cancer — she's going to suffer more dramatic mood swings than she already does,

which could quite easily tip her over into psychotic behavior.

"I heard the strangest thing at the Goblin Markets the other night. I was talking with Alfonse, one of the hobs there, and he said someone from the freehold had been asking strange questions about how to have a fetch made. Not of themselves, mind you, but of a little girl."

"I thought that was a bit odd and when I asked him who it was, he said he didn't know but the description he gave sounded a bit like Auntie Ally. It doesn't make any sense to me. Why would she want a fetch of a little girl?"

Ally has indeed been asking questions about whether or not it is possible to have a fetch created specifically. She's trying to find a way to get her daughter back, even though the real daughter is dead. Because she can't have the real one, she thinks the next best thing might be just as good, particularly if she can have the fetch made so that it never gets any older.

The problem is that having one made involves making a deal with the True Fae. Ally's not sure she wants to go that far yet, but the thought keeps eating away at her mind and she is contemplating pursuing the matter further.

"Lately, I've started coming across some weird stuff in the Hedge. It's little ceramic statues in some places, ribbons tied to the thorns in others, and small shelves with candles or cut flowers in others. To be honest, it's starting to freak me out. It's almost as if someone is trying to attract the attention of their Keeper again."

"Even weirder is the only person I've run into in the Hedge lately is Auntie Ally. She was coming back from a foraging expedition with some goblin fruit I'd never seen before. She gave me one, and damn it was good. Maybe she's the one putting the weird stuff out there. It wouldn't surprise me; she is pretty weird herself."

Strangely enough, Ally isn't the one leaving the decorations in the Hedge, although she has seen them herself and approves deep down inside, because she sees it as a way of someone reclaiming some of their humanity again. She's occasionally tied up a couple of the little alcoves and even replaced some of the flowers in one, but she has no idea who's actually responsible for placing them there in the first place.

AUNTIE ALLY

Seeming: Wizened

Kith: Chatelaine

Court: Winter

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 1, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 4, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Crafts 1, Medicine (Pharmaceuticals) 2, Occult (Goblin Fruits) 3, Politics 1

Physical Skills: Larceny 1, Stealth 3

Social Skills: Empathy (Emotions) 3, Persuasion (Emotional Blackmail) 3, Seduction 1, Socialize 4, Subterfuge 2

Merits: Court Goodwill (Autumn) 1, Court Goodwill (Summer) 1, Harvest (Goblin Fruits) 2, Hollow (Hollow Size 1, Hollow Amenities 2, Hollow Wards 4) 7, Mantle (Spring) 2, Resources 1

Willpower: 4

Clarity: 3 (Derangements: Depression, Irrationality, Obsessive Compulsion)

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 5

Defense: 3

Speed: 9

Health: 7

Wyrds: 3

Contracts: Artifice 2, Fleeting Winter 3, Hearth 4

Glamour/per Turn: 12/3

GOBLIN FRUITS

Slumberberries: These small, dark green berries grow sparsely on parasitic vines that spread through the Hedge. The sour berries appear only in clumps of five or six, with each branch of the vine only producing fruit at one spot. When eaten raw, the berries cause drowsiness; if eaten just before sleeping, they will cause a character who eats them to fall into a deep, dreamless sleep. If the berries are boiled and the liquid drunk as a tea, it will cause vivid nightmares, usually involving the character suffering immense pain or physical torture.

Bloodbane: This pale yellow lichen tends to grow in moist areas, and needs to be scraped off using a sharp knife. When dried and ground up, it is easily mixed in with other foods and prevents the blood's clotting agents from working. The single dose can cause gut cramps or minor bleeding into the lungs and the effects wear off after a day and a night. However, if it is consumed regularly, it attacks the character's bone marrow, preventing creation of new blood cells, and can cause massive internal bleeding. If consumption is stopped, the character will eventually recover, although they will be sick for some time. Bloodbane is Toxicity 3 with one dose, but rises to Toxicity 6 if taken more than once in a month.

Fuguespores: These brown spores come from a type of fungus that grows on the briars of the Hedge. When ingested, they tend to lodge in the intestines, growing slowly through the gut wall and releasing toxins into the bloodstream. These toxins, over time, can cause hallucinations or dizzy spells. When the fungus matures inside the body, more spores can be released into the bloodstream to grow in other parts of the body. If a spore lodges in the character's brain, the fungus destroys the character's memories, leaving him in a fugue state (see *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 100). In extreme cases, it can put the character in a coma or cause permanent brain damage. Fuguespores are Toxicity 5.

Story Hooks

- Ally volunteers to help with one of the freehold's major festivals or events for the year, one that the characters are working on, getting involved with every aspect of the preparations. This brings Ally into close contact with the characters, and she'll begin to believe they are the ones who need her help. She targets one or more of the troupe with her subtle emotional blackmail, and won't hesitate to escalate "problems" to higher levels if the characters try to shut her out of the proceedings. She'll also talk about the characters behind their backs, trying to convince others that she's the one being wronged and asking them to intervene on her behalf to get the troupe to accept what's she's trying to do.

- Ally takes an interest in any information she can learn about fetches and how people deal with them. She'll talk to the characters about what they want to do (or have already done) with their fetches and how having one affects their life. She'll often talk wistfully about the subject, saying her fetch died before she escaped from the Hedge and she wonders if that's why it feels as though a part of her is missing sometimes. She'll also ask questions about what fetches are made from and if any of the characters had anything to do with making them during their durance.

- At a social gathering, several of the people there — possibly including the characters — become violently ill after eating something that didn't agree with them. Ally is in the middle, doing whatever she can to help people. The symptoms look like an allergic reaction to something in the food, but some there also get sick although they are not allergic to any of the ingredients. As if that wasn't enough, Ally's tumor triggers a seizure, causing her to convulse on the floor and rant that her Keeper is punishing her for not looking after the freehold properly.

THE FREE MARKET DRAGON: BARON FAIRWEATHER

Of course, you understand that opening one of our locations in your community will help that community thrive. First and foremost, we offer jobs with competitive pay and excellent benefits. Our arrangements with our suppliers guarantee that the savings we pass on to you result in the lowest-cost alternative available. Plus we're open 24-seven. Ignore the nonsense spouted by the liberal media. All we want from you is acceptance in your community and the chance to make it a better place. Do you accept us?

Aliases: The Cloistered Baron of Impossible Dreams, Baron Fairweather, the New Robber Baron (media nickname)

BACKGROUND

There are entities alien to this world that lurk on the edges of reality, invading our dreams and kidnapping humans, adult and child alike, to act as their playthings and slaves. They are ancient creatures, unknowable because they remain utterly mutable. Innumerable agreements between the entities' names and reality itself make up the whole of its form, and the entities agree with one another to grant each other titles that give them even greater power. The titles, in turn, act as extensions of the name's will, and make their own agreements. These entities act as gods over their many mad realms, reforming them to their will and lording over all who enter. They do battle with one another over these realms, bizarre wars of words, ideas and deeds steeped in arcane traditions and human legendry. They tear off one another's titles, consuming them in a peculiar form of cannibalism, absorbing them into themselves and claiming their conquered realms.

And one has chosen our world to be its new conquest.

THE LIMITED INFINITE

The entities known by some as the Others crave incessant competition, strife and struggle. They feed from these, as mortals feed on food, and glut on them as mortals drink alcohol. Within their own realms, however, they are the ultimate authority, lord and master over every facet of their surrounding reality. True conflict is impossible within their demesnes, so they reach out, striking at one another and at humanity. To do so, they purposefully limit themselves, binding up some part of their potential within a single title and granting it a physical form.

The Cloistered Baron of Impossible Dreams is just such a title given form. The otherworldly entity that possesses that title distilled some small portion of its essence into the figure now known to the mortal world as Keith Fairweather. Fairweather serves as a distorted reflection of his true form, a being of mad hunger and inhuman greed given a shape that can only be described as beautiful. An extension of his master's will, where his master is also himself, he is both similar to and more than a hand, grasping into reality. Like a hand, he is not fully aware of his master's true greater nature, while his master is fully aware of what his servitor is doing. Unlike a hand, Fairweather possesses significant free will, even if that will was formed specifically by his master from the whole cloth of the cosmos, and he acts largely independently.

At some point in the distant past, the powerful entity that claims the Cloistered Baron of Impossible Dreams as one of its many titles swore to take the mortal world as its own. It would lay claim to the title of Dominus of the Living World, a title coveted among its kind, placing that mantle upon its nigh infinite form, a final jewel for its crown. It is in the nature of these entities, however, that they can only take power they earn through conflict, and thus they must form actors and props from their greater spirit to mount any form of campaign. It chose to invest a portion of its essence into the Cloistered Baron title, knowing full well the extent of the impractical ambitions of the mortal populace.

It is also in the nature of these beings that they are bound to operate within the context of the innumerable narrowly defined rules born of the many compacts they made with reality. One of these timeless pacts marked the mortal world as the sole possession of those who dwell there. None of the Others could claim it in one of their games of epic wordplay and storycraft; nor could they claim it through a campaign of war or terror. Any Other that wished to claim the mortal world had to claim it through the rules in place in that world, and one of those rules was that the world must be given to an Other before an Other can claim it.

Thus, the being now known as Keith Fairweather came into existence. He has watched as generations have grown old and died and has forgotten easily as much as he now knows. He forgets exactly when he came to the mortal world, since he still has some difficulty understanding the human conception of time as a linear constant, but knows that in that time the hunger that drew him to the mortal world paid off in the discovery of the New World, a world driven by the very passions and dreams that Fairweather considers his personal dominion. He does not know whether or not he influenced the formation of the American Dream, the self-serving capitalist philosophy of Ben Franklin, the greedy expansion of Manifest Destiny or the greed-as-a-virtue objectivism of Ayn Rand, but each development has granted the Baron more power.

The Baron Fairweather has remained in the shadows for over half a millennium, manipulating men of power toward his own ends. He has taken numerous names and identities over that time, though those he has discarded are, indeed, behind him. He remembers few of the discarded identities, and the most recent identity he knows with any surety that he pretended to was an oil baron during the early 20th century. In some ways, his mutability arises from his nature as an avatar of one of the Others. In another, it stems from his own nature as a devourer; he consumes lives, and once he has taken what nutrients he needs from them, he discards the remnants

as so much excrement, leaving numerous broken hearts and ruined fortunes in his wake. But much of his tendency to capriciously reject his own past experiences is conscious; by rejecting his past experiences and acting solely on his current passions, he maintains his connection to the Others and avoids the danger of losing himself in the rules of mortals, a fate that would mean the end of him.

Fairweather has toyed and flirted over the last three centuries with several different methods of leading mortals to self-enslavement. None of them was his idea (and he is smart enough to recognize the irony that humans are ceaselessly capable of offering up tools for their own subjugation). His favorites, at least until now, were indentured servitude and slavery. While the former offered immediate gratification as the mortals gave up their free will from the start, the latter offered a more potent sweetness when each individual slave broke down and gave in to his lot. Those who struggled against Fairweather — who took the form alternatively of a slaver, an auctioneer and a plantation owner at different times — only provided him with the delicious conflict he craved.

MAXMART

The rise of large corporations that handily skirt antitrust law provided the Baron Fairweather with his most lucrative and far-ranging method of mortal self-subjugation yet. Noting the success of early entrants into the box-store phenomenon, he resolved to attach himself to an up-and-coming business called MaxMart. His preternaturally persuasive talents and supernatural Contracts allowed Fairweather to insert himself into the highest echelons of the company's power structure as a lucratively paid publicity consultant. His position allowed him a great deal of influence over the development of the business, while keeping him out of the public limelight resulting from any of the many scandals the business has weathered as a result of its often less-than-ethical practices.

Fairweather guides the company, utilizing similar business practices to other big-box stores: MaxMart offers a wide selection of goods at prices lower than any independent grocery or department stores. Everywhere they set up shop, they undercut local businesses, driving them into decline and dissolution. The company uses its market share as a weapon against its suppliers, forcing them to provide goods at a significantly lesser cost than they would otherwise, harming the suppliers while "passing the savings on" to the customer. Recently the company has expanded into the hypermarket business, developing stores that contain not only the stock of a full discount department store but also a full grocery store, including produce and a delicatessen. The company has expanded into the international market, with subsidiaries in Mexico (MexMart) and Japan (Akiyama).

In comparison to its competitors, MaxMart is still quite small but growing rapidly. The expert leadership of the Baron assists it in manipulating its customer base and drawing consumers from the other larger companies. His unnatural powers, including several Contracts with reality and supernatural pledges formed with various members of the company's leadership (see below), ensure that the company has a powerful edge over the competition. It promises to grow even more rapidly in years to come.

The effect of MaxMart's entrance into a community is still being studied and not yet fully understood. There is no question that it tends to drive smaller establishments out of business, often becoming a central hub both for employment and consump-

tion by the local populace. Unlike its competitors, which tend to focus their attention on middle-class suburban neighborhoods, MaxMart (given its supernaturally bolstered bottom line) tends to target the lower class, establishing locations in decaying urban neighborhoods. The location attracts local jobseekers and consumers alike, and when other businesses falter, the two become one and the same. The result is an economy in which MaxMart is providing money to the neighborhood, which is ultimately coming back to it. Perhaps strangely, these neighborhoods seem to benefit from MaxMart, and the general quality of life is higher than it was before MaxMart's arrival. The culture of the neighborhoods is curiously pro-MaxMart, however, and initiatives have been put in place to guide the rising youth into service of the corporation at a young age.

MaxMart is currently considering initiatives that would allow it to provide other services to customers, including providing gasoline, dental care and video rental. Attempts to enter the banking market have been repeatedly rebuffed by federal banking regulatory agencies. MaxMart's ultimate goal seems to be utter domination of the economy. As far as Fairweather is concerned, he who controls the world's money controls the world.

DESCRIPTION

An individual always comes away from an interaction with Fairweather with the discomforting impression that she's agreed to something that was not in her best interest, even on the rare occasions that she hasn't. Fairweather always seems thrilled to have had the opportunity to speak with an individual, even if the visitor did nothing but threaten and bluster. His movements are slow and graceful, carefully measured and utterly confident. Fairweather is never rushed. In any given situation, he controls the rate of conversation subtly by slowly answering questions in a calm, controlled manner. Fairweather remains polite to allies and enemies alike.

The Baron Fairweather is strikingly handsome. His dark, lustrous hair is always carefully styled, and his bronzed skin envelops chiseled features and a taut musculature. His teeth are almost shockingly white, though his eyeteeth are slightly more pronounced than usual, granting him a hungry, predatory appearance. He dresses exclusively in expensive suits, often with some small tells to his true nature, such as alligator-skin shoes or a tie tack that depicts a dragon or flame. His skin is flawless in appearance, if a bit too smooth to the touch. There's an airbrushed appeal to him, as if he stepped fully formed from the cover of *Fortune* magazine.

Fairweather always accents his appearance with bits of gold, whether a gold band on his finger, a gold earring or a simple pair of gold cufflinks. His lair, a high-rise apartment in a major metropolitan area, is similarly though less tastefully appointed. Every facet of each piece of furniture or decor is gilded with gold or precious jewelry. The beautiful women he entices to join him at social affairs are mere jewels themselves, draped in layers of clothing, necklaces, rings and other finery.

Under the Mask, Fairweather is visibly a dangerous thing to cross. His skin becomes visible for its true nature, a hide of tiny scales of deep bronze. A pair of horns rise from the Baron's skull and his tongue is often, though not always, forked. He fights with a long dagger, as well as his elongated fangs and claws.

Fairweather was created as a creature of pure craving, and every aspect of his true form emphasizes this. His claws are designed

for grasping prey as his fangs were crafted to rend flesh from bone. His eyes smolder with the intense hunger of flame, and a corona of fire occasionally envelops him. Those few who have harmed him significantly have reported that he is capable of manifesting as a pillar of flame or a leaping, diving serpent of fire.

Fairweather tends to avoid conflict. If he can offer someone something that will convince her to leave him be, he does so. He is not above offering power in an organization or even a supernatural society (such as a vampire's covenant, mage's Order or changeling's Court) and can actually do quite a bit in service of an individual. Unless the client has the forethought to entangle Fairweather in a pledge, however, he uses the time he garners through his promises to learn more about his enemies and arrange for their destruction in a manner that does not implicate himself.

SECRETS

Baron Fairweather desperately covets the success of the mortal-founded corporations that serve as his competition. He loathes that the lesser beings that live such fleeting lives came to the concept before he did, and that it took him so long to recognize its potential. He has not forgiven himself for being late off the starting line, and is sure that had he seen the value of big-box business earlier, he would already dominate the market, possibly even the world. He has made overtures to the larger corporations before and likely will again, but the older companies continue to rebuff him, to his confusion and consternation. He has become convinced that the other corporations are controlled by entities that know his true nature, possibly even other Others. He would give almost anything to insert himself into one of the more successful businesses or, failing that, learn the reason why he has been so often snubbed.

Meanwhile, Baron Fairweather treads a fine line, keeping secret his interest in and involvement with other companies from his closest allies among the leadership of MaxMart. Were his partners in business to uncover Fairweather's true nature or true motives (they believe he is an eccentric but very powerful and extremely well connected entrepreneur), they would likely abandon him, breaking their oaths to him. The supernatural sanctions on the oaths will not dissuade them, given that they don't believe

in (or in some cases know about) them, but the domino effect of broken pledges would cripple both MaxMart and Fairweather, at least for a time.

The Wyrd plagues the old Other with several demands for his continued youth and power. He keeps these frailties closely guarded secrets. Fairweather must spend a Willpower point each turn to remain in physical contact with ice or to sleep for an evening without some item of gold under his pillow. Contact with spoiled milk causes Fairweather intense pain and inflicts one health level of bashing damage each turn. Finally, Fairweather cannot refuse a gift offered freely, and must retain any such gift for an entire day.



Fairweather's greatest secret, of course, is his design on the world: his quest to claim it for himself. If someone were to uncover this plot, Fairweather would spare no expense or effort in buying the character off or, failing that, hunting the offending creature down and destroying it. Of course, the fact that he bought an individual off is no guarantee that he won't later have her destroyed.

RUMORS

"I hear there's something in the food at that new superstore down yonder. People always going back there, like some kind of addiction. Ain't never seen no customer that loyal before."

This is not true. Fairweather's business model is specifically designed to increase dependence on MaxMart by undercutting the competition, providing work for the unemployed and

offering significant store discounts to employees. There are no compulsions or substances, supernatural or otherwise, at work in the willingness of MaxMart customers to return to the store. Unless, of course, the Storyteller wants there to be.

"You know Fairweather, that foreign Lost involved in running that MaxMart place? Yeah, I heard the Summer King's cut some kind of deal with him. Something like a discount and no questions asked for weapons, so long as the Summer King stays out of his business. That's what we all need, right? The Summer Court to have access to a fucking arsenal with no paper trail."

This is not necessarily true, but it is precisely the sort of deal Fairweather might make to an individual who might otherwise serve

as a stumbling block on his path to ascendancy. He even fulfills the deals he makes, at least until he finds a way to solve the problem posed by a blustering interloper in a more permanent fashion.

“Fairweather’s in town again. They say he’s got some kind of meeting with one of the bloodsuckers. I swear, I always knew that guy gave me the creeps, but even Rotting Kev stays the hell away from the leeches.”

Again, not necessarily true. Fairweather does a lot of traveling, given his nature, and tries to keep much of it sub rosa. When he can’t hide his presence in an area, he might start precisely this manner of scandalous rumor to draw attention away from whatever he’s *really* doing there. On the other hand, Fairweather has a great deal in common with the vampires, and they tend to find him urbane and genteel, so it is not unlikely that he has made deals with a few of them on an individual level. He has no wholesale connections to any vampire government, however. Even his agreements with individual vampires tend to be short-lived; they find his fiery persona somewhat disconcerting after prolonged exposure.

BARON FAIRWEATHER

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 6, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 5, Manipulation 6, Composure 5

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer 1, Crafts (Pledge) 4, Investigation 3, Medicine 1, Politics (Economic) 4, Occult (Faerie) 4, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 2, Larceny 1, Stealth 3, Survival (Human World) 3, Weaponry (Dagger) 4

Social Skills: Animal Ken 3, Empathy (Motives) 3, Expression 3, Intimidation (Veiled Threats) 2, Persuasion (Cutting a Deal) 4, Socialize 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Allies (Big Business) 3, Allies (Government) 2, Ambidextrous, Danger Sense, Disarm, Fighting Finesse (Dagger), Inspiring, Iron Stamina 3, Quick Healer, Resources 4, Status (Corporate) 4, Striking Looks 4

Willpower: 10

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Greed

Initiative: 11

Defense: 4

Speed: 15

Health: 10

Wyrd: 9

Contracts: Dream **•••••**; Elements (Fire) **•••••**; Fang and Talon (All Reptiles) **•••••**; Mirror **•••••**; Vainglory **•••••**

Glamour/per Turn: 50/10

Armor: 1 (Armor of Flames)

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Special
Clawed Strike	1(L)	7	na
Rondel Dagger	1(L)	12	Armor Piercing 1, +2 Damage on Surprise Attacks

Fae Aspects

• **Immortal Flesh:** As an inhuman entity manifested in physical form, Fairweather can shrug off some of the lesser slings and arrows of the mundane. Bashing damage does not affect Fairweather at all, unless delivered by a cold iron bludgeon. Cold-forged iron causes aggravated damage, should someone be skilled enough to strike him with such.

• **Ruled by Passion:** Fairweather is a creature almost embodied by his passions and vices, with higher morality and self-denial little more than a whim to him. For him, passion is a virtue, and denial of such an affection. His supernaturally amoral nature is reflected in an inverted ability to regain Willpower. Fairweather regains one Willpower point from indulging his Virtue, but refreshes his whole pool when satiating his Vice.

• **Beautiful Seeming:** Fairweather is a striking individual, his almost androgynous appearance appealing to most people, regardless of orientation. This preternatural beauty is more than skin deep, however, and infuses his every movement and turn of phrase. Fairweather may spend Glamour points to increase dice pools that include Presence, Manipulation and Persuasion. Each point spent increases the pool by a single die. The effect lasts for one roll.

• **Dragon’s Talon:** Fairweather’s true form is decidedly reptilian, his temples crowned with horns and his fingers and toes tipped with sharp claws. Brawl attacks made by Fairweather inflict lethal damage and add a single die to the pool (already factored in above).

• **Incite Bedlam:** Once per day, Fairweather can inspire an intense emotion in up to 15 individuals. To do so, he must spend one Glamour point and one Willpower and roll his Manipulation + Wyrd (15 dice). He typically uses this power to inspire fear in his enemies or greed in his allies or others he is doing business with. When inspiring greed, he gains +3 dice to the roll, and when inspiring envy, he gains +1. The roll is contested by a reflexive roll of Composure + Wyrd (or Blood Potency, Primal Urge, etc.). If the roll is successful, the targets are consumed by the emotion for the remainder of the scene, acting in ways that are driven by the emotion rather than rational thought.

• **Contracts:** Fairweather possesses a number of supernatural abilities garnered by forging contracts directly with reality. Details on the powers can be found on p. 124 of *Changeling*. For those without that book, the following grants a rough sketch of his capabilities:

Fairweather can enter others’ dreams, control those dreams, pull items from those dreams into the real world and even travel through dreams from one sleeper to another.

He cannot be harmed by fire, can sheath himself in it (inflicts 4 lethal upon those who come into contact with him and provides one point of Armor against attacks), can summon it forth and control it, and can transform himself into a dragon of flame.

He can speak with all reptiles, call them to him, gain their keen senses (typically a sense of smell from a forked tongue) and transform into any natural reptile.

Fairweather can change his shape, giving himself utterly different features, changing his height and weight and even transforming into inanimate objects.

Finally, Fairweather is preternaturally fair: he can cause others to assume him to be of higher station (or Status in an organization to which they belong), can add a number of bonus dice equal to his Wyrd to Expression and Persuasion rolls for a scene, effectively gain Striking Looks +2 (on top of his Striking Looks Merit) while preventing mundane mortals from attacking unprovoked, can reveal his true form and cause onlookers to flee in terror and can tell a story that profoundly affects his audience, making them believe it either happened to them personally or they personally witnessed it.

Assume that each ability costs 2 Glamour to activate (while the strongest powers also require the expenditure

of a Willpower point). Fairweather rolls his Wyrd + an appropriate Attribute or Skill to determine whether or not the effect succeeds (or how much damage an effect causes, in some cases).

• **Pledges:** Fairweather has spent his time in the mortal world forging deals with several powerful businessmen and government leaders. Aside from tying said individuals to him, this has the added effect of making parties on both ends of the pledges more powerful, granting increased abilities, influence and wealth on all sides. Assume that Fairweather has an additional eight dots in Social Merits (mostly Allies and Contacts) and that the members of the board of directors of MaxMart are surprisingly potent adversaries (though none has supernatural powers, at least not as a result of a pledge with Fairweather). The details of the pledges are left to the Storyteller, but may include things like leaving a carrot on the back porch each evening or never harming a lizard. Clever characters may find ways to trick Fairweather's allies into defaulting on their pledges, significantly weakening parties on both ends.

Story Hooks

• MaxMart begins looking to open a store in an area of interest to the characters. This may be a neighborhood they live in or claim as their personal domain, but it may instead be the neighborhood of an ally, retainer or family member. The desire is sparking an interest in local media, the flames of controversy likely fanned by competing businesses that have no interest in MaxMart's presence. Meanwhile, the characters may pick up bits of rumor about some dark agenda behind MaxMart, or perhaps the rumors of a dark presence in the company's shadows, pulling its strings from the darkness. If the characters live in a large city, other MaxMarts may well exist and Fairweather may be known to them by reputation, if not personally. How do the characters react to the developing business, and what are the consequences of ignoring it?

• Fairweather is interested in opening a MaxMart location in the territory of one of the characters' rivals. The rival is using his influence in the area to block the invader, so Fairweather needs several socially and politically astute individuals to help smooth things out and ease him into the neighborhood. What does Fairweather offer the characters? Can he be trusted to keep up his end of the bargain? Can the characters help him without drawing the attention of their rival? And what are the consequences of success? Does Fairweather turn out to be a weapon beyond the characters' ability to control?

• Fairweather has long gazed at the older, more influential big-box stores with adoration and unabashed envy. One such multinational corporation has recently snubbed his advances yet again, and Fairweather's nature won't allow him to accept it without some form of retribution. Fairweather enlists the aid of the characters (without revealing any hint of his true nature, if possible) to infiltrate the company and unearth its dirty secrets. Specifically, he's looking for any hints as to why the business continues to ignore his advances, but he is willing to settle for some dirty laundry he can leak to the press for the sake of revenge. How do the characters infiltrate the company? What practices do they uncover? What dark supernatural secrets are hidden within its corporate offices? What do they do with the information? When they inevitably realize the danger Fairweather has put them in, how do they react? Can he offer them enough to turn aside their anger? Or do they ally with him against the threat posed by the company they infiltrated?

BUNYIP

Aww, it's sooo cute! Mommy, can I keep it?

BACKGROUND

The legend of the bunyip originated from the stories told by the Aborigines of Australia. According to Aboriginal myth, the bunyip was a spirit of the water from the Dreamtime that was hostile to humans, attacking anyone who ignored its bellowing warnings and approached its watery home. Along with a few other spirits, the bunyip survived the end of the Dreamtime and continued to haunt the lakes and rivers of Australia, eating unwary fishermen and sometimes crawling from the waters at night to hunt women and children. During the 1800s, continued attempts to capture or document the existence of the bunyip failed, giving rise to the expression "Why chase the bunyip?" to describe an enterprise doomed to failure from the onset.

Like most legends, the story of the bunyip contains elements of truth that have been buried under centuries of superstition. Long, long ago, the creatures identified as bunyips escaped from the Hedge and adapted to life outside the Thorns. At first, bunyips hid from mankind in swamps and lakes, using their fae magic to frighten off humans and larger predators. Over time, the bunyips learned to draw power from the terror they caused, drinking in the Glamour formed by the human emotion of fear. As civilizations advanced and became less fearful of loud noises, bunyips found the imaginations of children were the most fertile ground for sowing and reaping fear. Leaving the waters of their lakes and rivers behind, the bunyips adapted once more and learned how to take on shapes that delight children, enticing kids to come close enough for the bunyips to attack. Bunyips also learned to use the Glamour they drained from children to open gates in the Hedge, and in this way they spread throughout the world.

Proof that Darwinism has some effect even on unnatural creatures, the bunyips that waited until children were asleep to feast on their fears were the most successful and least likely to be discovered and killed. The surviving bunyips perfected their tactics of luring children to take them home, then slowly draining the child of Glamour. Of course, the nightly harvesting of fear came with a steep price for the children. Perhaps because the imagination of a child is much more part and parcel of the whole being than is the case in adults, or simply because young bodies and minds are more susceptible to fae magic, a child who fell into the clutches of a bunyip rarely survived longer than a month. Bunyips drained the life energies of children along with Glamour, and soon enough, the creatures began to hunger for both.

DESCRIPTION

One of the powers of the bunyip is to take on whatever form it determines a child will find most appealing. The lovable mongrel pup with one floppy ear, a kitten that totters unsteadily on short, stubby legs or a hamster that stuffs its cheeks full of food are all popular forms. Like changelings, the bunyip has a Mask that hides its less-than-cuddly true form from both view and touch. To

all five senses of a human, a bunyip that has taken on the form of a Jack Russell really is a Jack Russell.

Viewed in its rarely seen true form, the modern bunyip is about the size of a large housecat. It has a doglike face with protruding fangs and is covered in shaggy brown or black fur. Its four legs end in three-toed feet, which are clawed and resemble the feet of a lizard. The bunyip's tail is short and stubby, covered with shorter fur the same color as its coat. Though rarely called upon to use it these days, the bunyip is capable of producing bawling yaps, almost like that of a seal, which are loud enough to startle and scare off potential predators.

The traditional environment of the bunyip is water and the creatures still have an affinity for swimming. Though they aren't capable of breathing underwater, the creatures can hold their breath for much longer than might be apparent, considering their size. Bunyips require food and water just like other animals and have a preference for raw meat. Unlike natural animals, bunyips can live for extended periods without sustenance, especially when they are feeding on the Glamour and life-force of a child.

Bunyips feed on the Glamour created by fear in the same way as changelings, but, unlike changelings, bunyips can only feed on children. Once a bunyip has been taken home by a child, the creature waits until the child is asleep, then uses its fae magic to shape the dreams of the child into nightmares. The bunyip rolls Wits + Empathy to harvest the Glamour from the fear caused by nightmares, gaining one point of Glamour for each success. Bunyips may only harvest Glamour from the same child once a night. The side effect of this process causes damage to the body of a child, slowly draining living energies. For each point of Glamour harvested, the child suffers one point of bashing damage. Because the damage inflicted isn't really physical in nature, bashing damage caused by harvesting heals like lethal damage. When the damage wraps into actual lethal damage, the child begins to manifest flulike symptoms of a high fever, runny nose and nausea. If the bunyip isn't driven away, the energy drain will eventually result in the death of the child. It is at this point that most bunyips use their store of Glamour to open a gate into the Hedge and disappear from the home.

In the days following their initial escape from the Hedge, bunyips were the size of a wolf and fought tooth and nail to defend their territory. The creatures were predators that hunted the swamps, rivers and lakes for fresh meat. Nowadays, bunyips will flee from a fight if able, opening gates into the Hedge that are too small for most opponents to follow them through. If backed into a corner, the bunyip shows its true form and attacks with its poisoned fangs, hoping to frighten an aggressor with its loud bellow. If at any point during a fight, a bunyip sees an opportunity to escape, it will take it rather than continuing to struggle. If no escape is possible, bunyips will fight to the death.

Bunyips are solitary predators that mark their territory to warn off others of their kind. It's almost unheard of for two buny-

ips to battle over territory; the creatures seem to regard the idea of fighting among themselves as a waste of energy. It seems likely that bunyips reproduce in some manner, though no one has ever seen them at it or claimed to have seen a bunyip cub. The current theory among changelings or those humans who dabble in occult knowledge is that bunyips mate in the Hedge, burrowing in among the thorns. After birth, the cubs are cared for by one parent until they are fully grown, and then all the creatures abandon the den. Bunyips seem to live for between 10 and 15 years, and if they meet with a natural death, can apparently sense their coming mortality and make their way back to the Hedge to die. One popular changeling myth about bunyips is that somewhere in the Hedge is a bunyip graveyard, filled with the bones of every bunyip that returned to the Hedge to die.

SECRETS

Bunyips have developed a self-defense mechanism that allows them to sense the presence of other fae creatures, including changelings. Unlike mortals, changelings can see through whatever Mask the creatures throw up and identify a bunyip for the fae beast it really is. At least as intelligent as wolves, bunyips attempt to avoid places where changelings gather and will not enter any building in which they sense a changeling. The creatures seem to realize that changelings are better able to combat them than normal humans and that their normal escape mechanism of ducking into the Hedge isn't as effective against the Lost.

Many fae creatures have a weakness or a prohibition against certain types of activity that can be exploited to kill them or drive them off. For the True Fae, this weakness is cold-forged iron, against which they have no defense. Bunyips have two frailties as a result of their fae natures; one can ward them from a home, the other can be used to fight them. No one really understands why these things affect bunyips, only that they do.

A bunyip can only enter houses (or any dwelling place) through a doorway or through a window that has been left open for at least a week. Hanging a horseshoe, cross or any other protective symbol over a doorway or window bars a bunyip from entering through that portal. Attempting to force a bunyip through a portal that is protected causes physical harm to the creature and it will fight to escape the torment. For each turn the bunyip is forced into the threshold of a protected entrance (even through force, a bunyip is still barred from entry), the bunyip takes one point of lethal damage, which appears in the form of scorch marks on their furry hides.

Natural animals can sense something is wrong with a bunyip, even if they can't see through the Mask. Their animal instincts recognize the presence of a predator. In the wild, the

poisonous bite and loud cries of a bunyip are usually enough to defend against would-be predators or other aggressive animals. Family pets are a different story. In a home, the love and loyalty shown to their owners protect pets against the powers of a bunyip. Pets are immune to the poison of a bunyip and are deaf to their howls. A pet that has lived with a family long enough to form an attachment (note that abused or mistreated animals don't gain this protection) ignores the Defense of a bunyip and inflicts aggravated wounds with its attacks. Bunyips that are forced to share a home with other pets do their best to trick the animals outside the home where the bunyip can use its poisoned bite to terrorize and chase off the pet. Failing that, the bunyip will attempt to use its Dream-Shaping power to convince its child-victim to get rid of the pet, or at least separate it from the bunyip.

Discovering the frailties of the bunyip is a research roll with a target number of 15 (see the *World of Darkness Rulebook*, p. 55).

RUMORS

"Everyone has heard the urban legend about the old woman who microwaved her dog after a bath to dry it off.

Well, I happen to know that legend is true, only it wasn't an old woman and it wasn't a dog. It was a kid and a bunyip."

Some children are bound to identify their new pet as the cause of their sickness. When this happens, the bunyip will often attack the child, hoping to suck the last bit of Glamour out of the kid after nipping him with its

poison bite. Stories float around all the time about kids who run lawn mowers over kittens or set dogs on fire with gasoline. The child in question is usually sent to a psychiatrist for treatment of possible sociological issues, but not every kid who kills a pet is a sociopath in the making. Some of them discovered they had adopted a bunyip.

"They sell pets at Goblin Markets, but you have to be careful. If the deal seems too good to be true or the price far too reasonable, you might be taking home a bunyip instead of a pure-breed."

Hobgoblins can almost certainly tell a bunyip from a cocker spaniel, though you'll never get one to admit it. When a difficult customer asks for a rare breed at bargain basement prices or something ridiculous like a miniature unicorn, hobs have been known to pass off a bunyip as the real thing. Oh, the hobs are careful how they word the sale, don't ever say they broke their word, but all the same always take a changeling with you if you know you'll be buying from a hob. Hobgoblins have also been known to sell bunyips directly to retail pet stores, probably just for the sake of the chaos that will follow.

"Bunyips were bred by the True Fae to trick children into the Hedge and into the waiting arms of the Others. Mostly the True Fae rely on privateers for that kind of service these days, but you never know."



The True Fae have an endless number of gambits they use to trick humans into entering the Hedge. A child who sees the cutest little doggy ever is likely to chase that doggy, especially if it licks the child's face before it runs off. A few of the Lost claim they were chasing an animal of some kind when they looked up and noticed they weren't in Kansas anymore. Some of the True Fae might even keep bunyips as pets to loose upon their child-slaves as punishment, or just for their own twisted amusement. It's been said that the Others can follow the scent of a bunyip, even in the mortal realm, and where they find a bunyip, they are likely to find children asleep in their beds.

BUNYIP

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

Mental Skills: None

Physical Skills: Athletics 3 (Swimming), Brawl 2 (Tooth and Claw), Stealth 4, Survival 2

Social Skills: Empathy 4 (Children), Expression 5 (Cute), Subterfuge 3

Merits: Fast Reflexes •, Strong Lungs ••, Unseen Sense ••• (Fae)

Willpower: 5

Initiative: 8

Defense: 3

Speed: 12 (species factor 6)

Size: 2

Health: 4

Wyrd: 5

Glamour/Turn: 14/5

Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Dice Pool	Special
Bite	1 (L)	5	Nightmare Fangs (see below)
Claw	0 (L)	4	

Fae Aspects

- Nightmare Fangs:** An astonishing number of creatures that evolved in Australia have poisoned teeth or claws. Despite being more a product of the Hedge than of mortal evolution, the bunyip is no exception. The bite of a bunyip that inflicts even a single lethal wound injects a fae poison that makes the victim see the bunyip as the manifestation of his deepest fears. The victim can attempt to resist the poison with a reflexive Stamina + Resolve roll, minus the Toxicity 4 rating of the poison. With success, the victim is unaffected by the poison. If the resistance roll fails, the victim suffers a debilitating fear of the bunyip and suffers a -4 penalty on any roll to harm, chase or resist other fae powers of the creature. The poison lingers in the system of the victim for one scene.

- Shifting Mask:** By spending five points of Glamour, the bunyip can alter its Mask to resemble whatever kind of animal is most likely to inspire feelings of love and delight in a potential victim. The bunyip may change its *apparent* Size by 1 through use of this power, allowing it to take on the guise of kittens and puppies or even ferrets or hamsters. The bunyip maintains the illusion until it shifts its Mask again or reveals its true form.

Story Hooks

- A growing number of children in town have died from a mysterious malady with flulike symptoms. Doctors have been unable to determine the cause or halt the spread. Interviews with grieving parents all mention the children began to have nightmares shortly before they developed the high fever and wracking cough that preceded their deaths.

- A loud, growling bellow has been heard emanating from sewer grates after a recent flood. City workers found only rats, but children seem to have gone missing near open manhole covers and large drainage pipes.

- Changelings in the city have noticed a number of animal tracks leading through known gates into and out of the Hedge. The tracks seem to belong mainly to dogs and cats and it's a mystery as to how the creatures have managed to find and open the gateways.

- Childish Desire:** This power is mechanically identical to the Fleeting Spring Contract, "Cupid's Eye" (see *Changeling: The Lost*, p. 149) and troupes with access to *Changeling* are encouraged to use the rules presented there. The bunyip stares into the mind of a child, seeking what kind of pet she most desires. The bunyip must spend 1 Glamour to activate this power and rolls Wits + Wyrd vs. the child's Composure. With success, the bunyip is able to determine what kind of animal the child will react to most favorably. This power has no effect on humans older than 12.

- Dream Shaping:** This power is mechanically identical to the Contracts of Dream, "Forging the Dream" (see *Changeling: The Lost*, p. 125), and troupes with access to *Changeling* are encouraged to use the rules presented there. This power only works on sleeping targets. The bunyip must spend 1 Glamour to activate this power and roll Wits + Wyrd. With success, the bunyip can enter the dreams of the sleeper and shape them into nightmares. Each use of the power creates one particularly vivid nightmare that the sleeper will remember upon waking. This power has no effect on humans older than 12.

- Stolen Breath:** By feeding on the life-force of a child, the bunyip can heal its own wounds. The bunyip must spend 1 Glamour to activate this power and roll Wits + Wyrd vs. the child's Resolve + Stamina. With success, when the bunyip harvests the child for Glamour, it may trade in 1 Glamour to heal a point of bashing damage or 2 Glamour to heal a point of lethal damage. Stolen Breath intentionally draws on the life-force of a child, rather than just being a side effect. Using this power increases the damage suffered by a child from being harvested. Each point of Glamour that is harvested to heal the bunyip inflicts an additional point of bashing damage to the child.

THE BLIND KING: CONCUS

Fear is power.

BACKGROUND

Consus either doesn't remember or doesn't care to tell the story of his time in Arcadia. If asked about his durance, he gives the questioner a blank stare (no one does blank stares like Consus) and asks how the question is relevant. He is a tad more forthcoming about his life as a human. Consus says he was born and raised in Las Vegas, third son of one of the small *Mafioso* families that clung to existence after the city was mainly purged of their kind. He traveled to the East Coast after high school to attend college and returned to the family with a law degree from Harvard. From the time of his return, Consus worked for the family, moving up through the ranks, and was named *consigliere* at 40. During his time as *consigliere*, Consus gained a reputation for foresight, of always seeing the bigger picture, which made his advice particularly valuable, and it is perhaps that very reputation that attracted the attention of the Others.

Though not a young man when taken, Consus returned to the mortal realm after escaping from Faerie looking as though he had aged 30 years during the five years he was gone. In addition to the other changes wrought in his appearance by Arcadia, the brown eyes he had been born with had become milky white, giving him the look of a blind man. Even the Mask can't hide that particular change; both humans and Fae bear the scrutiny of his apparently sightless stare. Though his vision might seem cloudy to others, Consus found that he had never seen more clearly. Confronted with a problem to which he saw no immediate solution, Consus would allow his eyes to unfocus and the power of Wyrd contained in his sight would show him possibilities he hadn't considered.

Consus eventually made it back to Las Vegas after his escape and found his family under siege. During his five-year absence, Hispanic gangbangers had begun to move in on family turf and businesses. Las Vegas had a new police commissioner who had promised to drive the last vestiges of organized crime from the city and had targeted Consus' family as the most visible remnant of the mafia. Consus began to formulate plans on ways to fight back, ways to ensure the dominance and security of the family, but before he could put his plans into motion, he had to deal with a more personal issue. That of his fetch.

He had heard about fetches from other changelings as he traveled back to his hometown and had considered the idea that he himself had been replaced with a fae-spun replica. When Consus first saw his fetch stepping into his

house, carrying his morning paper, Consus had to fight down the urge to murder the thing. It looked exactly like he, Consus, should've looked: a fit, middle-aged man with attractive features and a full head of hair. As much as he wanted to destroy the thing that had taken his life for its own, Consus restrained himself for the good of the family. No one would believe the aged, blind figure was the same *consigliere* who had, days before, looked decades younger. Destroying his fetch would cause more chaos in the family to which Consus had devoted the majority of his life to serving. Swallowing his pride, Consus knocked on the door of his home, and when the fetch answered, its eyes widened at the sight of him. Consus told the thing they needed to talk. A deal was struck; a pledge was sealed.

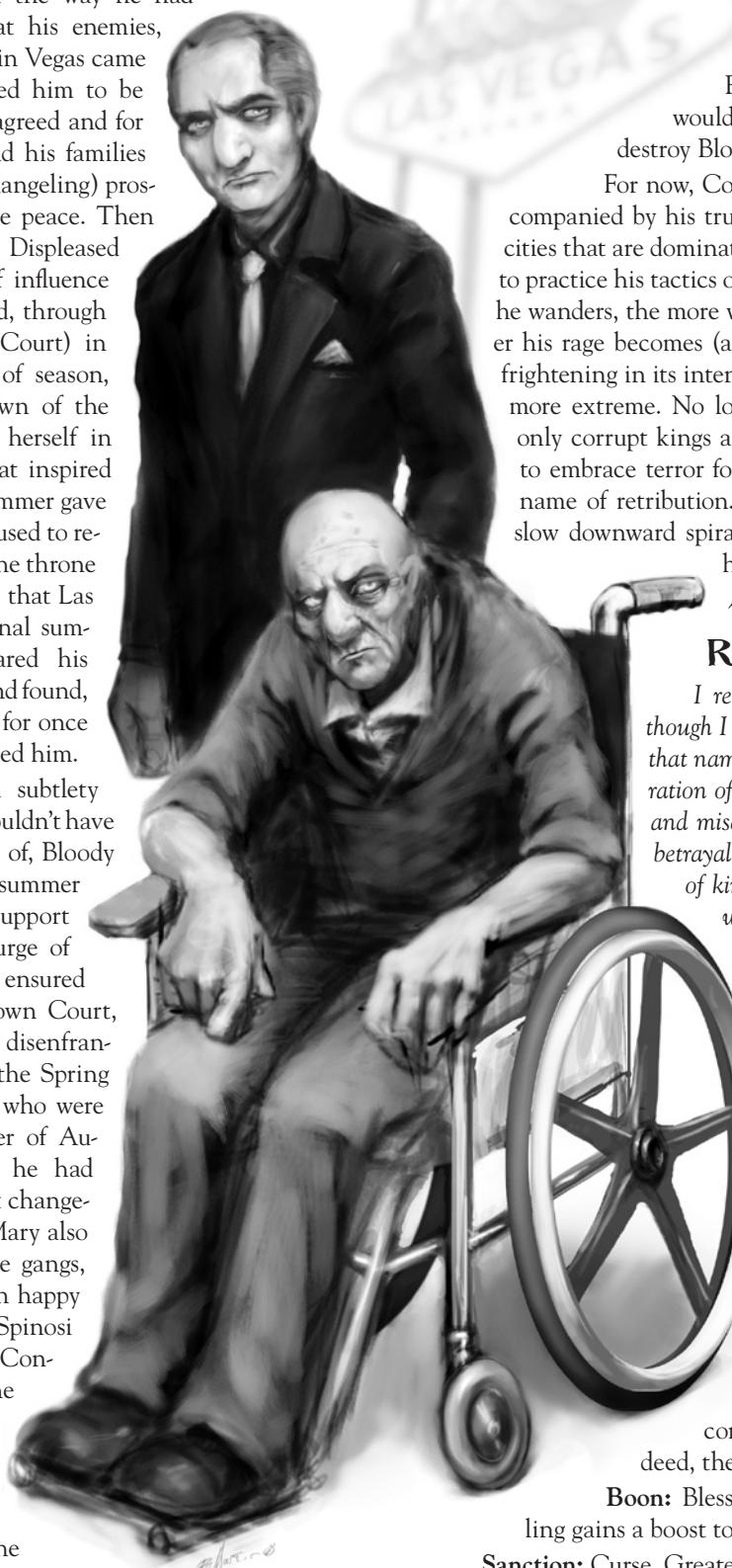
The fetch — which, of course, had his old name, Tommaso Spinosi — introduced Consus to the family as a cousin. Once he had been accepted into the fold, Consus worked to set things right. At first he worked through his fetch, acting behind the scenes, then, as the family grew increasingly reliant on him, he resumed his old position as *consigliere*. The gangers were beaten back with a campaign of terror orchestrated by Consus. Their homes and warehouses were burnt to the ground. In the span of three months, five different gang leaders were killed with car bombs. Using his innate talents and the Contracts he had learned in Faerie, Consus spread rumor and dissension among the gangers until they were so paranoid they began to turn against each other. Eventually the gangs sued for peace and an agreement was made that divided up the turf and businesses in the city and benefited Consus' family more than the gangers.

While the street war was raging, Consus also put plans into motion to deal with the commissioner. Knowing that any hint of mafia involvement would work against him, and unable to use local, mortal talent because of the war with the gangs, Consus used his contacts in the Autumn Court to bring several members of the Scarecrow Ministry to Vegas. With a series of staged attacks, whispered rumors and muckraker articles, the Scarecrows manipulated the citizens of Las Vegas into fearing the activities of the LVPD. Their crowning achievement was implicating the commissioner in a police cover-up of the brutal beating of two teenagers accused of shoplifting beer. The hue and cry raised by the public in response to the supposed activities of the police led to the mayor asking the commissioner to step down. With the war with the gangs over and their political trou-

bles eased by the resignation of the police commissioner, when the *capofamiglia* (Don) died in his sleep, Consus assumed control of the family.

Impressed with the way he had used fear to combat his enemies, the Autumn Court in Vegas came to Consus and asked him to be their king. Consus agreed and for a short time, he and his families (both mortal and changeling) prospered in the relative peace. Then came Bloody Mary. Displeased with the amount of influence Consus wielded (and, through him, the Autumn Court) in the city, even out of season, Mary took the crown of the Summer Court for herself in the bloody coup that inspired her name. When summer gave way to fall, Mary refused to relinquish control of the throne to Consus, claiming that Las Vegas dwelt in eternal summer. Consus prepared his Court to go to war and found, to his surprise, that for once his foresight had failed him.

Acting with a subtlety most changelings wouldn't have thought her capable of, Bloody Mary had spent the summer secretly building support for her cause. A purge of possible dissidents ensured the loyalty of her own Court, and she sought out disenfranchised members of the Spring and Winter Courts who were jealous of the power of Autumn. Aware that he had more allies than just changelings to call upon, Mary also made deals with the gangs, who were more than happy to double-cross the Spinosi family. By the time Consus was alert to the danger, it was already too late. In a single night of violence, Bloody Mary drove Consus and the Autumn Court from Vegas, while her ganger allies attacked



and killed every member of the Spinosi family they could find, including women and children. Driven from his home, his Court and family either dead or scattered, Consus swore the Oath of Retribution and promised he would one day return to Vegas and destroy Bloody Mary.

For now, Consus wanders the country, accompanied by his trusty retainer-fetch, seeking out cities that are dominated by a single Court on which to practice his tactics of fear and betrayal. The longer he wanders, the more wrongs he witnesses, the greater his rage becomes (a chilly, contained rage that is frightening in its intensity) and his methods become more extreme. No longer satisfied with terrorizing only corrupt kings and queens, Consus has begun to embrace terror for the sake of terror, all in the name of retribution. His Clarity has started on a slow downward spiral that could eventually make him into a true monster.

THE OATH OF RETRIBUTION

I remember the name of my lord, though I do not speak it. The memory of that name shall seal this oath, this declaration of my hatred. I vow to bring pain and misery, fear and terror, hatred and betrayal to those who dare claim the title of king in a time that is not theirs. I will do all in my power to punish the usurper, the tyrant and the dictator, no matter their Season. In return the Wyrd shall guide my Sight, revealing how best to injure my foes. If I fail in my oath, if I allow the unjust to rule unopposed, if I become what I hate, let the Wyrd curse me and bring ruin to all my works.

Type: The Name of the Keeper

Task: Endeavor, Greater (-3, the changeling swears to constantly oppose, by word and deed, the reign of rulers out of season)

Boon: Blessing, Greater (+3, the changeling gains a boost to his kith blessing)

Sanction: Curse, Greater (-3)

Duration: Lifelong (+3)

Invocation: 1 Willpower dot

The Oath of Retribution is an example of one of the few types of pledges that don't require a second party to swear. Instead of speaking the pledge to another person, the changeling speaks the pledge to the Wyrd itself. A pledge made to the Wyrd is a lifelong commitment and, as such, shouldn't be taken lightly or hastily. The changeling who attempts such a pledge must have a *true* commitment to that pledge or the Wyrd may not even recognize the pledge.

Breaking a pledge made to the Wyrd always results in the worst possible punishments imaginable. Not only does the oath-breaker suffer the effects of a greater curse, but he also attracts the attention of the Gentry, even if the oath isn't sworn on the name of a Keeper. In a case like the above oath, which is sworn on the name of the Keeper, the changeling oath-breaker will soon find himself back in the clutches of his erstwhile master, who is unlikely to be pleased to have his name taken in vain.

DESCRIPTION

To mortal eyes, Consus appears old and haggard, completely bald with liver spots and the milky-white eyes of the blind. Consus' fae mien also looks old, but not quite as frail or sickly. His skin has the consistency of old parchment and his white eyes give off a faint luminescence like the fading glow of a candle in the dark. In the presence of others, Consus is always seen sitting in a wheelchair and he plays up the idea that he is physically disabled as well as visually challenged. This is a sham. Consus is neither blind nor crippled; he has found that people underestimate him when they believe him to be wheelchair bound and blind. Consus is nearly always attended by his fetch-retainer, Tommy (see sidebar), and the pair of them often lead people to believe that Tommy is actually the brains of the operation.

In face-to-face meetings, Consus is slightly abrasive, not bothering to hide his disdain for other changelings who are willing to live under the rule of a tyrant. His voice betrays hints of his Italian-American heritage, especially when he insults people for their lack of (from his point of view) initiative or their cowardice. Perhaps as a result of his defeat at the hands of Bloody Mary, Consus has the most difficulty dealing peaceably with militant members of the Summer Court.

Consus is constantly on the alert for rumors about kings and queens who have chosen to extend their rule out of season, even Autumn Court rulers. When such rumors reach him, Consus and Tommy pack up and move to the source of the rumors, always setting up shop on the outskirts of town. Consus makes contact with a few changelings who live in the city, portraying himself as a rich tourist, and begins to discreetly gather information. Once he is ready to begin, Consus moves house and drops off the changeling radar altogether, even staging an exit from the city if he believes he is being watched. Then the fun begins.

Rather than target the corrupt rulers directly, which is what most of them would expect, Consus first goes after their friends and families. The daycare center that watches over the child of a ruler receives an anonymous bomb threat; the homes of the ruler's supporters are ransacked; their significant other finds the mailbox stuffed with pictures of them, some taken in their homes while they sleep. This low-level harassment continues until Consus is sure he has the attention of the ruler before switching tactics, and the killings begin. If Consus is able to make contact with local terrorist cells (foreign or homegrown; he isn't picky), he will supply them with equipment in return for their cooperation, ensuring their silence with oaths and pledges. The terrorists target the work or business of the ruler with car and mail bombs, or stalking and killing the ruler's employees or co-workers one by one. If terrorists aren't available, Consus does some of the work himself, assigns some wetwork to Tommy and hires out-of-town mortals for the rest of it. If the offending ruler isn't Autumn Court, Consus can sometimes talk the Scarecrow Ministry into assisting him to raise the level of fear in a city.

Consus continues to ratchet up the level of tension until the ruler begins to lash out in paranoia and frustration, which Consus turns to his own ends by assassinating allies of the ruler and leaving evidence at the scene pointing to other changelings of the ruling Court. Only when the ruler is overwhelmed by fear, too afraid even to sleep in her own home, will Consus attack her directly.

SECRETS

As his connection to the Wyrd continues to grow and his hands become more and more bloodstained, Consus has found relief from his own fears by returning to the Catholic beliefs of his family. If he is unable to visit a church at least once a week to receive confession, Consus grows irritable and distracted. Churches are the only places in which he truly seems at peace.

With the passing of the years, his connection with his fetch, Tommy, has grown stronger rather than diminished. The Pledge of Twin Minds requires that he see to the safety of Tommy as long as the fetch serves Consus faithfully. This unusual combination of continued close proximity and sworn pledge to his fetch has created a situation that amuses Consus but would horrify other changelings if they found out. Tommy has become the Bane of Consus. If he were ever moved to anger, the lightest blow from Tommy would cause serious damage to Consus. The old Wizened views the situation as a test of his own fears, a test he passes daily.

His reticence about speaking of his time in Arcadia hides the fact that Consus can't remember what happened to him there. He remembers being dragged, screaming, into the Hedge by unknown assailants, and he remembers stumbling back through the Hedge, but the time in between is blank. A

The Fetch

Tommaso Spinozi was just as appalled to learn he was a copy as Consus was to see him, yet from the moment Tommy looked Consus in the eyes, he knew the truth. When Consus suggested the two of them needn't be enemies, that two minds, twin minds, could work better than one, Tommy agreed to swear a pledge with him. Tommy shares the same Attribute scores as Consus and many of the same Skills. Storytellers can alter the stat block of Consus to create whichever type of retainer would be most useful for Consus in their chronicle. If the troupe is likely to go after Consus with guns blazing, fixing Tommy's stats to make him more of a physical threat is encouraged. If the chronicle is more politically oriented, Storytellers are welcome to simply copy Consus (minus the changeling template) to truly represent the fetch and the changeling as twin minds. Keep in mind that it is unusual for a changeling and fetch to work in harmony. The relationship between Consus and Tommy will (and should) seem strange and somewhat creepy.

Tommy has several Echoes from the *Changeling* core book (see *Changeling: The Lost*, p. 256), as well as two new Echoes. From the core: Attuned to the Wyrd, Enter the Hedge, Feast of Shadows, Match, Mimic and Shadow Step.

- **Spying Eyes (Wyrd 3):** By spending a point of Glamour, the fetch can see through the eyes of its changeling counterpart for one turn. This quick glance amounts to a still picture of the changeling's surroundings. The fetch can only use this Echo if it and the changeling are within five miles of each other.
- **Intimidation (Wyrd 5):** By spending a point of Glamour and making eye contact with its target, the fetch can attempt to intimidate that person into following its instructions. The fetch rolls Presence + Intimidation + Wyrd versus the target's Resolve + Composure + Wyrd. If the fetch gains more successes than its target, the fetch may give the target a short command (no more than one sentence) that the target *must* obey, unless the command is suicidal in nature.

very few of the Lost he has encountered during his wanderings seemed to recognize him and their reactions were always the same stark fear. When questioned, none of these changelings can quite remember why they should react to his presence like they do; the fear seems almost instinctual.

RUMORS

"I heard about this old guy who is a slave to his fetch. The fetch keeps him doped and uses the poor bastard to gather Glamour for the fetch to eat."

The origins of this rumor lie in the façade that Consus and Tommy present to other changelings. It is very easy to assume the fetch is the dominant personality in the relationship and that Consus' activities somehow work to the benefit of the fetch. Changelings who show up to "rescue" Consus from his captor are in for a rude awakening when both master and servant turn their ire on the meddlers.

"Remember hearing about that shit that went down in Memphis last year? The Spring Queen decided to keep the crown, and a few months later was found floating facedown in her hot tub. Most of the changelings in the city still talk in whispers about stuff that didn't make the news, like serial killers stalking the Spring Court and the Queen's hair salon getting blown up. Anyways, my buddy in Memphis tells me that just before the shit hit the fan, his motley saw a blind Wizened rolling

down the street in a wheelchair. Something about the Wizened gave them the creeps, but they never saw him again after the Queen died. That sound like a coincidence to you?"

Regardless of how hard Consus tries to hide his presence from the majority of changelings in a city, his appearance is unique enough that some of the Lost are bound to remember him, especially in the wake of the violence his coming portends. Rumors linking the blind Wizened to acts of violence (some true, some not) have slowly begun to spread and a few changelings have started to seek him out. Should one of these changelings hear about the fracas in Las Vegas, the truth about Consus might begin to come out.

CONSUS

Seeming: Wizened

Kith: Oracle

Entitlements: None

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 5, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics (Law) 4, Computer 3, Investigation 5, Occult 3, Politics 3, Science 2

Physical Skills: Firearms 2, Larceny 3, Stealth 4

Story Hooks

• It was a joke, nothing more, but a couple of weeks after the Winter King declared he would hide with the crown, things have started to get weird in the freehold. A member of the motley, also a good friend of the Winter King, found a death threat on his answering machine and someone nailed the body of his cat to the back door.

• In the atmosphere of fear created by the (supposed) threat of terrorist attack, the Autumn Queen has seized control of the city and refuses to relinquish it. The motley is deciding on what to do when they receive a phone call. The voice on the other end sounds like leaves rustling in the dark and the speaker (male) offers to help them stand up to the queen, if they have the balls.

• Something about the guy struck you as odd, so you followed him. After a while you figured out he was a fetch. Then you saw him approach an old Wizened in a wheelchair and something about how the changeling turned his head reminded you of the way the fetch moved. Now you are wondering why (or if) a changeling would voluntarily deal with his fetch.

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Expression 3, Intimidation (Creepy Stare) 3, Persuasion (Inciting) 5, Socialize 2, Streetwise 4, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Allies (the Scarecrow Ministry) 3, Contacts (Hackers, Weapons Suppliers, Terrorists) 3, Danger Sense, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Language (Italian, Spanish) 2, Mantle (Autumn) 5, Resources 5, Retainer 4

Willpower: 8

Clarity: 4

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 6

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Health: 7

Wyrd: 7

Frailties: Fetch (Bane), weekly confession (taboo, compulsion)

Contracts: Darkness •, Fang and Talon • (rats), Smoke; Eternal Autumn; Fleeting Autumn •; Fool's Gold ..

Pledges: Oath of Season (Autumn Court), Pledge of Twin Minds (Fetch), Oath of Retribution (versus unjust Courts)

Glamour/Turn: 20/7

Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool
Glock 17	2	20/40/80	6

PANOMANCY

As a result of his high Wyrd and the Oath of Retribution, Consus' kith blessing works a little differently from most Oracles. At Wyrd 7, Consus can use his Panomancy once per scene and he is just obsessive enough that he probably does. Additionally, once per chapter, Consus can divine the course of future events. This operates like the Goblin Contract, "Diviner's Madness" (see *Changeling: The Lost*, p. 165), without driving Consus temporarily insane. Though Consus can never remember the prophecies he makes, Tommy keeps a record of the foretellings.

THE CONQUEROR WORM: DZARŪMAZH

You are fine sport, indeed, for so small a thing!

Aliases: The Deathless, Mr. Dorian Hargrave

BACKGROUND

One of the first things taught to any changeling is that the Others cannot abide the touch of cold-forged iron. Their flesh recoils from its manifestly terrestrial substance, and its very presence causes them pain and discomfort. Many different tales are told as to why this is, though the lore of the Lost always agrees that the Gentry were, for whatever reason, unable to reach an accord with that primitive element. Whether they offended against the fundamental essence of iron or were never able to come to terms with it, none can say for certain, and most True Fae are, apparently, quite content to leave things at that.

Most, but not all.

It's unsurprising, really. Any such being that could manage to cut a deal with the substance most hateful to the Others would wield a potent — perhaps insurmountable — advantage in all interactions with its fellow Gentry. Immune to the searing kiss of iron, such a Fae could rampage unchecked through Arcadia and establish itself as the preeminent tyrant among Faerie's inhuman denizens. It is perhaps fitting, then, that one of the so-called "emperor of beasts" is the Fae who seeks this elusive pact. Dzarūmazh, sometimes called the Deathless, is a dragon of Faerie and, like most of his kind, a ruthless, selfish, acquisitive creature, driven by the lust for ever-greater power.

No one quite knows when the dragon began its ambitious quest. Some say Dzarūmazh has *always* walked the mortal world in one form or another, in pursuit of the elusive secret of cold iron. Others believe that its coming is much more recent, inspired, perhaps, by the exploits of would-be dragonslayers, both mortal and changeling, who thought only of the glory of striking down one of the mightiest of monsters, and of the rich rewards that must surely follow so heroic an act. Whatever the case, no records of Dzarūmazh's search exist, in *any* freehold, before the middle of the 18th century, when William the Wolf, Crimson King of Roanoke Island, met the dragon in open challenge on Midsummer's Day. It was a vain effort to defend the other Lost of the freehold against the creature's relentless quest to obtain the secret it so desperately craved (a clue to which Dzarūmazh apparently believed to rest somewhere in or around the site of the lost colony). The dragon's name, bellowed at the Wolf, was later recounted by Maggie Twopence, an Autumn fae survivor of the invasion, to a scribe of her Court in a freehold in the Province of Pennsylvania.

From that time onward, Dzarūmazh shows up every now and again in changeling histories. Sometimes, the lost diary of a long-dead Wizened or the elegantly penned scrolls of some Fairest will tell of an interaction with the dragon, during which he sought to bargain for the esoteric lore of cold iron. Most other times, however, there are only panicked accounts, written in the author's dwindling lifeblood on half-charred pages, or in letters scrawled frantically into shattered and blackened stone with the tip of a dagger, "DZARŪMAZH HAS COME." On occasion, the Deathless has left the desolate ruins of entire freeholds in his wake, when impudent Lost have seen fit to withhold some desired piece of information from him, some moronic would-be "hero" has attempted to play dragonslayer, or even just when a fit of pique and frustration has driven the monster to heights of rage unfathomable to mortal beings.

Still, the dragon's sojourn is something more nuanced and elaborate than the games typically played by the Others, and some changelings have recollections of peaceful — if exceedingly tense — interactions with Dzarūmazh. A handful has come away with a sense that something is driving the dragon, something far deeper than mere avarice or even the characteristic amoral curiosity of the True Fae. Perhaps motivated by the strange customs of hospitality and gratitude that govern his kind, Dzarūmazh has (generally) treated fairly those who sincerely share their knowledge on the subject of cold iron. Sometimes, if a piece of information is particularly good, the dragon rewards them. Some few have gotten away with lying to the creature, but most would-be deceivers aren't quite so lucky. The most fortunate of this unhappy lot are devoured quickly. One or two of the rest of them might still be alive, though they surely wish otherwise.

Of course, the dragon's various mortal and changeling identities have also crept down through the years. Without any real empathy for the mayfly creatures of the human world — and little regard for the memories of such frail-minded beings — Dzarūmazh only thinks to change his earthly name every half century or so, and his appearance among mortals or the Lost somewhat less often than that (and then only superficially, in the latter case). Thus, the exploits of Dorian Hargrave and his predecessors still exist as trails of documents, ranging from hotel registries, to bills of sale, to ship's manifests, to the libraries of certain freeholds. In the house passed down from Winter King to Winter King in Budapest, Hungary, a painting of Sir Isaac Duvall hangs over the mantel, the eyes and aristocratic fea-

tures almost identical to those possessed by Dorian Hargrave. Kept by the chamberlain of Hong Kong's freehold, an embroidered tapestry depicts a similar-looking man, Gavin Cosgrove, sipping tea with a serpentine princess. On the innermost wall of a cave near the sea in the northwestern United States, expertly rendered pigments reveal the image of Gerhardt Fire-Eye engaged in trade with local changelings, his white hair, angular face and luminous eyes strikingly familiar to anyone acquainted with Mr. Hargrave.

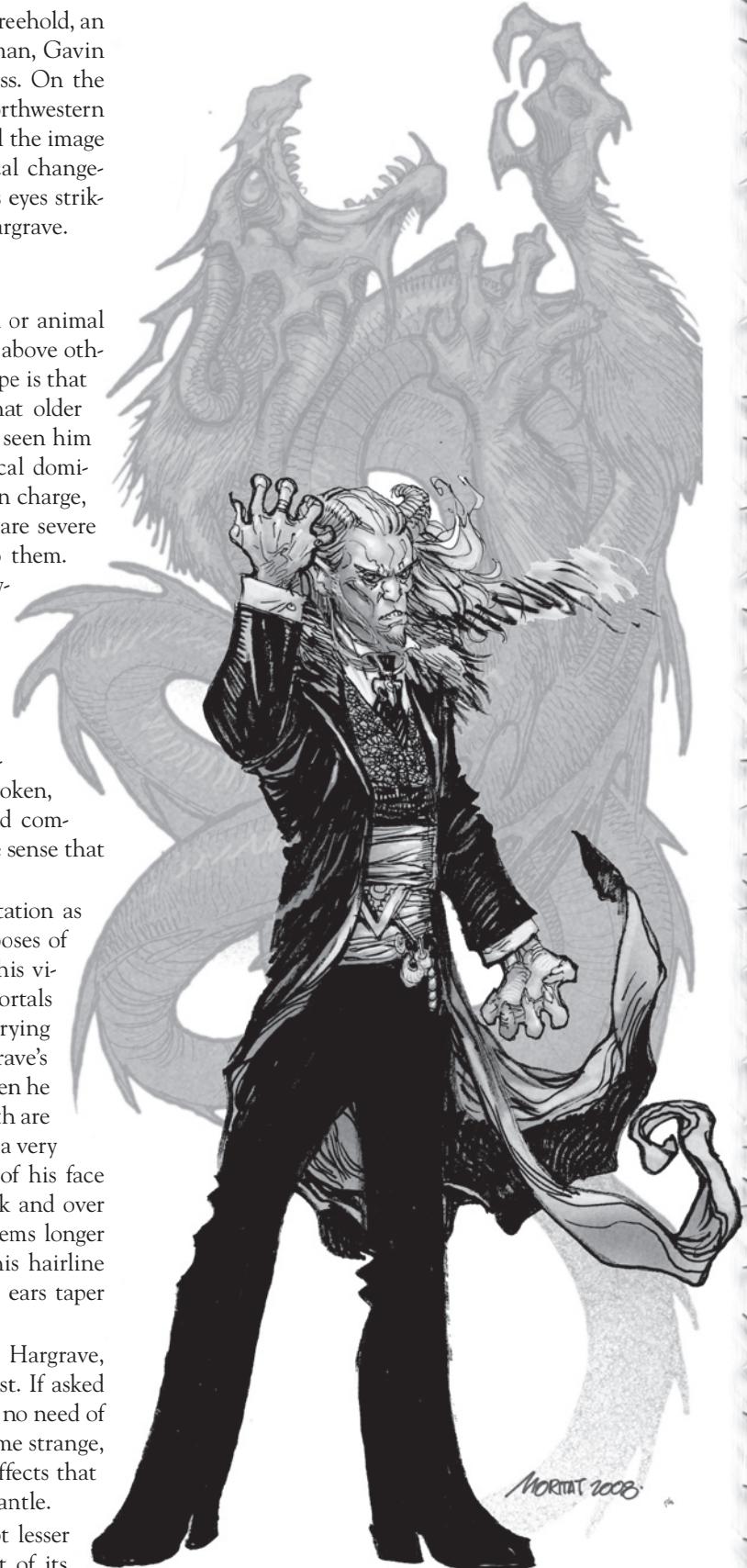
DESCRIPTION

While Dzarûmazh may assume any human or animal form he wishes, he tends to favor certain shapes above others. In modern times, his commonest mortal shape is that of Mr. Dorian Hargrave: a fit, stately, somewhat older gentleman of nebulous extraction. Most who've seen him tend to agree that he reflects aspects of the local dominant ethnic and social divisions — whoever is in charge, *that* is who Hargrave seems to be. His features are severe but appealing and have a certain feral cast to them. His vaguely reddish-brown eyes are forever studying others, sizing them up both as pawns and as prey, and no one truly feels comfortable in his presence. When he stands close, his breath smells acrid, like a deadly venom lit aflame and left to smolder. His flawlessly manicured nails look glassy and his teeth are too white and perfect for a human mouth. He is usually soft-spoken, though his voice is unnaturally compelling and commanding; those in his presence are struck by the sense that there can be no defying his wishes.

At will, the dragon may alter his manifestation as Dorian Hargrave, affecting a mien for the purposes of changeling perception. He may either restrict this vision to the eyes of the Lost or freely reveal it to mortals (although he typically opts for the former when trying to blend in among the Lost). In such a case, Hargrave's mouth trickles a steady stream of dark smoke when he speaks and his eyes glint a dark crimson. His teeth are sharp and his nails taper to talons. Tiny scales of a very faint mottled greenish-brown frame the edges of his face and spread down the sides and back of his neck and over the backs of his hands, while his white hair seems longer and wilder. Shining black horns sprout from his hairline and curl back closely along his head, while his ears taper to points.

When using the human form of Dorian Hargrave, Dzarûmazh often claims to be a Draconic Fairest. If asked for his Court, he will usually answer that he has no need of one, or he will make claim to membership in some strange, foreign Court. If need be, he can create small effects that might be indicative of a potent but unknown Mantle.

Naturally, Dzarûmazh may choose to adopt lesser forms, and it sometimes does so in the pursuit of its



overarching objective. Cats, dogs, birds, snakes and other such creatures may be imitated, along with all their natural capabilities. If he desires to do so, Dzarûmazh may alter the shape of any animal whose form he adopts, affecting changes both blatant (adding ram's horns, foot-long spines and an aura of ghostly blue flame to a wolf's body, for example) and subtle (adopting the power of human speech while wearing the skin of a housecat).

When he sheds all pretense of mortality, the great dragon is not so much perceived as he is later recalled, and then only as a nightmare defying consistent description. Generally, accounts agree that the monster is a mottled brown-green in color, with eyes the color of luminous blood. He is long and sinuous, sporting talons the size of scimitars. The scattered few tales of Dzarûmazh's appearance — commonly recounted by survivors crippled in body, mind, or both — generally agree that he is too large to fit in any space smaller than the average high school gymnasium, and then only by coiling repeatedly inward upon himself. He is a titanic creature and may well be capable of altering even the size of his "true" form.

While in his dragon form, Dzarûmazh is the very incarnation of arrogant power. When he speaks, the Earth itself trembles and lesser beings fall to their knees in awe and terror. The conqueror worm does not make requests — he issues commandments that must be heeded. Those to whom he reveals the fullness of his majesty feel privileged to bask in his magnificence. Even changelings, who instinctively understand Dzarûmazh's nature when it is so blatantly unveiled for them, cannot help but wish to serve the dragon and please him, even to their own detriment. To look upon Dzarûmazh the Deathless is to behold a god, clothed in earthly flesh: a monstrous, avaricious god whose might could readily lay waste to most freeholds in a single night.

SECRETS

Naturally, the tale of the conqueror worm goes far deeper than just a quixotic obsession with cold iron. If it were merely that, after all, the mercurial nature of the True Fae would have long since overwhelmed even Dzarûmazh's great persistence and the Arcadian beast would, at the very least, spend most of its time on the far side of the Thorns, only occasionally emerging to indulge in its pastime. No, Dzarûmazh has a much more pressing reason for its quest: the great dragon is dying. Slowly but surely, the broken tip of an ensorcelled cold iron spearhead is working its way toward Dzarûmazh's heart. It may take a decade, or a century, or a millennium, but that enchanted sliver of iron is inevitably going to spell the end of the ancient creature. The truth of the matter is that Dzarûmazh is desperate, and he believes that only a pact with iron itself can undo the hurt that wracks his body with pain and torments him with the knowledge of his own looming mortality.

Dzarûmazh as a Keeper

The Deathless goes back and forth between Arcadia and the mortal world with a frequency that most other Gentry would find alarming. Part and parcel with this regular travel between worlds, however, is the ample opportunity to kidnap humans and drag them through the Thorns for purposes understood only by the Others. Perhaps a fair, virginal maiden catches the dragon's eye and he claims her as a "sacrifice" by bringing her back to his Arcadian lair. Or maybe a courageous warrior impresses the ancient creature with her resolute nature and unyielding strength, and he opts to "reward" her bravery with a chance to test her mettle against *real* enemies. Whatever the case, Dzarûmazh can easily fill the role of Keeper for one or more of the changelings in your motley — perhaps even all of them.

Those who have suffered the dragon's attentions are in a unique position when it comes to divining his secrets and weaknesses. These Lost will have wandered the Arcadian caves in which he sleeps, counted the innumerable Faerie coins of his hoard, guarded the craggy passes that lead to his mountain home, been suspended in golden cages to sing for his pleasure, and been otherwise subjected to the old monster's inhuman whims. Of course, the agonies of a brutal durance and the memory-scouring properties of the Thorns will leave such characters with only fragmented recollections of anything they might have learned about Dzarûmazh, so they will have to work at deciphering the lore that lies, sleeping, within their own scarred minds and ragged souls, if they hope to use such knowledge against him.

Naturally, the dragon will not confide this knowledge in anyone — no Fae, no mortal, and no changeling — though there are certainly ways of finding out such perilous lore, with or without Dzarûmazh's consent. Discovering this information (or the means of learning one or more of the dragon's weaknesses and so discerning such information) is likely a significant journey in and of itself, but there is always a price to be paid for the truth, especially among such

inveterate deceivers as the Gentry. Characters who learn the dragon's terrible secret have a choice to make: will they try to hasten his demise or offer to aid him, in exchange for some sort of binding oath, should they succeed? Inasmuch as the Others can be genuinely grateful (or feel *any* true emotion, for that matter), Dzarûmazh would, indeed, be appreciative of anyone who could extract the baneful shard and save his life, with or without the elusive contract with iron. The dragon might offer valuable treasures or strange fae magics. It might perform a single service, like doing battle with another True Fae on a character's behalf, or rescuing a friend or loved one from Arcadia. The Gentry are bound by strange rules; many of them are compelled to answer service with service of equal value, and preserving the existence of such a potent True Fae against lingering certain death is a boon of great magnitude. Of course, crafty characters might see other angles to exploit in all of this.

RUMORS

"Oh, you think that dragons only exist in fairy tales? Yeah, well, so do ogres and boggarts and brownies and whatever the hell else is kicking around between here and Arcadia, and I see that sort of shit every other damn day when I visit the freehold. So, listen to me when I tell you that there are dragons beyond the Thorns and, just maybe, some on this side of the Hedge. The way I heard it, there's an old and nasty one — old and nasty by the standards of the Gentry, mind you — who goes about his business in the mortal world, clothed in human flesh. I don't know what he wants... Hell, I don't want to know what he wants. The stories I've been told say that he comes out this way every so often, looking for something. Something to do with cold iron, I think. Can't figure out what one of the Others wants with cold fucking iron, but it can't be good."

This rumor works best if Dzarûmazh isn't a local (in his form as Dorian Hargrave), but rather a regular visitor to the area, likely seeking something related to his all-consuming quest to escape his inevitable fate. In this case, the dragon will tend to travel in more innocuous shapes (like bats, dogs and random mortals), but might be incited to assume his natural form by a threat in the Hedge or some other significant event. Given the size of the creature, it's quite likely that someone could spot him, whether a changeling, an ensorcelled mortal, or even a hobgoblin capable of human speech.

"Mr. Hargrave is a really old Draconic Fairest. The way I hear it, he was around for the Great Depression and maybe even the First World War. But, I mean, you can totally tell that he's old and powerful; I mean, just look at that crazy shit going on in his Mantle when he gets worked up. What Court is he from? I don't know. A couple of folks have asked him that before and he never gives a straight answer, apparently. He travels a lot — disappears for years at a time, sometimes — so the rumor is that he was inducted into some weird Court while he was out traveling the world or whatever. Russian, maybe, or Scandinavian, or something like that. Some folks have said he

was in the Middle East when he found his Court. All I know is that he's scary as hell and could probably rule this freehold if he felt like it."

Any changeling looking to dig into "Mr. Hargrave's" history had best be prepared for a lot of roadblocks and inexplicable omissions, but this is nothing new when researching the history of the Lost; they often have reasons — and, occasionally, the resources — to obfuscate their pasts. Still, some changelings have exceptional resources of their own when it comes to exploring the personal histories of others, and Dorian Hargrave's past is both lengthy and fascinating. He's wealthy, but doesn't seem to have much in the way of a bank account. Rather, his money just seems to be there when he needs it (not impossible, especially for one of the Fairest, but certainly unusual). He's involved in various businesses, but his position in each of them is extremely nebulous. He leaves no records when he travels; it's not so much that he goes anywhere than that he simply disappears at will. While some Lost journey via the Hedge, the frequency with which Hargrave wanders makes that method suicidally inadvisable, at best, especially considering the far-flung destinations to which he is commonly assumed to travel. He has few close ties to other Lost, but never seems to run out of disposable mortal minions. And the scant photographic evidence that exists indicates he hasn't aged a day in decades — an impressive feat for even the most powerful of changelings.

Those who resort to supernatural methods (or are extraordinarily accomplished and persistent in their use of mundane means) can discover still more. Dorian Hargrave seems to be just the latest in a string of identities, not a one of which is more recent than half a century old, and the oldest of which dates back to the 17th century (when Dzarûmazh was wounded by the deadly lance). His appearance remains more or less constant, and he seems to come and go throughout time, emerging in different places, but always as a man of wealth and influence, always a traveler, always interested in strange antiquities, and always powerful beyond the reckoning of most Lost. Some of the evidence may well indicate that he could be a loyalist, allowed to come and go from Faerie as he wishes. Perhaps he's even been given some token or taught some arcane Contract that grants him safe passage through the Hedge. Given that Hargrave very obviously seems to be a Draconic, however, it's unlikely that he's Gentry.

"Mr. Hargrave is branching out into operations in China, I heard. He's apparently looking for some people to work out there. I know it sucks to relocate, but the pay is supposed to be fantastic, and there's all kinds of opportunities for promotion. I guess he wants people to research and catalogue all that old shit he's always trying to find. I've been thinking about taking him up on the offer. I figure, five or six years of that and I'll have a pretty impressive résumé, especially considering I didn't even graduate from college. I mean, can you believe that? He's a hell of a guy to give someone like me a chance like that."

For mortal characters (or non-changeling supernatural characters with close connections to normal human beings), Dorian Hargrave probably just seems like an extremely wealthy, somewhat eccentric individual. Of course he's got some weird agenda; what man with his money and connections doesn't? The fact is that he seems to pay well and doesn't ask a lot of questions about the people he employs. Those who impress him (or who just seem like they wouldn't be missed) can earn his "favor" and might be offered "exciting opportunities," whether at home or abroad (fetches, after all, aren't in a position to complain about being made in a person's hometown or 4,000 miles away, in a foreign country).

Those who dig deeply into the rumor may learn that most of Hargrave's "chosen few" don't go on to do much with their lives, but that's really par for the course. While the majority of these folks seem to be almost aggressively ordinary, most people simply fail to capitalize upon the chances they're given and end up with boring, humdrum lives. A couple of them die under weird circumstances, but that's also not terribly unusual among people who go digging into arcane secrets and who trade (whether legitimately or otherwise) in bizarre relics of the paranormal. Some end up with weird identity issues, like ranting strangers who crop up, claiming to be these people who've been around for years, just living their lives without any especially noteworthy incidents. That latter fact is probably the strangest of the lot; while none of these items is, of itself, a cause for alarm, taken together, they're certainly disturbing, at the very least. Together, these different issues seem to indicate some sort of weird conspiracy or other malevolent force at work around Mr. Hargrave, perhaps initiated by the man himself.

For an interesting approach to a chronicle, you might even have players create mortal characters (perhaps years or even decades in the past) who work for the dragon and who are taken by him to Arcadia, and then move back and forth between the torments of the characters' respective durances and the unusual events that surround their fetches, as these artificial people begin to learn that something unusual is afoot. When the characters escape from Arcadia, they have a built-in reason to have strong feelings regarding Dzarûmazh and, despite their fragmented memories, likely also possess more and more accurate information about him and his activities than any other changelings on Earth.

DZARÛMAZH

(Numbers listed before a slash are for Dzarûmazh's human or changeling forms, while those after are for his "true" shape.)

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 7, Wits 5, Resolve 10

Physical Attributes: Strength 4/20, Dexterity 5, Stamina 6/20

Social Attributes: Presence 6/12, Manipulation 7, Composure 9

Mental Skills: Academics (Research) 8, Crafts 4, Investigation (Artifacts) 9, Medicine 6, Occult (Alchemy) 10, Politics (Changeling) 6, Science (Metallurgy) 5

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 4/10, Drive 2/0, Firearms 1/0, Stealth 2, Survival 7, Weaponry 8/0

Social Skills: Expression 6, Intimidation (Formal Challenges) 10, Persuasion 4, Socialize 4/0, Streetwise 2, Subterfuge (Lies) 8

Merits: Allies (innumerable; only available to Dorian Hargrave), Contacts (as Allies), Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Fame (Antiquities Collectors; Dorian Hargrave only) 1, Meditative Mind, New Identity 4, Resources 5, Status (Hargrave Imports; Dorian Hargrave only) 5, Striking Looks 4

Willpower: 10

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 14

Defense: 5

Speed: 14 (human or changeling forms) or 30 ("true" form)

Health: 11 (human or changeling forms) or 40 ("true" form)

Wyrds: 10

Contracts: Artifice ••••; Dream ••••; Elements (Metal) ••••; Vainglory ••••

Glamour/Per Turn: 100/15

Armor: 3/3 (human or changeling forms) or 7/7 (bulletproof; "true" form — in this shape, modern firearms are useless against Dzarûmazh)

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Swordcane (human form)	2(L)	—	14	—
Fist (human form)	0(B)	8	—	—
Claw ("true" form)	1(L)	—	31	see below
Bite ("true" form)	2(L)	—	32	see below
Breath ("true" form)	0(A)	20/40/80	8	—

Fae Aspects

- **Legendary Monster:** Most True Fae are limited to a maximum of 6 in any Trait while in the mortal world. Dzarûmazh transcends this limitation; he is able to draw on his full might in either world.

- **Dragon's Fury:** Dzarûmazh normally only makes one attack (claw or bite) per turn. By spending three points of Glamour per attack as a reflexive action, however, the Deathless can add up to two more attacks in a given turn (for a total of two claw attacks and one bite). Regardless of how many attacks he makes in a turn, though, the dragon's enormity works somewhat to his disadvantage in dealing with much smaller foes: for every three full dots of Size by which the subject of a claw or bite attack is smaller than Dzarûmazh, the dragon loses two dice on his attack roll —

while nimble for his size, the Deathless has trouble striking at what are, to him, minuscule targets.

- **Hellish Heart:** A venomous fire rages within the belly of the Deathless, which he can disgorge in a vicious, flesh-scouring stream of toxic vapor. By spending five points of Glamour and as an instant action (requiring a Dexterity + Athletics roll), Dzarûmazh can spit his baneful breath at a given target, inflicting aggravated damage on a successful attack. Note that the dragon can make no other attacks during a turn in which he employs his lethal flame.

- **Immortal Flesh:** As one of the True Fae manifested in the mortal world, the dragon can shrug off some of the lesser slings and arrows of the mundane. Bashing damage does not affect Dzarûmazh at all, unless delivered by a cold iron bludgeon. Cold-forged iron causes aggravated damage, should someone be skilled enough to strike the creature with such.

- **Ruled by Passion:** The True Fae are entities almost embodied by their passions and vices, with higher morality and self-denial little more than a whim to them. For them, passion is virtue, and the denial of passion an affectation. Their supernaturally amoral nature is reflected in an inverted ability to gain Willpower. Dzarûmazh regains one Willpower point from indulging his Virtue, but refreshes his whole pool when satiating his Vice.

- **Ten Thousand Shapes:** By spending three points of Glamour and as a reflexive action, Dzarûmazh can reshape himself at will into whatever living form suits his current needs: human, animal or even something more fanciful. He tends to “default” to certain forms (like that of Dorian Hargrave), though nothing expressly confines him to such familiar shapes. Dzarûmazh can use this Aspect to increase the Size of his dragon form, as well, adding one point of Size to his default Size of 20 per point of Glamour spent. As a side effect of this ability, the dragon can speak any earthly language, as well as being able to read and write any that have a written form.

- **Unholy Splendor:** While in his “true” form, the Deathless continually projects an aura of otherworldly awe and dread. Any attempt to attack or even defy him requires the reflexive expenditure of a point of Willpower, which allows a character to act as she will with regard to Dzarûmazh for the remainder of the scene. By spending three points of Glamour as an instant action, the dragon can redouble the power of this aura with a Presence + Wyrd roll, forcing every character whose successes on a Composure + Wyrd do not meet or exceed his own to fall prostrate for the remainder of the turn. Only through the reflexive expenditure of another point of Willpower can such a character again act against the Deathless.

Slaying the Dragon

As is evident from Dzarûmazh’s write-up, killing the creature in open combat is a virtual impossibility. Dragonslaying, after all, should be an undertaking of monumental scope. Characters who learn the truth of the Deathless and wish to put an end to his centuries-long quest have an epic journey ahead of them. They must seek the advice of sages and prophets, pore over dusty tomes of forbidden knowledge, gather arms and armor that can pierce Dzarûmazh’s scarred old hide and stand up to his steely talons and the smoldering fume of his poisonous breath, and perhaps even deal with rival Gentry. Striking down such an enemy is something decidedly greater than killing some rogue hobgoblin or beating up a violent crackhead who’s just demanded a character’s wallet, and it needs to be treated with the appropriate sense of gravity.

Certain aspects of the dragon’s history have been left deliberately vague, so as to be most easily incorporated into the events of your chronicle. Who was the warrior who mortally wounded the Deathless, for example? This individual’s identity may play a critical role in Dzarûmazh’s defeat. Likewise, the creature’s specific Frailties have not been detailed here, so that you can tailor them to suit the sort of story you’d like to tell. Perhaps the dragon has actually made some meaningful progress toward forging a pact with the element of cold iron; do the characters want to try to steal that lore from Dzarûmazh or are they willing to work *with* the True Fae to have it? Of course, if they *kill* the dragon, they can have such knowledge all to themselves. But how?

The point of all of this is that laying Dzarûmazh low is about so much more than dots of Strength or Weaponry, or how many Contracts a character can bring to bear against the monster. Killing this particular Other is about a daring quest and the many perilous roads that the heroes must walk before they’re ready to bring all of their wits, courage, cunning — and, yes, strength — to bear against a seemingly insurmountable foe. It’s about one of the quintessential legends: the story of the dragonslayer.

THE PIED PIPER: DJ HAMLYN

You get your tune into someone's mind, and they're yours to do whatever you want.

BACKGROUND

Blessed with natural good looks, David Piper was one of the most popular guys at school. Everyone loved him and did whatever he wanted them to. Piper, naturally, took advantage of this and was inherently lazy. Instead of studying, he goofed off and sang and played guitar in a rock band. While he was a natural singer and a gifted musician, he was too lazy to practice enough to make it as a professional.

However, he got a rude awakening once school was over and his good looks and lazy attitude weren't enough to earn him a living. After struggling financially for a while, he ended up working as a pest exterminator. His business was particularly busy, servicing homes in suburbia. Piper preferred working for bored, rich housewives who had pest problems and a stunted love life. He'd come over and work on killing the pests, all the time serenading the lady of the house. More often than not, he serenaded them into bed, where he was a talented lover. Word of mouth took over, and he was inundated with calls from women who could have sworn they'd heard a mouse or glimpsed a cockroach somewhere in the house, even if there was no sign of the little beasts.

Seduction was a perk that could be taken too far, though. Piper occasionally wondered if he'd meet a painful death at the hand of a jealous husband. What he didn't expect was that one woman he seduced would turn out to be part of the Gentry.

The Lady of the Grove had heard rumors about the so-called "piper" who sang so beautifully and loved like no other. Curious, she arranged to have him visit her, to see if the stories she had heard were true. When she found they were, she took him to Arcadia to entertain her there in her realm.

While the Lady enjoyed his physical prowess, it was his voice that impressed her more than anything else. She loved to listen to him sing, often for hours at a time, so she pressed him into service as a minstrel in her domain. She adored lying back in the long aquamarine grass with the sunlight filtering through the mist and trees as Piper serenaded her.

If he failed to entertain her, she tortured him for weeks at a time. But when he did a good job, she rewarded him by overloading his pleasure circuits for days, making him want to stay where he was.

Piper, however, never forgot all the women he had been with. Despite the ecstatic sensations the Lady provided him,

he could never commit himself full time to a single woman, and it was his lecherousness that eventually let him escape into the Hedge. Piper knew he was a slave and he longed to be free again.

One day, after the Lady had grown tired of his singing, he slipped quietly into the Hedge. Four months later, a battered and bruised Piper emerged from the Hedge into the mortal world. For a while, he was simply glad to be back and vowed to himself that he would turn over a new leaf and be grateful for every day.

Music became his life; just after his escape from the Hedge, it was the only thing he had left of his identity. He found that his durance had left him with a much stronger voice and the ability to sway people's emotions through music. For six months, he made a living as a session singer, doing backing vocals for dozens of smaller bands. That earned him the attention of a record label, which offered him a chance to record his own album.

After experimenting with different musical styles, Piper ended up recording a trance album, blending in his unique vocal abilities. He became a hit on the underground rave scene, where he tours under the name DJ Hamlyn. His live concerts have become increasingly popular, particularly with college students, who find the music, when combined with drugs like Ecstasy or LSD, provide a high like nothing else.

Piper hasn't tired of the rock star lifestyle yet. He adores the adulation he gets from the fans and gets his own high from harvesting Glamour during his concerts. For him, a concert is the ultimate expression of the Spring Court's ideal, and he uses his music to make people want to act on their own desires.

DESCRIPTION

Piper comes from Scandinavian stock, giving him his blond hair, blue eyes and rugged good looks. He keeps himself in shape with regular gym visits and running, and he accentuates his muscle definition with tight jeans and open shirts whenever he can. He's meticulous in his grooming, often stopping at a mirror to make sure his hairstyle or his clothing is perfect. Piper also has an affection for gold chains and dark sunglasses. He prefers smaller, rectangular lensed ones, although he has on occasion worn mirrored pince-nez.



To changeling eyes, Piper glows slightly, drawing attention to him. His physique, if anything, appears even more chiseled than it does to mortal eyes. His chest is larger than it should be, a result of his increased lung capacity because of the singing he did in Arcadia. The Lost sometimes think they hear music when he's around as well, which often weirds them out. What they hear depends on the individual; it tends to be whatever they like to hear the most.

Piper is arrogant, loud and overly flirtatious. He knows he's good at what he does and he's not above telling everyone around him. He loves to be the center of attention and will manipulate situations to make sure he stays there. He's good at getting people to laugh and finding out things about them, things that he can then relate back to himself and share what he thinks about those things as well. Most people think Piper is great fun to be around, and he's rarely on his own as a result.

He's nothing if not a hedonist. Piper revels in the Mantle of the Spring Court and does everything he can to encourage those around him to give up whatever drudgework they have to do and just enjoy their lives. Why work when you can enjoy yourself? The work will wait, right? He takes very little seriously and leaves all the routine, boring work to other, un-

seen minions. He's also not above cutting people out of his social circle if they want to focus too much on the mundane elements of life, or simply ignoring them as if they weren't there, particularly when it comes to hired help.

Because of the way his Keeper treated him during his durance, Piper believes that whatever he wants, he's entitled to. That particularly includes beautiful women. He's the consummate pick-up artist and doesn't think twice about hooking up with a woman who happens to be with another guy (or girl, for that matter).

To him, it's a game. He prides himself on how fast he can win over the most beautiful women in any room. He's so good at it he's been used as case study for some of the pick-up artist chat rooms on the Internet.

SECRETS

DJ Hamlyn loves messing with the minds of the people who come to his concerts. One reason he started recording trance music is that the repetitive beats open up the subconscious minds of his audience, leaving them receptive to whatever suggestions he wants to plant. Because he's a mad hedonist, he usually implants suggestions to lower people's inhibitions even further than they would normally be at a rave. It's not unusual for at least parts of the audience to have a wild orgy, or to break out into a brawl. Piper doesn't care; as long as people's emotions are flowing, he's happy.

He revels in the Glamour that his concerts generate. He carefully writes his music to have the maximum emotional impact on his audience. His music often teases, building toward a crescendo but never quite reaching it. The audience keeps expecting the music to crest, and the anticipation is almost palpable to Piper when he's playing. He builds it up and up, eventually releasing it like an orgasm, and he drinks in the Glamour as the audience finally goes wild.

His wild lifestyle has made him his fair share of enemies as well. More than once, a jealous lover of a woman Piper has stolen has vowed to kill him in revenge. Four attempts have been made on his life, but somehow, Piper found out about them just before the hit happened and managed to survive. Three of the assailants were arrested at the scene, and the fourth has never been found. His wounds have never been life threatening, and it's led him to believe he's untouchable.

Piper is an addict. After he escaped from the Hedge, he tried just about every drug he could get his hands on — often taking several types at once — trying to recapture the exquisite sensations he experienced during his durance. Nothing worked, although he did find several drugs, particularly LSD and magic mushrooms, that he's quite fond of taking. Wherever he goes, he quickly finds a source for all sorts of illegal drugs and isn't above acting as a middleman for anyone looking to score some for themselves. Because he believes everyone is too uptight and should learn to relax, he quite often slips drugs into the drinks of those he's partying with, or even just into the coffee of someone at the local coffee shop.

His biggest problem is that nothing is as good as the feelings his Keeper treated him to while in Arcadia. Despite his best efforts, he keeps craving the ecstasy, almost to the point of voluntarily returning to his durance so he can experience it again. His withdrawals were so painful for him that he attempted suicide twice in the first few months after his escape from the Hedge.

Unfortunately for his unsuspecting audience, he found another way to get the hit he needed: he sells people from his concerts to his former Keeper, in return for more of the ecstasy the Lady used to provide him with. He managed to broker the deal via a hobgoblin so he didn't have to deal with his Keeper directly. She sets the price for his reward and it has been getting increasingly expensive every time he needs another hit. At first, it was only a couple of people at a time, but as time has gone on, the number of people he needs to sell into durance has been increasing.

Piper doesn't think twice about what he's doing. To him, mortals are usually weak-willed and just playthings for him to toy with. If sending other people into durance in Arcadia keeps him free and still getting his ecstatic fix when he needs it, that's the price he's willing to pay.

So far, Piper has managed to keep his deals a secret from everyone around him. He is exceedingly careful when setting up the deals with the hobgoblin, never meeting in the same place twice. When he needs his next fix, he leaves a message in a particular secret Hollow owned by the hob, who will then send Piper a message about when and where to meet next.

A hit of the ecstasy usually lasts Piper for a long time. But like a serial killer who gets a rush from murdering his victims, the rush lasts less and less time every time Piper indulges in it. He's been increasing his intake in the past year, and now needs a hit almost every month or two. While he's aware that he risks being discovered the more he does it, the need for the rush is increasing as time goes on.

RUMORS

"A friend of mine went out on the town with Hamlyn last week. He'd won some weird contest that pick-up artists held, just to be Hamlyn's wingman for the night. My friend's pretty good

with the ladies, but he said he's never seen anything like Hamlyn in his life. He said Hamlyn doesn't peacock, but he still had no trouble opening a four set. In under five minutes, he'd kiss-closed with two of them, and one of them was a top model or something. From what I heard, he taught my friend a whole bunch of stuff before leaving the party with three of the women on his arm."

Piper has become something of a cause célèbre for pick-up artists around the country. His natural charm and ability to woo women — regardless of whether or not they are attached — brought him to the attention of the underground pickup scene, and one of them approached him for some pointers. Piper was highly amused by the whole concept and was happy to help, letting some of the artists come along with him when he goes out partying, so they can learn some new tricks and observe how he operates. None of them realize he isn't mortal and is using fae abilities to make his life easier, but he has nonetheless become a hero for many of them.

"I don't know who the suppliers are at a DJ Hamlyn gig, but they always have the best stuff. I don't do eccys very often, but I've always had a bigger high at one of his gigs than at any other time I've taken them. My friend Aaron dropped a tab of acid last night and he said he could see the music. I think I'm going to give that a go next time, because he said it was the biggest headspin he's ever had. It might be something in the air, or maybe something about his music, but it's a buzz, man!"

Drugs are readily available at Piper's gigs and he actively encourages higher quality product. Whenever he comes to a new town, he gets in contact with the local suppliers and makes sure they send dealers with better quality drugs. In return, they get a small cut of the door takings. In at least two cities, that's sparked a bidding war among rival drug cartels — and in one case, a drive-by shooting — for who's going to supply the gig. Piper doesn't expect a cut of the drug money; he's more interested in making sure his audience's minds are as open as possible.

"Something weird happened at a DJ Hamlyn gig in Seattle. I've got contacts in the magical circles up there and one of them told me that a newly Awakened mage disappeared after the gig. She'd gone along to have a good time — against the will of her mentor — and she hasn't been seen since. I thought she'd probably just taken one pill too many and ended up in a psych ward somewhere with her brain leaking out her ears, but that was a month ago, and a search of all the hospitals has turned up nothing."

The people Piper's former Keeper requests aren't always mortal. She occasionally asks for something more, including vampires, werewolves and mages. Supernatural creatures are harder for Piper to capture, although he's had more luck with vampires, as they're more inclined to come to his gigs to prey on the audience. The missing mage in Seattle was indeed taken by the Lady of the Grove, but no fetch was sent in her place, as it would have been detected too easily by her cabal.

Story Hooks

• The characters attend one of DJ Hamlyn's performances and realize that his popularity has a lot to do with the amount of Glamour he's pouring into his contracts to alter the moods of the audience. People are shedding their inhibitions and letting their repressed emotions run wild. One or more of the characters will have others come up for some *very* close dancing, or perhaps even more. With a successful Wits + Subterfuge roll (with a -2 penalty due to the subtlety), the characters also detect the subliminal messages Piper is including in his music. What to do about it? Stop him? Demand a cut of the action?

• While the subliminal messages in the music usually just cause people to give into their repressed emotions and let their hair down, it has a different effect on some people. A man's mind is altered by the subliminal messaging and he discovers he can see through changelings' masks and can see their mien. Convinced they're demons, he starts hunting them down, torturing and killing them in an extremely brutal way. He may decide to go after one of the characters.

• The price for Piper's next hit has just gone higher than it's ever been before: the Lady has asked for a changeling to be handed over to her. Piper's balking a little at the price, but he's also trying to figure out a way he can trap one of the Lost. He may decide to target one of the characters, or he may go after one of the other important Storyteller characters in the freehold, which will have ramifications for the characters in other ways.

DJ HAMLYN

Seeming: Fairest

Kith: Minstrel (see below)

Court: Spring

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 2, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Computer 2, Occult 1, Politics 3

Physical Skills: Athletics (Running) 2, Brawl 2, Drive 2, Firearms 1, Larceny 2

Social Skills: Empathy 2, Expression (Music) 4, Persuasion (Seduction) 4, Socialize 3, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 1

Merits: Fame 2, Harvest (Emotions) 3, Mantle (Spring) 3, Striking Looks 4

Willpower: 5

Clarity: 5 (Derangements: Inferiority Complex, Narcissism)

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Lust

Initiative: 5

Defense: 2

Speed: 9

Health: 7

Wyrds: 4

Contracts: Dream •, Eternal Spring ••, Fleeting Spring •••, Vainglory •••

Glamour/Per Turn: 13/4

KITH: MINSTREL

The Gentry love to be entertained and moved, especially by music. Fairest trained as Minstrels spend their durance serenading their Keepers, sometimes with an instrument, sometimes using only their voices. The Minstrel's blessing is Perfect Pitch: a Minstrel changeling can spend a point of Glamour to re-roll any failed dice on one Expression roll (so if, for example, a Minstrel who rolls six dice and gets 2, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9 can spend a point of Glamour to re-roll the 2, 5, 6 and 7). They also excel at soaking up the adulation of a crowd when performing, enjoying the benefit of the 8-again rule for any attempt to harvest Glamour from the emotions of the spectators during their own performance.

THE THOUSAND-FACED LIAR: EVERETT FLINT

I understand, friend, I really do. It is hard to keep going, knowing what we do, having seen what we've seen, out there, in the worlds beyond. I would never wish that on anyone. But the simple fact is this: the Hedge is all that separates us from Their predations. You've seen the signs, I know you have. The Hedge will fall, and when it does, if it does, our world will fall as well.

Aliases: The Hydra, Henry Kellogg (True Name)

BACKGROUND

Few Lost embody the sobriquet “Bridge Burner” as fully as Everett the Liar. Born Henry Kellogg to a faithful Baptist family in the small town of Columbia, situated near Alabama’s southeastern border with Georgia, Everett first attracted his Keeper, a creature of strong social graces and infinite taste (primarily in its own opinion), through his easy willingness to tell anyone precisely what they wanted to hear. Everett never lied out of malice, but rather toward the goal of inspiring hope in others.

A childhood accident that lost Everett his brother to a piece of farm equipment convinced the youth that God did not exist and never had. Over time, however, he came to understand that the lie of religion provided a necessary function in the lives of those in the community: religion gave a sense of purpose, a reason to hope and, perhaps most importantly, a stringent set of laws by which to live life. Everett, always a pragmatist, accepted the lie and began furthering it himself. As a teenager, he became strongly active in the church community, a bright young voice of hope among his people. As a young man, he entered the seminary, quickly gaining a more scholarly understanding of his religion. His first assignment upon taking the cloth was to a small town in the suburbs of Mobile, Alabama. Late one night, his Keeper, a monster in the form of an angel, came to him in his church and led him away to Heaven. For a brief flicker, Everett tasted faith in the Almighty for the first and last time in his life.

Everett never discusses the indignities his Keeper must have subjected him to in the hated realms of Arcadia. Few Lost are interested in the secondhand experiences of a Keeper that left a so thoroughly altered changeling in their wake. Where once Everett was truly kind and sympathetic, he can now manage neither emotion; any show of compassion on Everett’s part is a thin sheen over this hard, embittered soul designed to gain the sympathy or confidence of a possible ally in his war against the Others.

Initially upon his return, Everett joined the Ashen Court, a group he believed had the best chance of coming to a strong understanding of the Fae. He made no bones of his interest in waging war against the Gentry, and excelled in the Court’s activities and the arts of Contracts and pledges. His past haunted him throughout, however, and when he came upon tales of books found in the Hedge that contained the life story of their possessors, he made it his quest to find one.

At first, Everett had little luck in uncovering such an artifact, but a return to his home of Columbia offered up what he was looking for. While searching the Hedge near the church at

which he had attended services as a child, Everett uncovered an old Bible that had been left in the tangled brambles. He fell out of Lost society for a year and a day, secluding himself in order to thoroughly understand the tome he had found. When he returned, he seemed less interested in the secrets and rites of the Autumn Court, instead taking up a banner of hate for all things fae, couched in careful words and fiery rhetoric.

THE BITTER CRUSADE

Everett has recently made a name for himself among the Lost through a campaign of constant and vigilant oratory against the Hedge, entrances into it and those who would make use of them. One of the most open and infamous of the Bridge Burners, the Liar still manages to inspire or coerce unsuspecting and credulous Lost alike to his crusade. In part, his ease in doing so can be attributed to his strong charisma, which is bolstered by his seeming and kith. The true secret behind his power is the *Book of Revelations* (see “Token,” below).

The text Everett found in the overgrown Hedge of Columbia was not precisely what he was seeking. Instead, he uncovered a book heavily couched in the terminology of its prior form as the Bible. Everett’s *Book of Revelations* (not to be confused with the biblical Book of Revelation) recounts an expanded version of the biblical apocalypse, in which the various monstrosities and demons of the end time are clearly a full-fledged army of the Gentry. Everett has interpreted the book as a divine revelation of the future fall of the Hedge and the impending doom of the world as a result. Furthermore, the book speaks of Everett’s place in the end times, of his role as a speaker against the evils ahead, who can galvanize the Lost to close off all contact between the mortal world and the fae.

Thus far, Everett has followed numerous prophecies gleaned from the *Book of Revelations*, each one verifying the potency of the book’s power. Each fulfilled prophecy brings more Lost into his camp, and each new prophecy presents an opportunity for Everett to misinterpret the words of the book, possibly with dire consequences.

In the meantime, Everett pursues the clues he has been given, lying and cheating his way toward closing gates into the Hedge, stealing and destroying numerous tokens and killing privateers, loyalists, hobgoblins and the occasional Lost. Everett and his followers will do whatever is necessary to avert the impending apocalypse.

DESCRIPTION

Everett’s intensity can be off-putting. His eyes smolder with the power of his convictions and his lips curl back slightly at every word, giving him the impression of a snarling dog ready to bite. Each movement is carefully restrained, as if he struggles to control himself and might break loose in a torrent of destructive activity.

at any moment. Everett is absolutely sure about the righteousness of his endeavor, and every carefully chosen word seems to underscore that.

Everything Everett does is carefully measured. He speaks slowly and deliberately, with a hint of a southern accent. His vocabulary is exacting; he rarely misuses a word or speaks in a manner that implies anything other than exactly what he means. Of course, what he means is not necessarily the truth.

Everett appears to be a man of above average height and handsomeness. His thick black eyebrows rest above his deep brown eyes, and he wears his dark hair combed carefully back from his slightly receding hairline. He wears nondescript clothing, favoring white collared shirts and dark slacks, adding a corduroy coat when the weather turns chill.

Under the Mask, Everett looks much the same, though his features are slightly elongated, his fingers spindly and his eyes wider. In both Mask and mien, Everett appears to possess features that any individual finds compelling (see "Kith: Romancer," below). The inability of those he has met to come to an agreement regarding his appearance has led to some Lost derisively nicknaming him "the Hydra."

SECRETS

Each day that passes sees Everett slip further from the convictions of the Autumn Court and more toward the wrath of Summer. His Mantle has dwindled significantly, already dropping to such a level that he finds it difficult to utilize his highest level of the Eternal Autumn Contract. He keeps his knowledge and use of the Autumn Court's esoteric powers quiet, for the most part, but Lost of the Ashen Court who witness him using the third clause of Eternal Autumn — a power that, judging from his Mantle, he is clearly unworthy of — become irate. If he abuses it, he may even be marked for elimination.

Despite his time spent with it, Everett knows very little about the *Book of Revelations*. Most of what he claims about its power is based in his long-dormant sense of faith. He is, of course, a remarkable liar and dissembler, and if turned toward that subject, will quickly move to establish

the book's validity while subtly attacking those who question him. If his lack of understanding of the book were somehow proven and publicized, however, he would quickly lose much of the repute he has.

Although Everett leads his followers in much the same way a priest might lead his congregation (with an emphasis on fire-and-brimstone preaching on the righteousness of the cause), he does not have any belief in God; at least, not as a single omnipotent creator figure.

Many of his followers are rather staunch Christians, however, and were they to discover his lack of faith, he might well lose much of their support.

RUMORS

"That crazy-ass Christian changeling and his clutch of kooks are coming, I hear. They keep saying up east of here that he done shut down a freehold's biggest trod. Just closed the damn gate on it. Don't know how he did it. Best be keeping on if he comes here. I need my damn fruit harvest too much to be letting some quack ruin things. 'Course, if it keeps the Others away, it might be worth having a look at."

Everett's not Christian, though he does utilize many of the trappings of Christianity in his sermonizing and ritualism, and much of his cult follows the faith in one form or another. Nor are any of Everett's people particularly insane, though they tend toward a level of zealotry that non-believers find disquieting at best. Everett has successfully closed several large gateways into the Hedge, though he has no particular secret for it. He plays the closing of each gateway by ear, relying on his instincts and the prophecies of the *Book of Revelations*.

"Love him or hate him, I'll tell you one thing for sure. That preacher ain't long for the Ashen Court. I give it a year before he jumps ship for the Iron Spear. That is, if the Autumn Court will let him go."

Everett is not making a conscious decision to turn his back on his current Court, but there's no doubt that the ideals behind his actions have veered drastically from those ideals of the Autumn Court. His interest in the magics of the True Fae and the secrets of the Hedge has all but withered, while his wrathful campaign against the Hedge itself is reaching a fever pitch. The majority of his followers are Summer Court, and rumor among the changelings who know Everett is that the Summer Court would take him in a heartbeat. Whether that's true or not will likely only be answered when Everett's ties to Autumn inevitably shatter. Whether or not the Ashen Court will destroy him for his betrayal likely depends on local politics and the whim of the Storyteller.

"The real problem ain't that he's closing gates to the Hedge left and right. Hell, I'm half behind that myself. The real trouble's that he's been sticking his nose in the affairs of the damn vampires. They say he thinks they're banished Gentry. Heard he killed one up in Charlotte, got them all stirred up like a nest of wasps before skipping town with his posse. Last thing we need is him coming here and starting a damn war."

Everett does not suffer under the delusion that vampires are banished Gentry or even that they serve the True Fae in some capacity. He has, however, had violent encounters with them in the past. Only one of those times did he initiate the violence, and only then because the *Book of Revelations* directed him to do so. The other times, the vampires attacked him. A group of the bloodsuckers has apparently taken it into their head that Everett and his people are deserving of some form of punishment for an affront that none of the changelings understand.

EVERETT FLINT

Seeming: Fairest

Kith: Romancer (see below)

Court: Autumn

Entitlements: None

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (Religion) 2, Computer 1, Crafts 2, Investigation (The Gentry) 3, Occult (Christian) 2, Politics 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl (Boxing) 3, Drive 2, Firearms 1, Larceny 2, Stealth 2, Weaponry (Improvised) 1

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Empathy (Motives) 3, Expression 3, Intimidation 3, Persuasion (Inspiring Hope) 5, Socialize 2, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Allies (Followers) 3, Contacts (Christians, Police) 2, Court Goodwill (Summer) 2, Fighting Style (Boxing) 3, Harvest (Emotions) 3, Mantle (Autumn) 2, Resources 3, Striking Looks 2, Token 3

Willpower: 7

Clarity: 5 (Paranoia)

Virtue: Faith

Vice: Lust

Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Health: 8

Wyrd: 4

Contracts: Dream •; Eternal Autumn •••; Eternal Spring •; Mirror ••; Smoke ••; Stone •; Vainglory ••

Pledges: Everett possesses no long-term pledges and harbors a distrust of binding his fate to anyone else's, especially in the magic of the Wyrd.

Glamour/Per Turn: 13/4

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Bare-handed strike	0(B)	na	7	na
.38 Special	2(L)	20/40/80	6	6 shots
Baseball bat	1(L)	na	6	na

KITH: ROMANCER

Some Keepers recognize that a Gentry's greatest and most enduring love is itself. Lost who become Romancers were taken to act as a form of mirror, reflecting things not as they were but as the Gentry wished them to be. Romancers gain Narcissus's Blessing: Others viewing her are subject to a subtle illusion that emphasizes those aspects of the changeling that the subject find most appealing, sometimes going so far as to convince the subject that small aspects of the changeling are utterly different than they really are. (An observer who finds bright green eyes particularly appealing may believe that a blue-eyed Romancer has emerald eyes instead.) This manifests as a -3 to all characters' subsequent attempts to accurately describe her to others, including characters attempting to create police sketches. The blessing applies to clothing as well, but a sufficiently extraordinary trinket might grant a bonus to the roll. This is not a disguise, however, and unless the subject's standard of beauty has changed significantly between one meeting of the Romancer and the next, he recognizes her without any difficulty. Recording devices, which have no preconceived notions of beauty and no expectations, are affected by the Wyrd's magic as well, recording the individual as remarkably average. The -3 penalty applies to attempts to identify the character based on recorded footage or photographs as well.

TOKEN: BOOK OF REVELATIONS (•••)

No one save Everett himself knows precisely how he came into possession of his *Book of Revelations*. What is known is that it is some manner of powerful token, a book, bound in (what at least *appears to be*) scuffed, dark leather, which provides Everett with some knowledge of things to come. Or so he claims. The cover of the book bears numerous deeply scratched occult symbols, and the thin pages are graced with an illegible script written in what appears to be blood, with mad, shifting illustrations colored in the juices of goblin fruits. Of course, Everett loathes allowing anyone save himself access to the book. It became his burden when he found it in the Hedge, but it also serves as guide and shield.

Once per story, Everett *knows* something he otherwise couldn't, though what he has gleaned from the book is always heavily couched in metaphor. (This likely brings him to the characters.) As a result of what he has read in the text of his own future, Everett may re-roll three failed rolls per story. The action doesn't fail, then miraculously succeed; instead Everett recognizes the appropriate actions to take for success from one of the book's revelatory lines.

Action: Instant

Mien: When activated, the book shudders, and the deeply etched sigils on the surface glow a baleful green. When the book is opened, the sound of a children's choir seems to seep into the area, interrupted on occasion by an unnatural roar. As the music fades, scorpions with tails of fire pour from the pages before combusting in their own flames and vanishing into smoke. The words appear on the pages, as if rising out of the thin material; the images appear, then set themselves; and then all goes still.

Drawback: The *Book of Revelations* is heavy with the fate of the end of the world. A character requires Strength 3 to open it

(and therefore use it). Changelings with the appropriate gifts or Contracts *may* spend Glamour to gain the Strength necessary to open the book.

Catch: After choosing to activate the *Book of Revelations* without a Wyrd roll or Glamour expenditure, the character commits to tempting Fate. Any time the player rolls anything on behalf of the character, the Storyteller should roll a single die. The first time that single die comes up as a 1, the player's roll automatically becomes a dramatic failure, regardless of what she rolled. After this dramatic failure occurs, the Storyteller stops rolling the single die. Everett never uses the catch unless already in truly dire straits.

Story Hooks

- Everett and his congregants have come to the characters' town, preaching the destruction of the freehold's trods. For a variety of reasons, the local Court rulership wants him and his people gone. Unfortunately for the characters, Everett seeks them out, claiming to have seen them in some vision, sure they will assist him in his mission. Everett talks a good game and is *extremely* persuasive, more than willing to say anything to a character to get what he needs, regardless of his own beliefs. The Court leaders learn about the preacher's friendliness toward the characters and encourages them to see he is on his way as soon as possible. Which side do they try to please? Do they buy into Everett's apocalyptic rhetoric? Does he otherwise convince them that he follows the right course of action? Can the characters convince him to leave? Can they trick him into believing that he's accomplished his goals?

- The Autumn Court has tired of Everett and his activities, sure that he's bringing more attention to himself from the Gentry, other Courts, and other supernatural groups alike than any Ashen Courtier needs. The Autumn Court leader asks the characters to seek Everett out and shut down his operation by any means necessary. They'd prefer the characters convince him to turn from his crusade and again embrace the season of Autumn, but won't mind if they simply manage to irreparably wreck his relationship with his followers. They don't want him killed, however (and depending on the characters' freehold pledge, that might not even be a possibility), and lethal violence is strongly discouraged.

- Alternatively, perhaps the vampires, werewolves, mages or some other supernatural group have tired of Everett's impositions against their kind. If the characters are changelings, the Court leadership might set them on a mission to curtail Everett's activities in order to maintain peace between the supernaturals (possibly leading to some crossover gaming). If the characters are Kindred, Uratha or Awakened, they may instead find themselves investigating a cult with powers they don't fully understand.

THE BIRD OF SECOND CHANCES: FENGHUANG

Ah, I see you are dying. I think I can help with that. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Aliases: The Phoenix, the Ho-Oh Bird, the Bennu-Bird, the Ascending One, the Lord of Jubilees

BACKGROUND

The Phoenix: a bird whose death is not lasting, whose flesh and feather turns to ash but returns from the ash, as well. It is a bird of cycles, of rebirth. This mythic bird — quite often known by many names, as seen above — isn't all that mythic, though. Or, to say it a different way: the strange bird's story isn't relegated to folktale alone. No, Fenghuang is quite real, and those on the cusp of death may find themselves face to face with this supposedly mythic creature.

THE LIE

Ask Fenghuang, and this is what he'll tell you about his origin (oh, and we use the term "he," but it's important to note that Fenghuang happily flits from gender to gender, as noted in the description below):

"For many years, a peaceful and august emperor sat upon the throne. The people loved him, for he brought safety and prosperity to the citizens. He was not an old man, but he was not young, either. Then, one day he came out of his palace and stood atop the palace steps beneath the drifting cherry blossoms, and he was about to speak when an arrow came from the sky and pierced his heart.

"To this day, none know from whence the arrow came. Was it sent by a dissenter who snarled at civility and whose hands sought to wring this time dry of peace like one choking the life from an innocent man's throat? Was it somehow just an accident? Was it cast from the Heavens, by a god hungry for war? I cannot say.

"Whatever the arrow's origins, it cleanly punctured the blessed emperor's heart and so he fell to the steps, about to die.

"Ah, but the cherry blossoms turned from soft pink to searing orange — no longer petals, but now whirling embers. And the tree itself burst into flame. From the fire I came, born of the injustice of a man dying before his time. I perched alight upon the emperor's chest and withdrew the arrow from his heart using my beak, and then whispered a promise into his ear. With that, the emperor was alive once more and I, too, was now alive. That is my origin. That is how I came into being. Thank you for enduring my tale. Will you please share it with others?"

...and that's a total lie. Well, perhaps "lie" is too strong a term, as Fenghuang certainly believes it to be true. Be-

cause if the hobgoblin bird discovered the truth, bad things might happen.

THE TRUTH

This is the true story of how Fenghuang came into being. Hundreds of years ago — maybe more, who can say? — a 12-year-old girl named Fei Li lay asleep in her bed. Her mother, too, slept only a few feet away. The night was quiet but for a chorus of crickets.

The peaceable silence was not to last. The girl's father — a notorious drunk, a sodden brute with hands like clubs — came stumbling into the house, positively toxic with rice wine. He fumbled with a lamp, tried to light the lantern, but he dropped it. The glass shattered. Fiery oil spread swiftly across the floor. The flames didn't hesitate; its hungry fingers quickly reached for, and found, the two beds where mother and daughter slept.

The father, seeing what he had done, felt no remorse, only cowardice. He fled the fire, and did not lift a single fat finger to save his family.

And his family burned.

But that is not where the story ends, as it normally would. No, Fei Li was dreaming. In this dream, she was supposed to be doing her chores but was instead gambolling about with a peacock, a peacock she called Fenghuang. And when the flames reached the little girl in real life, the flames entered her dreams, as well — the peacock suddenly was cast aflame, not in the way that the bird was burning and suffering but in the way that the bird's very feathers seemed composed of lambent fire, glorious and magical.

The bird said it was time to stop playing, though, which saddened the little girl. Fenghuang said before he had been just a dream but now was real, given life from afar by unseen hands, and that he could help the little girl if she so desired. Fei Li certainly did not want to burn alive in her bed and die, and Fenghuang was her friend. She asked for the mercy of the dream bird, and Fenghuang granted it.

The girl did not die as she was supposed to. She awoke in the still-smoldering wreckage of her home, not far from the charred body of her mother. Her clothes were mostly burned away, but she herself was unharmed — nary a singed hair on her pretty head. Fenghuang had saved her life, but the bird knew that something was wrong. Saving this girl had incurred a dire cost — he felt it in his feathery breast, but could not identify what that cost was, or who had exact-

ed it from the world. And so he forgot this and took flight, finding a distant entrance to the Thorns, where he awaits, eating goblin seeds and sleeping in his many nests. For Fenghuang, ignorance is bliss.

And what of Fei Li? The little girl represents a curious case, for even still she remains alive, still 12 years old in body, though certainly not in mind. Was it that Fenghuang gave her a truly heroic and mythic dose of whatever magic that goblin bird contains? Or was it simply that she was his creator (abstractly speaking), and thus was more intimately tied to the dream and the bird? Whatever the case, these many centuries later, Fei Li is still alive, unable to die.

A Game of Immortals

Fei Li joins the rare ranks of humans who are truly immortal. It isn't kind to them, really, this immortality. They can remember everything, and while they may collect much joy in their eternal lives, they aggregate great pain, as well. Fei Li, angered at her mother's death, sought her father and murdered him in his bed — with oil set afame. Some say she went on to burn all those before him, not just the still-living members of her father's family, but even going so far as to defile her ancestors' graves to poison his line forever.

SECOND CHANCES

One year ago, a widower father of three children was going to die.

In his arms, two rustling bags of groceries — cake-making materials, as it turns out, for his youngest daughter's birthday. He was walking home in a safe part of town; twilight draped the horizon in ribbons and banners of black and purple, and all seemed right with the world.

The man who stabbed him did not know him. The killer came up out of nowhere, a ragged hunting knife in his hand, and he stabbed the widower again and again in the back. The blade pierced the lungs and kidneys over and over. The bags dropped. The man — just some mad soul whose brain was broken by constant methamphetamine use — didn't steal anything, didn't take money or pilfer the flour. He simply fled, wondering how he had got blood all over his hands.

And the father died. Almost.

Fenghuang, Bird of Second Chances, alighted upon his chest. The man was able to see past the hobgoblin's Mask and witnessed the creature in its lambent glory. The bird whispered in his ear, asked him if he wanted a second chance. And why wouldn't he? His daughters waited. He

wanted to bake them a cake. Their mother had died only a year before; what would it do to them to lose a second parent in so short a time?

He agreed and was given life. A second chance, truly. It seems so perfect. So easy. But it's really not, is it? The man was happy that night, and the cake tasted as sweet as any cake ever had. But the events picked at him. He knew it was real: he had a t-shirt and jacket perforated with many stab holes, the fabric soaked through with his own blood. His skin, though, his body, was no longer wounded.

It was like a hangnail, a skin tag, a scab. He couldn't leave it alone. He had to pursue it. Try to find the bird, try to find others who had seen the bird or been given a second chance. And he found them. And they're out there now, diligently pursuing the information with little to no idea of what they'll find. So what if they don't pay as much attention to their families? So what if their obsessions threaten to consume them? Isn't this burden so much better than, say, the burden of death itself?

DESCRIPTION

Fenghuang is polite. Sometimes painfully so. There's little actually monstrous about the bird, though certainly there lingers a certain *alien feel* when one speaks with a fiery bird who's more than likely perched upon your breastbone.

Given that time seems to stop — or, at least, slow oh so mightily — when in the presence of Fenghuang, the bird has a great deal of time to converse, if the subject is interested. For the most part, the bird will be direct and to the point, explaining the situation to the subject and then offering the second chance with as many "pleases" and "thank you's" and "if you may's" as the bird can manage. That said, a dying person who finds a fiery bird on his chest may take a moment to be a bit gregarious. It's a curious situation and, for many, deserves a minute or two of conversation with the avian chimera. The bird is accommodating, and will chat for five minutes or five hours if given the chance. Oh, and when the bird speaks, its voice will modulate between male and female. Always the same crisp, evenly mannered tone, but its gender refuses to be pinned down.

Physically, to those who aren't dying, aren't changelings, or aren't in the Hedge, Fenghuang looks like an *odd* bird, sure. Perhaps a bird that doesn't exist in any known biology book or Amazonian nature guide, okay. Bright red plumage, black eyes, a long heron's beak. But nothing about the bird screams "otherworldly."

To those who can see through the hobgoblin's Mask... well, otherworldly is the order of the day. Fenghuang is a chimera. The bird is cobbled together from many: a peacock's tail, a heron's beak, a rooster's comb...all of it on fire. White fire, red fire, orange fire — rippling waves of different hues, smoldering, hissing, crackling. The bird is also abnormally large: a good four feet tall, with an eight- or nine-foot wingspan. Feathers sometimes drift from its open wings,

burning like bright embers or slips of paper disintegrating to ash as they drop to the earth.

SECRETS

Fenghuang has a secret that even he doesn't know. Fenghuang is the result of a pledge, a Contract between one of the True Fae and the very nature of life and death itself. In a way, Fenghuang is the hobgoblin embodiment of the single clause of this Contract, representing the ability to bring someone living, be it human or changeling, back from the certain brink of death and once more into the realm of life.

Of course, fulfilling that clause has its cost, a cost of which Fenghuang remains blissfully ignorant. See, the Contract was written by a Fae known as the Crimson Ministrix, a strange creature who is nearly as red and fiery as the Bird of Second Chances. And this Crimson Ministrix has a great love of snatching children from this world, but finds the effort necessary to do so both troublesome and droll. This Contract, as embodied by Fenghuang, is this: whenever Fenghuang appears and offers life to the dying and the dying accepts, the Ministrix is afforded a great luxury. At that very moment, she may reach into our world and pluck a single 12-year-old girl (not of her choosing; fate chooses) and draw the child into Faerie. With no effort at all.

RUMORS

"Remember when the Summer King disappeared for that week last year? Just up and left, came back, said he was 'on a quest' to keep the freehold safe? Big lie. The King, he died. Or nearly. He was in the Thorns with me and Advisor Krone, trying to figure out where he could set up a new Hollow since the Silent Arrow compromised his last cubbyhole. Next thing we know, we're overtaken by a pack of Briarwolves. A big pack. Unnaturally large, a good dozen or more of the things. Krone fled like the little twat that he is, but I stuck around with the

King, hacking at these things — well, one of them got a hunk out of the King's neck. He was untouched up until then, but the neck? I dragged him off the path — not wise, I know, but at least the wolves couldn't follow. I figured I'd look around for some goblin fruits, maybe some Ochre Drape to help stop the blood flow, but...he seemed dead. Then there was this bird. Like a heron had sex with a peacock and someone lit the freak-bird on fire. I only saw the bird but for a moment — time seemed weird, for a minute — and then the King was up, feeling at his neck. No blood. No wound. All clear. He had to spend a few more days out of the spotlight to 'clear his head,' as he put it."

The King did have to clear his head, because the whole thing doesn't sit well with him. Not only has he walked away from the experience shaken and feeling a little...loose, mentally speaking (see Aspects, below), but there in the Hedge, he recognized something about Fenghuang. He was able to see — perhaps a benefit of high Wyrd and high Clarity — that something about the bird wasn't right. The King could sense the mad energies of Faerie at work, and that unsettles him greatly. He worries that he's now a pawn of the Gentry. He's not. And he hasn't yet figured out the connection with Rachael Rollins, the 12-year-old girl who was taken at the precise moment his life was saved. But the paranoia is working on him. (Oh, and Krone? Krone's still lost in the Hedge somewhere, if the characters care to try to find him.)

"At the Black Cotillion last night, we had a...guest. The room had just settled into the Viennese Waltz when the doors opened, flooding in all that garish light from the outside. A young girl, Asian, maybe Chinese but who knows, comes sauntering into the room like she owns the place. She's not one of us. No Mask to pierce through. Not ensorcelled, either. She walks right into the waltzing throng and the music cuts short and the dance just collapses, leaving us all standing there, not sure what to make of this girl — does someone need to pull out a rapier, give her what-for? But before anyone can decide, she speaks. She says her name is Fei Li, and she's looking for a bird, a phoenix, known as Fenghuang. She said she can pay handsomely. Nobody knew what she was talking about, so she said thank you, and left. Ruined the whole night. Gave us something



to talk about, at least. Don't tell anybody about this. It'd be so embarrassing — the Black Cotillion interrupted by a pre-teen in a bowl cut? Ugh."

It's true. Fei Li is looking for Fenghuang. Why that is, well, who knows? Has she figured out what Fenghuang is really about? Does she want her life to end, finally? And that whole bit about her paying handsomely for information, well, it's true. Fei Li is wealthy like only someone alive for many centuries can be.

"You get that bird, and you cut off his talon, take a feather, or chop off that cock's comb, and boy, you've got yourself some weapons against the True Fae."

True. Though, this rumor doesn't necessarily explain what to do with these items, does it? See below, under Aspects, for more information.

FENCHUANG

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 5, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 3, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Investigation 3, Occult 3

Physical Skills: Athletics (Flight) 3, Brawl 3, Stealth 3, Survival 2

Social Skills: Empathy 4, Expression 4, Socialize (Polite) 3

Merits: Fresh Start

Willpower: 6

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 7

Defense: 4

Speed: 16 (species factor 10)

Health: 6

Wyrd: 5

Glamour/per Turn: 15/4

Armor: 2 (Lambent Flame)

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Beak	2(L)	na	7	See Aspects
Talon	1(L)	na	6	See Aspects

Fae Aspects

• **Burning Form:** Any time the bird makes a successful attack, assume the target also suffers a single point of lethal damage representing a burn. The same goes for any successful attack *upon* the bird — scoring a hit means searing one's flesh with one point of lethal damage (the only exception to this is firearms fired at a distance). This fire, however, being more Wyrd in nature, doesn't actually set anything *aflame*. In addition, the bird doesn't burn everything it touches — this is only in combat, when the bird's "blood is up," so to speak.

Story Hooks

• First hook: a character dies. It can happen. It probably doesn't happen *often*, but characters in a World of Darkness game are vulnerable to many horrors and mad wonders, and could very well get dead as a result. And Fenghuang might just be the answer. Fenghuang appears to the character, offers that second chance, and boom. This can even move into the story hooks noted below.

• Fenghuang's appeared a few times over the last years and somebody — maybe even the characters — has put it together. Every time the Bird of Second Chances does his thing, a 12-year-old girl goes missing. What to do about it? How to track down a bird that usually only appears when someone is dying? Moreover, telling Fenghuang the truth isn't going to do wonders for the bird's sanity. Imagine that you give a dollar to the homeless every day for one year. And imagine that you discover that every time you gave a dollar, someone had to die. You were performing an altruistic act that had hidden dire consequences. Fenghuang won't take that well. He might react violently. He might die from grief. Maybe the characters want to hunt him down without telling the bird the truth — but he's a hobgoblin made of fire and will not go easily into that good night.

• Fei Li hires the characters to investigate the bird. One way or another, they discover the truth — the bird is linked to the Keeper known as the Crimson Ministris. And now Fei Li wants to pay them to kill that Keeper.

• War is coming. The freehold — led most likely by the knights and soldiers of the Summer Court — is preparing an attack on the True Fae. The Gentry have come closer and closer to the city, and the changelings have had enough. But they need strength. So they ask the motley: kill Fenghuang. Take its feathers, its comb, its talons. And, oh yeah, can they find out exactly what to do with them?

• **Second Chances:** As noted, the bird can bring anybody back from the brink of death with but a whisper and a point of Glamour expended. Two caveats: first, the person cannot be already dead, not even for a moment. And second, the person cannot have a Morality (or equivalent score, such as Clarity) below 6; the bird simply will not attend to those who may be close to becoming monsters themselves.

The bird slows time down to a hair's fraction as it communes with the dying. Others may thus catch a glimpse of the bird, but Fenghuang often appears to blink away as fast as he appeared, given the strange time dilation.

Upon choosing to accept the second chance, the person's wounds are all converted to bashing damage — this damage doesn't show physically, but may manifest as a kind of *soreness*, a general physical malaise.

However, the individual isn't told about some of the other consequences of this so-called second chance. First, the person will assume the mild derangement of Fixation. If this is already possessed, the character instead gains the severe Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder. In addition, while Morality or Clarity loss isn't more likely, upon *losing* Morality or Clarity, the character does have an easier time gaining a derangement as a result. The roll to gain a derangement from degeneration is made at -2 dice.

For many, this manifests as an outgrowth of almost losing one's life and being saved by a weird phoenix. That cracks the head a little bit. Some relish life and grow

obsessive about "living it to its fullest." Some can't let go of the mystery of the Bird of Second Chances and pursue knowledge about it (and perhaps the occult in general) with dogged determination.

• **Feather, Talon, Comb:** If someone can get these items off Fenghuang, they can be used as weapons — particularly powerful against the True Fae. Feathers are easy enough. The bird will actually relinquish one feather to those who ask. The other two, however, demand some degree of violence, if not outright destruction of Fenghuang: they must be cut from the hobgoblin's body.

A feather can be used in crafting arrows — both the fletching and the point. Arrows crafted in just such a way burn the True Fae, incurring aggravated damage.

The talon can be used to protect oneself from the True Fae. A changeling can cut himself with the talon, incurring one point of lethal damage. This grants him two points of Armor against any and all *physical* attacks from the Keepers for 24 hours. Only one person can benefit from one talon.

The comb must be brewed into a heady, sour soup necessitating at least two days of slow simmering in an iron pot or cauldron. It can feed up to 10 individuals. Those who consume the puckering brew gain +1 to Defense for the next week, and +2 when in combat with the True Fae. It also vastly increases virility in men and fertility in women: after consuming the soup, the next time the person engages in sex (protected or no), it's likely that it will result in pregnancy.

THE CLEVER KINGMAKER: FREDDY CLOVERSMITH

*You want to be great? You want to be a contender?
You want to be the best of the fucking best? Crème de la crème? All that shit?
I can make that happen for you.
But if you want that, and you really have to want that,
this is what you're gonna have to do...*

Aliases: Bonetwiddle Fibskin (True Name)

BACKGROUND

It is a truism of the World of Darkness that politics matters. Politics determines far more than who gives speeches for the next two, four or six years. It means more than simply which agendas are going to be pushed or what forests are going to get the axe on the altar of progress. In the World of Darkness, politics can define reality. Politics can determine the quality of life over entire regions. It determines who gets preyed upon when the creatures of the night divvy up the city blocks. It determines whether those freaky-ass wizards get to continue experimenting with reality in a given location, or if they draw down sanctions from their betters. It establishes whether the house you're raising your kids in falls under the watchful eye of a group of easygoing shape-changing graffiti artists or a loathsome, hate-filled group of eco-terrorists who want to rip apart your family for not separating your green glass from your brown.

But most importantly, politics determines whether you get what you want, or if somebody else does.

That's where Freddy comes in.

Freddy may not know what your goals and desires are, but he knows you have them. Everybody does. And Freddy makes it his business to help. Down on your luck? Down and out? Hit rock bottom? Seek out Freddy Cloversmith, they say, and he can fix everything. He can give you that crucial edge you need over a rival. He can see to it that that fair-weather friend of yours who sold you out for better stock options gets his comeuppance. He'll make all of your debts go away.

Except the debt to him, of course.

Freddy Cloversmith is something of a poorly kept secret. He keeps a rundown secondhand shop in the seedy part of town. Rumor has it among those in the know that Freddy's got some manner of illicit business operating out of the building, though no one has a clue exactly what. What is known for a fact is that he can make things happen for you. Good things. All he wants in exchange is your firstborn child. Or so they say. The fact that no one personally knows anyone who has handed over her firstborn to him doesn't stop this most persistent rumor.

Surprisingly little is known about Freddy, especially

given how much attention he draws from the rumor mill. People say he's old, older than he has any right to be. Some point at a famous picture of Teddy Roosevelt, the one where his right hand gesticulates pointedly above his head, pointing out that one of the blurred figures in the background looks suspiciously like him. They remark that he doesn't look a day over 30, but damn, does the Infiniti logo look like that mark in his left eye. One of the city's oldest sages claims that Freddy set up shop in the same building once before, back when he was a kid.

He's also been known to have his fingers in numerous pies around the city. His influence is incredibly subtle for its breadth, and those who come into contact with him while establishing and expanding their own sway are often shocked to find Freddy already there. They say he has many faces. Word tells of more than one local who was dealing with Freddy for a year or more, thinking him an entirely mundane money launderer, fence or dealer, only to find out later that she was in business with none other than Freddy.

Apparently he didn't leave his old home because he got tired of the view, either. Following his history back through the cities he has settled in over the last decade reveals a startling pattern: Freddy enters a city, sets up shop, picks someone (or sometimes a group of someones) from among the dregs of society. Within a year, they've ascended to the halls of power. And, of course, there Freddy Cloversmith is, haunting those halls like a ghost.

But the stories inevitably turn dark. Sometimes Freddy's chosen falls suddenly and violently from grace, some dark secret bubbling forth or some foible in public speaking ruining her credibility. Sometimes she maintains power, but her grip turns tyrannical, a darkness falling over her and everything she touches. Either way, soon Freddy has moved on, seeking greener pastures where the locals are less wary of him.

THE REAL STORY

Freddy's pretty sure that he started out human, but he'll be damned if he can remember anything about those days, or even how he came to be as he is now. The Gentry, those foul, mad, insidious creatures that haunt dreams and the edges of reality, were certainly somehow involved ("They're involved in everything, friend," he's known to say). But he can't say if

he started out as a changeling or some other manner of being. He knows enough about vampires, werewolves and warlocks to know he's not one of them (and, frankly, he's glad of it). He doesn't have access to (or interest in) the Shadow Realm, so he doubts he's a spirit, but he has been known to travel the near the Hedge, and he considers the local Goblin Market a favorite stomping ground. Sometimes he makes arrangements with the other marketeers, setting up a stall in some shadowed, out-of-the-way place to peddle his wares. He suspects he's some manner of hobgoblin, but has never felt much of an affinity for his supposed peers.

And he's had plenty of time to develop one.

His memories stretch back at least

a century, perhaps longer. He remembers a time when automobiles were not simply uncommon, but considered masterful marvels of modern technology. But memory's a funny thing, and he only remembers the broad strokes of what happened longer than a decade ago and only specific scenes and occurrences without strong context for his life before two decades ago. Freddy's has been a long life, though how long it will continue to be he can only guess.

Freddy considers himself an entrepreneur, fully enmeshed in the American Spirit. He remembers the days when a man could march into the wild frontier with nothing but a pickax, a shovel and the clothes on his back and build a business empire out of blood, sweat, sacrifice and determination. Freddy values those virtues even today. He adores Horatio Alger (whom he feels *sure* he met personally) and reviles the villainous Upton Sinclair. (One of Freddy's most pleasant memories was his presence at Frank Merriam's side on the night the man defeated the Socialist muckraker for the governor's seat of California. He'd like to believe that he personally had something to do with Merriam's victory over Sinclair, but can't seem to remember anything else about the campaign.) For Freddy, joy is found in the effort necessary to claw one's way from the dirt to the top of the heap, and each time he abandons a chosen beneficiary, he tends

to leave much of what he has gained in the process behind him before striking out to make it big anew.

Freddy sees himself as a kind of backroom dealer for Fate. Fate, he knows, *needs* great men, and men who wish to become great *need* the assistance of Fate. Rarely, however, do the two know how to reach out to one another, and that's where Freddy comes in. He acts as the middleman, a power broker. People come to him with needs. Freddy charges them things he needs personally, then trades off memories and emotions (those casually discarded and unused by the masses, never his own) to Fate, who makes a few small concessions to Freddy's client. Everyone gets what

they want, and everyone leaves happy.

Until somebody decides he wants *more*. Then Freddy knows he's found his mark, his key to power in the city. He promises to make his mark's dreams come true, to get him everything he ever wanted, as long as he's willing to work for it. He frames his own participation in what is

to come as a facilitator. He helps others help themselves. And since, he claims, his role is such a minor one, his payment is always equally small or cheap. The cost for Freddy's services always seems a bargain, at first (and some wise paranoiacs turn away, knowing that nothing that seems that easy can be anything but the opposite), but when the time comes to pay up, Freddy's clients universally discover that the sac-

fice demanded of their erstwhile benefactor will ruin them, in mind, body or power. Those who don't pay find Freddy an extremely unpleasant creditor.

Freddy's sole interest is the accumulation (though not the maintenance) of power. He does not discriminate between forms and sources of power, and has been known to involve himself in the affairs of all manner of supernatural creatures and mortals alike. He enjoys the trappings that come with power, but only when he is in the process of earning them. The ultimate price he demands of his clients always comes to him in a moment of inspiration. He knows it is something that Fate desires, but he is not always sure why, even after the client has paid up. The fact that the price often ruins the client in some form, whether it breaks



his mind or destroys his credibility, does not seem to disturb Freddy greatly. The path to great power and wealth requires great sacrifice, after all. The question of whether or not he acts in service of some other entity, one that has its own agenda that has nothing to do with Fate, has not entered his mind.

DESCRIPTION

People tend to describe Freddy Cloversmith as “slippery,” and the description is not mere metaphor for his personality. Everything about Freddy seems somehow slick, as if ready to slide off and snake away at any moment. His movements underscore this and tend toward the fluid and subtly manipulative; he practices sleight of hand incessantly, possibly subconsciously, the movement of one hand always serving to draw attention from the other, even when the other has nothing to hide.

People, especially those familiar with his reputation, find Freddy shockingly friendly and optimistic. There’s no charm to it, however, and few find themselves drawn toward seeking him out for any reason other than business. His voice is high, sometimes uncomfortably so, and he speaks with an archaic, nasal accent that has been likened to the voice of Depression-era radio announcers.

Freddy tends to wear wrinkled, tired suits that look like they’ve spent more time on a floor than a hanger, and his ties typically give the impression of having been crumpled. His features are long and pale and his thin nose appears to have been broken at least once. His chin is oddly prominent, his tongue slightly too long. Black hair clings to his scalp as if freshly oiled, though if asked, he claims he uses no product. His smile is disconcerting, his handshake clammy and his breath smells slightly of embalming fluid. His eyes are bichromatic, his right a strikingly bright green, his left a weathered, rotten olive green with the strange yellowish ring of a birthmark in the iris.

Beneath the Mask, he looks much the same, though his features are somewhat exaggerated. His eyes are little more than slits, one a verdant green, the other a sickly yellow. His chin projects past his nose and his long tongue is slightly bifurcated. His skin, while dry to the touch, always gives the impression of being coated in a thin sheen of sweat.

SECRETS

One of Freddy’s most important secrets, though hardly one of the best kept, is what he is capable of providing in the way of services and how he goes about doing so. Freddy doesn’t advertise, though rumor of his abilities almost always circulates quickly through the gossip mill when he comes to town. Usually three or four individuals have already taken advantage of Freddy’s more subtle services before his presence in the city raises any flags, and someone’s star is usually on the rise before anyone figures out what Freddy’s doing.

So what is Freddy doing, exactly? Like he says, Freddy

is a facilitator. His clients truly are doing most of their own work, driven by their greed, desire, ambition and the confidence they get from knowing they have Freddy in their Court. Meanwhile, Freddy eases things along, using subtle deals with Fate itself to ensure that a character’s plan comes off without a hitch or that his rivals falter in their counterstrike against his assets. Sometimes Freddy gets his own hands dirty, using his guile and powers of stealth to steal the secrets or ruin the plans of those who might stand in the way of his client’s ascent.

Freddy’s also remarkably well connected, and he keeps those lines of information a close secret (typically even from those contacts through the use of form-changing powers). As a result, he seems extremely knowledgeable regarding things he has no business knowing. If a character sees through Freddy’s pretensions of omniscience and begins attacking his web of informants, Freddy’s ability to provide information to his chosen client will be severely curtailed.

Freddy lives to ascend the ladder of power, but is not terribly married to any particular form of that power. As a result, characters may be surprised to find how easily he bounces back from a failure. He’ll fight tooth and nail to avoid failure, but once one of his schemes has been utterly ruined and he gives up the plot, he can almost immediately recover and begin seeking his next client.

Despite his relatively low Wyrd rating, Freddy suffers from a major frailty, possibly due to some pledge he made in the distant past, the specifics of which he no longer remembers. A character in possession of Freddy’s True Name (see above) can speak the name three times to require Freddy to perform some minor service. This frailty can be used by an individual (or single group of individuals, if they are tied closely together; a changeling motley, vampire coterie, were-wolf pack, mage cabal or promethean throng counts, but a governmental group of those creatures, such as a Court or Covenant, does not) three times before Freddy is free of the individual’s power over him. The frailty cannot force Freddy to do anything that would risk his life (including revealing any of his secrets), but can be used to force him to let a client out of an agreement. Freddy keeps his True Name secret at all costs.

RUMORS

“They say that new guy in town, the one nobody’s got a bead on yet, I’ve heard he’s a fixer. Like he’s the guy to go to when shit’s gone wrong, and he makes it all just go away. I mean, not for free or any stupid-ass thing like that, but, you know, for the right price. What’s the right price? I ain’t got a clue. But one of my people down south said he went to the guy with a problem, and he offered to make it go away. All it cost was his nightmares, whatever the hell that means.”

This rumor bears a lot of truth. Characters who know of Freddy can count on him to fix any number of problems they run into, for the right price. He is manipulative enough

to talk a DA out of prosecuting and, if that fails, sneaky enough to tamper with evidence without getting caught. He might not be able to kill those vampires you pissed off, but he can find out where they're sleeping during the day. And those damn spirits the werewolves sent to hound you? Well, he might just know somebody with the right wards or talismans to send them packing.

The prices Freddy charges are based roughly on the effort he has to go through to solve the problem. Often he just puts it in monetary terms. After all, the shop he keeps does cost rent. But sometimes, especially if he's in need, he'll ask for things of a more ephemeral nature, such as the memory of a first kiss or a dream of utter bliss. These likely seem like excellent deals for characters who don't normally interact with the Fae (a fact that Freddy will take advantage of, on occasion), but changelings will likely approach such deals with caution at best.

The question for the Storyteller, of course, is what effect does Freddy's bargain have on the characters? Do the characters miss whatever they bartered away? If they go to get it back, what will Freddy require in return? Does he even still have it? What if he's traded it away to the Goblin Market? He might be willing to take them there, for a price.

You know that Cloversmith shit that's been hanging around with the mayor? Yeah, that scrawny guy, always standing in his shadow like fucking Wormtongue. Well, I hear tell from some of the willworkers that they think he's immortal. They say time just doesn't seem to touch him. I thought it was a crock of shit, but then I was going through my grandfather's stuff today, sorting it out and all, and I came upon a picture of Grandpa back when he had just become a community leader. And I look at it, and I swear to God I do a double take, like in the movies. Standing there with my grandpa is the same fucking guy.

Freddy Cloversmith is old, there's no doubt about that. And in a way, he's ageless (or he doesn't seem to age). But is he *immortal*? It's possible. But what's more likely is that he's taking years from others. The most likely scenario, of course, involves Freddy bargaining away years of his customer's lives in exchange for protection or help. After all, who's going to think twice about exchanging a year down the road when the alternative is death in the immediate future? But the secret may be darker. Perhaps he bartered immortality off a vampire. Perhaps he is in collusion with the Gentry, and they have extended their deathless nature to him. Or perhaps he sacrifices a newborn babe once every decade to Time itself to regain his lost youth. The answer, ultimately, is whatever best suits the Storyteller's chronicle.

So you asked me about Cloversmith, as your buddy's been acting all high and mighty since he started hanging with him, so I did some digging. I traced him back four cities, and it was way less hard than you'd think. The guy does not keep a low profile. I mean, he does now, but that's just how it starts out. Everywhere he goes he quietly inserts himself into the landscape, then finds someone to latch himself onto. Every city he's

been in, he's attached himself to someone just before they rose to power. If your buddy's been running with Cloversmith, I'd recommend you make sure you're still friends. Chances are he's going places."

This rumor is going to surface in any city in which Freddy remains for any given amount of time. Information may not travel between cities among the supernatural populace as it does among mortals, but it does travel, especially when people start looking into an individual's past. Freddy, for his part, does nothing to obfuscate his past. The fact that he's been consistently associated with those rising to power rarely hurts his reputation and usually brings him more customers. Mortals rarely catch on to Freddy's machinations, especially since so many he helps to power are members of supernatural groups rather than normal humans, but it might serve as an entrance into the greater World of Darkness for a group of mortals to come across evidence that the fence they've been using may be an immortal kingmaker. This rumor does on occasion garner him negative attention (there are those in the World of Darkness who would rather see a kingmaker killed than a rival made king), but he has, thus far, been exceedingly difficult to kill. Freddy isn't really interested in stand-up toe-to-toe fights, and will flee and hide if assaulted.

There is an aspect of chicken-and-egg causality to this rumor, as well. When characters first learn of Freddy and his tendency to attach himself to those whose star is on the rise, do they assume he has the inside track with fate and knows who is going to be great, or does he take an active role in crafting that greatness? The other question that this rumor should beg for the paranoid characters in the World of Darkness: if Freddy Cloversmith is known for attaching himself to kings, why does he keep fleeing to new cities? What dark secret does he hide?

FREDDY CLOVERSMITH

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Crafts 2, Investigation 3, Occult (The Hedge) 3, Politics 3

Physical Skills: Athletics (Jumping) 2, Brawl 2, Larceny 4, Stealth 4, Survival 3, Weaponry (Knife) 1

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Empathy (Desires) 3, Expression 2, Intimidation 2, Persuasion (Cutting a Deal) 4, Socialize 1, Streetwise (Goblin Market) 4, Subterfuge 3

Merits: Contacts (Goblin Market, Gentry, Changelings, others as needed) 5, Court Goodwill (Autumn) 3, Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes 2, Fleet of Foot 3, Fresh Start, Iron Stomach

Willpower: 6

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Envy

Initiative: 8

Defense: 3

Speed: 13

Health: 8

Wyrd: 4

Glamour/Per Turn: 14/5

Armor: 1/0

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Swipe	0(B)	na	4	na
Knife	1(L)	na	5	na
Knife (Thrown)	1(L)	6/12/24	6	na

Fae Aspects

• **Sneak Thief:** Freddy relies on his ability to hide, avoid detection and otherwise move unnoticed to avoid confrontation or evade capture. His sneakiness infects his very words and informs every aspect of his interactions with others. Freddy may spend Glamour points to increase dice pools that include Wits, Dexterity, Subterfuge and Stealth. Each point spent increases the pool by a single die. The effect lasts for one roll. Freddy also gains the 9-again rule on Stealth dice pools.

• **Careful Whispers:** Freddy gains the 9-again rule on Empathy and Subterfuge rolls involving conversation or gathering information. He can spend one Glamour point to whisper to anyone within earshot, whether he can see them or not. The target hears Freddy as if he were right beside her, whispering into her ear.

• **Master of Mystery:** Freddy can spend one Glamour and roll Stamina + Wyrd to change his appearance. Each activation of this power allows him to appear as a member of any kith (he can choose the kith, but not the specific features) or change one specific feature per use to that of an individual he has seen in the past (allowing him to mix and match features to create effective, believable disguises). Freddy may spend one Glamour point to change all signs of his passing to anything other than a human entity. By spending a Glamour point and successfully rolling Intelligence + Wyrd, Freddy can erase all signs of his passage. By spending a Glamour point and successfully rolling Wits + Wyrd, he can cloak himself in shadows, granting him a +3 bonus to all Stealth-based dice pools. Freddy may spend one Glamour point to attempt to blind an opponent for a scene; on a successful roll of Intelligence + Wyrd (contested by the target's Resolve + Wyrd), the character is blinded.

• **Fate Fixer:** Freddy is capable of altering fate in several ways. This is one of his favorite forms of seducing a potential mark and an invaluable tool for assisting others in climbing the ladder of power. Freddy may spend 1 Glamour to cause

any of the following effects: he may cause a character to suffer a -2 penalty to her next attempted action (this power can be used once per hour per subject), grant a subject a +4 bonus to her next attempted action (this power can be used on a single type of action only once per sunrise and sunset), ensure that a character automatically gets one success on an action without rolling (this power can be used once per day per subject), or grant a subject the 8-again rule on a single roll (once per day per subject). Freddy uses these powers extensively to assist those with whom he comes to an arrangement to help them achieve power.

• **Friend of the Gentry:** Freddy knows a few spiteful curses he has picked up in his journeys. By spending three Glamour traits and one Willpower point and rolling Manipulation + Wyrd, he can mark an individual in a manner that attracts hobgoblins and the Gentry. The roll is contested by the target's Resolve + Supernatural Power Trait (Wyrd, Blood Potency, etc.). If Freddy wins the contested roll, the target is marked by a baleful green halo of light visible to only hobgoblins and Gentry in the material world but visible to anyone in the Hedge. The glow lasts for one day per success on the roll, and inflicts a -5 penalty on all attempts to hide from any entity that can see the light. The power also tends to attract such malign creatures to the character, but the game effects of that aspect of the power are left in the hands of the Storyteller. (At the minimum, the target can expect to suffer nightmares until the effect ends; characters suffering under this curse do not regain spent Willpower for sleeping.) A character who realizes he has been cursed (typically by entering the Hedge and seeing the glow for himself) instinctively knows that Freddy is responsible for the foul magic. Freddy can also spend 1 Glamour and 1 Willpower while within sight of the Hedge to call upon the Gentry. (If he is actually in the Hedge, the cost of the power is waived.) On a successful Presence + Wyrd roll, the Gentry arrive within 10 minutes. He usually uses these two powers in tandem against those who try to stiff him the price of his kingmaker services.

• **Wyrd Magics:** Freddy knows several mystical powers gleaned from the savants of the Ashen Court. He may spend one Glamour point to attempt to glean the knowledge of one of a subject's fears. He rolls Wits + Wyrd penalized by the subject's Composure to do so. He can spend one Glamour point and bring a plant to full ripeness, ready to harvest, with a successful Manipulation + Wyrd roll. Finally, he may spend 1 Glamour and roll Presence + Science to cast a withering glance at a plant, animal or person. A plant thus affected withers. Animals and people gain their Defense against the attack, and the malign assault inflicts one level of bashing damage per success on the activation roll.

Story Hooks

- The most obvious manner in which a group of characters will come into the orbit of Freddy is through his use as a fixer. The characters might get into a bind and learn from a friend that there's an individual who can help them out of it for the right price. Freddy turns out to be a remarkably reliable source of aid, as long as the characters don't attempt to screw him over. The twist comes when they either uncover his reputation as a kingmaker (perhaps becoming suspicious of a good thing and digging into his past) and demand the same power, when he begins asking for things that are absurd (dreams and memories, for example), or when he abruptly stops helping them (perhaps due to a commitment to his new "client"). The sudden change in the relationship not only leaves the characters in a lurch, but also inspires their investigation, possibly into an aspect of the World of Darkness with which they have not had previous contact. What do they do when they uncover the truth: that Cloversmith is the individual responsible for the rise in power of those he has been associated with? Do they try to keep him from interfering with local politics? Or do they try to turn him to their advantage, reaching for the highest echelons of power themselves?
- Conversely, what happens when they discover he has withdrawn his aid from them because he has taken on one of their most hated and bitter rivals as a client? Now that their rival seems fated to enjoy a rise to power, how can they stop him? Do they attack their rival directly, not knowing Freddy's power, or do they try to knock out their rival's support by getting rid of Freddy? Do they try instead to cozy up to their rival and try to win their way into his good graces before his inevitable ascension? Can they convince Freddy to turn his back on the rival? Can they usurp him for their own? In a bidding war between two rivals, with the city itself as the stake, how much is Freddy willing to ask for? Is he willing to play both sides? If so, how long can he keep it up before the characters become aware?
- The characters may come to Freddy in need of assistance in getting out of a major fix that is either part of the ongoing story or something they brought upon themselves. Perhaps he can help them, and the cost even seems more than reasonable, but whatever they gave away turns out to be something truly important to them. Perhaps a mage's "treasured memory" is what he can remember of Awakening, and now his magic seems less powerful as a result. Perhaps a vampire gives away her nightmares, only to find them haunting her during her waking hours (or perhaps she finds that sleep without nightmares does not refresh one of the walking dead, resulting in no regained Willpower). Either way, the characters need to buy back whatever they sold. Is Freddy willing to cut a deal? If the last deal was more than they could handle, what will he want from them now? Does he even have the item anymore? Perhaps he traded it to a hobgoblin at the Goblin Market, requiring a jaunt to that bizarre locale (see *Changeling: The Lost*, p. 279). Or perhaps he has passed it on to a rival as a way to solve one of that rival's problems — the characters!

THE THIEF OF HOPES AND HEARTS: GENTLEMAN JOHN

I steal because it earns me a thrill. It's the only thing that really seems to get my blood hot these days. It's a shame, but what a rush you know? I'm a bad man, truly. But I'm a nice bad man. Would you care to come with me? Have a drink, perhaps?

Aliases: The Thistle Thief

BACKGROUND

Winter comes, and with it, the Thistle Thief. Rich or poor, black or white, young or old — it doesn't matter. The season brings a rash of thefts, and the only items taken are those that seem to *matter*. Irreplaceable things like love letters, family photos, one-of-a-kind pieces of art, heirlooms, singular inventions. Some of the items stolen have significant value: a Picasso taken from a wall or a vault might go for millions on the art market. Some of them have no dollar value at all: a teen girl's diary containing all her wishes and dreams and fears is worth nothing to anybody but those close to her, and even then, the value cannot be measured by coins or bills.

So, if the burgled items are of such diversity, how does one know one is the victim of the Thistle Thief? Ah, it's right there in the alias. Whenever the Thief steals, he leaves behind a single dead thistle encrusted in a light frost that refuses to melt until the warmth of a human touch falls upon it.

Where did he come from? Who is this Thistle Thief, and why does he do what he does?

FOR FREEDOM, MY HEART

The truth is this: Gentleman John does not remember who he was before he was taken. He only remembers pilfering something from somebody on the street — a ring, perhaps, or a shiny bracelet. But even as the item slipped into his grip, his mark turned to him with the most beautiful face he'd ever seen, a face that was too pretty to exist in this world (a judgment that would turn out to be quite accurate). He heard a whisper, and it seized him in his tracks. He heard a rush of wind and a stir of brush — even though he was in the city, on the sidewalk, surrounded by the blaring din of traffic. A thorn bit his palm. The ground opened beneath his feet.

For the next... well, it seemed like a thousand years to him, but who can say... John knew his task, for it was the whisper that drifted into his ear before he tumbled into another world. The beautiful face, with its perfect porcelain lips, said to him: "Steal my heart, and you steal your freedom."

Locked in a teetering manse on the edge of nowhere, sometimes the beautiful woman would descend the stairs

and tower over John (who knew he was but a dirty boy, a filthy ragamuffin with straw in his hair and grime beneath his yellowed nails). She would pull down her dress and reveal her breasts to him, and he'd swoon at the forbidden sight, but that was not what she aimed to reveal. No, for then she'd pull a golden key from nowhere, and she would plunge it into the flesh above her breastbone. John would hear the soft rumble of tumblers tumbling, and her chest would open — a small, square door cut into her bosom. Within the door sat a small heart, delicate and purple like a pulsing plum. Then she would close the door and the key would again be gone. It wasn't long before John felt his breath hitch not at the sight of her breasts but at the glimpse of that perfect heart. He'd whisper her words every night before sleep: *steal the heart, steal freedom*.

Of course, stealing the heart wasn't so easy. His earliest attempts were clumsy. He'd distract her, hoping to catch sight of the means to open that door. Or he'd wait 'til she slept upon her cold slab of marble, and his nimble fingers would play at the folds of her gown, hoping to reveal not an illicit glimpse but a gander at the golden key. Every time, she would catch him. And every time, she would punish him.

Punishments were eternal. She would force him to serve as an end table or to feed her succulent drupes collected from the Thorns. All easy enough tasks, were they not seemingly endless — months or years of brushing a beautiful woman's hair has a way of driving one a bit batty. But given that his punishments always brought him into close proximity of his mistress, he was able to speak with her, to learn what upset her sensibilities and also to learn what *pleased* her.

And soon, his hopes of thieving that luscious heart found a different approach.

For her, he became a perfect gentleman. He learned what words pleased her and how to string together flattery like the pearls of a perfect necklace. Yes, inevitably he failed. Again and again he'd let slip the wrong compliment or allow his once-ignoble demeanor to come through in a slip of the tongue or in an indelicate gesture. And once more, she'd punish him.

Then came the time — years later; epochs later — that he got it right. He said all the right things. Brushed the hair from her face, offered her chocolates and berries in just the

right order, humbled himself in just such a way to be modest without being meek. And then, he heard it: the subtle, soft sound of lock tumblers tumbling.

It was her turn to swoon. Her eyelids fluttered; she was consumed by, in her words, “the vapors.” A golden key slipped from her sleeve and into his open palm.

As she fanned her face, dipping in and out of consciousness, he plunged the key into her breast and found the still-pulsing heart in his grip. It looked delicious. He could not help but take a bite.

Then: a rush of wind, a rustle of brush and a bite of thorn. He found himself running down a cobbled trod in the Hedge, the walls of briar teetering above him. The world waited ahead of him, beyond an open door that needed no key.

ONCE A THIEF...

Gentleman John didn’t give himself the epithet of “The Thistle Thief,” but he likes it well enough. He started stealing maybe 10 years ago, and thought to leave the thistle behind as kind of a parting gift — a flower for the victim, a mark of sorrow they can keep to commemorate the loss of a beloved and inimitable item. (It is in this way that the Court of Sorrow is a perfect fit for Gentleman John. He keeps his own sadness at bay by stirring grief in others.)

John pilfers goods mostly from the human populace, but he’s not above stealing from the changelings (or any fiend who passes into his awareness) if he finds something of notable singularity. He’s had a few run-ins with police over the years, but only out of happenstance. At present, law enforcement hasn’t been able to craft an accurate (or, at least, *useful*) profile of him, and so any close calls have been purely coincidental — a pair of beat cops witnessing John clambering from a third-floor window or a witness catching John in the middle of placing the hoary thistle upon a shelf now absent of its treasure.

He really only does steal during winter, though. The rest of the time, he happily rests on his laurels, enjoying the sun and the blossoms and the soon-to-be-falling autumn leaves. But then winter comes anew, and his hands grow eager once more. (Oh, and Christmas makes for a beautiful time to be a thief. Not just to steal expensive goods, but to plunder tear-jerking Christmas cards or a child’s one-of-a-kind drawing from the refrigerator...)

ONCE A HEARTBREAKER...

Gentleman John is a consummate whore — not in the sense that he’ll sell his body, but in the way that he’ll woo (and screw) any woman who crosses his path. She needn’t be pretty, though some are. She needn’t be rich, though again, some are. She merely needs to be a woman with a heartbeat and a propensity to fall for the Gentleman’s gentlemanly bullshit. Mostly, John prefers ladies of the plainly *human* sort, given that changelings often present a bit more of a

challenge. And therein lies a small irony: John’s romance of his beautiful Keeper was of powerful difficulty, and when it comes to stealing objects, the greater the challenge, the better it seems to be for him. With women, though, that doesn’t carry over. The easier, the better. John isn’t a fan of complicated relationships. The harder it is to get to the woman’s heart, the less interested he gets.

DESCRIPTION

John always knows what to say to men and women. Every person might as well be a lock, with words and gestures coming together to form the key. With women, he uses it to get into their beds and dreams. With men, he uses it to gain information and entry regarding things to steal. Really, he’s used to getting his way with words, whether it’s to earn favor from a local changeling queen or a politician, or just to get someone to buy him a drink at the bar. He’s all manners, all pomp and circumstance and deep flattery. And it works...most of the time.

Anybody who sees through his verbal chicanery and either calls him on it or manifests resistance puts him off his game. He’ll not pursue it; it’s as if the target of his wiles is dead to him. Oh, but if the target continues to call him on his bullshit, he’ll grow more and more uncomfortable, as if suffering a greater and greater imbalance. It takes a while to get him there, but eventually he’ll blow, with a volcanic temper. He won’t strike out at the person (unless they’ve gotten violent toward him), but he’ll scream and shout, he’ll break a beer mug or bash one barstool into another until both are resolved to splinters. Effectively, he throws a big temper tantrum because he did not get his way.

Also worth noting: he gets weird around truly beautiful women. Those with Striking Looks at four dots seem to put him off his game, reminding him perhaps of his Keeper. He might be able to pull it together, but he also might stammer, finding himself suddenly tongue-tied (even tripping over a lump in the rug or a doorjamb).

While John is keen on earning the hearts of women (a stable of encounters that probably adds up to at least one new “conquest” per night), he’s completely resistant to giving them *his* heart (for notable reasons — see “Secrets,” below). Oh, he fakes emotional attachments quite well, and does so for as long as it takes to clinch the seduction. But once that’s done, he’s done. The façade drops, and he discards the woman as casually as one pitches a used tissue into a trashcan. He seems almost *incapable* of growing attached to a woman.

Physically, Gentleman John possesses the lanky swagger of a Mick Jagger or David Bowie — just a bit androgynous, a bit too much elbow and knee, but oddly all the more attractive because of it. His mannerisms are all flair and gesture, but in opposition to that, he dresses quite conservatively: lots of black suits, white shirts, black or single-color ties. His hair always looks like once it was slicked back, but

it has since grown disheveled; it speaks to an air of chaos about him, a callback to the young rascal he once was.

Of course, that's just John's Mask. His mien isn't drastically different, but it's certainly *more* of the same — he's taller, lankier, and his limbs and even his fingers seem to possess extra joints. His eyes, too, are wild and alive — motes of light and madness swirling within.

SECRETS

- Gentleman John cannot have his heart stolen by anybody — that is to say, metaphorically or literally. On the surface, it seems that John just won't let anybody get that close to him. He'll certainly pretend for the sake of coaxing some not-yet-eager partner into bed, but otherwise, they'll find he keeps his heart locked away somewhere. And, to a degree, that's true. His heart is locked away somewhere. It doesn't live in his chest — feel for a pulse, and you'll find none. The part that's false is that it's not John who's keeping his heart locked away somewhere. Frankly, he doesn't know *who* has it. And that plagues his every dream, wondering who might be in possession of his heart. It's a haunting confusion. He's pretty sure he had it when he stole the heart of his beautiful Keeper. He's pretty sure he had it when he bolted through the Hedge (he remembers the pounding in his ears, the noisy rush of blood). But then... gone. Poof. Knocking on his own breastbone, he hears only a hollow return.

- John is desperately afraid of the Hedge. While entering the Hedge doesn't directly damage his Clarity, he certainly *feels* as if



it does — he gets dizzy, suffers sweats and sometimes even glimpses hallucinations dancing at the edges of his vision. And, uh oh, the Hedge is psychoactive.

It feeds off strong emotions, and his emotions about the Hedge are strong. Fear and confusion bleed off him in waves when he's in the Hedge. Which only makes the Thorns and trods all the more maddening, with trails twisting around upon themselves, with the Hedge walls actually surging close together, tightening the path ahead. Because of this, John avoids the Hedge for as long as possible. Assume that when he's in the Hedge, his Perception rolls are at -4 dice, and all other non-Social actions are at a -2 penalty.

- This is what John does with much of what he steals: he uses it to broker deals at various Goblin Markets. They have lots of great toys and tricks, a wealth of Goblin Contracts and other fae secrets, and John wants them. And he knows that the things he takes have a kind of magical, emotional weight to them. The mad merchants and market mavens seem to take a great shine to the things he steals — a cat-faced goblin might lick a lost Polaroid and shudder with paroxysms of glee, while a shadowy purveyor might take a long, deep smell of a baby's bootie (which John stole right off an infant's waggling foot) and determine that it suits his appropriately shadowy needs. John does this out of view of other changelings whenever possible. Note, too, that some Goblin Markets are directly in the Hedge, and John still gets nervous in such places; while he suffers no Social penalties (he can keep it together to *appear* unaffected), he does suffer the other penalties, as noted above.

- Frailty: minor Bane (the ticking of a clock). Gentleman John cannot bear to be in the same room as a ticking clock; he actually takes one point

of bashing damage from stress and fatigue per turn that he's in the same room as an audibly ticking clock.

RUMORS

"The Silent Arrow knows what John's up to. They don't condone it, exactly, but as long as he sometimes performs tasks for them — you know, stealing shit — they'll protect him. So, as long as he does what they want, they do what he wants. Which means if you mess with Gentleman John, the Winter Court messes with you."

True. At present, the Winter Court watches his back. That said, the pressure is on from the other Courts to give him up. Political pressure mounts. At present it is still protecting him, covering his ass, but it's also asking him to perform riskier and riskier thefts for it. There exists a way for characters to levy the political pressure to get the Court to budge, but that'll take some work. Alternatively, they might come upon John performing a Court-specific job, which makes him nervous and displeased.

"I hear the Hedge really freaks him out. But that can't be true, because every Saturday at midnight he goes into the doorway down on Archer Avenue, and disappears into the Hedge for an hour or so. Don't ask me to follow him; I don't need his grubby little fingers pilfering my Hummel figurines or my porn collection. Hey, I love my porn stash, shut up."

Porn stash aside, this rumor is accurate — and, in addition, following John is no easy task. He does go into the Hedge and tries to cover his trail as best as possible. So what is he doing, exactly? He's meeting the character who might be his one true friend in this world. In the Hedge lives — yes, *lives* — another changeling who shared the same beautiful Keeper with Gentleman John. This changeling isn't sane. This changeling is probably quite dangerous. But, to John, it's a kindred spirit, and they get along quite well (perhaps it's because this changeling is *also* without a heart). Characters investigating John may be able to use this changeling for information, but they do risk the danger of dealing with a high-Wyrd, low-Clarity Hedge dweller.

GENTLEMAN JOHN

Seeming: Fairest

Kith: Larcenist (new kith, see below)

Court: Winter

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 4, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Crafts 2, Investigation 4, Occult 1, Politics 2

Physical Skills: Athletics (Flee) 3, Brawl 1, Larceny (Planned Jobs) 5, Stealth 4, Survival 1, Weaponry 2

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Expression 3, Intimidation 1, Persuasion (Seduction) 4, Socialize 4, Subterfuge (Seduction) 4

Story Hooks

- Gentleman John is missing his heart. And he thinks it's high time he found it. The reality is, though, he's deeply afraid to set out on the journey himself. He doesn't know what he might find, and his greatest fear is that somehow his Keeper took it from him (he's heard the rumors, and is inclined to believe them). So, he comes to the characters. And he tells them he'll give them whatever they want, even if it's not yet in his power to provide it, if they can find a "valuable artifact." He won't tell them what it is he's looking for, exactly. He may mention that it is *a heart*, but not *his* heart. Or he might instead suggest that it's some other token or relic that they track down for him. The other part of the problem is that, in reality, he's not going to do much to actually get the motley the rewards they ask for, not unless the characters forge a pledge with him. And even if such a pledge exists, he's quite good at wording pledges so they favor *him*, not the other party.

- Something from one of the characters is stolen from home or Hollow. Something valuable. Something *beloved*. And left behind in its place? No, not a dead thistle. A vibrant, living rose, so bright it seems to pulse with color. Does the Thistle Thief have competition (the Rose Robber, perhaps)? Or has he decided to try a new tactic?

- Stealing from one of the seasonal monarchs was a bad idea. She busted him. She blew the case wide open, and on the sly made sure that the police, the media and every damn citizen of the city know who John is and what he's done. John comes to the characters and begs for their help. Can they hide him? Maybe help him find a new identity? This could go either way for the characters. John's...well, a selfish dick. It's *possible* he could get close to them if they offer genuine selfless help. But it's all the more likely that he turns on them. It's even possible that he frames one of the characters to *be* the Thistle Thief (not difficult, given his ability to plant evidence like stolen items and dead thistles).

Merits: Direction Sense, Fighting Style: Social Maneuvers 4, Fleet of Foot 3, Mantle (Winter) 3, Resources 3, Striking Looks 2, Token (15 Thistle gift Trifles; see below) 5

Willpower: 6

Clarity: 5

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Lust

Initiative: 6

Defense: 4

Speed: 14 (with Fleet of Foot)

Health: 7

Wyrd: 6

Contracts: Dream ••; Goblin (Trading Luck for Fate, Fair Entrance, Fool's Gold, Good and Bad Luck); Hearth ••; Mirror •; Vainglory ••;

Glamour/Per Turn: 15/6

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Saber	2(L)	na	6	na

KITH: LARCE NIST

The Larcenist kith is very close to the Fairest's Dancer Kith (*Changeling: The Lost*, p. 114), except here, the alien grace of the Wyrd is applied in part to one's ability to pilfer and plunder. The same lissome form and magical poise are present in **Thievery's Grace**, where the changeling benefits from the 9-again rule on any Larceny or Socialize rolls involving agility, and always adds one to her Dodge total when dodging attacks.

TRIFLE: THISTLEGIFT

To use this trifle, the changeling must plant a delicate kiss upon the living thistle (painful, though it causes no damage); when this is done, it withers and dies. For the remainder of the scene, the changeling leaves behind no physical evidence of his passing: no fingerprints, no footprints, no fluids, nothing.

FIGHTING STYLE: SOCIAL MANEUVERS (• TO ••••)

Prerequisites: Presence •••, Manipulation •••, one Social Skill at ••••

Effect: Your character is trained in the art of social manipulations and able to twist a victim around his thumb for purposes of getting what he wants. This might be something the character develops naturally, but it can be taught.

Dots purchased in this Merit allow access to special "social combat" maneuvers. Each maneuver is a prerequisite

for the next. Your character can't have "Stick and Move" until he has "Sugar Lips, Honey Tongue." The "maneuvers" and their effects are described below.

Note that the positive effects of each "maneuver" may end upon one dramatic failure by the character or several consecutive Social failures.

Sugar Lips, Honey Tongue (•): Your character's first interaction with a target is a mind-blowing yet convincing compliment — the goal being to knock them off balance a bit before going in for the "kill." Using this "move" necessitates first keeping a close eye on the target for at least 20 minutes, reading body language, determining vulnerabilities: what parts confirm her self-esteem, or what is it about her self-image that needs boosting? Upon delivering the compliment — and it must be the first thing your character says to the target — you roll your character's Manipulation + Socialize versus the target's Presence + Composure. Your roll gains a bonus equal to half of your Empathy score, however, rounded up. Success on the roll means the target suffers -3 dice to any further Social Resistance traits or rolls.

Stick and Move (••): Being too aggressive in some social situations can be the deathblow to one's manipulations; hence, it is often necessary to retreat from the conversation, to feign disinterest or distraction. This forces the victim to be the aggressor (though, admittedly, the false aggressor), thus investing the victim in your character's well-being. Roll Presence + Subterfuge versus target's Wits + Empathy. Success indicates that you can use the victim's own interests and desires against her: for the remainder of the scene, you gain a bonus to all Social rolls equal to half the victim's Presence score (round up). Drawback: this necessitates the expenditure of a single point of Willpower to engage.

New Approach (•••): Any time it looks like your character has lost a Social contest, you may spend a Willpower point to force that contest to be re-rolled, gaining a "second chance," of sorts.

Chip Away (••••): Your character can continue to put the target off balance through denials, assertions, compliments, insults — whatever tools he has in his arsenal. Once per turn, your character may make any Social roll and spend a Willpower point. In doing so, you do not gain +3 to that roll, but instead force a -1 Social penalty upon the target by continuing to unbalance the conversation. This penalty is cumulative, and can build to a maximum of -3 dice. Drawback: if you fail a Social roll after successfully engaging this tactic, the target gains the upper hand again and the Social penalty disappears. You may not try this move again on that target during this game session.

THE CRYPTIC FORTUNETELLER: GRANDMA MARA

Yes, dearie, I can tell your fortune. But do you really want to know?

Aliases: Mara Crystalgazer, The Fateweaver

BACKGROUND

Uncertainty about the future causes fear in most people. They often don't know where the money for the bills is going to come from, or whether they'll have a job after their company downsizes or whether or not the person they are with is really the love of their life. Most people just continue without trying to find any answers to those questions, but some prefer to find possible answers by consulting with psychics and fortunetellers.

Most fortunetellers are charlatans, picking up on cues from the subject and feeding them whatever it is he wants to hear. But there are a few who are naturally gifted at reading what Fate has in store for a person and being able to explain what the subject needs to do in order to achieve their goals.

Grandma Mara is one of the few who have *real* skill. She's been reading people's fortunes for decades and has earned a reputation for being highly accurate not only in what will come to pass, but also in finding the subject ways to change what Fate has already laid out.

For over 70 years, Grandma Mara has been a fixture at local markets and traveling shows, reading people's auras and using her giant crystal ball to divine people's futures. She sets up her tent at flea markets and festivals. Mara also pitches her tent at Goblin Markets and is more than happy to give readings to the Lost.

Clients come to her with a question in mind and she usually tells *them* what their question is before they've had a chance to explain what it is they are looking for. This acuity has helped her build a huge clientele who repeatedly come back to her for additional readings, particularly when something starts to go bad in their lives.

Mara is actually adept with all the major forms of divination, although she prefers using the crystal. However, if a client requests a tarot card reading, the use of bones, tealeaves or even chicken entrails, Mara is more than happy to oblige. The actual mechanism for doing the divination is merely an act for her, as she has other, supernatural means of divining a person's future and she only uses the props as a traditional way of convincing the client that she knows what she's doing.

Where Mara was born and grew up is a secret known only to her, and a source of much speculation at the traveling markets where Mara does her readings. She's been

asked dozens of times about her background, but she always shakes her head sadly and says she prefers not to talk about it because it's too painful. Some people have asked if her parents were killed, but she merely wipes a tear from her eye and changes the subject. The source of her abilities is also something she doesn't talk about. She merely says she's had them as long as she can remember, and doesn't really bother to speculate about where they come from, just as long as they work.

There's more to her than meets the eye, of course. There always is.

DESCRIPTION

A reading with Mara always begins with the client entering her gaudy orange-and-purple-striped tent. It has several diaphanous veils across the entrance, making it impossible to peer directly into the tent's central chamber from the outside. Some people say that entering Mara's tent feels as though they have entered another world, and that even the noise of the markets outside seem to disappear once they're inside.

Once the client enters, Grandma Mara emerges from her private chamber at the rear of the tent. To mortal eyes, she appears to be an old woman of Eastern European descent. Her hair is completely white and she wears it pulled back and covered with a scarf. She dresses like a stereotypical gypsy, with long, colorfully embroidered skirts and a flowing blouse. Her face is heavily lined with age, particularly around her eyes, which are very dark brown. Some clients have even said that her eyes are out of place, as they look as though they belong to a young woman.

To changeling eyes — or anyone else who can penetrate her Mask — she appears to be even older and more cronenlike. Her nose is hooked and her teeth are pointed. Her hair is still white, but it is much sparser and wiry. She also has a hairy wart on her chin, but her eyes remain the same. Most changelings aren't sure whether she's one of the Wizened, or some sort of hob, and Mara does nothing to clarify the situation.

She stands quietly for a few seconds, then sits opposite the client and reaches out and takes his hands. Most people are shocked by the feel of Mara's touch, as even though they look like an old woman's hands, they are incredibly soft and feel almost sensuous.

Mara stares into her client's eyes for a couple of seconds, then tells him why he is here. She's preternaturally

accurate with her initial reading, using her fae abilities to read what her client wants. If the client expresses surprise, Mara just smiles and then goes on with the rest of the reading.

In most cases, Mara prefers to conduct a reading using the huge crystal ball she keeps under a scarlet velvet cloth in the center of the table, although she changes her style based on what the client requests. She listens to what the client hopes to get out of the reading and then tailors her responses accordingly.

As the reading goes on, Mara always narrows in on the mental blocks that are preventing the client from experiencing whatever it is he's hunting for. It might be some emotional trauma the client suffered, or it might just be a complicated tangle of conflicting beliefs that are making his life a misery. Once she's identified the problem, she'll hint about the real problem without ever addressing it directly.

If the client buys into the reading, Mara asks if he is willing to do something about it. If he is, Mara will create an expendable token — which is usually presented as a "good luck charm," prayer or potion — specifically for the situation. She'll explain the use of the item, but will neglect to explain the negative ramifications that will be triggered once the item is used. If the client isn't interested, Mara often secretly invokes a minor curse on him, simply out of spite. He might lose his wallet or have a car accident on the way home.

Although the cost of the reading is usually cash — unless the reading takes place at a Goblin Market, in which case the cost might be something more esoteric — the real cost of the reading occurs when the token or Contract is used (see below).



Once the markets are over, Mara quickly packs up her tent and disappears. While she is on friendly terms with several of the regular market vendors, none of them knows where she goes, and she always refuses invitations to come out for dinner or to socialize. She simply says she's an old woman and the day has tired her out and she needs to go home and rest.

SECRETS

Grandma Mara isn't human, nor is she one of the Lost. She is, in fact, a True Fae. She's working a grand plan that's been underway for centuries and will run well into the future. She believes the mortal world is created by the collective desires and thoughts of the human race. By manipulating the thoughts of an individual and causing those thoughts to be passed onto someone else, her ideas can be spread like viruses throughout humanity.

Mara revels in chaos and individuality. If anything, she would like to see the physical world done away with altogether and everyone and everything converted to nothing more than emotional energy — in other words, she wants to see Arcadia absorb the mortal world completely. Unfortunately, because everyone believes the same things, the physical world is subconsciously agreed upon and it continues. By scrambling people's desires in subtle ways, she can change their lives and the lives of all those around them.

The temporary tokens she gives them are like a Glamour time bomb. The use of one of them is dependent on the client consciously making a decision to use it. When he does, the Glamour infused in the token alters the client's thought processes and sets in motion a series of coincidences that will allow him to manifest whatever it is he is looking for in life. If the client wants to get rich, he'll find some money, feel compelled to buy a lottery ticket and come up with a winner. If he wants to find his soul mate and fall in love, he'll literally bump into just the right person on the street and feel compelled to say something, which gets the two of them talking.

A person's personality is made up of the collection of beliefs they hold to be true (whether or not they are is irrelevant). In order to manifest a different future, their thought processes need to change, and the token rewires a section of the client's personality. The downside to the token's use is that the client's personality can make radical changes in ways they didn't expect. Memories that were highly important to the person suddenly become irrelevant and are forgotten, and they may end up ignoring their friends and family as though they were strangers. Other things that held no meaning for the client suddenly become vitally important.

There's no real rhyme or reason for the changes. They just happened to be beliefs that were bound up around the core beliefs that needed to be changed to manifest the client's desires. In game terms, the character picks up a new derangement (see *World of Darkness Rulebook*, pp. 96–100). His Virtue and Vice might also change. People close to the client will start to notice changes in the person's personality, some of which will be evident right away; others will grow stronger over time as the new belief system beds itself into the person's subconscious.

For all Mara's conviction that the mortal world is nothing but beliefs, she finds actually being in the mortal world to be incredibly painful. The reality of physical objects means the thoughtform that created that object is so locked into one particular pattern that she cannot change it easily. She only ventures into the mortal world when she absolutely has to and she retreats to the Hedge as quickly as possible to rest afterwards.

Mara's tent isn't as it appears, either. The main chamber and her private meditation chamber are part of a secret Hollow in the Hedge. She's had the tent constructed so that when the client moves through the veils in the entrance, he actually moves out of the mortal world and into the Hedge. This is why some clients report the sound of the outside world disappearing once they're inside. She also knows that spending time inside the tent will alter the way the client thinks, simply because of the nature of the Hedge itself.

When she arrives at the market, she quickly pitches the tent, then disappears inside, to the safety of her Hollow. Once the markets are over, she swiftly pulls down her tent again, then finds a quiet spot to open a gateway back into the Hedge. She also won't let anyone help her with it, despite liking to give everyone the impression she's really a frail old woman.

RUMORS

"This little kid started freaking out at the Markets the other day. I guess he was about three, and like all kids that age, he got bored when his mom kept stopping to look at stalls and stuff. He ran away and went wandering around the Markets by himself. His mom was getting frantic, looking for him, when she heard his screaming coming from that old gypsy fortuneteller's tent. When his mom arrived, the old lady was waiting by the entrance to the tent with him. He kept saying there were monsters and all sorts of scary things in there, but no one believed him."

Story Hooks

- Someone close to the characters uses one of Grandma Mara's tokens in order to get a new job, and her personality radically changes. Whereas before she was a shy, introverted person, she's suddenly loud and outgoing, sleeping around and taking drugs. She does get her new job, although some say she got it because she slept with the boss, not because of any skill on her part. She also starts to forget who the characters are, treating them like acquaintances rather than close friends. She starts to talk to other people about information she holds in confidence about the characters, possibly including the fact they aren't human anymore.

- A character who uses one of Mara's tokens suddenly starts developing strange illnesses, including rare forms of cancer. Before he used the token, he was extremely fit and healthy, but within weeks of using the token, he is seriously ill in hospital. The doctors are at a complete loss as to how he contracted the diseases, as they can find no other triggers. What's actually happening is that the belief rewiring caused by Mara's token has created conflicts in the man's subconscious, and those conflicts are manifesting in the form of physical illness.

- The characters are caught up in a hostage drama when someone who has used one of Mara's tokens loses control and decides to rob a bank. The man is overly aggressive and paranoid and responds to any potential threat with violence. He's already shot one bank customer because she tried to calm him down. The police have surrounded the bank, but the man is not responding to their negotiations and is threatening to kill all the hostages — including the characters — unless he is given a helicopter and several million in unmarked bills.

trance to the tent with him. He kept saying there were monsters and all sorts of scary things in there, but no one believed him."

As mentioned earlier, Mara's tent is actually a Hollow, although most people don't recognize it as such. Her private chamber at the rear of the tent has an entrance into the Hedge that connects to a trod that leads to her home do-

main in Arcadia. From time to time, some of her minions visit her there, and it was these strange fae creatures that the child saw.

"There's something really weird about that old gypsy fortuneteller who has a tent at the local market sometimes. I go for tarot readings and stuff like that all the time. I believe that knowing what the future holds can sometimes help solve problems before they arise. Anyway, right from the moment I entered her tent, I could feel there was something wrong. When she came out through the curtain at the back of the tent and just stared at me, I got a cold shiver up my spine, as though she was looking right through me. And then when she started telling me things about my life that I hadn't ever told anyone, it just started freaking me out. I had to leave, as I had a really bad feeling that something bad was going to happen. It did too! I got hit by a car on the way out and broke my leg!"

Not everyone who visits Grandma Mara comes away thinking it's a good thing and their luck is going to change. As she's one of the True Fae, people who are psychically sensitive can detect a sense of wrongness about her and the atmosphere inside the tent. Mortals with the Unseen Sense merit (*World of Darkness Rulebook*, pp. 109–110) or supernatural characters have a chance to recognize that Mara is something other than she appears to be.

"I swear, ever since I visited the old fortuneteller at the market, some weird stuff has been going down in my life. After I used the prayer she taught me, within weeks I'd had a big cash windfall and everything in life suddenly got clearer. I could see the limiting beliefs that I'd held before and it's felt so good to get rid of those. But the old woman herself...I keep dreaming about her, every time. I'm almost afraid to go to sleep now, because I know she's going to be there, as if she's hunting me or something."

While Mara doesn't do follow-up work on all her clients, she does take a liking to some of them who show real potential for furthering her plan. Mara is a master dream weaver and she will connect with her clients through their dreams and further reshape parts of their dream landscapes if she thinks it will further her plan (see *Dream-Shaping, Changeling: the Lost*, pp. 190–201).

GRANDMA MARA

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 6, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Craft (Tokens) 3, Investigation 3, Medicine 2, Occult 2, Politics 4

Physical Skills: Brawl 2, Larceny 4, Stealth (Moving in the Hedge) 4, Survival 2, Weaponry (Blades) 2

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Persuasion 4, Socialize 2, Subterfuge (Lying) 4

Merits: Harvest (Emotions) 3, Harvest (Pledges) 4, Hollow (Amenities 3, Size 1, Wards 4) 8

Willpower: 9

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Greed

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 10

Health: 8

Wyrds: 8

Contracts: Dream ••••, Fleeting Spring ••••, Mirror •••

Glamour/Per Turn: 30/8

Frailties: Rigid thinking (major taboo), the mortal world (minor Bane)

Mien Blessings: Flicker, Lyrical Voice, Panomancy (Oracle)

Fae Aspects

- **Create Temporary Token:** Mara is able to create a temporary token to give to her clients so that they carry out her plan. Each token is able to bring about a specific situation when triggered, based on the desires of the individual client. It does this by radically altering the client's thoughts and beliefs, using Glamour. Unfortunately, the rewiring expands beyond just the character's limiting beliefs and can leave the character with a new derangement and/or changed Virtue and Vice.

- **Ruled by Passion:** The True Fae are entities almost embodied by their passions and vices, with higher morality and self-denial little more than a whim to them. For them, passion is virtue, and denial of passion an affection. Their supernaturally amoral nature is reflected in an inverted ability to regain Willpower. Grandma Mara regains one Willpower point from indulging her Virtue, but refreshes her whole pool when satiating her Vice.

- **Immortal Flesh:** Grandma Mara does not age, and she is immune to mundane disease or illness. She does not take bashing damage at all, unless the source is iron. An iron weapon inflicts bashing damage as normal; a cold iron bludgeoning implement will inflict lethal damage. A cold iron slashing or piercing implement inflicts aggravated damage.

- **Unraveling the Knots:** Mara doesn't actually see mortals as individual people; she sees them as clusters of ideas. By talking with a client and examining her auras and the layout of her dream landscape, Mara can discover what core truths the client holds to be real. She can use that information to give an accurate "psychic" reading and to lay the seeds for changing the person's beliefs later on.

THE QUEEN OF JEALOUSY: GREEN-EYED GERTA

Tell me — where have you been? And don't lie to me. I can see a lie like a bright star in the sky: it glitters and twinkles, a false gem in Heaven's crown.

Aliases: The Green Queen

BACKGROUND

Gerta is the Queen of the Spring Court. She has been the Queen for many years now, and for the most part is a wise and judicious ruler. But her courtiers recognize the danger intrinsic to her rule, and worry that it's becoming all the more apparent and perilous. She's good with "the people," but often grows troubling when dealing with individuals. Her jealousy stays contained... mostly. But once it's out, it's *out* — a lashing whip abrading flesh left and right. How did she get this way?

THE ORPHANAGE

Gerta knows nothing of the land of Faerie, at least nothing beyond the walls of the so-called "Orphanage" in which she was kept. She remembers little about this time (blessedly, for it was far from pleasant), but what she does remember still marks her to this day.

The Orphanage was home to a number of captives stolen from the world — nascent changelings, some bullies, some shrinking violets, all suffering the trauma of the Wyrd bleeding into their once-human bones. Greta does not know what it was she did to displease the Keeper who stood vigil over the "orphans" (this Keeper was known by most as The Dowager), but displease her she did. The Dowager gave the other orphans permission to take from Greta anything they wanted. Did they want her porridge? Her shoes? The bows in her hair? Take them, the Dowager said. And the others did. Greta watched as they took what was hers and made it their own.

She couldn't stand it, so she cried, wept and raged against the others. This only furthered the Dowager's displeasure, however, and soon the Keeper let the other orphans take *more*: at first, they stole great clumps of her hair, but then soon started picking her apart the way a callous child might destroy a doll. They pulled her fingers from their sockets, they plucked her legs out of her hips — all was fair game except for the features upon Gerta's face. The Dowager commanded that Greta be able to see and hear what others had taken from her, so that she might view fully how nothing was truly her own.

Greta was able to cobble herself new parts from dolls, toys and other items around the orphanage, but the others only stole from her again and again.

(A note: the changelings of the Orphanage were not all children. Gerta certainly wasn't, and those who were have not returned to this world.)

THE FIRST STING

She was out of the Hedge and free from Faerie several years before her jealousy truly manifested in a way that suggested hid-

den madness and coming danger. Gerta had fallen for a Duke of the Icebound Heart (*Changeling: The Lost*, p. 297), who thought he could wine her, dine her and ditch her. He was wrong.

She did not take well to being rejected, especially after she had given him so much — he was the first she was able to trust with her heart, and he opted to toy with it the way a cat paws at a mouse before growing bored. Her jealousy manifested in somewhat normal ways, at first: late-night phone calls, her pounding on his door late at night. It wasn't long before she became all the more insistent, however. She left him mad little letters that vacillated between obsessive love and bitter vengeance. Her jealousy soon became quite public: she was able to discern the location of the Winter Court's proceedings (kept secret from other changelings) and she stormed in, ranting, raving, making up stories about what he'd done (including imagined treacheries against not just her, but the Court of Sorrow in general). While it didn't do tremendous damage to him and his reputation, his Status was dented, at least. Gerta maybe didn't recognize the power she had consciously...but certainly, some part of her identified the thrill the power gave her. It's what pushed her onto the path to become Queen, and what gave her the impetus to keep her jealous ways mostly submerged beneath a seemingly calm and measured demeanor.

Desire Twisted

The Spring Court's thing is desire. What Gerta represents isn't desire, exactly, but its twisted cousin. Jealousy is easily the dark half of desire; what one wants, one gets, but Gerta's head's all tangled up and she believes she can never really *have* what she wants in the end. That doesn't stop her from trying, though, and thus her desire manifests in a furious shade of green.

Also worth mentioning: this jealousy falls upon anybody who grows close to her. Yes, that applies to lovers both human and changeling, but it also applies to those she calls "friends," be they male or female. Desire needn't be sexual: the desire for companionship, for her to hold onto what she might so easily lose, is what drives Gerta. Or, more specifically, what drives her to madness.

And what happened to the Duke of the Icebound Heart? That's a tale she'd rather no one know. (See "Secrets," below.)

DESCRIPTION

Speak with Gerta and you'll likely sense it: a quiet madness lurking at the edges. Her eyes glint and flare. Her jaw tenses. She endeavors to be a Queen with a calm veneer, with measured words and prudent judgment. And she almost gets away with it. Her words generally seem fair; her proclamations come without extreme prejudice. She is by most definitions an elegant teacup, unpretentious and without ornamentation. This teacup, though, hides a brutal tempest.

It is, of course, her jealousy. A changeling who becomes her friend, confidant, advisor or lover will feel its barb often enough. She is ultimately very kind to those near her; too kind, if you believe the Lost of the other Courts. Gerta showers those near her with gifts, boons, compliments or titles within the Spring Court. It comes whether it is deserved or not. All of this comes at a fairly steep cost, though: Gerta is paranoid. She's obsessive. Over time — maybe weeks, maybe months — she develops something of a "stalker" mentality. She gloms onto those near her, drawing them to her like a black hole sucking in light and matter. It starts slow. It often comes with benefits to the target: she may come bearing gifts, or she offers herself to a lover with open arms, open lips and an unparalleled willingness.

Soon, though, it starts to become worrisome. She may show up too often or at odd times. Her gifts might become

odd — either needlessly superior (anything from a high-ranking position for a young changeling to a parcel of real estate) or simply bizarre (a bouquet of dead flowers, the head of one of the changeling's enemies). Rebuke her once ("Sorry, I have a headache," or, "I'm not sure this is working out") and it's like a knife in her back. Her passive-aggressive wrath doesn't

take long to amp up: before the victim knows it, she's already ruined some small part of his life (lying to one of his loved ones, tricking him into breaking a long-standing pledge, destroying his finances). Gerta always offers the victim a chance to come back into her good graces, and she'll fix his problems... mostly.

Inevitably, it breaks down. Might be his fault, might be hers. He may start to do all the things she baselessly accused him of: suddenly, he cheats. She finds out. And she punishes him without mercy. Alternatively, he might grow all the closer and more faithful (out of fear or some twisted dependency), but it doesn't really matter. Eventually, her paranoia takes full shape. She imagines specters where there are none. Her mind conjures

all manner of groundless tales:

oh, he's clearly sleeping with his fetch, or he's just getting closer to her so he can try to steal her throne. Perhaps she thinks him suddenly in hock to some Keeper — and even if it's not true, she may try to engineer the "facts" to support this unsubstantiated theorem. (So far, this hasn't led to the death of any humans or changelings, at least that anybody knows about. Exile, though, often waits at the end of the road for those drawn into her envious gravity.)



Gerta isn't of otherworldly beauty, but there lurks something sultry and sensuous about her: her green eyes are profound, her lips pouty, and her head is topped with a perfect cascade of fire-red hair (with nary a strand out of place). In addition, she offers a lissome grace that borders on artificial, even impossible.

That's probably due to her mien, though: as a Manikin, she's largely synthetic. Her skin is plastic, and bits of it (usually at the joints) seem broken off to reveal tiny pistons and pulleys within. In some spots, those who view her might see the plastic IV tubing that serves as her veins, as well as the searing hot blood that runs within (as fiery as iron heated until molten). In addition, her Spring Court Mantle adds a verdant twist: tangled around those plastic tubes are coils of ivy, and her red hair is shot through with flowers, leaves and poison oak.

She's still beautiful, though, but in a far eerier way — think some of the designs of H.R. Giger, which belie a malevolent eroticism.

SECRETS

So, what happened to that Duke of the Icebound Heart, anyway, the one who "first" broke Gerta's heart? The poor Duke suffered a bit of a breakdown, actually. His new home? A local mental institution. His low Clarity — rock bottom at this point — has him a gibbering mess, chasing shadows, laughing at jokes that were never told. If someone were able to pierce this madness, maybe allow him to find even a moment's worth of sanity, he might tell that person just how he got there. He might explain how Gerta — without anyone else knowing — went into the Hedge and summoned his Keeper, and how she told that Keeper everything the Fae Lady needed to know to torment the poor Duke until his brain was little more than a quivering pile of craziness. He might go on to say that his own damn Court is keeping him there in the institution, secreted away from other changelings (and, more importantly, the Gentry), as is their predilection... but that's not really her secret, is it? Her other secret... well, he doesn't know that one.

The other secret is what Gerta gained by selling out the Duke. See, she made a deal with the Fae Lady; a *pledge*. By offering up such betrayal to the eager Keeper, she was able to procure a measure of the Keeper's power. Gerta's smart, she's powerful, and she may have one day been destined for the Spring throne all on her own. But she elicited a promise from the Fae Lady that she would be allowed to ascend to the throne and remain there until she was dead. If anybody found this out, well, she might get dead a lot faster than she ever imagined.

- Frailties: minor Bane (children), minor Bane (snow falling), major taboo (must always tell the truth in the presence of a Winter Court changeling)
- Derangement: Suspicion (mild)

RUMORS

"You'd think someone like her would keep only one horse in the stable at all times, you know what I mean? She's always so jealous of everybody else, making sure that she's the 'only one' for them, right? So it stands to follow that the victim du jour is the only one for her, too. Wrong-o. She's got a fling on the side, if you can believe that. And the story says it's one of the kings of the other Courts. Maybe even the Winter King — ain't that a bite? The really weird part is, supposedly that fling's been going on for quite some time now, at least a year, maybe more. So how does this King keep her from going all crazy jealous-eyed moonbat? What's his secret? And why isn't he sharing?"

Is it true? Does she keep a fling on the side (or, more appropriately, is she the "kept" one)? Those who end up the subject of her "attentions" may want some more information, either to learn the King's secret or to have him work on the character's behalf. The only real clue as to the truth of this is her annual one-day disappearance: Gerta can't be found anywhere during the day (and night) of the Winter Solstice.

"You ever find that she's got you in a bind, coiled around you like a boa constrictor, there's a few ways to handle it. If you're looking for the quick fix, she likes flowers. Orchids, I think. If you're looking for the long con and you're really good, it's time to convince her that she's made a mistake and you're not the one for her. Divert her attention to somebody else. You'll need to find a sacrificial lamb, someone you can throw under the bus. But it works, if you've got the gilded tongue."

She does love orchids, but not just *any* orchid, oh no. She likes orchids from the Hedge — and orchids from the Hedge only come from hot, humid swampy areas of the Thorns. Procuring one involves danger, plain and simple, but that danger *might* be preferable to the threat Gerta could represent. As for misdirecting her to another, that *does* work, but she's getting wise to it. Assume that any Social attempts to do this (probably Manipulation + Persuasion or Manipulation + Subterfuge) are contested by her Wits + Empathy, and she gains +3 to that roll.

GREEN-EYED GERTA, SPRING COURT QUEEN

Seeming: Elemental

Kith: Manikin

Court: Spring

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 3

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 3, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 5, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Investigation (Paranoia) 4, Politics (Freehold) 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 1, Firearms 1, Larceny 2, Stealth (Spying) 3

Social Skills: Empathy 3, Expression 2, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 3, Socialize 3, Streetwise 1, Subterfuge (Detect

Lies) 5

Merits: Allies (Private Detectives) 3, Eidetic Memory, Harvest (Emotions) 4, Inspiring, Mantle (Spring) 5, Status (Spring Court) 5

Willpower: 5

Clarity: 5

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Envy

Initiative: 5

Defense: 3

Speed: 10

Health: 7

Wyrd: 7

Contracts: Eternal Spring •••; Fleeting Spring •••••;

Hearth •••;

Glamour/per Turn: 30/8

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
.38 Snubnose	2(L)	20/40/80	6	na

Jealousy's Fleeting Spring

Sounds like a poem, doesn't it? For Gerta, it kind of is. Gerta's become quite adept with the Contracts of Fleeting Spring, and she uses it (sometimes consciously, sometimes not) to engage and prove her own jealousies.

Think about it. The early clauses allow her to stir the desires of another, and even steer them toward her. With Wyrd-Faced Stranger (•••), she can "test" her friend or lover to see if perhaps he desires something more than he desires her (if he gazes upon Gerta and thinks her to be someone else, that confirms her paranoid fears about the target's love and loyalty). Pandora's Gift (••••) can either be used to grant the target a last-minute "reprieve" from Gerta's punishments, or can be used to further steer the target toward a desire other than her. And with Waking the Inner Faerie (•••••), once Gerta determines she is not the end-all and be-all of the victim's desires, well, she can push them on a reckless and perhaps life-threatening quest to find what *does* make him happy. It's passive-aggressive, really — setting him "free" so he can doggedly pursue his desires without thought to his own well-being.

Story Hooks

• Uh oh. Gerta has set her sights on one of the troupe's characters. She's begun her "wooing" process, and frankly, it's a hard thing to resist. She's generous. She's kind. She's *brimming* with lust. (Alternatively, maybe "set her sights" means she needs a confidant or advisor, and selects the character for those reasons.) Once the character is on the hook, it's hard to pull himself off it... but frankly, it's hard even before the hook is set. She doesn't take rejection well, and she'll wage a war of passive-aggressive ruination against the character *and* his friends. Then again, acting as her friend or paramour is also a quick way to power...

• Gerta's powerful, and powerful people have enemies. And you know who else has enemies? Powerful people who make enemies left and right by dint of their raging jealousies. A small army of dissenters (probably from within the Spring Court) has banded together in secret to take her down. They think she's dangerous, she's crazy and she needs to be stopped — maybe even *killed*. They approach the characters, looking for their help. Will the characters offer aid? Gerta isn't really sane, but her rule over the freehold is sound. Is the instability worth it? Who will this army nominate to take the throne?

• Dead men tell no tales, but *almost* dead ones do. One of Gerta's most recent "victims" ended up lost in the Hedge, bleeding — and blood can be like chum in the water when it comes to summoning the many slavering things of the Thorns. Before she left him in the Hedge, Gerta — maybe drunk, maybe just nuts — spilled her guts. She told him everything she'd ever done, either to confess her sins or to make clear just how fucked he really was. Yeah, but he didn't die. And now he's falling facedown at the characters' door, and he's ready to talk. Can they save his life? Can they at least keep him alive long enough for him to tell them everything, including her deal with a Keeper?

THE HORROR IN THE DARK: THE HOOK

Wet, ragged breathing and the scraping of sharp metal on the trunk of a car

Aliases: The Claw, Hook-Hand, the Hook-Hand Killer

BACKGROUND

In the wake of the Second World War — with the looming threat of human extinction and the subsequent rise of a paranoid regime, inclined to see threats to the American way of life in every shadow — a creed of virulent repression gripped the nation. Young people were taught to fear their urges in the 1950s, as surely as they were taught to fear the Reds. It was a society that denied its desires, smothering them under a heavy blanket of terror, for any chink in the moral armor of the West could end the world in hellfire and ashes; or so the politicians and priests would have the next generation believe, anyway.

But fear and lust are powerful feelings, and they've been bound together in the human imagination for a long, long time. Woman as devilish seductress, feeding upon the vital essence of the men she ensnares. Man as cruel and insatiable ravisher, taking by guile or by force what virtuous women attempt to deny him. Sickness that withers and destroys the generative organs and, from there, the whole of the body (and sometimes the mind). The swollen belly of the expectant

unwed mother, wearing the mark of her dishonor for all to see. Over the ages, a number of Gentry have been drawn to this heady blend of fear and lust, and to the strange and (to their alien thinking) delightful ways in which these two seemingly contradictory drives are alloyed within the human soul. In the 1950s, however, one of the Others was called to that age's particular manifestation of sexual longing and to the reactionary, irrational, moralistic fervor that denied it.

With a savage instrument, it penetrated the soft flesh of those who unwisely sought dark and lonely places for their moonlit trysts.

Not content merely to steal young men and women away to Arcadia, it sowed horror with the same casual abandon with which it scattered torn innards and mangled limbs. Sometimes, a terrified survivor was left behind to gibber incoherently about the inhuman brutality of "the Hook," but only often enough to perpetuate the tale and make this nightmarish legend take root and grow in the fertile soil of the mortal mind. And sometimes,

times, the shell-shocked survivor wasn't human at all, but instead something that believed itself human, woven up from a strand of hair, a drop of blood and a few dry branches, tied together with a ragged strip of the darkness torn from the hole in space where the new moon hung.



Always the Hook disappeared in time, only to emerge somewhere else, haunting lonely roads, isolated retreats, rural cornfields and distant lakefronts. Sometimes, it sought more urban hunting grounds, scraping a vicious claw along the concrete walls of drainage ditches or echoing the shrieking of metal on metal across rusting bridges in the bad part of town, where no one sensible dares to go at night, though it much prefers the places away from the constant susurru of cars, the wailing of sirens and the artificial lights that can turn night into day.

In the 1970s, it murdered in four different towns, leaving only fear, pain, death and urban legends in its wake. In the 1980s, it made its first kill outside the United States, claiming two lives in Manitoba, Canada. Some say the Hook began to range even further afield after that, slaughtering a pair of young backpackers making their way across continental Europe, toward the end of the decade. Another story tells of a hook-hand killing in India, while another recounts the Hook's coming to Australia, and still another to Iceland. Some of these stories — quite probably most of them — are surely just myths, embellishments of perfectly mundane (or at least unaffiliated paranormal) incidents. The problem is sorting the truth from the fiction, a pursuit almost certainly doomed to failure. The process is further convoluted by the fact that the hook-hand murders have their admirers among the Lost and normal mortals, as well as certain other denizens of the supernatural. Still, the Hook seems invariably to return to the United States, the birthplace of its legend — or the modern incarnation of such, at the very least.

As society struggles to drive back the dark, while simultaneously indulging its carnal desires, the Hook knows only a siren song that demands its presence. It comes to remind mortals and the Lost alike that terror *must* exist, and that it must strike at people when they are at their most vulnerable; when fear is a far-off thing, its voice dulled by lust and the promise of satiation. A baneful metal claw is its answer to a world in need of atrocities and a visceral reminder that only dreadful consequence can force human beings to conform to harsh standards, to be moral and obedient, to color inside the lines and never to leave the shelter of the lights of civilization.

And so, the Hook continues to reap a savage toll of broken lives, forever seeking the next opportunity to strike fear with a brief reign of terror, before disappearing back into Faerie, only to strike elsewhere when the particular savor of its favored repast grows too potent to ignore. Without rhyme or reason, it seeks out new prey, a merciless thing for which the only constant is a gnawing, relentless instinct commanding it to emerge — from between the trees, from behind an abandoned old barn, or within the depths of the cave where the local high school students go to drink and get laid — and to kill, and kill, and keep on killing.

Taken to Arcadia

It's possible that you might want to use the Hook as part of a changeling's prelude, having the character dragged through the Thorns, kicking and shrieking her throat raw, on the end of a cold steel claw. Unless you're looking to put a character through an *extremely* unusual durance, however, the Hook doesn't as a rule actually involve itself in the Arcadian existence of a changeling once she's been brought to the other side. Because it doesn't interact with others, save to inflict pain and fear, this particular Other is generally ill suited to acting as a Keeper. It seems neither to need nor to want the company of others for any extended period of time — just long enough for them to scream, to bleed and, quite probably, to die.

There is no apparent rhyme or reason as to why the Hook spares a rare individual from death, here or there, instead dragging such a soul back to its otherworldly home and abandoning her for some other True Fae to find and claim. Still, certain commonalities *do* emerge. For instance, most of those taken by the Hook tend to become Darklings or Ogres, though it is unclear as to whether the creature favors those with such latent proclivities or whether it simply deposits its captures in places rife with potential Keepers who share in such tendencies. Only one thing is truly for certain: if a changeling originally taken by the Hook wishes to learn the truth behind her capture, she has an *exceptionally* dangerous road ahead of her.

DESCRIPTION

At its core, the Hook is a bogeyman. It doesn't engage in banter (or speech of *any* sort, for that matter) and it doesn't indulge in any other type of behavior that would in any way quantify or humanize it. It wants — *needs* — terror and suffering, and it knows only one way to extract them from human minds, bodies and souls. It would be somewhat inaccurate to say that the Hook is drawn to punish those who stray to the edge of the boundaries of both human settlement and "moral" comportment; rather, these sorts of ac-

tivities, undertaken at the correct times and in the correct places, are like a glittering lure to a particularly gruesome sort of fish. It wants what it sees, but has only a single response to its desire. Lasciviousness and isolation aren't what the Hook craves, any more than a wolf thinks to wish for a wounded deer. Rather, these factors are merely the stimuli that incite a predictable response from something that may not even be capable of articulating its longing to itself.

The frenzied, rambling narratives with which maimed and disfigured survivors recall the Hook never seem to quite agree on the specifics of its appearance. Some say it is a looming figure in a voluminous black trench coat and fedora, always illuminated from behind (if, indeed, any light at all is to be had) and, thus, without any visible features. Others recount a hulking shadow, surmounted by a burlap sack with two eyeholes cut into it, revealing only twin pools of darkness. Still others tell of a dirty set of dark brown, blue or gray coveralls, and some sort of covering for the unseen face (perhaps a gas mask, welding visor, a hockey mask or even a latex Halloween mask). In no case can a face of any sort be discerned; often, no skin at all is visible. All of the stories, however, agree upon the presence of the hook, and the few survivors' tales that allow for such detail usually seem to place it at the end of the left wrist, though a few place it upon the right. The specific nature of the hook itself is a subject of some contention: some of the few survivors offer panicked whispers of a weapon gleaming and barbed, while others stammer on about a simple, battered, rusted implement. In some rare few cases, the hook has two or more prongs, though most stories agree that it has only one.

SECRETS

The Hook has no dark past by which it might be shamed, no unfortunate entanglements that can be used to control it through social censure. It knows nothing of the sane, rational interaction between thinking minds and exists solely to harvest fear, suffering and death from its victims. Still, even such a brutal and uncompromising thing has its secrets, though the Hook itself may not truly know or understand them, and they can be employed by those who wish to protect themselves against it — or to strike out at this singularly dangerous Other.

First, the Hook cannot abide the presence of one who does not fear it. Such an individual would, surely, be exceedingly rare, though it is certainly possible that she might exist, somewhere. Such a person is one in a million (if even that common), as the Hook is, essentially, an incarnation of raw, elemental terror. If one could be found who did not pay the creature its desired tithe of fear, however, it would be compelled to flee from her, with perhaps nothing more than a parting swipe or two at those her courage protects. Note, however, that such a person must not only be immune to the general aura of horror that the Hook projects, but also capable of resisting the fright that it can actively and mystically engender, else she is no proof against it.

Second, the Hook spills truly innocent blood at its own peril. If its claw should pierce the flesh of someone whose purity vastly outweighs his sin (Morality, Clarity, etc. of 9+), then the Hook automatically suffers levels of aggravated damage equal to those inflicted. Further, the blood of the innocent directly harmed by its actions can be smeared onto other weapons (one weapon per level of damage), each of which will then cause aggravated damage to the Other for a single successful strike. Interestingly, the Hook need not necessarily willingly harm the innocent in order to be blighted by this vulnerability; a cunning and amoral changeling might, for example, disguise such a saintly soul as one of the Hook's intended victims or even push him in the way of an incoming blow from the creature's trademark weapon.

If confronted with either of the above, the Hook will attempt to flee through the Hedge, opening a new passage into that place, if need be. Should it suffer damage from harming an innocent, the Other will also put up an unearthly shriek of torment, conveying pain obviously alien to the experience of the human (or changeling) mind.

Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, the Hook fears one thing above all others: its own cruel instrument. The commonest tale of the Hook-Hand Killer involves the weapon being found in the door of a car after the intended victims speed away, and it is indeed possible (if not necessarily easy) to wrest the claw from the Other's wrist. If it is taken, this weapon can be wielded against the Hook, though the True Fae will do anything within its nature — absolutely anything — to get it back. While the Hook could not, for instance, engage in a conversation to try to bargain for the weapon (since talking is alien to the creature and may even be impossible for it), it will resort to skulking or the use of another weapon (preferably something brutal, like a huge, rusty old meat cleaver; a battered, notched-up machete; or an ugly old sickle, snatched from a farmer's work shed), held in its good hand. The Hook's signature weapon inflicts aggravated wounds when used upon the creature. Removing the weapon from the Hook's wrist is best handled at Storyteller discretion, taking into account the weapon, if any, used by the character attempting the feat, as well as any other mitigating circumstances (it's likely much easier, for example, to strike the True Fae's wrist when the claw is lodged in a heavy oak door than when it's in mid swing), though the task will surely be exceedingly difficult under all save the most unusual of circumstances.

RUMORS

"I heard that the Ashen Queen keeps a little shrine to the Hook in the walk-in closet of her bedroom. She's got, like, every newspaper article that might even remotely have anything to do with it. Clockwork Jack was saying to me last week that she's been trying to get her hands on some of the remains of one of the Hook's victims. Can you believe that shit? Just between you and me, it sounds like she's got a thing for that fucker, and that's just plain sick on a lot of different levels."

One of the most persistent rumors regarding the Hook is that its exploits are followed and, in some cases, admired or perhaps even worshipped by certain Lost of the Autumn Court. What changelings might take weeks, months, or even years to accomplish in the arts of spreading fear, after all, the Hook can do in a single blood-drenched night and then vanish, leaving nothing of substance for the mortal authorities to discover about the nameless killer. Some of those rare few who know anything of the secretive Scarecrow Ministry believe that this True Fae might be something of a god to its more twisted members, for it is certainly the sort of bogeyman many of them aspire to become. Some Scarecrow Ministers, it is said, attempt to replicate the Hook's work in the hopes of attracting its attention to a given area, so that they might feast upon the abject terror that the Other tends to cultivate; though surely only the bravest, foolhardiest, or most suicidally insane Ministers would stoop to such mad tactics. Perhaps one or two of them hope, secretly and shamefully, to be brought back to Arcadia on the end of its merciless claw.

"Some say that the Hook has been many different bogeymen over the course of time and that its weapons of choice are littered throughout the world and mortal history: a rusty and bloodstained ax, a chipped and pitted straight razor, a battered old pitchfork. Cats-Eye Dahlia said that some of the Summer Court folks look for those weapons every now and again, because the thing just might be able to be killed with one of them. I'm not sure if that's true, and I'm sure as hell not so eager to stake my life on a machete that looks like it'll fall apart if you sneeze on it, but that's something to think about, I guess. Certainly couldn't hurt to try if the fucker was bearing down on you, after all."

If the Hook has, indeed, worn other faces over time, and if, indeed, it has left behind the armaments it wielded while in these shapes, then perhaps it is possible that its old weapons could be used to some considerable effect against it. Of course, the likelihood that the Hook has simply left lying around implements potentially fatal to it is slim, though this particular True Fae is odd even by the standards of its

Story Hooks

- The killings have started again. The seers and prophets warn of the return of the "hook-handed one, who comes to claim its tithe of blood." For the moment, it's mortals who've attracted the attentions of the Hook, but it's surely only a matter of time before its inhuman gaze falls upon the Lost once more. The last time it came, the Hook killed four changelings over the course of six months, before simply vanishing back into the mists of time and, in all likelihood, through the tangle of the Thorns and back into Faerie. This time, it was a young couple in a pickup truck by the lake, just about a half hour out of town. Next time, it might be a horny teenager or two, or it could be one of the freehold's Lost; maybe even someone important to one or more of the characters. Or, perhaps, one of the characters *themselves...*

- ...but it turns out that those killings were merely the work of rogue Ashen courtiers, emulating the infamous and horrific exploits of the Hook in the hopes of inspiring renewed terror among both the mortals and the changelings of the area. Even as these misguided Lost are brought in by the freehold's authorities, however (an action that likely involves the characters' motley), and their ill-advised murders punished by the unified will of the seasonal monarchs, a few lingering questions remain. Why did the criminals choose this particular method by which to incite the fear of the locals? What deeper agenda, if any, were they serving by their actions? And why is it — if, indeed, all the Ashen changelings behind the killings have been caught, as they have to a one confirmed — that two more mortals have just turned up dead, torn to shreds with what was obviously a razor-sharp hook?

- The characters are out driving at night on an isolated country road (perhaps they're nomads, or perhaps they're merely on a business trip or college vacation) when their vehicle breaks down. Their cellular phones don't seem to get any reception out here, but there was a gas station about four miles back along the road, easily within walking distance. As the characters make their way toward the station, though, they notice another car, just a little way back, by the side of a road that curves off into the woods. Under the moonlight, something black is splashed all over the vehicle. Before the characters have time to decide what to do, they are startled by the frantic screams of a young woman who staggers, badly bleeding and semi delirious, out of the trees. She seizes hold of the nearest character who'll allow her to, ranting about "the hook-handed man" who killed her boyfriend and who, she says, is still out there, in the woods, while the gas station is still about two and a half miles away.

race and may simply not see things in so logical a manner. Perhaps weapons are cast off with the same casual disdain as old identities, or they are left at the site of the last killing to be conducted while in a now-abandoned form. Using these discarded weapons to inflict telling harm upon the Hook is a long shot, to be sure, but trying to do so may be the best chance for a freehold presently suffering from its attentions.

“They say that the killing up on Maye’s Point and the one out by the reservoir were the work of the Hook and that the cops covered it up, because this happened once before, in the 1970s, and it was never solved. They’re afraid it’s a copycat and they don’t want anyone getting any ideas, but they’re wrong. Twice now in two weeks, it’s been the exact same deal: right around graduation, a guy and a girl in a car, parked off in the woods. It’s come back and I don’t think it’s leaving this time.”

Some of the locals (whether changelings or mortals) feel that the recent murders in the area — exactly like those committed over three decades ago — are the work of the Hook-Hand Killer, which has returned for some inscrutable reason known only to itself. Naturally, anyone who puts credence in this sort of tale understands that it is a deeply unnatural creature preying upon the people of the area, though the authorities are loath to do anything about it, fearful of stirring up controversy and, worst of all, attention. After all, they couldn’t catch the killer the last time this happened, and they certainly don’t want to look inept this time. So, instead, the police and other involved professionals are doing what they can to keep the news of the murder down to a dull roar, though the media, always eager for sensationalism, attempt to dig for more information, well aware that panic equals ratings and ratings equal profit. Characters who want to look into the matter must dodge the police on one side and the media on the other, skirting the line between being kept in the dark and uncovering too much for too many.

THE HOOK

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 6, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 4, Dexterity 6, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 5, Manipulation 2, Composure 6

Mental Skills: Crafts (Weapon Maintenance) 5

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl 4, Stealth (Shadows) 6, Survival (Tracking) 6, Weaponry (Hook) 6

Social Skills: Empathy (Fear) 4, Intimidation 6

Merits: Disarm, Fast Reflexes 2, Fighting Finesse (Hook), Fleet of Foot 3, Iron Stamina 3

Willpower: 10

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 14

Defense: 6

Speed: 18

Health: 15–17 (see below)

Wyrd: 7

Contracts: Darkness ••••; Dream •; Smoke ••; Stone ••

Glamour/per Turn: 20/7

Armor: 4/4 (bulletproof; guns are effectively useless against the Hook)

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Hook	2(L)	—	15	see below
Fist	0(B)	—	8	—

Fae Aspects

• **Harvester’s Hook:** The Hook’s iconic weapon doubles as its primary feeding strategy. Whenever inflicting points of lethal or aggravated damage upon a sentient being with its claw, the Hook may divide the points of damage dealt between its Glamour, Willpower and/or Health (healing either bashing or lethal damage, though not aggravated damage), recuperating points in the appropriate category or categories, up to its normal maximum. (In other words, if a given attack inflicts four points of damage on a victim, the Hook may choose to recover four points of Glamour, two points of Glamour and two points of Willpower, and so on.)

• **Immortal Flesh:** As one of the True Fae manifested in the mortal world, the Hook can shrug off some of the lesser slings and arrows of the mundane. Bashing damage does not affect the Hook at all, unless delivered by a cold iron bludgeon. Cold-forged iron causes aggravated damage, should someone be skilled enough to strike the Hook with such.

• **Mutable Form:** With an instant action and the expenditure of three points of Glamour, the Hook can change its Size to be anywhere between 5 and 7, inclusive. Rarely will it alter its Size in the course of a single encounter, however, even when doing so would be to its benefit. A secondary side effect of this Aspect is the ability to alter its features at a whim, so as to present the particular face of fear that strikes its fancy on any given night. Invariably, the Hook’s “face” is a mask of some sort, or shadows so deep (likely under a hood) that they cannot be penetrated. No force, Contract or otherwise, can remove the Hook’s mask or dispel the darkness veiling its features.

• **Ruled by Passion:** The Hook regains one Willpower point from indulging its Virtue, but refreshes its whole pool when satiating its Vice.

• **Unearthly Fortitude:** The Hook has five additional points of Health, irrespective of its present Size; this True Fae is virtually impossible to bring down.

THE WANDERER: JACK O' THE LANTERN

Can I come in for the night? I'll not make trouble.

Aliases: Will-o'-the-Wisp, the Traveler, the Wandering Man, the Protector of the Hedge, Johnny Torch, Cartaphilus, Heartless Jack.

BACKGROUND

Most changelings in the United States or the United Kingdom know the story of Jack o' the Lantern. It's the kind of story that appeals to them, after all. Jack, they say, was a greedy and amoral man, but very clever. With a crowd of swindled townsfolk on his heels, he met the Devil on the road. The Devil told him it was time for him to die, that the burghers would string him up and that he would be roasting on the eternal embers of Hell before the night was out.

"Fair enough," said Jack, "for this is the wage of sin. But I do wonder..."

"What do you wonder?" the Devil asked, always curious about human cupidity.

"I wonder if you wouldn't rather see the people chasing me fall to discord? After all, they clearly aren't very wise or innocent — see how quickly they bought into my scam, and how quickly I fleeced money and goods from them!"

The Devil considered this, and then asked, "But how, Jack, am I to do this? They are already wary because of you."

Jack smiled. "Change yourself into a coin, then, and I shall pay them. And then they shall fight over who may keep the single coin, and I shall make my escape. You can always catch me another day."

The Devil became a golden coin of such luster that anyone who saw it would know it was worth a king's ransom. But Jack did not look long upon the coin; he simply stuffed it into his purse, next to a silver cross he had stolen in the village. And the Devil, braced up against the cross, was powerless to change back. Jack then fled, using paths and escape routes known only to himself, and by morning was well away from his pursuers.

THE FATEFUL BARGAIN

Jack opened his purse, and he heard the voice of the Devil calling out for freedom. But Jack knew the Devil would surely kill him upon his release, and said, "Devil, I shall free you, but only if you swear never to take my soul."

"Done!" the Devil cried. Jack removed the cross from the purse, and there stood the Devil, smiling. "Fare you well, Jack," he said, and vanished back to Hell. Jack thought this curious, but went on about his life of sin and caprice.

It came to pass that Jack died, and when he approached the gates of Heaven, he was turned away and sent to Hell. The Devil himself waited for him outside the black and fiery pit.

"Hello, sir," said Jack. "Though I fear the torment of Hell, I admit I am weary from life. If I cannot have Paradise, I shall bear my time here as I can."

The Devil smiled. "But I cannot go back on my word, Jack," said the Devil. "You cannot enter here, for I have sworn never to take your soul." He pointed to the path back to the world of men. "Go. Wander the world until Judgment Day. Swindle God into letting you into Heaven. But never approach my home again."

"But..." Jack stammered, "but shall I have nothing to guard me against the cold and the dark?"

The Devil threw him one small ember and then vanished. And Jack climbed back up into the world and carved out a small turnip, and placed the ember inside to help light his way.

JACK AMONG THE LOST

The story of the man cursed to wander the world forever predates the story of Jack o' the Lantern, of course. Early Christian mythology mentions a Jew, or in some stories a Roman, who mocked Jesus Christ and was condemned to wander until the Second Coming. The changeling who took the name "Jack o' the Lantern" knows all of these stories and claims all of them as his own. He is, however, an inveterate liar and a cheat. Although his story is remarkable, even among the Lost, he is not the Wandering Jew, nor does he scour the world looking for one honest man. He is a changeling who made an extraordinary pledge.

Exactly what era Jack really dates from is unknown, but he speaks modern English (among other languages) and is comfortable with technology. He was a career con artist and thief before his abduction by a band of privateers, and he was sold to the Goblin Market and kept in a cage in the Hedge for years before he ever saw Faerie. By the time he reached the clutches of the Gentry, Jack was well versed in the languages of pledges and had a better understanding of the Others than most mortals could ever hope to achieve. He bore his durance for a while (his story about this durance — when he bothers to acknowledge his changeling nature at all — varies, but usually involves courier work), but then asked for work that would take him out into the Hedge. He came back to his Keeper with a story about a treasure so beautiful that no one could resist it. It was, he

said, the heart's price, the one trinket anyone would kill for. And he'd almost found it, but to find one last clue, he'd need to venture into the mortal world again.

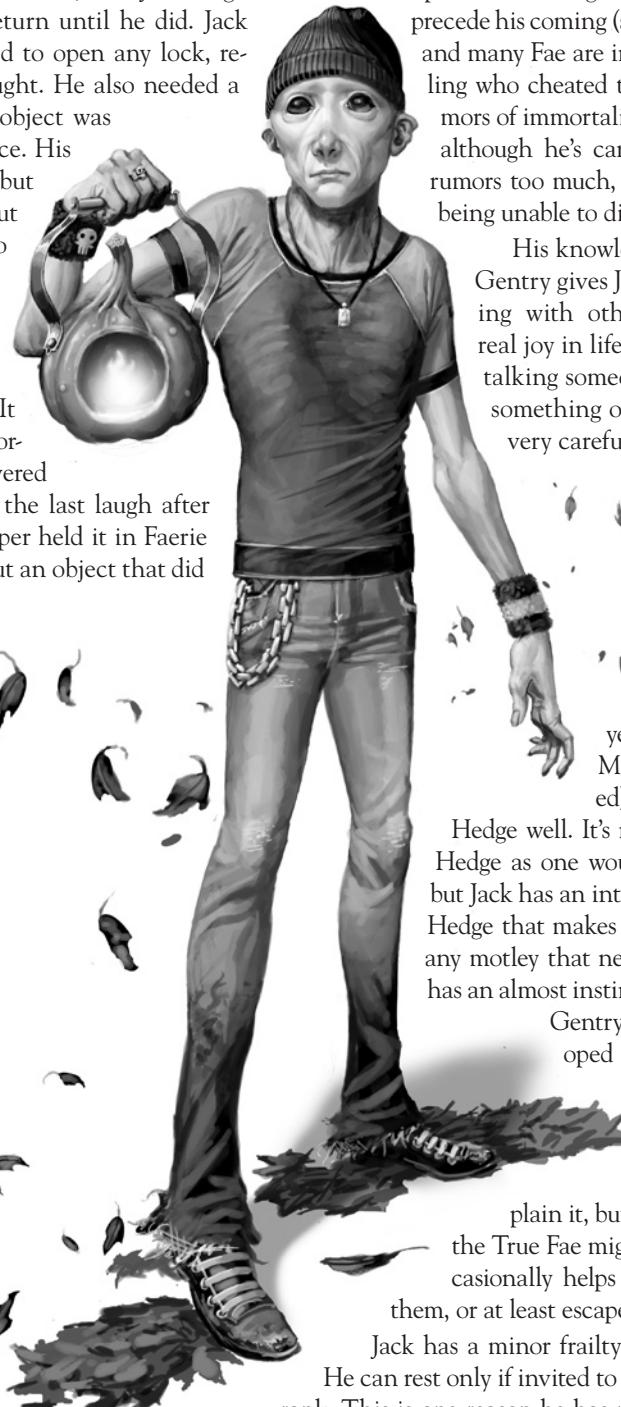
His Keeper, a greedy, grasping thing, always looking for a way to find power over others of his ilk, told Jack to go and find this object, and not to return until he did. Jack swore that he would, but he needed to open any lock, remove any barrier and never be caught. He also needed a way to light his travels, since the object was sure to be hidden in some dark place. His Keeper granted him these powers, but warned him not to return without the object, swearing that the way to Faerie would be barred to him unless he carried this priceless, nameless treasure in his hands.

Jack left Arcadia and then the Hedge, free of his durance. It was only when he reached the mortal world once again that he discovered that his Keeper had, perhaps, had the last laugh after all. His heart was missing. His Keeper held it in Faerie — and Jack could not return without an object that did not exist.

DESCRIPTION

Jack's age is difficult to guess. People peg him anywhere from early 20s to late 40s, depending on the light, the angle and the time of day. Jack doesn't dress up if he can help it, preferring jeans and a comfortable shirt. He isn't a slob, but isn't a swell, either. His shoes and build identify him as a frequent walker, and he carries a shoulder pack wherever he goes. In years past, he carried a walking stick as well, but in modern times that gets him more attention than he'd like.

Under the Mask, Jack is of medium height and is rail thin. His chest looks concave and sunken, and his breath is so shallow he can't fog a mirror. His face is gnarled and weather-beaten and his fingers are singed from years of tending his lantern. His ears are rounded and shriveled, and his nose is slightly upturned.



Jack always carries his lantern. During the day, he keeps it in his shoulder pack. At night, he holds it in his hand or hooks it to his belt. See below for details on this token.

Jack's mood varies from being conciliatory and helpful to spiteful and arrogant. The legends that usually precede his coming (see below) work in his favor, and many Fae are intimidated by "the changeling who cheated the Gentry." Of course, rumors of immortality work to aid him, as well, although he's careful not to play up these rumors too much, as some Lost see claims of being unable to die as a challenge.

His knowledge of the Hedge and the Gentry gives Jack an edge when bargaining with other changelings. His only real joy in life is the con, the moment of talking someone else into handing over something of value for nothing. Jack is very careful, though, to avoid gaining

a reputation as a swindler. He doesn't mind being viewed as enigmatic or even unpredictable, though.

SECRETS

Jack spent several years traveling with a Goblin Market (as a prisoner, granted). As such, he knows the

Hedge well. It's not possible to "know" the Hedge as one would know a city, of course, but Jack has an intuitive understanding of the Hedge that makes him an invaluable asset to any motley that needs a guide. Likewise, Jack has an almost instinctive understanding of the

Gentry — it's not as well developed as he pretends (how could it be?), but he knows that the Others do have some patterns to the way they behave. Jack can't explain it, but he's good at guessing what the True Fae might do or want, and this occasionally helps him guess at how to beat them, or at least escape them.

Jack has a minor frailty, one that he keeps secret. He can rest only if invited to do so by someone of higher rank. This is one reason he has never sworn allegiance to a Court; since anyone with even a slight Mantle "outranks" him, he can rest at their invitation. But without permission, he can't even take a nap. No matter how weary he is, he must stay awake and active (though not moving, necessarily).

Depending on how old you decide Jack is, he probably knows other secrets as well. He might know where treasures are buried, about ancient pacts between changeling Courts, or how to activate gateways long thought sealed. Jack o' the Lantern keeps secrets well, but he's also adept at *pretending* he knows secrets.

RUMORS

"He's immortal. He can't die, even if he wants to — and I heard he's tried. I heard he was on one of those planes. Come on, don't make me say it. Those planes. And he just got up and walked away afterwards. He's not great in a fight, but he's killed whole motleys just by stabbing them, again and again, because he can't die."

The truth of the matter is that Jack doesn't know if he's immortal or not. He's never tried to kill himself, and he's certainly never taken a stupid risk in order to die. He doesn't want to die; he just wants his heart back. It's possible that he's immortal because his heart is missing, but he has no interest in testing this theory.

"He's a privateer, but don't hold that against him. He's bound to lead any of us he finds back to Faerie — if he finds us in the Hedge. So if you see his light in the Hedge, don't follow it. If you see it in the mortal world, though, you can always follow it and be safe, because he'll lead you away from danger."

Jack has, on occasion, fallen in with privateers, because he has little to fear from them (as he cannot return to Faerie). Jack does sometimes lead other changelings away from dangers, both in the Hedge and in the mortal world, but he's not consistent about it, and since he can't extinguish his light, he's often interrupted by changelings thinking he'll guide them to safety. Jack happily capitalizes on this, of course. He's not bound to lead anyone back to Faerie, however; nor could he, even if he wanted to.

"He's the best hope we've got. Think about it — he tricked the Gentry! He beat them at their own game! He hasn't chosen a Court, because he knows the whole system is bullshit. That's why we're all Solstice, too, because the seasonal Courts are just something that loyalists invented to keep us busy. Works, too, don't it?"

While Jack would never admit it, tricking the Gentry isn't as hard as most changelings think. Other Fae have escaped their Keeper's clutches through a clever play on words or by taking advantage of a Gentry's whimsy or caprice. Jack just happens to have a well-known story about it. Jack has no interest in being a leader, though he's happy to be a counterculture figure. Secretly, Jack wishes to join the Autumn Court. It's one of the many things he wants to do when his life is once again his own.

"He's not really a changeling at all. He's fooling everybody, including himself. He's just a man who made a deal with the Devil. Oh, there's a Devil. Just because fairies are real doesn't mean God's not, boy. There's a God, there's a Devil, and there's ol' Jack, too smart for his own good, caught right in the middle."

Story Hooks

- Jack is searching for something that will allow him back into Faerie long enough to retrieve his heart. He promised to find an object so desirable that no one could refuse it, and thought he was making this trinket up. But maybe something like this does exist? If Jack has a reason to suspect the characters have this item, or have seen it, he will try and get the information out of them. He won't ask outright, though. Jack o' the Lantern is patient and will wait *years*, if need be, to get what he needs. He'll be the best friend the characters could hope for, right up until he doesn't need them anymore.

Another possibility, of course, is that Jack figures he doesn't need to go back into Faerie himself. If he could convince another changeling (or a motley) to go in and get his heart back, that would be even better, as even if he does return to Arcadia, he'll need to negotiate his way out again. Of course, he'd have to be very sure about this motley's capabilities — it's his *heart* they're retrieving, after all. What kinds of tests would Jack put this motley through before putting the actual job on the table? And how might he motivate them?

- The characters follow Jack's light and find themselves in a mess of trouble. Jack was spying on a group of hobgoblins, and now the characters have blundered right into the middle. This might be an opportunity for the changelings to help Jack, or vice versa, or it might be a chance for Jack to strengthen his legend and put the characters in his debt.

- Jack was the victim of a greater swindle than he could have realized. Jack's fetch is still alive...and in its breast beats Jack's heart. If Jack learns this, the last shred of decency he possesses vanishes and he vows to track this fetch down, rip out his heart and place it within his own chest at last. He will say and do anything to achieve this goal, but is it even possible? Might the heart not immediately die when he pulls it out of the fetch's chest? And how has the fetch avoided notice all these years, anyway?

Oh, but God's got a plan for Jack, if only he can figure it out. If Jack can get back into God's good graces, then we all can!"

Christian changelings aren't necessarily common, but they're by no means unknown. The rumor that a being like Jack o' the Lantern is actually a demon, an angel or simply a man who made a Devil's bargain persists among such changelings. Jack himself doesn't mind perpetuating it. He doesn't tend to use this rumor to his advantage, however, almost as though he is afraid that God might still be watching. It's possible Jack retains some faith yet.

JACK O' THE LANTERN

Seeming: Wizened

Kith: Chatelaine

Court: Solstice

Entitlements: None

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 5, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 5, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics (History) 4, Computer 1, Crafts 3, Investigation 2, Medicine 1, Occult (Hedge, Gentry) 3, Politics (Changeling) 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 1, Drive 1, Firearms 2, Larceny (Locks) 4, Stealth 3, Survival (Hedge) 5, Weaponry (Staff) 3

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2, Empathy 3, Expression (Storytelling) 3, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 4, Socialize (Changelings) 4, Streetwise 3, Subterfuge 5

Merits: Court Goodwill (All) 2, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Fleet of Foot 3, Harvest (Hedge Fruit) 4, Language (any the Storyteller desires), Resources 1, Tokens (see below)

Willpower: 7

Clarity: 4

Virtue: Fortitude

Vice: Pride

Initiative: 7

Defense: 4

Speed: 14 (with Fleet of Foot)

Health: 8

Wyrd: 6

Contracts: Artifice •••; Dream ••••; Goblin — The Shooter's Bargain; Hearth •••; Smoke ••; Vainglory ••

Pledges: Barred from Hell, but Nowhere Else — Jack cannot enter Faerie without an object fitting the description he provided to his Keeper: something so beautiful that everyone wants it. His Keeper kept his heart as a kind of collateral, and so Jack can only regain Willpower from his Virtue and Vice once per *week*; he just can't muster the necessary passion

to do it more often. He is very difficult to catch or confine, however. Any roll to escape entrapment or bypass a barrier receives the rote action quality (see p. 134 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*).

Glamour/Per Turn: 15/6

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Staff	3(B)	N/A	9	N/A
Pistol	2(L)	20/40/80	8	N/A

TOKEN: JACK'S LANTERN (•)

Jack's lantern is carved from a dried gourd of some kind. It resembles a small pumpkin, but upon further inspection, its texture and coloration resemble no plant found on Earth. Jack has attached a handle of metal and wood to it, and inside the gourd is a wick that never burns down. The "fire" it provides the light does not ignite other materials (Jack is unable to so much as light a match off the flame), and the lantern produces no noticeable scent of burning.

During the day, the flame is so small it goes unnoticed, and Jack stores it in his backpack while the sun shines. But after dark, the light provides the holder of the lantern enough light to see clearly, no matter how pitch black the night or how thick the rain, fog or snow. In addition, the light reveals hidden things. Secret hatches, doors and compartments shimmer while under the lantern's glow, but only the person holding the lantern can see this.

Action: N/A (always active)

Mien: The lantern's light is strange and compelling, shimmering from yellow to red to blue to green. The gourd is always warm and moist to the touch, as though it was just harvested and hollowed moments ago.

Drawback: Jack's lantern only works at night, or when well away from the sun (it would work in a catacomb, but not inside a house during the day). In addition, anyone who sees the light feels compelled to follow it. Jack occasionally uses this to his advantage, but in general, it's extremely inconvenient. An onlooker can resist the temptation to follow the light with a successful Resolve + Composure roll. Changelings and other supernatural beings can add their Supernatural Tolerance trait (Wyrd, Gnosis, Blood Potency, etc.) to this roll. If the roll succeeds, the character still feels a desire to follow the light, but can choose to ignore it. If the roll fails, the character begins walking toward the light, but isn't under a strong compulsion to continue (a reasoned argument can snap her out of it).

Catch: This token has no catch — anyone can benefit from using the lantern simply by holding it.

KINGSLAYER OF THE VELD: KUMALO

I smell a lion. I sharpen my spear.

Aliases: The Lionslayer, The Lion Tamer

BACKGROUND

Kumalo has killed kings. Three of them, to be precise, evidenced by a trio of sharp notches taken out of the staff he carries. He believes it is his task — really, his *obligation* — to rail against the corrupt Courts and put the power back into the hands of those who do not have it. Kumalo was once a gentle man, however; an older Zulu farmer not far from the lands of the Phinda Resource Game Reserve in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. How did he become the hand of vengeance, an angry spirit prepared to murder corrupt kings?

THE LION'S MARRIAGE

Kumalo was happy when his daughter, Nzomi, married. The man she married, Kembo, was reputedly rich and powerful, living in the city of Maritzburg. As a gift to Kumalo, Kembo gave the old man many cattle and goats to bolster his farm work — the goats gave the richest milk, the cattle the tenderest meat. The husband took the daughter away to the city and Kumalo was sad to see her go, but pleased she had found such a fine husband.

But one night, she returned to visit her father, and she whispered to Kumalo (as if someone were listening): "My husband smells strange. I do not trust him." When pressed, she could not precisely describe it but she said it was a smell of both "wildness" and of "blood." The wildness hung about his shoulders, while the odor of blood drifted from her husband's mouth.

Kumalo, of course, did not believe his daughter — it was too strange to imagine that it meant anything at all. But she begged her father to look into the man she had married. With some reluctance, Kumalo agreed to travel to the city to look in on her new husband.

BLOOD AND PAW PRINTS

Kumalo investigated, as he said he would. He waited for the man to leave their home in the city, and Kumalo sneaked inside. What he found concerned him: the man's clothing and pillows smelled of a wild musk and faintly of blood. In addition, the house contained a large freezer full of slabs of raw meat, as well as bones stripped of muscle, and all the walls of the house were home to various big-game safari animals. He found tufts of yellow hair underneath the pillow, and his son-in-law most certainly did not have golden hair upon his head.

Still, Kumalo was uncertain. This made no sense. He had heard of shapeshifters before, but folklore was just that;

it couldn't be real, could it? He staged a small test to confirm it: by the front door, Kumalo placed a pile of wet mud. Then he waited.

When Kembo came home, the son-in-law stepped across the threshold and into the mud. The plan had worked. Kumalo saw that when Kembo crossed the clean floor, he left behind tracks — not footprints, as hoped, but broad paw prints, like those that would belong to a lion or other big cat.

Kumalo stepped out of the shadows and held his staff against Kembo's chest, demanding an explanation. Kembo offered it. He explained what he was — a man of the spirits, an *amaDelozi*, or one who is possessed of the ancestors. But Kumalo did not believe this and said the man was plainly a sorcerer (and in Zulu folklore, all misfortune is unnatural and believed to be caused by sorcerers or evil spirits). Kembo offered the old man twice the cattle and goats as before, and said that he was one of the kings of the spirit-men and could even promise Kumalo many things. What did he want?

Still, Kumalo was having none of it. He told Kembo that he was to forget Nzomi, and that she would stay away from Kembo. And if Kembo decided to come fetch her? Kumalo made it clear: Kembo would die.

KEMBO'S DARK PLEDGE

The truth was Kembo was king of a local variant of the Summer Court known as the Court of the Dry Veld. He was a proud king and would not let some foolish human from the rural plains push him around and steal the wife who was rightly his. He thought to simply attack the man — it would be easy to kill him. Ah, but that could earn him disfavor from those beneath him, for one was supposed to respect one's elders, even as a changeling.

So, Kembo decided on a quiet but even more dastardly approach. He made a deal with an unknown Keeper, and the deal was this: he would offer Kumalo and three village children to the Keeper as sacrifices to Faerie. In the deal, the Keeper would then leave the Court of the Dry Veld to do its business without risk. Kembo and the Keeper struck the pact.

The next night, Kumalo heard his goats crying and bleating. He went to investigate and found them being dragged into a hole into the ground — he tried to save one, and it only served to pull him into the hole. Into the Hedge. Soon, into Faerie.

KUMALO'S RETURN

Certainly, Kembo never thought that Kumalo would return, having escaped his durance. To Kumalo, the durance

lasted 10, maybe a dozen years. But it was only a few months later that he emerged from the same hole from which he had disappeared. Already his daughter had been taken, his farm razed to the ground, his cattle taken back or butchered. All done by the fetch who was left in his place, who worked to give Kembo the Veld King whatever he desired.

Kumalo did not suffer his fetch's presence for long. He found him sleeping, and he beat him to death with his heavy walking stick. The fetch resolved into a pile of goat dung and tarnished scarabs.

He knew he would have to kill the King, Kembo, too. But that could not come now. It could not even come soon.

But it would come one day, years later. He integrated himself into the lower echelons of Kembo's Court without the King ever even knowing he had returned. And when the time came, he murdered Kembo at a distance with a powerful throw from a long spear. The spear pierced the Beast King's chest, killing him instantly.

Kumalo took his daughter back. His crusade, alas, was far from over. Over the previous years, he had come to see how the rulers of the many Courts were just as corrupt as the Keepers they had escaped. They held all the power, while those beneath them had none of it. The solution was not pleasant, but Kumalo had changed. Once a peaceable farmer, he was now a vengeful warrior. And the king and queens of the many Courts had to pay with their lives.

DESCRIPTION

Kumalo's gentle demeanor is long gone, replaced by a hard edge, a haggard thousand-yard stare and a wild grin that contains approximately zero mirth. If he doesn't know a character, he'll approach her with suspicion — he asks a great deal of questions, often trying to trip a person up in their own language and logic (then using it as proof of either her treachery or stupidity). He also scrutinizes her physically, often circling her, tapping at her or poking her as one might test a slab of beef.

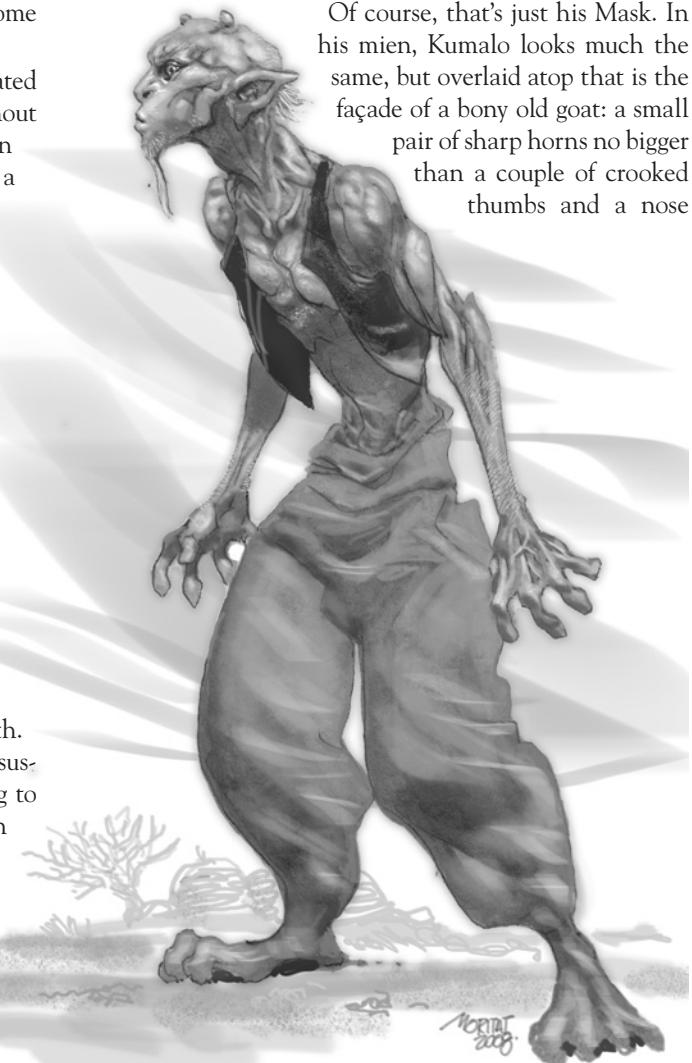
If he knows the character does not belong to any Court, he's likelier to be a bit softer — it's not exactly being "friendly," but it's as close as Kumalo gets, these days. He might even wax wistful with such a character, talking about days past (when he was just a farmer, a *human* farmer) with fond remembrance and more than a little regret.

Alternatively, if he knows a character belongs to a Court, he's certain to be standoffish, angry and more than a little stubborn. Even if logic dictates he do something, if the suggestion comes from the lips of a notable courtier, he'll stand in the way of that course of action until the stars die and planets grow cold. He views those who stand within

the Courts as acting contrary to the health of any freehold, and he's pretty vocal about it being the same as standing with the True Fae.

Physically speaking, Kumalo stands tall — easily six foot six — with a faint hunch to his bony back. A few scraggly gray and white hairs thrust from his chin, just beneath his probably scowling mouth. The clothing he wears is usually minimal: a plain t-shirt or sleeveless vest, a pair of baggy pants. In Zulu fashion, he never wears shoes — his profoundly callused feet will carry him wherever he needs to go.

Of course, that's just his Mask. In his mien, Kumalo looks much the same, but overlaid atop that is the façade of a bony old goat: a small pair of sharp horns no bigger than a couple of crooked thumbs and a nose



that's folded into some strange hybrid of a human maw and a goat's muzzle, and those chin whiskers are longer and all the more "billy-goat-gruff."

SECRETS

While certainly not a secret that can be kept for long, Kumalo has discovered that like many other changelings, he ages...differently from humans. Unlike most other changelings, though, he's found that he's aging *backwards*. Some of

the wrinkles at the edges of his eyes have faded. His muscles have grown more taut, his memory a bit more clear. At first he thought he was just imagining it, but he now believes it to be utterly true. He keeps this secret because he likes that others underestimate him as nothing more than a foolish old man.

Kumalo likes to let everyone know how he saved his daughter from the awful King, and how she loves him dearly and he'll never again let her go. That's all mostly true. But Nzomi no longer cares for her father as she once did. He has changed. And, despite her fear of her husband and the truth that emerged about how Kembo betrayed her father, she still loved him in a strange way. She has not been able to justify the murder of her husband by her father, and it disturbs her. Kumalo hides this; it stings him terribly.

Kumalo doesn't remember his durance. But that's not the story he tells everybody else. No, Kumalo quite plainly states that he killed his Keeper during his escape. This gives his story, his ability and his mission a lot of credence — if he can kill a Keeper as a fledgling changeling, and he can kill a king not long after, then perhaps his mission is truly divine. Perhaps he's supported by the ancestors, and surely his crusade is pure. If someone were to discover the lie, it might weaken Kumalo's seemingly righteous stance.

RUMORS

"The truth is, as I am to understand it, that Kumalo did not kill his Keeper, as the man suggests. Quite the opposite, I am afraid. The story is this: in bargaining for his escape, Kumalo promised not only to kill King Kembo, but also to kill any other king or queen who waited in his path. In this way, he weakens the freehold so that the True Fae may come to us and seize us once more, dragging us back to our cages and our toil back in Faerie."

It's true that Kumalo did not kill his Keeper, but the rest is pure rumor. That doesn't mean, though, that the rumor won't gain legs and worm its way into the ears of Kumalo's allies or supporters. Besides, even if it's not true in the strictest sense, consider it: if he keeps killing the kings of many Courts, doesn't that still give the Gentry some edge? Investigating this isn't easy, and in trying to prove that Kumalo isn't working for the True Fae, characters may discover that he is lying about dispatching his Keeper. If he's lying about that, isn't his message of trust and inviolable truth damaged?

"You may not believe this, but you must. I have seen Kembo the King. He has returned. I see him stalking the shadows outside the city. I have found his lion paw prints in the mud. He hopes to destroy Kumalo and, if need be, the whole freehold for letting him die. His corpse is mad with revenge. The ancestor-spirits sent him as a curse to all of us. Woe to us all, woe, woe."

Another untrue rumor, but it has some seeds of truth. Someone is out there — someone with the face and claws

Story Hooks

- The Courts have banded together in this one small way: they will hunt Kumalo and kill him. He's too dangerous. Yes, so far he's managed to destroy only *corrupt* kings, but that may change — he certainly seems willing to end *any* reign with a swift throw from a sharp spear. So, the Courts will hunt him. Will the characters join? Or will they seek him out and warn him? Can they perhaps broker some kind of tenuous trust between all sides?

- Kumalo is loudly making clear his intentions to assassinate whom he believes is a corrupt queen sitting on her jungle throne. But as far as the characters know, she isn't the corrupt empress he claims she is. Is he deluded? Can they prove to him that she doesn't deserve to die, or even to be exiled from her own rule? They may need to stand against Kumalo, and if they cannot, he may be able to destroy her while their attentions are focused elsewhere. He is a smart hunter. He knows he cannot take on a ruler by himself or head on. He is stealthy. He uses tricks to get close. Characters will need to be sharp and resilient.

- Up until now, Kumalo's been a lone wolf (or, perhaps, lone goat) in all of this. He has no motley. He has no Court. Yes, he has allies who support him, but the word on the street is that one group might be courting him: the Margrave of the Brim. This noble order, composed of a number of Court outsiders, will theoretically support the overthrow of the current system and all the kings in an effort to give power to the commoners. (Alternatively, it's possible that with all the rulers gone, the Margraves will simply move in and claim power for themselves, though this certainly goes against their public and stated purpose.) Can the characters stand in the way of this alliance forming? Or do they have reasons to support it?

and paws of a lion. Someone with the charnel smell of rotten meat and raw death about him. But who? And why? It's not Kembo. Could it be one of his allies? Or his servitors? Is

it even a changeling, or might it be his Keeper, come back into this world? Is it possible that his fetch survives and is somehow mimicking his changeling counterpart's leonine features to some goal?

KUMALO

Seeming: Beast

Kith: Broadback

Court: None

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 3, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Crafts 2, Investigation 3, Medicine 1, Occult 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl (Grapple) 4, Stealth 2, Survival (Forage) 4, Weaponry (Blunt) 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken 3, Empathy 1, Intimidation (Crazy Eyes) 3

Merits: Age Reversal (see below), Fast Reflexes 2, Iron Stamina, Iron Stomach, Meditative Mind, Strong Back

Willpower: 7

Clarity: 5

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 8

Defense: 3

Speed: 11

Health: 9

Wyrd: 5

Contracts: Fang and Talon (Hyenas) ••; Fang and Talon (Big Cats) •••; Hearth ••; Smoke •••

Glamour/per Turn: 14/5

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Heavy Staff	3(B)	na	9	Adds +1 Defense
Light Zulu Spear	2(L)	na	7	Adds +1 Defense; can be thrown with Dex + Athletics
Grapple	na	na	8	No damage

NEW MERIT: ACE REVERSAL (•)

Prerequisites: Wyrd 4

Effect: The changeling ages backward instead of forward: a 50-year-old man gets younger by the day — one year of life is equal to one year reversed (instead of turning 51, he turns 49 on his birthday). This has little mechanical effect, though certainly it's possible that a player will seek to affect stats accordingly as a character grows younger — Willpower might drop, for instance, but Physical stats might increase a bit.

(Why is this such a low-dot Merit? Ultimately, because in the day-to-day game, it doesn't have a lot of effect. Maybe a year passes and the character appears a bit younger, but it's only the type of thing that really shows itself over a long chronicle — and even then, it doesn't have any huge systemic effect on the character, instead incurring a more *narrative* effect. Plus, the drawback is worth figuring into the cost.)

Drawback: Not only does the character still one day die (he'll eventually be a baby and will continue to age backward until his frail infant body cannot support his life outside a womb), but in addition, the character does not find his life expectancy grown any more (according to Wyrd) once he purchases this Merit.

THE KEEPER'S BAIT: LIZ MALLOY

Help! I... I don't know any way... that you can help me by yourself! Go get your friends, quick! I feel him coming! I feel him coming!

Aliases: Erin Peters is Liz's True Name. She utilizes numerous false names in her duties, however.

BACKGROUND

Liz Malloy was never the nicest girl in school. The family's middle-class lifestyle provided by her astronomer father did little to help her fit in at the exclusive private school she attended on scholarship, and her teenage years did less to allay the notions she developed early on that an individual only gets what she wants by stepping on others. Populated by the privileged and beautiful, Liz's school, rife with social one-upmanship, backbiting and gossip mongering, instilled in its students a strong sense of the dog-eat-dog world that awaited them beyond graduation.

Liz herself was a rather constant target of abuse, often mocked for slights against propriety as varied as wearing the same school uniform she had worn the year before or having the temerity to accept a date from one of the *real* students to her junior prom. She made it to her prom, but never quite reached graduation. As she locked herself in her bedroom toward the end of her junior year, researching the occult in a search for curses she could bitterly enjoin against her erstwhile classmates, she attracted the notice of a creature that found her bitterness beautiful, her anger appealing and even her envy enticing.

The fetch he left in her place, a pale simulacrum of Malloy cobbled together out of rotting roots and poisonous wild mushrooms, killed itself within a week.

Within Faerie, Liz Malloy found herself transformed into a creature of magnificence and placed on display. Her acerbic resentment toward the mortal world, her Keeper claimed, served as bright and beautiful illumination within his dark halls. She spent most of her nights locked away, safe from danger, her Keeper told her, in a dark room illuminated only by her own resentment. Her Keeper brought her out on special occasions, grand balls and maddening masques of the Gentry, ancient creatures that vied with one another over which performed the deepest depravities and indulged in the most vicious vices. Never quite content with the brightness of her acrimony, however, Liz's Keeper incessantly stoked the fire of her hate by visiting various reprehensible and occasionally violent abuses upon her.

Liz escaped her captor at one of his mad revels. She bet one of the Gentry guests that she could outshine him. She made the first attempt, filling the hall with brightness. The Other laughed off her pathetic display and erupted into a pillar of bright white flame, casting a blinding light over the whole hall. The Other demanded that Liz admit defeat and, when he received no answers, intensified his brightness. This cycle played itself out several more times before Liz's Keeper suddenly demanded that his guest cease his illumination. Sure enough, when the Gentry could see again, they found that Liz had flown from the shackles of slavery.

Liz's bitter memories of the injustices she had suffered in her private school drew her back to those halls, and she pulled

herself, bloody and on the brink of madness, from the Thorns into the very bathroom stall to which she used to retreat to escape the caustic taunting of her classmates. The Lost found her shortly thereafter, helping her come to grips with and understand what had happened to her on the far side of the Thorns. Being intimately familiar with the emotion of desire, especially in others, she showed an immediate affinity for the Spring Court. She quickly grew in stature in that Court, her understanding of vicious, backstabbing politics serving her well. Eventually she purchased her way into the Satrapy of Pearls.

FALL FROM GRACE

The Satraps were the first to uncover the full extent of Liz's commitment to free commerce. They learned that almost since her return, she had fallen in with the privateers. The unfortunate accidents that tended to befall her rivals in her ascent toward power were suddenly placed in disquieting context, as the Lost realized there was nothing Liz was not willing to do to get what she wanted. Investigations into disappearances or accidents in the Hedge began to point to Liz's dealings with Hedge-dwellers, hobgoblin markeeters, privateers and banished Gentry alike. She was manipulative and venomous, willing to lead the foolish into the Hedge to certain doom simply to clear her way on the ladder to influence.

The Satrapy found her behavior incredibly distasteful, and while they weren't willing to eject her from their number (she had paid the price of admission, after all), they were not above providing evidence to the local Court leadership. Liz was forced from the freehold. Rather than travel to another freehold and attempt to begin again, only to inevitably be found out, Liz took up residence in a Hollow nestled deep within the Hedge. From there she accrued a band of fellow privateers, most of them Courtless, and took to setting traps for the Lost.

Liz's favored tactic is to manufacture some manner of trap and place herself in it as bait. When a changeling or motley happens upon her, she cries out for help, convincing them she is on the run from the Gentry, hobgoblin slavers, privateers, one of the Courts — whoever Liz suspects most likely to spur the marks to action. If the changeling is alone, she usually asks him to return with his motley for assistance. Meanwhile her coconspirators lie in wait; at the right moment, they strike, capturing the Lost for sale to whoever is willing to pay the highest price for the individual. Past customers have included all of the same groups Liz uses as her phantom captors, including the Gentry.

Of course, word has spread of Liz's behavior. The story of Liz Malloy is something of a fairy tale, a dark warning presented to newly returned Lost about the dangers of trusting too easily. Yet the ploy continues to work. On one hand, Liz's persuasiveness cannot be overstated. On the other, it is against human nature, and even the nature of the Lost, to ignore an apparently defenseless creature crying for help.

DESCRIPTION

Liz is something of a social chameleon, capable of quickly gauging what tactics will most appeal to an individual or motley. She can play innocent and helpless with equal ease as playing hard and determined but in a bind. Those who interact with her true personality, as much as she still has one, discover a woman utterly hardened by her experiences. She kidnaps others not only to feather her own bed, but because she enjoys it. Inflicting pain on those around her has become the only joy she truly takes from what remains of her life.

Liz is not a cackling madwoman or moustache-twirling villain. Instead, she comes off as being very calm, collected and calculating. Her vocal tone tends toward dark and even (unless she is playing at helplessness and fear), and her pale eyes are incredibly hard and unfeeling. She possesses no ability to sympathize with others, and even those who have suffered similarly to her will fail to elicit commiseration from her. Instead, she may act even more heartlessly toward those who haven't seen the truth of the world and grown a spine.

Liz tends to drape herself in rough, handmade clothing that hangs loosely from her thin frame. Her body is thin and wiry, her prominent clavicles and flat chest giving her a youthful appearance that belies her age and experience. She wears her dark hair cut to chin length, and her eyes seem strangely pale, as if she is developing cataracts.

Behind the mask, Liz looks much the same, though her skin is smooth and flawless, her hair perfectly combed, her nails clean and smooth even after hours of manual labor in the Hedge. Her eyes appear hard and pearlescent, as if the original orbs have been plucked out and replaced with gems of the deep. Liz dresses exclusively in iridescent Hedgespun she crafts herself, and a halo of shimmering lights always hovers about her head at about brow level, like the rings of Jupiter. A sweet scent of honeysuckle seems to accompany her at all times.

SECRETS

Liz's most obvious secrets are her affiliation with the privateers and her interactions with the Gentry. These aren't secrets in the sense that nobody knows she's doing it (at this point, she's practically earned herself urban legend status among the Lost),

but because she is usually hiding her identity during most interactions with other Lost, whether she's infiltrating a freehold for some reason (perhaps looking for a specific Lost the Gentry want returned) or tricking some poor Lost sap who has been bumbling about the Hedge.

She also keeps her affiliation with the Spring Court somewhat under wraps whenever possible. This aids her not only in avoiding identification by those familiar enough with the story of Liz Malloy to peg the privateer to the Spring Court, but also handily avoids the

rage of Spring Courtiers who realize exactly who the woman is and how deep her betrayal of everything that Lost society holds dear runs. How she manages to maintain her connection to the season (and hence her Mantle and Entitlement) are the matter of a great deal of speculation (see "Rumors," below).

Liz does have one secret that she maintains from even her motley: Liz Malloy never left the service of her Keeper. As her Keeper's guest dazzled the other partygoers and Liz made her escape, her Keeper cornered her near the border of its Arcadian realm. Impressed and surprised by her deft cunning, it offered her a deal: she could return to the mortal world, as long as she continued to acquire servants and slaves for her master. Liz, well aware of the necessity of crushing others to get what one needs, agreed immediately. The Lost, almost to a person, believe that Liz Malloy acts out of unbridled avarice and a complete lack of concern for the rights and freedoms of others. To a large extent, they believe correctly. None realizes that some of those she captures, especially among the mortals, are sent directly to her own Keeper.

Liz's own motley is kept out of the loop regarding the woman's connection to her former Keeper, and the Keeper has been entangled in a pledge by Liz to keep her motley out of it. As far as Liz knows, the contract is ironclad, but the fear that some small loophole exists for her Keeper to wriggle through sometimes keeps her up at night.

THE HIDDEN HORDE

Liz's motley keeps a massive Hollow deep within the Hedge. Its location and the keys necessary to bypass its wards and doors are known only to the motley.

Located within a wide, open glade in the depths of the Hedge is an old sailing vessel, the keel buried deep in the Hedge-soil. A



gangplank stretches down to the ground and can easily be raised to prevent invaders from boarding. Numerous traps fill the area around the Hollow, just in case someone manages to uncover the key to one of the doors. These aren't lethal, but they are enough to slow down an intruder. Below deck, the ship is warmly appointed in a pseudo-Victorian fashion, replete with thick drapes, numerous Hedgewax candles and even a small chess set, the pieces of which are carved to represent the motley's first 32 victims.

RUMORS

"I've said it before and I'll say it again. The Spring Court's full of a bunch of selfish bastards who don't give a damn about the rest of us. Why do you think Liz Malloy's still a cardholder? 'Cause she leaves the Court alone. Bet you money if you looked into the few Emerald Courtier disappearances linked to her, you'd find that not a one of them was anyone the Springs would miss. Come to think of it, wouldn't surprise me if all the non-Springer disappearances didn't help the Court, too. Makes you wonder whether or not she's a privateer at all."

Liz Malloy may be a lot of things, but an assassin or enforcer of the Spring Court is not one of them. At the Storyteller's discretion, she may maintain her Mantle through some underhanded and quite secret dealing with the Spring Court leadership. The likely truth, however, is that the Spring Court would rather be done with her; her oath, however, is not with the Lost of the Emerald Court, but with the season of Spring itself, and Spring has not had its fill of Liz Malloy yet. As long as Liz feels desire so deeply and inspires it so in others, she will have a place among Spring's chosen.

"Never trust a stranger you meet in the Hedge. Especially if they're asking for help. If you're lucky, it's some hobgoblin out for a quick meal. If you're not, it's Liz Malloy, and she and her little band will throw a net over you and drag you back to Arcadia."

This cautionary tale is not uncommon among the Lost of the world, though Malloy's name varies in different regions, and some regions add some other social taboo to avoid to the tale. Malloy, for her part, doesn't give a damn about any form of Lost wisdom or morality. She's not doing anyone a service by punishing the wicked or similar nonsense. She prefers to capture Lost through her bait-and-trap tactic, but if a contract calls for a specific Lost, she's not above leading her band on the offensive and into the material world.

LIZ MALLOY

Seeming: Fairest

Kith: Bright One

Court: Spring

Entitlements: Satrap of Pearls

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 4, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 4, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics 2, Crafts (Hedgespun) 3, Investigation 3, Medicine (First Aid) 2, Occult 3, Politics 4

Physical Skills: Athletics (Sprinting) 3, Brawl 2, Firearms 1, Larceny 2, Stealth 2, Survival (Hedge) 3, Weaponry (Swords) 3

Story Hooks

• Characters are most likely to come into contact with Malloy if they have somehow become her mark. They may come across her crocodile tears trap in the Hedge and be inclined to play hero, or they may have earned the wrath of some hobgoblin or Gentry willing to strike a deal with her for their heads. Malloy is a cunning, daring foe, and her five compatriots are battle hardened. Escaping or defeating Malloy is a steep task; doing so without slipping from Clarity is more difficult still.

• On the other hand, Malloy may make off with someone the characters care about, such as a friend, family member or ally among the Lost. How do the characters find Malloy? Can they cut a bargain to get their companion back? If Malloy is unwilling to deal, can the characters rescue the kidnapped without Malloy's band noticing, or will they have to engage in a battle of blade and claw in the darkest depths of the Hedge?

• The possibility remains, of course, that the characters will somehow find themselves on the same side of a conflict as Liz and her band. Perhaps her Keeper would rather see the Hedgebeast or Gentry plaguing the characters' freehold destroyed. Perhaps Malloy strikes the characters as the most able ally in seeking out and capturing a Lost that has gone mad and begun feasting on any fae flesh it can find. Maybe the characters even need someone found and brought to them. Any number of reasons could bring a motley into contact with the low-Clarity Malloy and her privateers. The question, of course, is who comes out of such a confluence changed? For better or for worse?

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Empathy (Motives) 3, Expression (Acting) 3, Intimidation (Hard Stares) 2, Persuasion 4, Socialize (Etiquette) 3, Streetwise (Goblin Markets) 3, Subterfuge (Feigning Helplessness) 4

Merits: Allies (Privateers) 5, Contacts (Goblin Market, Slavers, Gentry) 3, Fighting Style (Two Weapons) 4, Harvest (Goblin Fruit) 3, Hollow (Amenities 2, Doors 2, Size 4, Wards 5) 13, Mantle (Spring) 3, Resources 2, Token 5 (Blood Pennon)

Willpower: 8
Clarity: 2
Virtue: Prudence
Vice: Wrath
Initiative: 8
Defense: 4
Speed: 12
Health: 8
Wyrd: 7

Contracts: Artifice ••; Dream •; Eternal Spring ••••; Fleeting Spring •; Fleeting Summer •; Goblin (Trading Luck for Fate, Fair Entrance, Grace Falsely Shed, Call the Hunt); Hearth •••; Mirror ••; Smoke •; Stone •; Vainglory •••

Pledges: Liz and her privateer band share the Motley Pledge (p. 188, *Changeling: The Lost*). They gain +1 to their Persuasion dice pools and the Merit Iron Stamina 2 as a result of this pledge. Liz has also entered into a pledge similar to the Knight's Oath (p. 189) with her Keeper. This protects her motley from the Keeper and provides her a boon of two points of Glamour once per month and a +1 to all Weaponry rolls (factored into the values given below). In return, Liz must act in the service of her Keeper whenever he so wills it.

Glamour/Per Turn: 20/7

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Bastard Sword	4(L)	na	12	Two-handed
Rapier	2(L)	na	10	Armor
Main Gauche	1(L)	na	9	Piercing 1 +1 Defense when used with another weapon
Hatchet	1(L)	6/12/24	8	Thrown

GOBLIN CONTRACT: GRACE FALSELY SHED (••)

When a changeling's very surroundings betray her inner power, it is sometimes necessary to sacrifice that power, at least temporarily, to manipulate another. This power allows a Lost to do just that, allowing her to appear as a rank fledgling, at the cost of being reduced to a fledgling's powerlessness.

Cost: 2 Glamour + 1 Willpower

Dice Pool: Manipulation + Wyrd

Action: Instant

Catch: A changeling can forgo the cost of invoking this Contract by ramming a thorn taken from the Hedge through her own hand. The thorn must pass fully through the hand; in doing so, it inflicts 1 Health Level of lethal damage. The thorn cannot be removed from the hand for the period of the Contract's effect, and the damage cannot be healed during that time. While the thorn remains, a character may suffer penalties (-1 to -2) to Social rolls and almost certainly will suffer a -2 to all rolls involving manual dexterity with the wounded hand.

Roll Results

Dramatic Failure: The character's Wyrd lashes out at her attempt to suppress it. Energy burns upwards out of her soul, lashing her flesh in green and silver tendrils that remind onlookers of the Thorns. The character suffers one point of bashing damage per dot of Wyrd the character possesses.

Failure: The Contract fails, and there are no visible effects.

Success: The character hides away a portion of her power. Her effective Mantle fades to 1 and her effective Wyrd falls to 3 (this power has no effect on changelings with Mantle 1 and Wyrd 3 or less). The character loses all bonuses based on Mantle save those she would have at Mantle 1. She loses all powers she might have as a result of high Wyrd (such as Incite Bedlam, high Wyrd-based blessings (see *The Equinox Road*), and Merits with a Wyrd prerequisite higher than 3), and may spend no more than 3 Glamour per turn. She loses any physical sign of any Entitlement she may have, as well as any bonuses gained from that Entitlement. She loses access to any Attributes or Skills higher than 5. She retains her current Glamour pool, her pledges (and the effects thereof), and any Frailties she might have as a result of a high Wyrd rating. She affects the Hedge as a Changeling of Wyrd 3. At the end of the scene, the Contract's effect ends, and the character regains all of her lost powers.

Exceptional Success: As per a Success, but the character maintains any Attributes or Skills higher than 5.

Suggested Modifiers

Modifier	Situation
+1	Character is in the Hedge when activating the Contract
+3	Character is within sight of other changelings when activating the power
-1	Character is not in the Hedge when activating the Contract
-1	Each dot of Wyrd above 3 the user possesses
-3	Character is within sight of other changelings when activating the power

THE BRIDGE TROLL: LONG-TOOTH TOM

Pay up or get the fuck off'a my bridge.

Aliases: None

BACKGROUND

Tom Dawkins was a pretty ordinary guy, all told. He was a big guy, to be sure, but that, in and of itself, didn't really make him exceptional. He was married to a woman he'd met in college and with whom he'd had a daughter before either of them graduated. He was serving in the military because he liked the work and felt he was making a difference. He was in the Middle East when Desert Shield became Desert Storm and, despite the many dangers of the conflict, he came through it relatively unscathed and ready to go home to his family. He figured that maybe he and his wife could deal with the nagging little issues that had seemed to be driving them apart before he left and, whatever the case, he could spend some quality time with his little girl. Tom's life was full of promise as he began the trek home.

Nowadays, if one were to know enough about the situation to ask him for specifics, Tom couldn't say at exactly what point he'd reached in his homeward trek when the Gentry came for him. It's all been lost to him in something akin to the blur of panic and sensory overload he vaguely recalls from combat in Kuwait. He can't even remember if other people were with him when it happened, but in the quiet hours of the night, he concedes to himself that he hasn't really thought all too hard about that part.

Tom's memories of Arcadia are a disjointed jumble of images and emotions, some of them mutually contradictory, and — with a singular exception — he has no sense of which of them, if any, are real. The only recollection that stands out to him as having genuine substance is being assigned to guard a bridge and commanded to devour any who attempted to cross without offering payment, and holding onto the memory of his daughter as the only light of sanity and normalcy in that seemingly endless waking nightmare. He has no idea how much time transpired in that place, standing upon that bridge and demanding recompense from every passerby, but he knows it was roughly 10 years later that he escaped. For the life of him, however, Tom can't quite remember how he got away.

But when he showed up at the modest house that he and his wife, Darlene, had purchased together, a new family lived there and they threatened to call the police on the terrifying vagrant that Tom had become. When he finally came back to his senses, hours later, the traumatized changeling had blood and ragged bits of flesh in his mouth. He fled from the area and later came to realize that a decade had passed and his family was gone — moved away to some other city, it seemed. Tom wandered the highways and back roads aimlessly, looking for a way to escape the pain of memory and, often, finding it at the bottom of a bottle. Just as often, though, he discovered the oblivion he craved by wholly embracing his fae nature and burying Tom Dawkins just a little bit deeper within him.

Finally, as is almost always the case with these things, Long-Tooth Tom's wanderings came, temporarily, to an end. He found

a new place where he could live, somewhere so unlike the life he had once had that there'd be no way of confusing the one for the other. Better still, this new home gave him a purpose: it had a bridge he could guard and upon which he might demand tribute from those changelings who wished to use it. A few bucks from a passing Beast might buy him a cheap bottle of vodka, while a Wizened on her way home from the grocery store could purchase safe passage in exchange for one of her bags of food. In the beginning, that was all Tom wanted — just enough to get by.

But Long-Tooth Tom came to understand that there had to be more to this new life than merely scavenging for scraps. He was strong and he was willing to do whatever was necessary to see his wishes fulfilled. He began demanding more and more outrageous things: bushels of goblin fruit, rare tokens, pledges to be sworn to him and Contracts to be worked for his benefit. Finally, the Ogre got the better of him and he started demanding sacrifices. Worse still, the steeper Tom's requirements became, the happier he was, as he started to feel once more the power and responsibility that used to be his as the guardian of some Arcadian span. Only by the narrowest of margins did the Seasonal Courts amass sufficient power to drive out Long-Tooth Tom, for they pitied him as much as they despised him and had no wish to kill him, though he seemed to lack such compunctions in his desire to remain.

Again — reluctantly, this time — Tom took to the road, wandering in search of a new home and growing madder and more dangerous in his isolation and exile. Sometimes he would park himself on this bridge or that along his journey and demand compensation from a random stranger. Other times, he wouldn't even bother with the ultimatum and would simply sate his unnatural hunger upon a lonely traveler. He tried to settle in this town or that one, but always ended up moving on; something didn't quite sit right with him in any of those places. But now Long-Tooth Tom seems to have found a place that's to his liking, with a good bridge for him to claim: somewhere that sees a lot of traffic by day and enough stragglers by night to satisfy his dual needs for extortion and consumption. If he's lucky, maybe some changelings will stumble upon Tom's chosen bridge soon and he can send them back to their little kings with news of its new master. Then, after a little while of milking the freehold for small potatoes, he can ease back into his old habits.

DESCRIPTION

Long-Tooth Tom's primary motivation is an obsessive-compulsive territoriality regarding his bridge, and that all-consuming concern directly informs most of his interactions. Tom needs to "protect" his bridge (from what, however, even he doesn't quite know) and feels compelled to receive compensation from those who make use of it. While he can (often, but not always) check this need in the case of mortals, he is driven to collect his "rightful toll" from changelings who attempt to cross. Complicating the matter is the fact that Tom's chosen bridge may not be an out-of-the-way structure, tucked away in some rural corner of the world;

Alternate Route?

If Tom sets up shop on a major thoroughfare and demands his tithe from passersby, so what? Why not just go around and save the trouble of having to pay the Ogre or, worse still, choosing to confront him over a lousy couple of bucks or the breakfast sandwich in one's shopping bag? There are a lot of potential reasons why changelings (or anyone else, for that matter) might need to — or decide to, or be forced to — cross the contentious span and deal with Long-Tooth Tom, one way or the other.

Perhaps the local freehold's rulers want this interloping brute driven off and select the characters' motley for the task. Maybe they've got to get across the city as quickly as possible and Tom's bridge is the only way they're going to do that in less than an hour. Then again, maybe they just haven't heard this news about the newcomer and ignorantly stroll across Tom's chosen territory, only to be met with a curt demand for some sort of compensation. Tom might start attacking mortals and threatening the secrecy of the area's Lost. With a little bit of forethought, it's easy enough to force an encounter with the Ogre.

Tom's nature is such that he'll attempt to choose the most critical and well-traveled bridge in the area, making the act of circumventing him a virtual impossibility or, at least, consistently inconvenient enough that no one in their right mind will be willing to put up with it for any length of time. Eventually, some sort of measure will prove necessary — especially as Tom's "toll" grows ever steeper.

likelier than not, it's a major thoroughfare.

Tom Dawkins looks the part of a menacing, especially shabby homeless man. At six and a half feet in height, he towers over most folks, and his build is broad shouldered and powerful. His long salt-and-pepper brown hair and dangling chinstrap beard are dreadlocked with the elements, filth and years upon years of neglect. A faint strip of sparse fuzz grows over his upper lip, but nowhere near enough to conceal his jagged yellow-gray teeth, set into receded gums that lean just a little bit too far to the reddish side of pink. His features are blunt and thick with far too many old scars, though he looks like he might have been handsome, once. He wears layers of bundled clothing, even in warmer weather, the outermost of which is, invariably, a bulky, pea-soup-green military

surplus overcoat, and all of it is perpetually in one stage or another of falling apart. His heavy, long-fingered hands are the size of dinner plates, and callused to the point of looking (and feeling) like sandpaper.

When the Mask is cast aside, however, Long-Tooth Tom emerges from behind the man. The Ogre is a knotty mess of corded muscle, piled upon bones as thick as timbers. His dingy gray-brown hide is creased with a network of puckered scars, as well as tough, leathery clumps of scaly warts. Ivory-white tusks jut upward from beneath the bottom lip of Tom's gaping, overly broad mouth, while the twisting tangles of his hair and beard are, if anything, even longer and more gruesomely riotous. His breath reeks of blood and raw meat at 20 paces and his voice is a hideous, grating rumble that rattles the nerves of even the most stalwart. Despite the abnormal size and bulk of Tom's mien, his hands are still a little bit too big for him and end in thick yellow nails that might as well be claws; all the better for catching hold of someone and scooping her up into his savage maw.

SECRETS

Before he vanished while en route home from the Gulf War in 1991, Tom Dawkins had a wife, Darlene, and a six-year-old daughter, Charlotte. While Darlene and Tom never quite got along after they got married, he loved his little girl more than life itself. The only thing that sustained him throughout his brutal durance was the thought of getting home to his Charlotte. When he was turned away from his old home by new residents and unable to find his (presumably ex-) wife and child, Tom died a little inside and turned to the Ogre in an attempt to forget the man.

Since that time, Long-Tooth Tom has been unable to stand even the faintest suggestion of anything that reminds him of the family that he lost. Particularly painful to him is any image that calls to mind Charlotte's strawberry-blond curls or her exuberant, innocent, infectious laughter. At such times, Tom often flies into a berserk rage, driving his conscious mind far from the pain of the life that was stolen from him. Then, Tom's first priority is almost invariably escape, unless someone antagonizes or threatens him (or he feels threatened or antagonized), in which case he's likelier to fly off the handle and hurt somebody. Most other times, he'll just break things in his quest to get away and collapse somewhere that he can have a bit of privacy for his newest emotional breakdown.

Lastly, Tom is especially vulnerable to the sound of his real name (Tom Dawkins works, as does his full, legal name, Thomas Robert Dawkins). For the remainder of the scene after Tom's birth name is spoken, any source of bashing damage that he suffers becomes lethal and any lethal damage upgrades to aggravated. His changeling moniker is a thinly veiled misdirection (he figures no one would guess that the name of his mien has anything to do with what's on his birth certificate). Needless to say, Tom guards this secret most closely of all, fearful of the power of his mortal name to undo him.

RUMORS

"They say that Long-Tooth Tom knows a way to use bridges as gateways into the deep Hedge. As I heard it, a fella by the name of Tatterpatch bartered with him for the secret and found a huge grove of fantastic oddments. The story goes, the bigger the bridge, the deeper into the Hedge it can reach. I guess one of those really huge bridges could take you straight to the gates of Faerie."



If approached about this one, Tom will look straight-up confused. Why anyone would want to delve into the deep Hedge is well and truly beyond him; he's terrified of the Thorns, in general. They remind him too much of all he's lost. Naturally, characters might be inclined to see Tom as "protesting too much" about the whole situation and take that as a cue to press for details. Long-Tooth Tom, however, while almost unbelievably vehement in his insistence that he knows no such lore, is, in fact, telling the truth, rather than attempting to conceal some proprietary knowledge. And if push comes to shove, Tom will respond to insistent inquiries with his customary reaction to anything that strains his comfort zone.

"Old Long-Tooth Tom has some kind of hidden stockpile of goods, from all those he's robbed along the roads; all of the tolls he's demanded. He's got tokens and other stuff, like gold watches, wallets full of cash, hobgoblin pelts, and maybe even stranger stuff. I'm not sure where he keeps all of it, though. No one wants to ask and everyone's leery about getting close enough to sneak a peek."

In his typically crude way, Tom started this rumor on his own in an attempt to get others to approach his bridge closely enough for him to accost them and demand a toll. Every time he got the chance, he'd intimate that he had all manner of great stuff squirreled away in some vast treasure heap and, with the kinds of powers and cubbyholes to which the Lost have access, who's to call him a liar? The truth of it, though, is that Tom tends to barter for necessities and any luxury items that he does end up with invariably get hawked for a little bit of cash for food and booze. As he sees things, Tom's got a hard enough time guarding his bridge; why should he add to his burden by taking responsibility for a heaping pile of useless crap?

"This crazy homeless guy lives under the overpass that leads to Route 6. You know that one I'm talking about: that one the kids tagged about 10 years back with the red spray paint. The city talked for a couple of years about cleaning it off and they never did. Yeah, that one. I blew a flat right on the damn off-ramp at about two in the morning and he came up from underneath. I wasn't sure what to make of it and I found myself wondering why I left my pepper spray in the car when I got out to check my tire. He started ranting about me about "paying the toll." Fucked if I know. He looked crazy and dangerous, though, so I gave him what he wanted, which was — of all things — the leftover Thai food in my back seat."

Whether mortal, Lost or otherwise, the easiest way for characters to hear about Long-Tooth Tom is through the normal rumor-mill that brings word of odd happenings to those with the resources to hear them. The first or second time characters hear of this bizarre vagrant, they might dismiss it; by the fifth or sixth time, it becomes a little more pressing, especially when one considers the increasingly bizarre and precious demands that Tom makes whenever he becomes comfortable in a given location. A homeless guy shaking someone down for the money in her purse? Not terribly unusual. The same transient later biting off two of a drug-addled late-night clubgoer's fingers as the price of crossing "his" bridge?

A more disturbing development. Needless to say, characters who dig into these tales will, sooner or later, find themselves face to face with the bridge troll himself.

LONG-TOOTH TOM

Seeming: Ogre

Kith: Gristlegrinder

Court: Summer

Entitlements: None

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 6, Dexterity 3, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 3

Story Hooks

• A young Firetouched — a pretty teenaged girl with strawberry-blond curls and a hearty laugh that, nevertheless, hints at a deep pain — arrives at the characters' freehold, just as Long-Tooth Tom's predation is beginning to become a serious problem. She claims to be looking for her father, Thomas Robert Dawkins, who she's heard now goes by the name of Long-Tooth Tom. As it turns out, Tom wasn't merely on his way home when he was taken by the Gentry: he, his wife and his daughter were *all* stolen on the night he arrived, though he now has no memory of his homecoming. Do the characters try to use Tom's daughter to reform him? If they are able to learn his frailty, then they know that Charlotte, in revealing his real name, has just handed them the weapon they need to destroy the Ogre. Dare they use this knowledge? What might the cost be if they *don't*?

• Tom's just found the perfect bridge: the one where one of the doorways to the motley's Hollow is hidden. He makes it known to the characters that he's intending to claim the location as his own. Worse still, the local freehold's authorities seem unsympathetic to the characters' plight. In effect, the motley is told to deal with the problem on its own. Of course, elements within the seasonal monarchy may be looking to wrest the Hollow from whichever party emerges from the struggle victorious. In the end, convincing Tom to accept some sort of compromise may be the only viable solution.

• Long-Tooth Tom has done the unthinkable: he has killed and partially devoured a mortal who dared to cross his bridge without compensation. Now the Ogre is on the run from the authorities, all the while ranting on about the various Lost he's seen and the atrocities of Faerie. Tom's description is as yet vague enough that the police don't know who they're looking for, other than a hulking homeless man. He moves from bridge to bridge, in the parts of town the police won't usually touch, camping out and, by instinct, demanding tolls from those who pass by, whenever he feels like he can get away with it. Naturally, *someone* has to do something about Tom, before his insane mutterings attract the attention of mortals to the Lost or, worse still, garner the notice of the Others.

Mental Skills: Crafts 2, Investigation 2, Medicine 1, Occult 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl (Bite, Grapple) 6, Drive 1, Firearms 3, Larceny 1, Survival 2, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Animal Ken 1, Empathy 1, Intimidation (Raw Menace) 5, Streetwise (Scrounging) 3

Merits: Brawling Dodge, Danger Sense, Fighting Style: Boxing 1, Iron Stamina 3, Iron Stomach, Mantle (Summer) 3, Natural Immunity, Quick Healer

Willpower: 5

Clarity: 3 (Avoidance, Irrationality, Suspicion)

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 6

Defense: 3

Speed: 14

Health: 10

Wyrd: 6

Contracts: Eternal Summer 3; Fleeting Summer 1; Stone 5

Pledges: None

Glamour/Per Turn: 15/6

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Grapple	N/A	—	13	—
Fist	0(B)	—	12	—
Bite	2(L)	—	15	—

THE SCARLET WIDOW: MARQUISE TISTRESSE

I am a woman of exquisite tastes.

Aliases: Maharani Jhaalaa, Lady Weft, Madame Nanasi

BACKGROUND

The many paths through the Thorns to and from Arcadia are mazy, and winding, and sometimes hung with webs. Travelers must take care not to be caught in the larger webs, subject to whatever hunger or need a fae thing has for them. And some of these webs, or so it's said, will catch even the Gentry themselves.

Faerie ecology is a peculiar thing. It's not bound by the same rules as the ecology of the modern world. Rather, it observes those rules with an odd, detached interest, and then takes them as suggestions. When a kill is made in the Hedge, sometimes the corpse rots away as though devoured by bacteria, and sometimes it doesn't. There are countless types of small, crawling Faerie vermin, yet they are erratically present; some places have far fewer tiny insects than ecology would seem to demand. Some have none at all. Some creatures that lack predators grow out of control, consume their resources and starve; others remain at a given number, never really reaching overpopulation, either by finding new ways to die or simple immortal ennui.

Predators, too, may be free of the shackles of biological necessity. Some of them eat not because they must do so to live. Some eat because eating defines them.

The beast calling itself Marquise Tistresse began as one of these predators, long before she became so much more. What her early days were like, none could say. She herself has only the faintest memory-shards of the hunts and snares back then, before her cannibalistic apotheosis.

She wasn't always intelligent, though she was decidedly cunning. She remembers hiding in the Thorns from things larger than her, though even that's no proof that she was ever small; there are behemoth things in Faerie, monsters that would make a tour bus look like an insect. She remembers a dark tunnel, sheets of thick webbing and a bed of bones. And she remembers the day her surroundings became so much clearer and sharper, her eyes awakening, her mind forming words for the first time. The day she caught and ate one of the True Fae, and became as him.

FATTENED UPON GODS

The bright prince had strayed from his retainers on the hunt, laughing as he sought the sobbing woman's trail. His mind was on his sport, not on danger — for who could injure an immortal such as himself, even if he was far from

the heart of his demesne? So the tremendous spider plucked him up along with his peacock-plumed steed, drew them into her lair and devoured them with relish.

There was nothing left at all of him when she was done. He was the finest meal she'd ever had, and she devoured him down to the bones and beyond, gulping his last breath, chewing on his final thoughts. She rested in her lair, happy and content, digesting it all — and some of him stayed with her.

At first, the spider didn't realize anything had changed. She observed the beauty of her lair and the crimson dew hanging on the thorns outside, and she deemed it lovely. It didn't occur to her that she had never thought of things as "lovely" before. She only knew that she wanted another meal as delicious as the last, and she began to plan for it with the intellect of an Arcadian prince.

The hunt would be perfect. She now knew that sometimes the Gentry would go hunting their escaped slaves outside the walls of Faerie proper, and that would be another perfect time to strike. So she bade her time and spun her webs. And at some point later — how much later? Who could say, given the irrationality of Faerie time? — she caught another nobleman a-hunting, and his mortal prey as well. Again she savored the meal. And again she learned.

In this manner, the spider — who now began to think of herself as the Scarlet Widow, having assimilated the concept of titles and names — gained understanding of Arcadia and of the mortal world. She mulled over the wonders of both, and decided to try hunting in each.

First was Faerie. Not only was it closer, but the prey there was too good to resist. But it was a bad place to hunt. The land obeyed the will of its noble masters, not of the Scarlet Widow. Many things too foul to digest properly wandered the bleak outskirts, stumbling into her webs. Once she found herself discovered and hunted in turn. Her carapace was stung and scarred with elfshot before she scuttled over the grand walls of Faerie and back into the Thorns.

She still craved the prey to be found in the heart of Arcadia, but it was clear she wasn't strong enough to hunt there yet. But in the stew of her devoured memories, she remembered another world. It too seemed to have promise — and she remembered the way.

ESTABLISHING HERSELF

By the time she arrived in the mortal world, the Scarlet Widow could already take on a humanlike form, accented by the Mask to appear completely mundane (save for her beauty, of course). She lacked comprehensive knowledge of

the world proper, but that was easily solved. She hunted in the shadows of a city for a time and absorbed more information with each new victim. She learned how money worked and the details of social circles, where the true power lay. Gradually she began to build a human identity for herself, an exotic émigré of wealth and connections. Once she'd gathered enough money from theft and murder, she moved on to a new city, where she began to establish that identity proper. She couldn't resist giving herself a title to go with her new name, and so she chose "Marquise Tistresse."

Her new identity raised a few red flags among some people, of course. That struck her as ideal. People of power, of *real* power, suspected her and investigated her, and she stepped closer to their attentions. It was all really too perfect.

The Marquise now has plenty of money, social graces and enough absorbed memories of human culture to be able to pass as a native of the mortal realm. It's a fascinating new world she finds herself in.

There's just so much to digest.

DESCRIPTION

The Marquise is a singularly dangerous creature: a monster in the process of apotheosis. Devouring other beings of power strengthens her, but she isn't indiscriminate in her appetites. The Scarlet Widow prefers to dine selectively upon meals that both have new strengths to offer her and will not cause her undue troubles by their absence. Like many spiders, she spins a web of exacting geometry. However, the Marquise Tistresse spins a web that reaches among social lines as well as physical.

Upon her first meeting with any new acquaintance, Marquise Tistresse carries herself with delicacy, courtesy and reserve. She is a genteel hostess, complimenting her guests with a sometimes uncanny eye for detail. ("I do adore your necklace. Is it Turkish? Ah, I am quite jealous." "My dear, that shade of red is perfect for you. If it were just a shade more toward the violet, the effect would be ruined." "What excellent hands you have. You must be a skilled typist.") She doesn't give off the warm, empathic aura of a genuinely sweet woman — not only is such a thing unnatural to her, but she feels it would raise undue suspicion. Few people are that nice, and if they seem to be, they're up to something. As such, she prefers to present herself much as she is, as a refined lady whose interest in her guests is genuine, but not so vibrant as to be improper. She is unfailingly hospitable until she has determined whether a given guest is tempting enough to be considered food — and she remains hospitable even beyond that point. Although she isn't a sexual being, she is clever enough to feign sexual interest in a potential target or ally if it seems it would be a particularly effective tactic.

To most eyes, the Marquise is an elegantly lovely, dark-haired woman of exotically mixed parentage. One can catch glimpses of Asiatic ancestry in her eyes, a faintly Middle Eastern or North African glow to her caramel skin, or fine Nordic bone structure in her cheekbones. Her age is difficult to determine, particularly given the mix of her youthful good looks and



elegantly mature bearing. She is fond of silken garments of elegant cut, particularly favoring a choli-lehnga ensemble (the cropped top and gypsy skirt of South Asian fashion), with or without a sari. A small kohl tattoo adorns her navel, and she favors elaborate multi-strand necklaces and other jewelry. Her speech is virtually unaccented, and she has the peculiarity of never speaking in contractions.

The false identity she maintains is not very well documented. She claims to have reasons to avoid revealing too much, and does not deny that she might be living under an alibi. However, she does carry herself with the grace and manners of a noblewoman, and so many high-society folk assume she must have a terribly romantic and tragic story, something involving dangerous politics in some exotic nation or another. Other supernatural entities are prone to pick up on her tells as a potential supernatural being herself, which again she doesn't deny openly. She prefers to let others make assumptions about her nature and motives, so she can place herself in a superior social position by debunking them if need be.

Beyond her Mask, the Marquise is distinctly fae, but not monstrous. Her skin takes on a glossy sheen, her fingers are long and delicate and her belly tattoo becomes intricate organic markings. Similar markings adorn her brow, like extra rows of eyes. She might be taken for a Venombite easily enough, or a Darkling of some sort.

The Scarlet Widow's true form is not so subtle. When given the opportunity to stretch her eight legs properly, she swells to the size of a horse. Her chitin is a mix of reddish black and dark red, organically patterned like Rorschach blots across her cephalothorax and abdomen. She is clearly more orb spider than tarantula, with slim legs that are still steel hard and strong enough to support her body. Two of her eyes are larger than the other six, and all are arranged symmetrically — but anyone who gets close enough to look into them sees a fiery orange iris with a too-human pupil swim up from the depths of each dark orb. Apart from her size and eyes, the Marquise's only other departures from mundane spider anatomy are the small, chitinous fingers that can unfold from the underside of her chelicerae, allowing her to manipulate items with human dexterity. Her size does not penalize her grace, and it is quite alarming how quickly and quietly she can move when the need arises.

Even the Mask cannot conceal her form entirely — there is simply no mundane equivalent to a spider of her size. Peculiarly, her true form's Mask gives the image of an animatronic monster, a great work of special effects with a faintly rubbery-seeming skin and an electric whirring in her legs. This is an imperfect guise at best; some onlookers may fail to catch the false tells that imply the giant spider is unnatural. Marquise Tistresse is aware of her distinctiveness even to mortal eyes, and is not so foolish as to assume her true form near mortals unless thoroughly desperate, or confident that no witnesses will survive.

SECRETS

The Marquise keeps several layers of secrets, though she may reveal some to her most favored allies, and she doesn't immediately set out to eliminate those who discover some of her subtle...quirks.

First of all, it's not widely known that she's in fact a giant spider in humanlike form. People who know what to look for might note she's spiderlike in some ways, but she avoids undergoing her full transformation in front of people she would really rather not kill and devour. Even so, Tistresse doesn't consider this her most top-priority secret. As long as she can reassure others that she's quite reasonable and really not a threat (unless someone would like to arrange for her to be), she won't react violently to potential exposure.

In order to both live comfortably as a tremendous spider and be able to have guests over without causing a stir, the Marquise does her best to keep overlarge living quarters with two separate sections. The façade is appointed with all the rooms she would reliably need; the hidden lair is a gutted section filled with webs where she can relax in her original form. In some cases, this has taken the form of an expensive house with an expanded basement area. However, she has also discovered that by occupying two apartments at once and carefully arranging a hidden trapdoor between them, she can live quite comfortably in a skyscraper if so inclined. It's possible for a dedicated investigator to discover that one of the apartments adjoining Tistresse's home has been purchased in full, but never actually seen to be used.

The revelation that the Scarlet Widow can ingest the abilities of her prey, now — that is something she does her very best to keep to herself. It's key to understanding her motivations, of how she selects prey and what capabilities she might have.

RUMORS

"There's this lady, maybe foreign, calls herself the Marquise. I don't know who or what her real story is, but she hangs out on the outside of politics — you know, real politics, our politics. I hear she's a good friend to have. People who piss her off tend to disappear. More importantly, people who piss her friends off tend to disappear."

If the Scarlet Widow insinuates herself into a local supernatural community, she tends to wind up in much the same position — a potential kingmaker or string-puller, someone with connections who is looking to have the right friends in charge. A preferred modus operandi is to host or attend a party or two in order to get to know the locals, size up any promising potential meals, then begin to insinuate herself into both the good graces of her target and her target's enemies. With luck, she'll be able to make a meal of her trusting target, and then attribute the disappearance as "a favor for my new friends."

The average supernatural community isn't full of idiots, of course. It wouldn't take too long for the Scarlet Widow's reputation to develop a large red "DANGER" flag. However, most supernatural communities in the World of Darkness are used to this on some level. Idealism is all well and good, but in some communities it's essentially a given that you're already hobnobbing with monsters. Given that Marquise Tistresse has a penchant for making allies she doesn't betray, many would consider an association with her worth the risk. All it takes is the desire to prove that you are far more desirable to her as an ally than your rival would be. The unfortunate truth is that "most desirable" is not necessarily the best face to present to Tistresse.

"You know that Tistresse is a spider, right? The Scarlet Widow, they call her. Well, how do you think she got that name? She's just like a black widow — looking for a mate and a post-coital snack in the same package. Not everyone who disappears around here is taken by Them, you know. Some of them walk right into her web. So you want to know why people are still inviting her to parties and going up to her house for a cup of coffee? It's because her title means something. She's also a fae princess, and she has to play by the oldest rule of all — the guy who wins the heart of the princess wins half her kingdom, maybe even breaks her curse. The risk is immense, don't get me wrong, but the reward? Something else entirely."

A beautiful woman who is also a spider — the implication is obvious. It's not really true in this case, of course, but why would that stop rumors from spreading? It's inevitable that when the arachnid aspects of Tistresse's nature are revealed, many Lost will leap to the conclusion that she is the archetypal black widow. If Tistresse shows open interest in women as well as men, that's hardly unusual behavior for Faerie, or even for the mortal world these days.

The Marquise, of course, would be aware of these rumors. While unfortunate for business, such rumors are the sort of talk that would be difficult to quash. Therefore, she encourages the spread of the companion rumor: "win her heart, win half her kingdom." In part, this rumor serves as bait for the ambitious and arrogant to seek out her company rather than shunning it. More importantly, though, it plants the idea that she isn't a beast hard-wired by her appetites. It suggests she is something more, the archetype of the princess as well as the monster. It encourages others to think of her as an entity with multiple levels, who can be reasoned with. And it's true, in some fashion. She really is partly fae princess — that was one of the archetypes she's already ingested.

The interesting twist is that this rumor may not be as fabricated as all that. Perhaps one of the qualities the Marquise has ingested is the capacity for unselfish love, as yet existing only in potential. While such a capacity obviously wasn't gained from her nature or that of her Gentry prey, it may have been assimilated from a changeling she devoured. The Scarlet Widow would be quite startled if she found herself falling in love, living the role of one of the archetypes

she's eaten. The potential consequences are many, varied, enticing and frightening.

"The Marquise knows the way back to Arcadia itself. Oh, it's true! A friend of mine overheard her talking about her spending a summer there. She said it wasn't quite to her tastes yet, and that she came to our world for a more comfortable season or 10. And the interesting part — she claimed offhandedly she'd go back someday, when the mood took her. She even promised to take the little boy toy she was chatting with, if he was interested in sightseeing. Now, it's possible she's lying — but if I know that type of woman, and I do, she wouldn't lie in the middle of an actual boast. Too much pride in speaking the truth. Now, I wonder if she could be induced to play tour guide for people like you and me?"

This rumor is quite true. Among the various memories she's consumed for her own are knowledge of faerie trods that can run from the mortal world to Faerie itself. In addition, the Marquise's mercenary nature makes it quite feasible that she could be persuaded to act as an escort to Faerie for a group. She might not be able to fend off any True Fae encountered along the way on her own, but her presence could certainly make a group's travel safer.

This rumor would be of the most interest to changelings (who might want to rescue a friend from Faerie or avenge themselves on a Keeper) and to mages (who would have great interest in seeing if the Arcadia Tistresse knows is the same as the Supernal Realm; and if not, certainly it's worth seeing anyway!). Of course, supernaturals of other sorts and even mortals might have their own reasons for journeying to Faerie.

Tistresse might be interested in such a proposition, if she feels sufficiently well fed that she could fare better this time. The problem is arranging a price. The thing she values most is, regrettably, another enticing meal. She may demand a potent dish, payable upon delivery to the walls of Arcadia — one of her fellow travelers, unless something else can be arranged. And it's a bad thing to break your word to a creature of Faerie.

MARQUISE TISTRESSE

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes: Strength 3 (7), Dexterity 5 (7), Stamina 5 (7)

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 5, Composure 5

Mental Skills: Crafts 4 (Weaving, Tailoring), Investigation 3, Medicine 1, Occult 2, Politics 1, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl 4 (Bite), Larceny 1, Stealth 3 (Silent), Survival 4 (The Hedge)

Social Skills: Animal Ken 2 (Spiders), Empathy 1, Expression 3, Intimidation 3, Persuasion 3 (Calming), Socialize 3, Subterfuge 4 (Conceal Motive)

Merits: Ambidextrous, Contacts (any three appropriate) 3, Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Fighting Finesse (Bite), Language (English, French, Spanish),

Story Hooks

• Marquise Tistresse decides she's ready to try drawing out one of the True Fae into the mortal world, where it will be weak enough to devour yet still, perhaps, convey some measure of its true strength to her. Of course, setting a web isn't enough. She needs bait. If she knows any changelings who have spoken of their Keepers, they are sure to strike her as likely candidates. Even if such a changeling is one of her "friends," she isn't above using him as involuntary bait as suits her purposes. On the other hand, she may approach a potential lure with an open proposal — help her draw out his Keeper, and she will rid him of the pernicious monster. Of course, there are countless ways this best-laid snare might snarl and break. If it goes wrong, a wrathful True Fae — or perhaps even a whole Wild Hunt's worth — will be looking for someone to suffer a colorful revenge, even as the Scarlet Widow scurries back into the shadows to avoid their gaze.

• The classic crossover hook: Marquise Tistresse decides to sample the flesh and power of an exotic new delight. The player characters may be her intended prey, or they may be the ones she decides to approach to help her entrench herself on the outskirts of their society. They may even be both, if she decides they're the most appealing of the wonderful new people she's discovered.

• Someone has unraveled the Marquise's true plans, and has decided to remove her as a potential threat. Of course, she's a terror to face in her own lair, so the would-be spider-slayer — who may be a mentor, rival or even a player character — has decided on an indirect approach: poisoning the poisoner. If a potential meal can be properly enchanted, treated with bizarre goblin elements, or otherwise made very hazardous to her digestion, it would be an expedient way to get rid of her. Unfortunately, just stuffing a corpse full of cold iron and leaving it at her doorstep won't work. She's too clever to fall for something obvious, so the poisoned bait will have to be taken in such a way that she suspects nothing. It's even possible to kill two birds with one stone by having her devour an enemy, and die in the doing. But how to imbue the bait with a poison she won't detect, in such a way that the bait himself won't be able to warn her — or even notice at all? A very cunning plan will be called for...

Chinese, six others) 10, Resources 4, Striking Looks 4, Toxin Resistance

Willpower: 9

Virtue: Prudence

Vice: Gluttony

Initiative: 10 (12)

Defense: 3

Speed: 13 (21; species factor 7)

Health: 10 (14)

Wyrd: 7

Glamour/per Turn: 20/7

Armor: 1/1 (3/2)

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Bite (human form)	1(L)	—	11	Envenomed Kiss; must follow grapple
Bite (spider form)	3(L)	—	15	Envenomed Kiss
Strike (spider form)	2(L)	—	13	—
Webbing	—	10/20/30	9 (11 in spider form)	Entangles

Fae Aspects

• **Goblin Spider Form:** The Marquise may shift back and forth between her human and spider forms as a reflexive action; she may change forms once per turn. When in her spider form, her Size increases to 7 and she gains the traits in parentheses listed above.

• **Immortal Flesh:** As a creature of Faerie, the Marquise is immune to many of the shocks of mortal flesh. She does not age, nor is she subject to mundane disease or illness. She does not take bashing damage at all, unless the source is iron. An iron weapon inflicts bashing damage as normal; a cold iron bludgeoning implement will inflict lethal damage. A cold iron slashing or piercing implement inflicts aggravated damage.

• **Gossamer Snares:** The Scarlet Widow's of web-spinning stock, accustomed to weaving sheets and funnels of webbing for her home. Her webs are generally Durability 2, and can have anywhere from 4 to 12 Structure, depending on the size of the web in question (a single cord having 4 Structure). At her pleasure, she may spin sticky silk; the adhesive is Strength 4 and remains potent for up to a day. She can attempt to ensnare a target of her own Size or smaller as an instant action, rolling Dexterity + Athletics to catch her prey. It costs one Glamour point to create such a snare.

She may use this power in either form. When in her human guise, her spinnerets are concealed in her navel — one of the reasons she favors clothes that bare her midriff when she can get away with them.

• **Wall-Crawler:** Marquise Tistresse can move up sheer surfaces or even across ceilings at her full Speed, without the need for an Athletics roll. She retains this ability in either form.

• **Envenomed Kiss:** In either of her forms, Tistresse is highly venomous. Her bite attack delivers a Toxicity 7 poison. She is immune to the effects of her own venom, and it does not “spoil” a corpse for her purposes (though she complains slightly of the aftertaste). The Marquise possesses enough venom to make four such attacks before she must replenish her supply, which takes roughly a day’s time.

• **Ingest Powers:** Marquise Tistresse can devour the corpse of a supernatural being, ingesting and manifesting some degree of its previous abilities. It takes her roughly five minutes to consume a corpse in full, and she must begin within half an hour of the victim’s demise. Once she has entirely devoured a corpse, she may then spend a dot of Willpower to permanently gain one of the victim’s special powers.

The number of powers that Tistresse has already ingested in this fashion is left to the Storyteller. From her True Fae victims, she has already gained the ability to enter and leave the Hedge like any changeling, an infallible sense of direction and the ability to take on humanlike form. She may also possess one to five individual powers (Contract clauses, individual Discipline levels, Gifts or the like) gained from her supernatural prey, depending on how long she has been active in the mortal world and how many kills she’s successfully made. These powers work as they ordinarily would, although altered to match Tistresse’s Traits. She spends Glamour instead of Essence to activate a stolen Gift, for instance, and would roll her Wyrd where Primal Urge was called for. However, she does not compensate for missing Skills in this way; if using a power that requires an Academics roll, she does not get to substitute another Skill in its place.

• **Ingested Skills:** In addition to ingesting and internalizing the supernatural powers of her prey, Marquise Tistresse is also able to draw up ingested memories, augmenting her own skill set. She is fluent in at least 10 languages at this point, and enjoys them all — the lure of a new language is one of the things that can tempt her to devour a lowly human instead of waiting for more potent prey. The Encyclopedic Knowledge Merit mechanically represents part of this power. In addition, she may spend Glamour to increase any of her Skills on a one-for-one basis; thus, she could spend three points of Glamour to gain a Drive 3. Skills gained in this

fashion last for one scene. The Marquise cannot use this ability to raise any Skill in which she already has a specialty; her own abilities are too innate to override in this fashion.

A Panoply of Nutrients

Obviously, Marquise Tistresse’s “Ingest Powers” Trait can be used to further customize her to suit your chronicle, no matter the game. If playing *Vampire*, for instance, you can give her a variety of Disciplines to reflect a diet rich in Kindred victims. If you’re playing *Werewolf*, you might want to give her a towering spider-wolf form in addition to her monstrous spider form, and use the Gauru mechanics to represent it.

There isn’t a hard and fast limit to the number of powers you can give the Marquise. She can be scaled anywhere from a moderately dangerous foe on up to the biggest, most dangerous threat in the city, a truly epic Faerie monster. However, it may be best to err on the side of discretion. Her role in the campaign is generally not to be the most powerful entity in the city. She *aspires* to that role, which is what makes her a dynamic antagonist who actively attempts to snare others in her webs. It makes things more interesting if the players have a chance at thwarting or even destroying her. It may not be easy, and it may not even seem possible at first glance — but it should be a potential way to go.

Note, too, that Marquise Tistresse can ingest weaknesses if her diet is steady enough. She has the vulnerabilities of a True Fae already. If she were to feed regularly on vampires, she would not only gain vampiric powers such as Disciplines, but she would likely also develop a vulnerability to sunlight or a tendency toward the Rötschreck. This can help balance her out as you add more capabilities to her arsenal, granting her new vulnerable points that can be exploited, or that she will actively attempt to conceal.

THE SPHINX: MAYA SHARPTONGUE

What goes on its knees, then its back, and then rides but goes nowhere? Too easy, you say? I think the Autumn King probably feels the same way about your girlfriend now.

Aliases: Maia Wind, Lastri Tabrizi (true name)

BACKGROUND

When Lastri Tabrizi was a little girl, she used to travel the world with her parents. Her father was a well-to-do businessman, the son of Iranian immigrants, while her mother was also a first-generation American and, as she liked to put it, “a Third-World mutt.” Lastri, as a precocious, inquisitive child, was exposed to many cultures from a young age and was always curious as to how things worked; the “why” behind everything. She asked questions all the time — a habit actively encouraged by both of her parents — and could not be content until she knew their answers. While she wasn’t precisely spoiled, Lastri grew accustomed to attention and a certain privileged standard of living. Despite the wanderlust instilled in her by a globetrotting lifestyle, though, as she grew from a girl into a young woman, Lastri’s parents decided to enroll her in a prestigious prep school in the United States.

Needless to say, Lastri didn’t do particularly well with a settled life; after years spent flying, riding and training everywhere, how could she? She was rebellious and proved to be a handful for the staff at her school. Though repeatedly disciplined for her disruptive behavior, Lastri kept pushing boundaries, clearly unconcerned with graduating from the stodgy institution (or *any* school, for that matter). Letters were written to her parents, who simply responded with more donations to the school and assertions that the curriculum probably wasn’t challenging enough for their brilliant daughter. Grudgingly, the headmaster continued to contend with Lastri’s untamed nature, the price of the Tabrizi’s generous bribes. The interplay between the administrator and the bellicose young woman became something of a comfortable pattern around the school.

Until one day, Lastri Tabrizi was gone and no one could find her, for the young woman who turned up a week later wasn’t Lastri. Indeed, she wasn’t even human, having instead been cobbled together out of straw and candle wax, bound together with strands of Lastri’s hair.

As for Lastri herself, she had been visited in the night after a particularly dire talking-to on the part of the headmaster. Eyes glinting in the moonlight and his feral features devilishly beautiful, he beckoned her with a clawed fingertip and promised to show her vistas incomprehensible to the human mind. Too long imprisoned behind gray stone walls, denied the exciting travels and the particular sort of intellectual stimulation she craved, Lastri was all too quick to agree. If her parents were going to abandon her in a place she hated, the young woman reasoned, why should she stay for their sake?

Arcadia, however, was not quite everything it was promised to be. Certainly, Lastri saw magnificent things: mountains of gold-veined crystal, forests of endless shadow, and oceans that reflected the very tides of time itself, but there was a price to be paid for

this adventure. The cost of Lastri’s curiosity was her reason, her humanity and, eventually, her very soul. She loved her Keeper and he, in turn, lavished much affection upon her, fit to burst the heart with rapture and flay muscle from bone. Lastri was a treasured pet and was whipped and spoken to kindly when she pleased him, and caressed and told what a disappointment she was whenever she was anything less than a perfect slave. She came to crave the lash and to hate comfort, freedom and anything else that took her away from the agony that love and loyalty earned for her.

To reward his prized plaything, the Fae snipped away the damaged pieces of Lastri’s body and replaced them with the best and most beautiful parts from his other animals: a few talons here, a pair of luminous eyes there. He made the girl’s outer form match her inner cunning, as well as the ferocious spirit that hid within her, now all but utterly suppressed by obedience to her tormentor. And then, one day, Lastri did something that offended her beloved master to his inhuman core: he never explained what that something was, but instead merely opened the door to her cage and bade her leave Arcadia altogether — he commanded her to be free.

Heartbroken, Lastri staggered out of Arcadia at the grave of her fetch, who had died years before. She curled up at the foot of the headstone, hoping only to lie there until death claimed her as well, but that was not to be her fate. As she wept before a marker that should have been hers, Lastri heard her Keeper’s voice, “Deliver unto me 1,001 changelings and you shall be my most cherished and beloved slave once more, little sphinx.” That night, Maya Sharptongue was born and Maia Wind became her Mask.

Naturally cunning and with a heart long since made callous by her vicious durance, Maya began life as a nomad, wandering from freehold to freehold. Some she aided sincerely, though only to build her credibility as a friend and ally to all those she visited. Word spread from place to place of a wandering Beast whose incisive mind helped the Lost cut to the heart of dangerous secrets. And if some of those hidden truths were unpleasant or led to pain? Well, all knowledge comes at a price, and blame is better placed upon the one who commits the evil deed than the one who reveals it. Thus, when Maya Sharptongue told outright lies, there were many who believed her. When she toppled freeholds, whose scattered changelings were occasionally recaptured by the Wild Hunt, Lost were quick to blame the “corrupt monarchs” and “exposed loyalists” whom Maya was too late to stop, rather than the elusive Beast herself.

One thousand and one is still a long way off, but Maya has time and patience and a soul-crushing longing for the imprisoning embrace of the Keeper whose cruelty is all she can remember ever wanting.

DESCRIPTION

Regardless of whether she appears in her Mask or her mien, Maya Sharptongue is sardonic, cunning and quick-witted.

She can imitate pretty much any accent at will, provided she's heard it for some length of time. She usually prefers a neutral, impossible-to-place American accent most of the time, as North America is her preferred stomping ground. If asked her place of origin, she typically replies, "Anywhere...everywhere." Maya habitually dodges any questions of substance about herself, deflecting such inquiries with wit and humor, or — if her interrogator gets pushy about it — with belligerence. Of course, among the Lost, many have secrets they want to keep in the past and bringing up a changeling's personal history can be rude and painful, considering the suffering and humiliation they have all suffered. Later, though, Maya will go out of her way to make peace with anyone who gets pushy about her past, saying it's hard to talk about it with someone she doesn't completely trust. Among the Lost, that's a common enough sentiment and, if Maya is dealing with mortals, well, a lot of people have reasons to keep secrets.

Maia Wind is a pretty woman of indeterminate ethnicity — quite probably some combination of Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, Indian and Southeast Asian extraction. Her black hair is close-cropped and a little bit spiky, and her almond eyes are light brown, set into a face of rounded angles, with an olive complexion. Her lips are almost always quirked in the slightest hint of a smile. Maia tends to dress in clothing suitable for motorcycling — her preferred method of transport. Her voice has an ever-so-slightly singsong quality to it that some people find infuriating, and others fascinating.

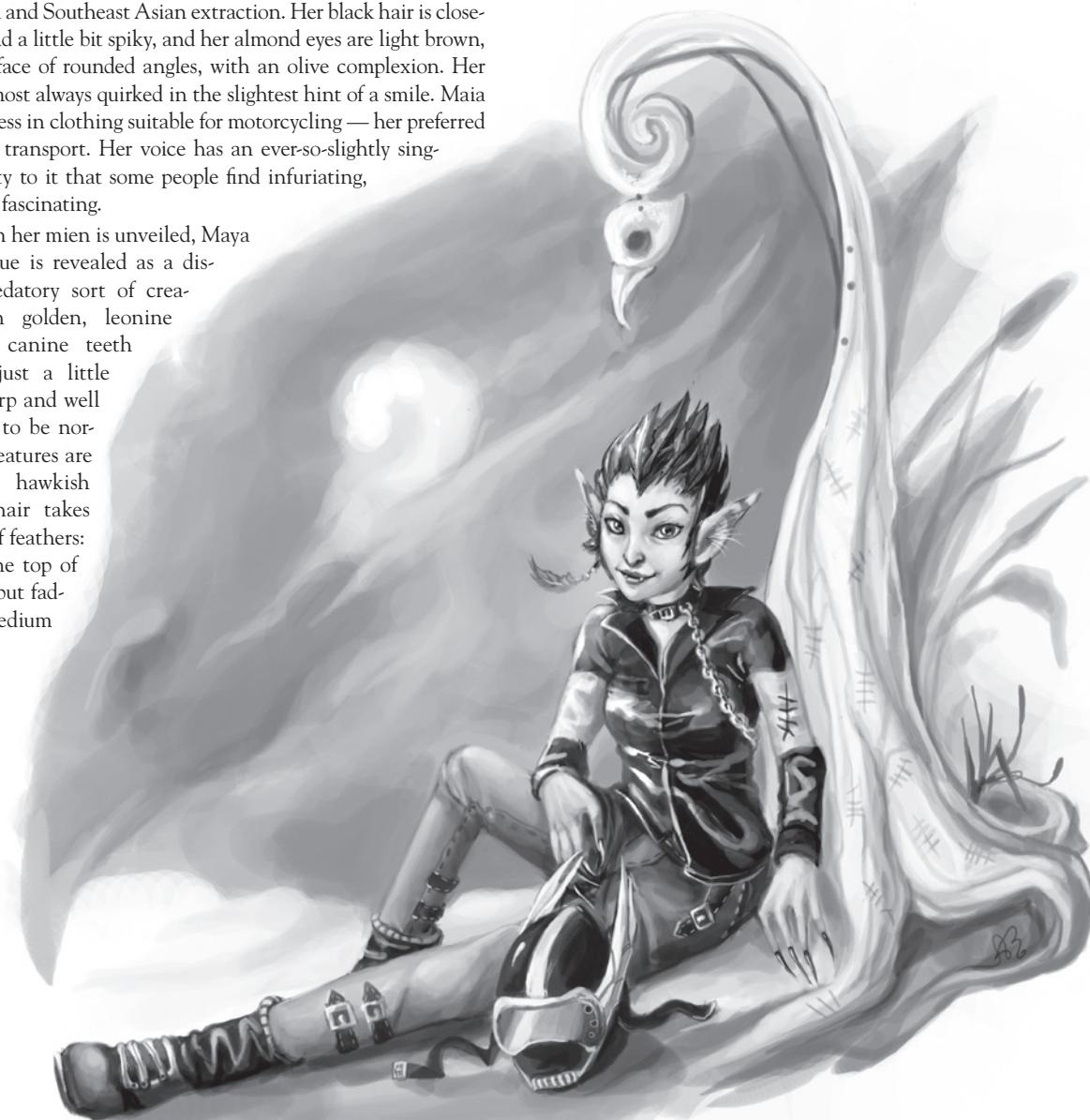
When her mien is unveiled, Maya Sharptongue is revealed as a distinctly predatory sort of creature, with golden, leonine eyes and canine teeth that are just a little bit too sharp and well developed to be normal. Her features are distinctly hawkish and her hair takes the form of feathers: black at the top of her head, but fading to medium

brown by the tops of her ears and light brown at the back of her neck. Her fingernails are sharp and opaque, like short claws, and she moves with a catlike grace, seemingly forever ready to pounce upon her prey.

SECRETS

Maya Sharptongue is a loyalist, making her way in the world by selling other people — mortal and changeling alike — out to the Others. She uses her gifts of riddle-craft to foment unrest within freeholds and to lead normal people into the clutches of the Gentry. She betrays as a matter of course and makes herself smell like roses in the process; the True Fae commanded by her Keeper are wise enough to at least *appear* to suffer setbacks at Maya's hands often enough to turn her into something of a folk hero to those who haven't directly suffered on her account.

Perhaps just as importantly, however, is a secret Maya has confided in no one, not even the otherworldly master who com-



mands her allegiance: she hates herself and, in the lonely hours of the night, contemplates suicide. The only thing that stops her is the shameful conflict she feels at the thought of never again knowing the approval of the Gentry. That, and the vain hope that someone, somewhere will learn of her iniquity and, despite that knowledge, help her to redeem herself. To mask this internal struggle, Maya employs her rapier wit and amuses herself with cruelties both petty and grand, and tries not to think too much about her untenable situation.

RUMORS

"I came across this Darkling while I was checking out a trod that opened up near my Hollow — some guy by the name of Digger — and he told me all about Maya Sharptongue. Says he met her back when his freehold was under attack from the Gentry. Apparently, she went out looking for their leader and found him, and she challenged him to a riddle contest and won, so the sons of bitches were forced to go back to Arcadia with nothing to show for their troubles. Trod closed up without a trace by the next day, so I didn't get a chance to talk to that Tunnelgrub again, but Maya seems okay to me."

The commonest sort of rumor about Maya Sharptongue (spread by her seemingly heroic actions, but — more importantly — also by her connections among other loyalists, as well as hobgoblins, ensorcelled mortals and even the rare disguised Gentry) paints her as quite the upstanding changeling. She puts her life on the line and matches her wits against the lords and ladies of Arcadia, all for the good of the Lost. She accepts no recompense, save perhaps for the thanks of her people, a few trifles, a hot meal and enough money to gas up her motorcycle. Everyone who's heard of Maya Sharptongue has heard these sorts of tales.

"Maya Sharptongue led this one young motley to uncover all kinds of corruption in their freehold, where the Spring King and the Summer Queen were chopping up changelings in the Hedge to grow some kind of weird goblin fruit with their blood. Or maybe they were feeding their people to hobgoblins, so they could build an army of them. I'm not exactly sure of the details, but I know Maya left a trail of breadcrumbs for the locals and they figured out what was going on and...y'know...'took care' of those two. Hunt of Leaves did them in, as I heard it."

Of course, a few of the stories about Maya are a little bit darker, but almost always in ways that demonstrate the depths of her conviction, her devotion to the Lost. Sure, it seems a bit brutal to hand over an unscrupulous leader to the justice of the Autumn Court, but that just goes to show how serious Maya is about protecting other changelings from those who would do them harm, those who would presume to act like the hated Gentry. Many folk heroes do unsavory things, but their sometimes-bloody actions are typically motivated by a driving desire for justice, and Maya is all too happy to allow others to have such a perception of her. Better to be seen as an extremist in matters of defending the Lost than to be seen as "soft" on privateers, those who've gone mad with lost Clarity, and the like; it makes her work that much easier to accomplish.

"Maya Sharptongue? Oh, yeah, I know her. Damn straight I know that whore. Met her once, back before I had these horns and these snake's eyes of mine. Well, more than once, really — 'course I knew her as Maia Wind, being that I was human then. Had to track her down over the past three years, since I got back from through the fucking Thorns. She came to me one lonely winter night when I was

down on my luck and feeling vulnerable, and she offered me a chance to find someone I'd been looking for. Made me follow her stupid clues, and I followed 'em, all right. Followed 'em straight into the path of something with six arms and a crown of fire, and it dragged me into hell. You wanna know if I know Maya Sharptongue? Hell, yes, I do, and I've got a bullet with her name on it."

Part of the danger of Maya's chosen path is that she's left quite a few broken lives in her wake. Certainly, she's done some good (she's had to, so as not to arouse too much suspicion), but not everyone she swindles and betrays gets killed, and those who get dragged off (or back) to Arcadia sometimes manage to escape. Many of these are hunted down by one or more Gentry, but some of them — just enough to make a difference — get away and learn enough tricks to remain free. Of course, most of these refugees hide out and count their blessings each day they don't wake up to huntsmen and hobgoblin hounds at the foot of the bed, but some few just can't let go of the need for vengeance and they go hunting after the Beast who sold them into bondage.

The majority of these quests are fools' errands and amount to precisely nothing. Without powerful resources (or a lot of funding), it's hard enough to find a mortal who could be anywhere, let alone a changeling without any normal identity more extensive than a fake ID and some cash for bribes. Add to that the fact that Maya has some tricks for coming and going from the Hedge in relative safety, and she's one hard woman to pin down. Still, some do manage to make progress in their respective obsessive quests to hunt down the woman who ruined them. Certain kiths are built for this sort of thing, after all, and the dogged determination of the human (or changeling) spirit is not to be easily dismissed. Some Lost have hounded her steps for years, whether to put a blade in her heart or simply to ask her, "Why?"

MAYA SHARPTONCUE

Seeming: Beast

Kith: Riddleseeker

Court: Spring

Entitlements: None

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 5, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 3, Dexterity 5, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 3, Computer 1, Crafts 3, Investigation (Riddles) 5, Medicine 1, Occult 3, Politics (Fomenting Dissent) 4, Science 1

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl 2, Drive (Motorcycles) 4, Firearms (Pistols) 3, Larceny 3, Stealth 3, Survival 2 (Shelter), Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Animal Ken (Felines) 3, Empathy (Exploiting Weakness) 5, Expression 2, Intimidation 1, Persuasion 4, Socialize 3, Streetwise 4, Subterfuge (Subtle Lies) 5

Merits: Barfly, Common Sense, Contacts (Hedge, Street, Underworld), Court Goodwill (Autumn) 1, Court Goodwill (Summer) 1, Court Goodwill (Winter) 1, Danger Sense, Direction Sense, Eidetic Memory, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Fast Reflexes 2, Fresh Start, Harvest (Emotions) 3, Harvest (Hedge Bounty) 2, Language (English, French, Hindi),

Laotian, Latin, Spanish), Mantle (Spring) 3, Quick Draw (Firearms), Stunt Driver, Striking Looks 2

Willpower: 5

Clarity: 3 (Depression, Wanderlust)

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Envy

Initiative: 10

Defense: 5

Speed: 13

Health: 8

Wyrd: 4

Contracts: Dream •; Fang and Talon (Eagles) ••; Fang and Talon (Felines) ••••; Fleeting Spring ••; Hearth •••; Mirror ••

Pledges: Oath of 1,001 Souls (The Name of the Keeper;

Tasks: Greater Endeavor [-3]; Favor: Greater [+3]; Sanction: Death [-3]; Duration: Lifelong [+3])

Glamour/Per Turn: 13/4

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Heavy pistol	3(L)	35/70/140	9	—
Fist	0(B)	—	5	—
Knife	1(L)	—	5	—

KITH: RIDDLESEEKER

Truly unusual among Beasts, Riddleseekers hone their seemingly natural cunning and curiosity to a razor's edge. These changelings exercise an Inquisitive Instinct: the Riddleseeker's player may spend a point of Glamour to add two to all Wits-based dice pools — other than Wits + Composure perception checks — for the remainder of the scene. Further, the character gains a free Investigation specialty in "Riddles." The mien of such a changeling usually reflects animals noted for especial wisdom or cunning: snakes, owls, cats or foxes, for instance. In some cases, however, these Beasts are attuned to more fanciful composite forms, legendary creatures associated with riddles (such as the sphinx) or with great knowledge (like the Iranian Angha).

Story Hooks

• A strange woman visits a non-changeling character, claiming to have a unique insight into his present dilemma (whatever it might be), insight she is willing to share, for a price. However, she cannot freely reveal her information and must instead use riddles and puzzles to convey her meaning. Naturally, Maya's intent is to lead the character to some sort of harm for her benefit; a mortal might be guided to the edge of the Thorns, so that he can be snatched up by Maya's Keeper, while a vampire or mage might just be swindled out of a great deal of money or a valuable relic. Though doing so initially seems to turn out well for the character, following Maya's trail to its conclusion can only lead to disaster, but is he savvy enough to turn aside before it's too late?

• The legendary Maya Sharptongue visits the characters' freehold, only to single out their motley for a dire warning: one of the seasonal monarchs is a loyalist, though she hasn't been able to determine which one. While she's gathered knowledge from other loyalists pointing to this particular freehold, Maya knows almost nothing about this place or the changelings who inhabit it, so she requires their aid in order to ferret out the traitor. Of course, Maya's activities are well known by those whose allegiance is sworn to Arcadia's inhuman masters, and she has reason to believe the betrayer knows of her coming, so she needs to lie low and guide the characters through the steps with her riddles and omens, rather than investigating personally.

• The characters learn of Maya Sharptongue's perfidy (preferably after she's given them seemingly sincere aid through her riddles) and decide to go after her. For whatever reason, she keeps leaving clues for the motley, leading them to various individuals, objects and places that help them in their quest to bring her down. While there are setbacks along the way, the characters genuinely seem to be making progress. Is Maya leading them astray or is she instead truly hoping to be killed? Even if the latter is true, however, will her Keeper sit idly by and allow his wayward slave to perish before finishing her tithe?

THE CANNIBAL HAG: OLD MIDDY

Oh bless me, but aren't you the sweet young thing for coming to visit a lonely old lady. Come on in, child. I did some baking yesterday, so let me get you something sweet.

Aliases: Mrs. Shokereth, the Crazy Cat Lady, Nana Middy

BACKGROUND

You see that house up there? That's where Old Middy lives. She's a crazy lady with a lot of cats. My sister says she's a witch. I think that's stupid. Witches wear black and are really ugly, with warts on their noses. Old Middy's just old. But she is kind of weird. She says she's got a bunch of grandkids of her own, but nobody ever comes to visit her. She doesn't have a car, either. I think she's just lonely. Mom wouldn't let us go trick-or-treating to her house last year, but my friend Terry did, and she gave him like three brownies!

I miss Terry. I bet if his parents could have afforded a real doctor, he'd still be here.

It is in the nature of the young to fear old age. Good health and vitality are traded for withered infirmity. Beauty wrinkles and fades, strength ebbs, the mind clouds. While almost all cultures maintain a tradition of respecting one's elders, most also hold onto a low-key cultural dread of the twilight years. In countless fairy tales and legends, a wicked monster will take the form of an ugly old man or woman, its soul as shriveled as its form. Age becomes a symbol for death, the crone who will eventually devour every last young soul.

And like many an old story in the World of Darkness, some of them are quite true.

OLD AND HUNGRY

The creatures born of Faerie are not tied to time in the same way that human men and women are. They may progress from youth to senility in mimicry of the mortal world's natural cycle, or invert it, becoming younger with each passing year. Many do not age at all, or shift their apparent age only when the mood takes them. Fae things are timeless, ancient and youthful at the same time.

Some of them, though, the child-eating hags of folklore, were born old. They crawled from whatever cold, damp burrow that birthed them already haggard and bitter. They can't remember a time when things were new to them. They simply inherited their old age as part of their nature.

Just as the metaphor implies, such a hag is the death of the young. Witness the creature that has taken to calling itself Old Middy. Old Middy is hungry for youth — she's starving for it. She has never known what it's like to be fresh of face and clean of limb. She wants to discover the joys of youth for herself, but has no idea how to achieve such a

thing. All she has is her hunger and desire. If she can't create it, she will find it and devour it. Perhaps someday, if she eats enough, she can finally become young herself.

She came to the mortal world some time ago. Her mortal name was patched together from stolen dreams of witches, "Medea Shokereth," but she much prefers "Old Middy." She plays the role of the kindly grandmother or great-aunt, the careless old woman with a great fondness for children. Like the Baba Yaga or the wicked witch in the gingerbread house, she keeps her door open for others to come and visit her. But if prey doesn't present itself, well, that's fine, too. That's what her little kitties are there for — to go steal lives, and bring them back for her to fatten herself on.

DESCRIPTION

Most of the time, Old Middy delights in the façade of the harmless old woman. She pretends to be forgetful and easily distracted, often feigning ignorance or acting as though she's misheard or misunderstood someone's speech. She doesn't talk about her youth at all — she's not really capable of imagining a plausible childhood, so she tends to avoid the subject. If she's feeling a bit playful, she may let it slip that her given name is Medea, though she feigns ignorance as to the actual connotations. "They tole me it was Greek. Now why on Earth my daddy would give me a Greek name instead of something proper from the Book is something I will never know."

Though she's fairly deft at feigning humanity, Old Middy is still one of the Gentry, and still not quite as familiar with mortal logic and the cause-and-effect ways of the mortal world. There are a few tells in her behavior that could give away that she's more alien than senile. For one, she displays a complete inability to tell precise time: she understands day and night, morning and evening, but can't read a clock or a digital watch to save her life. It doesn't affect her ability to cook or bake — her nose tells her when she's done — but it's an oddity in her behavior that she's hard pressed even to recognize, much less explain. She also has a love for raw eggs that borders on the feverish. If a raw egg is brought into her presence, she'll immediately move to devour it regardless of whatever the socially acceptable thing to do might be. (She doesn't keep any in the house and doesn't go grocery shopping; her foodstuffs are dragged out of the Hedge. Her kitchen is always stocked with myriad peculiar meats, spices and produce, but there's precious little by way of prepackaged food there.)

To the mortal eye, Old Middy is an African-American woman in her 70s or 80s, overweight but not obese, with blue-silver hair, thick glasses and a preference for faded floral-print dresses. She tends to move slowly, but seems to still be in decent health. She speaks with a moderate Deep South accent, difficult to place precisely. She smells like wood and dust and old cloth, and even a bit like decaying magnolias and wet earth — she smells like the land around her.

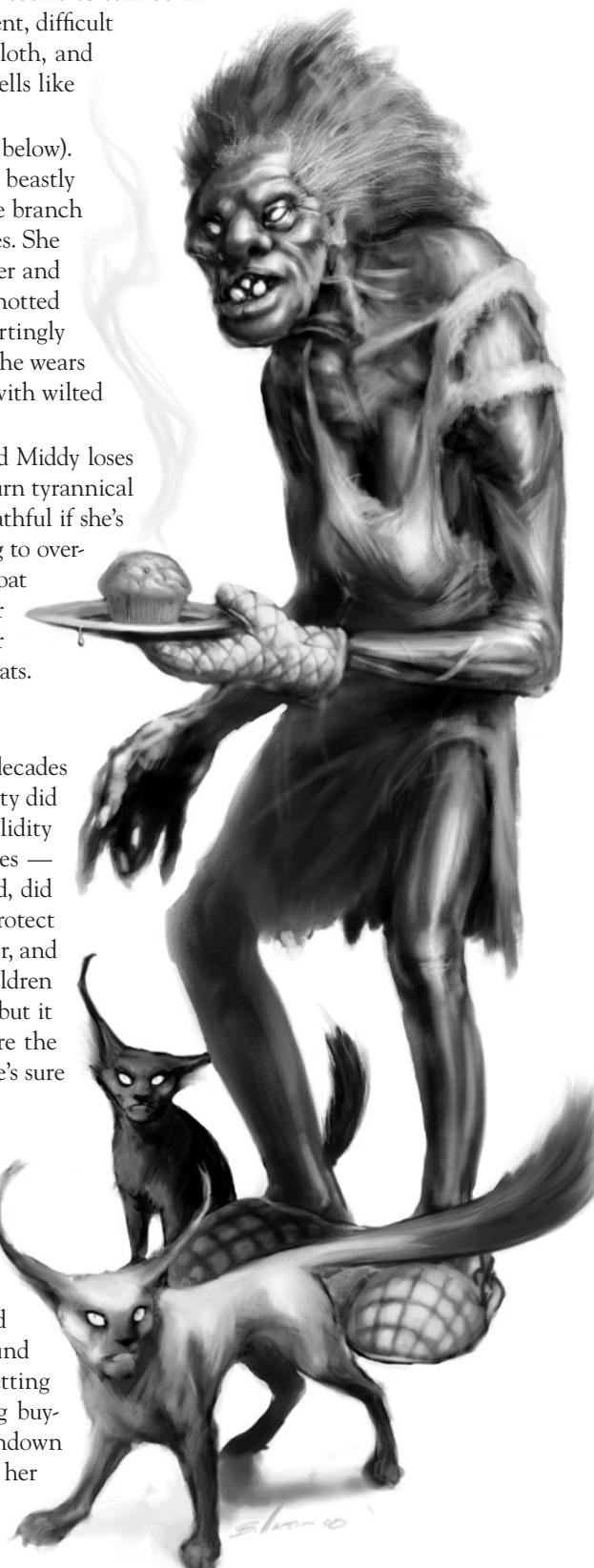
Old Middy does her best to reinforce her Mask (see below). Those who penetrate her illusion perceive Old Middy as the beastly crone she is. Her flesh is a pale brown more like a rotted tree branch than any human skin tone, carved with innumerable wrinkles. She has three good teeth in her head, one of copper, one of silver and one of gold — all three hard and sharp as steel knives. Her knotted frame is almost apelike, no longer overweight, with disconcertingly long arms and legs bowed almost to the point of deformity. She wears a sackcloth gown that is immodestly ripped here and there, with wilted flowers woven into the threads.

If dealing with people who know what she really is, Old Middy loses much of her pretense of being kindly and reasonable. She'll turn tyrannical if she thinks she can browbeat someone into submission, wrathful if she's stymied, or cowardly if confronted with opponents too strong to overcome. She'll threaten to gut her enemies from flanks to throat and bake their innards, to crack their bones and feed their marrow to her cats. And if they find out she's too strong for them, they may also find out that she makes good on her threats.

SECRETS

Old Middy established her off-the-grid lifestyle many decades ago, back when there were fewer computers involved. The city did take an interest about 20 years ago, checking up on the validity of her house ownership and the possibility of property taxes — then nothing. The assigned investigator, one Ernest Ledford, did a 180-degree turnaround, and began falsifying records to protect Old Middy. The reason was simple: Ernest was a father of four, and Old Middy told him exactly what would happen to his children if she grew angry. He's retired from government work now, but it would still take some serious convincing to get him to share the whole story — his first grandchild was born last year, and he's sure Old Middy knows.

Hungry as she is, Old Middy will eat just about anything. The breath and flesh of the young are what truly nourishes her, but she enjoys eating for the pleasure of it. Her kitchen is usually stocked with fresh ingredients and she can bake many marvelous pastries with the peculiar ingredients she gleans from the Hedge. As such, she both keeps a secret garden in the Hedge for goblin fruits and must often visit the local Goblin Market for produce and "found meats." She always goes shopping in disguise, to avoid letting any local changelings draw a connection between the hag buying chopped redworm and the crazy old lady in the big, rundown house. She must also leave her cats at home, which makes her about as vulnerable on her shopping trips as anywhere. Of course, there's a strict non-violence policy at Goblin Markets, but she might be vulnerable outside the borders.



Like most creatures of Faerie, Old Middy is bound by her word when she gives it. Currently, she's under an oath to spare a child whose mother has given Old Middy a gift of food and drink. Naturally, she tries to avoid socializing with any women of childbearing age if she can help it; she's much more prone to offer her delicious baking to children or men than to a woman who might be a cook herself.

Old Middy also has a poetic weakness. While the breath and flesh of children strengthens her, the breath and flesh of the aged greatly weaken her. If someone were to trick one of her cats into stealing the breath of an elderly person rather than a child without noticing, the breath would be poison to Old Middy (of Toxicity 8). The same would be true if she were tricked into eating the flesh of someone past middle age, though it would take a clever bit of culinary preparation to make it seem as tender and rosy as a child's flesh. (And perhaps some experience that is better left unspoken...) If one actually managed to have one her cats mistakenly steal the very last breath of someone dying of age-related natural causes, and Old Middy were to consume it, she would be struck dead forever. For obvious reasons, Old Middy keeps this particular secret close to her chest; she knows about her weakness. She was tricked in this way once, some decades ago, and the child responsible escaped her. Some part of her fears that the child is still alive, or that he told others about the experience — but that was a city ago, and the pain has long since faded.

RUMORS

"What, the crazy old spinster at the end of the road? I don't know what her story is. You never see anyone come to visit her. I don't think she even gets any mail. Probably her kids left her and never wanted to see her again. She doesn't seem all that bad, but you know how it is with old ladies with too many cats. Nobody really wants to be around them for long."

The first warning sign that something's amiss with Old Middy is that she's effectively off the grid. She has no relatives, nobody knows how she gets the money to stay in her house and nobody ever sees her go shopping or groceries get delivered. Most people don't notice that much, of course; they stay focused on their own business and prefer to ignore crazy cat ladies when they can. However, a bit of investigation or even surveillance can turn up Old Middy's lack of connection to modern society. The records surrounding her house seem somewhat legitimate, but there just don't seem to be enough of them.

"You ever smell the baking coming out of Old Middy's house? Like nothing else, really. I used to work in a Michelin three-star restaurant, and I never smelled anything as good as the cooking there. It's not just ordinary talent, though. She's got some sort of supernatural power invested in her, or maybe in her oven. I read about that sort of thing in this medieval book — love charms and curses and blessings embedded in actual food. I wonder what she'd ask for some of it?"

The World of Darkness has plenty of precedent for edibles that are supernaturally blessed...or cursed. Werewolves know about edible talents; changelings cultivate goblin fruits and bake pledges into food. There's not a lot of truth to this rumor, although some of Old Middy's foods might incorporate the effects of the goblin fruits she uses as ingredients. She's essentially immune to most of the detrimental poisons, hexes and side effects of the fruits, so she wouldn't notice. That said, she does keep an exhaustive library of cookbooks, many penned in Faerie or by supernatural entities of no clear origin. There might be any number of secrets tucked away in her culinary library, from the ideal recipe for long pig *puerco pibil* to the formula for an alchemic elixir or notes on the distillation of human blood for vampiric purposes.

"So you found out Old Middy's a hag, right? Well, here's the thing. I remember hags back from Arcadia. They had a coven, came in a pack of three. A lot of female Gentry like to hang out in threes, I hear; classic witch-goddess number. What I'm getting at is that Old Middy has a couple of sisters. They don't live with her, though — so where are they? Did they kick her out? Is she setting up house for them to come and live with her? Or are they already here?"

It's true that there are a number of female trios among the Gentry — depraved Graces, alien Norns, monstrous Gorgons and the like. Like many mythic parallels, it may be that the feminine three is somehow woven into the patterns of Fate itself, or it may simply be the fashion among the Others. It's entirely possible that Old Middy does have sisters. Most likely, they'd be hags like herself, born ancient and with an awful hunger for the young. Each one would possess similar Traits, though perhaps with different familiar animals — one might command crows, another spiders, snakes or centipedes.

Another possibility, though, is that Old Middy has younger sisters — a Maiden and a Mother to match her Crone. Despite outward appearances, they might be very similar at heart: the youngest feeding on the elderly because she wants to taste old age someday, and the middle sister preying on younger or middle-aged adults simply to keep her sister's balance. They might even be rivals, disdaining the company of Old Middy and her depressingly morbid antiquity — but still drawn to her call if it seems the Lost are threatening their sister.

OLD MIDDY

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 4, Resolve 5

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 4, Stamina 6

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 4, Composure 3

Mental Skills: Academics 1, Crafts (Baking, Knitting, Bonecrafting) 4, Investigation 2, Medicine (Poisons) 3, Occult 3

Physical Skills: Athletics 2, Brawl (Claw) 4, Larceny 3, Stealth 4, Survival (Hedge) 4, Weaponry (Knife) 2

Story Hooks

• The most obvious story hook: Old Middy sets up quietly in the neighborhood, and starts to feed on children close to the characters. If the characters have children of their own, Old Middy may start by preying on a classmate, a friend down the road. If the characters are able to identify the threat and prove they're sufficiently strong to overcome her, Old Middy may sue for peace, promising to leave the little ones be in exchange for her life. Sooner or later, though, her hunger will get the better of her. Any promise extracted will have to be carefully worded, because she has a Faerie's gift for twisting the wording of a pledge to suit her goals.

• Mrs. Shokereth is an ancient creature in a body that will never be young. However, the World of Darkness also has a few creatures with terribly old souls that wear forms of perpetual youth. When Old Middy learns of the existence of a vampire that was Embraced while still a child, she becomes obsessed with the little darling. She might try to eat the creature, of course, but it's even more feasible that she'd try to adopt it and live vicariously through her unaging "grandchild." And what if the vampire agrees? Old Middy is a very disconcerting creature to live with, but if one were willing to put up with her fey ways, the two could strike up a very dangerous partnership. The young of the neighborhood would be in more danger than ever, particularly with the vampiric child exerting its knowledge of keeping the Masquerade. Blood for one, breath for the other, and the leftovers can go into a pie...

• Old Middy's taken in a new stray — a bunyip (p. 26). Just as talented at stealing breath, and with a lot more intelligence and power to boot, her new "kitty" has become the ringleader of her pets. The two of them are hatching many new and cunning plans to target the children of the neighborhood and beyond. If the characters are able to recognize the bunyip from their research (or prior experience), they may be in for an unpleasant shock when they follow it to its nest and find that this one has a patron — a dangerous one.

Social Skills: Animal Ken (Cats) 2, Intimidation (Unmasked) 3, Persuasion (Wheedling) 3, Subterfuge (Playing Harmless) 3

Merits: Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes 2, Hollow 5 (Size 1, Amenities 4)

Willpower: 8

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Gluttony

Initiative: 9

Defense: 4

Speed: 14

Health: 11

Wyrd: 5

Glamour/Per Turn: 14/5

Armor: 2/2 (tough skin)

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Knife	1(L)	—	8	—
Claw	1(L)	—	10	—
Bite	2(L)	—	10	Must follow grab

Fae Aspects

• **Cannibal Glamour:** Old Middy regains her Glamour pool by eating flesh and inhaling stolen breath. Each Health point's worth of damage she devours gives her 1 Glamour if taken from a child; if taken from a young or middle-aged adult, she regains 1 Glamour per 2 Health points. If she inhales breath stolen by her cats, she regains 1 Glamour for every two "points" stolen (see below) from a child, and 1 Glamour for every four points stolen. However, the flesh or breath of an elderly person is poisonous to Old Middy (see above).

• **Immortal Flesh:** Like other True Fae, Old Middy doesn't age, and is resistant to many of the shocks that would afflict mortal flesh. She is immune to bashing damage and mundane poisons, as well as any detrimental effects from consuming goblin fruits. Cold iron inflicts aggravated damage, however, even if delivered by a blunt instrument.

• **Grotesque Vitality:** Old Middy can heal wounds quickly by spending Glamour. She may recover one point of lethal damage for every Glamour point she spends, up to the maximum allotted by her Wyrd. Healing in this fashion is a standard action.

• **Careful Mask:** Old Middy has worked long and hard to preserve her Mask from the casual eavesdropper. By spending one Glamour point at sunrise, she strengthens it for the entire day; other Fae cannot see her true mien without using a supernatural power, and all other supernatural beings suffer a -6 penalty to rolls to penetrate the Mask, rather than the usual -3. However, she cannot strengthen the Mask at night. In addition, her shadow still reveals her true form.

• **Ruled by Passion:** As one of the True Fae, Old Middy has a supernatural connection to her inmost desires, and only a

faint philosophical half-interest in the concept of altruism. Old Middy regains one Willpower point from indulging her Virtue, but refreshes her whole pool when satiating her Vice.

OLD MIDDY'S CATS

The cats Old Middy keeps are as fae as she is. One part *cait sith*, one part *bakeneko*, her cats are roughly the size of raccoons. They appear to be large, sleek cats with particularly lambent eyes to those who see the Mask. Underneath, they are clearly two steps removed from mortal. Their ears are particularly long and come to curved points reminiscent of horns. Their tails are thick and flatten slightly toward the end. Perhaps most disturbingly, their muzzles are faintly manlike; they can purse their lips to simulate a kiss, something they do as they steal the breath from a sleeping child.

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 2

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 1, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Investigation 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 4, Brawl (Claw) 3, Larceny 2, Stealth (Skulking) 4, Survival (Hedge) 2

Social Skills: Animal Ken (Cats) 1, Intimidation 2

Merits: Direction Sense, Fighting Finesse (Claw), Fast Reflexes 1

Willpower: 4

Initiative: 7

Defense: 4

Speed: 13 (species factor 7)

Health: 5 (Size 3)

Wyrd: 1

Glamour/per Turn: 10/1

Armor: 1/1

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Claw	1(L)	—	9	—
Bite	2(L)	—	6	—

Fae Aspects

- **Steal Breath:** Old Middy's cats have the folkloric power to steal the breath from a sleeping individual. To do so, the cat must crouch over the sleeping person's mouth and nose for a full minute and spend a Glamour point. An Intelligence + Wyrd roll is then required. The victim takes one point of bashing damage for each success. The cat can repeat this as often as necessary, but each cat can only store up to five "points" worth of breath before it must return to Old Middy. As supernatural damage, it's quite possible to kill a child during this process, if the child is ill, hurt or if the cat continues to steal breath long enough to suffocate the victim.

- **Open, Locks, Whoever Knocks:** Despite their lack of opposable thumbs, Old Middy's cats have a supernatural way with locks and latches. By placing one paw on any closed door, window, container or the like and spending a Glamour point, the cat can compel the mechanism to open. This power circumvents security systems and even rusty hinges; the door opens as quietly as the cat pads in.

- **Wordless Communication:** Old Middy's cats can communicate with one another and with their mistress without words. They have an effective telepathic bond with a range of 100 feet, and an empathic bond that stretches out for a mile. The death of a cat sends shocks throughout the empathic net, inflicting one point of bashing damage on any other of Old Middy's cats or Old Middy herself, if within a mile. This damage bypasses Old Middy's usual immunity to bashing damage.

THE RECURRENT

I remember you. I should. I was you, until you killed me.

Aliases: Various; the Recurrent uses the name of whatever person it is currently impersonating.

BACKGROUND

The Gentry stole Michael Urbanitz away one night. Big Mike, his mates called him, but the Fae that took him just picked him up like a child and carried him, screaming, into the Hedge. Before taking him back to Faerie, the Keeper slapped together a facsimile of Big Mike out of earth and wood and sent it back into the real world to fool Mike's mates.

A year and a day later, Big Mike returned, even bigger now. Big Mike was a Stonebones Ogre, and when he found the fake "him" the Gentry had left, he smashed it with a hammer he'd found in the Hedge.

Was it the hammer that started the process? There's no way to know now. The Recurrent had been born.

All that was left of the duplicate Mike was a pile of dirt. A bush grew from it, a bramble with small, sharp prickers. And one summer evening, a sharp-tongued Gentry ripped up that bush to create a duplicate of a woman she was taking with her to be a scullery maid. That woman escaped, eventually, and hunted down that tart-tongued, unfriendly phony. She burned it to ash, and dumped the ashes back in the Hedge.

Another Fae collected the ashes, mixed them with water and blood and made a thick ink out of it. He used the ink to color in the leathery skin of a duplicate he was creating to replace a boy he was planning on stealing. And that boy, after what felt like an eternity under the thumb of the Gentry, escaped and slew the duplicate.

But by now, the Recurrent was starting to remember.

The dark-skinned Leechfinger killed the thing posing as him and drained his inky blood out of him, relishing that the Fae-made replica could feel pain. He burned the body, but the blood soaked into the floor, staining the wood a lustrous black. And, predictably, those boards formed the body of another duplicate when an industrious Fae came calling some years later.

But this duplicate knew what it was from the first moment of its creation, and didn't bother pretending to be the person the Gentry had stolen. Instead, he used the knowledge from its previous incarnations to prepare for the future. It hunted down changelings and observed their powers and their forms, learning what it could of Glamour and how it might be manipulated. Although it searched (and continues to do so) for the reason why it seems fated to become such a duplicate over and over again, the answer has eluded the Recurrent. By the time that basis for its current body escaped from Faerie and hunted it down, the Recurrent was ready. It armed itself with magic and steel and battled the changeling, ready to begin its own existence.

The battle was over in seconds. The changeling's blade cut the Recurrent's head from its body, and the head rolled down a

hillside and into a swamp. And there it lay for years, until a Faerie creature found the decaying skull and used it to fashion a replica of its intended slave. And the Recurrent lived once again. During this incarnation, it killed a dozen changelings, in practice for the inevitable battle with its own duplicate. But again, the result was the same — the Recurrent died, and its remains lay buried until another of the Gentry found and used them.

DESTINY'S CRUELTY

The Recurrent has lost count of the number of incarnations it has undergone. It even suspects it might be used to create more than one fae duplicate at once, but all of the memories and experiences merge upon death. Every time it has "lived," it dies at the hands of the person it was created to impersonate for the Others. Every time that happens, some part of it, no matter how derivative, winds up being used as raw material for another such duplicate. The Gentry don't seem to know anything about this, nor do the sages of the Fae (and the Recurrent has asked both).

The Recurrent has tried every trick it can think of to kill its changeling before the changeling kills it. Nothing has worked. The Recurrent has set traps, hired mercenaries and assassins, even taken the battle to the Hedge in hopes of attracting Gentry attention, but it always ends the same way: the Recurrent dies in agony.

But the Recurrent still has hope. It believes that if it can kill its duplicate before it dies, it will be free, and immortal. After all, no other changeling has ever killed it, and many have tried.

WORD SPREADS

It was the death of the Wilson's Five motley that started the first rumors about the Recurrent. Wilson's Five — so named because they were all students at Woodrow Wilson High School when a many-armed Keeper snatched them up and took them back to its watery home in Faerie — found the Recurrent disecting a young Spring courtier one warm night. Brash, hot-headed and full of Summer's wrath, the Five descended upon the Recurrent, thinking him to be a mundane serial killer who had picked the wrong target tonight.

As it happened, it was the changelings who picked the wrong target. The Recurrent slaughtered four of them on the spot, and the fifth lay crippled on the ground, his spine broken. The lone survivor managed to round his gun and shoot the Recurrent. The next day, though, from his hospital room window the survivor saw the Recurrent step out of a gateway in the Hedge, and spread the word to the other changelings.

The Lost have no shortage of bogeymen, and the Recurrent joined the ranks of the things that the Fae fear in short order. But it's not just changelings who have come to fear this creature. Vampires have attempted to feed upon the Recurrent, only to find that its blood tastes like mud and it isn't afraid to fight the undead. Werewolves sometimes catch its scent while on their wild hunts,

and look at each other in wonder at a being that carries the smells of hundreds of distinct people at once. Mages can sense the Recurrent's supernatural heritage, but when they focus their powerful perceptive magic on it, the spells simply slide away.

The Recurrent lives within the World of Darkness, but also behind it, alongside it. What it wants, however, is not to join the world, but to remove its one vulnerability and cement its position as an eternal being.

DESCRIPTION

The Recurrent doesn't hate changelings, not exactly. It just wants freedom. It doesn't know what it would *do* with freedom, because it doesn't have any particular interests of its own; its personality is an amalgam of countless people stolen by the Fae. It doesn't think of itself as having a name apart from whatever identity it is using presently, and this identity informs its personality. As such, the Recurrent might act murderous, friendly, knowledgeable, pompous, down-to-earth or in any other manner appropriate to its current form. No matter how it acts, though, a perceptive character can tell that it's all show. The Recurrent isn't human, and it doesn't pretend to humanity well. It can mingle with humans briefly because of its vast store of memories and experiences, but a real conversation reveals that the Recurrent is hollow, unable to relate to true humanity.

The Recurrent kills changelings when it gets the chance, but not out of malice or fear. It's hoping to find something, some strategy or secret that will allow it triumph over its own "basis." As such, it sometimes targets other duplicates or even non-fae supernatural beings, trying to broaden its base of knowledge enough to reach its goal.

Physically, of course, the Recurrent's appearance varies greatly. It might be a child, an elderly person, an adult of either sex and any race. It looks like a normal human being, and since kenning never reveals it for what it is (see below), it can disappear into a crowd with ease.

SECRETS

The Recurrent's weakness should be obvious by now: the changeling on which its current incarnation is based is the only thing able to kill it. Any other being that manages to do so — to truly kill it, not just drive it to temporary dormancy (see *Aspects*, below) — would end the cycle forever. Likewise, though, if the Recurrent manages to kill its changeling "base" before its present incarnation dies, whether by direct or indirect action, it would lose its vulnerability and become truly immortal. At that point, the Recurrent might well become a danger to every changeling in the world: suppose it decided that someday, a changeling might find a way to kill it? If an immortal creature began a crusade against the Lost, the toll would be dire indeed.

The Recurrent knows a great deal of temporal information, but it doesn't have perfect recall and sometimes memories blur together. It recognizes people from previous incarnations, but it can't always remember which one. Sometimes it sees a building and knows something important is buried in the foundation, but can't remember what or why. It has, on occasion, manipulated changelings into investigating this sort of thing, hoping to find something useful. Mostly, it just finds dead bodies or hidden treasure, but nothing it can really *use*. These discoveries can be very interesting for its pawns, however.



RUMORS

"If you find that thing the Fae left behind to replace you, destroy it utterly. Burn it, dissolve it in acid, whatever. But don't let any piece remain, because if the Gentry get hold of it, they can use it to bring you back there."

Of course, rumors and stories about these duplicates abound, but the Recurrent is probably indirectly responsible for starting a fair few, deliberately or otherwise. Whether it's true that the Gentry can use discarded chunks of their handiwork to control changelings or not, the reuse of such parts might well have played a role in the Recurrent's "birth."

"There's a creature out there that nothing can kill. No bullet, no fire, no blade, no spell — nothing. You can tear it up, burn it to ash, and it just gets up the next day like nothing ever happened. And here's the worst part — when it gets up, it looks different. It looks like someone else entirely. But it remembers you."

This rather dire warning obviously combines some of the aspects of the Recurrent, while missing out a few important details. As an interesting side note to this rumor, some of the Lost (and other supernatural beings besides) trade stories of a similar being that not only resurrects itself after death, but scorches the last around it, leaving the area blasted, dry and prone to raging fires. The Recurrent has never evinced such effects, and so these stories might be exaggerations.

"Why can the Fae create those replicas? Why can they make such perfect clones of people? Like everything else, it's a bargain. It's a contract they made with Humanity. And there's one guy out there, one immortal guy, who holds the key to breaking that contract. He's the Gentry's anchor in our world, never dying, just changing identities every now and then. But if he ever dies for good — and you know there's a way to kill him, that's just how these things work — then the Others can't fuck with humanity anymore. They can't steal them, can't copy them... maybe even forget about them entirely."

On a regular basis the Lost come up with stories and legends that explain why the Gentry are able to continue their depredations without being caught or found out, and these stories usually have a fabled loophole or condition that, if closed or executed, would stop the cycle forever. The Recurrent would make a convenient target for such a story (maybe it is the anchor for the Fae, but if it is, it doesn't realize it). Note, too, other fae beings fit the "wander the world, never dying" description, including Jack o' the Lantern (p. 77).

THE RECURRENT

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 4, Wits 5, Resolve 4

Physical Attributes:* Strength 4, Dexterity 6, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 2, Manipulation 5, Composure 4

Mental Skills: Academics (History) 5, Computer 2, Crafts (Traps, Weaponcraft, Metalwork, Leatherwork, Repair) 4, Investigation 5, Medicine 4, Occult (Resurrection, The Fae, Changelings) 5, Politics 3, Science (Poisons, Chemistry) 4

Physical Skills:* Athletics (Running) 3, Brawl (Choke Holds) 4, Drive 3, Firearms 3, Larceny 4, Stealth 6, Survival 3, Weaponry (Knives, Clubs) 4

Social Skills: Empathy 1, Intimidation 4, Persuasion 1, Streetwise 4, Subterfuge 1

Merits:** Ambidextrous, Danger Sense, Disarm, Encyclopedic Knowledge, Fast Reflexes 2, Fighting Style: Boxing 5, Fleet of Foot 3, Language (any the Storyteller requires)

Willpower: 8

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Envy

Initiative: 12 (with Fast Reflexes)

Defense: 5

Speed: 18 (with Fleet of Foot)

Health: 10

Wyrd: 6

Glamour/Per Turn: 15/6

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Pistol	2(L)	20/40/80	11	N/A
Shotgun	4(L)	20/40/80	13	9 again
Club	3(B)	N/A	12	N/A
Knife	1(L)	N/A	10	N/A

*While the Recurrent's form might appear weak or frail, it retains its Physical Skills and Attributes from one incarnation to another. It can therefore be deceptively fast, strong and deadly. On occasion, though, the Fae steal a mortal bound to a wheelchair or with some other infirmity, and the Recurrent is likewise bound by any such restriction.

**A given incarnation might also have Social Merits such as Striking Looks, Resources, Allies, Contacts or even Fame.

Fae Aspects

• **Attuned to the Wyrd:** The Recurrent can recognize the Lost for what they are. It sees changelings' fae miens as well as their mortal guises. In addition, it can sense changelings coming before it sees them. This sensation is general; the Recurrent cannot differentiate between Lost, but can tell when a changeling is in the same area (within a 50-foot radius). The exception, of course, is the changeling the Recurrent is impersonating. The Recurrent can immediately tell if that particular changeling is within this distance. This attunement means that changelings cannot surprise the Recurrent (see p. 152 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook*).

• **The Catch:** The Recurrent always has a "catch" in its current form, and this catch is a situation or weapon that can be used to truly end its existence forever. The catch can only be activated by someone *other* than the changeling upon whom that incarnation is based, however. The catch is always extremely arcane and elaborate, and the Recurrent knows the catch instinctively (meaning that if someone were able to read the Recurrent's mind or enter its dreams, he might uncover it). An example of the Recurrent's catch might be that it can only be killed by an arrow fashioned out of rosewood and fired from a homemade bow at sunrise through an open gateway from the Hedge.

If the Recurrent dies through any other means than its catch, it simply falls dormant. Its body reforms in 24 hours,

on the opposite side of the Hedge from where its body died (so, if it died in the mortal world, it reforms in the Hedge and vice versa). It might be possible, therefore, to imprison the Recurrent, but doing so would require a prison on *both* sides of the Hedge, as well as a constant means of killing it (which would probably erode the Clarity of the jailer(s) over time).

The changeling upon whom the Recurrent's present form is based, however, has no need of the catch. Any attack it inflicts upon the Recurrent by any means causes aggravated damage. By contrast, the Recurrent, while it *can* attack this changeling, can inflict only one point of damage in a given attack, no matter how many successes the Storyteller rolls.

- **Death of Glamour:** The Recurrent becomes a sinkhole for Glamour, creating a small zone in which no Contracts are honored and no fae magic can function. The Storyteller spends 10 points of Glamour and rolls Resolve + Wyrd (obviously, this Echo takes at least two turns to enact, due to the Glamour expenditure). If the roll succeeds, no Contracts function within a 50-foot radius and all beings that can hold Glamour, except the Recurrent itself, lose one point per turn. The changeling weakness to iron, however, also ceases to function during this time, so this power can be of some small benefit. This power lasts for one turn per success.
- **Enter the Hedge:** The Recurrent can enter the Hedge the same way a changeling can (see p. 216 of *Changeling: The Lost*).
- **Heart of Wax:** Made of Glamour and inanimate matter, the Recurrent feels no pain. By spending a point of Glamour, it can ignore wound penalties for the rest of the scene.
- **Inscrutable:** Perceptive and analysis-based magic doesn't work well on the Recurrent, probably because it is so many different people. While it's not impossible to read the Recurrent's mind, any attempt to do so incurs a -3 penalty in addition to any Attribute-based penalties that might be assessed. This penalty also applies to spells, Gifts, Disciplines and any other supernatural powers that attempt to analyze, identify or otherwise gain information about the Recurrent. This includes lie detection, attempts to read its aura, and powers that allow for postcognition. This power is always active.
- **Mimic Contract:** This power only works in the presence of a changeling *other* than the Recurrent's current counterpart. The Recurrent spends one point of Glamour. On the following turn, it uses any Contract that the changeling possesses.
- **Normalcy:** This power is permanent and never needs to be activated, although the Recurrent can turn it *off* for a scene if it so desires. The Recurrent is completely undetectable by fae magic. As far as the perceptive magic of the Fae and changelings are concerned, the Recurrent is simply a human being. The Recurrent must turn this power off to use its other powers (with the exception of Attuned to the Wyrd, Inscrutable and the Catch).

Story Hooks

• The obvious story hook for the Recurrent is to have it mimicking a **Changeling** character. If you take this route, the story might be a brief one to introduce players to the concept of the fae-created duplicate (or the "fetch"), or a longer one in which the Recurrent runs and the characters must chase it down. In any event, the real horror of the creature is when it returns in a different form, but with a murderous desire for revenge on the changeling who (most recently) killed it.

• And this brings up another possibility: suppose the Recurrent realizes that if it can kill all the changelings it ever impersonated *before* its current basis escapes from Arcadia, it can even the odds of beating that changeling? If that's the case, then even more experienced **Changeling** characters who have already slain their fetches might have much to fear from the Recurrent.

• The Recurrent can also act as a manipulator. As mentioned, it doesn't always remember its previous "lives" perfectly. Maybe the characters (who don't need to be changelings — they could be vampires, werewolves, mages, a cell of hunters or even a group of normal mortals) are bribed, blackmailed or tricked into investigating something for the Recurrent. It might be a gateway into the Hedge, a house with a secret in every keyhole, a mysterious package sunk in a quarry, or a book with unholy poetry written in the margins. The Recurrent thinks it might be important, and the beauty of a story like this is that he might be completely wrong (the information is trivial or false), partially right (the information is important, but has no use for his current incarnation — though it might just what the characters need) or completely right (the information reveals his current catch; see below).

THE BOCEYMAN WHO COMES WHEN CALLED: SKIN AND BONES

Give me a name.

Aliases: The Man with the Sack, The Bagman, The Tall Stranger

BACKGROUND

Be good, parents used to say, or the bogeyman will come and take you away. The story has a hundred different incarnations. Maybe it was an animal in the first telling, a wolf or great cat. Children everywhere grew up hearing about wicked spirits or little men who would kidnap them given half a chance. In some places, it was the gypsies who filled the role of the potential abductor.

Nowadays, there's still the worry of kidnappers with all-too-human faces. Far more people worry about strangers with candy or stray hitchhikers than they do about actual supernatural beings allegedly lurking out there. The Lost know different, of course.

The stories about a bogeyman usually involve the thought of transgression. "Don't go across the railroad tracks at midnight, or it'll get you." Of course, human abductors and predators aren't held at bay by a person's obedience to the rules. The True Fae are, somewhat, but the rules vary so much. But sometimes there's a story of a supernatural bogeyman who'll get you through no fault of your own, because *someone else set him on you*. Like the story of Skin and Bones.

ASK THE CHILDREN

Skin and Bones is the subject of a local urban legend. They say if you do the right ritual, you can call him up, tell him somebody's name and he'll take that person away forever. Parents discourage the story, of course; nobody wants their children to think too much about a classmate turning them over to an abductor. But the kids still tell the story now and again, in whispers. Some of them keep it with them into their teens, and then tell the story again.

If a changeling hears the story, though, it's enough to make the blood run to ice. They know that a story like that is just too possible. And regrettably, this one's true.

The story doesn't go into detail about who or what Skin and Bones is. His name is his description. He's the Tall Stranger, the Man with the Sack. There's no explanation of where he came from, or why he does what he does — these morsels of information are often left blank just to entice the listeners' imagination. Nobody knows what happens to the people he takes away. They're just *never heard from again*, and that's where the story ends.

The story of Skin and Bones is so classic, it's made it into a few scholarly works on urban folklore. There was even a direct-to-video movie made in the 1980s, low budget and with reliably terrible performances. They called the bogeyman "Scareface" in that movie, figuring it would be more frightening — if anything, it made the movie a bit more dismissible. Some people now think the story of Skin and Bones is a rip-off of the Scareface movie, no less.

THE TRUTH

But those who do their research find out the story is old. A grandmother remembers her grandmother telling her the story

when she was a child. There are similar tales to be found in the various ethnic neighborhoods of the city. The backdrop of an archaic photo shows the words SKIN AND BONES written backwards across a piece of glass in the distance.

His origins are unclear. He's decidedly one of the Fae, equal parts medieval bogeyman and modern urban legend. Nobody seems to know more than that, though. He might be one of the lords of distant Arcadia, but if so, he's been doing humble work for decades rather than manifesting in all his glory. He might have origins in the Hedge, somewhere between here and there. He's definitely not a changeling, even if he might have started out that way.

Skin and Bones is a creature defined by his purpose. He comes when he's called, and he abides by the unwritten contract of "*give me a name and I'll make that person disappear*." He doesn't always come right away. Sometimes he waits until you're drifting off to sleep before he steps out of your mirror and stands over your bed. Sometimes you see your reflection swim away, replaced by his face. Sooner or later, though, if you've made the kind of call he can't ignore, he comes through. And you'd better have a name for him.

DESCRIPTION

It's a rare thing to meet Skin and Bones outside of a summoning or abduction. He doesn't come to the mortal world for any other reason. Some changelings have said they've seen him out in the otherworld of the Hedge, always at a distance, carrying his bulging gunnysack on his back. The stories get a little wilder from there. He's allegedly been sighted in a Hedgeside cemetery, presumably to bury his targets. Others see him on a wide Faerie road, no doubt bearing a burden home to Arcadia. But stories like that don't seem to come up much until after someone's had an up-close-and-personal run-in with the Tall Stranger, and then they crop up like mushrooms. Everyone's got an opinion.

His nickname fits him. Even to mortal eyes, he's nearly skeletal. It's not that he seems old — he's just gaunt, with a sunken nose and dark, recessed eyes. He wears the worn but still-intact clothes of a vagrant: a battered hat, a suit so drab it's hard to tell if it's brown or gray, and thick-soled shoes that clomp inevitably down an empty hall — at least, when he wants to be heard. He stoops a bit to enter a room or when he has his sack over his shoulder, but he's a tall one, with long arms and long fingers. He gives off an aura of being *wrong* — most people can't help but be afraid when they see him, ordinary though he may seem. He gives off a sense of the unavoidable: if the crazy old man decides he's going to take you, you can't help but feel that nothing you can say or do would stop him. It's an impression not far from the truth.

His true mien is more disturbing, though not full on demonic. His skin seems perpetually dusty and it creaks softly like leather when he's in the mood to be heard. His limbs and digits are even longer, giving him a strange daddy longlegs gait. Sometimes his finger-length toes will creep out the front of his tattered shoes, curling and sifting like a second pair of hands. There's no

light or color in his eyes at all — just a deep blackness, a hint at the darkness inside his gunnysack.

His voice is low and hollow; not that it's often heard. He doesn't talk much beyond his ritual "Give me a name" greeting. He doesn't answer questions such as "why are you doing this?" or "where did you take them?" unless somehow supernaturally compelled to do so. Even in the middle of a fight he can't escape, the Bagman is quiet and methodical, as though it's just another day on the job.

When Skin and Bones comes to take a target away, he is the very picture of patience. He won't chase someone over open ground: he'll pace after her slowly, waiting for an opportunity to close the distance by using his ability to travel between mirrors. If he's after someone who has been named to him, all he has to do is touch her to put her in his gunnysack, so he doesn't bother much with any other kind of grappling or striking. He will wrestle an opponent to defend himself if need be, and he is surprisingly strong for his near-emaciated frame — but mostly he doesn't see the point of fighting against people who aren't his actual target. He'll simply retreat through the nearest mirror, attempt to lose pursuers in the Hedge, and try again later. It's nothing personal. It's never personal.

SECRETS

Skin and Bones must have somewhere to go when he hasn't been called. Somewhere out in the Hedge, he has a secret lair, a Hollow where he takes his captives. Those who are able to find this place might be able to discern the fate of his abductees — it might conceal a tremendous prison filled with tiny cells, a gate to Somewhere Else into which he dumps his captives, or perhaps a ledger listing bills of sale. The Man with the Sack takes pains not to be followed, of course, and can move through the Hedge quietly and easily. Finding his nest is easier said than done.

As far as most people know, once you go into Skin and Bones' bag, that's it — there's no getting out. This is untrue. It's possible to give of your own blood to have the sack regurgitate one of its prisoners. This secret would be very tricky to learn, though there may have been eyewitnesses — human, changeling or hobgoblin — who saw someone freed in this manner. The main trouble is that most people who know about this secret also know enough about Skin and Bones that they don't want to draw his attention, and would be reluctant to share.

The most vital secret about Skin and Bones is that he is actually unnamed. When he says "Give me a name," it's a secret plea. If he's given a name that somebody else already owns, one that cannot be his and his alone, then he's off to make that person disappear. His compulsion is to remove that person so that, perhaps, the name may someday be free and his alone. If he's called and the summoner won't give him a name, then he grows angry and may take the summoner away instead.

It would be possible to eliminate the threat the Bagman poses entirely by giving him a name of his own. Of course, that would mean finding a name that nobody else has, on Earth or in Faerie. Then it would be a matter of summoning Skin and

Bones and responding to his call of "Give me a name" with "I give you the name ____." At that point, Skin and Bones would no longer respond to the usual summons and would no longer ask for names of people who wind up disappearing.

Giving him a name would also give Skin and Bones a new weakness. He would be vulnerable to anything that preys on the power of a true name — including his own abilities. If he could be summoned and then told his own name... then perhaps he would have no choice but to take himself away.

RUMORS

"If you call him, Skin and Bones will come and take someone you hate away. Find a broken mirror and write his name backwards on it. Then whisper the name of the person you hate three times. That's all it takes."

This rumor is partially true. The basic method of summoning Skin and Bones is hinted at, but incomplete. To properly summon him, a person does have to write *Skin and Bones* backwards on a broken mirror. Lipstick is good; usually in the stories of whoever summoned him last, it's a girl more often than not. However, he doesn't require a name until he appears. The key to summoning Skin and Bones is emotion — emotion strong enough to give off the scent of Glamour. That's why idle curiosity or even a child's superstitious dread isn't enough to bring him around. You have to want to see him. You have to hate the person you want him to take away so bad you can



taste the bile, or be so afraid for yourself that you'd call up a bogeyman to protect you. Then he can smell you, and he'll be on his way. He's not a fool, though. If he sees through the mirror and finds you're surrounded by a burly group of thugs, he won't show his face. Until later.

"Nobody Skin and Bones takes has ever been seen again. Nobody. They don't find bones, or even hair. They can't even find traces of a struggle. He's taken people right from their dinner table — warm food still on the plate when the girlfriend gets back from the bathroom. They aren't murdered where they stand, they just vanish. Into the sack and gone. I don't think he sells them off to the Others, to be honest — then one of them might come back. I think he takes them nowhere. Literally to nowhere."

Where do the people Skin and Bones abducts go? That's the question. The prevailing opinion among changelings is that they're carried off to Faerie, there given over to the True Fae. Some say he eats his victims entirely, right down to their names. Others say he takes them to the Goblin Market, where they're sold off to the Gentry or transformed into quaint little knickknacks. It's not hard for the Lost to come up with dreadful scenarios, given their own experiences.

The truth of what happens to Skin and Bones' targets is left to the Storyteller to determine. It should be something appropriate to the chronicle. If Skin and Bones shows up in a **Vampire** game, for instance, he's probably not carting them off to the Hedge or the spirit world — at least not if the Storyteller wants the players to have even a small chance of discovering the truth. In a **Werewolf** game, though, he might be taking them to a place-that-isn't, somewhere out of the werewolves' usual ability to handle but not completely beyond their comprehension.

"He used to be human, I hear. There's a story about this miserable old coot who used to live here a hundred years ago, maybe longer. He hated most everyone, but he loved this one child — maybe it was his grandchild, maybe it was just a little neighbor boy or girl. No, I don't know if it was a boy or a girl; it's the kind of thing that's hard to verify. Anyway, one day the child went missing, ran away from home or was maybe kidnapped. And this old man went crazy. He went out looking for the kid, and kept on looking. Now he won't die until he finds the kid, but he's forgotten the name. That's why he comes when you call him and will go take away whoever you name for him: he's hoping to find that kid, maybe all grown up, maybe not. And if it isn't that kid — and it never is — then he doesn't bring them back."

The core of this rumor is actually possible. Maybe the Bagman was once just an ordinary man. It's hard to tell, though — like so many fae things, Skin and Bones is more of a strange force wearing an imperfect human mask than a person with the usual gamut of thoughts and feelings. Could a mad human being who wandered into the wrong place become a monster? It's not the most farfetched thing a scholar of the occult could devise.

If the Tall Stranger actually does have a human origin, he might have some core human memories left. It's hard to say what would awaken them. The right name, perhaps — if someone were able to find the name of that child who was so important to him, or perhaps if they were able to find his name, traded away long ago for immortality. Either of these things could rewrite his motivations, and possibly his very nature. Or what if he discovers himself actually falling in love — becoming obsessed with a person, or even something more selfless?

SKIN AND BONES

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 6

Physical Attributes: Strength 5, Dexterity 3, Stamina 6

Social Attributes: Presence 4, Manipulation 2, Composure 6

Mental Skills: Investigation 4, Occult 2

Physical Skills: Athletics 3, Brawl (Grapple) 4, Larceny 3, Stealth (Silent) 5, Survival (Hedge) 3, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Intimidation (Unspoken) 3, Subterfuge 1

Merits: Brawling Dodge, Danger Sense, Fast Reflexes 2, Iron Stamina 3, Strong Back

Willpower: 12

Virtue: Justice

Vice: Envy

Initiative: 11

Defense: 3

Speed: 13

Health: 11

Wyrds: 5

Glamour/Per Turn: 14/5

Armor: 3/4

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Strike	1(B/L)	—	10	Bashing or lethal; see below

Fae Aspects

• **Hunting by Name:** When Skin and Bones has been given someone's name, he develops a supernatural affinity for his target. He always knows what direction his target lies, and has a general sense of how far he has to go to get to her. He still has to close the distance as usual (usually by traveling the Hedge), but he'll always know the way as long as he's in the mortal world or the Hedge.

• **Nameless:** Skin and Bones has no name of his own. He is effectively immune to supernatural powers that require someone to know his name; he has no true name to be discovered, much less compelled. He cannot be bound by pledges or oaths laid on him by another, only by his own fae code of behavior.

• **I'll Take Your Name:** If he makes eye contact, Skin and Bones may stare into a person's very soul to learn their name. He spends two Glamour and rolls Intelligence + Wyrds; the target contests with a reflexive Resolve + Wyrds roll. If Skin and Bones wins the contest, he learns his victim's true name. Use of this aspect is a standard action. He uses this power rarely, usually only if a summoner refuses to name a target for him, whereupon he attempts to learn the summoner's name and spirit her away instead.

• **Brutal Hands:** Skin and Bones doesn't like to fight, but if he has to, he can be very dangerous. His fingers can jab like iron rods into soft flesh, or crush a windpipe as easily as plucking a daisy. He may inflict bashing or lethal damage with his unarmed strikes at his discretion.

• **Tick, Tack, into My Sack:** If Skin and Bones has been formally given a person's name, he may spirit her into his gunnysack by touching her and expending a point of Glamour.

Story Hooks

• One of the local motleys (or packs or coteries or cabals) has had a bad, bad falling-out. It likely started with broken hearts and jealousy, and soon led to oath-breaking, harsh words and worse. If changelings, some of them may even have started to lose their tenuous Clarity in all the changes and broken promises; other supernaturals may have suffered similar degenerations. The group came apart like an explosion, of course. Now the members are starting to disappear. As a group, they'd learned the secret of summoning Skin and Bones a year ago. They'd pledged never to use that secret, but now pledges are splintering, friends are enemies and the survivors are going even madder with each new disappearance. The local authority wants someone to find out what's going on, of course — it could be the predations of the Gentry, and he wants to see what exactly this group has done to attract that kind of attention. And who gets sent into this emotional war zone to discover what's going on, getting caught in the middle of this paranoid game? It figures.

• Somebody posted the summoning ritual for Skin and Bones to the Internet. Now lots of people are trying it, and although most lack the emotional intensity to make it work, enough have succeeded to make Skin and Bones a very busy bogeyman indeed. He seems to be reaping an awful lot of Glamour from all this work, and it may make him even more powerful — he's already displayed an ability to get from summons to summons so quickly that he's virtually in more than one place at once. Maybe he's approaching some kind of godhood. Maybe he's actually begun some form of mitosis and is spawning off duplicates to keep up with the demand — a power driven by the importance of keeping his contracts. Either way, it's a serious problem.

• A bit of research has indicated that Skin and Bones is capable of learning the true names of other people without their permission. This is a tremendously valuable skill, particularly for mages fond of using an enemy's true name to establish a powerful sympathetic link for spell-casting. The trouble is that the Man with the Sack is a tricky one to coerce. As a fae creature, he'd be compelled to uphold any bargain he made, most likely. On the other hand, it's uncertain what a person could offer in exchange for the service of providing a true name. Skin and Bones seems to have very little interest in anything outside his core "purpose." The characters may be the ones having to figure out just how to coerce the fae kidnapper into using his talent to give them the name they want — or they may be the ones trying to figure out how an enemy did it already.

He rolls Strength + Wyrd; the victim contests reflexively with Strength + Wyrd. If Skin and Bones wins the contest, the victim is sucked into the gunnysack. It's larger on the inside than it is on the outside, as well; Skin and Bones can keep up to 25 Size points of victims in his gunnysack at once (essentially, 5 Size per point of Wyrd). He can spirit a victim into his bag if he hasn't been formally given her name but knows it anyway (such as if he uses his I'll Take Your Name aspect), but his Strength is reduced by 1 in such an instance.

Escaping the sack isn't easy. An entrapped victim must accumulate 20 successes on an extended and contested Strength roll against the gunnysack (which, as essentially a part of Skin and Bones, uses his Strength of 5). As usual, a dramatic failure eliminates all successes. Most people are either exhausted long before they can succeed in forcing the sack to open, or fight their way free a long, long way from home.

There's a secret way to free someone from Skin and Bones' gunnysack, though. If someone smears the sack with his own fresh blood and says the name of the captive, the sack will give up the prisoner... for the cost of just a bit more blood. The liberator takes one point of lethal damage as part of the transaction.

• **Mirror Travel:** Mirrors are gateways to Skin and Bones, particularly the broken ones. He may enter or leave the Hedge from any nearby mirror as a reflexive action, though he can only cross between worlds once per turn. It costs one Glamour point to make the transition if the mirror is intact, but nothing if the mirror is broken. Skin and Bones can also see where mirrors are in relation to his location in the Hedge, making it easy for him to navigate from one mirror to the next. This power isn't a functioning teleport between mirrors, however; he must still cross the Hedgespace between mirrors to emerge from another.

• **Immortal Flesh:** The creature called Skin and Bones is durable even for a creature of Faerie. His skin is tough as boiled leather and his bones are hard as stones. He doesn't have to eat or drink, or seemingly even breathe; deprivation means nothing to him. He is immune to bashing damage (though a cold iron bludgeon will still inflict aggravated damage). Bullets mean even less to him than blades; it's uncertain just how much vital tissue he has to damage in any meaningful way. His armor rating is entirely natural.

TRICKSTER GOBLIN: THE TIKBALANG

You must come this way! Quickly, now. It's the only way you'll be safe.

BACKGROUND

Out on the lost highways, a tall man in a dark coat stops your car and tells you the road is blocked ahead — so take the next turn, the *left* turn, and you'll be just fine.

On the winding Appalachian Trail, you meet a lone hiker, and he tells you and your friend that he saw the *coolest* thing down the trail up on the right. Seriously. It's not far down there — just a five-minute hike. No biggie. Check it out.

In a labyrinthine mansion whose halls are twisted, you seem to have gotten turned around, but a butler you've never seen but who seems friendly enough ushers you in the “right direction,” and he tells you to just take a shortcut through the sewing room to get back to the party.

In each case, nothing strange. Just a helpful stranger offering some direction or advice, right? Wrong. Those who take the advice of this supposedly “helpful stranger” and take the unbeaten path may inadvertently be falling into a trap. That is the nature of the Tikbalang, a trickster hobgoblin.

TRICKSTER

Filipino folklore has long spoken of the Tikbalang, whose sole purpose seems to be to misdirect those who are lost. The story is that those lost in the mountains and forests may meet the Tikbalang on the road. The creature might scare them onto the wrong path, or instead might mimic the voice or appearance of a loved one or simply pretend to be a helpful stranger. The goblin lures the wanderer further and further away from safety, until the person is so lost she'll never find her way back again.

This is all true, but the Tikbalang does more than just trick one into getting supremely and irrevocably lost (though that always remains one option). Often enough, the trickster goblin will lead humans into the Hedge — and, once in the Hedge, will lead them to further danger, often to the margins of Faerie itself. Sometimes, the Tikbalang will lead its victims to some other form of danger: a pit, a clearing where a bear hunts with her cub, a muddy slope or a stretch of forest where a pack of mad werewolves hunt. Stranger still, the Tikbalang may show up *again* “in the nick of time” to help the victim escape the danger, thus ushering her into yet another perilous situation. After all, a corpse is of little use to the Tikbalang, who feeds from the fear and confusion it stirs in its victims.

DESCRIPTION

Those who meet the Tikbalang upon the paths and trails, or even on the lost highways and in the tangled hallways, will meet someone who most likely wants to help them. The Tikbalang may appear as a helpful stranger, or may instead appear as someone the person trusts — even if that person shouldn't be way out in the middle of nowhere.

The Tikbalang *knows* things about its victims. Things it should not know. Initially, it might use this to earn trust: “It's me, Matilda, remember when we played together when we were

kids and you scuffed your knee and had to get that tetanus shot?” Over time, though, the Tikbalang may use it to frighten: a helpful stranger who suddenly says, “I know you have seven dimes in your pocket nestled next to a fraying red handkerchief” doesn't exactly stir an overwhelming sense of safety.

And that's the true trick: if kind words and careful directions don't seem to work, the Tikbalang grows irritated. It starts to rely on fear instead of friendly trickery. It *frightens* a person onto the wrong path, presenting some kind of threat that blocks the safe ways through the forest (or mountain, or mansion). It may drop its Mask (which it can do with an expenditure of one Glamour) in favor of its ghastly mien.

The creature doesn't have just one Mask. It has whatever Mask it needs to have. It's not really a conscious decision on the part of the Tikbalang — sometimes the creature shows up as a stranger; other times, a loved one or friend. Its Mask is good, but not perfect (see Aspects, below), and a victim might see through the façade — though, when people are panicked, they're often easily focused on getting help rather than getting hurt.

The creature's mien is unpleasant to behold: it's easily seven feet tall, with a pale, bony, disjointed body. Its legs and arms are too long, and when the creature hunkers down, its head sinks past its knotted knees while its gangly arms lie draped across the ground, pointed fingers twitching. Its face is long and lean — vaguely horselike at a distance, hence why the Filipino legend often portrays the thing as half horse and half man. Up close, though, the equine comparisons fade, and the face looks more like something you'd find in one of those freak-show “mutant fetus in formaldehyde” jars. The head is pallid, with a thin layer of doughy skin covering its misshapen skull parts.

One significant portion of the creature's body? Three bone spines rise from just behind the creature's neck. They seem to serve no function for the Tikbalang, but to those who might break off one of those spines... (See Secrets, below.)

SECRETS

- Wearing one's clothes inside out will protect one from the depredations of the Tikbalang. The old folklore says it's just the shirt, but those who pry a little deeper into their occult research may discover it has to be every article of clothing upon the body, down to the skivvies and socks. Wearing clothes inside out means the creature cannot even approach and must stay at a distance of at least 100 yards. In addition, it may not speak. So, a victim may still glimpse it and the Tikbalang may still try to work its goblin mojo at a distance, but for the most part the victim is protected (and, if the victim has chosen this particular folkloric solution, it means she's aware that the Tikbalang exists and can be a threat).

- The Filipino saying is this: *may kinakasal na tikbalang*. Translation: “A Tikbalang is getting married.” Really it's a saying used when rain comes on a sunny day, but its folkloric con-

notation goes far deeper. A character can — disgusting as it may be — choose to marry the Tikbalang. Upon being confronted by the creature, a character must offer the thing a ring and ask for its hand in marriage. It must agree. And when it does, even on a sunny day it rains — for damn near a hundred miles around the “proposal.” No actual ceremony is necessary: the creature and the character are now “married,” and this is a sin against Clarity 2 (it’s not quite on par with “intimate contact with a True Fae,” but it certainly isn’t far from it). What exactly is the benefit of this? Well, on one hand, it stops the Tikbalang from being antagonistic. In fact, the creature will now direct the lost individual toward the safest path, as opposed to the most dangerous one. In addition, for as long as this strange goblin “pledge” holds, the creature can be called upon once a night for one scene, and in this scene it will do the bidding of its bride-slash-groom. It will attack others, it will defend the character, it’ll even throw itself in front of a bus.

Aye, but there’s the rub. Marrying a Tikbalang has its downsides (and some would say it’s basically one big downside). If the Tikbalang gets hurt or the character ends the marriage (done simply by declaring it finished and spending a point of Willpower), the character gains a major frailty (*Changeling: The Lost*, p.

87) regardless of the individual’s Wyrd score — or whether the character even *has* a Wyrd score, if she’s mortal. The Storyteller should work with the player to decide this major frailty, whether it’s a Bane or a taboo. It could have to do with the Tikbalang: perhaps the Bane is that the character cannot be around married people or the taboo is that any time the character hears bells (not just wedding bells), she must take off all her clothes and put them back on again, inside out.

- Breaking off one spine from the back of the Tikbalang’s neck offers the character who holds the spine some advantage. Not only does the spine incur aggravated damage against the creature when held as a stabbing implement (+1), but even wielding it at the Tikbalang can cause it to gibber and wail and slink away. The character holding the spine gains +3 to any Intimidation rolls the player attempts against the Tikbalang.

RUMORS

“Mary O’Brine — that hag from Alcatraz? — has been seen coming up out of the water to greet some awful, bony, abortion-faced thing with a gold ring on its finger. And it matches the gold ring on her finger. Care to explain what’s going on there?”

Sometimes, changelings marry the Tikbalang because it affords them some edge: not only does it protect them from the Tikbalang but, as noted, the changeling can now command the Tikbalang to perform his or her wishes. But why is this, exactly? If one marries a Tikbalang or does some research in the distant libraries or Hedge caches of the True Fae, one might find a startling revelation about the Tikbalang’s origins: the Tikbalang was once a man whose bride was taken from him on their wedding night by a thieving Keeper. He followed it into the Thorns to try to reclaim her, but he got lost and could not find his way to her, or his way back. The Hedge...it changed him. He hunted and ate the meat of hobgoblins. He drank the nectar from many fruits. And over time, he became the Tikbalang. If only one could learn his name...

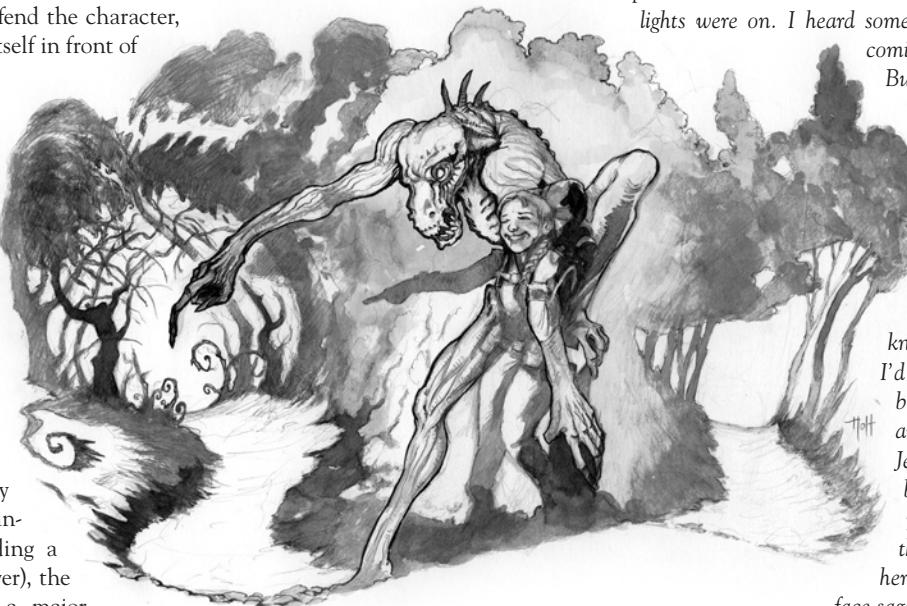
“I... saw this thing. I was walking home from the 7-Eleven on the corner. People were out because the bars had just closed. Street-lights were on. I heard somebody laughing. Music coming from somewhere.

But then... I heard a whisper. From an alleyway. Jesus. It was my mother. My mother! She told me she missed me. That she wanted to walk me home and she knew a shortcut. If only I’d come with her. She beckoned with open arms. A warm smile. Jesus Christ. Mom’s been dead for seven years now. I told the thing that looked like her to go to hell, and her face sagged — then I saw it. It was awful. Those yellow eyes. I can’t shake them.”

This guy’s experience is, sadly, not unique. The rumor among the changelings is that the Tikbalang is getting braver and braver — wandering much farther afield than the distant mountain passes or winding Hedge trods. No, the Tikbalang is out in the city. Amid people. But why? Further investigation might reveal that someone has the Tikbalang on a leash, whether by magic or by marriage. The truth is it’s one of the True Fae, using the Tikbalang as a way to march humans — or escaped changelings — back to the Hedge where the Keeper can capture or trick them back to Faerie.

“I don’t know what the fuck your game is, but it’s not funny. You think it’s a good idea to go airing the dirty laundry of the Prince’s councillors right in front of everyone? They are not happy with you, and I’m probably going to get caught in the crossfire. Thanks a lot. Don’t give me that shit, of course it was you! I was right there!”

The Tikbalang will never surrender its old games, but it might learn a new one. Given the complicated political structure of any supernatural society, things start shaking up in amusing ways when true things start being said aloud. While it might not have any particular control over its Mask, when you go into a place where only vampires or changelings or magi are supposed to be, people may see you as someone they expect. It may appear as



one of the characters, a mentor, a rival — the Tikbalang doesn't care. And in the process, it's going to cause a lot of trouble. Even if the impersonated party can prove her innocence, the exposed truths that the Tikbalang reflexively unearths can cause a lot of havoc. The trouble is, when can you tell that a rumor actually points to something not deliberately trying to poison your reputation? Who can expect a Tikbalang?

Story Hooks

- One of the characters wakes up and finds something under her pillow: a spine broken off a Tikbalang. But why? Is this a threat? Is it a useful weapon — a resource and a warning all at the same time? The character, with the help of her motley, will need to investigate. Who left it? What's the message? Tracking down the Tikbalang might be necessary, too — but that's not easy, nor is it particularly wise.

- The motley learns that an enemy — perhaps her Keeper, perhaps someone of an opposing Court — has gone to ground and is using the Tikbalang as a weapon. Which means this foe has quite likely married the damn monster (and the rain on that beautifully sunny day three weeks past confirms it). The Tikbalang is a master tracker, but if one could instead track the Tikbalang (effectively outshadowing the lurking creature), one could perhaps track it back to the motley's hidden adversary.

- The Tikbalang is out there. In the free-hold. Lurking in shadows, leading wayward fools into some very dangerous parts of the Hedge. Except that someone (maybe even one of the characters) discovers the truth: the Tikbalang was once human, once the groom whose bride was taken from him by the Gentry. They learn another key secret: his bride? She escaped from Faerie. And she lives in the city. Among them. Hell, they probably already *know her*. If only they could find out who it is, they might be able to use her to hurt — or even help — the Tikbalang. Can one redeem the strange hobgoblin? If they try hard enough, maybe they can.

THE TIKBALANG

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 3, Wits 3, Resolve 2

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 5, Stamina 4

Social Attributes: Presence 1, Manipulation 5, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Investigation 2

Physical Skills: Athletics (Foot Chase) 5, Brawl 3, Stealth (Plain Sight) 5, Survival (Tracking) 5

Social Skills: Intimidation 4, Subterfuge 4

Merits: Direction Sense, Fleet of Foot 3, Giant, Iron Stomach

Willpower: 4

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 7

Defense: 3

Speed: 15

Size: 6

Health: 10

Wyrds: 5

Glamour/Per Turn: 14/5

Armor: n/a

Weapons/Attacks

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Claw	1(L)	na	6	na

Fae Aspects

- **Imperfect Mimicry:** The Tikbalang spends a Glamour point to raise his Mask and seem human. This Mask comes replete with its own powers and goes beyond being simply a disguise: the Mask is designed to comfort, to deceive, to force a victim into false trust. The Tikbalang must succeed on a Manipulation + Wyrd roll that subtracts the target's Empathy score. Success on the roll allows the Tikbalang to add +3 to any Persuasion or Subterfuge rolls over the next scene. Failure indicates that the Mask is still "up," but the victim notices something "off" about the Tikbalang — a sheen of bone beneath an eyelid, or an extra joint in one of its fingers. A victim may attempt a Perception roll (in this case, Wits + Empathy) to actively look to see if anything is strange about the way the "person" is acting, but that roll is penalized by the Tikbalang's Wyrd score if the Tikbalang successfully used Imperfect Mimicry that turn. Note that the Tikbalang sometimes mimics someone the victim already knows, but the Tikbalang does not choose the identity. It's as if the creature pulls it from the target's own mind.

- **Stolen Knowledge:** The Tikbalang may spend a Glamour point and roll Wits + Wyrd, subtracting a victim's Composure score. Success indicates that the Tikbalang knows nearly everything about a victim: what's in his pockets, what his grades were in seventh-grade algebra, his mother's maiden name. It doesn't know his feelings, though — only information quantifiable as "data" applies.

THE CHILD KING: WILD SAM

Let the wild rumpus start!

Aliases: Wolf Boy, Peter, No-Shadow Sam, The Boy-King

BACKGROUND

Sam was the sort of kid who gets put on medication nowadays. He probably needed it. Sam was — and remains — hyperactive, easily distracted, abrasive, standoffish and downright contrary. Simply put, he's a brat. But he's a brat with the power of Arcadia behind him, a motley of changelings beside him, and entirely too much power in his Court. His rise to glory is interesting, and Wild Sam is a name on the lips of many a changeling across the world. To young Lost, he's a hero. To the older changelings, he's cause for great concern.

Sam was born in the early 1970s, and he had reached the tender age of 11 when the Gentry came for him. His Keeper was child-like in many ways, and just wanted a playmate. Sam was taken away to an experience of Faerie that other changelings would envy. Everything he wanted was provided. Every day was a grand adventure, and every night was a sleepover complete with sticky, sweet things roasted over fires and horrifying ghost stories.

Of course Sam cried for his parents, at first. But Faerie changes people. It changed Sam from a rambunctious and difficult but clever child into a living embodiment of the idea of childhood. Sam's development stopped at age 11, and so he never gained the higher reasoning functions he should have. He never really stopped being egocentric, and he sees the world in the stark, black-and-white ways that children often do. He probably could have stayed in Arcadia forever, but his Keeper, as the Others are wont to do, grew bored

and kicked him out. Wild Sam managed to call up a few memories of his life back on Earth and emerged from the Hedge in his own backyard, seven years to the day from the date of his abduction.

His Keeper hadn't bothered leaving behind a fetch, and so Sam's parents had always assumed he'd been abducted. All of the evidence pointed to him being gone for good. But Sam didn't know any of that; he only knew he was home. His mother was the only one in the house that night, and Sam banged on the door, demanding to be let in as though nothing had happened. His mother saw her son, unchanged after a seven-year absence, and sank to the floor, sobbing, her mind unable to accept what she saw.

Who knows what might have happened if a member of the Winter Court hadn't been near? Drawn by the grief that hung over the house, the changeling found Sam still beating on the door, and led him away. He explained that

Sam couldn't go home again, that the shock would kill his parents. He had no family now and he should get used to the idea that he would never see his loved ones again.

If the Spring Court had found Sam first, would he have become a different kind of changeling? Possibly, but it's impossible to say now. In his hunger for sorrow, that Winter Court changeling broke Sam's heart. Somewhere in Sam's soul, he made a decision — he would never grow up. If he grew up, he would have to face the guilt and sadness he felt over losing his family, but if he stayed a perpetual child, he would never have to feel such terrible realities. The changeling presented Sam to the local freehold, and Sam made quite an impression —



bold, brash and seemingly unfazed by his time in Arcadia. The Summer Court ruler made an overture to him on the spot, and Sam accepted with the fire that only a prepubescent boy can manage. As the assembled changelings watched, the Mantle of Summer settled on the boy's head, and they gasped at the fire in his eyes. "Behold," one whispered, "the Boy-King."

Names are funny things. Sometimes they stick. While no one's sure who first called Sam "Boy-King," the nickname had made the rounds within the month. His Mantle grew in power until he was the equal of the reigning Summer King, and when that changeling fell in battle with loyalist mercenaries the next season, Sam started giving orders. He rallied other child changelings to his side, and he made promises that seemed impossible to keep. No fetch would live while

Wild Sam's Motley

The name changes with each incarnation, "The Wild Boys," "Sam's Knights," "The Shadowless Kids": the names are always reflective of the types of changelings who comprise the motley. It happens sometimes that the motley is predominantly Darklings, and thus it takes on a spooky, melancholy bent. Once, it was five changelings: Sam, three Ogres and a Hunterheart. No enemy of the Summer Court was safe for months. Whatever the case, Sam always has new members swear the same oath: *I swear on my blood that I won't rat out the motley, I won't harm the motley, I won't steal from the motley, and I won't keep secrets from the motley. I will come to the aid of the motley whenever I am asked, but I know that if I'm ever really in trouble, I can ask the motley for help, too. I can leave the motley if I want, but if I do, I can't get back in. Wild Sam is the leader of the motley and always will be, and he can kick anyone out if he wants to.*

The pledge makes clear, obviously, that Sam is the undisputed leader and that he has complete control over the membership. Sometimes, changelings refuse to join under those conditions, but Sam, true to form, has never altered the oath. He's proud of it (it took him days to design, and for Sam, anything that holds his interest that long is impressive), and it's fairly watertight, as pledges go. The pledge has the usual mechanical benefits behind it; the exact Traits that it boosts vary by the other members.

he was king. No beast from the Hedge would terrorize the Lost. No Gentry would steal mortals during summers.

Was it because of his youth, or because of his passion that people followed him? Whichever the case, Sam delivered on those promises, and when autumn came, he slunk away like a boy returning to school. But the result was clear — during the long nights of fall, the frigid days of winter and the brisk, wet evenings of spring, everyone was *really* looking forward to summer.

It's been nearly 20 years and Sam hasn't aged a bit, physically or psychologically. Members of his motley do grow up, however, and Sam sometimes lets them go gracefully. Sometimes, though, he swears eternal enmity upon them. This treatment is reserved for those changelings he truly loves and thinks of as his best friends. He cannot bear to watch them change, and he cannot forgive them for growing up.

DESCRIPTION

Wild Sam is passionate and impulsive. He wants whatever he wants with every fiber of his being. He pursues everything he does with everything he has. Fortunately, though, he's easily distracted. If something keeps his interest, he won't rest until he has what he wants from it. If he finds out that a vampire is feeding from old people at a nursing home, well, that's just *not right*, and he'll call down the fury of the Summer Court on that bloodsucker. If he finds out that a teacher is giving out homework five nights a week, extra on Fridays, well, that's equally *not right*, and that teacher gets treated to the same fury.

Sam, obviously, has no sense of gradation, no sense of priority and no ability to delay gratification. He's not above using his considerable magical prowess to get his way. Other changelings have learned to live with it, just as they do when any powerful ruler abuses his power. It's just that Sam gets away with it a little more, because he's just a kid.

Like many children his age, Sam latches on to new experiences quickly. He loves meeting new people, especially beautiful women (he was just starting to get interested in girls when he was taken) and "cool" people of either gender. Changelings, as it happens, are often "cool," and no matter how many he meets, Sam always gazes in wonder at a kith or Contract he's never seen before. As such, Sam can be a great way to highlight some of the wonder in *Changeling: The Lost*. He is ever the child, and therefore always amazed.

Sam's Mask is that of a skinny, freckled 11-year-old. He has a multitude of scars on his hands and face, all from rough-and-tumble play, and his shoulder makes a weird clicking noise if he rolls it (a remnant of a soccer injury and one that he'll show off with the flimsiest pretext). His red hair falls loose and wild around his face, though sometimes an adult changeling cuts it for him. His eyes are blue, clear and intense, and he talks so fast that he stumbles over words.

Under the Mask, Sam looks much the same. His frame fills out a bit more, and his eyes gain a fire that makes adults

chuckle — clearly something is important to this kid (actually, *everything* is). Wild Sam doesn't cast a shadow and even those viewing his Mask notice this, though witnesses who can't see fae phenomena typically chalk it up to a trick of the light. If asked, Sam says his Keeper took his shadow and changes the subject.

The Mantle of Summer sits comfortably on Wild Sam. He always appears flushed and sweaty, as though he's been outside playing all day. His skin is hot to the touch, and being around him leaves others restless and craving sweets.

SECRETS

Sam knows more than he thinks he does. Other people talk around him as though he can't hear them, and changelings often forget that he's a king in the proper season. Sam doesn't remember political nuance and he's not great with non-literal language, but he does have a child's memory for dialogue and a habit of quoting people at inappropriate times.

Sam also knows about dozens of good hiding places, both in the Hedge and in the mortal world. He knows keys into the Hedge from all around the city, and he knows secrets about the mortal world culled from years of taking child changelings under his protection. He knows about pledges and oaths among the Lost — he forbids his child motley from keeping secrets from him (and, in fairness, he swears an identical oath to his friends). When summer rolls around, he always names an adult Summer Court member as his majordomo, and this position is actually a highly coveted one, because it puts the changeling in a position to learn much. That requires coaxing it out of Sam, of course, which in turn requires holding his interest on a topic he finds dull (politics). This is a truly Herculean task.

THE SUMMER CLUB

Perhaps Sam's greatest secret is the Summer Club, his immense Hollow in the Hedge. The Summer Club is part forest, part summer camp and part candy store. The trees all have just the right kind of knobby branches for climbing; the kitchen is stocked with cakes, pies, candies, milkshakes, chips, hot dogs and any other kind of food a kid could want. Hobgoblins are plentiful, friendly and soft, except for the slimy or disgusting ones good for frightening changelings of more girlish constitutions. Getting in only requires Sam's permission once, and then the changeling is welcome until Sam rescinds that permission. Unfortunately, if Sam throws a tantrum (and it happens occasionally), he often bars the Summer Club from everyone and hides out for days at a time.

The Amenities of the Summer Club, in addition to the foodstuffs and hobgoblin companions, include spontaneous campfires bursting to life in previously unseen clearings, sturdy vines that allow swinging from tree to tree and swimming holes where the water is always warm enough to swim, but cool enough to take off the summer heat. During the "off season," as it were, these Amenities become

appropriate to the time of year. In the fall, the trees bring forth crisp apples, some of which are pre-coated in caramel. In the winter, the place is blanketed with snow, but there's always a roaring fire and a mug of cocoa in the clubhouse. In the spring, the weather is temperate and warm rainstorms, complete with jagged lightning (which never strikes anything, of course), punctuate the birdsong.

Where did the Summer Club come from? Sam isn't sure, but he thinks his Keeper made it. If he thought about it, Wild Sam might come to the conclusion that his Keeper made it to keep Sam happy, even though he got bored with Sam. That's possible, but it's not really in character for the Fae to be that considerate. More likely, one of the doors out of the Summer Club leads to Faerie, and Sam's Keeper is just waiting for someone to catch his eye as a new playmate.

RUMORS

"That's Wild Sam. Don't let his youth fool you, though. He's got oaths with every King and Queen for miles around. The Blackbird Bishopric in the next town over swore to protect him, and he's got friends in every freehold from here to the coast. He might seem like your bratty little brother, but he's too well connected to be a total simp."

Wild Sam does have a lot of oaths, and a lot of friends. Whole noble orders taking oaths to protect him is perhaps a bit farfetched, but it is true that folks seem to have a soft spot for him. Sam turns on his friends frequently, but he doesn't do it in a cold, manipulative, calculated way. If he crosses someone, it's probably because that someone suggested that he wash his face or read a book or (worst of all!) go to school.

"He's a loyalist. Notice how he doesn't talk about his Keeper, but he talks about everything else, with no filter at all? That's because his Keeper was the perfect crush. Like your hot babysitter or teacher. He's still smitten, and he's trying to find a way to please her. She cursed him, though. That's why he never gets any older."

This rumor is persistent, but it's not true in the slightest. Wild Sam's Keeper was a young boy, like him. Sam does sometimes make mention of his Keeper, but the story tends to get muddled and mix in elements of Sam's human life; Sam talks about his mother, his brothers, etc. Unless, of course, Sam is referring to his Keeper's mother...

"The Boy-King is here to free us all, to usher in a unified kingdom of the Lost. He's the ultimate bridge-burner, destined to destroy the trods that lead to Faerie and stop the Gentry from taking people. When he comes of age, he'll first lead the Summer Court in a route of Arcadia and bring back all those who have been stolen, and then he will ride back to the mortal world, scorching the trods behind him. Of course, that won't happen until he grows up, and that won't happen until he accepts his destiny."

There are many rumors circulating through Lost society about why Wild Sam won't grow up. The story about his destiny is just one such rumor. Others state that he made some kind



of oath with Time itself, or that he already lived out his adult life in Faerie and is now “stuck” at age 11. When asked, Sam says he “decided not to grow up.” This answer doesn’t satisfy many changelings, but it’s the only one Sam’s ever given.

“Notice how he doesn’t cast a shadow? He says his Keeper stole it, but he’s just too embarrassed to admit the truth. When he got back from Faerie, he learned about fetches and how they can mess with shadows, and he got so scared of his own shadow that he had it removed. No, I don’t know how, but that’s not the point. The Boy-King is afraid of his own shadow!”

This rumor isn’t true, but it’s one of many about the loss of his shadow. A similar tale (which paints Sam in a more favorable light) says he tricked his fetch into attacking his shadow, rather than him, and killed it while its attention was on the shadow, but it tore the shadow away in its death throes.

Story Hooks

- Sam gets a crush on a female character. He pursues her relentlessly, bringing her presents and offering to slay beasts and undertake quests in her name. The character needs to be very, very careful, as Sam isn’t above swearing pledges on his true name to hunt down and kill an enemy of his intended, and his definition of “enemy” is loose. Getting him to back off, however, is just as difficult, since Sam is likely to take rejection poorly.

- One of Sam’s former motley approaches the characters and asks for their help. He left a token in the Summer Club, but he’s not allowed in anymore and Sam would surely smash the token if he knew where it was (they didn’t part on good terms). Can the characters get in and get the token without offending the Boy-King?

- If the troupe’s motley includes a young character, Sam might make an offer to join his merry band. Sam can be understanding about other obligations (at least, he *says* he’ll be understanding, though he doesn’t always remember what he’s said), and he’s always looking for more people to join him at the Summer Club. But Sam, like his Keeper, gets bored with playmates. And failing that, there’s always the stark inevitability of the future — everyone grows up, except Wild Sam.

WILD SAM

Seeming: Fairest

Kith: Playmate (see below)

Court: Summer

Entitlements: None

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 2, Wits 4, Resolve 1

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 4, Stamina 3

Social Attributes: Presence 5, Manipulation 2, Composure 2

Mental Skills: Computer 1, Crafts 2, Investigation 1,

Occult (Hedge) 2

Physical Skills: Athletics (Climbing) 3, Brawl 2, Firearms 1, Larceny 1, Stealth (Sneaking) 3, Survival 2, Weaponry 1

Social Skills: Animal Ken 3, Empathy (Children) 2, Expression 3, Intimidation 2, Persuasion 3, Socialize 1, Streetwise 1

Merits: Court Goodwill (Autumn) 2, Court Goodwill (Spring) 3, Court Goodwill (Winter) 1, Direction Sense, Fast Reflexes 2, Fleet of Foot 3, Inspiring, Iron Stomach, Hollow (Size 4, Amenities 5, Doors 3, Wards 4), Mantle (Summer) 5, Striking Looks 2

Willpower: 3

Clarity: 4

Virtue: Hope

Vice: Wrath

Initiative: 8 (with Fast Reflexes)

Defense: 4

Speed: 13 (with Fleet of Foot)*

Health: 7*

Wyrd: 4

Contracts: Dream •, Elements (fire) •••, Eternal Summer ••••, Fang and Talon (canines) •••, Fleeting Summer •••, Hearth ••, Vainglory •,

Pledges: Wild Sam swears oaths on a regular basis, but doesn’t create actual pledges as often. That said, he can have pledges of revenge, ensorcellment, love, loyalty, fealty and anything else the Storyteller requires.

Glamour/Per Turn: 13/4

*Sam is Size 4, and his Speech and Health are slightly reduced.

KITH: PLAYMATE

A changeling taken by a Keeper who just wants someone to play with might become a member of the Playmate kith. Their blessing is The Circle of Friends: the changeling gains a +2 to any teamwork roll when he is the primary actor. When he is a secondary actor, he can forgo making a roll to add dice to the primary actor’s roll and instead grant the primary actor 9-again (or 8-again, if the roll already has the 9-again benefit). See p. 134 of the *World of Darkness Rulebook* for more on teamwork.

THE ARTISAN OF POISONED DESIRES: YBALASHI

As Master commands, so shall it be.

Aliases: None

BACKGROUND

Among mad, twisting dunes of shining black crystal sand, over which hang three moons — one of gold, one of silver and one of bronze — do the desert nomads of Faerie tell this tale:

So long ago that time itself had not yet been born, the *ifrit* dwelt in cities of brass and flame and their power was great and terrible. They grew wise in strange magics and entertained themselves with the suffering of smaller, weaker things. When time came to be and humanity eventually became known to these cruel spirits of living flame, they looked with a hungry eye toward the frail, mortal creatures, eager to find some new sport with which to occupy their endless days and nights.

Ybalashi was a princess (or prince, perhaps?) of the *ifrit* and particularly cruel, even by their immortal reckoning. Crossing the farthest dunes and passing through vicious oases of thistles and barbs, she crossed into the human realm, seeking her pleasures in the torments of greedy merchants, vengeful maidens, curious children and others still. She would visit them in the small hours of the night and make available to them her services and her vast power, all to the end of granting the foremost desire of each. And, as was her way, she would heed the very letter of each wish, but twist it back upon itself in such a way as to bring abject ruin and despair to the wisher.

What follows is less well known to the tale-spinners of Arcadia and is, to them, as much myth and legend as their kind is to most mortals. The storysmiths say that Ybalashi came and went as she pleased from the human world, sowing pain and misery with such wild abandon that their broken dreams rained down like sweet nectar upon the desert sands and that strange, savage blooms sprouted wherever those shattered hopes fell. So great was Ybalashi's fame that it became known even among mortal chroniclers of the otherworldly, and a nameless wise man conspired to ensnare the vicious spirit in a web of her own making.

For long years, the scholar pondered every possible permutation of his wish, every dark end to which the *ifrit* might bend anything that he requested, and he perfected his word-craft in such ways as had never been seen before or since. When all was said and done, the scroll upon which the wise man's wish was written trailed from his hand to the floor and its intention was so tightly woven that none of the spirit's malice could possibly slip through the pattern of its threads. While he could not unmake the creature's evil entirely, it was possible to confine her and so curtail her power to work wickedness upon those ensnared by her seductive promises.

After that followed long years of pursuit, wherein the wise man followed a trail of devastated lives and the bitter leavings of wishes turned sour and spiteful. Here, he found the funerary procession of a prince who had hanged himself for the cost of

freedom from an unwanted betrothal. There, he deciphered the incoherent mutterings of a prostitute whose mind could not bear the weight of the price of her vengeance upon the man who had disfigured her. Still further along his bleak road, he took his supper with a brokenhearted father who learned only too late what had come of his longing for his son to return home from a faraway war. Each of Ybalashi's sins he studied within his mind and within his heart, taking the measure of the fae princess' monstrousness.

At last, among the ruins of a civilization long since fallen, the scholar found Ybalashi and, as was her way, she offered to grant unto him the foremost wish of his heart, an offer he readily accepted. When she asked him what it was he desired, the wise man unrolled his scroll and began to recite the command he had so painstakingly crafted. By his 10th word, Ybalashi's eyes went wide with rage and terror, for she knew then the mortal's intention but was forbidden by her nature either to interrupt or to refuse. Even as he continued to speak, the *ifrit* was compelled to fashion out of her magic a crystalline bottle and a stopper and to begin to pour the totality of her power and being into the vessel. She shrieked curses born of pain and fury, though the wise man listened to neither her maledictions nor her desperate pleas. Ybalashi offered to make the man a king, but still he read. She promised him a mountain of gold, but he did not desist. She told him she could make him immortal and like unto one of the *ifrit* in power, but he had no ear for her deceptions. And so it was that Ybalashi, the Artisan of Poisoned Desires, was captured by a mortal man. Since that time, the *ifrit*'s bottle has passed down through the ages, from owner to owner, enabling Ybalashi to destroy each master in turn with her own hopes and dreams.

DESCRIPTION

The vessel that contains the *ifrit* is a large, smooth, squat bottle cut from what looks to be a single piece of flawless, nearly opaque red-orange quartz, veined with gold. The stopper of the bottle is cut from a fire opal and, when it is first found, it is always sealed up with a strange, greasy, whitish-yellow wax that must be chiseled away with a sharp instrument, though misplaced blows don't seem to do any harm to the container itself.

The Artisan of Poisoned Desires tends to adopt a servile demeanor in her interactions with her current "master," though her natural arrogance shows through quite frequently. She bows and scrapes, to be sure, but her expressions and turns of phrase demonstrate her disdain for terrestrial creatures, whether mortal or changeling; her eyes convey worlds of condescension and casual disregard with a glance. Of course, all of this simply plays into Ybalashi's primary motivation, which is the ruin of everyone and everything for her own private amusement. She doesn't seem to derive any lasting pleasure from this cruelty, and neither does she particularly seem to despise others; if she were asked why she acts as she does and forced to give an honest answer, the *ifrit* would likely be struck dumb by confusion. Viciousness is her nature and

she cannot do anything other than give others what they most desire, in the hopes that they will be destroyed by it.

Despite this overweening pride and smugness, however, Ybalashi can — albeit rarely — be found in a better, more tranquil mood. Sometimes, when the wind blows just so, from the south — warm, dry and tinged with the aroma of exotic flowers — the *ifrit* grows calm and some have even seen the faintest hint of a smile curve her lips at such times. Things that remind her of home bring a measure of peace to Ybalashi's inhuman heart, and some few of her masters have, over the course of centuries, discerned this. Some used this knowledge as a tool with which to control her. Others, perhaps kinder at heart, indulged her more readily, allowing her to dance among the dunes of earthly deserts and to savor fruits plucked fresh from the trees of forgotten oases. All of them, however, she ruined in time, for gratitude is as alien to her as love, honor or mercy.

Ybalashi is a tall, slender, beautiful creature, elegantly androgynous in appearance, though leaning, ever so slightly, toward the feminine. Her skin has the look of buffed brass and is as soft and yielding to the touch as that of a newborn. Her irises gleam like bright, fire-lit opals and her thick, lustrous black hair falls, bone-straight, in tails and braids to a narrow waist. Ybalashi's limbs are long and graceful and her fingers swift and dexterous enough to snatch the wings off a fly in midair without harming any other part of the creature. The *ifrit*'s voice possesses what many have described as a husky, seductive, almost feline quality. Ybalashi is invariably garbed in colorful layers of translucent silk that reveal and conceal in exactly the proper ratio to best enflame the desires of the beholder.

SECRETS

In addition to a frailty that compels her to treat her present "master" with courtesy (even while she orchestrates his downfall), the Artisan of Poisoned Desires holds a number of secrets, but

none so closely as the one that can destroy her. While she may disregard a wish for her death, the *ifrit* can be slain by one willing to go to the greatest possible lengths. Even the nameless wise man lacked the insight necessary to realize her fatal weakness — or perhaps he was merely unable to summon up the courage needed to employ it. For countless ages, Ybalashi has guarded this knowledge, and none who has used her gifts has guessed it. The capricious and malicious Fae may be destroyed through the successive use of three particular wishes:

"I wish to win your hand in marriage."

Upon hearing this wish, Ybalashi must set a series of labors for her would-be suitor (whether male, female or otherwise; such distinctions are nearly meaningless to the Gentry). These tasks will certainly be Herculean in scope: fetching from the vines twisting about the very gates of

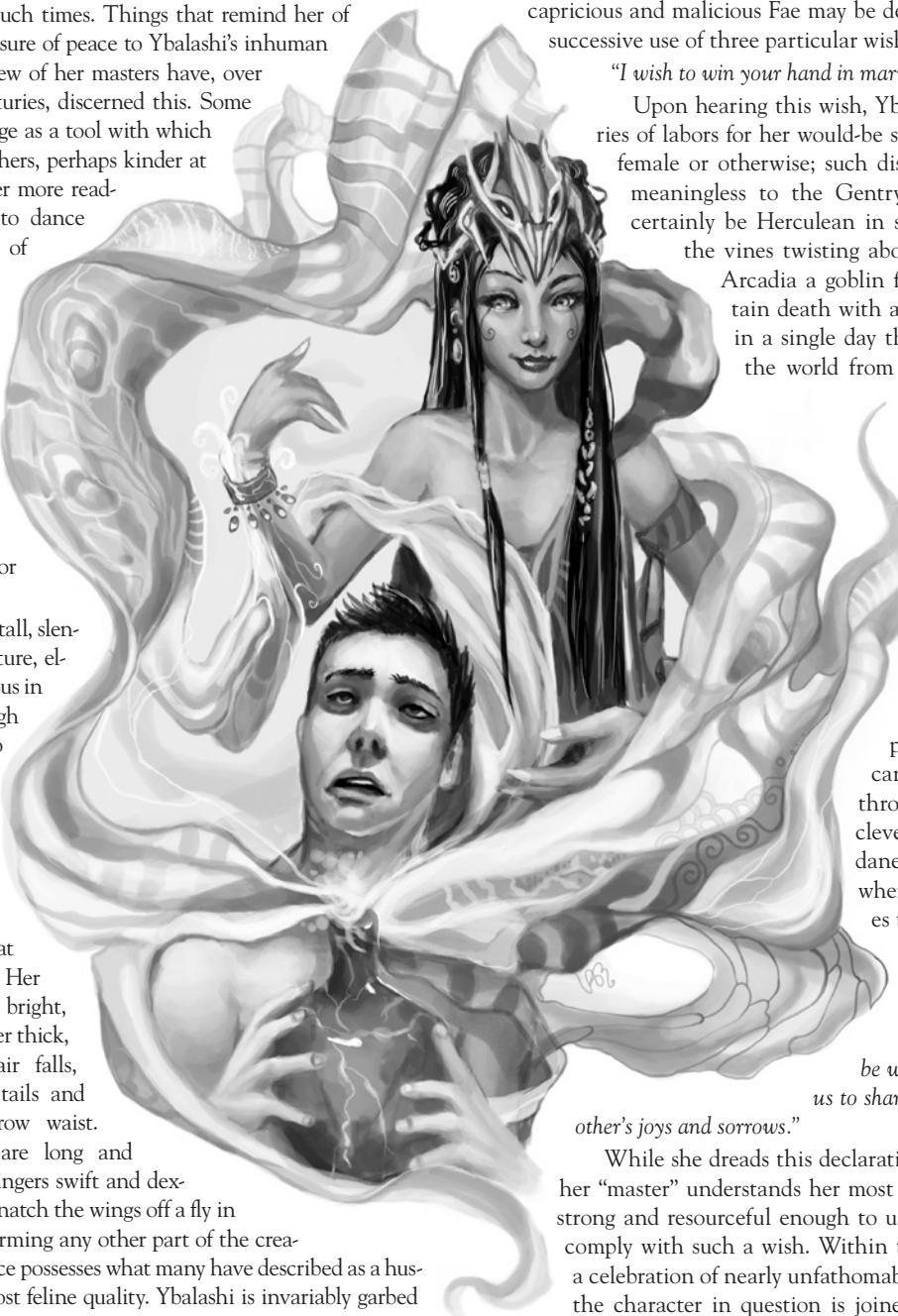
Arcadia a goblin fruit that brings certain death with a single taste; forging in a single day the sharpest sword in the world from steel alloyed out of elements that have never touched the Earth; and the like. These tasks will all be nigh impossible, but they must, ultimately, be able to be accomplished.

They might require supernatural capabilities, but many can also be surmounted through extraordinary cleverness or vast mundane resources. If and when a character manages to complete these labors, she must then utter the second of the three wishes:

"I wish for us to be wedded and for each of us to share an equal part of the other's joys and sorrows."

While she dreads this declaration (for it shows that her "master" understands her most telling frailty and is strong and resourceful enough to use it), Ybalashi must comply with such a wish. Within the Inmost Paradise, a celebration of nearly unfathomable scope unfolds and the character in question is joined to the Artisan of Poisoned Desires in a ceremony binding both on Earth and in Arcadia. Upon its completion, the character instinctively knows the wording of the final wish (which, as the character now shares in Ybalashi's power, need no longer be phrased as such):

"Freely and without reservation, I exchange places with you: I give unto you all that which makes me mortal and accept as my burden all that which makes you divine."



It is uncertain what happens after this final wish is uttered. Perhaps the Artisan of Poisoned Desires becomes human and her spouse becomes one of the True Fae. Or, maybe, the disparate natures of the two beings cancel one another out and they both perish. Likewise, it is uncertain what would happen if someone completed the first two steps of the process and then refused to undertake the third. The journey of the Three Final Wishes is unknown territory, and something to be viewed with as much trepidation and caution by the one who sets out upon it as by Ybalashi herself.

RUMORS

"You've heard about those 'genie in a bottle' stories, right? Everyone has. Well, I know one that's true. If you can find her, she'll grant all of your wishes. No shit! There's no 'three-wish limit' with this one, or anything like that. I've heard you've got to be careful how you wish, because anything that lives in a jar is probably pissed off and looking for some way to fuck with people, just to amuse herself, but all that means is that you've got to be clever with what you ask for. Nothing wrong with that. I figure if you're going to get everything you ever wanted, it probably pays to have a little bit of practice with staying on your toes and being smart about what you say."

The stories of Ybalashi's "generosity" — indeed, of her very existence — are hard to substantiate for most people. Still, when the *ifrit* draws near a place, on the hunt for a new "master," she is known to work her wiles and sow word of her coming (as well as her legend) into the shadows of society. She poisons the dreams of men with whispers of her bounty and inspires avaricious thoughts in those who have heard even the faintest rumor of her tale. Children who have known nothing of the Artisan of Poisoned Desires suddenly wish to hear the stories of genies and their lanterns, while collectors of arcane antiquities begin to hear rumblings of a unique artifact that has somehow made its way into the local Market. When Ybalashi wishes that her coming should be known, it is known, and she only rarely travels in secrecy; lives are harder to ruin when no one rushes to embrace destruction.

The people who look for Ybalashi range from paranoid conspiracy theorists, to haughty collectors, to thrill-seeking adventurers, to well-meaning yokels, to everything in between, and a lot of other folks besides. Some seek for innocent reasons, but most want to fulfill all of their wildest fantasies and only look at the fine print as it applies to *them*, rather than taking an interest in the hurts that such unchecked power might inflict upon the wider world. Of course, no one can escape the use of the *ifrit*'s "gifts" unscathed, but not for want of trying. By the time the rumor mill starts up about Ybalashi, the characters will almost certainly not be the only ones looking for her and, whether or not they want her power for themselves, they may need to make some hard choices (and take some unpleasant actions) to keep that power from falling into the hands of their enemies.

"The Gentry known as Ybalashi exists within a little pocket of Arcadia, inside her bottle. Apparently, the place is like some kind of horrible Faerie paradise, with weird palaces and gardens, and even hobgoblin slaves. I have no idea how all of it works, but there are supposed to be all kinds of bizarre treasures in there: rare goblin fruits, tokens and maybe even the secrets of unknown Contracts. I mean, we're talking about one of the Others who's walked in this world for centuries, on and off, gathering up lore and relics of her travels. If someone could find a way into that place — maybe even while she's

away from it — then who knows what kind of haul they could come back with?"

Of course, the only way to get into Ybalashi's bottle is to be her present "master" or to get in good with him, though many Lost who pursue the secrets and treasures of the Inmost Paradise have no idea of that, which is exactly how the Artisan of Poisoned Desires prefers things. Those who set out upon the *ifrit*'s trail can be sized up for their qualities as potential new "masters" and, if nothing else, their searches can be used to inspire paranoia in the vessel's current owner, causing him to make wishes that will hasten his destruction. If many can be made to suffer all at once, then so much the better! As to the plunder to be found in the Inmost Paradise, Ybalashi keeps only what serves to distract and seduce her "master," rather than anything that might be useful against her, so would-be robbers are, unfortunately, in for a rude surprise.

"Ybalashi is crueler by far to mortals than to changelings. Our kind, she merely torments with our own fondest desires, turning all that we wish for into a bitter poison that erodes peace, hope and sanity. She twists every wish until her 'master' is bleeding upon the jagged edges of his shattered dreams. No matter what one of the Lost asks for, Ybalashi finds a way to corrupt it, so that no good can come of the request and much harm is guaranteed to come to pass. What does she do to mortals that is so much worse, you ask? Simple, really: she does all the same things...and she sometimes finds a way to warp a wish so as to send one of them to Arcadia."

While Ybalashi's state prevents her from acting as a Keeper to changelings, she has certainly delivered more than her fair share of unwitting (and cruelly deceived) mortals into the eager hands of other True Fae. Again, she does this partly for future recompense — the Gentry are forced to obey strange customs of courtesy and compensation, after all — but mostly she does it because the suffering of others is entertaining to her. Often, the *ifrit* attempts to sell the mortal associates, friends and loved ones of her current "master" into Arcadian servitude in the process of fulfilling a wish, so as to most thoroughly destroy the poor wretch with sorrow, loss and guilt over the torments endured on account of his desires. While the true weight of this can only really be appreciated by changelings (who already know what it is to languish in the palaces and forests and deep chasms inhabited by the Others), Ybalashi is more than happy to offer a mortal "master" a glimpse of what has become of a best friend or cherished relative. On more than one occasion, she has even complied with demands to bring such people back, though they are, obviously, never again the same.

If you're running a chronicle with freshly escaped changelings, this rumor may also be investigated "in reverse"; as the characters begin to piece together the shattered remnants of their forgotten mortal lives, they realize they are all former friends, co-workers, lovers or other acquaintances of a single individual. Perhaps this person is old, gray and senile now, or maybe she's dead (and not necessarily of natural causes). Then again, maybe it's only been a couple of years and she's a broken vagrant, her life ruined by the Artisan of Poisoned Desires before Ybalashi set out for greener pastures.

In such a chronicle, the characters might want revenge upon the *ifrit* for the pain they've endured, while others might want to harness the True Fae's power by way of compensation for their suffering. Perhaps the characters can only get a lead on Ybalashi, rather than the mortal who (almost certainly inadvertently) sent

them to Arcadia, and they need to hunt down the Fae before they can find the woman they hold responsible for everything that's become of them. Ybalashi would be all too happy to grant such a wish and could certainly blaze a clear trail to their objective... for a very small price. If a few other mortals should disappear along the way... well, the characters seem to have survived Arcadia just fine, and what's a few more humans sold into the service of the Others?

Story Hooks

- A distant relative of one of the characters dies suddenly and wills her all of his possessions, including a strange, crystalline bottle, sealed with a strange, greasy wax. A note in the relative's handwriting (a perfect forgery, created by the *ifrit*) cautions her not to open the vessel, save in the direst of circumstances.

- Someone dear to one or more of the characters has been designated as an enemy by Ybalashi's current "master," or is, perhaps, simply in the path of said individual's present desire. If the characters have been following the *ifrit* and her "owner," they may find this out with enough time to formulate a strategy. Otherwise, their first indication that something is amiss might be a frantic phone call or email, or the sounds of screaming coming from the other side of an apartment door. Depending on how you want this to play out, the characters might have to race against Ybalashi or else have to somehow try to undo the damage the True Fae has inflicted.

- A mad changeling, his mind and soul broken by his long-ago durance, is on the trail of Ybalashi, having followed the *ifrit* from freehold to freehold over the course of years. He has only one thing on his mind: he intends to ask the Artisan of Poisoned Desires to turn him into one of the Gentry, so he can forget all his human pains and regrets and return to Arcadia, never again to hope, to dream or to imagine. It's uncertain as to whether such a thing is even *possible*, but if it is, it may well be within Ybalashi's power to do so. Regardless, the havoc that the *ifrit* could wreak in the pursuit of this insane wish is immense and it would surely entertain her enough to make the attempt worthwhile.

YBALASHI

Mental Attributes: Intelligence 6, Wits 7, Resolve 6

Physical Attributes: Strength 2, Dexterity 7, Stamina 5

Social Attributes: Presence 3, Manipulation 7, Composure 5

Mental Skills: Academics 6, Investigation 6, Occult (Middle Eastern Legends) 7, Politics (Arcadian) 5

Physical Skills: Athletics (Archery, Dancing) 6, Larceny 4, Stealth 6, Survival (Desert) 3, Weaponry 3

Social Skills: Expression (Legalese) 7, Intimidation (Subtle Threats) 4, Persuasion (Seduction) 6, Socialize 6, Subterfuge 6

Merits: Ambidextrous, Fast Reflexes 2, Language (Arabic, Classical Greek, Coptic, English, Hebrew, Latin, Persian, Sanskrit, Spanish, Turkish), Meditative Mind, Striking Looks 4

Willpower: 10

Virtue: Charity

Vice: Envy

Initiative: 14

Defense: 7

Speed: 14

Health: 10

Wyrd: 7

Contracts: Elements (Fire) ••; Hearth ••••; Mirror ••; Smoke ••

Glamour/Per Turn: 20/7

Armor: None

Weapons/Attacks:

Type	Damage	Range	Dice Pool	Special
Fist	0(B)	—	1	—

(At present, Ybalashi has no access to her customary armaments.)

Fae Aspects

- **Artisan of Poisoned Desires:** Ybalashi can make an individual's wishes come to pass, though the time required to do so and the cost of the action depends upon the complexity and grandiosity of a given wish. Asking for a fine bottle of whiskey might call for a single point of Glamour and no dice roll, causing the desired object to manifest in a puff of smoke and fire, while a wish for rule over the freehold may require an extended roll of Ybalashi's Manipulation + Wyrd, necessitating three points of Glamour per roll and a total of 20 successes (with a week between rolls) accumulated. The larger and more powerful the wish, the more baneful its fulfillment must inevitably be to Ybalashi's "master," whether through the specifics of the wish itself or through the cost of its acquisition. Naturally, some wishes are beyond the *ifrit*'s power ("Make me the President of the United States," for instance); in general, any wish that impacts — or potentially impacts — the world on a massive scale is outside the scope

of Ybalashi's abilities. If at all possible, however, she will use the time required in the fulfillment of a wish to get away from her prison and wander in both the mortal world and the Hedge (which is as close as she can now get to her homeland), unless directly ordered otherwise.

• **Immortal Flesh:** As one of the True Fae manifested in the mortal world, Ybalashi can shrug off some of the lesser slings and arrows of the mundane. Bashing damage does not affect her at all, unless delivered by a cold iron bludgeon. Cold-forged iron causes aggravated damage, should someone be skilled enough to strike the Artisan of Poisoned Desires with such.

• **Refuge of the Adamant Vessel:** As long as Ybalashi's bottle remains intact, she cannot die. As long as Ybalashi lives, the vessel is unbreakable. While she may be harmed — terribly so — she cannot be killed, save through the exceptional means outlined above. At will, Ybalashi can cause her vessel to move on to a new owner through means either mundane or unusual, riding the strands of destiny to an uncertain destination, though she usually will not do so until her present "master" has been destroyed through the double-edged fulfillment of his deepest yearnings.

• **Ruled by Passion:** The True Fae are entities almost embodied by their passions and vices, with higher morality and self-denial little more than a whim to them. For them, passion *is* virtue, and the denial of passion an affectation. Their supernaturally amoral nature is reflected in an inverted ability to gain Willpower. Ybalashi regains one Willpower point from indulging her Virtue, but refreshes her whole pool when satiating her Vice.

THE INMOST PARADISE

As Ybalashi quickly points out to her present "master," he and his guests can enter the *ifrit*'s opulent prison simply by his telling her he wishes to do so. (Alternatively, the vessel's owner can imprison enemies therein by wishing for such.)

While a seemingly endless realm of nightmarish beauty, the bottle that serves as Ybalashi's home in this world is, to her, a terrible, claustrophobic, *limited* sort of a place, something suitable for mortals or perhaps the Lost, but certainly not for one of the Gentry. For any creature other than Ybalashi, however, the Inmost Paradise is a vast playground of wonderful and terrible vistas. Numerous palaces are positioned in different landscapes: a fortress of brass and flame atop black basalt cliffs, for instance; a white marble villa sprawling across the entirety of an expansive oasis; or jagged towers rising up out of an endless salt flat, hewn from salt crystals each as tall as a skyscraper. At the "center" of this strange land — peopled by hobgoblin slaves and, perhaps, the occasional unfortunate condemned there by a former "master" — stands a garden of such overwhelming verdure as to make any earthly conservatory look like a patch of weeds by comparison.

Ybalashi's garden contains a wide variety of goblin fruits, some of which are common throughout the Hedge and some of which are of a rarer vintage. In addition to most of the varieties of goblin fruits and oddments listed in *Changeling: The Lost*, the *ifrit* has found, transplanted and cultivated samples of the following:

• **Bloodapple:** A dark crimson fruit, splotched with small patches of deep reddish purple, the bloodapple is shaped like a slightly knobby and irregular version of an ordinary apple. Its skin is slightly tough, but edible, concealing cloyingly sweet, pulpy, extremely juicy flesh the color of freshly spilled blood. A tight seed cluster at the center of the fruit forms something of a pit. Consuming a bloodapple changes one point of aggravated damage into one point of lethal damage. A changeling may only benefit from the use of one such fruit in a single scene, however.

• **Ghoul's Shroud:** A lacy, light gray moss that sprouts up from the cracks in rock faces and falls in hanging curtains, ghoul's shroud can be dried over a fire and ground into a meal that becomes a bland but sustaining porridge when added to hot water, but it must be consumed in its raw form — tough, fibrous and almost painfully tangy — for its more otherworldly qualities to take effect. For the remainder of any scene during which she eats raw ghoul's shroud, a changeling ignores any poison with a toxicity of less than 4. During this time, her eyes weep constantly and her throat is parched, and no amount of water will slake her thirst.

• **Serpent Gourd:** A long, narrow, shiny black gourd that grows high up, atop tangled clusters of woody vines bristling with slender, vicious thorns longer than a grown man's finger, apt to cause harm to anyone trying to pluck one of the fruits. When it is split open, the serpent gourd's ivory-white flesh comes apart in long, thin strands (hence its name). When boiled, the gourd's flesh has a slightly woody, savory flavor, but no special properties. When boiled with a fistful of the thorns from its vines, though, and strained, the fruit produces a thin, clear, syrupy elixir with a somewhat bitter flavor. For up to a day after consuming this brew, a changeling benefits from a +1 die bonus to all oneiromancy and oneiromachy pools. Note that the serpent gourd stubbornly resists all attempts to cultivate the fruit in any way that would make its harvest less perilous; under such circumstances, it simply will not grow.

• **Widowroot:** This oddment can be spotted by the single, small blue flower that sprouts from it, with seven petals and long, drooping leaves. The root itself usually rests two or three feet below the surface and is a writhing tangle of hard, woody stalks about the size and shape of a football. When an entire root is chopped up and smoked over glowing coals for a few hours, it sweats a tiny quantity of a clotted amber-colored sap. If this sap should enter the bloodstream (say, on the end of a bladed weapon), it erodes an individual's sense of conviction. Those thus affected lose two points of Willpower. A single root creates enough sap to coat a single weapon for a single strike and a person may only suffer from the effects of one dose of widowroot on any given day.

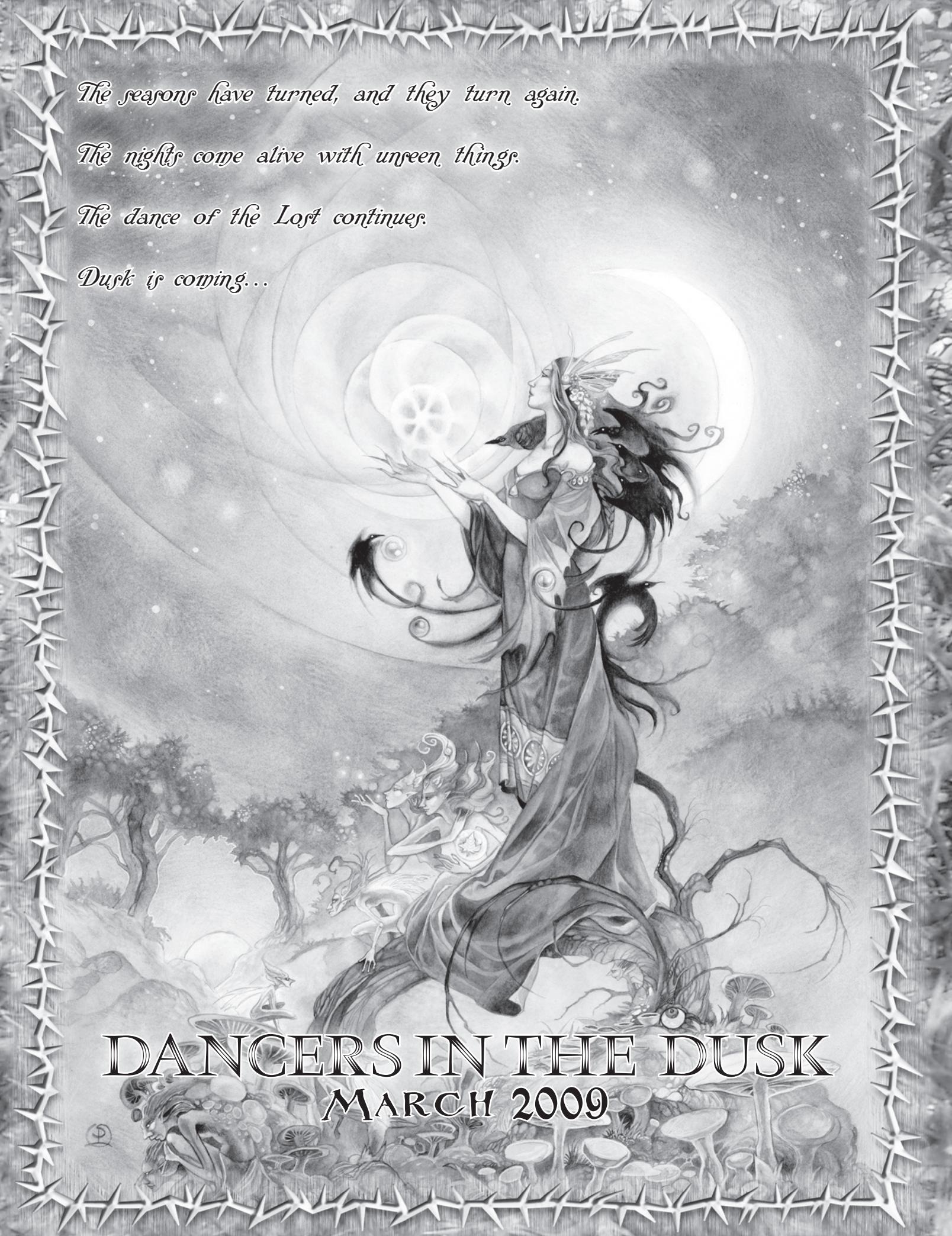
Naturally, frequent visits to the Inmost Paradise are apt to play havoc with a changeling's Clarity (or anyone's Morality, for that matter, irrespective of its particulars), as the *ifrit* offers ever more jaded pleasures for the amusement of her "master": goblin fruit wines refined beyond the craft of any mortal (or changeling); docile slave concubines of all descriptions upon which to slake his lusts; viciously entertaining lethal gladiatorial combat between hobgoblin warriors; the ability to change the landscape to his every whim, as though he were a god. It's power enough to drive anybody mad and, through it all, the Artisan of Poisoned Desires simply answers each new request with three words, "As Master commands."

The seasons have turned, and they turn again.

The nights come alive with unseen things.

The dance of the Lost continues.

Dusk is coming...



DANCERS IN THE DUSK

MARCH 2009





*Broken mirror,
Broken glass,
Make my wishes
Come to pass.*

*Skin and Bones
Come out to play,
Take my enemy
Far away.*

— NEIGHBORHOOD
CHILDREN'S RHYME

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