

Changeling: The Lost Preview, Part 1

Crisp Autumn Air

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Introduction

To go on means going from here, means finding me, losing me, vanishing and beginning again, a stranger first, then little by little the same as always...

Samuel Beckett, *The Unnamable*

There was always something you were missing. Something everybody *got* that you didn't, some metaphorical party to which everyone was invited but you. Someone offered you a glimpse of it, of that thing that would make you whole. So, you followed them.

But you were deceived. The wider world you had just a glimpse of was only a sliver of a vast landscape of madness and horror. For a while you kept going, yes. But eventually, you had to get out.

So, you did. You braved pain and isolation, and you changed your life again. You ran back over the line, rushing toward the place you came from, the memory of all that was good in it lighting your way.

And now you're back. Turns out your life kept going without you. In your absence, the familiar became strange. You're out of place again.

But you won't take it this time. You will make your place and you will defend it when your deceiver comes knocking. And if something is still missing, and there always seems to be, you will find it and you will make it part of you.

There will be dragons and there will be sirens and there will be all the armies of the otherworld sent to bring you back. But you will slay them and you will shun them and you will stand on the battlements of your fortress as they break against your walls of thorn and iron.

You will be free.

And none of that was a metaphor.

[PLEASE CENTER THESE ASTERISKS]

You know the stories. The hero leaves his village on a terrifying journey, or the waif finds her way through the cold, dark woods. In the end, they kill the giant or shove the witch in an oven.

But what happens next?

In **Changeling: The Lost**, you take on the role of an ordinary person who has seen the extraordinary. Lured or abducted by the alien Gentry, you have passed the gates and Hedges between our world and the vast fantastic.

In Arcadia, the Gentry changed you. They forged your flesh and sewed your bones, and they gave you a role to play. You were a lover or a servant or a monster. But it was never your story.

Having run from your Keeper and climbed your way back through the Hedge (and didn't the thorns bite more than they did going in?), you're back in the world of pizza and Facebook and nuclear anxiety.

Your eyes are open now. You can see that magic is not the sole province of Faerie. The world is alive with wonders most people never see...and rife with horrors that count on that unwariness.

It's all part of your life now. You take the good with the bad, the magic with the monstrosity, the beauty with the madness.

It's not always an easy story, not always a happy story. But now it's your story.

Setting

Changeling: The Lost is set in the Chronicles of Darkness, which portray a world like ours, but alive with supernatural wonder and terror. For millennia, the enigmatic Gentry (or True Fae) have abducted humans from this world and taken them to Arcadia, a fairyland where the Gentry's will shapes reality.

The abductees are changed into faerie creatures to play particular roles in the True Fae's fantasies; these roles are Seemings, which correspond to fairy-tale character archetypes like the big, bad wolf (Beast), the ice queen (Fairest), the miracle worker (Wizened), and so on. Changelings turn the forms and powers forced on them against their fae Keepers, and escape from Arcadia.

On the way back, each changeling had to cross the Hedge, a surreal land that separates our everyday world from Arcadia. Finally arriving back in the realm of humanity, most changelings resolve to reclaim their lives — or build new ones. They're Lost, and it's time to find themselves. That's where our story begins.

Changelings face many challenges. The True Fae may have replaced them with duplicates called Fetches, who have been living the Lost's life in their absence. They must often risk trips into the Hedge, which is full of bizarre creatures and dangerous temptations. And most terrifying of all are the True Fae's Huntsmen, heartless shapechangers sent to drag the Lost back to Arcadia.

But changelings have an advantage the Gentry will never fully understand: They are not alone. They band together in courts, communities that practice supernatural defenses against the True Fae. These courts, in turn, make up freeholds, local societies that provide and gather protection and resources to help their members. These communities can be rife with intrigue and riven with infighting...but in the end, those are fundamentally human behaviors which defy the Gentry in their own way.

In **Changeling**, you'll play someone who's had their whole life taken away, and who won't rest until they have it back — or make a better one. You'll face fears and uncover secrets, slay dragons, and bargain with goblins. You'll walk the roads between dreams and penetrate the maze that lies behind every mirror. You'll see the truth behind all things, and you will make it your own.

Themes

Like the fairy tales that inspire it, **Changeling: The Lost** can tell almost any sort of story, but the book you hold in your hands revolves around six contrasting themes.

Beauty + Agony

You have seen flowers with colors that simply don't exist in the everyday world, and you have felt their barbs rake across your skin. You have been to the very home of wonder, and you have found its rotten core.

Clarity + Madness

You see the truth behind the everyday. The fantastic creatures that walk our streets. The gates into otherworlds of silver and thorn. Yet you're in a vertigo, a sense that the world has been torn out from beneath you, and can never be restored.

Lost + Found

Your memories brought you home. The smell of popcorn at the theater, the sound of your son's laughter. But you're forever apart from them, cast across the gulf of years or replaced by something that's even better at being you.

An Introduction to Storytelling Games

Chances are, you know what a storytelling — or roleplaying — game is already. But we love meeting new people. So, if you're new here, let's talk about the basics.

In **Changeling**, you play out stories following a core cast of characters as they make their way in a world that's a mix of the everyday things we know and the fairy tales that permeate our pop culture. It's a lot like a TV drama, and individual gaming sessions (which generally run two to four hours) are like weekly episodes. Secrets will be revealed, relationships will be tested, and fears will be conquered.

Around two to five players take on the role of one cast member each. You'll make decisions for your character — when her best friend betrays her, you'll decide if she grieves or takes revenge. When supernatural beings ruin her day, you'll decide whether she runs, negotiates, or unleashes her faerie powers. Perhaps most importantly, you'll tell the story of her ongoing efforts to reestablish a place for herself on Earth.

One player, the Storyteller, is responsible for portraying characters who don't belong to specific players, and presenting fictional situations that challenge the other players' characters. Think of these as the supporting cast of our imagined TV series — both ongoing characters who help or oppose the core cast, and guest stars of the week who turn up to cause unique kinds of trouble.

As for challenging the player characters, it's the job of the Storyteller to come up with scenes where the players have to make decisions fraught with conflict and danger. The Storyteller narrates a situation, then the other players say how their characters respond. The most important question a Storyteller can ask is "What do you do now?"

When a character acts, the outcome of the action is determined by rolling a handful of dice. The basics are simple. You add a few numbers on your character sheet (a mini dossier) and roll that many dice. You'll find out whether your action works, or fails and gets your character into more trouble.

While players other than the Storyteller will generally be advocates for their characters' success, planning ways in which they can succeed, a lot of drama and fun comes from when things don't go well for the protagonists. Again, think of a television series...the most interesting episodes are often the ones where everything goes wrong for the characters until they find a way to turn it around. That said, the Storyteller should make sure characters have a chance to bounce back rather than constantly dumping suffering on them.

The Storyteller is responsible for...

...bringing the world to life through description.

...deciding where scenes start and what's going on.

- ...portraying characters who don't belong to other players.
- ...involving each player and her character in the ongoing story.
- ...putting players' characters in tough spots, encouraging interesting decisions.
- ...facilitating the actions players' characters take, while making sure there are always complications.
- ...making sure that poor dice rolls affect, but don't stop, the story.

The players are responsible for...

- ...creating their own individual characters as members of the cast.
- ...deciding what actions their characters take.
- ...making decisions that create drama and help keep the story moving.
- ...highlighting their characters' strengths and weaknesses.
- ...confronting the problems the Storyteller introduces.
- ...developing their characters' personalities and abilities over time, telling personal stories within the overall story of the game.

Everyone is responsible for...

- ...giving other players chances to highlight their characters' abilities and personal stories, whether that's by showing them at their strongest or weakest.
- ...making suggestions about the story and action, while keeping in mind the authority of players over their characters and the responsibility of the Storyteller to occasionally make trouble.

Media

We particularly recommend the following as sources of inspiration for the content and tone of your **Changeling** stories.

***Grimms' Fairy Tales*, collected by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm**

A collection of German folklore from the early 19th century, *Grimms'* is probably the source of most of the fairy tales you know from childhood. More recent printings reproduce the book's original edition, which was concerned less with teaching valuable lessons than with the stories themselves. These early tales are not only a bit darker and bloodier than later tellings, but also a good deal messier and more sprawling — in other words, more like life.

***Jessica Jones* (season 1), created by Melissa Rosenberg**

Private detective Jessica Jones was a superhero, until the obsessive and powerful Kilgrave made her a part of his story instead. Having escaped his clutches, she tries to start a new life while struggling to stay connected to her friends through the walls she's put up around herself, just in case he ever returns...and now he has. David Tennant's Kilgrave is a starkly terrifying example of what a Keeper can be like, and Jessica's desperation to reclaim her life after what amounts to a durance and protect others from the same fate shows exactly the kind of intensely personal drama a **Changeling** story can bring to bear. The way she wrangles with who she can possibly trust and how to deal with the trauma of her supernatural abuse — and more importantly, how

she *learns* to trust again and heal from her experiences — are perfect inspirations for the Wild Hunt the Lost deal with every day. This television series is a survivor story that touches on very real issues, so we recommend checking content warnings before you watch.

***Labyrinth*, directed by Jim Henson**

After her baby brother is abducted by the Goblin King, teenaged Sarah must traverse a bizarre world of tricks and traps to rescue him. David Bowie is unforgettable in the role of one of the True Fae, and the Labyrinth itself is an incredible depiction of what the Hedge might be like. Sarah's companions are good examples of the friendlier sort of hobgoblin.

***MirrorMask*, directed by Dave McKean**

Co-written with fantasy superstar Neil Gaiman, McKean's film tells the story of Helena, a young woman whose mother is hospitalized after they have an argument. Helena travels to an otherworld shaped by her grief and guilt, ruled over by a Queen of Shadows who has mistaken Helena for her own daughter. As she navigates the Land of Shadows, Helena realizes that the actual princess has taken her place in the mortal world and is living her life in a way she distinctly does not want...but which she laid the seeds for.

MirrorMask's fairyland is a great source of inspiration for the different worlds of **Changeling**, and the way it's shaped by Helena's own conflicts makes it a particularly good fit for the Hedge. The Queen of Shadows, alien and dangerous but driven by her own loss to try and fit Helena into her world, is a great example of a Keeper. Finally, the Princess of Shadows using Helena's life to act out their mutual angry side is a particularly poignant example of what a Fetch might do.

***Once Upon a Time*, created by Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz**

Often a bit more lighthearted than **Changeling** usually is, until it abruptly isn't, *Once Upon a Time* is a television series in which well-known stories from fairy tales and Disney films are true — and their characters labor under a grand curse that whisked them into the real world, creating the small town of Storybrooke, Maine. Aside from the generally appropriate fairy tale themes and archetypes with surprising darkness lurking underneath, it explores the messy human side of being a storybook character in the mortal world, and stresses the importance of healthy relationships when dealing with supernatural problems. The character of Rumplestiltskin (spelled this way in the show) is a prime example of a wheeling and dealing hobgoblin, constantly there to remind us: *All magic comes with a price*.

***Over the Garden Wall*, created by Patrick McHale**

Young brothers Wirt and Greg tumble from their everyday lives into a creepy wood filled with mysterious, unearthly creatures. They try to find a way back home while making friends and, little by little, helping the denizens of this strange place improve their lives. This animated mini-series from Cartoon Network takes place in the Unknown, an excellent inspiration for the Hedge with its eerie timelessness, its talking animals and all their surreal problems that need fixing, and the slow reveal of the beauty behind the madness. It features one of the True Fae, too, and several instances of what could easily be durances in progress.

Content Warning

Changeling: The Lost deals with heavy subject matter, which may hit close to home for players or readers. Chapter 7 includes safety techniques for play, to help prevent the exploration of painful themes from being dangerous for players.

Abuse and trauma are part of **Changeling**. Not everything in the game is a metaphor, and very little is direct allegory, but the stories of the Lost are very deliberately survivor stories. They're about reclaiming your life, about owning yourself and your perceptions, about moving beyond pain without simply blocking it out. We hope the game can help players express complicated feelings in a comparatively safe environment.

The game's use of "madness" also deserves mention. Deriving from literary criticism of works like *Jane Eyre*, **Changeling's** madness refers to the protagonists' refusal to allow either Faerie or mortality to dominate their perceptions. It reflects how they take ownership of their truth in the face of influences both human and otherwise telling them their perceptions (and even their memories) must conform to the standards of the powers around them. The tagline "beautiful madness" speaks to the unique and wonderful position of knowing yourself and your life for what you truly are.

[IT'D BE COOL IF THESE TWO LEXICONS COULD BE SET OFF IN THEIR OWN BLOCKS OR SOMETHING.]

Lexicon

Changeling: The Lost Terms

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

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

bargain: A kind of pledge that changelings make with mortals to hide from the Fae's agents; also **Bargain**, the large-scale pact a Lost court makes with a force of nature, like a season, to protect the court from the *Wild Hunt*.

Bastion: The contained dreamscape of an individual person.

Bedlam: An uncontrolled burst of emotions a changeling can inflict upon others, voluntarily or involuntarily.

Bridge-Burner: A changeling so consumed with hatred for the True Fae that they vow to destroy dreams, creativity, and anything else that could attract fae attention.

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

Clarity: The measure of a changeling's ability to own her perceptions and experiences. High Clarity allows her to use her *kenning*.

Contract: A mystical pact struck between the fae and cosmic forces, allowing the fae to call on supernatural powers.

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

Dreaming Roads: The paths through the Hedge that connect to humanity's dreams, along which the Bastions of individual dreams can be found.

dreamweaving: The art of gradually changing a dreamscape to learn secrets and influence the dreamer, performed in Bastions. One who engages in dreamweaving is performing *oneiromancy*.

durance: The ordeal shared by all changelings, during which they were held captive by the True Fae.

Echoes: The powers manifested by a *fetch*.

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

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

fae-touched: Mortals bound to specific changelings by promises made before their durances, who entered the Hedge to find their loved ones and escaped again with some fae power of their own.

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

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

forsworn: As *oathbreaker*.

frailty: A supernatural prohibition or weakness that fae creatures suffer; they gain more of them at higher *Wyrds*.

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

Gentry: A changeling euphemism for the True Fae.

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

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

Goblin Contract: An illicit Contract, typically easy to learn but with strings attached. Changelings who purchase these from hobgoblins incur *Goblin Debt*.

Goblin Debt: Mystical debt incurred by the use of Goblin Contracts or when making deals with hobgoblins, which can transform a person into a Hedge denizen or *Goblin Queen*.

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

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

Goblin Queen: A Hedge denizen so overwhelmed with *Goblin Debt* that they become even more entrenched, ruler of their own little patch of the Hedge.

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

Hedge ghosts: Remnants of those who have died in the Hedge, or wisps of emotions and dreams made manifest.

Hedgespinning: The art of shaping the Hedge to reveal new paths or trip up enemies.

hobgoblins: The fae creatures and denizens of the Hedge.

Hollow: A safe haven within the Hedge.

Huntsmen: Early inhabitants of Arcadia, who were twisted by the True Fae into hunters who chase down escaped changelings.

Icon: A piece of a changeling's soul left behind in the Hedge when she escaped from her durance. Changelings can recover Icons to reclaim memories and boost their Clarity.

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

kenning: The ability of changelings who haven't lost too much Clarity to sense the supernatural.

kith: A subcategory of seeming, representing more specific abilities and needs.

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

loyalist, True Loyalist: A True Loyalist is a changeling who retains hidden loyalties to her Keeper or to other True Fae, often acting as a mole in Lost society. Changelings often use the general term *loyalist* to refer to any changeling who doesn't join a court or freehold.

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

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

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

Needle: The core identity and approach a changeling presents to the world to assert herself and exercise her freedom.

oath: A kind of pledge that binds two or more fae beings together in mutual support or enmity.

oathbreaker: One who has broken a fae oath. This title may rightly be used until the person has made restitution, and for a year and a day after. Often used as an insult.

oneiromancy: The practice of lucid dreaming and dreamweaving.

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

Others: Another euphemism for the True Fae.

pledge: A sealing, oath, or bargain made by the fae, enforced by the *Wyrd*.

portaling: The ability of changelings to escape any bonds or prison, and slip easily between the Hedge and the mortal world.

privateer: A changeling who acts as a slaver or bounty hunter for the True Fae or Huntsmen in exchange for continued freedom.

Regalia: Six categories of Contracts for which changelings and Fae can have an affinity. For the True Fae, Regalia are also powerful tokens that represent their cosmic pacts.

sealing: A kind of pledge that holds someone to a promise or statement of intent.

seeming: A changeling's physical aspect, which reflects the role he played in Faerie and the talents he used to escape.

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

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

Thread: The core drive and purpose a changeling uses as a lifeline to stability and inner strength.

Title: One of a True Fae's roles and faces, which manifests to interact with lesser beings.

token: An object infused with a measure of fae power. Can be oath-forged, Hedge-forged, or stolen.

Touchstone: A person, place, or object that helps anchor a changeling to her Clarity.

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

Wild Hunt: The sum of all the Fae's constant efforts to reclaim escaped changelings; also used to describe a single gathering of Fae forces to besiege a freehold *en masse*.

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

Wyrd: The power of Faerie, the cosmic principle of exchange.

General Chronicles of Darkness Terms

8-again: A result of 8 or higher on any die is rerolled in an attempt to achieve more successes. A further result of 10 on a rerolled die is rolled yet again, over and over, until no more 10s are rolled.

9-again: A result of 9 or higher on any die is rerolled in an attempt to achieve more successes. A further result of 10 on a rerolled die is rolled yet again, over and over, until no more 10s are rolled.

10-again: A result of 10 on any die is rerolled in an attempt to achieve more successes. A further result of 10 on a rerolled die is rolled yet again, over and over, until no more 10s are rolled.

action: A task that takes all of a character's time and attention. The Storytelling system measures instant actions (one to three seconds, taking place within a single turn) and extended actions, taking longer (duration determined by the Storyteller). Also, there are reflexive actions, which take no time and do not prevent a character from performing another action within a turn, and contested actions, in which two or more characters compete in a task or for a single goal.

advantage: A character trait such as Health or Willpower that usually represents abilities derived from other traits. Advantages are measured in dots and sometimes in points.

aggravated (damage): A damage point that inflicts a grievous or supernatural wound. Vampires suffer aggravated damage from fire; werewolves suffer it from silver. Mortals might suffer aggravated damage from a dire supernatural power such as a lightning bolt summoned from the sky by a witch. Aggravated wounds normally heal at a rate of one point per week.

Aspiration: One of a player's goals for her character. An Aspiration can be something the character seeks out, or something the player wants to see happen to the character.

Attribute: A character trait representing innate capabilities: Mental, Physical, and Social. An Attribute is added to a Skill (or another Attribute in certain cases) to determine your basic dice pool for an action.

bashing (damage): A damage point that inflicts a non-life-threatening wound. Bashing wounds normally heal at a rate of one point per 15 minutes.

Beat: A point gained for performing certain actions. Five Beats becomes an Experience, which can then be used to purchase new traits, such as Attributes, Skills, Merits, or supernatural powers.

breaking point: A trigger that causes a player to have to check for losing Integrity, Humanity, or a similar trait.

chance roll: Whenever modifiers reduce your dice pool to zero or fewer dice, you may make a chance roll on a single die. Unlike a normal dice roll, a chance roll succeeds only on a result of 10. Worse, a result of 1 causes a dramatic failure.

close combat: Attacks that involve hand-to-hand or weapon fighting. Such attacks use the Strength Attribute for their dice pools. Characters gain their Defense against close-combat attacks.

Condition: An ongoing effect, which may be physical, mental, or supernatural. For example, a character might be Guilty or Mesmerized. Usually, a Condition modifies a character's dice pools for certain actions. Players are rewarded with Beats when they act on or resolve (end) a Condition.

contested action: Two or more characters compete in a task or for a single goal. The one who gets the most successes wins. Contested actions can be instant or extended actions.

damage: The points inflicted against a character's Health or an object's Structure, rated as bashing, lethal, or aggravated. One point of damage inflicts one wound.

Defense: An advantage trait determined by taking the lowest of Dexterity or Wits and adding Athletics. Characters can penalize a close-combat opponent's accuracy by subtracting their Defense from his dice pool.

dice: The Storytelling system uses 10-sided dice to represent the element of chance. Dice are collected to form a character's dice pool for an action.

dice pool: The number of dice rolled to determine failure or success (and the degree of success) for a character's action. Dice pools are usually determined by adding an Attribute to a Skill, plus any relevant equipment and/or modifiers.

dot: The incremental measurement of a permanent trait. Most traits range from 1 to 5 dots, but some (such as Willpower) range from 1 to 10, and others (Health) can go higher.

dramatic failure: A result of 1 on a chance roll causes a dramatic failure, a catastrophe worse than a normal failure. The character's gun might jam or he might wind up shooting a friend by accident. The Storyteller determines and describes the result. A player can also turn a failure into a dramatic failure voluntarily in order to gain a Beat.

Durability: A trait representing an object's hardness, based on the material from which it is made (wood has less Durability than metal). Durability is measured in dots. An attack's damage must exceed Durability before the object is harmed.

equipment: Characters can improve their chances of succeeding in a task by using the right equipment. This benefit is represented by modifiers to the dice pool, depending on the equipment used and its quality.

exceptional success: Whenever five or more successes are rolled, the character achieves an exceptional success. This achievement sometimes provides an extra perk over and above the effect of having multiple successes. For example, a character who gains five successes on a Fast-Talking roll might allay the target's suspicions enough that he believes anything the character says for the remaining scene.

Experiences: A collection of five Beats, used to purchase new traits or to boost the dots of existing traits.

extended action: A task that takes time to accomplish. Players roll to accumulate successes during phases of the task, succeeding once they have acquired the needed total.

failure: A dice roll that yields no successes is a failure — the character does not succeed at his task.

Initiative: An advantage trait representing the character's ability to respond to sudden surprise, determined by adding Dexterity + Composure. A character's Initiative helps him get a high standing in the Initiative roster.

instant action: A task that takes place within a single turn. A character can perform only one instant action per turn, unless he has a Merit or power that lets him do otherwise.

Integrity: A trait representing a character's mental stability.

Merit: A character trait representing enhancements or elements of a character's background, such as his allies or influence. Merits are measured in dots, but are not always used to determine dice pools. Instead, they represent increasing degrees of quality or quantity concerning their subject.

modifiers: Dice pools are often modified by a number of factors, from bonuses (adding dice) for equipment or ideal conditions to penalties (subtracting dice) for poor conditions.

point: A trait expended to gain certain effects, such as a Willpower point or a measurement of damage or Health. The amount of points available to spend is equal to the parent trait's dots. Spent points are regained over time or through certain actions.

ranged combat: An attack that sends a projectile of some sort at a target, whether it's a bullet from a gun or a knife from a hand. Such attacks use the Dexterity Attribute for their dice pools. Characters' Defense cannot normally be used against firearm attacks, although targets can penalize an opponent's accuracy by going prone or taking cover.

reflexive action: An instinctual task that takes no appreciable time, such as reacting to surprise or noticing something out of the corner of your eye. Performing a reflexive action does not prevent a character from performing another action within a turn.

Resistance: Characters can resist others' attempts to socially sway them, physically grapple them, or even mentally dominate them. Whenever applying such resistance requires a character's full attention, it is performed as a contested action, but more often it is a reflexive action, allowing the target to also perform an action that turn.

scene: A division of time based on drama, such as the end of one plot point and the beginning of another. Whenever a character leaves a location where a dramatic event occurred, or when a combat ends, the current scene usually ends and the next one begins.

Skill: A character trait representing learned ability or knowledge. Added to an Attribute to determine a character's basic dice pool for a task.

Specialty: An area of Skill expertise in which a character excels. Whenever a Specialty applies to a character's task, one die is added to his player's dice pool. There's no limit to the number of Specialties you can assign to a single Skill.

Storyteller: The "director" or "editor" of the interactive story told by the players. The Storyteller creates the plot and roleplays the characters, both allies and villains, with whom the players' characters interact.

success: Each die that rolls an 8, 9, or 10 yields one success. (Exception: A chance roll must produce a 10 to succeed.) In an instant action, a player must roll at least one success for his character to accomplish a task. In an extended action, the number of successes required (accumulated over a series of rolls) depends on the task. In an attack roll, each success produces one point of damage.

trait: An element on the character sheet. Traits include Attributes, Skills, Merits, advantages, anchors, supernatural powers, and more.

turn: A three-second period of time. Instant actions are observed in turns. Combat (a series of instant actions) is observed in consecutive turns as each combatant tries to overcome opponents.

wound: A marked Health point, denoting an injury from damage.

[FICTION]

It Happened to Me, Part II

John:

It always starts the same way. Everyone already fleeing the burning building, lightning striking over and over, driving out the darkness in the night sky. Sometimes I'm standing amid the fleeing people, counting them as they turn to monsters before my eyes. Sometimes I'm running with them, my limbs stretching out in front of me, my hands disappearing into mist. The words of my scream catching in my throat and dissolving into a toneless sigh. Sometimes I'm on the roof, directing a man hurling lightning bolts, showing him who to strike next. I'm dreaming it a couple of times a night now. Cycling through the possibilities, faster and faster.

When I was little, I knew that I saw things in my head. That I remembered them before they happened. People getting hurt. People dying. Once, I tried to warn my aunt that her cat was going to be hit by a car, but she just blamed me when it happened. I didn't tell anyone after that, but the seeing never stopped. I tried to ignore the memories when I had them, and more often than not they were so disorienting that it was easy to just call them dreams. This doesn't feel like a dream anymore, and it's never come on so strong. Never carried so far into waking. I can smell the rain already. Petrichor wafting up from dry concrete. Cold droplets on my skin under a clear sky.

I feel like I'm being asked to pick a side, but I don't know which is which, only that not picking is just as dangerous. Something bad is going to happen, and if I'm not careful, it might be my fault. And I don't think I have much more time. I have to tell someone soon. So I went to a coffee shop.

Don't laugh. I couldn't think of anyone I knew who would believe me. A stranger seemed almost more likely to take me seriously. So I sat outside, in a chair that was going to be washed away, watching rain fall into my cup, waiting for the rumble that meant it was finally too late. The tide pools just across the street were almost dry. The water all drawn back to the bay and the sea, exposing the barnacles and tiny plants that burrow into the rocks. The cold sea water that will rush over this rocky ledge won't dislodge them, but the wrecked wood that it carries back will.

Her hair is a short black spray, and I know she's going to live, so she seems like a good choice.

I recognized her frightened face from futures where I ran or sometimes stood alongside her. Wendy. Wendy who ran. Just once, she and I ran. Pulling along two children that wait to go back. The littlest flies out of my arms, struck by the same bolt that hits me. Not that path, hopefully. Her children and I would die together. She flinched when I told her about the dreams. About the tide coming in. About the apartment building. About the monsters.

"They're not monsters." She almost hissed. And as she shook, feathers fell from her hair.

"They're just people. Just kids." She wanted to go back right that moment. To get her children. To sound an alarm. To do something.

Hearing her hot breath in my skin, I pulled at the hem of her cuff. "Please." I whispered over the screaming. "Please listen."

I told her about the sea. I told her about the man with electricity in his heart, whose skin was too tight for his bones. The hungry shadows he pushed us toward, with their silver nets sifting us off the ground like pearls in sand. Once I opened my mouth, I couldn't close it. I told her about everything. Even the cat. She listened to me quietly, asking gentle journalist questions as the wind hissed and the rain started pricking our skin. Looking for facts, some seed buried in my memory than we could start from. Then she told me about her children. About her new home.

About being surprised by love. And about what we needed to do. Because it was too late to run now, we had to fight or burn.

Or that's what she said, at least. I felt wrung dry. Like there was nothing left inside of me now that I had delivered this message to her. But she dragged me along, and I wasn't in any position to argue with her. If I didn't come along, she wouldn't succeed, and it would be my fault. If I did, it still might, but it would at least have been a choice. The rain finally felt as strong on the outside of my skin as it did on the inside. I said goodbye to the chair. And then she took me home.

I watched our reflections in the windows. Each failure splashed across our faces, bathed in firelight. How to thread the needle? Confront the man with wrath in his hands, and everyone dies faster. No survivors, neither red hind nor spring hare doe. Let him alone, and many flee, but none are saved. She had a plan, but it wouldn't stay under my skin. All I could see were the mistakes we might make. What will happen if I don't convince him. If she can't empty the lobby. If a black-haired woman can't lead the right people to the right roof. If there are three children instead of five. If the blonde in the pink skirt doesn't accept an invitation or trust a strange hand. So many ways for it all to go wrong. But after that it stops — mid-gesture, mid-thought.

The streetlights finally died, and we drove the last mile in darkness, by hope and by memory, amid strange growls and the suggestion of hands against our windows. The parking lot was flooded with people and the sea. Murky water rushed up out of storm drains, full of small gray fish that gathered where our feet fell, dragging our feet back out toward the blackness beyond. She passed through the lobby lights, cast onto the puddles below our feet. When she opened the door, I trailed after her like a little gray fish.

Inside, the scene had already begun. Three of Wendy's kids were already quietly ushering people out — two teenagers and a baby, waifish and covered in silvery feathers. A man with no eyes, who looked like he'd been crying. Two ghostly children trailing after a woman with short purple hair and a cow's tail peeking out below her skirt. But two children were missing. The blonde and black-haired women were close enough to kiss, all three whispering when they wanted to be shouting. But their arms were pulled tight and angry against their bodies.

"Well, isn't this a sweet tête-à-tête."

Lightning stood among them, skin too tight for his bones, crackling around the edges of my vision. And I was blind.

[END FICTION]

[FICTION]

It Happened to Me, Part I

Aimee:

So he's me, kind of. Better job, better relationship with my — our, mom. Takes selfies and posts photos of his matcha lattes and his wife and their million adopted babies. Gross.

He's...not married to *Katrina*, though. And I sort of thought we would be. I mean, I followed the scent of her hair back out of Arcadia. Rolled it around in my mouth like a peppermint as I ran, brisk and clean and full of unkept promises. When I stood in the long saltgrass by the bay to catch my breath on solid ground, *real* ground, the first thing I did was try to pick its scent up again. I thought I might have missed some dates, I didn't think I'd be missing years. Well, *he* didn't miss those years. He sews his button eyes back on every morning, thinking they're eyeglasses, and kisses some other woman. She's cute, I guess, but doesn't seem like our type. Or maybe just not mine. It's getting unhealthy, all this watching them go to work and scrolling through his Instagram.

And it's not like I have to kill him, right? I could just let him keep a life I don't even want, mothers and mothers-in-law and an associate at a nice anonymous firm. God, I was so basic. But he's not even friends with Katrina anymore. *Her* life, maybe I could slip back into.

That was the logic that carried me to the doorstep of her apartment complex, loitering in the lobby, waiting for her to come downstairs. Her voice was cautious and slow, like the words were crawling around a feeling too big to speak. Anger, probably. But she said she'd come downstairs. I rocked forward and back on the balls of my feet, squeaking in my wet shoes. I'd always been a little twitchy, but now I can't bear to be still. I spent a lot of time running, my first weeks back. The continuity helped, even if it felt a little perverse.

The elevator doors opened, and I released a breath I hadn't even realized I was holding. She *came* and she was so very the same that I blinked a little. Aging gracefully, I guess. A little sprinkle of white in her wiry black hair, long and full around her head. A belted dress I bought her at a street fair 10 years ago. No shoes. There was a wild look in her eyes that felt familiar, but before I could really think about it I was calling her name. It sounded high and sharp in the empty hall. Too different, even though I've been practicing.

"Ja...Aimee?" She started to touch my face, and checked herself. Flattened out the betrayed look on her face. "What are you going by these days?"

My heart twisted. "Aimee, I guess. That's how my roommates know me."

"What about Lucy?" She looked increasingly less confused.

Lucy? *Oh*. "It's...complicated. She doesn't know."

Katrina's eyes flickered past me and she snorted. "Girl, you're not complicated. I see you."

My vision went dark around the edges. I took a step backwards, then too many forward, until we were breathing the same air. "What do you see?"

She tipped my head up to look at her, and this time I actually did. A second eyelid snapped over her eye and back again. Eyes so deep a black I almost fell into them. I did fall onto her. And I felt the soft scaling on her shoulders. *Oh, Katrina*.

"I didn't...did you fall down the well after me? I never thought. Was that *you* yelling back to me? Oh god, I left you there. I'm so sorry, I thought it was a trick." Words were falling out of my mouth, I might have been crying. "I would have gone back, I would have gone back, I'm so sorry."

"Shh. If you can even think about putting a foot back into the Hedge without screaming, I'll accept that as an apology. It's been a minute, Aimee. Where've you been?"

She was smiling, a little. Not enough to get myself invited back upstairs, but enough to keep talking. "Oh, over the river and through the woods. I'm pretty sure my grandparents are dead now, though."

She rolled her eyes. "Not what I meant. Why hit me up now?"

"Oh. Well. I've actually only been back a couple of weeks? And if I'm being completely honest, I spent most of that time following...him to work and hanging out outside your building wondering if I should call you." Then I had an awful realization. "Wait. I found you under your real name. Did they...did they not replace you too?"

Katrina shivered. Now that I was looking, the scales rippled too. Like mica and cobras and the inside of shells. "She was made of glass and she wanted to fight about it."

"What happened?"

"I cracked her open and feathers poured out."

"I haven't. I mean, I didn't. I don't want to. Jesus, he has *kids*. He's a *he*."

"Yeah, I know. I went looking for you after I got back, too. I can see why you might want to leave well enough alone. Not like you wanted to be him before."

"Well, Mom seems happy with him, and...if Lucy can't tell, maybe it would be kinder to let her keep him? It seems cruel to just pop into her life and be like 'Hey, your husband is imaginary and I have to destroy him so I can have a name I don't want back. So how do you feel about a divorce and full custody of all these kids?' I *did* joke a lot about blowing up my life."

Katrina pulled on a curl. "Well, that's not quite fair to her, either. Like, what if...she does know? Or figured some piece of it out on her own, but didn't know what to do about it? She'd...she'd probably think she was going crazy, and only we would know different."

"Hell, I don't know what to do with my *own* life. I definitely don't have any words of wisdom to fill the pages of 'So Your Husband's a Fetch: Living with the Consequences of Fae Jerks.' She'd be better off talking to you."

Katrina winced. And even as the door creaked open, I knew. "She was going to talk to you."

"Aimee, we have a history. If she was going to call someone, it would have been me. I think you should talk to her, too, but she didn't come looking for you."

Of course they knew each other. I knew that. I must have known that. They had lives that kept happening while I was gone. People that they were to each other, through...James. Things about him they shared that I'd only know secondhand. I suddenly felt like an eavesdropper in a conversation about myself. A lacuna in their lives that was unwelcomely filled. Lucy was looking at me like her life might go up in smoke if I blinked. And she wasn't wrong.

The rain outside picked up. Katrina's eyes flickered to my left half a second before mine followed. It was like someone had run a finger up the length of my spine, at first just a nervous tickle, but getting insistent and angry.

I had not properly considered the possibility that escaping Arcadia wouldn't be enough to keep me safe.

[END FICTION]

Chapter One: The Face in the Mirror

[NO OPENING QUOTE SINCE THIS CHAPTER IS SPLAT AFTER SPLAT. I'VE PROVIDED SHORT INTROS TO EACH BIT, BECAUSE WE HAD THEM IN VAMPIRE, BUT IF THOSE DON'T FIT INTO THE LAYOUT, LET ME KNOW.]

[INTRO TEXT TO THE CHAPTER]

You know us by the tales you tell to children. Should they fail to heed, the Fair Ones will steal them away in the night. We were those children once. We were Hansel and Gretel whose breadcrumbs turned to ash, and we gorged ourselves on the sweetest lies and they rotted our dreams. We played our roles and spoke our lines, and our costumes became our seemings and kiths, our second skins. But we won't be your bedtime story anymore. Now we wear those skins like armor and build our own briar walls, our courts, to prick our Keepers' long fingers and bloody the merciless Huntsmen's eyes. And we'll live defiantly ever after.

[INTRO TEXT TO THE SEEMINGS]

Run, they said, and hush. Burn, they told us. Freeze and whisper. Smile. Rend apart and build anew. And above all, forget. We forgot, for a time, and we supped on enchantment, and the taste was honey laced with blight. Our captors remade us in their image, or in forms befitting our dreadful tasks. In thunder-dreams and maypole songs we heard the calling of home, and though our forms were new, old memories stirred. With sharp eye and slim shadow, with bright flame and keening cry, with clenched fist and clever ruse, we ran and did not look back.

But in the mirror now our breathtaking scars remain, the marks of Faerie that remind us: We'll never be as once we were. Never again will we be innocent or human. Never again will we daydream in drab sepia or know the pallid touch of ennui.

And never again will we be powerless.

Our transformations have made us more. Different, yes, and strange. But we aren't alone in our new seemings. We may have lost ourselves, but we have found each other, and in that we see what we have become.

Beast

A tale of abandon.

Don't quote your rules at me, I don't need 'em. Frankly, neither do you.

His earthy scent, his arresting gaze, his rough-edged grace. You never do this, but just this once, you take him home. In the giddy rush of it, of him, you feel alive. Morning comes like a lazy blush, and watching him sleep, you know you'll do this again.

Once upon a time, a wild creature lived in a wild land. It had food to eat, shelter from the elements, and confidence that nothing would ever prey upon it. One day, it fell into a hunter's trap, and for the first time knew fear. A morsel of food came along, with a sharp fang of metal that brought pain. Another meal carried a pane of silvered glass. In the glass, the creature saw itself and knew the truth: it was a dread monster laid low, and its prey had become the predators. Its heart was cowed. Despairing, it submitted to a cage's bars and a whip's lash. It begged for food and pleased its masters to earn shelter. The next time it saw itself in the glass, it understood

the cruel joke of its false freedom, and the crueler one it now endured. Its savage heart pumped human courage and forgotten wisdom through its veins. With that, the man who was a wild creature devoured his masters whole with his mighty jaws, and set out to keep vigilant watch for the courts of the Lost.

The Beast is as clever as he is wary, as fleet of foot as he is keen of eye. When he wants something, he takes it. When he feels an urge, he satisfies it. He knows that life doesn't have to be as complicated as people make it. All he has to worry about is himself; everything else is someone else's problem. If he's crude, it's only because social graces are far less important than needs. And if he's aggressive, it's only because he'd rather be the hunter than the hunted.

Beasts are less likely than other changelings to put much stock in the freehold as a government or organization, but they devote themselves fiercely to the fellow Lost they perceive as "theirs." Sick of leashes and expectations, they decide what's best for themselves and their loved ones first; anything else they agree to is a bonus. They have little use for high-minded philosophies or ethical codes, viewing survival and immediate gratification as priorities one and two, with everything else trailing at a distance. That doesn't mean they don't care or can't be kind and generous — they're just ground-level thinkers. Lofty principles sound nice, but they won't fill a hungry belly. Beasts are opportunistic because they refuse to rely on anyone. They don't like owing favors and they keep their eyes on the prize. Others may consider them heartless, but the Grims look out for themselves because to do otherwise is to give up control of their fates.

A Beast spent his time in Faerie unable to think beyond the next meal and the next danger. Whether he lived in constant mortal fear or in the lap of luxury, the basic gifts of language and self-awareness were denied him. The untamed fury of jungle drums or the summons of a master's whistle dictated his comings and goings, and come and go he did — always moving, always running. Fight, flight, and a longing for true freedom were all he had. Now, faced with the choices and rules of the human world once again, he's dumbfounded. It's easier to revert to base instinct, to let others do the thinking for him and lash out or flee whenever threats rear their heads, regardless of cost. He must work to keep visceral impulses from ruling his actions, and he wonders whether he might just be faking the rest. Sometimes, despite his pride in having clawed his way back to humanity, the temptations of a simpler time and wilder place linger still.

Once

The Gentry took away the bright spark that made you human and replaced it with savagery. Perhaps your body remained while your mind slept, or you roamed the treacherous fae wilderness in animal shape — or you were something in between. Your awareness condensed down to sensation and survival. Pleasures and pain ruled you as pillars in place of right and wrong. Your Keeper gave you gills and a fish's tail, and you swam behind glass in her aquarium and performed tricks for food while childlike goblins watched in delight. You lived in a kennel with other hounds just like you, fighting over scraps and rutting whenever the urge took you, until your master chained your collar to a post while you guarded her door. The Fae kept you in a dark, dirty pen, but you preferred that to when they turned you loose in the unforgiving forest without clothes for warmth or tools for defense, and bid you evade their hunting party to keep your skin.

You learned to run and hide, to kill, to obey. You were a beloved pet for a Fae princess or a hooded hawk on a Huntsman's arm. Whenever you showed a glimmer of independent thought, your Keeper punished you until instinct subsumed it again. But something jogged your memory,

and you woke up from your animal haze. With honed senses and swift feet, you seized your opportunity when it came. The wild roads and midnight dangers of the Hedge didn't stand a chance.

Now

You do what you want, whenever you want, and you won't apologize for stepping on someone's delicate toes while you do it. You don't take orders and you'll never beg for anything again. You endured enough humiliation at the hands of the Others to last you a lifetime, and you'll die before you let it happen again. But you're no lone wolf — you put your survivalist skills to good use for your comrades, keeping watch while they sleep and tracking enemies through urban jungles. When your motley is mired in complex intrigues and moral conundrums, you remind them to take life one day at a time and savor the little things. Your friends know that when cages need breaking and knights need devouring, you're the one to count on.

Nicknames: Coursers, Grims, the Savage

Blessing: Gain an additional dot of one Resistance Attribute at character creation. Your character gains +3 to Initiative rolls and Speed, and may choose to deal lethal damage with unarmed attacks. It costs a point of Glamour per three consecutive turns to enjoy this benefit if he has the Shaken or Spooked Condition, or another Condition that imposes fear.

Curse: In addition to your character's other breaking points, he risks Clarity damage with a dice pool equal to half his Wyrd (rounded up) whenever acting without thinking causes significant harm or complications for someone else.

Regalia: Steed

Tales

He doesn't cut the most impressive figure, and people tend to forget he's in the room. He doesn't speak out much. It's easy to underestimate him, and his enemies do it all the time. But he makes it his business to collect friends in high places. CEOs with fat wallets, changeling court rulers, vampire princes; he's not picky. He sniffs out their troubles and provides unexpected solutions, proving his worth and hoarding favors. That way, when the True Fae come knocking at his door, he's got a host of powerful allies just a phone call away. And if any of them ever want to betray him, they'll have to find him first.

She makes the circuit of elderly homes, coming by each week to sing comforting songs to the lonely old folks and keep them company. They all say her voice is the most beautiful sound they've ever heard in their long lives. Sometimes she stays the night to help out the nurses, and whenever she does, the residents all talk the next day about the lovely dreams they had. No one knows where she lives or how to reach her, but she always comes just when someone is about to pass away. Her lullaby eases the dying to their eternal rest, and she basks in the emotional release it brings.

His reputation sucks, but he doesn't care. He knows everybody whispers about him luring mortals onto trods, kidnapping kids and selling them to the Gentry, whatever else they think he gets up to. He lets them think it because it earns him a healthy respect. If they knew he was tracking troubled dreamers to their Bastions to devour their demons, they'd say he's gone soft. And if they heard he was going into the Hedge and enticing lost wanderers to stray from dark paths so he could take them home, they'd call him a hero. He's *sure* he's not a hero. He's a

bloodthirsty predator, and that's the side of himself he shows them when he picks up a Huntsman's trail and stalks it right back. It hasn't occurred to him yet that he could be both at once.

Darkling

A tale of mystery.

Don't worry if I stray from the path. Nothing out there scares me anymore.

She's behind you in the mirror, but you're all alone. She says she knows what you've done. You beg her forgiveness, but she's gone before the words leave your mouth. What if it wasn't good enough? What if she comes back?

Once upon a time, a traveler in a dark wood bartered her soul for one night's comfort in the warm firelight, and thus gave up her face. From then on, every evening when the sun went down, she wandered the forest in search of her missing face. She found many others — the masques of hideous revelers, the bloated rictuses of drowned corpses, the malevolent glares of cave dwellers with gemstone eyes. But nowhere did she find her own. Her heart was adrift. Despairing, she fashioned a new face for herself out of pieces of all the rest, and as she looked through its eyes she came to know the secrets each of them kept. Knowing it wasn't truly hers, but unwilling to give up such a treasure, she hid the new face in the folds of her cloak and tethered her heart to the unmarked paths the others had known. With that, she followed stolen signs behind night's veil to sneak back through the Hedge and share her insight with the courts of the Lost.

The Darkling loves the silence and prefers to be outside looking in — or at least, accepts it as her inevitable place. She's the first to venture where others won't go, where broken clues to long-lost mysteries call with fetching whispers. If she speaks in riddles, it's only because each word holds power of its own, so she chooses them with care. And if she watches too closely, it's only because what she learns might save everyone someday.

Though the Mountebanks fade into the background, they know better than to strike out too far on their own. They need strength in numbers as much as any changeling. Likewise, their motleys wouldn't last long against the Gentry or their Huntsmen without the Hedge wisdom the Darklings provide, nor would their freeholds run so smoothly without their knack for espionage to grease the wheels. They're prime picks for missions to recover Icons (p. XX), spy on rivals, infiltrate True Fae courts, or assassinate fetches. Others may view them with suspicion, but the Wisps keep their own counsel because to do otherwise is to expose their darkest selves to the light.

Arcadia isn't all lavish gardens and crystal spires. Cursed woodlands grow there, too, their twisting trails home to vicious tree-haunts with eyes that gleam. Dead things rise to walk the land and monstrous hellbeasts guard foul, forbidden magics. A thousand leagues beneath the sea sprawl lightless kingdoms ruled by tyrant fish lords and their deadly merfolk children. The Bewitched spend their time in Faerie here among the horrors, abandoned to survive on their own or ordered to cheat the fiends out of ancient knowledge that turns out to be nonsense. After so long befriending the shadows and deceiving the wretched, they end up kin to both, creatures of false face and soft step. Once they're free, they worry they've become too like the unspeakable things they once evaded. They know too much and fear their fellows mistrust them as traitors, or

that they can no longer tell the difference between true occult secrets and mad fantasies. Worse, so often unseen and unheard, they fear they're just echoes of people who never left Faerie at all.

Once

Dread was your constant companion, whether it stalked you from the darkness or from within yourself. Perhaps your master had no eyes and no need for light, forcing you to serve in an underground palace of perpetual pitch black while his many children teased and tormented you unseen. Perhaps you wore a mask you couldn't remove at a neverending masquerade ball, where the Red Death was someone different every night and murder was never far behind. Perhaps your Keeper forced you to collect oddities for his display cases, catching fellow human prisoners to stuff like dolls and braving dank caves to steal moldy tomes and tarnished relics from terrible wardens.

But with dread came fascination, and opportunity. Wandering blind, you developed ears keen enough and footsteps light enough to eavesdrop on all the secrets your master's children whispered behind closed doors, and eventually you knew enough to trick and blackmail your way to freedom. From behind your mask, you observed the Red Death's patterns and solved the murder mystery, exposing him for all to see and slipping out — just another domino — before the crowd's shock wore off. You snuck out every night to study the novelties you fetched by moonlight, until you found the one that taught you the key you needed to reopen a door into the Hedge. Through stealth, chicanery, and a curiosity strong enough to pry even into the Gentry's demented affairs, you tore yourself away from the hollow mysteries of Arcadia to become one yourself in the real world.

Now

You've had enough of being afraid. You'll never be truly rid of the fear you learned in Faerie, but you can wield it like a stiletto, sharp and icy cold. You can trade forms and faces to be anyone but the coward your Keeper made you. You can laugh away your troubles with a bit of sleight of hand, passing them on to other people when they least expect it. You're the one who knows it all, who goes anywhere you please, and it frees you in a way the other Lost can't understand. No more eyes following you wherever you go. No more barriers between you and the unknown you've come to love. You spy and thief on your own terms, and demand whatever you want in return — because they know you could just take it if they refuse. You may be often overlooked, but your friends know that for all you seem shy or hesitant, you're the one who's always heard the right whisper or read the right book.

Nicknames: the Bewitched, Mountebanks, Wisps

Blessing: Gain an additional dot of one Finesse Attribute at character creation. If you spend a point of Willpower, your character may touch something insubstantial and become part of it for three consecutive turns, transubstantiating into smoke, shadow, a sunbeam — whatever's handy. This ability costs a point of Glamour if anyone is looking directly at her at the time.

Curse: In addition to your character's other breaking points, she risks Clarity damage with a dice pool equal to half her Wyrd (rounded up) whenever a secret or important piece of information she knows turns out to be false.

Regalia: Mirror

Tales

She visits the children first in dreams, playing games with them there and coaxing them out of their shells. Then she starts visiting in the flesh, careful never to let their families or other grownups see her. The parents think she's an imaginary friend, and she lets the fiction persist. The children don't care that no one else knows she's real — they're happy just to have a companion who understands them. She stays for a while, until she knows they'll be all right without her, and then she moves on to find new friends. But each child carries a token of their time together to remember her by. If it also manages to protect its owner from the Fae, so much the better.

He has a trunk full of stolen uniforms, fake IDs, and stage makeup. Every town knows him by a different alias and profession. Every town hides skeletons in its closet, and he plays his part for as long as it takes to brush the dust from their bones and expose them to the press. Even his fellow Lost don't know whether they've ever seen his true face or heard his real name. He won't talk about his time in Faerie; in truth, he can't. All he knows is that he bargained away his identity and his memories to give someone else a chance to escape the Hedge. Now he doesn't remember whether the one with whom he made the trade was the sort to live and let live, or the sort to give a man a taste of his own medicine.

She seems like a harmless vagrant when she wanders the streets and subway stations, begging for coin. The rude commuter who shouts obscenities at her goes out later with a gorgeous date who skips out and leaves him with the bill. The kind passerby who fills her jar with dollar bills meets a stranger the next day who brings home his lost dog. She lives at the junkyard, scavenging the detritus of other people's lives and frequenting the Goblin Market no one else notices there. She'll share her peculiarly prophetic advice with anyone who seeks her out, but anyone who accepts her wisdom must also accept a task, and those who fail find their worldly possessions becoming trash in a hurry.

Elemental

A tale of metamorphosis.

Would you ask the rain to apologize for wetting you while it slakes your thirst?

You mean to turn the kid away, just as you've done every other day, but today you open the door instead. In his simple smile and dismissive glance you see that he knew you would, all along. He breezes past you. He said you couldn't hold out forever, and he was right.

Once upon a time, a boulder stood blocking the entrance to a cave in which there lived a sad young man. Day after day, the boulder watched the young man pace and sigh, heard him sing a mournful tune and speak in his sleep about places far away. The boulder came to love him. Worse, it understood how it caused his sorrow by keeping him prisoner, but it could only move aside at the command of the Faerie who visited to bring food. The man grew paler and weaker, and ever lonelier. The boulder's heart was moved. Despairing, it tried to beg the Faerie to set him free, but all it could do was rumble the earth. One day, the Faerie struck the man, blaming him for the earthquakes. The boulder could abide it no longer. In its rage, it shook the cave, burying man and Faerie under a ton of rubble. Grieving and without purpose, it remembered the man's dreams of faraway lands and vowed to return his body there. Its heart transformed fully from

stone to flesh. With that, the man who was a boulder carried his lost love back through the Hedge to stand sentinel for the courts of the Lost.

The Elemental is a force of nature, but more than that, he *commands* nature. Fire has no volition of its own; it burns indiscriminately, devouring fuel because it has no other purpose. With the indomitable will of a changeling to guide it, it becomes something greater. He is vaster in spirit than mere humans could ever understand. Nothing can contain him or deter him from his course. If no place exists for him, he carves one out. If he overwhelms, it's only because he can't remember how to tone it down. And if he's self-aggrandizing, it's only because he sees himself reflected in all the world's most magnificent miracles.

Other changelings point the Elementals in a direction and watch the fireworks. The results may be unpredictable, but *something* will definitely happen. Even the gentler Sprites display the seeming's characteristic relentlessness, though they may wear down obstacles little by little rather than tearing them apart all at once. They *do* more than they think, and shun being anything but themselves. Elementals identify with their specific natures more than most, and even two with the same elemental association can differ wildly in approach and temperament. They have a strange relationship with change — some find their moods swinging with the weather or the moon's phase, fluid like water or mercurial like flame; some have trouble quitting habits and detest uncertainty, immovable like stone or unbending like steel. Other Lost may call them incorrigible, but the Torrents listen to their gut intuition because to do otherwise is to deny who they are.

The Gentry transformed an Elemental into something completely alien. Often it was some manifestation of the classical elements, like a bonfire or a storm, but it also could have been an inanimate object, a living plant, or a clockwork automaton. It warped the way he thought and perceived, and now that he's returned, it's hard to bend his mind back into its former shape. He's transcendent and yet more single-minded. He understands function better than form, and purpose better than reason. It's difficult to consider the consequences of his actions beyond the immediate, and he doesn't care to. He lives moment to moment, trying to recapture the heady purity of what he was in Arcadia without the shackles. All this makes him the odd man out. He may dearly wish to tune in to his motley's wavelength, but the wind's howling speaks his language more clearly, and he fears — yet secretly hopes — that one day he'll forget how to speak anything else.

Once

You were a mighty phenomenon or a work of art chained to the will of your Keeper, possessed of wondrous new senses and sensations but bound to perform your duty. As fire, you longed to burn bright and hot, consuming all and reaching up to the heavens, but you could not escape the confines of your lantern, nor keep from guttering when the oil ran out. As a marble sculpture, you were unbreakable and alluring but immobile and exposed, put on display for gawking fae creatures with no respite for privacy. As a stiff breeze, you soared above the earth and touched everything with unseen fingers, but your Keeper breathed you in and kept you locked away inside her until she needed you to fill the sails of her ship. You could be what you were only how and when the Gentry allowed it.

When your desperation reached its peak, you remembered a time before your servitude, when the force of your own will meant something. You erupted from your glass cage and reveled in your fearless conflagration, blazing a trail back through the Hedge. You tore yourself free from your

pedestal and fled, untouched by thorns sharp enough to rend flesh. You gusted forth until you capsized the boat and formed a great tornado to tear all the barriers between you and home to pieces.

Now

The only purpose that matters is the one you give yourself, and the only limitations you tolerate are those you decide are worth accepting. Everywhere you go, mindless fragments of your gestalt await your bidding, and you are only too glad to oblige. You take every opportunity to unleash everything you have, because that's when you feel the most like you. And the world is filled with *you* — the wide, wild ocean and the rivers that sustain life itself, or the endless sands that fill the deserts and the sunny beaches humanity adores, are under your power. You wield them as your heart demands, because planning just gets in the way, and nature acts as it will. Your friends know that when danger calls for unrelenting persistence and maybe a lightning strike that shorts out a city block, you're the one to call.

Nicknames: Sprites, Torrents, the Unbound

Blessing: Gain an additional dot of one Resistance Attribute at character creation. As long as your character touches or is surrounded by his element, he may use it to take mundane actions at a distance of up to three yards (meters) away; these actions use his usual traits. This includes unarmed attacks, but not attacks with weapons. This ability costs a point of Glamour per action if he has fewer than half his maximum Willpower points remaining.

Curse: In addition to your character's other breaking points, he risks Clarity damage with a dice pool equal to half his Wyrd (rounded up) whenever someone browbeats, coerces, or forces him to act against his will.

Regalia: Sword

Tales

His flower shop is the neighborhood's pride and joy, and his garden grows fresher produce than any farmer's market. Kids dare each other to sneak into his private greenhouse at night, but none has ever successfully stolen a glance at his secret crop. Every October, he takes a long trip to meet with unknown associates, and tells no one where he goes. But the kids say that right before he leaves, they can swear they hear tiny voices in the greenhouse pleading for help. They don't sound human.

She's not the sharpest tool in the shed, but she used to be. She remembers a time when everyone would come to her for advice. Now she's constantly distracted by the whispering of the grass and the call of the fields, and she *hates* birds. The smallest threat to her friends or her home swiftly learns the meaning of true terror. She insists on returning to the Hedge to find her lost Icon, and nothing her motley says can convince her to stay away. She's certain that if she can get it back, she'll be able to think straight again. Then maybe she can help her fellow Lost reclaim the bits they're missing, too.

He drives a white Cadillac and keeps people at arm's length. He seeks out the deluded, the deceived, and the gullible to expose the harsh truth to them in no uncertain terms. He opens their eyes to the cruelty of those who fooled them and gives them what they need to reinvent their lives as they see fit. He takes none into his confidence unless they first melt his frozen heart with acts of true kindness or friendship. To his enemies he is the winter wind, cutting them down with

honesty as sharp as icicles, but his allies see the side of him that walks gently enough to leave no footprints in the radiant snow.

Fairest

A tale of perfection.

“Bitch,” is it? That’s Queen Bitch to you, darling.

You fall to your knees and swear you’ll die for her. She tells you to rise and asks, what good would your death do? No, she says, walk by my side, and together we’ll take down the bastards who would have us kneel.

Once upon a time, an empress reigned, beloved by everyone. She was the most beautiful of all the land’s people, the most perfect of form. Each day, her tailors fashioned a new outfit for her to wear, each more lovely and extravagant than the last. And each day, her tailors paraded her through the city to show off their work. See how the elegant line of her leg enhances the cut of this exquisite dress! See how her peerless poise keeps the birds in this crown from flying away! Her heart was hollow. Despairing, she tore the clothes from her body and let the horses of her parade chariot trample them in the dust. She strode the streets naked, and filled her heart with the satisfaction she felt at the shocked stares of the people, who truly loved her clothes more than they loved her. With that, she commanded them to step aside and took her rightful place at the head of the courts of the Lost.

The Fairest is adored, whether she wants to be or not. She possesses all the things everyone wants: looks, talent, money, friends. She speaks and the world listens. She leads the charge and others follow. A gentle touch, a lingering glance, one compassionate word — these hold all the power she needs to lend strength to the doubting and win over the reticent. None can stand against her judgments, whether she passes them down from an executive’s chair or spits them across a barricade at those who would take away her people’s freedoms. She meets opposition with sangfroid and support with warmth. If she’s imperious, it’s only because she refuses to be put in her place. And if she pries, it’s only because she’s had enough of small talk to last a lifetime.

While the Wizeneds maintain a freehold’s complex etiquette and operations, the Fairest hold their fellows together with inspiration and bold decisions. When their companions falter, crushed under the weight of their ordeals, they can rely on their Muses to pick their spirits up again. Even when someone else wears the crown, a Fairest is always there at the center of attention, swaying hearts and minds. Others may envy them, but the Sovereign bear the burden of leadership because to do otherwise is to cheapen themselves.

Nobody sees the hard work the Fairest puts in to live as a person instead of a figurehead. She endures enormous pressure and lives up to impossible expectations every day, and does it happily, because by shattering them beyond anyone’s wildest dreams she proves she’s worth so much more than they think. She isn’t the picture they paint in their minds of who she is, and she isn’t a frame for them to hang their trappings on, and she doesn’t care if they don’t like it. Meaningless niceties are sometimes necessary, but she prefers “kind” to “polite” — for those who deserve it. But she loves her many assets, too, and wouldn’t give them up for the world. She’s earned them and she uses them to get what she wants, and to hell with those who resent her for it. In her heart of hearts, she clings to them because they remind her of what was intoxicating

about Arcadia. She desperately wishes she could go back and rule *there*, in truth — claim the magic and pleasures of Faerie for herself, and banish its cruelties forever. Since she can't, she makes her own paradise wherever she goes, and woe to anyone who gets in her way.

Once

Your Keeper pampered and cherished you, even idolized you. You were the perfect companion, comely and silent, encased in a skin that had a mouth only when he kissed you. He called you “light of my life,” and lavished jewels and gifts upon you as though they would stand in for friends.

You were a ballerina, all elegance and grace. You danced when he wound the music box and posed, motionless, when the song ended. Lords and ladies journeyed from all over to ooh and ahh over the marvelous dancer. How fortunate, they said, that your Keeper found such a rare talent! How noble of him to share his toy with them!

You traveled far and wide, speaking your master's will to every ear. You rode the finest horse and carried the most splendid banner, and all envied your lofty position at the queen's right hand. She entrusted you, her fair champion, with her most important quests. You slew dragons, rescued enchanted princes, and led her armies. You ensured they would cheer your queen's name with your deeds. And every morning, you woke and remembered nothing.

Whatever the case, you were a novelty, a plaything. You were beautiful and noble, expendable and empty. You existed to glorify your Keeper, nothing more. No one knew you for who you were, if you even were anyone anymore. When you finally had enough, you *chose* someone to be and turned all your wondrous talents to coercing your way back through the Hedge.

Now

You glorify *yourself*, because no one will do it for you. You show people the real you at every opportunity, and you bring out their real selves, too. You already have their love, but you crave their respect, and you know the best way to get it is to share a true connection that trivialities can't break. Despite all your charms, it isn't easy — even your fellow changelings find you intimidating, or stare at you in awe, or let their jealousy consume them. But you know how to kill them with kindness, and you make yourself the only one who can give them what they want. You're the guiding light in a sea of uncertainty, the grandeur of Arcadia come to Earth in the flesh. Your friends know that when they tire from their labors or lose hope from their traumas, you'll be there with words to inspire and a plan to win.

Nicknames: Muses, the Sovereign, Unicorns

Blessing: Gain an additional dot of one Power Attribute at character creation. You may spend Willpower points on another character's behalf for purposes of the usual three-die bonus or +2 Resistance trait increase. You may still only spend one Willpower point per action. This ability costs a point of Glamour if any Condition is in play that would cause contention or mistrust between the characters, such as Leveraged or Notoriety.

Curse: In addition to your character's other breaking points, she risks Clarity damage with a dice pool equal to half her Wyrd (rounded up) whenever her action — or inaction — leads directly to misfortune for her allies.

Regalia: Crown

Tales

She hates ballet. All its rules, its strict positions. All the pain and suffering it takes to be the best. No, the dance she loves comes straight from the heart and pumps the soul out through its steps for everyone to see. She gives free classes on street corners, teaching freestyle hip-hop to kids who don't have the money or the support to learn from a school. The smiles on their faces as they express themselves to the fullest — and the Glamour she earns from them — are payment enough.

He's charming, and he knows it. He wears tailored suits, just the right amount of cologne, and a grin that turns on men and women everywhere. He loves to talk, and he loves to listen, and the stories he likes best are about all the things people desire. In his benevolence, he gives them what they want, and all he wants in return is a companion for a while. Of course, desires change day to day, but he's a resourceful guy. He doesn't mind repeat business, not at all. He doesn't like to be alone.

You have to look out for yourself in this world. That's what she learned from Faerie, and she never lets anyone forget it. She hears the names they call her behind her back, but who cares what they think? They say "iron fist," but she prefers "strong hand." Who else could keep the howling wolves at bay when other freeholds turn a gluttonous eye their way? Who else could command the respect of the hobgoblin hordes? No one, that's who. She'll never let *anyone* take her throne. And if she has to go so far as to win the heart of a Huntsman to prove her point, she will.

Ogre

A tale of brutality.

Get out of my face while you still can. I don't do that anymore. Not for the likes of you.

His breath stinks like stale tobacco and his chainsaw voice spews obscenities about your mother. The tough guy thing wasn't an act after all, so you lost that bet. And a tooth besides. The question now is, what could you possibly have that he'd want in exchange for leaving the rest of them where they are?

Once upon a time, a warrior set out to rid his land of monsters. He carried a weighty hammer, with which he crushed skulls and pounded bones to dust. Up and down the countryside he roamed, leaving behind him an ever-growing pile of hideous, broken creatures. When his task was finished, he turned to discover the dead were not monsters after all but ordinary folk, and *he* was the brute they had feared. His heart was black. Despairing, he sought a Faerie's counsel, but she laughed at his anguish and told him she had drawn the lie over his eyes, seeking to spare him the disgrace of being a terrible ugly thing. He knew then the world held no solace for him, so he tore the Faerie's head from her body and cleansed his heart with her blood. With that, he vowed never again to let pretty words cloud his mind, and lent his strength to the courts of the Lost.

The Ogre knows what a fine line separates a hero from a bully, and how hard it is to walk it. But walk it he does, with the resolve to overcome any temptation. Fancy lies and careful words seem a waste, and he gives no quarter to such weak tactics. Ugly and imposing even behind the Mask, he walks among mortals like a grizzly in human clothes and refuses to acknowledge the stares. In his sturdy arms and fearsome glare he possesses the might to crush or cow the fiercest foes. If he

speaks too bluntly, it's only because he has no patience for tiptoeing around the truth. And if he shuts people out, it's only because he doesn't want to be hurt again.

Other changelings agree that when shit hits the fan, behind an Ogre is the best place to stand. They're the freehold's stalwart defenders and the motley's loyal muscle. Sick of having to say they're sorry, they're careful not to do anything they'll feel obliged to apologize for. No more regrets, no more compromise. When they smash and maim, it's because someone deserved it. They protect their companions from themselves, too — if someone has to bloody his hands, the Bruiser always volunteers first, figuring his are already stained so he might as well do some good with them. Why doom someone else to become a monster when it's already his job to be one? Others may dismiss them as brutish and slow, but the Ogres keep it simple because to do otherwise is to drown in remorse.

The Gargoyles' greatest shame is that they weren't strong enough to fight back when the Gentry took them and forced them to commit atrocities. Now that they *are* strong, they refuse to allow anyone to best them again. Living this way is lonely, though, and letting others get close is hard. Their figurative — or literal — hammers are so big and easy to swing that all problems look like nails. With so much overwhelming force, it seems ludicrous to hold back in the face of ills that need obliterating. But that slope is slick with the blood of the Ogre's many unfortunate victims, and he must fight to keep from tumbling back down there, even when the excuse to revel in mindless intimidation and violence is tempting.

Once

You were no knight in shining armor, no dutiful soldier marching under a banner. No, you were a brutal destroyer — a thug without mercy. You endured by dishing out more pain than you received, and you fed on the terror you inspired. You were your Keeper's prized torturer, teaching her enemies cruel lessons in obedience and keeping other changelings in line when they rebelled. You were a gladiator slave, whipped if you didn't defeat the other slaves in an arena filled with jeering Fae. Even when you killed the others to free them from this hell, or let them do the same to you, you all returned to life the next day to start again. The Gentry transformed you into a hideous, deformed creature with a taste for flesh and took the gift of speech from you, leaving you hungry and unable to communicate out in the wilderness. Huge and menacing, without words to civilize your desperate cravings, you had no choice but to terrorize and prey upon the land's people.

One day, you took a long, hard look at yourself and couldn't go on like that. Maybe it was that last scream that did it, reminding you of someone you lost in another life. Maybe it was the empty look in the eyes of the last man you tormented, or the way the last youth you devoured tasted salty like tears. You turned your unholy strength to breaking your chains and bringing your Keeper's home crumbling down around her ears. You made a run for it, pulping the flesh of any hobgoblin lackey that got in your way. You didn't bother with playing by the Hedge's rules, tearing brambles apart with your bare hands until you stood once more in the world you called home.

Now

You can't erase what you did in Arcadia, but you can make up for it. You look out for your fellow Lost and butcher anything that comes for them, whether it's hounds and Huntsmen or confusion and temptation. What beauty you saw in Faerie was tainted by a blood-red haze, so

you try to preserve the simple pleasures you find here before they suffer the same fate. When Gordian knots set the courts to squabbling, you're the one willing to slice the whole thing in half and call it done. You erect walls around your heart, but the precious few who get to know the real you never regret it. Your friends know that you're more than a scarred face and a heart of gold: You're also the one they can count on to do the right thing, even when it happens to be the hardest thing.

Nicknames: Bruisers, Gargoyles, the Terrible

Blessing: Gain an additional dot of one Power Attribute at character creation. Whenever your character deals any damage to another, you may impose the Beaten Down Tilt, which lasts for three turns. This ability costs a point of Glamour if the Ogre makes the attack on his own behalf and not someone else's.

Curse: In addition to your character's other breaking points, he risks Clarity damage with a dice pool equal to half his Wyrd (rounded up) whenever someone he doesn't consider an enemy flees or cowers from him.

Regalia: Shield

Tales

He drinks too much, bathes too little, and his landlady has his late rent excuses memorized by now. Can he help it if orphans, runaways, and Arcadia survivors aren't exactly rolling in cash? They end up in better places than where they started, though, and that's what matters. One of these days, he'll tip off the wrong hobgoblin, with all his stomping around the Hedge looking for desperate changelings or fae-touched trying to escape. His Keeper will come for him, and then things will get really ugly. Until then, he'll keep at it. Deep down he suspects all the people he's helped will stand by him when his own trouble comes around. The thought keeps him from feeling too alone.

She never tells anyone what she likes best about her job — never admits that being allowed to break down doors and storm drug dens on the clock is why she joined the FBI, and it has nothing to do with high-minded ideals like justice or public service. She likes shouting in crooks' faces and watching them flinch. She likes it when they run, because she enjoys tackling them to the ground and beating them into submission. Her motley says it's a good thing she's found an outlet, but to be careful before someone starts to wonder *why* she's so good at profiling serial killers and terrorists.

He wonders how different his life now is from before. At least now he's salaried, that's something. The Spring Queen insists she's doing what she must for the greater good, but as far as he can see she's no different from any crime lord. The people he intimidates into paying her tithes and fealty probably believe he'd really eat them if they didn't comply. Who knows? If she ordered it, maybe he would. He's supposed to indulge, after all. He's not paid to think, he's paid to break bones and make examples. Still, shaking down unsuspecting humans because they didn't realize their urban development project encroached on a Hedge gateway seems a bit much. Maybe he should say something.

Wizened

A tale of cunning.

Huff and puff all you want, you'll never blow this house down.

She finishes your sentences, stealing the words right out of your mouth and transforming them into art on the page. By the time you hand over your cash, you're dead certain this was all your own idea.

Once upon a time, a clockmaker toiled for 100 days and 100 nights to perfect the ultimate timepiece, a pocketwatch that kept the hours so accurately, it could speak what was about to happen precisely a minute before. When the work was done, she came blinking into the sunlight to share her masterpiece with the world, only to find that time had no meaning here, and all her toil was for naught. Her heart was broken. Despairing, she pried open the watch's casing and scattered its pieces on the cobblestones. Only afterward did she realize she could use those pieces to repair her broken heart, and thereafter her thoughts were always precisely a minute ahead. With that, she out-schemed her wicked Keepers and pledged her nimble fingers in service to the courts of the Lost.

The Wized is happiest when she's busy. When her hands and mind are idle, she can't help feeling like she ought to be *doing* something. She keeps her wits about her in a crisis and pulls miraculous solutions out of the most vexing problems. If she chatters or complains, it's only because she's glad of the company while she works. And if she gives a little too much advice, it's only because she's been there and done that, she *made* the t-shirt, and she doesn't like to see the same mistake made twice.

Clever and industrious, the Wized are the other half of the glue that holds the freehold together, pairing helpful manipulation and a delicate touch with the Fairest's overwhelming force of personality. Their pragmatic approach sometimes misses the forest for the trees, but no one can beat the Wized in sheer accomplishment. They work for fun, they scheme in their sleep, and they refuse to allow a problem to go unsolved or a hole unfilled. Others may call them overachievers, but the Hatters build and plan because to do otherwise is to feel helpless.

The Gentry reshape palaces and gardens according to their whims, lifting nary a finger. They pluck trinkets from mortal dreams to adorn their shelves and brows. They want for nothing. To what end, then, does a True Fae steal away a human only to put her to work with meaningless chores? Every Wized asks herself this question countless times, shackled to an anvil forging the links to her own chains or dutifully crafting gifts for Goblin Queens who burn them immediately. Is it malice that drives her Keeper to change the rules of her slavery every time she thinks she's almost completed her task, or some perverse jest? Her escape is fraught with mazes and trickery, forcing her to bend her mind in irrational ways to out-think a logic that never made sense in the first place. By the time she's free, she's vowed never to let anyone take advantage of her again. She puts her constructive talents to use for herself, or for a cause, and all she has to protect herself are deft hands, a quick wit, and a cunning mind. Refusing to take her seriously or dismissing her work's worth is a good way to shake her confidence — or earn her spite.

Once

Promises are worth less than nothing without a contract to back them up. You know, because you heard so many and every one of them was a lie. "Of course you can go home, if you build one toy for each good little moppet on Earth. 'Tis child's play, for one with your skill!" "I'll set you free as soon as the war is over, my dear, but I so desperately need you to bring all my dead

soldiers back to life each morning.” “Be my lady-in-waiting for a hundred and one years, just that! and soon you’ll be on your way.”

You worked your fingers to the bone, hunched over your workbench or running yourself ragged in the fields, day in and day out. All that, for a glimmer of hope — surely *this* time your Keeper would cleave to his word. He never did. For all his insistence that he took you for your unique talents, for all his hollow praise, as soon as the job was done he laughed in your face. Or he scolded you, inventing faults where none existed; wheedled and flattered, passing you along to the next master like some prodigy apprentice; or even released you, on the face of it, only to reveal in the end that you’d never left Faerie at all. You drove yourself to distraction learning impossible crafts and following endless convoluted rules, but inevitably the bastard manipulated you into sabotaging yourself over and over. In the end, you beat him at his own game, poisoning yourself at guile’s teat in the process.

Now

You’re Wized because you have a way about you that reminds the others of a withered old seamstress: nose to the grindstone, with a jaded air and a half-empty glass. But for all your talk, you still mix ethereal colors into your palette and build wonders that dazzle even your fellow Lost. Though you’ve tried to bury that spark of mad inspiration, fearing eternal disappointment, it pulses in your heart and betrays your hard-boiled manner in the marvelous things you make. You bring a little piece of Arcadia into the world every time you cook up something new, and you hope the roses you grow won’t bring fae thorns along with them. Your canny — and *uncanny* — mind works overtime to keep the freehold running smoothly and your motley’s pockets full. Your friends admire your creations and put them to good use, but they know you’re not just making gadgets. You’re building a better world.

Nicknames: Domovye (singular: Domovoi), Hatters, the Shrewd

Blessing: Gain an additional dot of one Finesse Attribute at character creation. Your character can take a Build Equipment action (p. XX) to transform one kind of material into another, as long as she has the appropriate tools to work with what she has. For instance, she could spin straw into gold with a spinning wheel, or forge steel into diamond with an anvil and hammer. This counts as a five-die bonus for purposes of determining the required successes. This ability costs a point of Glamour per action if she’s jury-rigging, but in this case she can improvise her tools as well; she might spin straw into gold by running it around a ceiling fan, or forge steel into diamond by running over it with a car.

Curse: In addition to your character’s other breaking points, she risks Clarity damage with a dice pool equal to half her Wyrd (rounded up) whenever an unpleasant surprise takes her off-guard.

Regalia: Jewels

Tales

With her fae tools, she roams the Hedge’s winding paths, seeking the seeds of compelling dreams and redesigning them to her own specifications. For those who dream in fear or sorrow, she builds fantastical landscapes and adventures under a shining sun. For those who dream of crushing the weak and innocent beneath their heels, she builds devious labyrinths and cruel games the dreamers can never win. The Dream Engineer hands out her business card to all the

nearby freeholds. They keep it handy and hire her on commission to craft nightmares for their enemies or reveries of loves past for themselves.

He hides behind his online handle and never lets anyone see his face. With careful research, blatant hacking, and a little social-media stalking, he tracks down fetches and documents their every move. He drops anonymous tips to changelings seeking their false selves and plays cryptic benefactor with the unknowing scarecrows, sending them on wild goose chases to maneuver them into their changeling doubles' paths. His paranoia drives him to collect dirt on everyone else, too, to keep them from tracking him down in kind and exposing his operation to the world.

She tends bar at a little place downtown they call the Spinning Jenny, on the corner of 3rd and Main. Everybody knows to drink there if they're desperate, if they need something they can't get anywhere else. She listens to their problems and sometimes, when the hour is right, she makes an offer. She can help, she says, for a price. No, she doesn't want money. Nothing so crass. Just a trifle, something meaningful but small, you'll never even miss it. She performs miracles and collects their keepsakes, singing as they are with memories tender and sad. It's only after her customers leave that they realize — they never caught her name.

[INTRO TEXT TO THE COURTS]

Faerie was a nightmare from which we longed to wake, but the fantasia followed us home. Around every corner stalks a foe intent on dragging us back, a reminder that this world kept no place for us while we were gone, or a handful of magic that invites us to miss the wonder we left behind. Alone, we falter. We wander Lost from refuge to refuge and seek belonging. Safety. Solace. Fleeting wishes, when every raven and rainstorm can carry a Fair One along.

In their desperation, those who came before us struck deals with the sun and the moon — with the turning of the Earth itself. Protect us, they said, and we will honor you. Each of the oathbound gathered others of like mind, forming a court to keep the Gentry at bay. They found comfort in the seasons' arms, taking their lessons to heart, and so do we. Desire staves off the horror that haunts us in sleep. Wrath channels our passions and puts idle hands to glorious purpose. Fear empowers us to arm ourselves with the very weapons we fled. Sorrow keeps us from returning to paths best left untrod.

Together, we do more than endure. We fight back, each courtier in her own way.

Spring

The Antler Crown, the Emerald Court, the Court of Desire

Anything that's flawless is false. We are beautiful, my dears, not because we have no scars. We are beautiful because we refuse to be defined by them.

A crystalline sweat beaded its carved brow, and its Adonis-like smile splintered apart as she danced on. "This is not possible," it said, more like a cough. "This is not your master's music. That is not the gown your master dressed you in. How dare you laugh and sing and dance without me?"

A mortal might have identified the fear trilling deep within her eyes, but her smile was perfect brilliance, and the Huntsman wearing the Lover in Diamonds' face quailed from it. "I'm deeply sorry," she said. "Do I know you?"

Desire

Desire is a flame. It's the fuel in the engine of ambition. It's the warm rich red of passion and the pale insistent blue of hunger. It's a will-o-wisp dancing just out of reach, leading the foolish to bad ends. You can't live without its warmth and heat, but feed it too much and it'll burn you to ashes.

The other courts don't understand, of course. They reject the philosophy of desire. They may call it selfish, or short-sighted, or shallow. Why spend your time chasing pleasures, they may say, with the Others scratching at the threshold? Why don't you understand what's important?

Those are foolish questions. The Spring Court knows exactly what's important. Passion feeds ambition and art. Hunger is an understanding of your needs. But most important, desire is the food of life. With laughter and joy and pleasure, changelings live — without these things, they simply survive. Desire is the key to taking your life back or building a new, full life. It's an alluring philosophy, and it draws many Lost who don't want to dwell on the past. And with the Bargain, it even refutes the power of the Gentry. Fuck you, it says, we don't need you. You

didn't break us. You can't break us. We'll live and love and enjoy ourselves and forget you ever existed.

That last part is a lie, of course. But it's a lie with power. If you seed the mortal world with pleasure, that dulls the siren song of Faerie. Your fellow Lost dream fewer dreams of return if there's so much for them here. What's more, the solipsistic Others can't understand how their former pets can live without them. When they peer through a windowpane and see a room of Lost dancing and singing and making love as if nothing had happened, it confuses them. They doubt their own senses. Of all the ways to keep the Gentry at arm's length, the Spring Court's way is likely the most enjoyable — but it does require a hell of a poker face.

Spring is the enthusiastic patron of the Court of Desire. Spring is the transition from cold torpor to heat and light, the stirring of roots in warming earth. It's a season for sex, as many human cultures recognize, but that's an outgrowth of Spring's role as the season of birth, when the world is turning greener and better able to nourish mothers and their newborns. The Spring Court often claims to have been the first Seasonal Court to form — while Winter was still in hiding, Autumn was still drawing up wards, and Summer was still daring hunters to chase it, Spring was receiving callers to see just what they wanted.

Desire may be the most pleasant harvesting, when compared to wrath and fear and sorrow. But it's not always a matter of nourishing indulgence. Desire is one part passion, one part hunger. It can be a bitter dram of envy, a metallic tang of covetousness, or the overripe, perfumed bouquet of raw lust. A Spring Courtier might visit a strip club for a hit of raw sexual desire, or attend a social mixer for a more refined brew. But she can also find a poignant longing in an office building around five, when the workers who can't leave yet desperately wish they could. A pet supply store's adoption event is filled with the animals' longing for security and belonging, reflected by human — especially children's — desire to absorb and return a small animal's love. Even a busy restaurant has strands of wishful thinking from diners who would like to indulge more.

Courtiers of the Antler Crown are especially aware of the reliance on mortal emotion. Many wish they could draw Glamour from the desires of their fellow Lost, particularly their lovers...and the Spring Court is not at all shy about encouraging romantic and not-so-romantic entanglements with other changelings. The mutual attainment of desire is a powerful tool for healing. It's also a fine way to deepen bonds — if the Emerald Courtier is all that interested in deep bonds, that is.

Denial

It's a simple stereotype: The Emerald Court is full of hedonistic, escapist lotus-eaters who refuse to look at anything unpleasant, or even admit it exists. As a simple stereotype, it is of course flawed and inaccurate. But it's not entirely wrong. Most Spring Courtiers are clever enough to take the long view and disciplined enough to make sacrifices, because that's what it takes to reject Arcadia and find your way through the thorns. And yet, the nature of their Bargain encourages them to look away.

The temptation of Spring is to draw power from what you want — which makes it all the harder to deal with what you don't want. Pain, fear, rejection, loss...to most people, these things are the opposite of desires. The Antler Crown is absolutely strongest in times of beauty and prosperity, when everyone around them is either achieving their desires, or even better, has the hope that the realization of their ambitions is juuust around the corner. Conversely, Spring is weakest in ugly

times when hope is dim. Emerald Courtiers gradually learn that it's to their advantage to tell people "don't worry about that for now." And to some extent, to not worry about that for now themselves.

That's the bitterness that balances out the sweet. Other Lost may admire and covet Emerald Courtiers for their passion and enthusiasm...and at the same time, hold them in some contempt. If you're in real trouble, your Spring Court lover might be the last person you turn to, because she's the most likely to change the subject. They aren't often seen as reliable, and that can hurt.

Even so, the disapproval of one's peers is not the worst problem with denial, not when one considers the Fae. Their mastery of desire makes Spring the best-suited of any court to see through the beautiful glammers and temptations of the Gentry — but their penchant for denial leaves them vulnerable against enemies who use more brutish tools and tactics.

The Turning of the Seasons

High Spring: The Emerald Court takes power with a revel. The rise of a new Spring monarch requires celebration, for reasons far deeper (and more contractual) than a show of pride. This first lavish event sets the stage for a Spring reign, as a promise of many more. Some Emerald monarchs hold grand parties as shows of power, demonstrations of their influence, and public displays of courage — Winter is over and done, and the freehold can fly their banners in pride without fear of being seen. Others think in terms of freehold morale. A populace that allows itself to be happy together will be stronger when the hard times come again.

Spring monarchs lead by example. They live extravagantly, succulently, to entice other Lost to do the same. It certainly helps that they're feeding their own desires in the process. Of course, not all changelings look at these glorious excesses with admiration. A Spring monarch can easily acquire a reputation for useless decadence more than anything else. In some cases, it's accurate. But other Spring monarchs know the value of skill of arms, occult learning, or a strong information network. These wiser rulers are generous with their favors and privileges in order to win the goodwill, loyalty, and sometimes love of the other courts. It's not too difficult to tell the lackadaisical epicures from the dedicated leaders. A freehold quickly learns if their Antler Crown's tines are blunted or razor sharp.

Low Spring: It's fair to say that freeholds of the Seasonal Courts need all four courts to run properly. But the Spring Court is necessary to the other three in ways that are hard to equal. The Court of Desire is, among other things, a support group for all the Lost who need one. You need the Winter Court to gather intelligence, the Autumn Court to cast the magics, and the Summer Court to lead the fight — but you need the Spring Court to live in between all that. When the Courts tell newcomers what they have to offer, the Antler Crown stresses healing and camaraderie. *We want you to be happy and healthy. You deserve that.*

Some praise the Spring Court for being supportive of each other court in turn, lending their diplomatic skill to help smooth out conflicts. Others criticize the Court of Desire for petty politicking and ridiculous games of one-upmanship. Both are right. The Emerald Court overflows with energy that doesn't subside when they cede the throne to Summer. They can pour that energy into productive tasks, or they can vent it in potentially destructive intrigues if they don't feel that they're being properly appreciated.

In times of Low Spring, the Antler Crown takes roles that improve the freehold's overall quality of life. Some tend to the physical needs of their fellow Lost. Spring produces quality

horticulturists and gardeners, who may have a knack for goblin fruits as well as more mundane crops. Some take to healing, be it physical medicine or emotional therapy. At least one Spring Courtier in every freehold volunteers as a master of ceremonies and ritualist to help the other courts run their celebrations smoothly.

Give and Take

When Spring reigns, it compels an odd, partial peace. The Gentry and their loyalists cannot do violence to a freehold where a Spring monarch rules, unless that violence is born of heart's desire. Lesser urges cannot negate the geas. It halts a traitor attempting to line his pockets, even if he "desires wealth." It stays a raging Huntsman, even if one might call her wrath "a desire for vengeance." To pierce Spring's Bargain, one must truly covet one's target...such as a Keeper coming to reclaim its absolute very favorite, the one who got away. The Court of Desire encourages all of its members to be very honest about their relationships with their former Keeper and fellow servants, in order to keep track of who will be the greatest potential threat year round.

In true Emerald Court fashion, Spring's Lost try not to think about the ramifications of the Bargain too much. If Spring will permit violence meted out in the name of true desire, then does that mean their patron is more sympathetic to certain True Fae than to the changelings they harm?

The Court of Desire has near-innumerable rituals, celebrations, and obligations to perpetuate its Bargain. Other courts regard the Emerald Court's obsession with festivals and balls as a dereliction of responsibility. Quite the contrary: Spring requires celebration. It begins each year with the Spring Revel held when Winter cedes power to Spring. At this bonfire-lit event, the court does its best to ensure that each guest has some desire of theirs met before the revel ends. Another common celebration is the Homecoming. This event is much more like a birthday party than the "homecoming" parties held by schools or sports teams. It celebrates the date that a changeling returned to the mortal world from Arcadia. Each year a Homecoming for the Spring monarch is most likely, but the court is glad to honor others, particularly the strongest and most delectable potential allies from Summer, Autumn, or Winter.

The court is also bound by one universal rule: Your Desires Are Your Own. This "Verdant Rule" has many interpretations and ramifications, but at its heart it is a meditation on responsibility. It reminds the Antler Crown to acknowledge the desires of others without judgment, to recognize that desire is a mirror of the self, and to make no apology for their own wants.

Mantle Effects: The Spring Mantle is warm and enticing. It breathes renewal, redolent with scents such as new flowers, rain on earth, or the sun on the grass. The air moves around the Emerald Courtier — stagnation is the antithesis of Spring. The colors may change around her as well: Greens become vibrant, war colors become richer, or the lighting seems to take on the same cast as a morning sunbeam. At its most powerful, the Spring Mantle leaves the image of flowers growing up in the changeling's footprints.

Courtiers: A beauty merchant sells mortals romance in the form of haunting perfumes and exquisite jewels, taking their money but also their lust for status and respect. A white-haired Beast with pearlescent antlers runs at the head of an adoring motley. A Wizen storyteller loops heartbreaking tales into visual novels sold to only a few. An erotic oneiromancer crafts dream venues for his clients to safely explore desires that they could never voice aloud. A literal

firebrand whips up crowds with promises of better days ahead. A therapist becomes far too involved with her clients, soothing their wounds and exploring their wants in ways that would get her license revoked. An urban gardener establishes community gardens in low-income neighborhoods. A parole officer goes the extra mile to help his charges rebuild their lives, and discreetly harvests a touch of their new hope.

Legends

- Shed a tear for Mother Susan. When she wandered back out of the Hedge with thorn-cut feet, a young woman with no family to her name, there was nothing she wanted more than a child. But the changes in her flesh reached her womb as well, and no child could take root there. Many a Lost maiden has discovered the same...but Susan wouldn't let her story end there. She went back into the Hedge, again and again, and at last she walked back out with a swelling belly and an oath sealed behind her heart.

She wanted that child more than anything. And then...she had no child, but she carried the Bargain of Spring. Nobody ever heard the tale of how she came from here to there, not from her own lips. But you already understand, don't you? The child must have been the price she paid. She gave up the spring of her own life so that Spring would bless all of us. Honor Mother Susan, and weep for her, for that sacrifice must have been fueled by immense compassion...or overpowering guilt.

- Back in the day, the seasons didn't play nice. They went to war with each other, trying to crowd each other out. If Summer caught Autumn while Autumn was bathing and didn't have any weapons nearby, then Summer got to rule over the year for as long as he had his foot on Autumn's neck. There was a year where there was nothing but Winter, because Winter had tied up Spring and was keeping her in his house. He spent every day and every night watching the door, never letting anything bigger than a bug across the threshold.

That's where Raven comes in. Raven had a cloak of black feathers growing out of his back, a present from his Keeper, that let him turn into whatever he wanted. He turned into a mosquito and slipped into Winter's house. Then he turned into a handsome young man and seduced Winter's daughter. He persuaded her to get her father drunk, and while Winter was nodding off he set Spring free. She promised him anything he wanted for a reward, and he asked to make a Bargain with her. When Winter woke up three moons later, he was so embarrassed he went looking to make a Bargain, too.

- Never let anyone tell you that beauty is mere vanity. If not for beauty, we would never have had the courts. For the first of us all was a beautiful girl, a princess before she was our queen. She and her sisters were all shut away like songbirds, but their Keeper's vizier loved her from the moment he first saw her. In time, the vizier decided she would rather die at her Keeper's hands than let the young captive languish a moment more. So she taught the girl a charm of summoning, and then let her and her sisters free.

The princess was brave, and she led her sisters home without using the charm. At last, she stood with one foot in the Hedge, and she invoked the summoning. Spring came and appeared before her, beautiful as a god, and pledged to give her anything she wished. She saw the desire in his eyes, and said, "Give me a child." Spring gladly complied, and to protect that child's future he struck a Bargain. Clever as she was, the first Spring Queen then went to her sisters, and taught

them each the charm in turn. They summoned Summer, and Autumn, and Winter, and I think you can guess the rest.

- All of the seasons are bound by powerful oaths, same as the rest of us. Some of these oaths control where they can and cannot govern — Winter has no power at the equator, for instance, and Spring and Autumn can hold court at once as long as they're both on opposite sides of the world. The Emerald Court came about because one of us discovered one of Spring's most pitiless fetters: Spring could not kill.

When Spring came under attack, the First King offered to stand in its defense. He fought against the hounds of the dying year, nearly dying a hundred times before Spring healed him anew. At the last, he made a final pact with Spring: He took Spring's name, and he went into battle one last time, and he died as Spring. But because he died as Spring, he could return. His eyes opened at the end of the next winter, and Spring welcomed him with the Bargain.

This story hides a secret, though: Now Spring can kill again.

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Summer

The Iron Spear, the Crimson Court, the Court of Wrath

*Fuck compromise. You know who wants you complacent and afraid? **They** do. **They** want you thinking you don't want to fight back. No. Fuck that. You need to be **angry**. They **earned** your wrath.*

The hunter chose the horned Beast in the hoodie first: a sharp kick to the virilities, and the bull-man was down. Next was the troll with long, Black Annis fingers: she was still gawking when the baseball bat smashed into her temple. But when the hunter rounded on the third member of the motley, he realized he'd prioritized his prey all wrong. The waif held a blade near-long as she was, a crimson cloth knotted around its guard, and its point was already at his throat.

"When I started sharpening this sword, 10 years ago," she whispered, "it was a knife the size of my finger."

Wrath

Wrath is rejection. Wrath doesn't accept that things are the way they are, and there's nothing to do about it. When someone shoves a knife into you, wrath is the urge to pull that knife out and stab right back. Let Spring and Autumn and Winter all try to avoid or mitigate their pain.

Summer channels wrath to scream through blood-flecked lips, *no more!*

Nobody spends much time debating whether or not they belong with the Iron Spear. Summer Courtiers are those who drew a line and chose to push back. Maybe it was their own pain: loss, wounds, failure, humiliation. Maybe it was someone else's. But something awakened that fury in them, a wrath pure enough that they stopped thinking about flight and decided to fight. It's not always healthy, of course. Wrath doesn't make you happy, even if it dulls the pain and gives you something else to think about. It might lead you to sacrifice yourself for an empty promise of vengeance. But nothing gives a hunter pause like a beast that has decided it's not going to be prey any more.

There were other things that Summer had to offer, so long ago. But the Bargain with Summer was paid in wrath. It's the oath of the blazing sun destroying shadows. It's the vigilance of the longest day. It's the spike in violence when the streets are baking and the AC is out.

Anyone harboring illusions about "polite society" would be deeply chagrined to find out just how easy it is to harvest wrath, *especially* in a large city. Sure, you can drink up the anger in a rust belt diner full of frustrated, still-unemployed workers or in a congregation listening to a fire-and-brimstone preacher scream about how the sinners are ruining the world. But the city's full of people tightly packed...and hell is other people. Long lines at the bank or grocery store vent clouds of succulent frustration. Schoolyard bullies let out their anger on smaller children, who in turn seethe for retribution. Rush-hour traffic is practically a five o' clock dinner bell. Sporting matches are festivals of tribalized wrath, particularly if it's a contact sport.

Talk to a Crimson Court aficionado, and they'll tell you Glamour harvested from wrath tastes like heat. Sullen, suppressed anger has a low slow burn, and a berserk tantrum is a peppery explosion. Truly righteous wrath has a cleansing, spicy heat that seeps into your lungs. Hatred and the lust for vengeance add a metallic aftertaste. If you're unlucky and foolish enough to try drawing on the rage of something not human, like a werewolf, then it's like drinking molten gold. But for all that, the Iron Spear teaches that you shouldn't think of it in terms of consuming wrath entirely. You're meant to just hold it for a while — to forge it and hone it and give it a new target. A target that honestly deserves it.

Anger

When everything is going to shit, when you're afraid for yourself and the people you care about, you get angry. You look for someone to blame, because that's better than being impotent. You need a target.

The line between wrath and anger is a thread spun from semantics. Summer philosophy holds that anger is wrath with less discipline, less direction. Anger clouds your eyes. It drives you to strike, *strike now*, no matter what or who you hit. Anger creeps up on you when you don't have clarity of purpose. It makes you toxic — and worse, when the toxin runs its course, it leaves you weak and fatigued. Wrath is tiring, and anger doubly so.

That toxic nature spawns an ugly truth — many changelings fear Summer more than they fear Autumn. A Summer Courtier's rage might be triggering in its familiarity. All the more reason to focus that wrath, say the elders of the Iron Spear. Wrath can deter the Gentry. Anger will drive your loved ones from you — or worse, hurt them if they don't abandon you.

The Turning of the Seasons

High Summer: Summer stands. When the Crimson Court is in power, it marshals the freehold's defense. A Summer monarch doesn't precisely *militarize* a freehold — though some would like to, or have tried. The Lost are individuals, and a freehold's populace is full of people who might man a barricade in a time of need, but have no interest in making discipline and chain of command the new normal. But the Iron Spear usually has to spend three seasons watching the other courts ignore martial concerns. A Spring monarch typically leaves the freehold in high spirits but inclining to complacency. When Summer takes power, it's time to clean the guns and sharpen the blades.

Kings and queens of Summer are exceptionally intimidating creatures. If you want to avoid conflict, you join some other court where it's okay to hide or talk your way out of trouble. Crimson Courtiers test each other all the time, whether it's sparring to blow off steam, settling who's best with a sword or stick, or arguing over the best tactic for blasting out a warren of dangerous hobgoblins. The monarchs of Summer have to prove themselves constantly, and it shows. A tower of steel-cable muscle and scars flexes a killing strength in each finger. An elegant diplomat with cold iron in his voice never asks for anything twice. A plainly dressed woman seems smaller than she is until her thumb brushes up against the hilt of her blade, and the smell of blood seems to surround her. A crooked man in sunset regalia proposes daring offensives backed by seemingly uncountable layers of strategy.

An ascendant Summer monarch tends to focus on offense or defense. Defense involves activities such as gathering useful tokens of war, setting watchers on potential Hedge points of entry, building up the armory, and extracting pacts of alliance from whatever neighbors can be trusted to keep their word. Offense entails scouting missions deeper into the Hedge, grand hunts of particularly dangerous hobgoblins, and moving on tempting targets of opportunity. More fetches die when the Summer Court is in power than at any other time.

Low Summer: When another season holds power, the Iron Spear insists on offering counsel. A Summer advisor stands as close to the throne as she can, fully armed. She defers to the reigning monarch in most things, like a good soldier, but *always* has an opinion when there's a mention of a Huntsman, or of the Gentry.

High-ranking Summer Courtiers tend to split between looking inward and outward. Focusing inward is usually a matter of keeping the freehold defenses shored up. It's common practice to organize self-defense and physical training for interested parties, even weapons training for both ballistics and hand-to-hand combat.

Looking outward entails many things, in particular, small offensives against the Others. A hunt during Low Summer might not be large and grandiose, but a few truly dedicated Summer soldiers can do some real damage. In most freeholds, a Courtier of Wrath keeps something like a bounty system running year round, making public the descriptions, last known whereabouts, and names (if available) of the freehold's most dangerous known enemies. The payments for a Summer bounty are as strange and tempting as you might expect — cash is certainly possible, if gauche, but the truly dangerous targets are worth weapons and tokens and pledges.

Lower-ranking Summer Courtiers find ways to serve the freehold. Obviously, they provide the lion's share of soldiers, sentinels, and constabulary. Standing guard isn't a full-time job — most freeholds aren't nearly large enough to support that — but the Iron Spear is there when needed. In most freeholds, the Summer recruitment pitch is based on unity: *Everyone does their part, but we'll always have your back*. It's an attractive offer to Lost looking for a new place to belong and comrades they can trust, especially if they're all right with rolling up their sleeves. Some take well to crafting, be it gunsmithing, archaic weapons and armor, or restoring and improving vehicles.

The Iron Spear encourages a volunteer culture in times of Low Summer, even outside the prospect of the hunt. Keeping busy is a good way to maintain or further your court standing. In the absence of more organized activities, Crimson Courtiers focus their energy into action — vigorous exercise, athletic competitions, martial training, Hedge raids, street races, poetry slams,

all manner of pursuits. Wrath is a smoldering burden, and a responsible Summer Courtier (they're not all responsible) needs to direct all that furious energy into something productive.

To be Summer Court is to remember the necessity of vigilance, year round. Most Crimson Courtiers understand joy, just not unfettered joy. They dance and sing and even laugh, sometimes, at the freehold's celebrations, but the Iron Spear is the designated driver. At least one of them is always sober, eyes on the exits.

Give and Take

The Bargain of Summer is very straightforward: Where a Summer monarch holds power, the Others and their vassals must fight to the last. This compulsion isn't courage — indeed, a True Fae may be hollowed out by panic when it realizes that its enemies will not flee, and it *cannot*. It can only try to push forward, hoping that it's as invincible as it believes itself. The Iron Spear takes clever advantage of the Bargain during a hunt. If they can find a weaker enemy party, all they have to do is force the enemy to draw weapons in self-defense. The rest is bloody formality.

Summer also offers strength and focus. Strength is to be had in the Contracts of Summer — but focus is the philosophy antithetical to the Others, and therefore the first line of defense. The season guides its courtiers down a straightforward path, because straightforwardness is a weapon in its own right where the Fae are concerned. Gentry used to the perpetual twilight of their Arcadian realms falter when faced with changelings calling on the days at their longest and the sun at its zenith. Mercurial Fae, given to expect an echo of their fickleness, wither when confronted with the intense focus of the Iron Spear. Summer doesn't equivocate or flee — an unthinkable character trait in the debauched Gentry so used to having others crumble before them.

The Summer Court draws the most forthright Lost to its ranks. A faerie might find it easier to outwit a Summer soldier, but it might also think too many steps ahead. It can be very difficult for the solipsistic Gentry to anticipate the Summer Court by asking "What would *I* do?" The immortal game players never wind up thinking in terms of "Stop fucking around and just *hit* them."

In return for this strength and focus, Summer asks for blood sacrifice. Not of the B-movie, knives-and-altars human sacrifice variety, though — well, *almost* never — and not simply blood. The Crimson Court venerates their season with competition and physical mortification. They lead ritual hunts such as the *Mir-Shikar*, a grand hunt on the first day of summer targeting a foe or menace to the freehold. They hold tournaments of first-blood duels and cage fights, ranging from displays of meticulous dexterity and control to brutal punch ups where the victor's the one who can still stand up. Their parties are physical affairs where they leap bonfires, run across coals, and brand their skin; they stage eating competitions and sporting matches and mock battles. The court stokes the flames of Summer with aggression, and has many rituals to direct that aggression safely against their own. Mostly safely. Usually.

Mantle Effects: The Summer Mantle is strength and heat. It may pulse warmth like a heartbeat, with a faint smell of iron, or it may be a level, dry heat that seems to press the skin flat. A stronger Mantle may display heat effects like a mirage's shimmer or faint curls of steam. Standing near a truly powerful Crimson Courtier is like standing near an open furnace door — every time they shift, it's like an exhalation out of hell.

Courtiers: A betrayed mother swears vengeance for every year of her children's lives that she missed. An Ogre meditates on his sword, an instrument with no purpose but to cut apart men and women. A *rusalka* armors herself in ice to keep her fury frozen in her heart. A spine-fingered guitarist pours his rage into a ballad of loss and vindication. A ragged woman in a ragged coat visits the freehold every full moon, eating and drinking enough for any five people before she wanders away again to resume her hunt. A soft-spoken, gentle Fairest writes elaborate and ruthless battle strategies on delicate scrolls. A short-tempered bully picks fights at the drop of a hat, then offers to teach a few fighting and first-aid tricks by way of apology. An unobtrusive custodian quietly builds another few shattered Hedge-spears into the wall. A Hedge courier hides her true lightning speed under a casual trot, seeing whom she might draw out to chase her.

Legends

- Thousands of years ago, the seasons were at war. Winter started it, they say, refusing to melt her snows and cede the land to Spring. Soon enough, all four were at each other's throats. Summer was the fiercest, so before long the other three decided to unite against him. He fought the battle on three fronts, but knew he couldn't last, so he put a part of his soul into a fiery bird and sent it away to be safe.

A hundred stories tell what happened next. A soldier, or a maid, or a prince, or a princess, found the firebird. They guarded the firebird against the hunters that came after it, beasts of ice or flowers or withered wood. At last they returned the firebird to Summer, settling the war and earning his gratitude. We don't know the name of that first founder, but we know and share their heart.

- The tale of the founding begins with three siblings. The youngest sister was fast as thought, the oldest son was strong as the ocean, and the middle child was hungry as fire. With these gifts, they fought their way back from Arcadia, free at last from the all-seeing "father" that had taken them. They were nearly to the mortal world when they heard a terrible howl, far above. It was a wolf so immense it chased the sun itself through the sky.

The three leapt to the sun's defense without a thought. The youngest sister distracted the wolf and led it a merry chase. The middle child ate a great trough in the ground for the wolf to fall in, and the oldest son lifted a mountain to trap the wolf in the pit. The grateful sun revealed itself as Highest Summer, and pledged its gratitude to the three. Summer promised to teach the three's descendants and apprentices how to defend themselves against the wolf — for sooner or later, the wolf will get free, and it will come looking for us.

- Don't listen. It wasn't a brawler, a biter, or a berserker who first tracked down Summer — it was a sharpshooter. A hunter. The other courts will tell you otherwise, fearing hunters as they do, but think: How could you track all the skies in a year without patience?

Summer had run for a month, and yet it looked down and saw this mortal always behind it. Summer grew angry, as Summer does, and rolled out a furious sun to blister the hunter's flesh. Without a word, the hunter shot that sun from the sky. Summer, suddenly unsure, turned its chariot and rode on. Another month passed, Summer's anger grew again, and it spat out another ball of fire. And the hunter shot it down. Again and again. Nine months, and nine dead suns later, Summer at last stopped, and descended to face the sharpshooter. The hunter's face was calm, but Summer looked into his eyes, and it saw wrath. And then Summer understood.

- The name we all remember is Sam Noblood. Seems a strange name for a man whose mien flooded with red when he got into a fight, but the story holds — and there ain't much reason to doubt it — that Sam was the second coming of Achilles. He couldn't be cut by any hand but his own.

Sam wasn't the first one to think of pacting with a season, but he was the first to actually pull it off. He made a spear out of dead wood and autumn leaves, figuring the only thing Summer had to fear was Fall. And he went out to chase it like a boar hunt. He won that oath out of Summer by the strength of his arm. And Summer was glad to go along with it in the end, because if Sam could pin a season's ears back, then Sam's court had a real shot against the kings and queens of Arcadia.

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Autumn

The Leaden Mirror, the Ashen Court, the Court of Fear

Don't be simple. Of course it's not better to be feared than loved. But someone has to wear that particular crown.

The woman held out her fist, blood dripping from it and her skinner's knife. "I call on the silver bear," she said, and the Huntsman's silver-furred cloak bound his arms to his sides. "I call on the seven wolf brothers," she said, and the Huntsman's hide boots slammed together and would not move. "I call on the red stag," she said, and the Huntsman's russet leather choker tightened around his neck. "Aid me," she whispered once more, "and avenge yourselves."

Fear

Fear is a line in the dust. It's a boundary, an invisible wall. Fear keeps your enemy from crossing your threshold. Fear keeps your allies from presuming too much. Fear is a fortress, and the Leaden Mirror knows all the secrets in its foundations.

The Ashen Court has a complicated relationship with their signature passion. Some of them revel in the rush; others consider terror the most rational weapon in a frightening world. Obviously, they all know how what it's like to live in constant dread, thanks to the durance — but that could be said to be true of every Lost. The difference is that it takes a certain amount of introspection to swear the Autumn vow. Spring and Summer might suppress their old fears, and Winter may hide from them. But Autumn has to come to terms with those old scars.

Why, then, doesn't the Ashen Court play more like the Summer Court? Why do they treat the dread of knives and gasoline and broken glass as secondary at best? The answer's pragmatic — as terrifying as the threat of violence is, it works best on mortals. The True Fae play by different rules. They don't even reliably have bodies to break or blood to spill. To get at what frightens one of the Gentry, you have to threaten the rules they play by. And that requires sorcery. Nothing terrifies one of the grand gameplayers like the realization that what they'd mistaken for a pawn has its hands on the rulebook.

Autumn had many gifts to offer, but the Ashen Court chose fear. It was a power that flowed from lengthening nights and dead leaves falling from skeletal branches, of ripe fruits rotting on the ground. Autumn granted the understanding that death itself is not as frightening as *dying*. Animals fatten up before winter, driven by the secret understanding of starvation. Rich greens

wither away into sere browns. Mortals honor their ghosts and light lanterns against the deepening dark. Horror movies and Halloween are florid offerings to Autumn's ancient and subtle truth: the unconscious dread that perhaps this will be the year you won't see the coming of spring. The immortal Gentry don't understand mortality in these terms — but who better than the Autumn Court to instruct them?

Fear is a dangerous emotion to harvest. Stir up too much dread, and a neighborhood starts looking too closely at anything strange going on. The fear you get at horror movies is superficial, about as nutritious as the popcorn. But the Autumn Court has its ways. They follow people home at night, staying just out of sight and making just enough noise to let the person fill in the rest. Children have vivid imaginations and low skepticism, making it worthwhile to seed rumors of the frightening house on the corner. A measure to frighten children might also infect their protective parents. An animal shelter reeks of the stuff, with stressed animals panicking every time one of them cries out.

Bargaining

Everyone relies on their mechanisms. When the pressure's too great, an Autumn Courtier usually tries to find a way out. They don't run and hide, though — all that trafficking in terror builds up calluses on the soul, keeping the fight-or-flight question at bay. They have time to ask questions like *"What could I have done differently?"* or *"Is there anyone I can get to help me?"* That level of awareness doesn't mean they're fully in control, though. It only means their desperation is more articulated.

The Leaden Mirror's attention to the Wyrd feeds this character flaw. Magic has always been a practice of pacts and bargains, especially changeling magic with its Contracts and pledges. Do *this*, give *that*, and something will teach you how to turn the pages of reality until you find something you like better. So, when an Ashen Courtier feels her life or freedom is truly in danger, her first instinct is to look for some kind of escape clause.

Those Lost who've seen this side of the Autumn Court — *really* seen it — may find the Court of Fear even more frightening than before. When a desperate changeling starts thinking in terms of bargaining, well... The other courts are always at least a little worried that someone in the Leaden Mirror might turn coat and strike a deal with the enemy. The sorcerers are, after all, very good at bargains.

Worse, the Fae also know this.

The Turning of the Seasons

High Autumn: Autumn doesn't usually take the throne with grand displays like Spring and Summer. Their ceremonies are smaller, but more binding — an Autumn monarch will hold you to anything you say, so beware of empty platitudes for courtesy's sake. When an Autumn Queen *does* plan a grand event to mark her ascension, odds are that she intends to secure her rule through fear, and the intention is that everyone will leave the ceremony afraid to cross their new queen. The coronation banquet of such a ruler is certain to be...memorable.

When Summer has primacy, they look to the freehold's arms; when Autumn succeeds Summer, they look to the freehold's magic. This often takes the form of a cryptic census. Ashen Courtiers visit every member of the freehold, inquiring in the King's name as to any pledges they honor, any tokens they carry, or any oaths they are bound to fulfill. Usually people lie, or outright refuse

to give up their secrets. The Leaden Mirror rarely presses the issue — secrecy is, after all, an important defense for the Lost. But given Autumn's mastery of the occult, they can often offer advice for better using a token, dream, or Contract than the owner would have guessed. An honest changeling becomes an educated changeling. An educated changeling is of more use.

If an Autumn Queen needs to prosecute a war, or to complete a war that her Summer predecessor started, she plays dirty. She enlists the Winter Court to supply her with all the information they're willing to share on the enemy's weaknesses. She searches out the loopholes in the oaths binding her foes. She uses bait and false retreat tactics to lure hunters into arcane traps. She uses sorcery to obliterate magically weak opponents, and dispatches Summer Court volunteers to overrun physically soft targets. She disdains glory and honor for shock and awe. If she utterly destroys her enemy's appetite for conflict with the freehold, she'll have to fight only one battle during her reign.

Low Autumn: When another court sits the throne, the Ashen Court return to their archives. On a practical level, the Leaden Mirror appeals to changelings who want to learn. *We all need to know more about ourselves and our world, just to survive. We'll share our knowledge with you.* Just about every Autumn Courtier has a measure of interest in magic, often with an occult specialization. One might be fascinated by words, and surround herself with books and blackboards; another, immersed in the symbolism of colors, keeps a spectrum of rooms where each is dedicated to the spells peculiar to its hue. The court is one part cabal of witches and one part scientific community, sharing their findings. They don't hide from others the way the Winter Court does, but other changelings are often reluctant to seek them out. This suits them, of course. It gives them more privacy for their research, and of course, it isn't a bad thing to be feared.

Autumn Courtiers settle into a variety of roles to support a freehold. They make fine advisors and soothsayers, but more interestingly, some are natural therapists. These Ashen Courtiers can surgically expose, identify, and soothe a person's innermost worry and dread. The court also reaches for certain clerical duties, from cataloging the tokens known to the freehold to recording the freehold's history. They make *excellent* solicitors, devising the craftiest and most beneficial wording for an oath, pledge, or Contract. Some put the court's lore to work by exploring the Hedge, whether to find secret paths in and out or to tend and harvest goblin fruits. Finally, a freehold's justice system is of great interest to the Autumn Court. Winter may provide more investigators and Summer more constables, but Autumn accepts the truly ugly business of playing gaoler and executioner. Caging another changeling is a disturbing reenactment of the durance, but when it must be done, best that the job goes to someone who can at least benefit from a prisoner's terror.

No other court has anything close to the Autumn interest in the terrifying supernatural beings that lurk on the fringes of mortal society. While they don't trust vampires, ghosts, werewolves, or the like, these "fellow Autumn People" are grimly fascinating. Other supernatural beings have magic of their own, and they are entities to be feared. They feel like kindred spirits, though you'd have to be a fool to assume any bond. The Ashen Court has a dangerous tendency to investigate rumors of other supernatural beings. Some hope for allies; some to steal valuable new magics. All are rightly cautious.

Give and Take

Autumn's Bargain compels transparency. When the Court of Fear reigns, the Others and their pawns must give clear warning of their intentions before they attack. Autumn protects its

children from the dread of uncertainty. The more powerful the Gentry, the further in advance it must announce its intentions; the time varies from a few hours to as much as a lunar month. The True Fae wriggle and writhe to find cryptic, unreadable ways that might announce their intentions only to someone capable of their riddle-thought, but these attempts inevitably fail. So the Others draw up their battle lines and send out liveried hobgoblin heralds, or they scatter engraved invitations to a slaughter, or they light runes of fire on the Hedge borders. If they aren't permitted surprise, then they shall at least have grandeur.

The Ashen Court repays Autumn's blessing with many rituals — more, truth be told, than Autumn ever required. At the smallest level, they practice tiny individualized superstitions as minor sacrifices. A courtier might bury a packet of burnt pumpkin seeds before a diplomatic errand, keep a bit of worn heartwood on a keychain, or count the steps every time she goes downstairs. These micro-rituals are a show of reliability, proving that the changeling can uphold even the most trivial of bargains.

Greater rites are usually some variant of a harvest ceremony. A few of these are innocuous feasts, mostly notable for the amount of magical shop talk that takes place. But more are hunts — the Ashen Court harvests fear, after all. It's unclear to outsiders what differentiates the Hunt of Leaves from the Falling Night from the Ash Run, even if those outsiders are invited. They all have very similar structure. The quarry is an enemy of the freehold, from fetches or changeling traitors to True Fae themselves. The Autumn Court provides weapons and masking spells to all interested parties, and in return claims first choice of any enchanted spoils they may find.

Mantle Effects: The Autumn Court's Mantle is...peculiar. It's distinctly Autumn — in its strength it may be a cooling breeze, a rustling rattle like a tree's denuded branches in the wind, tiny flickering candle flames or lantern fires, dead leaves spinning from nowhere and vanishing to the same. A truly powerful Autumn Mantle withers green plants away to brown and sends shivers up the spine. But tied into all that are the marks of the Ashen Court's sorcery. Occult glyphs shimmer like witchfire or spread like blotting ink before fading. An atonal chant sings a wordless warning. Sparks like dying stars fall from the changeling's fingertips. An aurora of unearthly hues shimmers about the shoulders. The precise form these arcana take depends on the courtier, but wise Lost quickly learn to recognize the sign of a potent Autumn sorcerer.

Courtiers: An aspiring general discreetly inquires into Contracts that strike at the enemy's morale. An oneiromancer captures and catalogs nightmares, soothing his comrades' rest and uncorking the terrors in the dreams of enemies. A literal internet troll hacks a dark-net database and threatens to dox the names she finds. A performance artist weaves spells of dread into an already disquieting act. An archivist searches out the details of every pledge spoken in the freehold, recording each one in massive chained ledgers. A candlemaker blends wax with the juice of goblin fruits to protect — or curse — certain favored customers. An alchemical vintner crafts intoxicating draughts that alter the drinker's perception of the mystical. A lawyer goes over Contracts in exacting detail, extrapolating new possible loopholes to exploit. A would-be shapeshifter runs wild at night, and seems to have a different patch of fur or scales or feathers every morning.

Legends

- Nobody could catch Autumn. She had a robe made of leaves of every color, and when she wore it you could never tell her from a tree or a stone. She ran faster than a deer, could break

anything in her path, and never got tired. Many brave hunters ran after her until their feet bled and they collapsed. But there was one who just walked.

He was a clever one, who sometimes walked like a spider. He had a big bag full of stories that bent him near double, but he said it didn't weigh a thing. He went wandering into Autumn's lands until he found a clearing he liked, then he sat on a stump and opened up his bag. He took out a story, examined it carefully, and then recited it to make sure it was still proper. When he put it back and made to close the bag, a voice whispered, "Another." So he took out another story, and another, and another, and Autumn gathered up her invisible robe and crouched there, listening. When he finally put his last story away, he said "Well, and now it's the solstice." And to her surprise, Autumn admitted defeat.

- The first Autumn Queen wasn't what you would have expected. Clay Ariel wasn't strong, she wasn't swift, and she damn well wasn't frightening. She was a little thing, whose flesh and bone hands were replaced with soft clay after she was taken. She had to be careful not to damage her poor hands, so all her tools and toys and weapons were clay as well, things she could handle with magic kneaded into them.

But you'd be right to fear her anyway. When the four hunts began, Clay Ariel said, "I'll search out Autumn," and she set out with nothing more than the clothes on her back and a little smile on her face. She came back with the Bargain, and the Contracts of Fear. Now what in God's name could this quiet little clay mouse have done to earn that? How did she get picked over the sharp-edged murderers and doomcrows that set out on the same quest? We'll never know. And that's the lesson: Never take *anything* for granted.

- Spring and Autumn were once husband and wife. They had many children — storms, flowers, fruits, grains, all things young and beautiful, and all things ripe and sweet. But in time, Autumn fell ill. When her form became withered and leafless, Spring could not bear to look on his wife any longer. He fled, and she cursed him for his cowardice.

They feuded for many long years. Autumn swore she'd slay whatever living child of Spring she could catch, and Spring vowed he'd engender so many she could never kill them all. When they finally made truce, it was at the behest of a brave pair of changelings, a husband and wife who each sought out one of the seasons. Alas, these mortals sacrificed their own love for the Bargain. Spring's champion died to appease Autumn — at the hands of his wife, the first Autumn Queen.

- When Silver Marya went looking for Autumn, she found him waiting for her in his great bleak house, sitting on his barren chair. He welcomed her and offered her his blessing, his Bargain, and the hand of his handsome son in marriage...if she could prove herself worthy. The cunning old season asked her to gather his 1,000 horses by feeding time, to comb the leaves from his orchard by bedtime, and to sow his fields with wheat to make into dumplings by breakfast time.

She did each of these things, but not alone. With pledges and oaths, she compelled birds to gather the horses, sang the leaves away, and persuaded the wheat to grow and the millstone to grind it. When she sat down to breakfast with Autumn, Autumn smiled and told her she'd cheated. Before she could reply, he said, "But that's good. I want a daughter-in-law who knows it's better to be wise than brave. Teach all your children how to make pacts like yours, for only fools rely on their hands alone."

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Winter

The Silent Arrow, the Onyx Court, the Court of Sorrow

Cowardice? Just how short-sighted do you think we are? We're not trying to hide forever from the Others. That's impossible. We're finding a safe place to wait. Until.

The long-fingered hounds ran without baying in all directions. One snuffled at each stoop along the street, reaching up to caress the door only if the lights were out. Another, pale and naked, clambered into a dumpster to prod for warmth. A third rattled up a rusty fire escape, looking into each window. Nothing, nothing, and nothing. No spoor, no footprint, no sign of their quarry. The only thing that was left was a white mask lying in the street, and soon it too melted away.

Sorrow

Sorrow is a cage. It keeps a person from moving. It roots them in place, cold and unyielding. But people also willingly lock themselves within it. They embrace the bars' strength, for they're just as strong as the love for what was lost. They close the door to keep other people out, as if they were sharks. The Winter Court knows that sorrow can be crippling, but also inspiring. You just have to be certain you're the one holding the keys.

It's easy for a changeling to be drawn to sorrow. All you had to do was love enough. The Lost return home to find lovers in a false person's arms, parents dead and gone, children grown and unhappy. The life's work you built may be shuttered and lightless. The art you created may be destroyed or stolen. The Winter Court doesn't offer the same strength as Summer and Autumn, or the same abandon and hope as Spring, but it has never lacked for numbers. Those who join the Silent Arrow don't want to forget.

Sorrow's strength is twofold. Turn it against your enemies, and you strike at their will to fight. Turn it inward, against yourself, and you can see through false hopes and useless temptations. The Silent Arrow keeps loss, regret, guilt, and despair in their quiver. They're dangerous things to handle, but they have to be. So many of the Gentry aren't prepared for the pain that comes with losing something you truly loved — because so many of the Gentry weren't capable of truly loving in the first place.

Winter has always been the season of sorrow. Light is in shorter supply, and darkness comes early. The modern understanding of seasonal affective disorder offers a more scientific illustration of a relationship with Winter that some people have always endured. The longer the night, the easier it is to mourn.

Harvesting sorrow requires discretion, much like any other Winter Court affair. It wouldn't do to be seen with a smile of indulgence at a funeral, or when families are picking through the tornado-strewn flinders of their houses. Guilt and regret are nourishing vintages, and churches and prisons tempting sources. The more ruthless courtiers are experts at finding and reopening a mortal's old wounds, then feeding as they offer a sympathetic ear.

Depression

It takes immense fortitude to push forward under the weight of a heavy sorrow. The Winter Court has always been at greater risk for depression, both in the sense of major depressive

disorder and in the more vernacular meaning. In the former case, it's not because something in Winter's Bargain may inflict clinical depression — it's because changelings who suffer from major depressive disorder most often find their way to the Onyx Court. The Winter Court doesn't offer a false cure for depression, but everyone there understands. And fortune willing, a changeling might be able to turn their affliction into surprising strength.

The specter of depression has developed an interesting counterpart to the Winter Court's focus on remaining hidden. Pragmatism encourages the Silent Arrow to be ready to cut ties and run at any time. But pragmatism also encourages them to develop safe avenues to the things they enjoy and the people they love, as a means of staving off the sorrow that surrounds them. It's a cruel contradiction: isolation helps keep a secret, but isolation can eat at your soul. Onyx Courtiers have to be clever to balance these two needs, but of course, the court teaching is that they have to be clever simply to survive.

The great danger of depression is inaction. If you're always on the defensive, you can't make any sort of progress. Conscientious Courtiers of Sorrow watch their fellows for the warning signs of a shutdown and try to be ready to help. Less empathetic courtiers don't bother, figuring it's every Lost for themselves. The dangers aren't lost on changelings of other courts. Some can be loath to trust the Winter Court — when the Others come a-riding, what happens if the Onyx Courtiers crawl into their hiding places and refuse to stand with their brethren?

The Turning of the Seasons

High Winter: A freehold with an Onyx monarch is like a forest in winter — the trees seem still and quiet, but the roots are still quietly at work beneath the frozen ground. The freehold withdraws, declares no new grand offensives, and settles in for a time. And all the while, the Court of Sorrow spreads throughout the area, blending in neatly and using the lull to best advantage. They collate rumors, upgrade security systems, and check to see if each freehold member kept their bug-out bag up to date. Succeeding the throne after an Autumn reign has its advantages and disadvantages: The Autumn Court usually tidies up after themselves, but their tactic of fear can sometimes leave the local Hedge denizens inconveniently jittery and the Gentry on the alert.

A Winter king or queen usually seems very conservative next to their fellows. They make few open decrees, instead dispatching courtiers on secret and often deniable quests. When they require the neutralization of a threat, they commission an assassination rather than a war party. Winter has a particular tolerance for fetches, if tolerance is the right word: Very few fetches die during a Winter reign, to avoid stirring up trouble with the mortal world.

If war comes to the freehold, a Winter monarch may take to the field — leading from a fortified rear or dressed like a simple soldier — or he may direct the strategy from afar. But optimally, there will be no war while Winter reigns. If their information networks, wards of misdirection, camouflage, and discreet assassinations have all been reasonably successful, the enemy will be too disoriented and scattered to challenge the freehold.

Low Winter: When another court reigns, the Silent Arrow melts into the background as usual. They remain active in the freehold's affairs, gathering information and running covert errands. They openly volunteer just often enough that the other courts remember that they're present and contributing. Apart from that, the Onyx Courtiers tend to act only when directly asked. The Winter Court accords more respect to rulers who remember their existence and make use of their

talents. They also note that such rulers are more potentially *dangerous* to them...but that's part of respect.

Winter Courtiers play support in a freehold. They may have a variety of roles — scouts, doctors, cleaners, communications, researchers, counselors — but they're all tied into the same information network, and any freeholder with half a brain knows it. They also know a child of Winter will lie to your face, by omission or otherwise, without thinking twice. You can't trust every word a Winter Courtier tells you, but you can be certain they have the enlightened self-interest that keeps them part of the freehold, and are invested in the good of the freehold as a whole.

In most seasonal freeholds, the Silent Arrow is one of the smaller courts. It's easy to get the impression that they recruit new courtiers under protest, and would prefer to keep their numbers small and trusted. That's not, generally, true. The Winter Court demands discretion, but they offer a place to any changeling who feels safest when they're not attracting attention. They don't make the same social demands that Spring and Summer do. *We'll keep you safe and informed, so you can be in control again. You just have to be able to keep a secret.*

In that vein, the court upholds certain formal laws of secrecy, sometimes called the Icelaw. The Icelaw defines the most important things to protect. For instance, Winter stresses the medieval idea of courtly love, to protect the heart and reputation. Hate, like love, is best kept to yourself until it threatens to consume you, and then it must be acted on with swift discretion. A Winter Courtier must always be ready to evacuate or vanish, should the freehold suddenly fall. And the world is full of other supernatural beings who simply cannot be trusted — avoid them if possible, mislead them as much as you can, and never meet with one alone.

Give and Take

Winter's Bargain is one of the strangest of them all. While the Onyx Court is in power, the Others and their hounds are compelled to mourn, to truly mourn, their victims. An invader cannot bloody its blade or talons a second time until it has ritually acknowledged the death of its first target. The Bargain makes a Winter battlefield a truly peculiar sight, for most True Fae have no real idea how to mourn and can only approximate some form of guess. A spidery figure crouches over a corpse, spinning and folding a sticky origami insect to lay on its chest. A ice-skinned lady twists the arm of her servant until tears well out of its eyes, and then daubs those tears on the eyelids of the fallen. A six-masked rider arranges its prey's limbs into a mock-caper, and douses the carcass with blue fire from a Mobius decanter. And that's when Winter strikes. Against the Gentry, there's no room to honor these formal mimicries.

Like all other courts, the Court of Sorrow honors and repays its patron with rituals and celebrations. Winter's practices are not as grandiose, though. Too much pageantry would defeat the purpose of subtlety, but more to the point, a truly riotous winter festival would be *insulting*. Humans build fires in the dark part of the year to hasten it along and to beckon forth spring. When the Winter Court builds ritual fires, they burn reminders of their old human lives or their secrets. When they hold grand wakes in honor of all the Lost who've perished at the hands of the Gentry, they drink little and let the other courts have the lion's share of the debauchery. The Onyx Court pays their debt in ritualized grief and the recognition of loss. The most famous exception is the Winter Market, a bazaar that takes place the week before the winter solstice. Vendors must gain the court's permission to set up, and most are Winter Courtiers trading

information and “confiscated” goods. But the Winter Market is distinct in that all transactions gain the Silent Arrow’s gift of discretion.

The Winter Formal, another tradition with an innocuous name, is a once-a-year masquerade. The court requires masks to attend, and uses tokens and subtle magic to ensure that the identities of all participants are kept secret. The Winter Formal is an opportunity to socialize without the stress of politics, where everyone keeps secrets together.

Finally, Radio Free Fae is a tradition with no roots in the Bargain. As such, not all Winter Courtiers approve. Radio Free Fae is a bootleg broadcast, its location constantly moving and as secret as the identity of its participants. Its stated purpose is to share information that all Lost should know, even if the Winter Court hasn’t cleared some of that information for release.

Mantle Effects: The Winter Mantle is subtler than those of the other courts. At lower levels, the Onyx Courtier might be confused for a courtless; at higher levels, an observer might mistake the courtier for someone much less potent than they are. And why not? If the Silent Arrow’s primary goal is to elude notice, it would make little sense to proclaim one’s power far and wide. The most prominent feature — relatively, of course — is a feeling of starkness. The Winter Mantle creates a sensation of stillness and clarity, of light falling in just that way that reveals the little details in the changeling’s surroundings. At its most powerful, or when the Lost uses magic, Winter becomes a bit more evident. A few snowflakes fall, or a faint wind is cold out of all proportion to its gentle touch. If a full flurry churns around a Winter Courtier, *run*.

Courtiers: A forensic scientist finds clever ways to destroy evidence or plant false clues to misdirect their hunters. An aged librarian teaches others the secret speech of riddles with no answers. A stone-skinned hitman loads bodies into the trunk of a car that devours them. A pale, eyeless architect builds tunnels and chambers that never appear on any map. A favor broker parlays stolen secrets into influence with the Goblin Market itself. A school custodian passes on news to other Lost about the children they never see. A therapist teaches her brokenhearted clients how to face their innermost secret demons and how to live with grief. A funeral-home director fakes the deaths of certain sensitive clients, for a reasonable fee, of course. A software engineer buries stealth code into apps to hide or reveal certain locations. A gawky wallflower attends all the grand parties with her more glamorous friends, and carefully notes with whom they leave. A conspiracy theorist catalogs evidence about the movements and activities of vampires and werewolves, and prepares elaborate contingencies should they look the freehold’s way.

Legends

- Not everything green and growing is kind. Once, many fair young men and women were captured for the gardens of a Keeper called the Earth Mother. The Earth Mother was beautiful and giving, but she demanded utmost obedience. If someone displeased her in the smallest way, she planted them in her orchards, and they were never seen in fleshly form again. Many tried to flee her. Only one succeeded.

The Pale Maiden had listened and learned. She knew that the only creature that the Earth Mother feared was Winter himself. So she ran to the boundaries of the Earth Mother’s gardens, and she called out to Winter to come and take her away. Winter accepted her offer, and kept her hidden away for six months before returning her to the mortal world. There, she taught others how to honor her patron, formalizing the Bargain and forging the Court of Sorrow. But after six months

of rule, she vanished again. Some say the Earth Mother found her again, but that's a fool's supposition. We know where she must have gone — back into Winter's domain, to the seat he keeps for her by his throne.

- There was a child, unloved by her family, who ran deep into the woods to escape them when they were angry. She curled up in the snow, shivering, waiting to fall asleep forever, but the plumes of her breath drew Winter's attention. He came and sat beside her, and the chill of his robes drew the warmth from her, and he asked her to tell him her story. But she never complained, she never spoke of her family, and indeed she was too polite to speak of her pain at all. Winter marveled at the fortitude and manners of this small child, and announced that he would adopt her for his own.

Eventually the child came out of the woods. When she emerged, she wore a crown of ice and robes spun from heavy snowdrifts. She taught other children like her all the secrets that she learned from Father Winter, but to this day she has never spoken as much as her old family's name.

- Back when Sam Noblood was hunting Summer and Clay Ariel was negotiating with Autumn, there weren't many volunteers to chase down Winter. Only one person declared he'd force Winter to strike a bargain like the other three. The court remembers his name as Snowflake John, though it was surely something else. We don't remember his face, though; he was called Snowflake John because you couldn't pick him out of a crowd any more than you could pick a snowflake out of a drift.

John laid out his challenge to Winter, and then...he disappeared. Nobody saw him again for two years. When he finally showed up again, he claimed it was done — he'd bested Winter because Winter hadn't managed to find him for two full turns of the seasons. It was a ridiculous claim. Surely he wasn't telling us everything. But we had our pact, and an object lesson in why some things deserve to stay secret.

- Winter never wanted a Bargain. He put his house under the ice at the roof of the world, in water so cold no mortal could ever swim to his door and live. When Spring, Summer, and Autumn all agreed to aid their tiny supplicants, Winter sat in his house and shook his head. "Not unless they ask me to my face," he said.

But Winter had a daughter, and he had been cruel to her. When he caught her with a boy, he slashed her with a knife and threw her into the sea. So one day a quiet fisherman went out to the sea, and he tied a pretty necklace to his fishing line, and he lowered it down to her as a gift. When she followed his line up to the surface, he tended her wounds, brushed her hair, and promised he would marry her if that was what she wanted. She carried him swiftly down to her father's house, and pushed him through the door before he could freeze or drown. Winter was very displeased that he'd been found, and that he would have a new son-in-law — but a promise was a promise. The Bargain was his wedding gift.

Kiths

Sometimes, a True Fae needs their servant to be more than just a Fairest or Darkling. Sometimes, a changeling looks into a golden box she shouldn't have, or eats a fruit from a strange tree after three days of fleeing her master's hounds. Sometimes, the soul, for whatever strange and occult reason, just fits into a particular shape. This specialization of roles is called a kith. Most changelings who make their way back through the Hedge have a kith — their new powers are a double-edged sword their masters failed to grasp. These different kiths fill many different roles and perform diverse functions in Lost society. Mechanically, this is represented by a *Kith Blessing*. A Blessing has two parts: a lowered exceptional success threshold on a roll in a specific circumstance, and a power unique to the kith.

Below are 12 sample kiths for use in your **Changeling: The Lost** chronicle. By no means are you limited to these 12 — see the Kith Creation rules in Chapter Seven for more on building new and interesting kiths for your chronicle.

Artist

Would you mind stepping to the side? You're blocking my light.

Artists are not just the painters, the sculptors, the architects, or the composers. They are, in a very real way, their art. True Fae rarely abduct established artists to make Artist changelings. Novices, amateurs, and struggling small-timers might all be turned into Artists, however. The Gentry don't care about the initial quality. What they want is an Artist trained to create things solely for them.

As part of their durance, Artists often develop physical characteristics of their chosen medium. A sculptor's skin might become gray and flinty, whereas a painter might have splashes of random, vivid colors in their hair. In Arcadia, they were kept in a prison of their own frenzied activity. Stopping to rest might mean punishment, often in the form of being forced to destroy their own half-finished piece, or watching their Keeper destroy it because it wasn't perfect. Occasionally, an Artist is called to help their Keeper “design” a new changeling — with similar results if they stop working before the victim is finished. As such, many Artists are usually extremely protective of their works in progress, never letting them see the light of day until they are absolutely perfect.

Ogre: The architect has arms like Corinthian columns, bulging out of the shirt that's a bit too small for them. Their shaggy hair is always full of paint dust and wood shavings. They are surprisingly gentle for their size — but a force of nature if interrupted.

Wizened: The tiny, gnarled woman has splotches across her paper-white skin that might be ink or might be veins. Her eyes are a vivid, unearthly blue. She is never without her watercolors and can paint Arcadia from memory. Some Lost wish she wouldn't.

Kith Blessing: When the Artist uses a Crafts Specialty, achieving three successes counts as an exceptional success.

Tools of the Trade: A good Artist is never without her tools. She can spend a point of Glamour and gain a number of bonus dice equal to her Wyrd, to a maximum of +5, on a Crafts roll with one of her Specialties, as all the necessary implements of her craft manifest around her for a scene.

Bright One

*Excuse me. I was **talking**.*

There are few things that will turn a True Fae's head more than genuine passion. It doesn't matter what that passion is for — the arts, the sciences, a political movement, a lover, it's all the same to the Gentry. They see it as a fire, burning in the soul and setting the creature who feels it alight. Humans who are taken by the Others because of this passion usually become Bright Ones.

A Bright One is rarely taken by force. True Fae, when capturing a Bright One, go to lengths to ensnare them through their passion, whether it's posing as a kindly college professor and suggesting that perhaps her target might like to switch to the Classics department, or leaving notes from a mysterious admirer in the target's apartment building. The goal is always to get the soon-to-be changeling to go willingly, but never with full and informed consent.

Once in Arcadia, the changeling's passions are turned up to a fever pitch. She is subjected to nightmare after nightmare, always centered on the things she loves, and is punished if she shows any emotion. She becomes a Bright One when the built-up rage and anguish explode out of her in a flood of light and fury. For some changelings, this becoming is when they escape their durance. For others, they are stuck lighting innumerable inhuman balls, dinners, and hunts, only making their escape at a moment when they can blind their Keeper. Subtlety is not an option for these changelings — their mien radiates a soft glow always. Their Mask often, but not always, translates this as a pretty face or striking hair. It's difficult to look away when a Bright One is in the room.

Elemental: The air around this changeling ripples and shimmers as though she is on fire. Her hair is a striking red-gold, almost iridescent. She is quick to anger and even quicker to forgive, once you can convince her you're truly sorry.

Fairest: This beautiful creature looks as though they are made of moonbeams and starlight. They have a soft, silver glow, and a gentle voice to match. Their voice is never raised, but their anger is something to fear.

Kith Blessing: When the Bright One uses Socialize to attempt to be the center of attention, achieving three successes counts as an exceptional success.

Flare: A Bright One always has a visible glow, even in the darkest of rooms, though the Mask normally prevents mortals from seeing it. She can spend a point of Glamour to turn this glow up to a dazzling brilliance that blinds her enemies, and one Glamour every turn thereafter to maintain it; the Mask does not obscure this light. Each turn the Bright One uses this blessing, her enemies take a point of bashing damage and roll at a -2 on all Physical and Mental actions.

Chatelaine

I used to serve because it was a flogging otherwise. I left to get away from the whips and the cook's rolling pin and the ever-present threat of the hounds — but I still serve. I am useless if I don't serve. Another drink, madam?

Chatelaines are the perfect servants. Taken to Arcadia by Gentry with a taste for the finer things in life, these changelings are butlers, stewards, housekeepers, and domestic workers of all stripes. Taken for their attention to detail, they are thrown into their durance with no training and the full expectation that they will provide exactly what their Keeper wants when they want it.

Rare is the Gentry who keeps just one Chatelaine. A new changeling in a Fae household is expected to learn from the older, more established servants, and woe betide the servant who does

not learn her place quickly and quietly. Keepers rarely have to punish their Chatelaines directly; a simple sign of displeasure is more than enough to send the household scrambling to chastise the errant changeling. Chatelaines quickly learn to work within a system, using others' power to survive while serving a capricious master.

This quiet movement through hostile social territory becomes an escape. When you're beyond reproach, who's to say you can't walk right out the front door? The Chatelaines that come back through the Hedge are usually lower in the hierarchy. While it is not unheard-of for an established majordomo or lady's maid to have a place in the Lost courts, it is almost always the peons who were too tied to Earth to fit into the pecking order of a Fae household.

Darkling: A quiet servant with small fangs who seems to fade into the shadows that gather around her whenever she stands still long enough. She is uncomfortable with the spotlight and never speaks unless spoken to.

Fairest: A prim, perfect steward of the manor. Their uniform is always perfectly pressed and their eyes and hair are the same color as the brass finish. They are the *only* person to come to when the local courts want to plan a party of any kind.

Kith Blessing; When the Chatelaine uses Empathy to determine a target's immediate desires, achieving three successes counts as an exceptional success.

Will That Be All?: Spend a point of Glamour to activate this blessing for the scene. With a successful Manipulation + Socialize roll, a Chatelaine may use the Social Merits of one other character in the scene as though they were her own. When the effect ends, characters act as though the target had used the Merits himself.

Gristlegrinder

Well aren't you a little morsel. How about supper tonight, just the two of us? You don't need to fancy up — I hate undoing buttons and zippers.

Gristlegrinders are the cannibalistic nightmares of other changelings. Strictly speaking, they don't *need* the flesh of the Lost to survive — they're more like living garbage disposals who developed a taste for fae flesh while in Arcadia. Many Gentry keep them around as cooks, guard dogs, and implicit threats to their own slaves. Any kidnapped mortal could potentially become a Gristlegrinder. The ones that do generally had some emptiness inside before being kidnapped, be it grief from a breakup or a death, loss of direction in life after a stressful event, or simply burnout.

Almost every Gristlegrinder has tasted changeling flesh at some point. The Gentry make good on their threats once they can't find a use for a misbehaving thrall anymore, so many Gristlegrinders have vivid memories of butchering, cooking, and eating other Lost — or simply snapping their necks and swallowing them whole. Many Gristlegrinders actually ate their way out of Arcadia, whether it was by devouring the hobgoblins and nightmares standing in their way, or simply chewing a hole through the Hedge. The devouring doesn't stop when they leave Arcadia, however. Their hunger is all-consuming, be it for love, blood, money, or simply more food.

There are rumors that some Gristlegrinders have a taste for live flesh. Most will fervently deny the truth of this supposition, but all are looked on with suspicion by their fellow Lost, regardless.

Beast: She has a shark's eyes, a wolf's ears, and a mouth big enough to swallow you whole, my dear. She is always hungry, and always smiling.

Ogre: Fee, fi, fo, fum. This is the giant from child's stories, the one with the small eyes and the gnashing teeth, coming to chew you up for bothering him at mealtime.

Kith Blessing: When the Gristlegrinder uses Brawl to grapple someone with intent to eat them, achieving three successes counts as an exceptional success.

To Serve Man: A Gristlegrinder can make bite attacks that deal lethal damage, without needing to grapple a foe first. However, if she is holding something or grappling someone of a smaller Size than herself, she can opt to swallow it (or them) whole. She spends a point of Glamour and her jaw expands to the necessary size to swallow the target. With a successful Stamina + Survival roll, she gets the target down with minimal effort. A Gristlegrinder's digestive system deals two points of lethal damage per turn. If the target is poisoned or toxic, the Gristlegrinder takes damage as normal (p. XX), unless she has a Merit, token, or other means to negate it. Targets attacking the changeling from inside her must deal at least five points of lethal damage with a single attack to break out, but she can't apply her Defense against such attacks.

Helldiver

Sorry, didn't mean to spook you! Occasional hazard of the job, I guess. You won't believe what I saw down there...

Occasionally, the True Fae need to get places that even they can't reach. Sometimes they need a spy or a thief in their byzantine intrigues, someone who would go unnoticed and unaffected. When they feel like engaging in espionage, the Others create Helldivers.

Helldivers are unusual among changelings in that they are not only expected to leave Arcadia, they are encouraged to do so. However, this does not free them from their Keepers. Even in their otherworld forms, members of the Helldiver kith still in their durance have a silver thread attached to their person leading back to their Keepers. All Helldivers know the excruciating pain of being yanked out of another realm unexpectedly to face the wrath of their Keeper. Once the thread is broken, the Helldiver is free. Helldivers break their threads in different ways. Some find a goblin smith willing to destroy it (for a price). Some have them broken by the people they were sent to infiltrate. Some simply go through the agony of breaking it themselves.

Whether in their durance or freed, Helldivers are never in one place for long. They are always chasing some new rumor of a rare token, exploring alien worlds, or listening in on conversations they really shouldn't. Helldivers are hungry for knowledge. After all, knowledge is power.

Beast: This changeling has bright, inquisitive eyes and vestigial wings. They move with startling speed and are usually content to listen — that is, until you get them talking.

Darkling: Even when not Diving, she doesn't seem completely solid. Her eyes are constantly roaming the room, checking for threats. She speaks in a hazy, distracted sort of way, as though not all there.

Kith Blessing: When the Helldiver uses Larceny in the Hedge, Arcadia, or another unearthly realm, achieving three success counts as an exceptional success.

Dive: Spend a Glamour point to make a Dexterity + Occult roll. On a success, the Helldiver begins to fade into an incorporeal, invisible form. It takes a number of turns equal to (10 - her current Clarity), to a minimum of one full turn, to completely fade. While fading, the Helldiver cannot take any non-reflexive actions or interact with objects or people, and attacks with a non-magical component pass harmlessly through her. Once she completely fades, she acts like a

dematerialized Hedge ghost (p. XX), unable to physically interact with anything except other immaterial beings and objects, such as Hedge ghosts, other Helldivers, changelings using the Whispers of Morning Contract (p. XX), the unquiet dead, and spirits of all stripes. She can see and interact with all of these, no matter their current state. If she can find a gate to another realm, such as the deathly Underworld or mysterious Shadow, she may slip through with a point of Glamour as though it were a Hedgeway (p. XX). If ephemeral beings are normally material in another realm, she becomes so as well. She can spend as much time as she likes Diving, but she still requires basic necessities, such as food and sleep.

To end this effect, spend another Glamour point and make another Dexterity + Occult roll. If successful, the changeling fades back into the world at the same rate she faded out. Should a Helldiver gain the Comatose Condition (p. XX) while Diving, she immediately vanishes from wherever she is to reappear inside her Bastion, as though she had passed through the Gate of Horn to be physically present in her dreams.

Hunterheart

[mournful howling in the distance]

If animals have souls, they're not the sort of souls the Gentry can grab onto and twist into shapes to serve their otherworldly needs. Hunterhearts are the wild animals of Arcadia, the feral eyes peeking at you from the Hedge. Not all Hunterhearts are Beasts, but all spend their durance consumed with the urge to chase, to hunt, to kill.

Changelings who become Hunterhearts were usually taken for their mix of ambition and insecurity. If they were driven to be more in mortal life for no other reason than being bigger and more important than those around them, chances are good they will find themselves stalking some Faerie wilderness. As with any kith, this is not a hard and fast rule — some are merely shaped by the environment in which their Keeper imprisons them. A Hunterheart's durance, however, is always red of tooth and claw, whether they're a vicious storm striking down unlucky fae in their path or a lion prowling an Arcadian savannah, and very few leave without some scars. Of all the escapes made, a Hunterheart's is most likely to include direct combat — though just as many sneak out of their kennels and preserves as shred the throats of their Keeper's servants on their way out.

While this kith does see more Beasts than almost any other, it is important to note that their behavior hews more to the mythic archetypes of such creatures than to any Darwinian textbook. True Fae don't care that male lions are whiny layabouts who expect the females in their pride to bring them carrion – or even that only male lions have manes. Lions in Faerie are proud, noble hunters, bringing down only the most dangerous game. Similarly, wolves are mysterious loners, panthers are sleek and sexual, and sharks are both cunning and dispassionate. Some Hunterhearts have characteristics of many different hunter archetypes. What matters most is the chase, the fight, and the next meal.

Beast: This changeling has the shaggy hair of a hyena, but the cold, dead eyes of a shark. Even when relaxing, he seems to always be alert and ready to pounce. His voice is a growl, and he seems a little unsteady on only two feet.

Ogre: She's the troll under the bridge, the Cyclops hunting Odysseus's men (but with two eyes). She is implacable, and once she's given a quarry's trail, she will follow it or die trying.

Kith Blessing: When the Hunterheart uses Investigation to track creatures from Faerie, achieving three successes counts as an exceptional success.

Pounce: If the target can see the Hunterheart's eyes, the changeling may spend a point of Glamour to lock the target in place or cause him to flee in terror. The Hunterheart's player rolls Presence + Wyrd, contested by the target's Composure + Supernatural Tolerance. The target gains the Insensate Tilt (p. XX) or the Frightened Condition (p. XX) if the Hunterheart is successful, at her player's choice. If the changeling attacks the frozen or fleeing target, her unarmed attacks deal lethal damage.

Leechfinger

Relax. Let your body melt into the table. That's it. Now, it's normal to feel a bit of pain with deep-tissue massage. That's just your muscles letting go. Embrace it.
Relax.

If vampires exist, they cannot be turned into changelings. That is the generally held opinion among the Lost — the process appears to require a human soul. However, humanity is entranced with the thought of the Byronic undead ideal — mysterious, dreamy-eyed, and stealing the life of those around them. The True Fae have seized on this dream to create the Leechfinger.

Leechfingers are drawn from mortals who take. This definition is broad: A Leechfinger could have been a manipulative user, a cold contract killer, a kind-hearted fundraiser, or a polite financial professional. Anyone whose identity is built around taking and receiving in some way could make a good Leechfinger. In Faerie, they are used as weapons against the slaves of other Gentry and as instruments of torture against their Keeper's other changelings. With a touch, they steal life and vitality, leaving their target dazed and fatigued. This is a double-edged sword for the Keeper, however, as many Leechfingers have escaped after draining loyal servants and fighting back through the Hedge with their newly discovered vitality.

On Earth, Leechfingers find hunting both easier and more difficult. While brushing up against a mortal to steal a bit of their life force is easy to do unnoticed, other changelings know they exist. Even the kindest Leechfinger will be looked at with suspicion — the Keepers have already stolen part of their lives from the Lost, why should members of this kith be allowed to do the same?

Darkling: At first glance, this changeling could be a Playmate with their friendly, round face and pointed ears. On closer inspection, however, they sport small, needle-sharp fangs, and their eyes and fingertips are stained the color of old blood.

Wizened: This changeling is often mistaken for a human. They look normal. Too normal. Everything about them is structured to appear as average as possible, from their height to their eye color to the mid-alto pitch of their voice. Everything, that is, except for their long, spidery fingers.

Kith Blessing: When the Leechfinger uses Medicine to determine the health of a potential target, achieving three successes counts as an exceptional success.

Sap The Vital Spark: If the Leechfinger can maintain physical contact with a target for a full turn, she may spend a point of Glamour to inflict a point of bashing damage, which heals the Leechfinger, either downgrading one aggravated wound to lethal, one lethal to bashing, or one bashing to fully healed. As long as the Leechfinger can maintain contact, she can spend a point of Glamour each turn to continue the effect. If the target is a changeling, the Leechfinger inflicts

two points of damage per Glamour instead, and thus heals or downgrades two points of damage per turn.

Mirrorskin

No, I'm not Jack Smith. Who's that? He sounds like a pretty cool guy.

The True Fae are capricious, ever carried by their whims. Their actions seem illogical, their emotions mercurial, and their desires nonsensical. Changelings never really know their Keepers — Fae logic is hard enough to follow from a distance, let alone when you're in the eye of the hurricane. However, the True Fae are one thing consistently: themselves.

That's how the Mirrorskins escaped. In Arcadia, everything is what it is. That may sound tautological, but a Snowskin will never set another changeling on fire and the Hunt will never suddenly become the Knights Hospitaller. Mirrorskins are anything and everything — or, at least, they can appear to be so. In Arcadia, where appearance is everything, this is a huge advantage. True Fae who create Mirrorskins keep a close eye on them. They are often used as spies, showpieces, or sometimes literal mirrors. It is not uncommon for a Mirrorskin to have memories of being used as a prototype for another kith, twisting and morphing themselves into a multitude of painful and unsustainable shapes until their Keeper has an idea of what they want. Some were trapped on the other side of magic mirrors, used as advisers or consorts. Some were put on literal pedestals as living statuary.

For whatever purpose, they were used for their capacity to change, something the True Fae can't do without massive effort. Change and disguise are their weapons, and how they escaped. When they twist and turn and lose themselves in the Mask, that's when their Keepers lose them, too. The fight of the Mirrorskin is the fight to survive as someone else in its purest form.

On Earth, their capacities aren't much different. While they cannot contort themselves into the array of fantastic shapes they were forced to by the hands of their Keepers, they are unmatched in the art of disguise. Some Mirrorskins use this power to spy for their courts. Some use it to make a quick fortune. Some just use it to remain undetected in mortal life, hoping that they will go unnoticed by fae and humans alike.

The sorts of changelings who might become Mirrorskins were people pleasers in real life. They tried to be whatever they could to delight those around them, or at least avoid negative consequences. Customer-service workers, bullied children, and con artists alike all make excellent Mirrorskins.

Darkling: You could swear she looked like your best friend out of the corner of your eye — but no, you look at them straight on and he's the king of the Autumn Court. Except the king would never have that impish grin while lolling about on the Freehold's makeshift throne.

Elemental: No one has ever seen her “real face,” if such a thing could be said to exist. You can tell who she is by the shrill voice. Whenever she gets excited, though, her skin ripples like quicksilver and her eyes turn mirror-bright.

Kith Blessing: When the Mirrorskin uses Stealth while in disguise, achieving three successes counts as an exceptional success.

Mercurial Visage: A Mirrorskin may mold and shape her appearance like putty, making an entirely new face out of composite pieces of people she's met or seen in photos. Spend a point of Glamour and make a reflexive Wits + Subterfuge + Wyrd roll. The changeling does not suffer

penalties for lacking equipment, and the power changes both her Mask and mien, so that anyone attempting to penetrate her disguise will see another layer of disguise underneath. Supernatural abilities that would pierce her deception prompt a Clash of Wills (p. XX).

Nightsinger

Thank you, you've been a lovely audience. If you'll notice the jar on my lovely accompanist's piano, I accept cash gifts as a sign of your appreciation. Please don't make the mistake of throwing your platinum card in — that is, unless you're prepared to deal with the consequences.

Song is an art almost as old as humanity itself, and something the True Fae are utterly fascinated by. While they have otherworldly music of their own, the Gentry love human songs for the endless depths of their emotional expression. Nightsingers are the kith who produce many of the magical songs the creatures in fairy tales teach heroes or children.

Nightsingers were almost uniformly some sort of creative before they were stolen away to Faerie. It's not just singers or writers who become this kith, either. While it might seem odd for a sculptor or an oil painter to become a Nightsinger, it's really just a matter of learning to sculpt or paint with words and pledges the same way one might sculpt bronze or paint on a canvas. This is not to say the process is easy. The True Fae have odd and exacting ideas about what makes a good song, so a changeling who produces a less-than-satisfactory piece runs the risk of severe retribution.

This is a dangerous position to take as a True Fae. Most Nightsingers escape while their Keepers are in the throes of exquisite agony from a song sad enough to make a stone weep, or doubled over in laughter from a bawdy take on a solemn hymn. Some become their song and float straight out the door, carried by the notes they're singing. Stranger things have happened in Arcadia. Nightsingers find that, once they've escaped, their songs hold less power on Earth than they did in Arcadia. They can no longer achieve the myriad world-bending effects in the solid, consistent mortal world that they could in a realm built entirely of dreams and magic. This, however, does not mean that they're powerless — far from it. The other Lost quietly fear their ability to completely enthrall others with their song.

Fairest: This almond-eyed torch singer will have you opening both your heart and your wallet to her in under an hour. She has no dearth of admirers, but she always goes home alone. Some call her frigid, some call her prudish, but they're always back for more.

Wizened: He's not much to look at — skeletons have more meat on their bones. His wiry black hair sticks out in all the wrong places. But when he opens his mouth to sing, the rafters quake with his baritone and there is not a dry eye in the room by the end of it. He rarely opens his mouth to do anything else.

Kith Blessing: When the Nightsinger uses Expression to sing or compose a piece of music, achieving three successes counts as an exceptional success.

Siren Song: Spend a point of Glamour and roll Presence + Expression + Wyrd as an instant action to perform, contested by anyone who hears the Nightsinger's unearthly song with Composure + Supernatural Tolerance. Anyone who fails gains the Swooned Condition (p. XX) and is rooted to the spot for as long as she continues to sing. Any attempt to jar the victim out of it, short of an opposing power or physically attacking or removing them, will fail.

Notary

You do understand that when you agreed to bind your children and your children's children to that Other unto the seventh generation that they were being savagely literal, yes? There's no exaggeration with the Gentry. No, stop crying, I'll help you figure this out.

Not all pledges are signed on paper or carved into stone. Some are literally living documents. Notaries are changelings who were taken to solidify pledges between two or more True Fae. The agreement is written in their blood, etched across their skin, and imprinted on their soul. They are both witness and pledge, and they are kept under close supervision by their Keeper lest their pledge vanish into the thorns.

This makes Notaries extremely dangerous to be around. A True Fae will stop at nothing to retrieve a lost pledge, sending Huntsmen, loyalists, and even other True Fae after escaped Notaries. Many freeholds wouldn't bother keeping such a ticking time bomb around, except for the fact that members of this kith have an incredibly valuable Blessing. Notaries escape by finding loopholes in the pledges that bind them to the Others and walking right out the front door. On Earth, they're often viziers, lawyers, mediators between courts, and, if all else fails, the trickster who outsmarts the True Fae into leaving their freehold alone for yet another season. All Notaries can perfectly recite the pledge they were kidnapped to hold, and any changes made up until their escape.

Elemental: What appear to be tattoos are actually tiny vines wrapping around their arms, spelling out complex legal terms and burrowing into the skin. They are the person the courts come to for settling petty disputes.

Wizened: This changeling's skin is cracked and yellowed, like old parchment. She smells of dust and ink, and when she speaks, it's always a soft but pedantic correction on some poorly thought-out point of legal minutiae.

Kith Blessing: When the Notary uses Politics to negotiate, read, or interpret a Faerie pledge, achieving three successes counts as an exceptional success.

Abatement: Once per chapter, a Notary can completely negate the need for Glamour in a pledge as long as she is involved in its creation, without a roll. Thereafter, the Notary can perfectly recite the pledge as long as it lasts.

Playmate

Are you all right? You seem lonely. What can I do to make you smile?

Each member of the Playmate kith is shaped according to the whims of the specific True Fae who made them. A Keeper who plays at being a lost child might create an Ogre Playmate to carry them around and rock them into whatever passes for sleep among the Gentry. A Lady of Arcadia might create a brace of Beast Playmates for her menageries, where she goes to stroke their feathers and fur and sing softly in a language that hasn't been spoken for 1,000 years. The list goes on. Every Playmate reflects the specific attachment style of his or her Keeper, and every Playmate is made to feel needed.

While this alone might make it difficult for a Playmate to escape, members of this kith are almost always taken as mortals who already felt lost and alone. Adult children reeling from the death of

parents, new divorcees, and college dropouts are just some examples of the sort of people True Fae prey upon as new Playmates. They promise structure, connection, and love.

It's an open secret that most Playmates who now exist on Earth don't escape. They're tossed into the Hedge by the True Fae who created them, and then got bored with them. Many Playmates blame themselves — after all, if they had been better, wouldn't their Keeper have loved them?

Playmates occupy an odd spot in changeling society. On the one hand, they were let go, not chased on their way out, so many Lost view them with suspicion. Accusations of loyalism are not uncommon. On the other hand, Playmates have an extremely valuable blessing and are usually willing to help out wherever possible, and so many freeholds welcome them. It's unlikely that their Keeper will ever show up to reclaim them — though there's always the odd Fae who wants to play with secondhand toys.

Beast: This sad-eyed changeling puts you in mind of a hound left out in the rain. He's always the first to help out and the last to leave when the job is done. He never complains, but he never smiles either.

Fairest: She may not have been made to look like a cookie elf, but that's exactly what she reminds you of: long, curly red hair, pointed ears, rosy cheeks. She's the Spring Court's best healer, but they only really call on her for serious matters. No one's ever seen her leave the freehold.

Kith Blessing: When the Playmate uses Persuasion to cause someone to like her or her friends, achieving three successes counts as an exceptional success.

Coeur Loyal: A Playmate may touch a wounded character and spend a point of Glamour to heal any number of bashing or lethal damage points as an instant action. She takes the same amount of mild Clarity damage as bashing damage healed, and the same amount of severe Clarity damage as lethal damage healed; apply the mild damage first. She can't heal more damage than she has undamaged Clarity boxes left. It is entirely possible for a Playmate to lose herself completely while healing others.

Snowskin

*Calm yourself, you won't get anywhere by panicking. Is anyone dead or bleeding?
Is anyone missing?*

Faerie is not all exploding chaos and wild whimsy. Sometimes it is cold and still and quiet, like a snowfall on a winter's night. In palaces of glittering ice, or at the bottom of freezing oceans filled with all manner of unearthly creatures, Keepers enforce a frigid peace at the end of an icicle spear. Their servants often become Snowskins to better survive their chilling durances.

Those who interact with Snowskins find them to be cold both physically and emotionally. Members of this kith have, at the very least, an unusually low body temperature. Some develop ice crystals in their hair, or constantly fogging breath. Many Lost kindly describe them as “a bit frosty, but lovely once you get to know them,” or less politely, “that frigid bitch.” Snowskins are quiet and mysterious at best, actively antisocial at worst.

Before they were taken, Snowskins were generally stable and self-sufficient, able to take care of themselves should anything fall apart. Their durances sharpened this to a fine point, teaching them not to trust anyone or anything other than their own capabilities. They were left to fend for

themselves in snowy wastelands or fields of icebergs, often with little clothing or other warmth. They freeze to protect themselves.

It is this total freezing of the heart and soul that allows them to evade their Keeper's tender mercies long enough to escape Arcadia. The Fae are attracted to bright, expressive souls, not lumps of ice and shadow. Snowskins usually escape unnoticed once they force this change of heart. This complete empathic shutdown comes with a price, however — Snowskins learn to escape by putting themselves first, and to hell with everyone else, an attitude that does not change easily. Even once they're back on Earth, some never warm up to their fellow Lost, and those that do form extremely strong attachments to those they let in.

Elemental: Her hair might have been platinum blonde once, but it is now the iridescent white of a virgin snowfield. Her finely chiseled face always seems to be sneering at something, and she is never seen without her motley. Only those who are pledge-bonded to her know that it's because she is afraid to be alone in a crowd.

Ogre: She is the hulking enforcer of the Winter Court, all sharp angles and corners. No one has ever heard her speak in more than monosyllables, and she doesn't make friends. However, no one in the freehold is a fiercer protector of new escapees or a better guide to the local Hedge and trods.

Kith Blessing: When the Snowskin attempts to use Subterfuge to hide her feelings from others, achieving three successes counts as an exceptional success.

Heart of Ice: A Snowskin's derision can be more vicious than a howling blizzard. When she attempts to shut another down in public, spend a point of Glamour and roll Presence + Intimidation + Wyrd, contested by the target's Composure + Supernatural Tolerance. If the Snowskin succeeds, her target gains the Shaken Condition (p. XX) and suffers a -2 on all Social rolls involving other changelings until the Condition is resolved, as the Snowskin's contempt freezes him out of society.

Chapter Two: More Things in Heaven and Earth

Fantasy is hardly an escape from reality. It's a way of understanding it.

[Lloyd Alexander](#), *A Visit with Lloyd Alexander*

You were torn from an ordinary life where you thought you knew the rules into one of servitude and phantasmagoria. You escaped, fought your way back through the brambles between worlds, and reclaimed your body, your soul, and most importantly, your life.

This chapter guides you through what those experiences would have been like, what they might have been and how they might have felt, then delves into what life is like now, and how you take ownership of it.

Arcadia

Arcadia is the realm of the True Fae. It is neither the wellspring nor the gutter of imagination, but imagination defines it. Arcadia is a stage, with the will of the True Fae its lights and sounds, and their changeling and hobgoblin captives its actors. In Arcadia, the whims of the Fae are the laws of physics. And that can make it damn hard to get home.

The Fae, The Gentry, Your Keepers

The Fae are caprice wrapped tight around endless desire.

Standing in the right spot, with the right manner of looking, a Fae could create everything they can imagine. Literally any desire that might fleetingly cross their mind, Arcadia can provide. After 1,000 lifetimes' whims met with only as much difficulty as you desired in the moment of seeking them, you might grow bored. Spoiled. You might lack a certain empathy for the world you are making and remaking. You would be, after all, the only subject in a world of objects.

A Fae won't remember a time when they weren't the master of their own destiny. (Perhaps not can't, but certainly won't.) They have always walked amid the briars and the dreaming places, taking the very air and shaping it. Building a world out of bodies that were to hand. Like yours.

Once

The Fae are from Arcadia, and of it. In Arcadia, they can shape the very fabric of the world. Tell any story. Be any villain. Or hero, if it could suit them.

They are inscrutable, but not unknowable. They have voices, patterns of behavior, ways of moving through Arcadia, esoteric families they love and war with. The logic of their actions isn't always sound to an outside perspective, but given time and a safe place to stand, you could begin to predict them. Unfortunately, being able to sense the direction of the tide can't keep you from getting knocked over by it. And for most changelings, the motivation is indistinguishable from the act. The Fae are the instrument that created the durance. The Fae use changelings.

They don't lack for options. The Hedge is bustling with creatures that can carry out a Faerie's desires, not counting those she might simply summon forth. Perhaps it's more satisfying to take a life than it is to create one. Tearing a goblin from their life is even destructive in a way you and they recognized in one other, when they risked to meet your eyes. But they seek out humans and set them apart in Arcadia, bestowing both greater "favor" and more severe punishment. And while a goblin is only a stroll away, a kidnapped human from the exotic mortal world is more of

a challenge. It's tedious to steal a baby and hand raise it to harvest the fruit that shrivels at your touch. But it's quite the game to lure an adult who's strong of limb and wishing softly for a different life.

A Fae with a captive becomes their Keeper, and their recreator — by drawing on Arcadia to reshape a human into a changeling. That person's original temperament or skill might be taken into account in their reshaping, but no more so than that Fae's own desire. Fae make changelings out of your bones and their whims.

It's hard to say how time passed. In Arcadia, time felt more like a visiting guest than a steady companion. Someone for whom you dusted off the furniture and made polite conversation with. But whom, in their absence, you couldn't quite remember how you knew. Events occurred, certainly. But whether they all happened in one heartbreaking instant, or dripped along over lonely centuries, is hazy.

They came to you as a swarm of bees, piercing your fingers and crawling under your tongue and wrapping a tight new skin around you. Now you're busy constantly, flying from task to task with a purity of focus you dreamed of some eternity ago. You've been building a machine on the head of a pin, out of ferrofluid and magnets and matchsticks, when you catch yourself holding your breath. When was the last time you breathed out? When did the wind last refresh you?

[CENTER THESE ASTERISKS, I PRESUME?]

You never actually saw his face, always covered in shadows and clouds. But you crossed his path once, walking home from the park. Impossibly long arms pulled you up by the scruff of your neck and flung you sideways. You never dared to move after that. You held a red lantern out at an angle demonstrated by a man whose face had folded into a cradle of soft lines. Like so, and wait for his arrival. There was never an arrival. The lanterns and carriers around you eventually burned out. One, then another, until you were alone in castle that had fallen to ruin. Not even wolves came.

[AND THESE]

She was always dying. Every morning you wove her a new shroud; every night you and your sisters gathered around her to weep, every morning she woke dissatisfied with your lace. Now, once she is laid to rest, you begin to spin for tomorrow. You sit with her in her cell, your eyes going pale and wide doing her work in dark places. You work by touch and the moonlight reflected in the pool of water at your feet, and you won't see the sun again until your shrouds are as light as dawn. You've tried moth wings and spiderwebs and, strand by strand, your own hair. Tonight, perhaps your breath will be light enough.

[AND THESE]

Their arms were many and they spoke in chirps and hums that rattled your ears to bursting. Their laughter was the sound of storms and electricity and wire whipping in the wind. Your face was the prism through which they spoke. Your hands a constant flow of speech that a woman with black eyes and 12 fingers recorded in a small blue book. When the two of you were alone,

she taught you what the words meant. What they were saying through you. Then one day she was gone, and a hairline fracture cracked your face.

[AGAIN!]

The seaweed caressed your skin, and long webbed fingers curled around your arms. There's no light in the depths for your eyes to adjust to, but for the occasional blinding glare off the eye of a deep sea fish. Amid his whispers and your heartbeats, you watch over his 100 gleaming children, rubbing their glassy eyes with something that feels like silk and smells like sulfur. When their wings are sharp enough to cut your hands, you carry them as far as the flanks of the seamount. There might be a pale cream of blue a heavy mile above you. Or perhaps too much ointment has gotten into your eyes.

[AND ONE MORE.]

The scent of flowers first, overwhelmingly sweet and near. Then actual blossoms, filling your nose and mouth, trickling from your lips. Finally, petals erupting from your mouth with every gasping cough. Afterward, only wet and dry and cool and hot, and sometimes, a lung full of petals. By and by, a green man comes to prune your hands and brush the petals from your face. Your thorns catch his cloak, and as the fiber clings to you, you remember skin. You remember skin breaking.

Now

She looks you straight in the eye and says, "We should celebrate," before clapping her hands and pouring lavender champagne into your open palms. She draws your hand toward her mouth, and when you startle awake you're not sure if it was a memory or a threat. Maybe she did like flowers and the color purple and treating you like a vessel to fill. Maybe she just tripped down the Dreaming Roads, straight into the back of your head, to remind you that no matter how far you run, you're always going to be Hers.

Your memories are shaky these days, and your dreams are worse. Whether your time with the Fae was an interminable drudge or a relentless hail of activity, it's blurring around the edges. But the general shape remains, and terrifying moments sometimes burst through and leave you shaking. The time you were whipped for bringing a green fruit to the table. The honeysuckle smell of the gardens, where you buried maiden after maiden. The crunch of boots on dry grass. Warm skin pressed against yours. A hammer in your hands. Blood on your lips. You're not sure you want to remember more.

Your life is already a dull thrum of risk, and borrowing trouble from the past only opens you up to new ones. Every new memory you pin down cracks the boundaries you've drawn between before and after. It makes it harder to keep the two separate, and stay integrated into the world you ran back to. But actively trying to forget — pushing away your past in favor of a human present — is dangerous, too, even if it makes some days smoother. When you forget too much, you lose sight of how fragile your freedom is.

Because your past hasn't forgotten you, and you're still on the run. No matter how scorched the plain on which their towers once stood, no matter how bloodless and cold the body — what Arcadia shows you can never really be trusted. That doubt makes your palms itch every time you

walk through an archway, or go 10 minutes out of your way to avoid it. The Fae are petty, yet careless. The Fae are vengeful, but bored. It's not exactly flattering if your best hope for freedom is that your Keeper let you go because they've forgotten you exist. But it's better than nothing. Otherwise, there's someone lurking in your doorways and mirrors, and they want their pet back. If for no other reason than that you tried to take it away. Nothing here can quite be trusted either, but you ran a hard road to get home. It would be a shame not to try to live in it.

Living in the world requires a different kind of protection than it used to. Driving while black didn't stop being a thing, but the cops in the trooper car that slides up next to you might not have their humanity evenly applied. The man with no face who follows you for 25 minutes, each step landing precisely a fifth of a second after yours, a drum beat. The woman who smiles up at your security camera as she hammers on the call button again, showing her rows and rows of shining teeth. The black dog with eyes that make you dizzy, who's been howling outside your office all day. The voice whispering misogynoir in your ear, coming from the winking man on the other side of the train car. In place of a heart, a Huntsman is filled with your Keeper's possessive desire. They can't be diverted, because there is nothing left inside them but someone else's want. They can't be killed, not permanently, because that want will simply fly back to your Keeper, and be poured into a new vessel. A hunt can only ever be delayed. But in between being hunted, you still have the rest of your life.

That's where courts come in. They help you fit a story to the events of Arcadia, get your feet back under you, and keep the monsters from your door. Every city divides their time and responsibilities a little differently, building on the metaphors that speak to that community. Seasonal courts, which divide the year into quarters and trade authority with the passing of one into another, are common, but not universal. Some cities may share power between all courts at all times, collectivizing the skills of diverse changelings toward projects too big for any one group to manage. Some may ossify into a permanent hierarchy, preferring any kind of stability or continuity to the constant anarchy of Arcadia. As every changeling is both unique to themselves, and fundamentally alike, so are cities. Courts hold a large measure of authority, and speak to an emotion that burns in you — Desire, Wrath, Fear, Sorrow. Joining one is embracing, and giving in to, that emotion. Building it a home in your heart, and letting it drive you instead of consume you. Living an emotion in high definition can be exhausting, but a line to someone who feels the same way you do can be powerful, and empowering.

And anyway, all your friends are there. You ran away from Arcadia to find a human life again, but even if you slip right back into your old life, it's hard to keep a secret that big. It puts distance between you and the people who knew you before. People who might not react well to discovering that the tufts of hair you can't seem to slick down are actually antlers, who might not understand why you can't bear the taste of apples. The burden's a little easier with other changelings; they see you more clearly. They know what it's like to be changed, to have been lost.

The Durance

The Fae might please themselves to follow rules in snatching someone away, but they follow them in their own way, and only as long as it entertains them to do so.

You tripped, and accepted a hand up. You said yes to a pretty face whose whisper you almost heard. You walked through the wrong door, and let go of the handle. You stepped onto a circle of bare sand ringed with sweet-smelling brush. You were framed by the trunks of two spotted

sycamore trees. You picked a salmonberry from the low branches of a bramble. Then the air grew thorns, and something sour and strange wrapped around your heart and yanked you in.

There would be a reason, because everything has a reason. Reasons to blame yourself and reasons to doubt your memory and reasons to let Arcadia swallow you up. Requests you made, favors you were owed, offenses you committed. Someone is at fault for every bent blade of grass or dusty cufflink or hot gasp of desire. And if you asked your Keeper, that someone must have been you.

Those are the things they wanted you to think, when they gave a care to your thoughts. They wanted you to believe that you alone were responsible for your suffering, and that however they chose to treat you was far more gracious than you deserved, than you would have gotten from someone fairer and less fond of you. But the Gentry are liars, and you know that now.

They told you there were good reasons. But in the end, they were there, and you were to hand.

Once

The things that happened next, you endured. This was your durance.

One evening, for novelty and want of an earring, they tore you out of your life and sat a doll of straw and pennies in your place. They put your eyes in a crystal jewelry box, filled the holes in your skull with silver pearls and stardust, and left you buried in the sand like a forgotten toy. Then, when the nacre crept out of your eyes and covered your skin, they dug you up and hung you alongside a long golden teardrop that blinked slowly and lay still. Your eyes haven't seen your own face since.

For petulance, you were stolen because you somewhat resembled a man who once attended a wild menagerie of sparkling beasts. He stretched and molded your face until you looked more like the one who got away, and in time you answered to what might have been that man's name. But as he often reminded you, you couldn't hope to be as talented as your predecessor until you really became him. If you don't start remembering soon, he'll reclaim this name you haven't earned. In a wooded glen on the edge of his estate, there are a dozen iron statues with half-familiar faces.

For avarice, your skill was rewarded. More and better tools, useful assistants, endless materials. Each clockwork treasure whisked from your hands even as you paused to admire its smooth, animated motion. But the praise was riddled with concern. Surely, with what you had at your disposal, you could do better? What was troubling you, that so diminished the quality of your delicate brass machines? She knew you were capable of producing better work. Tomorrow you would do better. You had better.

For entertainment, your living flame was coaxed out of your body into a lantern. It went up in steam and smoke when you tried to climb back into it. For years after that, you lit the zoetrope that told unkind versions of the story of your life. When she grew tired of laughing at your charred body, broken hearts, and missed opportunities, she put you in a drawer and let you burn down to a guttering spark. Each time she pulls you out and breathes life back into your flame, she asks for a *new* story. You're running out of stories.

For desire, you were stolen away to grace the arm of a demon lover. They tended to your growth with great care and thoughtfulness. Your neck was elongated just so. Your limbs pulled long and lithe as a spider. Your cheekbones sharpened, and your eyes pulled wide and bleached clear.

Beauty is the polish added to a lustrous metal, the flower clipped just so. Beauty speaks for itself. Without words if necessary. Your tongue will regrow once you know to use it just so. In the meantime, while your glass slippers may yet cut your feet, be assured that the blood sets off your skin beautifully.

For loneliness, you followed her over stone and field, a step behind but never out of sight, and sang. You grew tired of your own songs, repeated year on year, and then the ones you invented as you trailed her through empty places. Now your songs are only sound, all meaning taken from you by endless repetition. You walked with her till your joints grew brittle, and your hair went white. Walked till she had to guide you by the hand, lest you tumble in your blindness. Until your bones shrank further and further, delicate as the toy songbird she kept in the cage hanging from her neck.

Now

Your durance was unique, but you see common themes when you trade stories with your friends and read court histories about the ones who came up before you. Places you were taken, people you were made to be. Your Keeper's fingerprints linger on your body, and their words scratched out a home in your mind. And on the other side of your captivity, that sets you apart from who you were. It doesn't leave you in wreckage, but neither are you unscathed by it. And your Keeper's fingerprints don't only linger on you.

They also reach out into the lives of everyone you knew *before*. Leaving you with one of the hardest choices a newly escaped changeling has to make. What to do with the creature made of gum wrappers and newspaper clippings that's squatting in your old life. Maybe you can get that life back — catch the rhythm and slip in at an opportune moment. Kill your fetch for taking your place and daring to believe that they're you. Run your old life again. Or don't. Maybe you feel too different from the person you were when you and your fetch parted ways. They were the one who finished your degree and found a job and a boyfriend and a graying poodle.

You try not to remember your own durance (or your escape) in too much detail, or else you'd never stop shaking. But the highlights stick. A Fae wanted something from you, that they were willing to use you up to get, and you escaped while there was still something left to save. Stories that you can spin out of horror, funny or sad or cautionary. Most days you accept who you are now, maybe even love it — after all, what they made you into also brought you out of their power. You try to remember what's worth knowing, while denying your Keeper free rent in your nightmares. You made a friend who knows as much about who you can be as who you were. You get by.

The Wyrd

Turn around seven times widdershins at twilight, and a new path opens. Promise you'll always be by your sister's side and you will, even if it means following her to the ends of the Earth and beyond. Meet a mysterious stranger who saves your life and prepare to hand over your firstborn child someday. Take the power of the Fae for your own, but remember it has no trouble biting the hand that wields it.

The Wyrd is the ineffable force that governs all fae magic. It binds pledges and connects changelings to Faerie. The Gentry embody it, and it runs through Arcadia's veins. The closer a fae being is to the Wyrd, the more powerful they become. From its coffer flows Glamour, a currency paid in feelings and passions that buy fae miracles.

But those are all just symptoms. The Wyrd has no guiding impulse, but it gives and it takes in equal measure, always. It's the power of exchange. It makes the rules and doesn't care if you never got the memo. Even the masters of Faerie capitulate to the Wyrd's decrees.

Once

It took 580 sacrifices before you figured it out. You counted, because you thought if you remembered each one then somehow, somewhere, they wouldn't be gone. And because you knew the numbers, one day you understood: She was predictable not because she simply loved so to sacrifice her subjects to her bloody banner, but because if she didn't, someone she *didn't* choose would fall in their place.

You snuck into the garage, where he always told you never to go, and you found the old jalopy gathering dust there under the tarp. Because it was forbidden, you used the clockwork fingers he gave you to make the engine sing, and you left the garage door in splinters as you careened down the path. You knew, then, that his usual trick of flitting to your side no matter where you roamed didn't work anymore. That the pacts he made with the wind and the stars were right here under your hands, in chrome and leather, and that the demands were now yours to make.

You never would have found your way back but for the sad-eyed panda woman and her helpful brood. They seemed so friendly, you couldn't imagine they would expect repayment. Maybe they didn't. But you found yourself deep in debt anyway, and wondered whether they'd even accept anything you had to give.

Now

Just as gravity is the force that says when you drop an apple it falls down to the ground, the Wyrd is the force that says when you gain something you must pay something in return. This is why all fae creatures — including you — make deals and promises. If *you* don't define the price when someone gains something, the Wyrd will do it for you, and nobody wants that. This is also why, when somebody breaks an oath or skips out on what they owe, the Wyrd steps in to make restitution happen one way or another. It's why Goblin Debt demands its due even when you haven't seen that troll in years, and why the True Fae must accept limitations and rules even while their natures strain to be boundless. Loopholes exist, but even they ensure a balanced checkbook in the end.

The Wyrd's tender of choice is Glamour, the stuff of pure emotion and daydream. You know it as the tantalizing scent you pick up when your neighbor's little girl cries alone on the porch, and when your lover's breath catches as he speaks your name; the rush of feeling alive as you take in these cherished moments and breathe them back out as power. They give, and you take; then you pay, and you receive.

You've heard a few names whispered at the edges of hearing, the few unfortunate souls who once tried to cheat the Wyrd's system. No one likes to talk about what happened to them. Hedgevine gossip says that's a rabbit hole even the Lost would do best to avoid.

The Hedge

The Hedge is the borderland between the human world and Arcadia. But it's more than just a strip of contested territory — it's a whole world in itself, one that's always around the edges of the mortal world. In the lonely places, where yours is the only breath stirring the air; in the uncanny places, where fear quickens your step; in the liminal places, where you hang in the

balance between here and there. An abandoned office park, weedy grass breaking through broken asphalt; a graveyard, Spanish moss hanging from the low branch of a tree; a cold beach at dawn, succulents dangling over the lip of a sandy cliff.

It doesn't always rip you away from the world, briars catching you and tugging you into some dark hollow of hobgoblins and malevolent Fae. Sometimes a fairy glen is lovely and mild, with soft places to tread, or lay down your head. Contact with the Hedge is the risk you take in your reclaimed life, and risk brings not only disaster, but reward.

Traversing the Hedge

The Hedge shapes itself according to need, presence, and the available terrain. There are some constants. Its paths are always labyrinthine and confusing. Time passes according to different stars, and the land beneath you to according to different earths. The character of the obstructions you encounter there will vary according to what you carry with you into it. Including, and especially, what you are carrying in your heart. The thoughts, desires, or memories that shape you will skew the landscape you navigate.

Carved through the Hedge is a network of trods, the country roads that lead through the wild wood that lies between the human world and Arcadia. They range from well-traveled streets to loose suggestions of paths half buried in undergrowth. The clarity of the path is not a good predictor of its safety, however. Some overgrown hiking trails might be quiet and unnoticed, protected by their obscurity. Some wide, busy roads may be kept superficially clear by enterprising bandits. Many trods are worn into the fabric of the Hedge by years of regular use, but some are maintained. All sorts of creatures might opt to maintain a trod — freeholds or hobgoblins caring for paths they need, individual changelings guarding a secret hollow or garden, or one of the Fae who likes a garden path to stroll along while in search of a new diversion.

Objects you carry into the Hedge may continue to work, but will become temperamental and whimsical. A flashlight may throw light, but as a lantern or a candle or a cold flame cradled in your palm. A phone might make contact, but to the person you last told a secret or with your voice translated into a forgotten tongue. An object may choose to obey the letter of the law rather than the spirit, or interpret your actions as metaphoric desires. A lit path may glow with a sudden beam of sunshine, or become alight with flame. A sword might become a serpent in your hand, poised to strike the warrior as well as the adversary.

Other strange places cross through the Hedge, or lie within it, hidden at the end of some long forgotten trod, like the Huntsmen in their distant Arcadian woods. Before their hearts are stolen by a Keeper, before they are called up and filled with a new heart's desire, their footsteps measure out the natural order of the forest.

Eerie paths lace around the Hedge, linking it with the minds of dreamers. These are the Dreaming Roads, and the Bastions of human dreams that line them vary in strength. Even the poorest offers a moment of rest, a shortcut, or an escape.

Somewhere else, both within and throughout the Hedge, there is a shining maze — desolate and cold, but not uninhabited. In the distance, hear the song of a Huntsman's horn, or the murmuring of voices behind the mirrors that line the halls. In moments of anguish, doubt, or pain, when you catch your face in the mirror and recoil or look away, unable to face yourself — you create a mirror-person. And these, the Halls of Mirrors, are their home.

Once

Most humans never intended to enter the Hedge. They stumbled in, through misadventure or deception, and never found their way back out.

Your first steps were easy and charming. A touch of wildness overlaid on a familiar place, a note in the distance that might have been a horn or a songbird, a tingle you felt under your skin, a sense that you had time to linger. When you crossed the threshold, things began to turn. Paths turned wilder and the noises become stranger, even what you suppose must have been the sound of your own footsteps. A rare, lucky few force their way back out before they've traveled past this point. You found yourself drawn deeper instead. When you tried to turn back, you found the way unfamiliar and disorienting. Walls of thorns grew up in your footsteps. Gusts of snow erased your path even as you looked back at it. Walking forward was far easier than trying to place just where your feet had been. It didn't resist the way it did when you tried to leave.

The Hedge drew on what lay inside you, calling up your secret fears and dreams to drive you forward. It tested your strength even as it lured you in. Beguiling you with the nearness of escape while pushing you to expend your will against it. But even as you were fighting a sketch of a path into being, you were moving deeper into the Hedge.

Sweet wisteria and jasmine vines wrap around an archway to a part of the garden you don't quite remember. It's dusk, and the park is closing, but you aren't quite ready to leave. It can't hurt to have a look, maybe sit a moment on the bit of stone glittering just past the archway. The statue next to it is curious, though. Lifelike, but so modern in dress, with a startlingly expressive face. You can almost swear it shifted slightly to glare at you. The scent of flowers is so heavy and distracting that you don't notice yourself walking closer. The statue keeps seeming to shift along the other side of the arch. Facing towards you, then away. Angry, then sad. Hands loose, then fists. You're almost close enough to touch it through a spray of flowers when you hear your name being called behind you. As you turn to look, a stone hand wraps around your wrist and pulls sharply.

[CENTER THESE ASTERISKS]

You stretch out on the steps that lead down to the river that divides your city, and watch the seaweed bob and wave just under the surface of the water. It looks, for just a moment, like hair billowing in the current. You fancifully imagine mermaids and sirens, and elementary school daydreams of fishtails and seashell bras. But, was that an eye blinking at you? The face is obscured by silty water and long algal threads suspended in it. Surely that smooth arc was a stone, the eye a bottle-glass pebble floating over it. Even so, you crawl closer to the waterline, which helpfully rises towards you. The seaweed drifts between your fingers expectantly, like softly clasping hands.

[CENTER THESE ASTERISKS]

You're sure you've hiked this way before; you should have hit the trailhead by now. Of course, trails are a little easier to track in daylight, and night came on so fast. Maybe you stepped off somewhere along the way. Your watch stopped hours ago, that must have been how you so thoroughly lost track of time. The headlamp battery held out for a few hours of darkness, but

now all you have is the strands of moonlight filtering through branches so thick they're clasped over your head. There's a rushing, grinding sound ahead, and hopefully it's the service road, not the sea. The rocky hillside begins to slide underneath you, sending you stumbling down too fast. As you duck to avoid a spider web as wide across as your arm, everything goes quiet. No water, no road hum, just a bassoon purr close enough to heat the back of your neck. In the distance, you hear a horn.

[CENTER THESE ASERISKS]

Three handfuls of dirt, a stolen grave flower, a torn hymnal; words you knew from a voice in your dreams. As you threw each into the fire, a door cracked open in your mind. When you spoke, you could hear the wind howling in your skull, rattling your windows. The lights went out, the fire went out, and there was a rustling at your threshold. When you opened the door, the air was filled with ozone, and something rushed past you, riding on the wind. The downed power lines formed a golden spiral, and in the center was a living spark that beckoned to you. The air was heavy as you walked between the cables. Tightening around you until you gasped. When you opened your mouth, the spark leapt in, and burrowed under your skin. A way opened before you of light and scorched earth with no trace of shadow.

[ASTERISKS. CENTER.]

You're lying in bed, replaying the day again and again in your head. What if you had phrased it differently? What if you had spoken up after all? What if you had lingered a little longer in the threshold? What if you had said yes? What if? Restless, helpless thoughts for the hours when you should be sleeping, long after the sedative should have kicked in. The wind picked up while you were wondering, hissing angrily through the crack between the sash and the sill. When you get up to press it closed again, there's a muffled scratching against it. Then a tiny chirrup, frightened and mournful. Without thinking, you open the window just a little more, and it flexes. Dead leaves and brambles and a dry, cold wind pour inside. As the seed pods crack open and root in your floor, the ivy crawls into through your window, groaning as it pulls at the wall. A solemn bird with a crown of golden feathers lands next to your hand, and when you reach out to touch her cloak of stars, it feels like falling into a dark and empty sky.

[CENTER THESE ASTERISKS.]

You're dreaming again of an endless maze of mirrors, chasing a reflection that feels less and less familiar the longer you search for it. On each pane of glazed glass, a face almost like your own — contorted in sorrow or anger, hollow with grief or longing. Lonely, lost, out of breath from running nowhere, you sit on the smooth glass floor and trace your shadow along it. Behind you, you hear humming distantly, and a gentle hand stroking your hair. A second, then a third, rubbing your temples and catching your head as it drifts to the side. You wonder faintly if you can fall asleep if you're already dreaming, and four hands drag you backwards into a mirror.

[ASTERISKS. ☺]

On the third warm, clear night, you dress in green and gold, and lie out under the stars. For hours you whisper to them, singing the songs you've been hearing in your dreams like a prayer, one after another. Words you don't quite understand set to a sweet melody that seems familiar, but unreachable in the morning. The sal branches overhead shake and sway, green leaves slowly tumbling from their branches and covering you. The smell of resin and sap is heavy in the air, green and sweet and musky. One by one, the night animals fall quiet, until all you can hear are your songs and the soft tinkle of jewelry behind you. From beneath your blanket of leaves, you see the suggestion of a face, framing its vivid purple eyes.

[ASTERISKS TO BE CENTERED, PLEASE.]

And through the Hedge, you were borne into Arcadia. Given the chance, why would it have let you go?

Now

It never gets easy, exactly, to move through a space where your perception of reality is constantly working against you. But you learn to negotiate (with yourself, with the residents, and with the Hedge itself), and take an active part in shaping the paths you walk. Changelings have an intuitive way with the Hedge. Perhaps no one survives their escape from Arcadia without a little bit of that skill, perhaps the strangeness in it simply calls out to the strangeness in you. There are limits, of course. Even adept Hedgespinners can't make the Hedge behave too far outside its own nature. A coursing river can't become an empty street any more than a dragon can become a dandelion. A few river rocks might become concrete, or a dragon's scales develop a soft coating of fluff, but their essential selves remain intact. Underneath any change imposed by a fae or a changeling or a hobgoblin, the Hedge is a dangerous wilderness — jagged rocks, cold stands of trees, endless thorny underbrush. The thorns are what you remember best.

When you first escaped, each step that took you back home bled the soles of your feet and raked at your skin. Each thorn tore a bit of you away. You try to be a little thankful, though. At least you made it through with enough of yourself still intact. Not everyone you've met on the other side has. Some hobgoblins make a living picking up the ragged bits and pieces people like you left pinned to the briars, selling them for favors or goods in kind, maybe even to the someone those Icons belonged to.

Thanks to your missing fragments of skin and soul, the experience of navigating the Hedge is complex, and your feelings toward it might be mixed. Most changelings return, for reasons practical or sentimental, and find that it's a little like your captivation and a little like your escape. The bubble of joy that comes with being only yourself. The Hedge won't accept a Mask. It burns away any illusions or disguises that lie between the world and your true face. Not every changeling had a family or a home, or wants one now, but the part of them that is fae feels at home in the Hedge. At the very same moment, the pain of loss washes all over you again, undimmed by time or distance. The parts of you that tore away, trying to find the parts of you that escaped. And that ache in your soul is the least dangerous thing to be found in the Hedge.

Your Keeper, for example, and all the hunters and hobgoblins they have to hand. In many ways, a changeling is a creature of Arcadia. But the Huntsmen and the hobgoblins were here first, and their mastery of the Hedge is superior. The mask-lifting a changeling feels when they enter the Hedge is literal, too. A Huntsman looking for a changeling will recognize them more fully and

track them more easily. (Though nearer to their own home and stolen heart, a Huntsman is also more easily distracted.) A hobgoblin hindering a changeling has no clarity to lose while expressing their dread powers. (Though they are softer of heart and more vulnerable to counter offers.) So even if your Keeper chooses to remain in far-and-near Arcadia, her servants may yet be seeking you along trods and the Dreaming Roads and in the faces of the strangers you walk past without ever seeing.

Your trod is guarded by a longing for home and peace, and the promise of someone waiting for you there. At the end of the path is a garden you tend for your friends and lovers and the holders of your debts, in preparation for their injuries and heartbreaks. Occasionally you hear the report of a rifle in the distance, and you sink under the soil, quaking.

[CENTER ASERISKS]

Hand over hand, shimmying up a narrow cleave amid boulders the size of houses. The easiest path (not that you'd know it from the cracked nails and bruised fingers), to a fizzing pink spring. The rainbow-haired gentleman who lives under its waters is as congenial a seller of lost property as you might ever find. His porch sometimes opens on a goblin market, but only when the mood strikes him.

[CENTER ASTERISKS]

Threadbare rope bridges and narrow plank walkways over the valleys and through the grasslands of a shola forest. Pressing on every side the sound of laughing birds. The hollow lies under a mound of fruiting myrtle, its door marked by a single jet bead buried in an overhanging branch. Inside you sigh, curled in the smallness of your burrow, and put your face back on.

[ASTERISKS]

Press the hamsa next to the frosted amber glass, and a tunnel clicks open under your feet. Dry and cold and darker than your true love's hair, you weave through sharp Hedge roots. Thorny enough, even down here, to catch and rip the soul of an unsuspecting traveler. See each blue door? Each leads to what was once a safe house. No one comes through those doors anymore. Not in a year and a day.

[ASTERISKS]

Duck under the arch formed by two broken sprinkler heads spraying day-warmed water up into the dusk. Don't drag or clip your feet as you step across each new threshold. First the evergreen bushes, then the citron trees, then step through the space inside the elementary school's geodesic dome. The walk to the night market will be long and lonely, drifting so close to the silent paths, but better to be alone than seen.

[ASTERISKS]

I've never been there myself, but you're not the first fetch who's asked. And even if there wasn't one already when the first one came by here asking, there's bound to be a colony of you by now. I'll walk you as far as the nearest mirror crossroad, sure. My face is ugly enough on its own, though. I don't want to see what nastiness might come of my reflections. The maze is big, but if the mirror-people aren't too busy trying to escape, they might point you better than I. Chin up. You'll find a home for yourself yet.

[ASTERISKS]

Every time I look at my reflection in water I can see a crown of thorns around my head. I won't lie, the first time it happened, I ran. I thought the Hedge was chasing me. I wouldn't recommend trying the kelp forest yourself unless you're a strong swimmer, sometimes briar wolves lie just past the border, disguised as packs of seals or sharks.

Our Arcadian Cousins

You came to the Hedge by accident or guile, less immigrant to Arcadia than its captive. But the Hedge has natives, too. Hobgoblins are made of the very stuff of Arcadia, but have identities more fixed than that would suggest. They live lives of interest to themselves and their families, and have goals that you might help or hinder — as they might for you. If you can find a way to tell the helpful from the deceitful, you'll have quite a few friends and fellow travelers who would love to know the trick.

Ghosts are what remains when there's nothing left of a person but a feeling or a memory. When something that's been torn from your soul goes unclaimed too long. Not everything that dies in the Hedge comes back as a vengeful spirit, but to die in the Hedge is to immerse your final emotions in a wood shaped by thought and desire. Many do come back, and have a variety of feelings about having died. Much as you would.

Other, weirder creatures live along the fringes. Mirror-people flit between reflective surfaces, observing the beautiful or grotesque scenes caught in mirrors. Some are content to look, but never touch. Some hunger for the sensations to which flesh is heir. The face they claim needn't necessarily be the one that spawned them, but they are *used* to that face. Some fetches, having forsworn their human lives, come to dwell in the mirror mazes and the trods nearby. Where better to live than among other creatures formed when Fae act on the mortal world?

Working behind the stalls, shopping between the aisles, peering in from the mirrored edges of decorative glass, or winding bashfully among the visitors, you can find most everyone at a Goblin Market. Goblin Markets sit somewhere squarely between tourist trap, devil's haunt, and county fair. What you might find there rather depends on the regional specialties, the frequency of appearance, and the esoteric qualities of the land upon which it stands. Pottery cups glazed with the ash of burnt Hedgewood, which give you terrifying visions if you over-steep your tea? Strings of bottle-glass beads, which turn black in treacherous water? Booklets of single-use paper banishment charms? Very nice roasted corn with crispy cricket flour? You can find lots of things at a Goblin Market.

Once

Hobgoblins, like humans, come to serve the Fae for a variety of reasons. Like you, they might have stumbled in the wrong place and been snatched up by something stronger and stranger than

them. Like you, they may have entered an ill-advised bargain, trusting on their own Arcadian nature to carry themselves away if their term of service became too unbearable. Like you, they found themselves bound more tightly than they might desire. Some might even serve willingly, just as some changelings do — out of love, duty, or greed. You came by similar paths, but your treatment was not at all the same.

You were a treasured, if unwilling, pet. They were just as unwilling, but less prestigious an object for your Keeper to possess. You hated each other a bit, and tried to see each other when no one else would meet your eyes. It was dangerous for them to be too familiar with you, though, lest they gain too much of your mutual owner's attention. Most erred on the side of deference, paid to the air slightly to your left. As though nothing was there, but the nothing that was there was *also* a dangerous creature to whom they should attend without quite acknowledging.

You both served as footmen to a prince of wolves. Throwing yourself over roots that his carriage not be jostled. Sweeping aside dishes flung from his table. Cleaning the long, white hair from his many fine suits. Brushing out and delicately trimming the mane he was so vain about. She was turned out for having dirty gloves. You tried to escape after her, but were caught by a lazy hound that ran too slow to catch her as she tried to clear the border of his lands.

[CENTER THESE ASTERISKS]

You were lovers, probably. The price of escape was losing each other's names, and all but the feeling of heart on heart. You remember yellow hair and a jackal who wheezed when she laughed. Riding through a frigid desert night after night, shaking under the sand like mice as you ran from your keeper's son. Your hands touched before you passed a ridge covered in sagebrush, and when you turned again, she was gone. Was her hair yellow?

[CENTER ASTERISKS]

You worked hand in hand with goblin maids, sewing and mending the skins of her dancing dolls. He fashioned wax heads, each one a replica of one of her living heads. She liked her dolls to match her face whenever she thought to change it. Your hands brushed twice, and he made a new head that looked a little like you. She had him put to death the next day. Or at least, staged a false trial so persuasive that he winked at you when you tried to take the blame.

[CENTER ASTERISKS]

You kept the giant bees from which she harvested a silvery wax. The statuettes she made were miniature and lovely, and writhed convincingly when subjected to flame. Your Keeper quite liked them. After a steady rhythm of alluding to other lives, you thought perhaps she might help you escape. She betrayed the plan to your mistress, and she shrugged slightly as you were beaten before the court. Someone collected the wax for her after that.

[CENTER ASTERISKS]

You stood at her left hand, and he stood at her right. You recorded her words, he the secret signs she made with her fingers drawn along the fabric of her dais. When she spoke ex cathedra, you sang her hymns together. At night, your hands touched through the wall between your dormitories, and you prayed again for one another.

[CENTER ASTERISKS]

You were your Keeper's shining jewel, the loveliest of his bird wives, with a cloak made of the very heavens. The goblin who carried your train learned somehow of your real name, and taunted you with the knowledge night after night. Threatening to tell you, and break the spell that hid you from your witch king when he had fallen into a mood. Threatening to never tell you, and let you die with the knowledge that he could have freed you, but wouldn't.

[CENTER ASTERISKS]

She held the basin that caught the blood that dripped from the wound that was ever in your side. Her hands stained brown, her skin darkening in the sun. You whispered to one another in the dark — of pacts you had made, not knowing what they meant, of people you would be, not knowing who you had been.

You and they were many things to one another. But always they were valued below you. Always they had some forced deference to you.

Now

But now they don't have to be nice to you. Now you need something from them, and they get to set the rules by which you receive it. Not every hobgoblin wishes you health and fortune on your journeys. Some resent having been expected to be subservient to a creature that's not even *from* Arcadia. They want someone to take that anger out on, and an otherwise-gentle goblin may find an opportunity for a nasty trick hard to pass up. But neither does every goblin mean you particular harm. Most are more interested in managing their own affairs than yours. They can be friendly in their own way, happy enough to collaborate if it benefits them. Some even sympathize with having been an object to someone else's whim, and having found the strength of desire to flee. And if your paths cross under an unlucky sign, it may be no more than the cost of business. But perhaps you can continue to help each other. Perhaps you have something the other wants, or needs.

What does anyone want from someone else? Hobgoblins want things or experiences that are valuable to them, in exchange for as little as they can give you in return. That could take a variety of forms, however. An act of service for one in return. An esoteric reagent from your mortal world, in exchange for that which refreshes and sustains. Currency for goods, favors for gifts, work for pay in kind, and, of course, Contracts. Any Contract is a little dangerous, but goblin Contracts are more like predatory loans. In the moment, they can be powerful and helpful, protecting you when you desperately need the strength they can provide. The costs are higher than you imagined, but in the moment, need is greater than caution. Invest too heavily in them, and your sense of self shifts. Your cozy trod is obviously superior to an ever-duller mortal world. The Hedge is more home than hazard. You become a Goblin Queen.

Mara Starcatcher wants a hundred first kisses, and a child's drawing of a family. In exchange, she'll tell you where your first love went, and when they will next think of you. For an actual child, she'll tell you the words that will shatter their heart.

Toru wants to put his wife's ghost to rest, or at least help her settle into her new identity as a ghost. If you can find her and bring her home, he'll tell you where he picked the apple flowers that soothed away the confusion that brought you to his doorstep.

Nutmeg caught you fair and square, and she'll drain the marrow from your bones if you can't come up with a riddle she's never heard before. Maybe she'll do it anyway.

Sylvia knows how to find the cenote where dreaming roots break through the Hedge, drawing a straight line from the human world to Arcadia. But she won't tell you how to get there until you can prove you know how to cross the sulfur-water barriers and deal fairly with the ghosts trapped there.

Fatima Two Fingers takes the odd motley to an inverted tower in exchange for ibis feathers and silk worms and mulberry branches. When the rain is coated in moonlight, the 27 stairways move back into place and a door opens. For a fresh lock of black hair and a vial of sand from the foot of a lost man, she'll return on the next full moon to bring you back.

Ghosts

Ghosts, on the other hand, are long past the needs that would keep body and soul together. Few are particularly happy about it.

Horse-faced woman wanders a trod lined with high cliffs and deep valleys, trailing groups of travelers but rarely approaching them. Her white dress is red with clay dust and the blood that stained her feet while she still fought her way through the Hedge. The rest of her soul is long gone, but she still has half of a pair of glass-green gloves.

Baba and Toumani still know all the histories, but are missing a kora and a drum with which to keep telling them. Find them a flute that can play itself, and a drum that hears the beat they hear in their hearts, and that history is yours for the listening.

Eelgrass wants news of his demon lover. For a few true words, he'll tell you if a ghost has seen your Keeper lately, or if your wild hunt has resumed. For false words, he'll bury the spark of a fight in the hearts of your loved ones.

Mimi lives with a black-naped leveret who can sing the old songs. If you can teach them a new one, she'll tell you the last six people who dreamed of you, and any secrets she deemed interesting enough to remember.

Leda Love lingers near the Halls of Mirrors, trying to catch glimpses of her own reflection. She'd steal your face if she thought it would help, but really, she just wants to know how she died.

The Return

Your durance is over.

Despite everything you saw, everything you did, everything that was done *to* you...you made it out of your Keeper's grasp. Out of Arcadia. Through the Hedge. Back to the real world.

You're back. You're home.

And your troubles have just begun.

What Is Real?

First and foremost, you've got to deal with the fact that you just spent the last however long in a place that the "real" world doesn't believe exists. You've undoubtedly had to do rigorous mental gymnastics to try to retain some semblance of sanity during your durance. You've learned that the world around you isn't solely governed by logic and physics, and that there's an entire reality (or possibly an infinite number of them) out there that the "real" world relegates to bedtime stories and children's books. Over there, you accepted what you had to in order to cope with existence across the Hedge. You did what you had to do, became what you had to become, played by the rules of that new reality. And you survived, in no small part because you were able to come to grips with that place and its alien ways.

But now you're back in the "real" world, and the rules just aren't clear any more. You're back where people are expected to hold down jobs, do their grocery shopping, and live mundane, responsible lives. You've got to find a way to fit in with the world you grew up in, to provide yourself with your basic needs — food, shelter, safety, companionship. That means reintegrating in some fashion with the way things used to be...the way that most of the world still believes them to be.

But, you still remember. How could you forget? Every time you hear the birdsong that is now your voice, touch the crystal coating that passes for your skin, or try to brush the gnarled fangs where you once had straight white teeth, you are reminded that reality is not the simplicity that the rest of the world thinks it is.

So, you try to carve out a mental space where you can juxtapose paying taxes and surfing the internet with the fact that you spent the last few decades as an alien god's hunting hound, hearth fire, or favorite piece of art. Knowing that both are true, that your experiences with one are as true as those with the other and that your memory and sight *can* be trusted...that's the balancing act your friends call Clarity. Because no matter where you end up, after your durance, it's never really going to be the same as how things were before.

You Can't Go Home Again

All changelings have one thing in common. No matter how long or arduous their durance, some tie to "home" gave them the wherewithal to make it back out of Arcadia, to traverse the labyrinthine pathways of the Hedge, and emerge back through into the mortal world.

Maybe, for you, "home" was the memory of the flat you grew up in, where your parents taught you who and what it was to be "you." It might be the garage where you and your grandpa tinkered with cars together, where you learned about engines and life without really understanding how either worked. Or maybe the shed you snuck your first smoke behind as a teen — and lost your virginity in not long afterwards...

Or, maybe it's not a place at all. Maybe it's the visage of your lover's face, eyes still half-lidded from your last goodbye kiss, that led you back through the brambles and briars. Or the smell of bacon and baking bread and coffee, Sunday morning breakfasts you shared with your children every week before whatever happened to you happened. A whisper. A glance. A favorite memory clenched so tightly that even your Keeper's deepest probing and most sinuous seductions couldn't wrench it loose from your mind. Any of it could be "home" for you.

During your durance, that memory of home may have been the only part of “you” that still remained. The one glimmer that your Keeper couldn’t reach, couldn’t manipulate, couldn’t change. And when you finally escaped, it was the North Star by which you navigated, the guiding light that you stumbled towards when stumbling was all you could manage to do.

Torn and twisted, the Hedge parted before you, and you fell, sprawling, wheeling to find that there really is no place like home.

Whatever it was that you held onto, that place, that person, that memory — it’s gone now. Different. You’re back home. But nothing will ever be the same again.

Old and New

What’s changed? Well, for one thing, time has passed. At the most mundane, every hour you spent across the Hedge was an hour that the world you once belonged to went on without you. When you return, the paint is faded and chipped on the literal or proverbial homestead that drew you back from your durance — or perhaps worse, what you once loved was wallpapered over, reupholstered by the passing of time, so different from what you remember that you start to question whether the precious glimmers you clung to were just lies you made up to keep yourself sane. You’ve spent years at your Keeper’s beck and call, clinging to the static memory of your past, while back home the world continued spinning along without you. If anyone missed you — if they even noticed you were gone — their mourning was sped along by the breakneck pace of modern day society.

You’ve each had a lifetime, separated by the Hedge and your Keeper’s cruel whims. Your children are grown, raised by others. Your lover went gray after years in the arms of someone else. Your parents are nothing but dust and names engraved on a stone. Any wound that your disappearance created (assuming your place was not filled by the True Fae) has long since healed over in the years you were gone, leaving nothing but knotty scar tissue in the space where your life once was.

How do you explain to your spouse why you disappeared without a trace, and how years passed with no opportunity to return? What justification can you possibly offer to the now-adult children who celebrated birthdays, graduations, weddings, and anniversaries without you there? How can you pick up a life that went on without you?

And that is, of course, assuming that time passed for you at a semblance of what it did for them. This is often not the case. The True Fae are tricky folk, and within their demesnes, time is as mutable for them as any other aspect of reality. Any return is difficult, but how could you possibly pick up the threads of a life that proceeded far faster than what you experienced on the other side of the Hedge? You escape from what seemed to be a week-long durance, but return to find a decade passed for your family for every day you experienced in Arcadia. Your newborn babe is now aged and infirm, while you look and feel more like his grandchild than his parent. How can you explain to the elderly woman dying after a lifetime alone that you were only gone for a few short hours? Even if she could believe you — would she forgive you?

Things only get more complicated when the slip is in the other side of the time-stream. Your decades-long durance left you wizened and gray, and you return through the brambles to find your lover still sleeping peacefully in the bed where you left them. The numbers on the clock have only advanced a click or two, despite you having experienced a lifetime of enslavement on the far side of the Hedge. You’re obviously not the person they know any longer. But how can

you watch from the outside, bent and wrinkled, as they slowly come to the realization that young, vital you disappeared and is never coming back?

And it's not just interpersonal relationships that are affected. Your job has, of course, been filled by someone else. Maybe it's your fetch, slipped into your place in the wake of your abduction (and doesn't it suck to find out they're doing it better than you did?). If not, eventually even the most understanding employer can't ignore your absenteeism any longer and fills your empty position with a new worker. And it's not as if you can just expect to be able to do what you used to do anyway. The world changed. Technology advanced. When you were abducted, the idea of a mobile telephone might well have been a flight of fantasy; now children play with toys more advanced than the computers used to launch the first moon mission. Your career path might no longer exist, and if it does, the chances of you being able to catch up to your modern coworkers is slim to none.

Day-to-day life has changed as well. The internet may well not have existed before your durance. Now, senior citizens connect with the world through social media, and phone calls have become quasi-obsolete. Music during your previous life might have been limited to live performances, short-wave radio, or record players; you may well have completely missed the era of 8-track tapes, cassettes, and CDs, re-emerging into a world where most music exists almost entirely in digital format. Bar codes and scanners. Home computers. Seatbelts and airbags, not to mention electric-powered cars. The day-to-day world has moved at a breakneck pace in the past handful of decades, and you're being thrown back in from a standstill. You are going to have to pick up the pace in a hurry or get left in the dirt.

And, as if figuring out how to juggle your current reality, your lost former life, and the things you experienced during your durance is not a big enough challenge, let's not forget that you're not the only oddity found on this side of the Hedge. When Shakespeare wrote that there are more things in heaven and earth than Horatio's philosophy was capable of dreaming of, he hit the mark. Your eyes are now open to a world that is far broader and contains more than any ordinary human could imagine possible, and those wonders — alien creatures, impossible places, freakish happenings — aren't restricted to the far side of the Hedge. That panhandler on the street might well be another changeling, ready to shake you down once she realizes you can see her true visage. The spot on the subway that always seems a bit too cold might be a weak spot in the Hedge, just waiting the right trigger to open wide and draw you in. The shadow flickering just outside your peripheral vision could be a spy sent by your Keeper to keep tabs on you...or a goblin hoping to catch you unawares so it can harvest your dreams...or maybe it really is just your imagination. The possibilities are, literally, infinite. But, while the bad news is that you're not alone in this strange world, the good news is also that you are not alone.

Fetches

Folk songs and fairy tales tell many stories about how the fairies steal babies from their cribs and cradles, replacing them with one of their own kind in the guise of a child. Like most tales about the True Fae, these stories are half true. For centuries, the Fair Folk have been stealing humans from their beds (and other parts of their lives) but when they leave something behind, it is not one of their own. It is a fetch, a flimsy simulacrum made of sticks and string, meaty bits, or whatever other ephemera the True Fae chooses to bend to the task. Should your Keeper leave a fetch behind, the creature is given your memories at the time of its creation, and infused with a

bit of your very own shadow. Once created, this creature lives out your life during your durance — and is likely not eager to give up its place once you've returned.

Once

Chances are, you didn't even know about your fetch until you escaped from your durance. As if worrying about your own fate wasn't bad enough, your durance was likely spent fretting about your family missing you, about the responsibilities you left behind, your job, your friends, your pets. Guilt about how the world goes on without you is a driving goal in many changelings' escape from Arcadia, and most remain woefully unaware that those they left behind are likely not missing them — in fact, don't even know they have gone.

If your Keeper was particularly cruel, though, they may have given you a glimpse of what "your" life was like back on the other side of the Hedge. Of the cobbled-together creature left in your place to keep your family and friends from looking too closely into your absence. They may have even showed you the fetch's true nature, the bits of shadow and debris from which it had been created, now happily kissing your children goodnight before tucking itself into bed with your spouse.

Now

While your fetch is not a changeling, that does not mean it is without its own resources. First and foremost, of course, is the fact that it's been living your life all along. How can you hope to convince those who knew you, once upon a time, that you are really you, when they've seen and interacted with your fetch as you every day that you've been missing? You — warped by your durance, changed by your experiences in ways that even your Mask cannot hide — are likely to seem less "you" than the being that has experienced your life in your absence. Your fetch knows things you missed during your durance, knows the joys and pain they've shared with the people you once called friends over the years. Years that are, for you, filled with memories of an entirely different place, different lessons, a different life.

And it's not likely they're going to give up their place without a fight. While fetches don't have the ability to use Contracts, per se, they are creatures of the Wyrd, and they have their own abilities — known as Echoes — which they will certainly use to defend their appropriated life. These powers play largely on your fetch's connection to you as a changeling, and can allow it to hide itself as a normal human being, enter and exit the Hedge, heal itself in magical fashions, or even — in the most extreme of circumstances — to summon the True Fae down upon itself and whoever else happens to be in the area.

It's easy to see your fetch as the enemy. After all, this stranger — this *thing* — was made by your Keeper. It has been living your life. Sleeping with your spouse. Taking your place. Most Lost, when they discover their fetch's existence, are filled with an immediate instinct to destroy it, to cut out the replacement their Keeper left to take their place.

But what happens when the choice isn't so clear? Not all fetches are bad "people." They are a replacement, a false "you," but that doesn't mean they're necessarily evil or that they haven't done their best to live the life you left behind. What do you do when you find out that your fetch is better to your family than you were before your durance? That they've succeeded where you struggled, overcome the challenges you were battling, and essentially become a better "you" than you?

Changelings, despite their desires, are often not well suited to returning to a mundane life. You've been changed by your durance, by the things that were done to you. You aren't the person you once were. You've been touched by the Fae, altered by them, and by what they've subjected you to. You see things now, know things, can do things that are frankly a danger to anyone around you. You're not "you" any more, not the you that you were before your durance. And while it may not have started as the real you, it's lived the life you couldn't. Raised your children. Worked your job. Paid your bills. Even now, it's willing to fight to protect the things and the people that you couldn't. Even if that means fighting you.

Freeholds

Like calls to like. Changelings are taken from locations across the globe and called back to wherever they most strongly identify as "home," and yet some areas seem to attract notably more Lost than others. In these locations, communities known as freeholds form. While freehold structures vary wildly, ideally each serves to provide the Lost in that area with resources, education, and protection, as well as some sense of stability and belonging. Many freeholds are fraught with power struggles and politics, but for most changelings, they are better than doing without.

Now

Your first contact with a freehold is likely to be not long after your escape. While there are countless portals out of the Hedge, the most commonly manifesting ones are often watched by the nearest freehold, in hopes of intercepting recently freed changelings before they can wreak too much havoc on the world to which they're returning. Some freeholds even sponsor scouts to patrol the Hedge areas nearest to their city, not only to observe and deal with any threats to the freehold from Hedge denizens, but also to rescue those who may have escaped Arcadia but for some reason have been unable to find their way fully back to the mortal realm.

Even experienced changelings must take care when dealing with a newly returned Lost. Many Lost are quite ravaged by the trials and travails they endured during their durance: physically injured, mentally scarred, emotionally damaged. Still reeling from their time beneath their Keeper's boot (sometimes quite literally) and whatever arduous journey their escape led them upon, a newly found changeling is often like a wild beast — a danger to themselves and those around them, regardless of their intent. Because of this, freeholds often implement an observe-and-protect policy initially, watching over newly discovered Lost from a relatively safe distance, while moving to intercept any dangers they may find themselves in. After initial reports as to the attitude, capabilities, and observable motivations have been gone over, the freehold will select appropriate individuals to initiate first contact with the new changeling. The exact nature of that contact may vary wildly. A mostly harmless newcomer from a civilized freehold might be approached through a casual encounter that turns into a candid conversation wherein the ambassador offers to introduce the new arrival to the rest of their community. A more feral arrival may be greeted in kind, with bestial freehold members exerting dominance over the newcomer, or making strides to incorporate them into a pack, at least temporarily. Skittish folk might be left messages of reassurance, rather than being approached directly, while those who seem an immediate danger to themselves or others may be taken captive and held in protective custody, at least until such a time as they can be educated in the minimum necessary truths to survive as a changeling in the mortal world.

In general, after initial contact, most freeholds treat newly discovered changelings with great care. Traditionally, a freehold offers open hospitality for a month's time, during which the newcomer is welcome to interact with freehold members, and is often actively sought out by locals. Different courts may vie for the privilege of sponsoring and training the newcomer, betting that their attention will pay off if and when their student joins the court. Motleys seeking to increase their numbers may actively recruit a likely match. In an ideal setting, after all, a new member of the community means an extra set of eyes to warn against treachery, an extra set of hands to help protect, and additional knowledge. Unfortunately, not all situations are ideal.

Not all Lost who return through the Hedge are exactly what they seem. Some work, knowingly or not, willingly or not, for the True Fae, even after their durance ends. Privateers may pose as newly escaped Lost, pretending to be injured, ill, or simply confused. Like a bird pretending to have a wounded wing to lure predators away from their nest, they hope that gullible freehold members will follow them off the beaten path and into an ambush where they can be captured and sold to the Goblin Markets, or to the True Fae themselves. Other Lost may pose as newly returned, in order to learn more about the inner workings of a freehold. This knowledge could then be sold to a rival freehold, to Goblin marketeers, or even to those who hunt the Lost like animals to harvest Glamour or other fae resources from them.

Because of these dangers, some freeholds have eschewed tradition, and adopted rather terse forms of screening new arrivals, which at their extremes might involve incarceration, interrogation, and even dream scanning. Those who pass the screenings are treated to traditional hospitality, while those who don't may well find themselves under the thumbs of some of the freehold's less savory members. While they may downplay these practices, keeping them hidden from the general populace, freeholds that practice such screenings believe that when dealing with the broad spectrum of dangers new Lost can bring to a community, the end justifies the means.

Membership

After their initial period of hospitality, changelings who pose no obvious threats are usually offered the opportunity to join the freehold by swearing a pledge. While the specifics may vary, at the very least, the would-be freehold member promises to protect the freehold and its members from the True Fae and their allies, and not to work for or with those enemies. In exchange, the freehold offers the changeling some level of protection and support. In some locations, this is as far as the bargain goes. In others, more is asked for — donations of Glamour to the ruling leader, obedience to the freehold's rules, or even adherence to any order the current leader decrees. And, in return, such demands are balanced by additional benefits to the members of the freehold — goods and gear, social standing, or supplementary protections.

Breaking a freehold oath is a serious matter, especially if done by knowingly collaborating with the True Fae and their minions. Exile is the least such a traitor can expect. Most oaths will bring down the might of the Wyrd against those who betray their fellow Lost after promising not to, although if the freehold catches up with them before the Wyrd can, there may not be much left to punish.

Courts

One of the strongest motivations shared by the Lost is their all-consuming desire not to return to captivity under their Keepers. When the first Lost escaped from their durances, there were no freeholds to protect them and no more experienced changelings to teach them. Touched by the True Fae, they were too strange to integrate themselves back into their home villages and

holdings, so most spent what remained of their short and sorry lives in constant fear of their Keepers at their heels.

In time, however, as more Lost escaped, those few who had survived long enough began watching out for and mentoring newer arrivals. However, any congregation of changelings proved to be a prime target for the True Fae, and something had to be done to keep their now growing numbers from being re-abducted as quickly as they emerged.

There are many courts, many ways that changelings have banded together to defend their homes against the Fae. There are Courts of Dawn and Dusk, of White and Red Roses, of the Land and the Sea. Some of these courts have Bargains, mystical agreements that limit the ways in which the True Fae can attack them. The most common of these bargained courts are the Courts of the Four Seasons.

Each season — Spring, Summer, Autumn, and Winter — offered early changelings different ways to avoid their Keepers' notice, and these tactics became integral to those changelings' way of life. In seasonal court freeholds, each quarter year is ruled over by a monarch of the appropriate seasonal court.

Chances are, when you first are approached by a freehold, representatives of the various courts may try to recruit you. Joining a court requires a pledge, and ties you on a deep and magical level to the elements of that season. It makes it easier for you to connect with the Contracts associated with that season, and if you truly embrace the spirit of your court, that connection will manifest in the form of a Mantle — a supernatural expression of your affiliation with that season, which can be used to aid you in various fashions.

One of the ways the seasonal courts help protect Lost from the True Fae is that they rotate power and leadership. As the seasons change in the natural world, the court aligned with the season also hands off power to the next, ensuring that no one group gains too much power over the others in the freehold. This idea — voluntarily giving over power to your peers — is so anathema to the True Fae that the very fact that it is followed provides some protection against the large population of a freehold being noticed. After millennia as the masters of their own domains, the idea of individuals intentionally and voluntarily giving up power to one another is so alien as to be virtually unrecognizable to the True Fae, thus providing a practical “disguise” for the freehold from their eyes. Failing to trade the throne when the time comes is the sort of power play a True Fae would understand on an innate basis, and thus is more likely to draw their attention. The threat of this is enough to keep all but the most fanatical of tyrants willing to hand off power, at least nominally, although it is not unheard of for corrupt Lost to attempt to find ways around this prohibition — often to the detriment of themselves and their fellow freehold members.

Motleys

In a world where Lost have learned that trust is hard to come by, even among their own kind, creating bonds of not only trust, but of genuine concern and affection, is often paramount to maintaining some semblance of Clarity. And while being a part of a freehold can provide a general sense of community, a role within the courts, or even a seat on the throne, it is within a motley that you are most likely to find what many have given up hope of — camaraderie, true friendship, and sometimes even love.

A motley is a group of changelings who form a bond together, one that most often is reinforced by a pledge. Most motley pledges follow a fairly standard format, although motleys with a

particular purpose — defending a certain neighborhood in a city, running a business together, or simply being a surrogate family for one another — may well customize the terms of their oath to support and promote those goals.

Trust is paramount in any motley, although yours might resemble a haphazard family while another might take more after a violent street gang. Regardless of how outsiders view them, members of a motley know that they can rely on one another above all else. Because of this, motley pledges almost always contain clauses forbidding you and the other members of the group from harming each other — sometimes even at the cost of injury or death. Other parts of the pledge may ban you from certain behaviors the group finds abhorrent, while offering benefits that foster and support your group's goals: charisma and social maneuverability for courtier motleys, for example, or increased stealth for a pack of scouts. Regardless of the terms, your motley is likely the most stable and trusted part of your life after your durance — and woe be it to any who try to break it apart.

That is not to say that life within a motley is always smooth sailing, of course. Especially for those who once lost their ability to trust and re-extended tenuous bonds to others, closeness breeds fertile soil for an entire host of potential intra-motley issues. Simple arguments and miscommunications can fester if your group is not extremely careful to maintain open communications with each other at all times. Any collective group tends to develop a leader or leaders to help make decisions and hone the group's focus. You might plan, vote on the leadership, or build a process for choosing a leader into your group's inception, but even within a motley that is planned to be egalitarian, dominant personalities frequently rise to leadership roles and command. After a durance under the whim of their Keeper, however, it is natural to balk at any perception of yoke or control, and even the most benevolent leader may find themselves facing a mutinous motley if they don't use extreme caution in their demands on the group.

Envy and resentment of power can also grow quickly in an environment as tightly bound as a motley. Any perceived favoritism, by the leader or other powerful or popular figures in the freehold, can chafe at the rough edges of your soul. Changelings are rarely the most stable of individuals, and something as simple as a perceived slight or potential insult can tear your group apart from within, if not carefully protected against.

One of the greatest treasures to be found in a motley can also be one of the greatest dangers to it. As often happens within a tightly knit social group, crushes, infatuations and relationships also often develop within motleys. And, while affection beyond the boundaries of platonic friendship might bring members of your motley closer together, the course of love is rarely without bumps. Unrequited adoration, messy break ups, or outbreaks of jealousy can shatter your motley irreparably, leading to drama and trauma.

The end of a motley is rarely an amicable situation. While some do prepare for this eventuality, creating a shorter-term oath to allow the membership dynamics to change without causing too much turmoil, when anger, jealousy, or betrayal lead to the end of a motley, the results can be devastating. Human divorce courts may be messy, but at least they don't normally involve supernatural tempers, curses, and the potential for an angry former lover summoning their jilted spouse's Keeper to enact revenge.

Mask and Mien

To themselves and each other, the scars a changeling bears from their Keeper's fae attentions are more than just psychological. You wear them every day on your skin as well as your soul, and while some are subtler than others, no Lost remains wholly untouched. While leaving Arcadia stripped away the more dramatic of your Keeper's "gifts," every time you look in the mirror, you will be reminded that the durance left its mark upon you forever.

Once

In their own demesne, a True Fae is capable of warping almost any aspect of reality to suit their whim. Weather, time — even the basic laws of the natural world that humans are accustomed to being static and immutable — all give way before the power of a True Fae in their own realm. And, as those abducted by them are quick to find out, humans are far from immune to that might.

The Fae treat humans as raw materials. Interesting, certainly, and often entertaining, but of no more concern than any other resource that required equivalent effort to obtain. Just as a cook would not hesitate to break eggs to make an omelet, or an artist sharpen a pencil to begin sketching, people are merely potentials to the True Fae. Valuable potentials, perhaps, and ones that they may well go to monumental extremes to capture once their attention has been drawn to an individual — but potential, nonetheless. Holding absolute power over their environs, Fae choose not to truly empathize with those whose lives they take control of, and as such feel no compunction whatsoever to maintain the essence or physical form of those they have taken command over.

There are as many stories of how changelings are changed by their durance as there are durances — each is unique depending upon the individual, their Keeper and the part they play within that True Fae's story. While it is possible for a human to be dragged into Arcadia solely to fulfil a role as a paving brick or drinking glass, such mundane roles could just as easily be performed by simple manifestations of the Keeper's magic. Most often, humans are cast in a particular aspect, either suited to their life before the durance, or — as Fae can be perverse and cruel creatures — in stark contrast to it.

Perhaps the iconic example of a human being taken to the lands of the Fae paints the human as a companion, courtesan, performer, or other form of entertainment for their master. Such a prisoner might find their looks altered to better reflect their Keeper's personal aesthetic preferences — made skeletally thin, uncommonly fat, impossibly muscular, or so painfully beautiful that the human heart holds no defenses against it. Fae tastes are not necessarily akin to those of humanity, however, so "ideal" might just as easily involve extra limbs, bestial features, feathers, spines, or an utter lack of skin covering their musculature.

For those who serve other roles, even less human forms are common. Legends tell of a True Fae who calls himself The Nurseryman, who plucks children from their bed and, still sleeping, plants them in his garden where they bloom into new and wondrous flowers every morning. The Veiled Scholar collects those who have unique knowledge on whatever topic she is interested in at the moment, and transforms her captives into living tomes, so that they may tell her their stories when she takes them from the shelf of her library-prison. Whether a never-fading lamp to guide the Hermit's path, or the dragon steed that General Who Knows No Defeat rides into battle, a changeling's form during their durance is a matter of their master's whim rather than their own will.

Nor is that form set in stone. The True Fae are not known for their constancy — when your appearance is subject to your Keeper's mood, you may well find yourself waking up as a winged angel one day, a rugged barbarian the next, and a giant spider creature on special occasions. You are, in the end, treated only as objects in a world with a single true subject, and the True Fae are no more concerned with your views on what form you are made to wear than a human would empathize with the feelings of their wardrobe when choosing to wear one shirt versus another.

How exactly the Keeper goes about altering their servant's form also varies drastically with the individual. The Lord of Blood and Blades might perform nightly surgery on his staff, doing experiments that are as much about *how* the changes are made as they are about the end results. A dancer slave of the Observer might find that they wake each morning in their gilded cage, dressed down to their toe shoes and transformed physically to suit whatever role their master deems for that day's act. The Philosopher of Pain might build up their changeling staff's endurance by infusing their food and drink with strange compounds, while She Before Whom All Beauty Bows might literally carve her minion out of a fresh block of marble each day in whatever form pleases her. The possibilities are endless, and unfortunately for the Lost, rarely pleasant to be the subject of.

Now

Once out of the direct control of your Keeper, however, your body will remember — at least to some degree — who and what you truly are. Perhaps it is the symbolic breaking free from your Keeper's leash, or the act of traveling through the Hedge and out the other side, or maybe the True Fae simply do not have enough power in the mortal realm to maintain their lockdown on their escaped servant's form. Regardless of the reason, your physical form — and the way you appear to humans upon your return, which is a different matter altogether — is less dramatic than that which was put upon you during your durance.

Mien

The form with which you emerge from the Hedge after your durance — your mien — is always at least roughly humanoid, regardless of what you appeared to be before or during your captivity. The vestiges of the durance are more than cosmetic; you really do have to comb your hair around your horns, or cut holes in all your t-shirts for your wings. And if you're a living torch, you might want to be careful when you stop for gas.

While much of your mien is tied to your durance, you're not locked in the shape your Keeper forced you into. Miens change with time and experience, and court affiliations change them as well. Spring courtiers may find themselves surrounded by the scent of growing flowers, discover vines and blossoms in their hair, or even notice their footsteps leave behind patches of verdant grass. The temperature around Winter courtiers often drops significantly (and raises around those of the Summer Court). Autumn courtiers may find their eyes grow hollow or glow from within like a jack-o-lantern, or they leave a trail of fallen leaves in their wake. The influences are widely varied, and the effects only increase as your court's Mantle — how closely you embody the court's ideals — grows.

Your mien is also influenced by how strong your connection to the Wyrd becomes. As a newly escaped changeling, you may bear tiny stubs of horns, miniature claws, a barrel chest, or slight stature. As the Wyrd grows stronger within you, however, your horns may gradually unfurl into

mighty antlers, or your claws lengthen into razor-sharp daggers. A stocky form may become literally barrel shaped, and a slim one turn truly skeletal if your Wyrd is extreme enough.

Changelings see their own mien when they look at themselves, and (barring the use of magic) see other changelings' miens when they look at them. With visages that vary from ethereal to macabre, gatherings of the Lost are visually diverse beyond mortal kenning — at least to those who can see the truth.

Mask

There is a reason, however, why the majority of the mortal world believes Lost and their ilk to be fairy tales. Your true visage, if not your true nature, is hidden from mortal eyes by means of a Glamour illusion — the Mask. To humans — and most other creatures — Lost appear to be normal people. The flame-maned beauty might be noted for her glorious hair color, or the dwarf with the strength of an ox appear as burlier than the average fellow, but the Mask ensures that, to outsiders, fae forms do not appear to be supernatural.

Sight is not the only sense affected by the Mask. While your human paramour may believe that her flower-bearing fae lover smells delightful, she will not recognize your scent as the lilacs and lilies growing in your beard. Hoof clicks will sound like normal footsteps to non-fae ears, and even claws or horns will seem like normal nails or an unmarred forehead if touched by human skin. This power is so great that it holds even after you die; no matter how grotesquely unnatural your living form might be, you will leave behind a mundane-looking corpse.

Contracts

While the juxtaposition of the mundane and the magical that changelings experience upon the end of their durance is inherently challenging, the fact that you are now something slightly other than human can provide some of the tools necessary to deal with those challenges. Perhaps the broadest and most powerful new tools available to you are the Contracts you can call upon. By tapping into ancient pacts that ancient Fae made with the world around them, your Keeper and its kind can alter themselves, humans, animals, their surroundings — and at their most powerful — the nature of reality itself. As their former servant, you have access to many of the same Contracts. While you may not shift the very laws of reality with them, masterfully wielded Contracts can make you more powerful — and dangerous — than human minds could ever imagine.

Once

While in Arcadia, it quickly became obvious that the laws of the world you grew up in no longer applied. But that did not mean that there were no rules. Even in the most chaotic Fae demesne, there is some order. The True Fae may be masters of their own domains, but they are bound by their own dictum, by the truths they acknowledge to be true, and by the power of the pacts they have sworn back through the eons. Although the details are lost in the fogs of antiquity, legends clearly connect the Fair Folk's current powers directly to the age-old promises sworn between the earliest of their kind and the world. And, ancient though they may be, these agreements are still as binding as they are powerful.

As their minion, tool, or plaything, some modicum of these Contracts applied to you as well. After all, of what use to an arcane being is a spy limited by moral senses, and how quickly would they grow tired of a plaything incapable of supernal dexterity? It served your master or mistress

well that you were more than human, and thus, during your durance, they extended some of these powers to you. And, for all that your powers during your imprisonment were subject to the whims of your Keeper, being bestowed with them triggered something within you, changed your very nature so that you would never be quite human again, and connected you on a deep and immutable level with those ancient agreements.

Now

Immediately upon your return, you may well have found that you were no longer capable of doing all that you could on the other side of the Hedge. Your connection with the pacts woven by your Keeper is weaker here outside of the kingdoms they control, and no longer fostered by your servitude to the Good Cousins. You once might have been able to change shapes at a whim, truly becoming a bird on the wing or a fish in the sea by virtue of your master's connection to the True Fae's complex and all-encompassing pacts with the essential nature of Bird or Fish. On your own, however, you may be only capable of altering your voice or mimicking a human's visage — single-line elements from a miles-long series of fae Contracts. Rather than being able to summon whatever otherworldly delights your Keeper's whim demanded from its garden instantly, as a part of their agreement with Fertility, now perhaps you can only speed a fruit to ripening, or stop someone from becoming pregnant. Weaker connections yield weaker results, but also allow a modicum of human ingenuity and a greater sense of free will and choice than the True Fae typically demonstrate.

Weak is not absent, however, and every changeling returns from their durance with some vestigial connection to the contracts of their servitude. You will find, here on the other side of the Hedge, that it may require more energy to do what you used to do effortlessly. While in Arcadia, your Contracts were fueled through your Keeper's fae nature, and your works on their behalf tapped into that surfeit of power. Now, however, you're essentially on your own, and while Contracts may have ways to circumvent paying in Glamour, most will require at least a small amount of effort.

Your powers here may begin so weak as to make you feel crippled. Like you are missing a part of yourself. But as time passes, you will learn. No longer limited by the powers your Keeper saw fit to share with you, you are now capable of extending your own will into the ancient pacts with the world around you. As a changeling, you can focus on fleshing out the Contracts that come most naturally to you, perhaps even eventually achieving power akin to that your former Keeper wielded. Or, freed from their influence, you may take the reins into your own hands. Although fraught with challenges, what you endured also opened up almost limitless potential to you. By tapping into these primeval deals between the Fae and the world around them, you can expand your horizons, making yourself into the being you dream of being, regardless of what you were originally created to serve as.

Pledges

Promises have power, especially among the Fae. Centuries in the past — millennia perhaps — they made bargains with the world around them that still hold true, fueling their nigh-omnipotent powers within Arcadia and offering escaped changelings a semi-stable source of abilities after their durance.

But these already sworn deals are not the only means by which the words of oaths hold supernal power. By investing your own Glamour into an oath, you can craft Pledges that magically bind

those involved in them. Carefully spun, Pledges can offer a wellspring of power to those abide to their tenets — or a world of pain to those who treat them lightly.

Once

Before your escape — possibly even before your durance — you likely discovered that the power of sworn deals was far, far greater than humans believe. The True Fae are bound by their word — even their lies are partial truths and unspoken information, rather than outright falsehoods. A Keeper might fail to point out a loophole in a contract, or abide only by the razor-sharp fine points of a deal, but to outright break a sworn promise is anathema to them. Many cannot even understand humanity's ability to do so with ease.

Often, humans make promises — or what is close enough to be considered a promise by the Wyrd — without thinking twice. We put forth our plans, preferences, hopes, and fears as statements of fact: “I will be there by 9.” “The Yankees will win or I’ll eat my hat.” “I’ll be damned if she isn’t the prettiest thing I’ve ever seen.” But, when looked at literally, many of our statements are promises...they’re just promises that other humans don’t expect us to keep. Or, at the very least, society deems that breaking such a promise has very little impact on how we are seen or treated by other humans.

To the oath-focused Fae, however, word given is a deal struck. It may well have been the power of a lightly given promise that led to your captivity. Ignorance of the power behind a Pledge is no excuse for not abiding by it, at least not in the ethereal eyes of the Wyrd, and words as simple as “I’d follow you anywhere” or “For you? Anything.” have found more than one unwary human bound to a path they’d never intended.

Even promises no fae creature had a hand in can carry weight beyond words. Someone you left behind when you vanished into Faerie might have kept a vow you made together, even while you left your end to dangle listlessly in your absence. That vow calls to them, lifting the veil to show them things aren’t what they seem, pulling them into the Hedge to find you. If they come back out again, they might find themselves fae-touched — mortal, but connected to you through a bond the Wyrd now recognizes and enforces as surely as any other, graced with some small glimpse of what it is to be fae.

During your durance, you may well have been bound as strongly by your perceived promises as by any bars or chains. However, this constriction is not without benefit; while experts at crafting pledges, the Fae are bound to their word just as strongly as they bind others. Most changelings learn these lessons quickly, coming to watch their words (and those of the beings around them), and utilize the unyielding nature of the Fae’s own oaths against them. For many Lost, promises made in Arcadia may well have kept them from suffering even crueler durances than they otherwise would, and for some, a carefully worded oath with their Keeper eventually gave them the means to escape. At the very least, the Lost inevitably learn to respect (and fear) the power of Pledges from their Keepers, and this caution is carried back with them, a potent tool to be used when they return through the Hedge.

Now

After enduring their durance, it’s not surprising that many Lost develop trust issues. If being betrayed by one individual makes it difficult to know what’s safe and what’s not, imagine discovering that your entire worldview is based on false premises. Finding out that supernatural creatures, magic, and alternate realities not only exist, but that you’re right in the middle of

them? That's enough to shake anyone's confidence, not only in the world around them but also in their own perceptions and instincts.

Pledges are one of the tools that allow changelings to start to rebuild that confidence, to begin to trust *something* in the world. By swearing oaths, be it non-aggression pacts, fealty pledges, or motley bonds, the Lost can extend at least a modicum of trust, despite their past experiences. Through them, they can begin to work with others who, like themselves, have been abused and fooled, tricked, and deceived not only by their Keepers, but by the nature of the world itself, by the blindness of their parents who taught them that fairies were the stuff of folklore, and by everyone and everything that led up to the mind-breaking reveal. Considering everything the Lost have endured, it's more surprising that they don't require Pledges from every single individual they interact with, than that they do rely on them so heavily.

Pledges also offer the Lost a sense of control, something that many have had stripped from them during their durance. Knowing that the promises sealed with Wyrd will be supernaturally upheld, not by them, but by the inherent (and seemingly limitless) power of the Wyrd itself gives even the most broken changeling a sense of empowerment. Even when dealing with those who can't be trusted, knowing that the Wyrd itself will enact punishment upon oath breakers, allows the Lost to interact with a world that has previously betrayed them. It's not surprising then that some changelings use the power of Pledges in ways that many would consider unethical. Mimicking their Keeper's propensity to utilize the power of a bound promise, even if the other party isn't completely aware of what they're agreeing to, has to be tempting for someone who has ended up on the short end of the stick more times than not.

Luckily, however, most changelings utilize Pledges and their power as the foundation upon which they can form relationships, buttressing tenuous trust with the augmentation of supernatural bonds. It is this ability that allows them to interact with each other, despite what they have endured, and thus not be doomed to spend the rest of their lifetimes in paranoid solitude.

