

THE LIVE-ACTION GAMING MAGAZINE

Mind's Eye Theatre™ JOURNAL

BECAUSE THE MIND'S EYE NEVER BLINKS



ISSUE NO.4

Mind's Eye Theatre™ JOURNAL

BECAUSE THE MIND'S EYE NEVER BLINKS

WELCOME TO THE
MIND'S EYE THEATRE JOURNAL,
THE MAGAZINE THAT PICKS UP WHERE OTHER
MIND'S EYE PUBLICATIONS LEAVE OFF.

THIS ISSUE PRESENTS:

- THE SECRETS OF THE WRAITHS OF THE JADE EMPIRE.
- THE CONCLUSION OF THE MAYDAY! CHRONICLE.
- LIVE-ACTION MAGE RULES... SORT OF.
- WORLD OF DARKNESS FICTION.
- TOPICAL ISSUES ON LIVE-ACTION ROLEPLAYING AND MORE.

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THE LIVE-ACTION GAMING MAGAZINE



Mind's Eye Theatre
JOURNAL

BECAUSE THE MIND'S EYE NEVER BLINKS



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- Live-action Pumonca rules
- Live-action rules for the True Black Hand
- Combination Disciplines
- Master-level Thaumaturgy Rituals

Issue #2

- Live-action Nunnehi rules
- Tips on starting and maintaining a long-running chronicle
- Articles on the Camarilla organization and One World by Night
- A look at how **Mind's Eye Theatre** has changed and grown over time

Issue #3

- Live-action rules for playing the Thallain of the Shadow Court
- World of Darkness Fiction
- A human's perspective on the terrors that stalk the World of Darkness
- A look ahead at one of the most eagerly anticipated **Mind's Eye Theatre** releases of the year



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WELCOME TO THE MIND'S EYE THEATRE JOURNAL!

Hello again, everybody, and welcome to the fourth issue of the **MET Journal**. For those of you who are new to the publication, let me take a second to acquaint you with just what you've got here. (For those who've read this before, you may skip ahead to "Deadguy Speaks" on the next page.)

The **Journal** is a quarterly publication dedicated to filling in the gaps in your White Wolf LARP environment. We offer rules for new character types, original storylines to work into your chronicles, guides for keeping your games under control and running smoothly and rules updates you won't find in any other **Mind's Eye** release. Plus, you'll find answers to the questions that have plagued you, original World of Darkness fiction and columns from people who've been LARPing or working here at White Wolf (or both) for years.

In this issue, we take a look at the wraiths of the Yellow Springs, the implications of **Hunter: The Reckoning** for your **Mind's Eye** chronicles and a short treatise on live-action mages from the **Mage** developer himself. And that's just a sample of what's in store for you here. We'll also take a look at what you've missed in previous issues (if you're joining us late) and what to expect in the future of **Mind's Eye Theatre** and White Wolf in general.

In future issues of the **Journal**, we'll present an entirely new LARP adventure, a look back through history at some historical expansions to our most popular games, a look ahead at a possible future of the World of Darkness and more **MET** rules conversions.

And you can help make the **Journal** even better. Send us letters on your opinions about the state of live-action roleplaying today. Send us questions about the features and rules you see here, as well as notes about the broken rules you come across in different **MET** publications. Send us horror stories about games gone wrong and how your player characters fixed them. We're interested in all aspects of live-action roleplaying, and we want to know what you think.

Stick around. The **Journal** is on the cutting edge of the live-action genre; we've got something for everybody. And if we don't have it yet, let us know. We'll get it for you.

Carl Bowen

Developer

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White Wolf

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DEADGUY SPEAKS

by Richard E. Dansky

*I'm sad to note that this column is the last Rich Dansky will write as an employee of White Wolf. Rich has been a part of White Wolf for years and has been the developer for **Mind's Eye Theatre**, **Wraith: The Oblivion**, **Vampire: The Dark Ages** and **Kindred of the East**. However, Dame Fortune smiles on me, and this column will continue to showcase Rich's unique insight, his wit, his observations on life in general and his view of the development of **Mind's Eye Theatre**, though he'll no longer be directly in the middle of the action.*



A GREAT ONUS IS PLACED UPON THEE

This one's going to be a little different, folks. Bear with me. I'm sitting here, not too long after the Columbine High School shootings, pondering what it is that we do that makes us such easy targets for scapegoating in the wake of tragedy. More importantly, I have to ask what we — you and I — can do about it.

(Author's note: I have nothing but sorrow for the families, friends and classmates of the children cut down in Columbine. My mother works in a middle school, and every time I hear about another outrage in a public school somewhere, my first irrational thought is to call and make sure that she's all right. Nothing I say here is intended to diminish the shock and horror of incidents like that at Columbine, even now, when so much time has passed.)

Here's a revelation for you: America does not necessarily like live-action roleplaying. It does not necessarily like people who pretend to be vampires or werewolves cavorting around the local coffeehouse or state park and frightening the paying customers with vicious rounds of Rock-Paper-Scissors. A hundred thousand people will cram themselves into a concrete toilet bowl with tiny seats on a weekend afternoon, painting team logos on their well-developed beer bellies and screaming for someone to rip a quarterback's or referee's head off, but it's those weirdos who skulk around in black and quote Shelley that people think you have to watch out for.

In other words, depending upon how understanding your local community is, it can really, really suck to be an **MET** player.

That's just the way it is, at least at the moment. You and I know it, and one of the favorite conversational topics that comes up whenever players of **MET** get together (besides discussing characters, making fun of those idiots at White Wolf who clearly don't know what they're doing and comparing prices on fake fangs) is the fact that the world just doesn't like LARPers. It's a sad state of affairs, yes, but something about it nags at me. LARPing may not be loved by all walks of life, but at the same time, that does not excuse the self-martyred "woe betide us for having an unpopular hobby" attitude that seems to exist in certain quarters. Yes, there are places where **MET** games get it hard. Believe me, all the stories come back to us here at the office sooner or later, and we do what we can to help. But there are other places where a little effort on the part of players and Storytellers, a little willingness to teach and explain rather than an insistence on feeling persecuted, can do a world of good.

So let's talk about responsibility here.

Specifically, let's talk about yours.

Yes, the world is an unfair place. If life were fair, everyone would understand intrinsically that LARPing is a friendly social activity that is enjoyable for a great many people, and not some sort of weird pseudo-mystical immersion in the nether realms of the human psyche. If life were fair, you wouldn't have to explain to your folks or your faculty advisor that it's just a costume and you don't really think that you're Mircea the Ravenous, Tzimisce Overlord of the Borgo Pass. They would just get it, wish you good luck storming the castle and — if you were really lucky — comment on the nice trim you'd added to your cloak since the last game.

But life's not fair. You know that, I know that, and the rest of the world knows that. Like it or not, our hobby is simply not something that much of "mainstream" society gets. It requires leaps of faith. It requires suspension of disbelief. It requires spending time as someone else, and, on occasion, it requires saying funny words and wearing funny clothes. None of these things are necessarily intuitive to perfectly nice folks whose idea of a game is building hotels on Baltic Avenue before someone else beats them to Free Parking. Sad as it may be, you simply cannot rely on the goodwill of the universe to make people understand that **Mind's Eye Theatre**, or any type of roleplaying, is nothing more or less than a game.

(Time for a sidebar rant here: One of the most frequent complaints I get when I hear from people whose parents or teachers or store owners or whatever have shut down their LARPs is that whoever is doing the shutting down is "wrong." Well, duh. Of course they're wrong. It is just a game, nothing more and nothing less, even if they're convinced it's going to turn you into Sabrina the Teenaged Witch. However — and this is the part that matters — *it does not matter one teeny little bit that they are wrong*, as long as they're the ones holding the big stick. Being right and a buck will get you a small cup of lousy cappuccino these days. As long as the folks with the power think they're right, it doesn't matter what the facts of the case actually are. That's the way it is, pure and simple.)

Yeah, they're wrong, but you know what: They could think that LARPing promotes watching the Teletubbies and joining the alien conspiracy at Roswell, and your game would still get shut down because *They Have the Big Stick*. Again, I state that it is categorically, unmitigatedly, unabashedly unfair. But that's just too bad. It was unfair that Belgian neutrality got violated in 1914 too, but the universe doesn't much care about fair. All you can do is try to make the unfairness of it all work in your favor — or at least work against you less emphatically. The more time you spend kvetching about life being unfair, the less you're going to get done. It's that simple.)

All of this brings us back to the most important person in the whole equation: You.

You have to make a difference, one person at a time. You have to take a moment and sit down with your parents to explain what you're doing and why it's just a game. They're your parents. Odds are they're not irretrievably evil. Odds are that if they've expressed disapproval over that game you're playing, it's because they're worried about you. They may not be doing the world's greatest job of expressing that concern in a palatable or even open-minded way, but it's there, nonetheless. Remember, also, where their information is coming from. The treatment of roleplaying in the traditional media has been, to be blunt, anywhere from mildly to wildly inaccurate on many occasions. However, your folks don't know that. They just know that it says right there, in black and white, in the Upper Herkimer Herald-Democrat-Observer-Picayune that an occult expert from Sheboygan, Michigan, has decided that your game is naughty and evil, and it must be that you're "immersed in the occult" — whatever that means. Personally, I've always resisted being immersed in the occult because A) the stains are hard to get out of my boxers, and B) I'm actually a former youth group chaplain who would really like to avoid disappointing good old Rabbis Alpert and Maslin back home. But that's just me.

On a more serious note, I know that you don't have to immerse yourself in the occult to play *Masquerade*. You know that you don't need to immerse yourself in the occult to play *Masquerade*. God help anyone who tries to claim that there's something Satanic about invoking the images of rock, paper and scissors, because, if you ask me, that's the final twist of the loosest of all possible screws. But that occult expert out there (and how does one make a career out of being an occult expert, anyway?) It doesn't strike me as the sort of thing one puts on a résumé is sure that the game does mandate such goofiness, and the harried reporter looking for a quote from an expert may not know any better. The quote gets printed, sitting there in black and white for all the world to see. And because that information is there in the paper — and they wouldn't print it in the paper if it weren't true — that's where your folks' idea of your hobby may well be coming from.

(An aside: The newspaper ain't always right. That little "corrections" item they tuck away where it's hard to find is there for a reason — and that's just the stuff someone caught and yelled about. You might want to bear that in mind. Just because it's in agate type on a piece of a dead tree doesn't mean it's gospel. After all, this got printed too, didn't it?)

What all that means, however, is that there's a window of opportunity here for you to educate your folks — and by extension, your teachers, professors, faculty advisors and so on. Show them the books up close and personal so that they read the big words that say "No touching," "No running," "No drinking" and "It's only a game." You may even want to think about running a little demo, showing off a staged scene complete with challenges. Let's face it, it's kind of hard for anyone with any common sense to work themselves into a self-righteous frenzy over even the most heated exchange of R-P-S. If you really want to push your luck, you can even sell it as a vocabulary-building exercise. After all, who uses the words "brawny" or "lithe" in their daily conversation? Come to think of it, how many of your friends knew what "obfuscate" meant before 1991?

Is this sort of common-sense approach going to work every time? Of course not. Some folks don't want to be convinced. Some folks would rather rant and rave than face honest, simple facts. There's nothing you can do about them. However, the vast majority of concerned parents, teachers and so on are concerned because they've been told they should be concerned. Show them and tell them differently, and you may see some remarkable results.

Now think about your community, be it a college campus, a town or a city. A basic fact of *Mind's Eye Theatre* play is that you need space and lots of it. You need corners to plot in, shadows to hide in, coat rooms to cut deals in — whatever. You need room, and by spreading out your contingent of players over a lot of room, you increase your chances of having your players bump into someone who isn't playing. When that happens, those who aren't playing may well be curious as to why that guy over in the corner (you know, the one playing the Nosferatu) has Rice Krispies and Karo syrup all over his face.

So is this a crisis or an opportunity? Well, if Gordo the Nosferatu decides to drip breakfast cereal all over the innocent bystanders, yeah, you just might get some negative feedback here. But if you take a minute and explain what you're doing — and it's always a good idea to talk with all of your players before starting the game about what to say if asked about what's going on — you can go a long way toward building some goodwill and maybe even recruiting a new player or two. It's just common sense, after all. No matter how alienated or antisocial your character might be, bringing that attitude into discussions with folks who don't know diddly about what you're doing is a great way to make them antisocial toward you. And believe it or not, there are a lot more of them out there than there are of you. Social Traits don't matter too much when you get tossed off site for trespassing or told by Public Safety to bust it up because you're freaking the mundanes.

In a broader sense, it behooves you to let the community around where you're playing know what you're doing ahead of time. Call the local police station and explain that there's a game happening there. Take the time to reassure them that there's no touching or actual combat. That way, when the Hitchcock refugee of a paranoid neighbor calls down to the precinct in a panic over the black-clad hooligans running wild in the streets, the gendarmes already know its you (and that you're harmless). If you're going to be meeting at a coffee house, let the proprietor know that there are 30 vampires coming, and encourage your players to patronize the shop while they're there. Thirty vampire players wandering in and drinking lots of coffee once a week is a stable customer base; 30 vampire players wandering in and taking up tables without buying anything is great way to shut that coffeehouse down.

And if you are so classless as to bring your food or drink from elsewhere into an establishment dedicated to serving the same, I'll personally hold you down long enough for the proprietor to kick your ass. Common courtesy is not optional. I know of at least one group that lost its space because some chuckleheads decided that they'd bring McDonalds Happy Meals to the site — which happened to be a cafe that served dinner. The phrase "dumber than a sack of sand" does not begin to do justice to this sort of nonsense. If you can't afford the coffee-house prices, at least have the basic decency to eat your McThing McOutside or before you get to the McGame. Either that, or get ready to volunteer your basement.

No, you don't have a constitutional right to obstruct commercial floor space, so be considerate. Recognize that your game does impact the community around you, even in small ways, and try to make that impact positive. That way, if some yobbo writes a nasty editorial about those darn vampires, your local coffeehouse owner sees the call to shut down the game as the potential loss of 30 of his best (and hopefully best-behaved) customers. Three guesses which way he'll hop in response. Profit motive outweighs fear of a black cloak every time.

By the same token, think about what your game can give to the local community to demonstrate tangibly that you're not a bunch of bloodsucking freaks: blood drives, cleaning up parks and stretches of local highways, food drives, adopting local families at holiday time.... You get the idea. None of these things is terribly difficult to arrange; there are dozens of charities out there in place who will be glad for a few more hands (even pale, tremulous hands with black-painted fingernails. Honest). Furthermore, the sight of a bunch of "vampires" doing a blood drive is often the sort of thing that's irresistible to local news media. It makes for a great visual, allows the writers to haul out the one-liners they generally get to use only at Halloween, and most importantly, it shows your troupe off to the community in a positive light. Just make sure that it's not the guy with Rice Krispies glued to his face who gets interviewed by the cub reporter — and definitely not the guy who thinks it will be fun to play a Malkavian and calls himself "Count Fruitbatula." He might think it's funny to do his little tribute to Gene Simmons on camera, but remember, that's the image that everyone in your local viewing area is going to have of you and your troupe. It often makes life easier if the entire world doesn't think you're a tongue-flapping drool spigot who gets his ya-yas licking a camera lens. Instead, you've got a perfect opportunity to be well-spoken and interesting for the public, even if it's a virtual certainty that whatever you say will be reduced to a nine-second sound bite. Do be careful with what you say; don't bog down in detail or get esoteric because there's always the chance that something you say could be taken out of context. It's sad but true. On the other hand, you can look at it this way: Those nine seconds will help you reach a lot more potential new players all at once than any flyer in a game store ever could. A lot of groups even have a designated individual who gets propped up out front every time the media comes calling. This tactic might not be a bad idea if you've got someone particularly eloquent on hand.

Unfortunately, even the best-coordinated and best-intentioned efforts at letting folks know that no, you're not really drinking blood, sometimes fall on deaf ears. It happens. Sometimes it happens politely, and sometimes it comes down with all the subtlety of a jackhammer manicure. If it happens, there isn't a lot you can do about it. Take some time off until the furor cools down and use that time to plot a truly kick-ass game. Find someplace quieter to play. Find a good convention nearby with a LARP and get your fix there. Swap to live-action *Changeling* and tell everyone you're doing Shakespeare. But don't yell and scream for the sake of yelling and screaming; it won't make matters easier down the road. Just find out who your real allies and enemies are and plot your comeback — preferably in accordance with what's already been discussed here.

In the end, it's not fair. It's something else that both you and I know. But just because it's not fair doesn't mean you can't do anything about it. It's worth the effort to diminish the chances of having your game or your participation in your game ended. It's worth the effort to get out there and teach people about the good points of what you're doing because the more of that you do, the less time you spend wondering when the hammer's going to fall. And the less time you spend wondering about that, the less time you have to spend explaining to the umpteenth reporter or concerned parent that no, you really don't drink blood or think you're the immortal spawn of darkness, the better your game is going to be.

In the end, isn't that what it's really all about?

- the deadguy -



THE CURRENT THINKING

Ah, the old's falling by the wayside all over the place in this issue of the Journal. In this feature, I've combined the letters to the developer and "Frequently Asked Questions" into one vozhd-like mass dedicated to what's on the minds of today's MET players. The ideas and opinions herein expressed are in no way those of the management or intended to represent an overview of the opinions of those who play Mind's Eye Theatre games, unless you find them particularly witty and worth taking to heart. Otherwise, the writers (some of whom appeared on the Forum section of White Wolf's website) are completely on their own.

A discussion started on the White Wolf website some months ago about the viability of mixed LARPs (i.e., games in which character types from various independent game lines participate in the same story). Considering that different themes, moods and ideologies apply to each individual White Wolf game, how easily could characters representing those themes (etc.) be meshed into one game? The original poster received a plethora of advice (some good, some decidedly not), and since this topic is one that recurs in *Mind's Eye Theatre* play (and will continue to do so throughout this game line's long future), I decided to reprint some of the best (and worst) responses. This first letter, though sloppy in presentation, is well-intentioned in meaning.

We have had a problem running an independent LARP with many people wanting to play many different things. First things first.

Numina: Certain numina are so rare that you have to use common sense. How many people in your LARP will have Tele/Pyrokinesis, or Telepathy?

Garou: Make sure the players of the Garou realize their characters either work with or against the vampires. In our game, our area is heavily BSD-dominated. The Garou know their life span is that of a zit. They have to work with vamps or against them. We allow players to play other werecreatures according to rarity. It is perfectly fine for one Gurhal to appear in West Virginia. However, 10 Bastet in one town in West Virginia is not good.

Mages: Don't touch them, they just cause problems. Just say no. Mummies: There are 47 in the world. How many of them are likely to come to *your* town?

Risen: Don't touch this one with a 20-foot pole unless you want a walking battle tank.

Remember, the Storyteller's best friend is the ability to say, "NO."

—Nurain (nurain@hotmail.com)



Boyde, however, had a much less histrionic point to make about the sensibility of mixing White Wolf character types in LARPs.

Mixed LARPs... well they can work, but you must have a clear idea of what it is that has allowed these radically different beings to meet and come together. What holds them together, and what pressures are most likely to rip them apart (and consequences be damned)? Concepts in mixed LARPs are very important to each character, so the players make ones able to fit in. Also the necessity to make characters who fit may limit the range of each type of being that is allowable in your game. A Red Talon werewolf in a *Masquerade* game, for instance, would be a complete no-no.

So with care and hard work, it can be a lot of fun.

—Boyde; (boyde@chem.gla.ac.uk)

And, of course, some people just don't get it. Consider the peril of running a multi-genre game when you don't understand the themes of each genre you're including.

I had a bad problem with Garou at a vampire LARP. They were nothing but a bunch of terrorist assholes that psychologically tortured the vampires who the game was for. I think that the games should not be mixed, or at the very least, limit the Garou in your games to two or three. They can be very dangerous.

Havok (mouse1115@hotmail.com)

On a different tack, a discussion arose recently around a particular dilemma that I'm sure many of you have faced in the course of your *Masquerade* LARP's lifetime. That's the problem of the Garou. For reasons unknown, many Storytellers allow certain players to portray Garou characters in otherwise vampire-dominated games, which leaves purists of both *Werewolf* and *Vampire* howling. The werewolf character in such a game is then often faced with the dilemma of siding with creatures tied to the Wyrm or tossing himself on the teeth of destruction and going on a glorious (if short-lived) rampage against almost every other character in the game. What, then, is the player to do? To answer that question (maybe) — as it's one of the most popular quandaries of modern LARPing — read on. The first respondent begs the most important questions a player playing such a fish-out-of-water concept can (and should) ask.

First of all, remember that Gangrel does not necessarily equal "friend to werewolves." And just what is your Garou doing hanging out with all these vampires? Are you infiltrating them? If you are, then you'd better not be obvious about your identity, because, cub, you're surrounded. Are you evil or a Black Spiral Dancer? If not, then I don't know what you're doing.

Sorry, but it doesn't make sense to me. In a tabletop game or in World of Darkness fiction do werewolves commonly fraternize with vampires? MET is a toned-down version of tabletop, true... but do you really want to be the only one member of a race amidst 50 others who are your ancient and eternal enemy?



Unless the Storyteller hooks you up with an interesting and somewhat logical plot line, I still can't understand the reasoning behind your role.

—mOth

While this next guy is no Baz Lerman (remember him?), he does make some interesting points. However, apply salt-grains liberally when reading.

I've been playing Garou for quite a few years and I've been there, I can feel your pain. Come to think of that, I'm in the same boat. My Garou characters are constantly surrounded by vampires. The best advice I can offer is simple: *Read Your Laws!* There are many, many, many neat little tricks Garou can pull to save their necks if they get in trouble, which are provided in **Laws of the Wild**. The rest of these tips are ones I've found that can really swing the balance in your favor.

— Avoid your Crinos form; it scares the hell out of vampires. They will attack you if you use it openly. Stay in Homid; it's less threatening.

— Gangrel can be your best buddies, and they're not Wyrm-tainted. Bonus! Get on speaking terms with them.

— If you are crafty and discreet, you can masquerade as a vampire (Gangrel are best). A Trait or two of *Meditation* could conceivably let you lower your heart rate and the temp in your hands, for instance.

— You can enter the Umbra from any reflective surface, even the reflection in a person's eyes (it says so in **LotW**). Don't forget a Gnosis Trait will get you into the Umbra without a test. Which is to say: If you have to, run.

— Spirits are your friend! Summon them properly, and they'll help you do various things (dependent on the spirit type). Awaken them and they're even more useful. Even if you kill them, they can serve as an instant Gnosis-battery!

— Use Gifts creatively. Take *Create Element* for example. You can create a fire with this Gift then make it bigger by adding air. Or better yet, encase that pesky Brujah's head in a block of stone as you make good your next action. Sure, he'll pummel himself free eventually, but it'll buy you some well-deserved time. Other good Gifts of note: *Jam Technology*, *Clap of Thunder*, *Control Simple Machine*, *Sense Wyrm*, *Truth of Gaia*, *Persuasion*, *Luna's Armor*, *Cyber-senses*, *Scent of Sweet Honey*, *The Falling Touch*, *Paralyzing Stare* and *Scent of Sight*.

— That brings me to the next bit of fun: The Umbra. Use It!!!! Screw *Blur of the Milky Eye* and that stuff. You can peek out of the Umbra with a Simple Test against half the Gauntlet. And the best part is that damn near all vampires can't see you.

— One claw, two claw, three claw, four, plus your teeth. Each appendage does aggravated damage.

— Get a Totem!!!!!! I can't stress this enough. Having a pack helps as well.

— Yes you are a savage beast full of Rage, but acting like one will only get 20 or so vampires hunting you for your hide. Be cool, calm and collected. Yes kindred are of the Wyrm, and they must be destroyed to save Gaia, but it would be much better if you could live to see that day. Besides, you loose Renown for stupid acts of bravery, unless you play a Get of Fenris.

— Don't play Get of Fenris.

— Manipulate.



— Fear can be a powerful tool, as can intimidation. Appearing in the Prince's haven and scaring the hell out of him can leave a lasting impression. If the vampires in your game think you have power, they'll be careful around you. Whether you actually have power or not is irrelevant.

—Johnny D (kisseswakingbears@juno.com)

But trust him on *Laws of the Wild*.... But really folks, while that advice may still leave many "serious" roleplayers sighing over their clove cigarettes, Johnny does raise an interesting case. Sometimes character concepts that don't technically fit in are the most fun, and with a little tinkering around with expectations, they can really add something to your game as long as you don't get silly with them. Which is something Johnny is still working on, apparently.

Here's what you do if you are playing a Garou in a vampire-dominated game.

Hope that there are a bunch of twinks in your game who enjoy hunting werewolves. That way, one of two things will happen:

One: You will take out some of them. Every game needs less twink characters.

Two: You will get taken out. Garou don't belong in a vampire game. Period. Cull their retards and make a new character.

—Zhavric (zhavric@hotmail.com)

Ya gotta love Zhavric. Read his stuff on our website Forums some time. He makes his opinions quite clear. You may not agree with him (pardon the gender-assumption if it's incorrect), but you gotta admire the *cojones* it takes to write like that over a public forum. Even if it is just over the Internet.

This next letter comes from a girl who's experiencing one of the more common out-of-game problems that arise around LARPs. Some of what follows comprises the gamut of good and bad advice. Which is which should become readily apparent.

Hello.

I've got a real problem here that I need advice on. The LARP that I've played in for about two years is really falling apart. The old Storyteller was just usurped by two new guys, and the Narrator positions have gone to all his friends, like he's handing out fiefs or something. I've worked for two long years doing all the writing, organization and maintaining the website, and I know more about *Vampire: The Masquerade*, live-action and the WoD in general than one of the ST's and two of the Narrators. I was kicked off the staff because the old ST thought it was too large.

Now, all the 'old-school' players have either quit, or they rarely play anymore. It's all twinks, cheaters and wankers of every kind (combat, rules, drama, tragedy, logic, relationship, etc.), and Experience Traits are given out based on who you know rather than how well you play. You might say, "Well just quit," but I've given so much to this game that I can't just leave it now that it's in its hour of need.

What should I do?

—Shadow (lilith5073@aol.com)



Seems simple enough. Let's see what the more vocal portions of the gaming community have to say to help Ms. "Shadow" out of her jam. See if you can separate the good advice from the bad.

Hey, here's a couple of suggestions.

A.) Make a good solid changeling character with Arts of Sovereign, Soothsay, and Wayfare, then throw all your realms into Actor. If the Storyteller will let you play your character, go give the twinks hell. You can really make a munchkin with Shining Host, if you're into munchkins or if you need to kick some butt.

B.) If that fails, or it doesn't sound like your thing, start a new LARP on a new night with a different system. Been playing *Masquerade*? Start a *Werewolf* LARP, or a *Changeling* LARP, or a mixed-species LARP. Make up game-wide antagonists and conflicts. Throw in demons trying to suck out the characters' souls, or a mayor who is actually a mummy responsible for dropping LSD into the city water-purification system. Make up some really likeable NPCs and have them abducted by aliens; throw a chimerical dragon or two into the pot... it's your game. Get creative.

C.) Still not your thing? Find a new LARP and play that game instead.

D.) Looking for something a little more vindictive? Make up a good solid LARP of your own and close the number of players. Then get it officially recognized by One World By Night or the Camarilla. You'll never lack for player requests, and you'll never run out of ideas. ("So, Chicago went Sabbat? Great! Then my town's going Sabbat too! And I wonder how the werewolf characters are gonna deal with this... or the changelings?") It'll make your rival LARPers sick with envy.

—Changeling at Large

Riiiiiight. You ever hear the one about the game in which the plot got so bad its Storytelling staff had to hit it with an asteroid? Remember: Don't believe everything you read. This next person has advice a little more down to Earth.

If your game's dying, you could do what I do. Make your LARP invitation-only. Invite only decent roleplayers and people you honestly enjoy hanging out with. A LARP should be like a social circle anyway. If you don't like a certain person, you don't invite that person to go to the bar with you or to go shoot pool (or whatever), do you? Why then would you think that you have to allow every basket-case immature twink to ruin your night of LARPing fun? Don't. Just let the twinks play their own game while you play yours.

—Fenris (fenris@mail.com)

Perhaps a little more helpful, but not exactly what the original author asked for. Zhavric (ya gotta love Zhavric) offers advice closer to the mark, though it is a bit close-minded where it diverges from the arena of live-action roleplaying.

Silly Twinks, LARPing is for roleplayers.

Friends, let's face it: There are those of us who know what this game is meant to be (*Masquerade*, that is) and there are those of you out there who will probably never get it.



I am speaking now to the people who understand improvisational acting, mood, tone and texture; those who are allergic to rocks, paper and scissors. Sick of the twinks in your game? Sick of the hour-long time freezes while a pack of wannabe-goth boys tries to affirm its manhood by playing a child's game? Tired of being the only one with something to say that isn't "I'm *Brutal* enough to blah blah blah..."? Do you often find yourself wondering where your game went wrong? Know the answer?

It's the twinks. They suck. You know they suck. Everyone else knows they suck... but they have the biggest gun-bunny characters around.... What do you do? Well, leave it to Zhavric to come up with the answer.

Buy them a copy of ***Aberrant***.

White Wolf's first venture into the world of the superhero and superpowers was *not* meant to be the Brujah Elder. It is here and it is now in this new book. Round up all your twinks when they show up, force them into a room, lock it and slide a copy of this book under the door. Let them get all that Mega-nonsense out of their system over a tabletop, and maybe — just maybe — they will get bored of playing characters that can juggle tanks. Maybe they will figure out that there is more to live-action gaming than number-crunching.

If they don't figure it out, leave them there.

—Zhavric (zhavric@hotmail.com)

Okay, so even all-knowing Zhavric has ably demonstrated his capacity to miss the point behind the *Aberrant* game, but his point about live-action gaming is solid. I'm going to switch to a different font here for a minute and throw my own editorial into the ring.

There exists in live-action gaming (in *all* roleplaying, really) a dichotomy between those who play for the stories, themes and moods inherent in the game, and those who play because being the biggest, baddest [insert fruity character concept here] you can be is a hell of a lot of fun. Any White Wolf game (especially in the live-action line) lends itself to just that sort of dichotomy quite easily. In fact, some would say that that dichotomy is just what makes these games so popular in the first place.

However, having both types of players in a game (unless the game is exceedingly well-populated) is going to result in players from one camp getting in the way of (and largely pissing off) the players from the other camp. It just happens; it's the way of gaming life. Thus the proposition of giving both factions what they want is the best way to go about solving a lot of the friction that crops up between live-action players.

Does your game have a significant contingent of players who just like to build indestructible doom-bots and overtake their enemies with effusive protestations of how *Brutal*, *Dexterous*, *Ferocious* or *Vigorous* they are? If so, get them together and work with them to give them the kind of plots they want. Throw slavering packs of Sabbat, Black Spiral Dancers, Unseelie redcaps (or whatever) at them, and let them do what they do best. If they have fun because you've made the "plot" for the evening engaging, you're doing your job.

Are you instead beset by tragically hip gothic youths who want to explore the boundaries of their fabricated [characters'] personalities, face moral dilemmas and use their brains to solve a conflict rather than relying on how many times they thought to write down the *Robust* Trait at character creation? You find some of them in every game,



and if you don't want to lose them (or have your game unravel because that's all there are), you have to account for them in your plots as well. Give them clues to process and mysteries to solve. Give them the work of cleaning up the messes caused by the clashes of the Stalwart hordes. Give them a reason to glower imperiously from the battlements as the others duke it out, but keep them involved.

By working with both factions of the LARP crowd, you (as a player, Narrator or Storyteller) create a more well-rounded game that caters to all of your players instead of creating cliques among them.

As for what to do when you've tried to work with your players, Narrators and Storytellers to no avail (maybe no one's listening, or no one understands what you have to say), don't be discouraged. Sometimes the best you can do is to lead by example. Create a character who interacts with (and has interests that take into account) the characters of both "real roleplayers" and "twinks." Get involved with (or try to create) plots for both types of player. Talk to fellow players after game sessions about what you liked and disliked about the game, then bring up the topic with the staff once some downtime has passed.

Just be aware that sometimes, no matter how reasonable you are, some games do begin that slow spiral into oblivion. If you've done all you can to save it or re-acclimate yourself to it, yet nothing helps, there's no shame in finding a new game more suited to your style of play. Just make sure you've done all you can.

And that's all I've got to say about that. This last bit is a more specific form of Q&A which has flooded us since the release of *Laws of the Night*'s revised edition hit the shelves.

Question: Aaaaarrrrrgh!! Where are the character sheets for this book!?!?

Answer: Fear not, you can find said character sheet right here in the back of your faithful **Journal**. We'll reprint it in the next few issues as well, just to make sure nobody's left out.

FURTHER FUEL

Let me hear from you!

You can e-mail your answers to these points, questions that repeatedly plague your games, or your opinions on subjects of your choosing to carl@white-wolf.com or mail them to:

White Wolf Publishing Inc.

Attn: Mind's Eye Theatre Journal

735 Park North Blvd.

Suite 128

Clarkston, GA 30021

You can also post new threads for discussion to the MET forum on our website (<http://www.white-wolf.com>).

PHYSICALLY
CHALLENGE
ME!



NEWBIE BOOT CAMP

by James Stewart

Yes, this former White Wolf intern-turned-employee has heard all the jokes about his name that there can possibly be — he didn't even blink when I told him I wanted to name this article "Mister Smith Goes LARPing" — but despite the abuse, he still agreed to this rather peculiar assignment. Basically, what I wanted was a newbie's-eye view of the LARP scene, detailing ways to break away from the awkwardness and uncertainties that make that first LARP event such a special outing. James delivers on that expectation with remarkable skill, even adding advice for experienced players to help ease the new folks into this brave new world they've discovered. Now, if we could just get him to stop running around the office shouting "Merry Christmas!" to all the different departments...

HOW TO SURVIVE YOUR FIRST LARP

*There will be time, there will be time
To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet.*

—T.S. Eliot, "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock"

Like all first times, my first LARP experience was special and scary. I can say proudly that I survived and even had fun, but I wasn't really sure what to expect. So, for those about to make their first appearance on the MET scene and the established troupes that must absorb these new players, here's a brief survival guide to help you through that first night.

The most important thing to remember is that, during the game, a lot of real-world interaction goes on that has little to do with the invented reality of the characters. Invented personas don't always relate to each other on their own terms; the player — the puppeteer pulling the character's strings — is never too far away. People who crave the spotlight push their characters to the center of the stage. Friends in real life tend to be friends in the game.

While this camaraderie might not always be true to the spirit of the game, it's unavoidable and largely appropriate. After all, the characters and their imaginary world exist so that real players can have fun. But when new faces appear in the crowd, an attitude arises which is equally true in both the game and real life: Strangers are unknown quantities. Will this new character prove a threat? Will this new player screw up our game?

Confronting this attitude might make you feel left out, but fear not. There are some things you can do to prepare yourself.

PRE-GAME STRATEGY

First, expectations: If you're already familiar with the tabletop version of the game you're about to play, realize that the live-action version's a little different. While tabletop games move along with one major plot and a few subplots, LARPs are collections of subplots with the larger plot proceeding somewhere in the background. *Mind's Eye Theatre* is often compared to community theater or theatrical improvisation, but it's more like a costume party. Don't anticipate a more intensive tabletop experience. While



the tabletop versions of the White Wolf games certainly emphasize character-development, characters are everything in MET. Rather than acting out a plot in which characters respond to external situations that are the sole purview and domain of the Storyteller, LARP characters respond to each other, each with his or her own agenda. This interaction creates story threads that thrust some characters together while excluding others completely. Getting involved with LARP plots takes a proactive commitment on the part of the players, whereas plots are all but spoon-fed to tabletop characters.

With that in mind, design your first character as a social being. While your character doesn't have to be a complete conformist or even an especially nice person, misanthropes who glare at the room in silent judgement and introverts afraid of everyone present are bad choices. That is, of course, unless your idea of a good time is leaning against a wall and not talking to anyone. At the same time, if you create a character who's too aggressive or generally obnoxious, you'll be keeping the wallflowers company on the sidelines as well.

Create an individual capable of conversation. Since most MET play involves talking to other characters, invent someone up to the task and remember that a good character is a person who wants something. Give him some goals and reasons to interact with others. If you're in a *Masquerade* game, for example, you'll probably start out as a neonate newly created or new to town, and your character must seek out potential allies if she hopes to survive.

While you can come up with your character's background and personality without a rulebook, do get your hands on the rules a few days before the game is scheduled, if it's at all possible, in order to build your character. If you can't get the rules beforehand, show up for the game a little early. Any open LARP worth its salt will have someone available to walk you through the character-creation process. That's the most complicated part of the game by far—the basic rules (apart from character creation) can be explained in five minutes. You'll need your own copy of the rules eventually, but for the first night, concentrate on making the best character (the most *real* person) you can.

Finally, exploit the connections you have with other players. If you have friends already involved with the game, make your character's background somehow involve their characters so you'll have some reason to hang close to them when you're not making much progress with others. If you're joining a game without knowing any of the other players, make sure you at least introduce yourself to the Storyteller over e-mail or on the phone. Make sure he knows you're coming and that you've never LARPed before. Ask him about the general mood of the game and how best to get involved with existing plot lines. Most Storytellers are friendly people who have plenty of experience with introducing new people to existing troupes. Plus, most Storytellers love it when new people express interest in their games, and they can be persuaded to answer questions and describe the themes and mood of the game with little effort.

WHAT TO DO DURING THE FIRST GAME

The game will begin and here's what it will look like: A bunch of people will be standing around, some in fairly elaborate costume, talking to each other. Don't panic—most of these folks are approachable. While it might be rude to slither up to a conversation and begin eavesdropping, keep in mind that your character is new and introductions are appropriate. Have answers ready for questions about who you are, where you're from, and what you're doing here. Who should you talk to first? In most LARPs,



there's an established hierarchy. Ask around, then seek out whomever you're accountable to — your primogen, a local noble, a ranking Legionnaire or whatever.

The important thing is to be bold. Where angels fear to tread, you must leap. Most LARPs are populated by cliques that tend to stick together, so expect to feel a little excluded at first. Don't count on anyone to hold your hand or lead you through the evening. Get out there and interact. Otherwise, expect a long, dull night.

At the same time, don't find one person who will tolerate your presence and cling to him or her for the entire night. For your first game, get out there and try to meet as many people as you can. Don't monopolize another's time. If your character isn't exactly a social butterfly, ask out-of-character to be introduced to a few people. Of course, there are always two safe bets for conversation: those who are like you (your clan, guild, kith, tribe etc.) and those who are standing alone, wishing they had your courage to go out and mingle. Befriending other new characters often makes good sense, especially in intrigue-oriented games. While individual new characters have little power, a gang of neonates or cubs is sure to frighten the establishment. Even better, it gives you a "home base," a group to talk with during lulls in the action.

As the game progresses, you'll probably see people doing strange things with their hands. Don't panic. These gestures usually mean the character is using some supernatural power that the player is incapable of producing. In Blackened Hearth (an Atlanta Camarilla chapter LARP, on which I cut my newbie teeth), for instance, crossing your arms over your chest means that your character is obfuscated (that is, using the vampiric power of invisibility). Pointing at your eyes means you're using Auspex (a supernatural heightening of the senses). These gestures vary from LARP to LARP, and not all of them signify the use of powers. Ask someone before the game how to signify that you're out-of-character (like when you're looking for a bathroom or having a snack between scenes). Usually, crossing your fingers does the trick.

During the evening, there will probably come a time when you'll need a rule explained. If you don't understand what's happening, signify that you're out of character and ask someone to tell you what's going on. Everyone's needed a rule explained at some point, so most players are willing to slow down the action long enough to fill you in.

In the end, there's a simple way to determine if you're doing the right thing at your maiden LARP: Ask yourself, "Am I having fun?" If the answer is yes, you're doing the right thing. If you sit in a chair the whole night, looking at all the costumes without ever opening your mouth, and you're actually having fun, more power to you. But if the answer is no, you're not having fun, you probably need to change your approach. Talk to different people, consider a new character, or get your existing one into trouble. If you stick silently to the wall, your character will probably survive as long as you do. But where's the fun in that? The exciting aspect of MET, besides getting to be someone (and something) else for a few hours, lies in achieving the goals you set for your character. Taking the plunge and talking to people is risky, in the game and in life, but it's ultimately well worth it.

Some final advice: Get to know the people you're LARPing with. For some, LARPing is just a fun pastime, and for others it's life. In the latter group, there are people for whom it's life because it's fun, and people for whom it's life because they're nuts. Avoid the nuts — there's no pleasing those people.

Fortunately, most MET-types are sane and indistinguishable from the rest of the humanity, and they probably have stronger opinions about the nuts than you do. I went into the Blackened Hearth game with an extremely cynical attitude about what sort of

people would be there. I expected to encounter the psycho confederacy, complete with screw-in fangs and their clan symbols tattooed on their foreheads. Happily, I was proven completely wrong.

THE NEXT GAME, AND THE NEXT

Stick with a LARP, and you'll be a familiar face before you know it. The best advice is just to use common sense. Have fun, and allow others to have fun as well. Don't be a Rules Lawyer, don't cheat, don't be any of the varieties of Twinkus METUs that Charles Bailey and Rich Dansky have described in previous issues of the *Journal*.

Most importantly, don't be afraid to play what you want to play. Your character can be a total bastard but still welcome in the game, because his presence provides a challenge for others. Also, don't be daunted by the petty politics that seem to surround some LARPs. Make your opinions known but don't be one of the folks who drive perfectly fun games to ruin by talking behind people's backs and staging bimonthly secret revolutions. At the same time, don't let the fear of that sort of out-of-game dynamic keep you from playing and enjoying yourself. Simply put, do what you want to do, but don't ruin other people's good time along the way.

POSTSCRIPT: BE NICE TO THE NEWBIES

Getting involved with a LARP would be easier if the experienced players made their games more accessible to new players. So for you folks already involved in a game, here are a few suggestions to make things better for the tyros.

Unless you want to keep your LARP small, inbred, poor and newbie-free, you need to incorporate new players in such a way that they'll have fun and stick with the game. Make a point of talking to the new people at least once during the course of the evening. Sure, your character's the most important being in the city, far too important to actually acknowledge a new face. Can't you send a lackey over to find out a little about the newcomer? In a larger game, it simply isn't practical to talk to all the new people. If nothing else, avoid discounting them out of hand. At least give them a nod and an acknowledgement before you get on with your life.

Also, don't whip out too many arcane rules on the beginners. They're still trying to figure out what all the crazy gestures mean. Saying, "I don't care if your sheet's done, I want to see you write up a treatment of your character history using the Prelude Flowcharts in the *Masquerade Players Kit*," doesn't quite convey the friendly welcome you should give newbies for showing up to your game. And if you absolutely must dominate a newbie's character into standing still so you can destroy her with your Advanced Stormbringer and the Windmill Dance of the Never-Ending Bloodbath, at least explain to her out-of-character what's going on. After the game, you should shake her hand and tell her sincerely that you enjoyed the scene and that you hope to see her again next time in more genteel circumstances. The newbie will, no doubt, come blazing back onto the scene with a new character ready to avenge the recently deceased, but at least she'll come back.

Those involved in organizing the game or Storytelling should pay particular importance to the new folks. Yeah, you're busy. At least come up to them after the game and ask if they had fun and invite them to the next game. If you're running an invitation-only game, you've probably already figured out that most of this advice doesn't apply to you. But for most LARPs, new players are precious — try not to scare away too many.

INSIDE THE CLOSET: FASHION TIPS FOR THE BLOODLORN

by Auntie Csilla

*Say you've never been to a **Masquerade** event — or you don't attend regularly enough — and you can't put your finger on exactly why you feel out of place. The reason for that may be the way you're dressed. While it's okay to stand out from the crowd, there are some accepted conventions of vampiric fashion that have become the norm and even passed on into the realm of stereotype. For tips on recognizing those stereotypes (and breaking the mold with class and flair), read on. Auntie Csilla's got just the right advice...*

Good evening, kiddies, and welcome to another edition of Auntie Csilla's wit and wisdom. How's it hanging? Mine's currently in mothballs for the season, but that's another story.

While there aren't any Elysium fashion police, there are times when they sure would be helpful. How many times have you been able to spot every Tremere walking in simply because they're all wearing black capes and accessorizing with pentacles and canes? How many Toreador insist on showing up in the same black lace ensemble? Consider this article, then, the equivalent of the Elysium Fashion Highway Patrol.

First, let's start with color. There's no denying that black is a nice basic to build on. It matches everything, it looks classy and mysterious, just about everyone can wear it (very slimming, you know), and it's timeless, while colors vary from season to season. At the same time, if everyone around you is wearing black, you don't stand out from the crowd. For all you Toreador, isn't that a fate worse than being tacky? If you want to go for the "I'm dark and mysterious" bit, consider other deep colors, such as crimson, forest green, teal, navy, burgundy, purple or charcoal gray. You don't even have to go all red or green or whatever. Just a few little bits (like the buttons, a scarf, a boutonnière, a vest, jewelry) can make somebody's eyes give you more than a once-over.

Secondly, fit. In short, if you can't zip it/ button it/ tie it without seriously sucking it in—and you haven't been able to for years—put it in the Goodwill bin. When clothes don't fit, you look uncomfortable and certainly not your best. It's one thing to be hermetically sealed in satin if you're built like a toothpick or you have the sort of figure that gets your picture slapped onto the "Dangerous Curves Ahead" signs, but honey, if you're neither, reconsider.

Thirdly, gimmick or shtick. Call it what you will, the most memorable characters always have something that makes them stand out when they wear it. Indiana Jones had his fedora, Fred Astaire had his tux, the Black Dahlia had the original head-to-foot all in black — er, bad kind of unforgettable on that one. At any rate, think about something you can do that will be your particular signature. It doesn't need to be wearing the same dang thing over and over. It could be a Toreador neonate who wears grunge or a Gangrel in chain mail. What about a Ventre whose main business is manufacturing surf boards?

Whoa, dude, he shows up to the primogen meetings in a body glove! (I'm of course presuming that said Ventrue has considered provision number two.)

Now I know some of you out there have to work when you attend court. Sheriffs, we all know what trashing unruly diablerists can do to that nice suit, and far be it from me to encourage you to ruin your Sunday-go-to-Elysium clothes. If you have to work, you know best what you should do. Consider what follows to be the law for all the rest of the layabouts.

Your average Brujah tends to look like a punk-era relic that got nibbled on by moths while in storage. Black leather, torn denim lots of piercings, tattoos and dangerous hair — gag me with a spoon. Hey, you guys make a big deal about how they're all independent and whatnot, right? So *dress like it!* Who said you gotta show up in torn jeans and a black leather jacket? I wanna see their faces when you trot in with black pants and a clean shirt! Sisters, watch them collect their jaws when you wear velvet or silk! Hey, what good is being a rebel if you all look the same?

I know, I know — when you look more and more like an animal and spend a lot of time with animals that don't give two bits what you look like, fashion becomes a secondary concern, and that's the way it is with your average Gangrel. Still, it's polite to wear clothes to Elysium; if nothing else, the city's decency laws will be all over you like white on rice if you don't. Goodwill bins, St. Vincent de Paul shops, the local Army-Navy surplus store — all are very good for restocking your wardrobe when you find yourself in a pinch. One fine-looking specimen was partial to collecting the occasional bit of jewelry from his travels and wearing it to court. He had a set of silver Tibetan bracelets that he wore on special occasions; I'm holding them for him right now while he's visiting the Yukon.

Before we go any further, I'd like to register a complaint against whoever it was it who said that Malkavians needed to accessorize with stuffed animals and fuzzy rabbit slippers. Come clean now, and I'll kill you before I string you up. But first things first — leave Mr. Bear at home, unless you really need him. Your average homicidal maniac, serial killer or otherwise serious nut job usually looks normal to the point of nerdiness. Some do what the voices in their heads tell them to do (including wearing every single piece of clothing they own to keep it from getting stolen), some wear special helmets to block out the mind-control rays, and some go for the antique look. I've seen mystics in filmy drapes, wack-job loners in their old varsity jackets, and an elder who wore *commedia* masks for special occasions. One of the most seriously twisted cases I ever spotted at court was Douglas Netchurch. I would give my left tit not to be left alone with this man (and so would you if you knew him), but if you saw him on the street and didn't know otherwise, you'd think he was just another doctor getting away from the hospital for a bit.

Yes, even the Sewer Rats merit attention. Call this lesson: "Names can be deceiving." Not everyone looks like he's been sewer-crawling, not to mention that sewers aren't always waist-deep in waste water. I've seen a lot of Sewer Rats scrounge their gear out of dumpsters when they need something to work the Obfuscate over. Some like to fudge their clothes in addition to their faces; I know one Nos who liked to show up wearing a tux. Point of order, kiddies — if you think it's fun to sneak around in your altogether and "dress" yourself with Mask of a Thousand Faces, I've got one word for you: *Cameras!* Do you really want to chance that your best girl/guy is going to find out a) that you look like road pizza outta the suit, and b) that your puss is less than you've been making it out to be? Besides, the heart attack that your average schmoe will have when he gets a load of you in your deathday suit will not endear Hizzoner to you.

Toreador — Gawd, here's the real fashion parade! Kids, do yourselves a favor and don't ever get between two preeners who are trying to one-up each other that night. If you really want to watch the fur fly, watch two *poseurs* show up in the same outfit. I ran that scam for a costume ball — two cats wearing the same Scarlett O'Hara dress, and did they ever get into it. Poor Princey-poo got hauled into the discussion, which put him on the hot seat since he owed favors to one's sire and the other was a primogen. Anyway, your average *artistes* either go for the whole "back in black" with silver jewelry, or they stumble out of the studio in a shirt they were probably using for the drop-cloth. I've seen a few going for the Romantic look — poofy shirts, velvet vests, general ethereal look. Too bad that swooning has gone out of style; most of these twits would improve the Elysium if they spent it unconscious. Overall, when in doubt, go for class over trash.

Now I've been told that all new Tremere do *not* in fact receive black capes, pentacle pendants and canes when they get initiated. Horse shit — they must be, because they can't *all* be that inept at accessorizing. Do they wear those pointy hats with stars on them when they're working wizardly wonders in the chantry? Let's start with the pentacle/pentagram/pretty star. Oh, please, there have *got* to be other mystic symbols you can wave around to freakout the Bible-thumpers. I mean, there's that wonderful Seal of Solomon (which actually comes in handy should you encounter a wandering demon), the Eye of Horus, Tarot cards (one of the few warlocks I can actually stand wears the Magician) — even crystals, if you feel like showing off how young you are. Then there's those canes — carry a sword cane only if you can use it, *bubeleh*. Most of the nasties who give you reason to carry one of those will make ground round out of you while you're still trying to figure out how to make the button work. And last, but not least, the cape: Skip it. Wanna slash apart your aura of nocturnal majesty? Try answering the question, "So, are you in a play?" with some degree of dignity. It's the same argument with regard to the all-black ensemble.

Venture — Wow. If they've got money, it shows. The best Ventre wear clothes that not only look good (whatever it is and for whatever occasion), but which compliment them and should put their personal shoppers at the top of all the socialite lists. If they were royalty, they still have their old crowns and robes of state (cedar storage, please, unless you get a buzz on mothballs). Unfortunately, if you spill something on Hizzoner, you'd best sell all your worldly goods and hope that the stain is dry-cleanable. If they don't have the money, they at least have the taste to pull a pretty good act ("Hey, wasn't that your primogen I spotted at the Off-Fifth outlet?"). Too bad taste and money don't always go together. Nothing can make you wince like a *nouveau-riche* Ventre trying to out-Toreador a Toreador.

And now, last but not least, all you poor little bloodlorn readers: Let your Mommy dress you, especially if you're saddled with a Toreador. Some won't give a shit how you look, just so long as you're there and you do your job. Ventre, Tremere, anyone who's into business will probably insist you wear a clean shirt and tie, at the least (if you can't afford the dry-cleaning, give these folks a miss). Malks may do anything from putting curlers in your hair to making you wear long sleeves in the dead of summer to hide the "accidental" cuts. But the Toreador are a whole other case. Something about how the hired help should not outshine the mistress. Pity the poor secretary disfigured by her mistress to ensure that Madame would always get picked for the kickball team first.

That's all for now, chicas. Check your flies before you get to the door, and take care until next time.



PRONOUNCEMENTS FROM ON HIGH

by the Mind's Eye Theatre developer

It's time once again for Cynthia to say her piece on the state of live-action gaming and Mind's Eye Theatre. This time around, she gives you the skinny on incorporating the events of White Wolf's table-top World of Darkness books into your Mind's Eye games. Basically, this column is the definitive guide on what you have to do with information you don't have to use unless you want to. This advice stands for table-top material, but it's even more applicable to live-action play.

WHITE WOLF CONTINUITY AND YOU

Recently, with the changes to the story lines that drive the White Wolf table-top books, there's been a great hue and cry from Mind's Eye Theatre Storytellers and players, and a bigger one is anticipated. Every time a table-top book advances the meta-story of one of our games, we hear, "Hey, do we have to do that?!"

The short answer is, no, it's *your* game. Now go have fun.

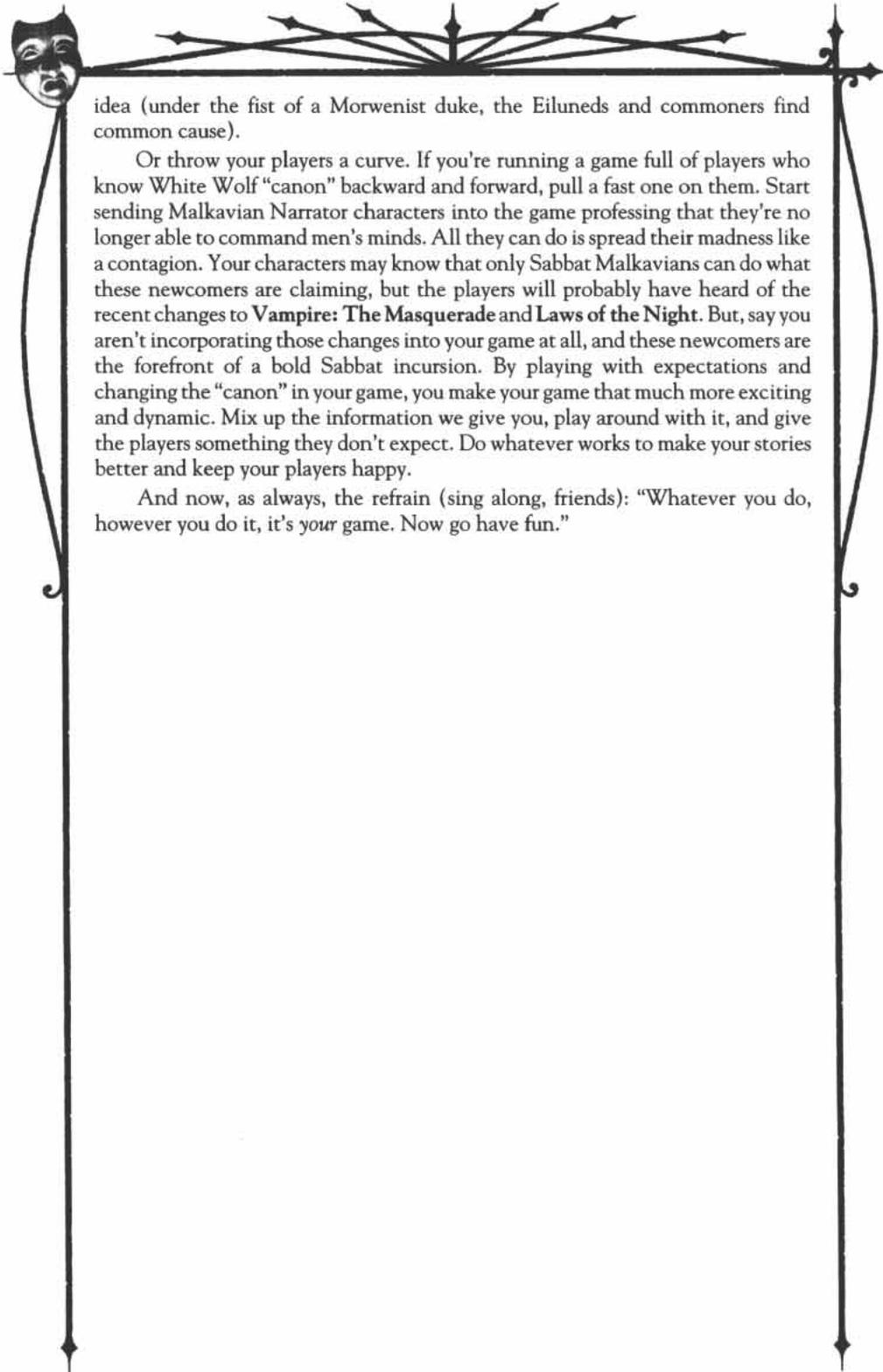
Too short? All right, here's the more detailed answer:

There are grand story-arcs in the various game lines. Some are coming to smashing ends, some are just beginning, and others are getting a jump-start that sends them off the deep end in their various "Year of the Reckoning" books. In part, these arcs help focus the books and build momentum to carry things forward. Our own real world isn't static, and neither is the World of Darkness. Things change, and not necessarily for the better. Even as table-top games come and go, the stories march ever, ever on.

After all, remember why a Storyteller sits around beating her head against the wall trying to think up new things for the players to do — she's telling stories. A story-arc is but one more story out of the thousands that populate the World of Darkness. These arcs, however, are not scripts. In the end, the choice of whether to deal with the fallout or backlash of a particular story thread is the Storyteller's.

If you don't want to incorporate the various arcs into your plot lines, there's nothing wrong with that. We're not going to bring the mountain in to beat your game into line. If you want Stygia to be standing in the deadlands (*what's this?*) or the Camarilla Malkavians to miss the "fun" of Dementation, that's up to you. You know what makes your game tick and what would take a sledgehammer to it. Just make sure your players know that you're running in a "nonstandard" direction, and that they're aware of all that comes with doing so (as in, "No, you can't have that new Discipline — we're running a different scenario.").

Now if you do decide to go with the grand arc, you have a number of options. You may choose to throw your players in the middle of things (starting with the evacuation of Stygia or the Sixth Great Maelstrom, for instance), or to let events come to them (Stygian refugees show up at the door of their Necropolis). You may choose the "pond ripple" effect (in the wake of High King David's disappearance, the throne factions start pressuring local nobles to pick sides), or the "home-front"



idea (under the fist of a Morwenist duke, the Eiluneds and commoners find common cause).

Or throw your players a curve. If you're running a game full of players who know White Wolf "canon" backward and forward, pull a fast one on them. Start sending Malkavian Narrator characters into the game professing that they're no longer able to command men's minds. All they can do is spread their madness like a contagion. Your characters may know that only Sabbat Malkavians can do what these newcomers are claiming, but the players will probably have heard of the recent changes to *Vampire: The Masquerade* and *Laws of the Night*. But, say you aren't incorporating those changes into your game at all, and these newcomers are the forefront of a bold Sabbat incursion. By playing with expectations and changing the "canon" in your game, you make your game that much more exciting and dynamic. Mix up the information we give you, play around with it, and give the players something they don't expect. Do whatever works to make your stories better and keep your players happy.

And now, as always, the refrain (sing along, friends): "Whatever you do, however you do it, it's *your* game. Now go have fun."



A PLACE FOR EVERYTHING

by Peter Woodworth

*It's that time again for an illustrative piece of MET-inspired fiction. This piece comes in from Peter Woodworth, who's made a name for himself writing Mind's Eye Theatre material such as **The Shining Host** as well as pieces of **Laws of the Wyld West** and the most recent version of **Laws of the Night**. Now, Pete (a die-hard Changeling fan) shows that he can write fiction as well as gamespeak, with this tale showing how even the most thin, unathletic sluagh can keep pace with the most dangerous creatures of the night. As long as everything goes according to plan....*

"Mister Frost! Mister Frost!"

The sound of the children's voices wasn't what made Mr. Frost look up from his well-thumbed paperback to glare over the thick glass of the main display case. Rather, it was the harsh sound of the front door slamming behind the children as they came that, in turn, caused the antique bronze chimes he had neatly tied to the top of the door to jangle discordantly instead of chiming in their usual harmony.

If there was anything at all that made Mr. Frost upset — and not many things in life had received this honor — it was witnessing an item being misused. That was simply unacceptable, and he elaborated this opinion at great length to anyone around him who had the misfortune to be caught abusing a possession of theirs in such a fashion. It was precisely this habit of his, in fact, which had earned his tiny curiosity shop a reputation for... eccentricity among the city's antiques and collectibles crowd, a reputation which served to keep away the more "respectable" collectors — at least when they thought anyone was watching them, that is.

Not that Mr. Frost cared for such petty matters of public esteem. Customers who needed him came to him, and that sort of business had always been more than enough to keep the shop in the black and fund his annual excursions to London and Cairo.

Besides, as these children had proven ably, the bulk of his transactions were with another sort of customer entirely.

They had come to him the night before, just as he had been about to close the store for the night, looking ten times more bedraggled and positively frantic. It had taken him several minutes to calm the five children down, but when he finally heard their story, it had set even his chill blood to boiling. According to the eldest, a satyr childling named Jesse, the short version of their adventure went something like this:

The five of them had snuck out of their houses and been roaming around after dark, when they decided it would be fun to go and see the old abandoned Jervais Mansion. Of course, Mr. Frost knew of the place himself — after all, no fae could grow up in this town without hearing tales about the "haunted house" that stood like a damned sentinel at the outer edge of the Garden District. The little motley had nerved themselves up with flashlights and a couple of good ghost stories, then gone over to the house to poke in the closets and raise some spooks.

Nervous and giggling as they were, they hadn't seen any obvious ghosts as they approached, but the laughter had quickly faded when they entered the house itself. There was precious little dust for an "abandoned" house, and going from room to room,



the childlings saw strange, evil-looking symbols carved into old floorboards, painted on the walls, even laid into the kitchen tile. A lot of the symbols looked new, but some looked like they'd been there for a long time, painted in faded paint or scuffed over by the marks of many feet. Most of the furniture was gone, but every room had a sinister-looking ebony statue crouching in at least one corner, watching them with narrow eyes. There were bookcases too, piled high with strange black books and objects, from tiny silver knives to big crystal balls and ominously human-looking skulls. They were all growing more scared as they went, but they were also convinced (as only children can be) that this place was just a "regular old haunted house," so they were in no real danger. Convinced, that is, until they finally entered the back pantry by the cellar.

There they found chairs, a pile of new magazines, a walkie-talkie, a half-empty cup of soda and a shiny pistol staring at them forlornly from where it lay on top of a glossy new *Time* magazine. Despite the heat, there was still ice in the cup, as if it had been left only a short time ago, and the sight of the gun brought the whole message home in a way the other, more exotic objects couldn't: *There are people in this house. Real people, and real bad people at that. And if they're not here now, then you can bet they'll be back soon.* In fact, water was running behind a door not far away, meaning that the someone who owned the gun was probably in the bathroom, bound to return any second.

Trembling with fear, the children swore that they had been about to go home when they heard voices in the basement. Chanting, to be precise. The children all looked embarrassed at this part of the story. Even with such obvious danger staring them in the face, such noises were too much to resist investigating, especially in a haunted house like the Jervais place. But when they went down the stairs they saw not some collection of innocent bed-sheeted specters, but a group of 12 pale, dark-robed figures performing what even children could see was some sort of dark ritual.

Investigating was Mistake Number One.

Mistake Number Two came when one of them (no one would remember who) screamed at the sight. The robed figures had turned immediately, baring wicked fangs and chasing the children out of the building hollering all manner of vile curses. The children had run as fast as they could, leaping fences and ducking under hedges to get away, but even once they were out of range, the monsters called after them. They yelled that the children had already been caught by their spells, that there was nowhere they would be safe now. The monsters called the children by name to show the truth behind these threats, then promised to drink their blood and inflict other hideous forms of revenge.

Now the children were too scared to go to the Duke, and they had heard there was only one other person to turn to in such a situation, one person who could set everything right — for a tidy fee, that is. Mr. Frost had graciously accepted that compliment, asked them each to return the next morning with an item they valued and sent them on their way once he reassured them that daylight would render the monsters powerless for the time being. Now here they had returned.

"Mister Frost," Jesse panted, her disheveled hair glowing like banked embers. "We... we have..." She trailed off, gulping air like a landed catfish. Mr. Frost's scowl deepened. A person's body was her ultimate possession, after all, and seeing such a pretty one so mistreated did nothing for his disposition. He swallowed his distaste as best he could, though. These children were badly frightened, and thus such minor lapses were excusable. This time, anyway.

"Hush, child," Mr. Frost murmured, not unkindly, slipping a bookmark into the battered spine of *Needful Things* and sliding out from behind the counter with the curiously eerie grace the slaugh were known for. He stepped lightly to the front door and pulled down the shade, pausing only to turn the deadbolt and change the store sign over to "Closed." Suitably arranged, he returned to his high stool. The wide eyes of the young motley followed him intently all the while, the payments he'd asked them to bring clutched tightly in five pairs of hands. He knitted his pale, slender fingers — so like the talons of a hunting bird, or so many customers had noticed — together under his chin, fixed his deep obsidian eyes on them and began to close the deal he had bartered with them only the night before.

"School?"

"We played hooky."

"I'll see what I can do about that. What have you brought me?"

Jesse, whose full fae name was Jesselayth, turned to the other children and looked at them pleadingly, her own hand closed tightly around something Mr. Frost couldn't quite make out. "Guys..."

Michael, a little eshu boy, came forward first, looking up at Mr. Frost with calm green eyes. "I got a book for you," he said, his initial hesitation disappearing as his kith confidence with the spoken word reasserted itself. "It's an old one that I got from the library last year. Mrs. Jacobs said I could keep it cause they were gonna throw it out anyway, so I took it home. It's really cool and it's got all kinda wicked gross pictures in it, too." He produced a tattered, coverless paperback whose yellowing title page proclaimed it *Dr. Rando's Amazing World of the Occult and Bizarre!* Mr. Frost picked it up, careful not to damage it, and began flipping through the pages. "There's a picture of a guy's cut-off head in the middle," Michael added helpfully.

"Thank you, Michael," Mr. Frost said with a grave nod of his head, concealing a smile. He turned to the others. "What else do you have?"

"I found this in my dad's closet next to his spaceship," ventured Kenny, the tow-haired pooka boy, putting a box on the counter. It was a build-it-yourself model car kit, seemingly untouched despite the words "Made in the USA 1959" printed on one side. "He said I could have it, so I took it." Kenny scratched his nose nervously, setting his thin whiskers and heavy cheeks shaking in tandem. "It's pretty new though, so I don't think it's worth anything."

Mr. Frost waved the concern away, ideas for the kit's use already spinning in his mind. "You're a born trader, my boy. This will do fine." The pooka's ears twitched with pride at the compliment. "What else?"

A pile of black feathers — which once might have been a crow but could now only charitably be called a mess — slapped down on the counter with a wet *squish*. "I was saving it for lunch, but you can have it." Jacque (pronounced "Jock" by anyone who wanted to avoid a giant wedgie or killer Indian burn) grinned his irregular shark's smile up at Mr. Frost. His eyes dared a refined gentleman like Mr. Frost to touch such a gross thing without throwing up, dared him in the leering fashion even the smallest redcaps learn.

"Delightful," Mr. Frost declared, sweeping the wrecked carcass up to inspect it. "I know just the person who might make some use of this item." He looked carefully from child to child, seeing that hope had started to dawn on their faces. Excellent. Still, he had a part to play, and he stuck to it. "This can't be all of it, can it?"



Jesse took a deep breath, stepped forward and opened her hand. An exquisite pearl broach in a silver setting lay poised on her palm. "My mom gave this to me when I was really little," she said quietly. "It's fake, but it's really pretty, and it's always brought me good luck." She seemed near tears but laid the broach on the counter anyway, drawing her mouth in a thin, strong line. "Is it good enough?" All the children looked to Mr. Frost, crossing their fingers.

She'll be a strong one, Mr. Frost thought with admiration. He took the broach and examined it gravely. A grand idea was already forming in his mind, but it was lacking one crucial piece. He hoped the last offering would complete the set. "Have no fear, young Jesse. It shall not be wasted. Thank you." The children all breathed relief simultaneously. He raised one final speculative eyebrow. "Anything else?"

"Yes, Mister Fross," came the tiny, whispered reply. Peep stepped forward, his oversized dark eyes and mousy mop of hair a sharp contrast to his pale skin. Easily the youngest, the little sluagh had to stand on his toes just to reach the countertop, and Mr. Frost suspected that the boy must've been carried by someone during the getaway the night before. Nonetheless, he seemed to fit in with the others just fine. "I rescued these from the post office last spring. It was really cold in there, and I got scared." With great care, the boy slid a folded sheet of white paper across the glass top. "Are they okay?"

Mr. Frost picked up the sheet, on which were stuck five brightly colored butterfly stamps. He frowned for a moment, then a slight smile flickered across his lips like a shadow at the edge of candlelight. "They're perfect, child. Just perfect. And you're very brave."

Mr. Frost sat for a moment more in silence, then rose to his feet, pulling down his black greatcoat and carefully sweeping each item into a pocket. "Come, children. I shall take care of your monster problem for you, but there are many things I need to do, and the day is short. Let's go."

As they followed the enigmatic sluagh out into the early morning light, Kenny turned to Jesse and said, with no small amount of admiration, "I think he's gonna get us all killed after all."

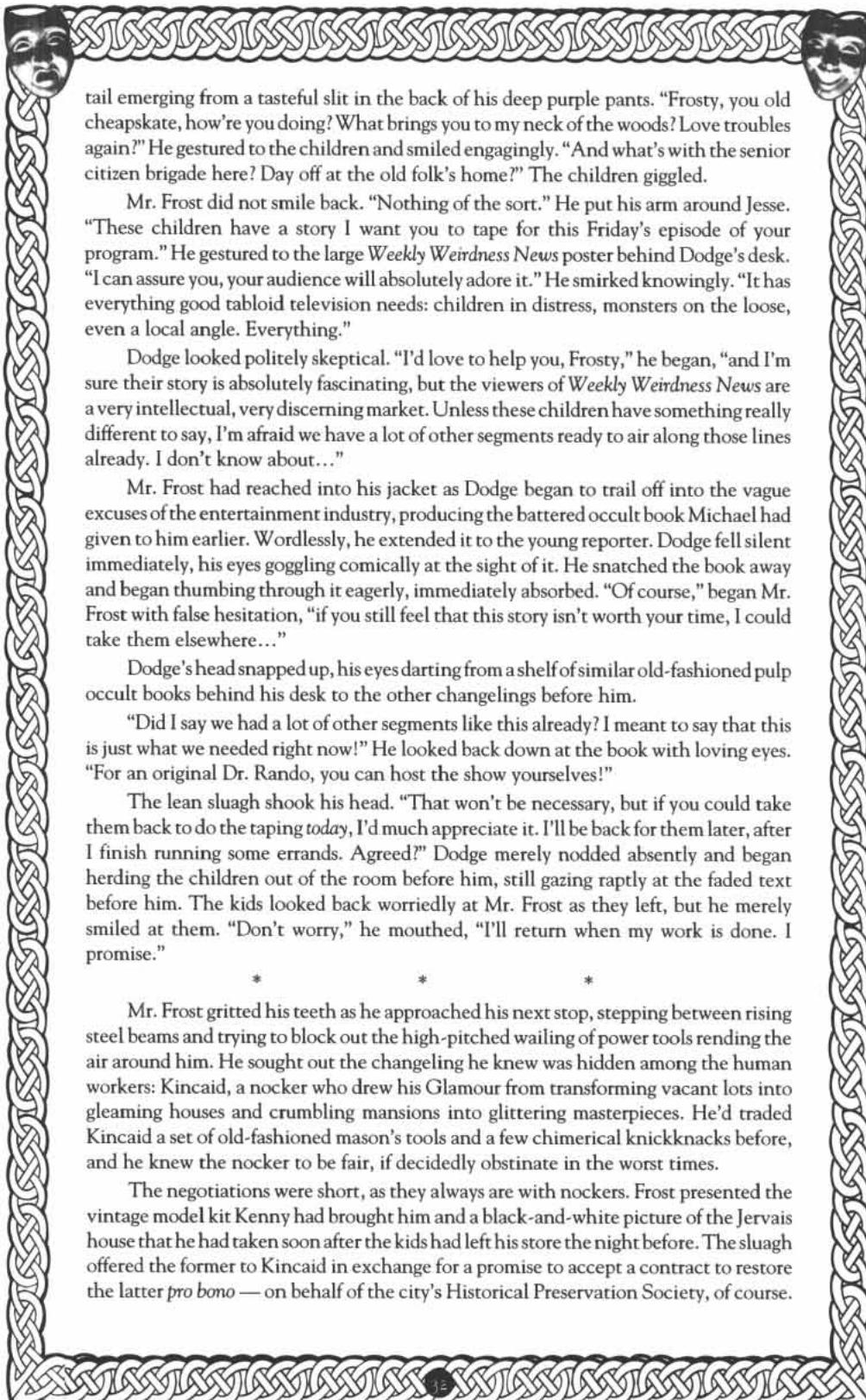
"Come on, Kenny," Jesse said, tugging the pooka along.

* * *

"I can't believe we're in a TV studio!" Jesse exclaimed.

The office was small but colorful, its walls slathered in garish movie posters and shelves teeming with odd knickknacks, and the children gaped comically at the array of memorabilia before them. Old movie posters from fifties B-movies vied with pictures of alleged Bigfoot tracks and blown-up reproductions of famous UFO photos. Mr. Frost's store and its prized collectibles were one thing, but this collection was far more contemporary and thus struck a more active nerve. Mr. Frost didn't care one way or another — it was the office's occupant, Emory Dodge, they'd come to see.

Dodge rose from his rolling chair, extending a hand across the desk with a wide smile for his old contact, sparing a slightly puzzled but affable expression for the group of children Frost brought with him. The pooka's loud yellow blazer and neon green tie went well with the decor, though they would've staggered sensible fashion designers from miles away against any other backdrop. Mr. Frost could see where the makeup had been applied to remove the natural dark circles under the man's eyes, the only touch of the pooka's raccoon nature that mortals could see. To him and the children, of course, the bandit-mask marks shone through gloriously, along with the furry ears and a tiny



tail emerging from a tasteful slit in the back of his deep purple pants. "Frosty, you old cheapskate, how're you doing? What brings you to my neck of the woods? Love troubles again?" He gestured to the children and smiled engagingly. "And what's with the senior citizen brigade here? Day off at the old folk's home?" The children giggled.

Mr. Frost did not smile back. "Nothing of the sort." He put his arm around Jesse. "These children have a story I want you to tape for this Friday's episode of your program." He gestured to the large *Weekly Weirdness News* poster behind Dodge's desk. "I can assure you, your audience will absolutely adore it." He smirked knowingly. "It has everything good tabloid television needs: children in distress, monsters on the loose, even a local angle. Everything."

Dodge looked politely skeptical. "I'd love to help you, Frosty," he began, "and I'm sure their story is absolutely fascinating, but the viewers of *Weekly Weirdness News* are a very intellectual, very discerning market. Unless these children have something really different to say, I'm afraid we have a lot of other segments ready to air along those lines already. I don't know about..."

Mr. Frost had reached into his jacket as Dodge began to trail off into the vague excuses of the entertainment industry, producing the battered occult book Michael had given to him earlier. Wordlessly, he extended it to the young reporter. Dodge fell silent immediately, his eyes goggling comically at the sight of it. He snatched the book away and began thumbing through it eagerly, immediately absorbed. "Of course," began Mr. Frost with false hesitation, "if you still feel that this story isn't worth your time, I could take them elsewhere..."

Dodge's head snapped up, his eyes darting from a shelf of similar old-fashioned pulp occult books behind his desk to the other changelings before him.

"Did I say we had a lot of other segments like this already? I meant to say that this is just what we needed right now!" He looked back down at the book with loving eyes. "For an original Dr. Rando, you can host the show yourselves!"

The lean sluagh shook his head. "That won't be necessary, but if you could take them back to do the taping today, I'd much appreciate it. I'll be back for them later, after I finish running some errands. Agreed?" Dodge merely nodded absently and began herding the children out of the room before him, still gazing raptly at the faded text before him. The kids looked back worriedly at Mr. Frost as they left, but he merely smiled at them. "Don't worry," he mouthed, "I'll return when my work is done. I promise."

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Mr. Frost gritted his teeth as he approached his next stop, stepping between rising steel beams and trying to block out the high-pitched wailing of power tools rending the air around him. He sought out the changeling he knew was hidden among the human workers: Kincaid, a nocker who drew his Glamour from transforming vacant lots into gleaming houses and crumbling mansions into glittering masterpieces. He'd traded Kincaid a set of old-fashioned mason's tools and a few chimerical knickknacks before, and he knew the nocker to be fair, if decidedly obstinate in the worst times.

The negotiations were short, as they always are with nockers. Frost presented the vintage model kit Kenny had brought him and a black-and-white picture of the Jervais house that he had taken soon after the kids had left his store the night before. The sluagh offered the former to Kincaid in exchange for a promise to accept a contract to restore the latter *pro bono* — on behalf of the city's Historical Preservation Society, of course.



What's more, as Mr. Frost delicately pointed out, the good publicity generated from such a noble renovation effort would easily recoup the lost income involved, as well as guarantee a list of wealthy clients well into the new millennium.

"Where'd you get this?" Kincaid said, gesturing gently with the model kit box.

"It came through the shop earlier this week," Frost whispered back calmly, hoping the nocker could make out the words over the din of construction. "Why? Is it valuable?"

"Not at all, Frost," Kincaid said, arching a sardonic eyebrow. "Not to someone who's been looking for a model from this series made in this year to complete a life-spanning collection. Hardly worth the concrete foundation under our feet."

The flat, poured base *did* look a little uneven to Frost, but he neglected to mention it in deference to Kincaid's feelings.

"Sure, I'll do the job," Kincaid shouted over the noise at last, his rough hands caressing the smooth contours of the box like a lover's curves. "But are you really sure about this? You're talking about the old Jervais place, right? I haven't heard anything about the city handing out a contract on it."

"That's because it hasn't been issued yet," countered Mr. Frost. "The day's still young. I'll call you with the specifics tomorrow morning."

* * *

After punishing his rarefied senses at the construction site, Mr. Frost allowed himself a moment to revel in the quiet, subdued atmosphere of the Baroness's salon. He then announced himself politely to the pleasant kinain girl behind the counter and took stock of his surroundings.

Ethereal Fashions was the kind of upscale clothing store that appeared more like a private residence than a place of business, with the clothes tastefully displayed off to the side and small tables set for serving tea instead of crude, glaring metal racks and couches for waiting husbands and boyfriends. Mr. Frost — seldom a caller in this part of town — was still admiring the tasteful decor when the kinain reappeared to usher him into the back of the store for an audience with the Baroness.

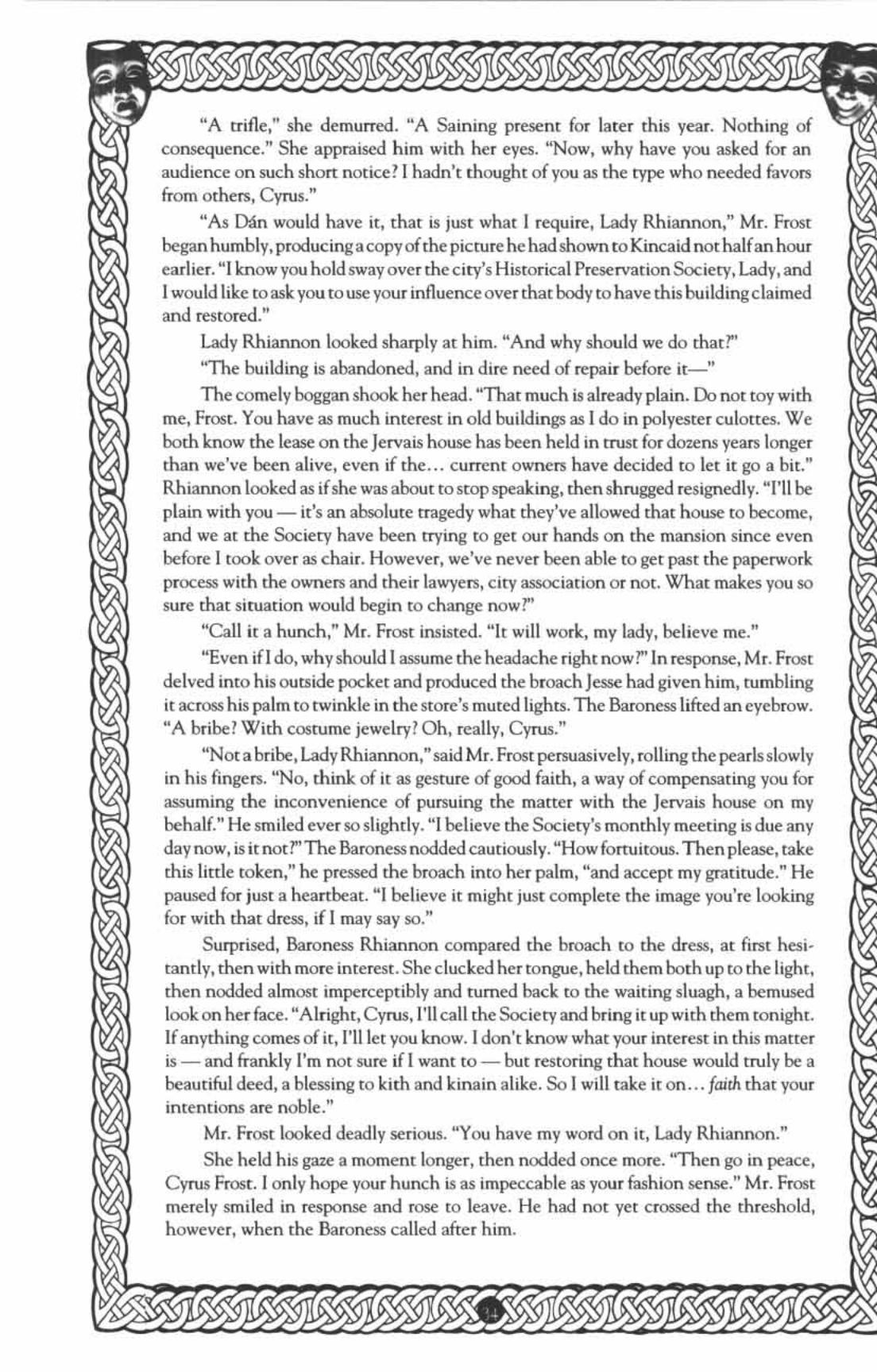
The Baroness appeared as he had always known her: a boggan of uncommon grace dressed in a simple blue-satin outfit that nonetheless teased out every aspect of her beauty. She was still bent over a fine silk dress with a needle in one hand and a spool of thread in the other when he coughed softly to announce himself. Even at court, she seldom left her knitting far from her hands, always altering some item or weaving another as she entertained guests or weighed cases brought before her.

This scene was a familiar one to Frost. He'd seen the beginnings of this particular dress at court two weeks before, when it was nothing more than a rough sketch, a few bolts of fabric and a dream borne on the Baroness's hands. Now, it was a marvel in itself, an innocent wish captured in cream-colored silk and fine silver thread. But even as Mr. Frost entered, the Baroness threw away her needle in despair, as if facing a puzzle she simply couldn't solve. Hearing him approach, the Baroness looked up and smiled thinly, the frustration evident at the corners of her lips.

"My Lady Rhiannon," Mr. Frost said, nodding slightly.

"Come and be welcome, Cyrus Frost," she replied, waving his politeness away. She looked down at the dress and sighed. "Accept my apologies for my abruptness."

Mr. Frost looked innocent. "Trouble?"



"A trifle," she demurred. "A Saining present for later this year. Nothing of consequence." She appraised him with her eyes. "Now, why have you asked for an audience on such short notice? I hadn't thought of you as the type who needed favors from others, Cyrus."

"As Dán would have it, that is just what I require, Lady Rhiannon," Mr. Frost began humbly, producing a copy of the picture he had shown to Kincaid not half an hour earlier. "I know you hold sway over the city's Historical Preservation Society, Lady, and I would like to ask you to use your influence over that body to have this building claimed and restored."

Lady Rhiannon looked sharply at him. "And why should we do that?"

"The building is abandoned, and in dire need of repair before it—"

The comely boggan shook her head. "That much is already plain. Do not toy with me, Frost. You have as much interest in old buildings as I do in polyester culottes. We both know the lease on the Jervais house has been held in trust for dozens years longer than we've been alive, even if the... current owners have decided to let it go a bit." Rhiannon looked as if she was about to stop speaking, then shrugged resignedly. "I'll be plain with you — it's an absolute tragedy what they've allowed that house to become, and we at the Society have been trying to get our hands on the mansion since even before I took over as chair. However, we've never been able to get past the paperwork process with the owners and their lawyers, city association or not. What makes you so sure that situation would begin to change now?"

"Call it a hunch," Mr. Frost insisted. "It will work, my lady, believe me."

"Even if I do, why should I assume the headache right now?" In response, Mr. Frost delved into his outside pocket and produced the broach Jesse had given him, tumbling it across his palm to twinkle in the store's muted lights. The Baroness lifted an eyebrow. "A bribe? With costume jewelry? Oh, really, Cyrus."

"Not a bribe, Lady Rhiannon," said Mr. Frost persuasively, rolling the pearls slowly in his fingers. "No, think of it as gesture of good faith, a way of compensating you for assuming the inconvenience of pursuing the matter with the Jervais house on my behalf." He smiled ever so slightly. "I believe the Society's monthly meeting is due any day now, is it not?" The Baroness nodded cautiously. "How fortuitous. Then please, take this little token," he pressed the broach into her palm, "and accept my gratitude." He paused for just a heartbeat. "I believe it might just complete the image you're looking for with that dress, if I may say so."

Surprised, Baroness Rhiannon compared the broach to the dress, at first hesitantly, then with more interest. She clucked her tongue, held them both up to the light, then nodded almost imperceptibly and turned back to the waiting sluagh, a bemused look on her face. "Alright, Cyrus, I'll call the Society and bring it up with them tonight. If anything comes of it, I'll let you know. I don't know what your interest in this matter is — and frankly I'm not sure if I want to — but restoring that house would truly be a beautiful deed, a blessing to kith and kinain alike. So I will take it on... *faith* that your intentions are noble."

Mr. Frost looked deadly serious. "You have my word on it, Lady Rhiannon."

She held his gaze a moment longer, then nodded once more. "Then go in peace, Cyrus Frost. I only hope your hunch is as impeccable as your fashion sense." Mr. Frost merely smiled in response and rose to leave. He had not yet crossed the threshold, however, when the Baroness called after him.



"I feel I should warn you, Cyrus. Our budget has been very tight this year. Even if we did succeed, I don't know that we have the means to order such an extensive restoration."

Mr. Frost turned, the grin on his face spreading like crystals on an icy window. "As it turns out, My Lady Rhiannon, I believe I know just the man for the job."

* * *

The last meeting of the day was nearly as short as the time spent with the nocker, for Mr. Frost cared even less to meet with this last contact than he did to spend time negotiating with a hard case like Kincaid. He simply waited outside the old mausoleum in which the contact slept until the last rays of daylight were dying on the horizon, positioned himself carefully in front of the door and knocked three times briskly on the heavy marble. A shuffling arose from within, and the marble groaned aside a few inches. Frost could see no more than the pale, delicate curve of the tomb's inhabitant's cheek.

"Some dream comes to tempt me," the bored, cultured and very old voice said quietly from within. "It wants something. What does it want?"

"I need the address of one of your kind," Mr. Frost said very carefully, making sure to keep his voice respectful and calm. "More specifically, I need you to deliver something to that one before the night gets under way."

"What insight does this dream bring me?" the voice asked in smooth, even tones.

"Your word first," Frost whispered, knowing he played a dangerous game. The seductive caress of Banality already tickled his skin like cold water.

"And why shouldn't I just wake from this dream?" the voice said, lowering in timbre and humming with thinly repressed anger. "And in waking, dream it no more."

The shape within stepped forward, revealing a silken fall of black hair before Frost stepped aside. The last, dying rays of sunlight on the western horizon (which Frost's shadow had been blocking off) fell into the tomb. The figure inside made no sound, but darted back instantly. Frost stepped back into place.

"I'll dream a while longer," the voice said tightly, after a very long, tense pause. "Tell of your insight. I will indulge the dream its message."

"Best to see for yourself," Frost said, handing the ruined carcass of Jacque's crow (which he was all too glad to remove from his unlined coat pocket) in through the mausoleum door.

"A harbinger..." the voice said in an odd mixture of confusion and interest. "I have not eyed the fall of a sparrow in some time." The voice fell silent a moment, and frost heard sickening sounds of tearing and scraping that finally resulted in the figure within the tomb gasping in undisguised shock.

"The dream tells of dire portents..." the creature inside said. "Castles falling to ruin... warring kingdoms... times of fire... a trial... the birth of a star... a hunt for arrogant usurpers..."

"So you'll deliver my message?" Frost asked as the voice trailed off. He held out a bulging manila envelope, sealed and marked with only a name and a title of nobility. "Time is of the essence."

Hysterical laughter erupted from within the tomb, and Frost had to force himself not to take a step back. Tides of Banality surged and swelled around him.

"I'll deliver it," the voice whispered, still laughing. "Now, fill me with your portent."

Frost saw a pale, perfect hand emerge from the tomb, and he put the envelope into it.

"And Frost," the voice said, banishing all traces of mirth as quickly as blowing out a candle. Frost looked up into a pair of eyes that had never seen the sun in all of Frost's long life. Frost stood pinned, like a bird before a viper. "Disturb not the sleeper again."

With that, the mausoleum door whisked shut, and Frost stood alone. All too happy to comply with the last wish, the gaunt slaugh walked away, hoping that a mad being's whim would not ruin an otherwise perfectly orchestrated day.

* * *

"Package for you, sir," the retainer whispered, scuttling into the presence of his undead master. "The Seer in the lowlands just dropped it off. He didn't say what it is."

"The Seer, eh?" Prince Marcel asked with languid curiosity. "Bring it here." He examined the plain manila package, the spidery formal handwriting on the front clearly marking it as intended for him alone; four bright butterfly stamps the only splash of color. Definitely the Seer's work, he thought with a mental sigh. The stamps hadn't even been postmarked. Then again, the Seer had never really understood the contrivances of modern bureaucracy.

Waving the butler away offhandedly, he slit the package open with sharpened fingernails. A video cassette marked "Weekly Weirdness News Show 149" fell out, along with a small, handwritten note in the same old-fashioned script that graced the envelope the package had come in.

He skimmed the note distractedly at first, then read it again with greater concentration. The language of the note betrayed modern colloquialisms and patterns of thought vastly different from the Seer's timeless linguistic flavor. All of the prince's earlier good humor faded during the third reading, replaced by a widening scowl as dangerous as any fault line. By the time he had finished his fifth reading, any vestigial pretense of humanity was long gone, the ashen hue of his undead state unmistakably apparent in his rage. It was all he could do to fight the urge to twist the tape into plastic ribbons as he slid it into the VCR. He did not want to believe what he had just read, but he could not take the chance that it might actually be serious as opposed to one very sick, very unfunny joke.

By the time the video was over, the arms of the Marcel's ancient oak chair had been shredded into thin strips of wood. With a bestial shout, the prince overturned his expensive steel desk in one fluid motion. At the sound of the crash, the butler came scurrying in.

"Is everything all right, milord?" he asked as obsequiously as he could manage, eyeing the upended desk nervously. "Shall I call the guards?"

Marcel glared at him without recognition for a long moment — a killing fury clouding his wide almost feral eyes. The butler knew his death was staring him in the face. He closed his own eyes, waiting, but when an agonizing amount of time passed and he remained untouched, he cautiously opened them again. Marcel was still perched in his ruined chair, his body taut, his eyes burning. The near-mindless rage of moments ago had passed, replaced instead with an intense, focused look of hatred. When he spoke, the effort to remain calm merely punctuated every syllable with barely restrained malice.

"I wish. To see. The Tremere. And the Seer. Bring them. All of them."

The retainer hesitated. "My... my lord?"

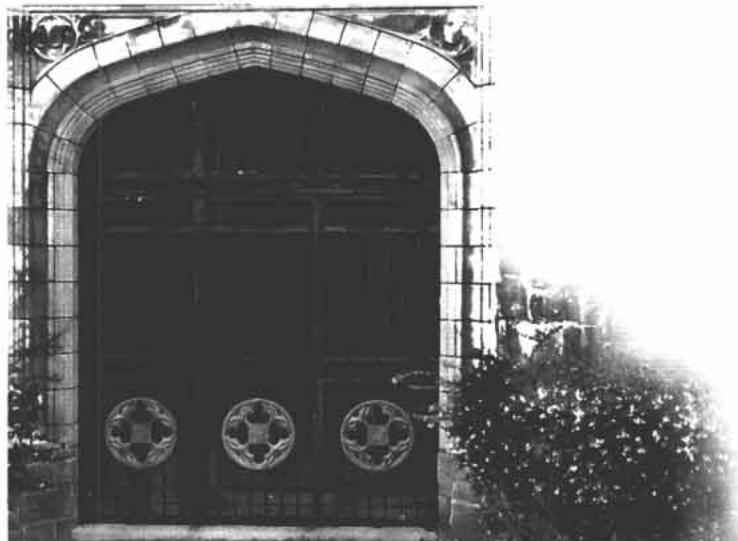
"Now!"

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Jesse got the envelope in the mail the next morning, the butterfly stamp on it unmarked by any post office marker. Even though she had found it in her room, it was addressed to all the others too. So even though she was *dying* to know what was in it, she waited until she could assemble them all before she opened it. The motley sat around on the floor of her parent's attic, hushed and waiting. Except for the time they spent in the studio with Dodge, they'd all been too scared to do much of anything yesterday, instead following Mr. Frost's instructions and staying home. At that age, such time — especially time spent looking out for monsters — seemed like an eternity, and they were all anxious. If this letter was good news, it was possibly their only chance to avoid spending every day like that, and they all felt it. Jesse drew out a piece of paper covered in Mr. Frost's long, spidery handwriting.



"Well, what does it say?" asked Michael impatiently as Jesse silently sounded out the words.

"Shhh, you dummy, I'm reading!" Jesse hushed him. The others glared appropriately until Michael stopped fidgeting. "Mr. Frost says hi to everyone," she began, picking up speed as she went, "and he wants us to know that it's safe to go outside again." There was an audible sigh of relief. "He says that the monsters have been taken away, and that we don't have to worry about them ever bothering us again, or we can tell him and he'll make sure that their... their... prince — that's weird — will get really mad at them and send them away forever and ever."

"Their prince?" Jacque asked, not understanding.

Jesse shrugged. "Do I look like I know what monsters do? Maybe it's another kind of noble we don't know about. Anyway, he says to let him know if absolutely anything else happens with those monsters, ever, even just in our dreams and stuff."

"Nah, I don't think I will," Kenny said, rolling his eyes.

"Dork." Jesse stuck out her tongue. "He does say, though, that we're not supposed to go near the old Jervais house, at least not for a while, cause its under... reno... renner..." she looked for a word the younger kids would understand "They're gonna be rebuilding it, so it won't be so scary anymore. The Baroness and some of the other grumps are fixing it. He says it'll be all nice when it's open again, and we'll be invited to the first party there, even if it goes past our bedtimes."

"Yea! A party!" Peep whisper-giggled excitedly.

"You're not going, you're too young," Michael retorted.

"Says who?" Peep bridled to his full three feet two.

"Says me!" Michael replied, laughing.

"Quiet, you guys, there's still some left!" Jesse commanded. The others fell silent. She finished her reading in a silence more suited to a library than a motley of childlings. "He says in conclu ... to finish up, that he's really sorry, but the show we did with Dodge won't be on TV after all." She silenced the protests with a look before they could start. "He says it was part of the plan to stop the monsters, but if they show it now, the monsters will be really mad, and they might try to come hurt us again no matter what. Dodge says we can come back any time and see the studio if we want, though."

"Well, that's wonderful," Kenny sighed sadly. "TV didn't look like any fun anyway."

"Did he say anything else?" Michael asked hopefully.

"Mister Frost says that if we ever need him again, we can just stop by his store any time, as long as we bring something to trade him." She frowned. "He also says the Baroness thinks I'm going to like my Saining present when I see it." Jesse shrugged. "He signed it, 'Sincerely, Mister Frost.'" She grinned broadly. "Oh, cool! He has a P.S. at the bottom!"

"What's it say?" the others shouted in unison.

"Mister Frost says we paid him too much for his services, so he saved the change left over and sent it to us." She looked up at the others, puzzled. "That's all."

"What change?" Jacque asked, still looking confused. In response, Jesse turned the envelope upside down and shook it.

Two battered crow feathers drifted to the ground and came to rest between them.



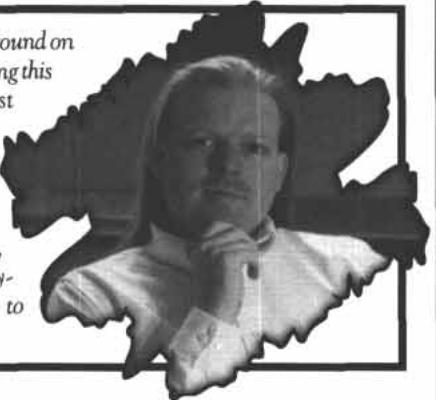
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LAWS OF ASCENSION

by Jess Heinig

Before you decide to either carry me around on your shoulders praising my name for including this material or curse me to the pits of the darkest netherworld for opening a whole new can of worms, let me explain. This article isn't what you think it is. Not exactly, anyway. Just take this material in the spirit in which it's intended, and nobody gets hurt. Besides, Jess knows what he's doing. He's been playing both Mage and MET long enough to know that the demand is out there for...



LIVE-ACTION MAGES

Oh yeah! The long-awaited live-action Mage material! More or less.

Sort of.

Well, not really.

Requests and submissions for MET Mage rules are among the most common type of mail I receive here at the desk of Mage-Central. Most everybody has a home version of live-action Mage, and I've got about eight billion copies in my desk here (it has an extradimensional space for that sort of thing). Even those who don't take up the burden of building their own Mage material inevitably get around to asking "Why hasn't White Wolf done this, especially given the incredible popularity and demand?"

Given that White Wolf is, after all, a business and that we do like to make money, one would think that we'd have long ago published MET Mage materials. However, in our never-ending (and often frustrating) commitment to quality, we've left this project undeveloped for the time being. We haven't, in fact, touched it with a 10-foot pole.

THE PROBLEMS WITH LIVE-ACTION MAGE

Basically, Mage depends on several core concepts that are very difficult to translate accurately into live-action play. The big problem lies in maintaining a faithful image of the game while simultaneously making it playable. If it's not Mage and it doesn't have the themes of redemption, triumph, hubris and power, then it would be a misnomer and a disservice to slap a Mage label on it and try to sell it as such. Conversely, Mage's powers and themes are so broad that they are extremely difficult to represent in live-action play.

Since we have given thought to the problems of Mage, though, I'm going to lay out the typical problems, and then some possible solutions. Just remember that this article is in no way a license to allow mage characters into your games or a lower-



circulation play-test version of True Magic rules. Consider this feature damage-control against pre-existing LARP mages you've already into your game.

ALL THE POWER IN THE UNIVERSE

Perhaps the most pressing problem with live-action mages is the incredible flexibility of the table-top magical system. With the right control of the nine Spheres, a mage can do just about anything. That being the case, how does one translate this broad variety into live-action play? You need an impartial Narrator to determine what a mage can and can't do, and having a Narrator for every mage player is just too unwieldy, even in games where the mage population is relatively low.

Using an Effect-based system of established rotes is one idea, but it limits what mages can do and runs counter to the *Mage* philosophy of altering the universe according to your will. Given enough time and knowledge, mages are supposed to be able to perform unbelievable feats at the slightest of thoughts! A list of permissible Effects is like, well, a list of spells out of a game by that other company.

THE PARADOX PROBLEM

Paradox isn't just a problem for mages, it's a problem in games, too. Paradox tends to strike according to the resonance that a mage has picked up— weird events and happenings that mess around with her individual style of magic and intent. Obviously, forming such an intensely individualized threat requires Narrator intervention, and you're back to the problem of having a Narrator to follow every player around. A point-based backlash system is possible, but it lacks the flexibility and randomness of true Paradox behavior. You could always make up Paradox backlashes on the spot, but the problem then becomes one of consistency and duration. Until the effect wears off (if it does), you would have to assign a Narrator to follow the character around to a.) make sure he's roleplaying a mage beset by such an effect, and b.) inform onlookers of what bizarre effect they see when the mage player neglects to do so.

FOCI? WHAT FOCI?

Another typical problem for *Mage* LARPers lies in the use of foci. Although mages are encouraged to use foci in the tabletop game, many foci are just impractical as props for live-action. It won't do to carry around a sword, a gun or a bone rattle (in public, even), so how does a mage player get a handle on foci? Item cards just lack the panache, although there isn't much choice of whether or not to use them. Doing away with foci altogether deadens a lot of the game's flavor.

"I TURN THE BUILDING TO GLASS."

Oh yeah. Need we mention the "I turn the vampire into a lawn chair" syndrome of True Magic's flexibility? Frankly, when given time, a mage can pull off stunts that seriously screw with game continuity. It does little good to play in a mirror of your home city if that Marauder wannabe just reduced downtown to a sinkhole. If you run the inevitable crossover, having a mage reduce the opposition to small heaps of stuffed toys gets tiresome very quickly. Managing high-end power is a real concern when Masters can rend the fabric of reality and then fold, spindle and mutilate anything in their way.



THE ANSWERS

So there are no easy answers to creating live-action **Mage** rules — yet — but there are still some ways to get around the problems. If you're willing to look at the core concepts of **Mage** and make specific sacrifices or changes, you can go a long way.

ANTAGONISTS

The simplest answer to integrating mages into your live-action chronicles is by leaving them firmly in the hands of Storyteller characters portrayed by players you trust not to go crazy with power. Give them some running guidelines, drill them in the specifics of the plot and let them loose. That way the players you pick keep the reins of True Magic firmly in Storyteller-controlled hands. These players simply tell the other players what happens when the mage character does magic and resorts to tests and challenges only when necessary for the advancement of the story.

PERSONAL NARRATORS

Of course being difficult and unwieldy doesn't mean it's impossible. If you want to assign one Narrator to each mage character's player in your game, and you think your game can handle it, then do so. The player can tell his personal Narrator what he wants to happen, and if the Narrator approves, she determines what tests must be made at what difficulties. Using this technique is tedious, and it can drag your game out endlessly. But if you really *must* have mages in your game incorporating all the flexibility and variety of True Magic, it's a semi-feasible solution.

SORCERY!

The easiest system for converting **Mage** to the live-action paradigm simply uses the sorcery systems from **Laws of the Hunt** and the associated **Players Guide**. If you can wiggle your fingers and do magic, you're a mage! As usual, blatant magic in the midst of the unbelieving simply fails. Still, the various praxes are powerful enough to give mages some viability and entertainment value. Be sure to use the more powerful paths from the **Players Guide**. The original paths in **Laws of the Hunt** work better for characters who happen to study a little magic instead of the potent powers of more erudite sorcerers from the **Players Guide**.

When you use sorcery for live-action mages, remember to put down some stats for your Traditions and their associated capabilities. Even if you decide on a completely different system of imagery, remember that the Traditions don't bar sorcerers from membership. Anyone who can do magic is an asset in the Ascension War, so the sorcerous templates for Traditions are valid for mortal affiliates.

HIGH MAGIC

If you just can't envision **Mage** without the flexibility of True Magic, you'll need to do some work to build a system that works for you. Just as every mage has a personal vision of the world, each game has its own vision of how mages work. You have to address the various problems listed earlier.

However, please keep in mind that we've already thought up, racked our brains over and discarded more MET **Mage** systems than there are readers of this **Journal**. By all means, design a system of Effects, Spheres, Paradox and Foci that works for your game, but don't submit it to us as the greatest idea since item cards. Likely, it isn't as universal or balanced for everyone else as it is for your game.



SYSTEMS

As far as the systems for simulating magical Effects, Paradox and Foci go, we won't even begin to take a stab at it. These areas are best left to your house rules until we come up with a workable system of our own. Any simulation we propose here would be an invitation for such a never-ending enfilade of e-mail and letters that we'd never forgive ourselves. If we're going to open ourselves up to that, we'll roll the dice on a full-production, \$15 **Laws of Ascension** book, thank you very much.

More generally, however, we can give you an idea of how to simulate the rest of MET play where mages are concerned. We can give you how to build a mage, when to play R-P-S and what the various mage-only Traits might do. Again, these rules aren't MET canon, but they're a step in that direction.

Most everybody out there has a few systems for simulating Mage. If you need a simple, quick-and-dirty way to simulate Arete, casting and so on, just try out the following guidelines:

Create your mage character with seven primary Traits, five secondary and three tertiary. You get five Abilities and seven Backgrounds (Influence, Avatar, Mentor, and so on). You get three Willpower Traits.

You start with one Trait of Arete. When you perform an Effect, it requires a test with a Static difficulty determined by Sphere and level. You can use an Arete Trait for a retest, once per night per Trait. You can never have more levels in a Sphere than you have Arete Traits. Also, for each Arete Trait that you have, your maximum Traits in each Attribute category go up by one from the base nine for a supernatural human. Thus, with Arete one, you can have up to 10 Traits, while Arete five allows up to 14 Traits.

You get five levels of Spheres, chosen from the Basic levels. You also get a free level in your Tradition Sphere, even if that Trait takes you to the Intermediate level. If you're an Orphan, you just get a sixth Basic level in a Sphere of your choice.

The difficulty for magic is typically the Effect level +4 Traits if it's detectable, +3 Traits if it's not. Thus, using a Sense Forces (first level undetectable Effect) is difficulty 4, while a lightning bolt (Forces 3, definitely detectable and improbable) is difficulty 7. You can make a retest with an Ability if it's appropriate to your paradigm and focus (using Linguistics if you're a Hermetic mage speaking Enochian, or Do if you're an Akashic Brother, for instance).

Anytime you want to inflict aggravated damage or create something out of nothing, you must expend a Trait of Quintessence. You can also spend a Trait of Quintessence to lower a magical difficulty by one. You start with Quintessence Traits equal to your Avatar Background rating (bought as a normal Background for just this purpose), and you get more from Nodes or Tass (see the **Mage** book for details).

Whenever you fail an Effect Test and the difficulty is twice your number of Traits or whenever you fail a retest on an Effect, you suffer Paradox.

As a rule of thumb for combat, a level-two Sphere can inflict one level of damage, a level-three Sphere can avoid or absorb one level of damage, a level-four Sphere can negate an enemy's point of special power (Blood, Willpower, Gnosis, etc.), and a level-five Sphere can inflict two levels of damage.

SPHERE/ TRAIT ALIGNMENTS

Correspondence, Mind, Time — Mental

Entropy, Prime, Spirit — Social

Forces, Life, Matter — Physical

EXPERIENCE FOR MAGES

Attribute/Ability Trait: One Experience.

Willpower Trait: Three Experience.

Sphere: Four Experience Traits for a Basic level, eight for an Intermediate level, 12 for an Advanced level. Add one point if it's not a Tradition specialty.

Arete: Four Experience Traits plus your current rating after an appropriate Seeking for enlightenment.

TELLING A MAGE STORY

So now that you've got all sorts of cool powers and neat new character types, it's time to blow stuff up!

Ahem... I hope you know better than that.

Remember, **Mage** is a game about exploration and about the inner journey that mirrors external transformation. It's not just a game of cool Effects! Ideally, your mage characters should be interested in changing the world and themselves for the better, not in just using fireballs while taking on vampires, Technocrats and evil politicians.

Of course, you've already heard this lecture. If you are a **Mage** player, then you've read the essays on hubris, resonance, power and responsibility. If you're not, then hopefully the magic of **Mage** will convince you to pick up the system and give it a try.

Best wishes — your stride now crosses the universe!





THE DARK KINGDOM OF JADE

by Bruce Baugh

While Bruce Baugh is new to writing material for *Mind's Eye Theatre*, he is no stranger to the World of Darkness. His previous writing credits stretch across many of our game lines, the most memorable of which focus on *Wraith: The Oblivion*. Some of you may remember his name from such books as *Doomslayers: Into the Labyrinth*, the phenomenal *Wraith: The Great War* and even *Ends of Empire*. The importance of wraiths from the Jade Kingdom in that last book, in fact, is what prompted this article.

THE ASIAN DEAD

There are realms of the dead beyond the Dark Kingdom of Iron. The most populous and powerful is the Jade Kingdom, or the Dark Kingdom of Jade. Though few Stygians know much about it (or vice versa), the Asian afterlife offers new challenges and opportunities. A chronicle can run a very long time before exhausting the possibilities in Asia, and crossover with the Stygian empire offers an equally wide range of possibilities. This article is (and can be only) an introduction to the existence of wraiths in the Middle Kingdom — China and the surrounding countries. For full details on everything from the condition of wraiths in the occupied Japanese Shadowlands to the distinctions between civil and criminal cases in the Jade Kingdom, see *Dark Kingdom of Jade*.

BECOMING A WRAITH

Every person has two souls, the *hun* and the *p'o*. The *hun* comes into being at conception and governs the mental and spiritual life of an individual while the *p'o* originates at birth and controls the physical aspects of life. At death, the two souls separate. The *p'o* lingers to see that the proper burial rights are performed, then drifts off into the void. The *hun* advances to paradise, aided by the prayers and sacrifices of still-living family members.

Sometimes, however, something goes wrong. The *p'o* does not separate from the *hun*, and both stay trapped in the Underworld. Premature death sometimes causes it, as does inauspicious burial, and sometimes it happens for no readily discernable reason at all. The *p'o* resents its subordinate role, and it attempts to separate itself by destroying the *hun* if lesser means cannot serve. Paradise comes seldom, if at all, to trapped souls. The void of Oblivion swallows many. Destruction reaches out to grasp souls that cannot direct themselves so as to avoid the lure of nothingness. The best most wraiths can hope for is continued existence in the Yellow Springs, the intermediate realm of existence Stygian wraiths call the Shadowlands. Within the Yellow Springs, wraiths find some fleeting contact with the living world and opportunities to develop their abilities in this twilight existence.

Sometimes the separation of the soul goes even more wrong. The *hun* passes on, but the *p'o* remains near the living world, generally in the vicinity of its body. The left-behind *p'o* becomes a *kuei* or hungry ghost. The *kuei* retains only the simplest of motives, particularly a desire to revenge any slights done to the body. *Kuei* usually lapse into Oblivion within about three years.

**THE MECHANICS OF THE P'o**

Create a Jade wraith's p'o using the Oblivion rules for the Shadow. In game mechanics, the p'o and Shadow work the same way, accumulating Angst and drawing on Thorns and Dark Arcanoi, even though Jade wraiths feel differently about the p'o. To most wraiths in the Yellow Springs, the p'o is a natural and proper part of their soul given too much power in the afterlife rather than an innately dangerous force.

JADE

Wraiths of the Yellow Springs refer to various substances found in the Underworld as "jade." All jade buried along with a body in the Skinlands comes into the Yellow Springs in relic form. This True Jade is worth more than anything else in the Kingdom, including most souls. Skilled artisans can shape it into objects which never fade from existence, and True Jade stores Pathos. White Jade, created by the Way of the Artisan, lacks True Jade's durability.

THE MECHANICS OF TRUE JADE

A True Jade blade slices through any White Jade Artifact when its wielder wins a Static Physical Test against the target's total of Traits. Cutting through True Jade with a White Jade blade gives the wielder a three-Trait penalty.

THE JADE KINGDOM

Trapped souls also find government. Qin Shihuang, the First Emperor of a unified China, died 23 centuries ago. He'd prepared himself out of a great fear of (and fascination with) death, and he promptly took control of the afterlife corresponding to his empire in life. He ordered artisans to build and bury around clay statues around his tomb, and these statues emerged as vessels for the souls that became his nearly unstoppable Immortal Guardsmen. They gleam as if freshly painted even today. With these and other unique spiritual tools and weapons, Qin Shihuang secured his empire and proclaimed himself Yu Huang. He spread his rule across Korea, Japan, Tibet and other lands around China. The wraiths of the Occupied Territories suffer under heavy military occupation, their inhabitants enslaved and forged so that Yu Huang's Chinese subjects may exist in relative comfort.

In life, Yu Huang used eunuchs for sensitive missions, as did emperors before and after him. Emperors reasoned that eunuchs could be trusted not to let concerns about their own family interfere with loyalty to the throne. (In practice, enough eunuchs found other ways to promote their personal dynasties that the wicked eunuch giving bad advice became a cliché of popular storytelling.) In the afterlife, early ministers presented Yu Huang with something comparable. Jade Empire Eunuchs are individuals with erased memories and semi-mechanical jade machinery implants. An authorized official touches a lever to make the Eunuch record everything it sees and hears, another to make the Eunuch play back a particular passage. Some Eunuchs retain a vaguely human appearance, others not, depending on the preferences of their makers. Eunuchs circumvent the problems of incomplete and unreliable records that plague other Shadowlands governments.

The short-lived Skinlands Qin dynasty applied the philosophy of Legalism, developed by Han Fei in the fifth century B.C. — about the same time Confucianism and Daoism emerged. In Skinlands China, Legalism merged with many other philosophies, becoming just one element in the philosophy of governance, but in the Yellow Springs, Legalism still reigns supreme. Legalism makes no assumptions of innate goodness or moral power in the universe. Instead, Han Fei recommends seven principles for rulers:

- Know and compare the various possibilities.
- Punish failure with unvarying severity.



- Reward success with unvarying generosity.
- Listen to all views and hold the proposer accountable for every word.
- Conceal your intent behind unfathomable orders and deceptive assignments.
- Conceal your knowledge when making inquiries of a minister.
- Speak in opposites and act in contraries.

Yu Huang's government includes four distinct branches, each sending a representative to most towns. The Four Magistrates and their assistants administer the routine chores of government. Smaller towns may have fewer magistrates, or the population might be forcibly relocated to larger communities. A few wraith families usually provide most of the officials, as they did in life.

District magistrates oversee groups of town and rural areas. Families have to work harder to maintain dominance at the district level, and individual service — or lack thereof — comes to matter more than family connections. City magistrates, overseeing large Necropoli, operate as peers of district magistrates. They divide cities into sectors and neighborhoods, each with its own Four Magistrates. Sometimes a few families achieve dominance, but, more often, high population density leads to constant upheaval and little continuity of lineage among the staff.

Commanderies oversee several towns and the surrounding rural districts. District commanders scrutinize their subordinates throughout the area. It's a prestigious position with few demands... most of the time.

The Jade Kingdom consists of 34 provinces, each with a Governor chosen directly by the Emperor and provincial representatives of the Four Branches. Governors have final authority in principle; whether they use it, delegate it or find it manipulated away from them depends on the individuals involved. The Emperor can review and negate governors' decisions, but he seldom does so.

The imperial court itself occupies the Jade Palace, a sprawl of more than 200 separate buildings deep within the Tempest. A single prominent jade road connects the palace with the Shadowlands. Yu Huang moves his residence and chambers from one building to the next without warning, driven by constant paranoia and fear. A separate staff unit specializes in keeping track of his whereabouts for urgent reports. The Four Branches maintain their headquarters in the Jade Palace as well.

Officials at all levels receive salaries, but they're not paid enough to cover their actual expenses, let alone the social displays expected of them. Ironclad custom requires subordinates to give "gifts" to their superiors, and citizens offer "gifts in appreciation for service" to officials. This universal pattern of bribery isn't considered immoral unless it gets really, profoundly out of hand or officials take payments without providing appropriate service in response.

THOSE WHO RULE

The specific proper names given for the branch leaders in this section come from *Dark Kingdom of Jade*. Feel free to change them for your own chronicle, if you want to give a different flavor to the relations between branches and their respective styles of operation.

THE FOUR BRANCHES

The Jade Censors keep track of the resources of the kingdom. They supervise Reaping, tally Artifacts and relics and review the allocation of raw materials. The Emperor guarantees families the right to Reap their own kin, but in practice an endless network of regulations and judgments makes it impossible to maintain consistency. Ideally, a local Censor takes part in every decision about a wraith's fate before its Caul comes off. Corruption, ambition, greed and laziness all complicate the reality. The Censor can assign a wraith to its family, another group in the



administrative region or even take it into personal custody. Likewise, every relic theoretically carries an imperial stamp of approval and authorization before ending up in someone's hands for very long. The Censors get busiest in times of war and natural disaster in the Skinlands; crises bring out both the worst and the best in the Branch. Hu Ji, a woman of unknown mortal antecedents, runs the Branch. She's personally wealthy and therefore free from most temptations to yield to powerful families, but she's not so secure as to be entirely sure she enjoys the Emperor's support.

The Judges of the Dead make sure that Jade laws apply fairly and consistently. As Han Fei's principles suggest, justice itself isn't a primary concern: Any system applied consistently suffices to create a Legalist social order. The Judges monopolize law enforcement among civilians, but they may be required to yield to the Military in wartime and crisis. In accordance with Chinese tradition, the judge conducts his own investigation, combining the functions that Western justice separates out among judges, prosecutors and police. The Judge also holds the authority to carry out his recommended punishment, though appeal up the chain of command is possible. Judges require more assistants as their territory widens, and commandery and provincial judges personally try only the most important (or interesting) cases. Li Gao has directed the Judges for three centuries and enjoys the closest relations with the Emperor. He's known for punishing and purging Judges who show too much sympathy or other incompetence.

The Protectorate of the Prosperous Realm seeks out sedition among citizens and corruption among officials. Protectors enjoy very broad authority to investigate anything that looks like a possible violation of Jade law. Since almost everything is a violation of some sufficiently obscure edict, Protectors can punish nearly anyone at any time. Nobody can keep them out, and lying to them constitutes an admission of guilt. They cannot impose sentence — that's the realm of the Judges, Censors or Military depending on the nature of the offense — but their recommendations usually find acceptance. Formal trials don't always happen. Everything from Buddhist proselytizing to questioning the divinity of the Emperor can bring Protector attention down on lowly souls. Fan Wushang has directed the Protectorate for 1500 years. While he enjoys the Emperor's support, he also keeps himself personally at a distance so that the Protectorate does not seem merely an arm of imperial whim.

The Military makes the Emperor's wishes known by corporeal force. Military units include infantry, cavalry, navy and (in more recent times) mechanized forces of all kind. Most soldiers volunteer for terms of a few years, as being a veteran opens doors for the rest of a wraith's existence and brings honor to one's family. Some duties, like patrolling major highways in the heart of the kingdom, pass without stress or risk. Others, like policing bad neighborhoods in the Occupied Territories, consume tremendous numbers of soldiers, which makes even the compensatory opportunities for personal looting look less desirable. Peng Xin, hero of the wars with Stygia, oversees all military force in the empire... except the Immortal Guard, who answer only to the Emperor.

FAMILIES

Family provides the basis of identity in the Yellow Springs. In the face of a vast imperial hierarchy, family provides shelter, purpose, protection and support. Family members look after each other's interests — one well-placed official can arrange contracts and patronage for many needy relatives. Yellow Springs "families" were all actually composed of true family members in older times, but in the modern day, these families comprise gatherings of wraiths linked by attitude, worldview or interest rather than lineage. The Communist campaign against traditional superstition and the chaos of modernization separated many wraiths from their lineages. When they emerged in the Shadowlands, they formed their own gatherings to provide the same sort of services that the old families did. Tension between old families and new drives political agendas at all levels of government and in society at large.



CONFLICTS

Every government faces some discontent among its subjects. Even though Chinese tradition generally encourages subservience or at least passive dissent and withdrawal, rebellion has old roots as well. Challenging rulers who no longer enjoy Heaven's mandate to govern is an established role for the virtuous rebel, and few rebels rush to think of themselves as anything other than virtuous. Any citizen with a grievance might become an outlaw, though the vast majority don't.

The Occupied Territories host more organized resistance movements. Japan and Tibet in particular challenge imperial power, and they require constant suppression. See *World of Darkness: Tokyo* for a detailed discussion of Japanese efforts to throw off Jade rule. In addition, persistent rumors about the Emperor's nature encourage dissent that might turn violent. It's a matter of history that early in his reign, Yu Huang descended into the Tempest and fought the Malfean Lung Wang. The official story is that Yu Huang triumphed, seizing Lung Wang's power and possessions for his own. Persistent rumor says that Lung Wang won and uses the Emperor's skin for his own nefarious agenda, whatever it may be. Everyone agrees that the Emperor's might transcends that of any other wraith. The question is simply whether that's because of his powers taken by conquest or because he's actually a master demon in human disguise.

The Jade Kingdom and Stygia do not get along well. Ever since the Russo-Japanese War at the beginning of the 20th century, there's been nearly constant conflict. In the 1930s, minor skirmishes escalated to all-out war, with the Jade fleet invading along unsuspected Byways to sack Boston. The war ended not long before the outbreak of the Fifth Great Maelstrom and weakened both governments' ability to respond to the storm. Tensions have risen steadily ever since, and observers on all sides predict a fresh conflict soon.

To Jade wraiths, Stygians seem barbarous at best. They have little social order, no proper appreciation of family, no sense of piety. It's easy for a cultured inhabitant of the Yellow Springs to see the typical Stygian as little better than an articulate *kuei*. Jade wraiths usually strike Stygians as confusing, elitist and deeply, offensively smug.

JADE BY THE NUMBERS

This section covers the actual mechanics of creating and playing Jade wraiths. For additional setting material, refer to *Dark Kingdom of Jade*. The rules given here supplement *Oblivion*. Jade wraiths function in game mechanics just like Stygian wraiths in all matters not specifically covered here.

CHARACTER CREATION

BACKGROUNDS

- Living Family

This Background replaces Memoriam in the Middle Kingdom for most wraiths, though it's also possible (but very rare) to have Memoriam as well. Keep in mind, large families that offer regular sacrifices also tend to call on their ancestors more often for help and services. Draw on Living Family using the same mechanics as for Memoriam.

One Trait: Occasional prayers are offered, but no sacrifices.

Two Traits: Honored at major festivals with prayer and small sacrifices.

Three Traits: Weekly prayers and significant sacrifices at festivals.

Four Traits: Weekly prayers and small sacrifices throughout the year, large gifts at festivals.

Five Traits: Daily prayers and frequent sacrifices.

- Wraith Family



This Background measures the strength of the wraith's family in the Yellow Springs, including Communist and other "families" as well as actual lineages. Extended families act as network of contacts and provide status by association for all loyal members.

One Trait: 3-5 members in one small area.

Two Traits: 5-10 members in one area, or several small branches in different regions.

Three Traits: 10 or more members in one area and branches elsewhere.

Four Traits: Several large branches and many small branches throughout the Kingdom.

Five Traits: Large branches in every part of the Kingdom.

• **Magisterial Office**

You hold a post in one of the Four Branches of Government. Position carries ever-greater responsibilities as well as privileges; remember that inspectors could be watching at all times. Your Storyteller can reject high levels of this Background if it doesn't fit the chronicle.

One Trait: Assistant to the local magistrate, with a small amount of influence.

Two Traits: Assistant to a city magistrate, who leaves small details to you.

Three Traits: Local magisterial office, with significant influence within your jurisdiction.

Four Traits: City or district office, with a number of magisterial subordinates.

Five Traits: Commandery office, which may even draw imperial attention (for good or ill).

THE YELLOW SPRINGS AND THE FINAL NIGHTS

War fever sweeps the Yellow Springs in the months leading up to *Ends of Empire* and the grand invasion of Stygia. Security forces tighten traffic across the borders, and suspected spies face angry mobs in addition to official interrogation. Levies on relics and souls for the forges rise constantly — in the Occupied Territories whole Necropoli become depopulated to fuel the war machine. Reserve military units all go to active status and fresh draft levies sweep more and more able-bodied wraiths into the army.

Then comes the invasion itself. After that....

If you want to use the "official" White Wolf story line, the empire falls into chaos. Yu Huang loses much of his army and nearly all of his best forces, thanks to defective transports and the outbreak of the Great Maelstrom. Suddenly overwhelmed and outnumbered, garrisons in the Occupied Territories crumble in the face of slave revolts. Within the Yellow Springs, threats to the integrity of the realm may lead Yu Huang to inadvertently reveal his true nature. If that happens, it's all over for the Emporer. Even if Yu Huang's identity remains intact, rebel movements exploit the invasion's failure as a sign that Heaven no longer favors him.

Your chronicle can develop in other ways. Perhaps the invasion succeeds gloriously. Perhaps it still ends in failure but the troops manage an orderly withdrawal. Perhaps the Great Maelstrom hits the Yellow Springs harder or more lightly than in "canon." The time is ripe for change, but you should make the changes suit your chronicle rather than force your game into a single mold.

ARCANOI

Most of the Arcanoi practiced in the Dark Kingdom of Iron are also taught in the Yellow Springs, though they're rare. Castigate isn't known at all, and Usury is almost unknown. In addition, the wraiths of the Yellow Springs learn and practice Arcanoi more or less unknown to Stygian wraiths. Jade Arcanoi cost the same number of Traits or experience to buy as the Stygian Arcanoi listed in Oblivion.



THE WAY OF THE SCHOLAR

Wraiths practicing the Way of the Scholar develop their *hun* so to understand and control the minds of others. Magistrates, particularly Judges and members of the Protectorate, specialize in this Arcanos.

Innate Ability

- **Studious Nature:** The mental discipline required by the Way of the Scholar makes it easier to learn all other subjects.

System: The Scholar gets a Trait bonus of one to all Mental Tests related to academic study.

Basic Abilities

- **Discern the Lie:** The Scholar attunes herself to the patterns of another's thought so as to detect lies.

System: Make a Mental Test. If successful, the wraith can tell if her target lies during the next 10 minutes.

- **Inquiry:** The Scholar can force the subject to answer one question truthfully. The subject may use some misdirection and partial truths, but no direct falsehoods.

System: Spend one Pathos and make a Social Test to get an honest answer to one question. Precision in phrasing counts.

Intermediate Abilities

- **Word of Yu Huang:** The Scholar may issue a single command to the subject. As with Inquiry, the formulation matters, as the subject may exploit loopholes and ambiguity. The subject may not be ordered to perform a self-destructive act.

System: Spend one Pathos and make a Social Test. If successful, the Scholar may issue a one-word command. This command can be "Hold" or something of the sort, making the subject stand still long enough to use Word of Yu Huang again at a cost of one Pathos. If this second attempt succeeds, the Scholar may give a one-sentence order for each point of his current temporary Willpower. The subject must make a separate Mental Test to notice the command being given. Otherwise, the instructions seem to arise from within.

- **Filial Duty:** The Scholar instills an urge to cooperate into the subject, making the Scholar as valued to the subject as a dear and honored family member. The subject won't abandon previous convictions, but he will help the Scholar in all other ways.

System: Spend three Pathos and one Willpower, and make an Extended Social Test. The Scholar's command remains in effect for three hours, plus one for each success on the extended test. The subject *does* realize what's been done to him once the effect wears off.

Advanced Ability

- **The Emperor's Servant:** The Scholar masters the intricacies of manipulating the *hun*, and can control the minds of others fully. This art allows her to implant permanent orders.

System: The Scholar must spend a full day with the subject (usually represented over the downtime between games), spend three Pathos and one Willpower and make a Social Test. If successful, the target may implant an idea that can be summarized in one sentence. The Scholar may make successive tests to increase the complexity of the idea implanted: A paragraph requires two tests, a page's worth of material requires three tests, a chapter's worth requires four tests and a whole book's worth of instructions requires five tests. The Scholar must *win* all the tests required. Failure at any one of them cancels out the whole effort, and a tie at any one of them means that the Scholar may only implant one sentence.

THE WAY OF THE ARTISAN

This Arcanos deals with the various kinds of jade and relics found within the Jade Kingdom. Artisans learn how to understand their materials and then transform them into whatever it is they



need. All Artisan arts carry a risk of failure. If the Artisan fails in the initial challenge, he must make a Simple Test. If he fails that test, then the material he's working with acquires flaws that make it useless for any task.

Innate Ability

- **Hear Jade's Tale:** The Artisan begins by learning how to evaluate an Artifact's powers and the condition of its soul before forging.

System: Win a Simple Test to learn this information.

Basic Abilities

- **Shape True Jade:** Only Artisans know how to work with True Jade, widely thought to be part of the Universe's soul in solid form.

System: Make a Mental Test against a difficulty determined by the Storyteller to reshape a piece of True Jade into any simple form. Very complex or precise forms may require further challenges, at the Storyteller's discretion.

- **Work White Jade:** White Jade, made of transformed human souls, lacks True Jade's strength and malleability. Working with it requires extra care and three times as much material to produce the same result.

System: Same as for Shape True Jade.

Intermediate Abilities

- **Rework Relics:** More experienced Artisans can rework material that was never a soul.

System: Make a Static Physical Test against a difficulty determined by the Storyteller to change a relic's form. Changing the relic's material requires three consecutive successes.

- **Empower Jade:** The Artisan can draw forth latent potential from her material and imbue it with Pathos and Arcanoi. The Artisan can store the powers of one Arcanos and the Pathos to use it. Unless she knows the Way of the Merchant, she can use only her own Arcanoi and Pathos.

System: Spend three Pathos, plus the Pathos to be stored in the item, and make a Static Mental Test against a set difficulty. True Jade retains its powers indefinitely; White Jade loses its powers over time. Each month the Artisan must repeat the challenge (without Pathos cost) to prevent the stored powers from beginning to leak out. Once the leak starts, the Artifact loses one Pathos and one level of ability per month.

Advanced Ability

- **Create White Jade:** The pinnacle of the Artisan's skill is the creation of White Jade from captive souls. First, the subject's Willpower and Pathos must be reduced to zero, then the Artisan spends three days transforming the subject's Corpus into White Jade. The Artisan must decide in advance whether the subject will become hard (suitable for weapons, containers and armor) or soft (suitable for parchment, furniture and clothing).

System: Make a series of 15 Social Tests, representing a total of three days of work. If the Artisan accumulates a total of 10 or more successes, the subject becomes White Jade. Each level of Corpus yields about three pounds of White Jade.

THE WAY OF THE FARMER

While Scholars work on the *hun*, the Farmer learns to cultivate the *p'o*. Farmers and Pardoners have some techniques in common, but Farmers focus exclusively on the *p'o* in others.

Innate Ability

- **Kuei Howl:** The Farmer calls out to *kuei*, tricking them (and any others in the area) into believing another hungry ghost prowls nearby. Rebel movements use it as the basis of signal systems.

System: Make a Simple Test against any *kuei* within 100 yards. If the Farmer succeeds, the *kuei* hear the call and respect the howler's territory, keeping clear. If she ties, the *kuei* fail to hear



t!he call and go about their normal business. If she fails, however, all *kuei* in range mount a furious attack.

Basic Abilities

- **Finding the Hidden Ghost:** The Farmer can sense *kuei* and wraiths under control of their *p'o*.

System: Make a Simple Mental Test against a target wraith or Spectre. If successful, the Farmer senses if the target is in Catharsis or Shadow-eaten.

- **Cowing the Bestial Spirit:** The Farmer can induce fear in wild souls by speaking forcefully to them.

System: Make an Extended Social Test. The effect lasts 10 minutes per success.

1 success: The subject flees in terror.

2 successes: The subject cannot advance and may only retreat slowly.

3 successes: The subject freezes in place.

4 successes: The Farmer may render the subject unconscious.

5 successes: The Farmer can control the subject's movements.

Intermediate Abilities

- **Purify:** Purify is the Farmer's art most like Castigate. It reduces a *p'o*'s supply of temporary Angst.

System: Make a Social Test against a difficulty of the target's permanent Angst score. If successful, the Farmer removes a point of temporary Angst or a Corpus level.

- **Deaden Spirit:** All *p'o*-dominated souls run on passion. The Farmer learns to nullify bestial tempers through soothing words.

System: Make a Social Test. If successful, the Farmer speaks to the subject in ways that prevent it from acting violently or suddenly for one minute per point of the Farmer's Willpower. The subject may wander around listlessly and mutter insults under its breath, though it can do little else.

Advanced Ability

- **Reap the Hungry Ghost:** The Farmer's most sophisticated art involves harvesting *kuei* Corpus like so much rice. The subject must be subdued. This art does not work on Spectres or wraiths under the sway of their *p'o*.

System: Spend two Pathos and make a Social Test. If successful, the Farmer reduces the subject to an easily transportable clay-like blood. The test takes half an hour per Corpus level.

THE WAY OF THE MERCHANT

Few love the arts of the middleman, but they are necessary for all souls who wish to use the sacrifices offered by living relatives.

Innate Ability

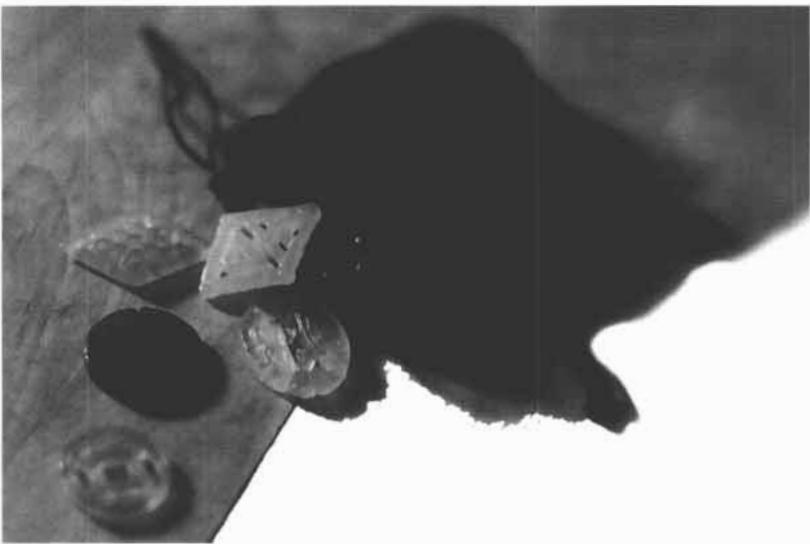
- **Jingle Jingle:** Merchants can literally smell money.

System: Make a Mental Challenge against a target wraith or other spirit to detect any Pathos stored through Mint Money that target carries. Or make a Static Mental Test against a Storyteller-determined difficulty to detect solid Pathos stored within 20 feet of the Merchant.

Basic Abilities

- **Transfer:** This art is the Jade Kingdom's equivalent to the Usury art of the same name. It requires Corpus-to-Corpus contact and generates a yellowish glow while the transfer takes place.

System: Spend one Willpower and make a Simple Social Test. If successful, the Merchant can transfer up to three points of Pathos.



- **Cash Money:** This Merchant art is the most widely used one in a Merchant's repertoire. It converts sacrifices into usable Pathos.

System: Make a Static Social Test with a difficulty of the number of points of Pathos in a sacrifice. Now the Merchant has that Pathos in a form he can give to others (via Transfer) or use himself.

Intermediate Abilities

- **Withdraw Essence:** The Merchant can extract Pathos from the corpus of a Farmer-converted *kuei* or raw White Jade (but not shaped White Jade or *kuei* hammered into new forms).

System: Spend a point of Willpower and make a Static Social Test against a difficulty of 6 + the number of Pathos points to extract (seven Traits for one point, eight Traits for two points and so on).

- **Returning the Favor:** The Merchant may imbue a mortal with Pathos. The mortal can spend one point to reduce the difficulty of a single challenge by two Traits, two points for a retest on a single challenge and three points to regain a point of Willpower. A mortal can gain only three points of Pathos at any given time through this art.

System: The Merchant must be within five feet of the mortal target but need not be manifest in the Skinlands. Spend a Pathos and a Willpower and make a Static Social Test against a difficulty of the local Shroud rating + the number of Pathos points to be transferred.

Advanced Ability

- **Mint Money:** The Merchant can convert her own Pathos into corporeal form: strings of coins, wads of paper money and other tokens of value. Some Merchants create unique manifestations so as to build up a "house reputation" for their work.

System: Spend two Pathos and one Willpower, and make a Social Test with a difficulty of six Traits + the Pathos points being converted. The money lasts one day per point of Pathos the Merchant possesses after completing the challenge.

THE WAY OF THE SOUL

The other standard Jade Arcanoi draw on Confucian beliefs; the Way of the Soul expresses Daoist ideas. Jade denizens turn inward to subdue the troubled *p'o* rather than summoning outside assistance as Stygians do with Castigators.



Innate Ability

- **Negotiation:** Students of the Way of the Soul learn how to calm the *p'o* by persuasion as well as force. It's risky, as efforts at calm may backfire and rile the *p'o* that much more.

System: When a wraith feels himself about to lose control of his *hun*, he can engage in Negotiation. Make a Static Willpower Test against the *p'o*'s permanent Angst. Success means that the *p'o* loses a point of temporary Angst and cannot attempt to seize control until gaining another. Failure grants the *p'o* a point of temporary Angst.

Basic Abilities

- **Coax:** This art lets the wraith modify the number of Shadow Traits her *p'o* offers.

System: Make an opposed test of the wraith's Social Traits against the *p'o*'s current Angst. If successful, the wraith forces the *p'o* to make a Shadow Bid (see Oblivion, p. 172). On failure, the *p'o* need spend no Angst.

- **Nullify Thorns:** The wraith can deny his *p'o* access to a particular Thorn temporarily.

System: Spend a point of Pathos and make a Physical Test against the *p'o*'s current Angst. If successful, the wraith picks a single Thorn that the *p'o* cannot use for the next half hour. The wraith can repeat this Challenge every half hour without further Pathos cost.

Intermediate Abilities

- **Give Higher Passions:** The wraith infuses some of her own passions into the *p'o*, replacing one of its Dark Passions.

System: Spend two Pathos and make an Extended Social Test against the *p'o*'s current Angst plus two Traits. If successful, the wraith can pick one Dark Passion to be replaced by one of the wraith's own passions for one day per success. The wraith doesn't lose access to the passion during this time.

- **Alter Demeanor:** The wraith can force the *p'o* to adopt a new pattern of behavior, either a different Shadow Archetype or even a Psyche Nature. By a combination of persuasion and intimidation, the wraith briefly elevates the *p'o*'s attention.

System: Spend three Pathos and make a Static Social Test against a difficulty of the *p'o*'s current Angst plus four. If successful, the wraith forces a new nature onto the *p'o* that remains in effect for one hour per point of current Pathos. On failure, the *p'o* gains one Angst, and the player makes a Simple Test. If that test fails, the *p'o* gains three temporary Angst and one permanent Angst.

Advanced Ability

- **Inner Peace:** The wraith joins forces with the *p'o*, subverting the *p'o*'s own agenda in the process of yielding some Psyche control.

System: Make a Willpower Test against the *p'o*'s current Angst. If successful, the *hun* partially fuses itself with the *p'o*. It can gain Pathos from Dark Passions as well as Passions, and it can use the *p'o*'s Thorns and Dark Arcanoi as well as its own Arcanoi. The *hun* can spend both Angst and Pathos as necessary. The fusion ends when the *p'o*'s current Angst reaches zero. If the *hun* fails the initial test, make a Simple Test. If that test fails, the *p'o* takes immediate control and gains three temporary Angst.

CHAINS OF THE EMPEROR

The Immortal Guard uses this Arcanos to help maintain their discipline. Its arts subdue rather than destroy, allowing Yu Huang's administration to enforce the harshest justice. Only the Guardsmen learn this Arcanos, though rumors sometimes circulate to the contrary.

Innate Ability

- **Soul Anchor:** Chains of the Emperor conflicts directly with Argos, and Guardsmen learn to sense uses of Argos within 50 feet of themselves.



System: Make a Mental Challenge to detect another wraith's use of Argos within 50 feet. It provides a general sense of the Enshrouded individual's whereabouts and pinpoints any other Argos user.

Basic Abilities

- **Brilliance:** The Guardsman's painted skin glows even more vividly than usual, filling the Shadowlands' darkness with an inhuman rendition of the glories of day.

System: Spend one Pathos. The Guardsman brightens over the course of three turns. At full brilliance, everyone in the area who looks anywhere near the Guardsman must win or tie a Static Physical Test to avoid blindness. Attacks against the Guardsman are at a Trait penalty of one for the first two rounds, and an additional two every round thereafter. Brilliance lasts for only five turns, but the Guardsman can renew it at his discretion.

- **Shackles:** The Guardsman transforms some of his own Corpus into bindings for the feet or hands of an immobilized opponent. They cannot be removed by anyone but a Guardsman except through Moliate.

System: Spend two Corpus and one Pathos. It takes one round to put Shackles on a foe immobilized by one means or another; the target must be stationary while the Guardsman fits the shackles.

Intermediate Abilities

- **Snare:** A Guardsman can reach out to cancel Argos arts used by others.

System: While in corporeal contact with a Guardsman, a wraith must first win a Physical Test before using any Argos art.

- **Lariat:** This art is similar to Shackle, but it can be used at distances up to 50 feet.

System: Spend two Corpus and one Pathos and take a turn to prepare. Then make a Physical Challenge. If successful, the Guardsman's target falls trapped as if by Shackles.

Advanced Ability

- **Net:** This effect extends Shackles even further, encompassing a whole group of targets up to 20 feet away from the Guardsman.

System: Spend three Pathos to create a colorful webbing 12 feet in diameter. The Guardsman then throws it. Anyone within the targeted area must make a Physical Test to avoid getting entangled. Once caught, a victim must win four Physical Challenges in a row against the Guardsman. True Jade cuts the net, but White Jade does not.



MAYDAY!

by Lindsay Woodcock

AN OBLIVION ADVENTURE IN THREE PARTS

PRELUDE

Events that began their inexorable course in Parts One and Two of this story are finally coming to a head. This chapter lets your Oblivion troupe participate in the making of Shadowlands history. In Part One ("Ambassador"), the circle met Tadashi Nakagawa, a Yellow Springs emissary carrying a relic *wakizashi* and an odd list of names of Stygian Heretics (both outspoken and covert). However, Nakagawa mysteriously dropped into a Harrowing before he could divulge any information on why he was carrying the relic or the list. The only clue to his real mission was a scrap of paper reading, "Find optimal points; solidify alliances; look for the unblinking." The characters may have even discovered that the relic was somehow tainted, infecting its user with temporary Angst.

In Part Two of the chronicle ("Deployment"), the circle discovered that the list of names of Heretics that Nakagawa was carrying comprised a Heretic cult acting in collusion with the Dark Kingdom of Jade. The cult, with members scattered throughout the Dark Kingdom of Iron, has laid the groundwork for an invasion, and that invasion is imminent and inevitable. In discovering this information, the circle may have gone to the Hierarchy, the Renegades beyond the walls of the Necropolis or even the Heretics themselves. No matter where they've gone, the wraiths are likely to have stepped on some toes and made some enemies.

Now the *wakizashi* is still on the loose, the Jade forces are at the gates, and an ill wind has begun to blow and scrape outside the citadel walls....

SOME TECHNICAL NOTES

No ready-made adventure could possibly account for player creativity, Narrator preference, or even pure chance; there are just too many variables to make for a single story that will work for everyone. Flexibility is essential. Keeping that in mind, each installment of the adventure is broken into individual scenes. The scenes are then divided into two sections: Hard Info and Choices.

Hard Info is just what it might appear: facts, events, and information that must, somehow, occur or be revealed for the adventure to run as planned. How you work it into the story is largely up to you as Storyteller, but it needs to get in there. Feel free to use existing social structures, Narrator characters or your favorite plot devices to deliver this information.

Choices are, again, just what they might appear. They spell out some of the things wraith characters might do in reaction to the Hard Info, plus some of the ways the story would be affected by character actions. The Choices account for the story's flexibility as characters, both Narrator and player, drive the plot. As long as the skeleton of the adventure æ the Hard Info æ is intact, don't worry about forcing the flesh into any particular shape. Let the players play their characters. Your only job is to emphasize drama and suspense.

By the way, the rest of this information is for Storyteller's only, unless you want to spoil the surprise of what's going to happen next.

PART THREE: INVASION

SUGGESTIONS

Unless your own version of this story calls for them, you won't need any special props to advance the plot, other than the relic *wakizashi* delivered by Nakagawa in Part One of the chronicle. You might consider re-introducing Nakagawa to the action, but unless you can come up with a convincing reason for how he has managed to make it all the way back to the location of your game from the Shadowlands of Japan (to which he returned after his Harrowing), you don't





have to. You could bring back Joseph Sauvant (the Hierarchy agent assigned to monitor the wraiths after they approached Hierarchy representatives with their information or suspicions—if they did so) as well, although he plays no special role in the events as they're written.

SCENE ONE

Hard Info:

Before the scene gets started, characters may notice the wind picking up and the screaming behind that wind. Perception-based Static Challenges may be made, or Narrators may decide arbitrarily who notices. What savvy observers should be able to figure out is that there's a Maelstrom brewing, and it's going to be *big*. At the same time, the armies of the Yellow Springs, long on the march, are finally within striking-distance of the Stygian empire. Forces are aimed at Stygia itself, and the air of growing tension should be palpable. Everyone's waiting for something to happen, and the Maelstrom is getting closer....

Choices:

If one of the characters recognizes the brewing Maelstrom for what it is, the Circle might choose to hole up in a strong Haunt early and try to hide from the Jade invaders. Should there be no Pardoner in the Circle or in the group's allies, the characters may be able to reason with a Renegade Pardoner or a friendly Hierarchy one.

If the characters are outside their city, they might be faced with entire warships popping out of Nihilis. Also, if there are city gates, the first line of defense against a Maelstrom or invasion is going to be that wall and those gates. The wraiths better hurry if they want to get inside. If they feel like it, let them try to convince Renegades or Heretics outside to join them inside where it's "safe." They may have trouble talking their way past the city guards, but base the amount of static they get on how well they roleplay.

Some enterprising (or suicidally insane) characters may even try to bargain/ negotiate with representatives of the Jade army, but do not let this tactic succeed unless the speaker happens to be carrying the relic *wakizashi*/Nakagawa delivered in Part One. Under no other circumstances will the Jade wraiths listen, and the relic will only keep the Jade wraith troops from slaying those characters immediately present. They will still be kept prisoner in the army's camp.

SCENE TWO

Hard Info:

This scene serves as exposition for whatever information the characters may have missed thus far. It should come out in the wash that Nakagawa was nothing more than a Jade-Kingdom spy, on the lookout for the Heretic cult responsible for opening the city to invasion. The relic *wakizashi* he carried was to be delivered to a stronghold of that cult and displayed as a symbol for Jade troops to pass over that location in their attack. Ferret out any cult spies who may have infiltrated the Hierarchy (and who, likely, have been trying to get rid of the characters who "know too much"). Set this discovery scene against the rising tide of the Maelstrom winds and the revelation that something huge and unexpected has just happened to upset the boundary between the Labyrinth and the Tempest (see *Ends of Empire* to find out exactly *what* it is).

Choices:

The choices in this scene revolve around how you deliver this information. If your characters are in the camp of the invading army, perhaps a too-proud captain of the military spills the beans. A series of interrogations and/ or torture sessions can reveal the necessary gems within the safety of the Hierarchy. Outside the walls, a crusty Renegade veteran of the Underworld may have discovered the conspiracy and have been all too happy to tell the characters about it, in exchange for their putting a good word in for him with the Hierarchs. (After all, it was the Renegades who destroyed one of Nakagawa's fetters in Part One, hoping to stop him before he accomplished his mission.)

However, once all this information has been relayed, there's no time left to do anything about it.

SCENE THREE

Hard Info:

The other shoe drops, the last straw falls and all hell breaks loose. The timing of this scene is ultimately up to you, but starting it as soon after the preceding scene as possible is best. What happens is simply this: All that hangs in the balance comes crashing down in waves of destruction and violence.

The Jade armies march on the Stygian Necropoli, destroying the walls, the buildings and any wraiths the troops can get a hold of. Any prisoners taken will be soulforged, and any building left standing will be occupied by Jade forces. The only building left alone will be the one displaying Nakagawa's *wakizashi*, which is only recognizable by the taint it carries.

Worse yet, the Maelstrom begins shortly on the heels of the invasion. However, this storm is no scattered shower on the Stygian front. The howling winds (and concomitant Spectre hordes) herald the coming of the Sixth Great Maelstrom. Nihilis the size of Candlestick Park rip open, and the worst of unimaginable foes flood the Underworld from the very mouth of Oblivion. The events leading up to the start of the Maelstrom have been set in motion off-stage and are unstoppable (see *Ends of Empire*), and now it's right in the characters' lap.

There has never been a Maelstrom this big before, so play it to the utmost. Destruction rains (or reigns) everywhere, playing havoc with both sides of the Stygia-Jade Kingdom battles. The screams are deafening, and the silence is ear-splitting. There is nowhere to run.

Choices:

The greatest choices in this scene revolve around your descriptions of the carnage wrought by the two-fold invasion. Find out what forces of nature scare your players and unleash those forces. Great Maelstroms are destruction incarnate, so make them feel it. Make them fear it. If they can't find somewhere to hide in a reasonable amount of time, wipe them out. Make them choose who they'll count on to survive, who'll they'll cut off from safety if needs be and which ports they'll run to in the storm.

If they try to hole up in a Haunt, how will they defend it from Jade wraiths and Spectres? If they run to the Hierarchy, will they aid in defending the walls, or will they aid in the fighting that will inevitably go on in the streets? Or will they simply hide in a deep, dark hole until the violence passes?

It's also possible to run a scenario in which members of the Hierarchy have discovered the significance of Nakagawa's *wakizashi*, and different factions are scrambling to get possession of it before the Jade army breaches the walls.

And finally, you may even consider scenes of cooperation between the Stygian forces and Jade forces. Not every Jade Kingdom wraith on the attack is expecting a horde of Spectres at their backs, and in panic, they may side with their erstwhile adversaries to ride out the storm.

SCENE FOUR

Hard Info:

After some indeterminate amount of time (days, weeks, hours, years?) the Great Maelstrom winds subside. The Spectres slink back into their holes, and the wave of destruction dies down. At some point, the characters who have survived should crawl from wherever they've holed up to survey what's left of their world.

Choices:

At this point, the choices are all yours. Decide how long the Great Maelstrom has lasted. Decide how much of the setting is left intact. Decide who has survived. Decide if the Jade Invasion Fleet is still on the move. It's all up to you.

If you need help deciding what to do now, see Rich Dansky's article on that subject on page 63 of this issue of the Journal.





IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD! WHAT DO I DO NEXT?

by Rich Dansky

*A subtle word of warning: This article is rife with spoilers. Left, right and center, you can't throw a dart at this article without hitting some piece of information specific to Wraith continuity that just maybe you didn't want to know. When you read the book *Ends of Empire*, you'll see what I mean. If you'd rather wait and see what happens in Wraith continuity first (before you decide to foist it onto your poor, unsuspecting players), read that book before you read this article. Some serious goings-on are afoot there, and this article relates them in digest form.*

Now, with that proviso in mind, you may skip this box and proceed to the rest of the article. Just don't say I didn't warn you.

RUNNING OBLIVION IN THE WAKE OF ENDS OF EMPIRE

One of the biggest problems about running an end-of-the-world game is that it tends to leave one at a loss for what to do for an encore. Let's face it, after manhandling Creation, anything you throw at your players afterward is going to seem somehow anticlimactic.

Upon reading *Ends of Empire*, **Oblivion Storytellers** might feel that they are caught on the horns of this particular dilemma. After all, the supplement does outline the fall of Stygia, the ultimate fate of Charon and the Deathlords, the Sixth Great Maelstrom and various other fairly emphatic endpoints. With so many of the familiar landmarks of **Wraith** destroyed, Transcended or otherwise irretrievably altered, it would seem difficult to maintain any sort of momentum or continuity for an **Oblivion** chronicle.

Fortunately, this doesn't have to be the case. A positive plethora of options is available to the creative Storyteller, each of which can make for rewarding, fascinating chronicles that won't send players scurrying for their sourcebooks to see if continuity is taking it on the chin in the process.

I. TURN BACK THE CLOCK

Enoch has become the target of post-mortem nuclear devastation in official World of Darkness continuity, but the advent of that cataclysm in tabletop **Wraith** doesn't mean that it's happened yet in your game. If you don't want to deal with the aftereffects of the destruction of Enoch, the Sixth Great Maelstrom and the other events of *Ends of Empire*, you don't have to. Honest. No one from White Wolf is going to come skulking around your game with a notepad and a whistle for the express purpose of reporting you to the Continuity Police. If you don't want to go as far forward with your plot as we have with ours, it's all right.

IT'S THE END OF THE WORLD! WHAT DO I DO NEXT?



On a more serious note, delaying the events of *Ends of Empire* indefinitely can be an eminently workable solution. After all, if you've spent months setting up plot lines that revolve around the characters' involvement in one of the Smiling Lord's multifarious plots, it's going to be profoundly unsatisfying for your players to have all of that swept away. They've put in the time, the effort and the passion of unraveling the plot, and they deserve the chance to resolve it.

That doesn't mean, however, that it's necessarily a good thing to hold back the tide of time indefinitely.

While it's a good idea to allow any existing plot lines that would be truncated by *Ends of Empire* to wind down gracefully, it's an even better one not to start up new threads that will pose the same problem down the road. Instead, think about plots that can survive or even be enhanced by the coming Great Maelstrom. Even if you don't have any concrete ideas for stories that can be extended that way, you can lay the groundwork for post-Maelstrom chronicles.

Start introducing Narrator characters who'll be important once the fertilizer hits the rotary ventilation device. Good ideas include Renegades with good survival skills for hostile conditions. Harbingers who'll be able to get characters through Maelstrom conditions, or even a tough-as-nails Legionnaire who can be counted on to defend the Necropolis against Spectres, regardless of who's in charge. Lay in in-game ways for characters to get their hands on the necessities of unlife — relics, Artifacts, soulfire — once things get crazy. (Indeed, this concept can make for a wonderful lead-in plot thread: The Grim Legion is hoarding stockpiles of all sorts of goodies; where are all the supplies going, and why?) Omens, signs and portents are your friends — Fatalism offers a handy way to start laying on the foreshadowing effectively. Having a bunch of wraiths who call themselves "Oracles" around can't hurt matters, either, when it comes to lining up news of the future. Increase Spectral activity — or have it disappear altogether and watch everyone get nervous. Send a Ferryman into town dispensing knowledge or even gifts that have no obvious bearing now, but which will be very useful once the walls come tumbling down (and in the meantime, no doubt there will be a mad scramble between characters to figure out who got what and why). Send out more Narrators to Shadowguide and have them play matters a trifle more excited than usual. A Jade wraith who's in the Necropolis to scout for the upcoming invasion can make an excellent Narrator character as well. Turn her loose and see if anyone catches her. All of these ideas can lead plots and characters toward the events of *Ends of Empire* before the actual storm, both literal and figurative, hits.

I I . HOLD ONTO THE MOMENT

The fall of Enoch and the events after it take, at most, a few days. Once the Stygian fleet anchors off the coast of the mysterious black city, the sequence of calamities becomes both inevitable and swift. However, it's highly unlikely that you or your Storytelling team is going to want to gear up for a 96-hour continuous Oblivion marathon session, one which ranges from Enoch to the Necropoli to Stygia and beyond. (I mean, if you really really want to, I'm not going to stop you, but you're responsible for the Vivarin, the Jolt! and the nervous tics that you and your Narrators rack up.)

On the other hand, those 96 hours or so are pretty jam-packed with action. A lot happens: Two nuclear detonations, a Great Maelstrom, a pair of invasions, the



return of Charon, the revelation of the Mnemoi, the end of the Deathlords and more. That's a whole lot of plot. Do you really want to have all of that happening offstage?

Instead, why not get your game involved in the epic events that are reshaping the Underworld? You don't necessarily have to run all of the pivotal moments — after all, it's going to be hard to find a rationale to shift your entire troupe from Enoch to a Necropolis to Stygia in the time frame available — but you can pick and choose your spots. If your chronicle has been set in a Necropolis, there's no reason that you can't divert some of the Jade invasion of Stygia to your game's gates. Furthermore, there's nothing that says that the entire invasion has to be wrapped up in a single session. This is a pivotal moment in the history of the Underworld, and, to quote Little Nell, "Slowly, slowly, it's too nice a job to rush." An invasion is rarely the sort of thing that gets wrapped up in a couple of hours. There's plenty of material — guerilla combat, active resistance, infiltrating enemy command, sabotage, deal-making and more — to keep the plot simmering for session after session. After all, the Sixth Great Maelstrom arrives on your schedule, not ours.

Furthermore, no one says you have to stop at one high point. If the defense-of-the-Necropolis plot is going well, maybe your players are indicating that they'd like to keep the action at home. There are plenty of ways, from counterattacks to going underground to having characters sell out, to extend the moment. There's no reason to move past a setting that's working well, after all. You can drag this out as long as you need to in order to satisfy your players.

On the other hand, perhaps the local wraiths might be interested in marching off to Stygia to defend the seat of Empire. That development would allow you to set up encounters in the Tempest on the way to the Isle of Sorrows as well as integrating the later events of *Ends of Empire* into your story line. There are plenty of exciting scenes in the story "The Last Danse Macabre" that can be integrated into *Oblivion* games easily enough. Why not give them a shot?

III. THE LAST DANSE MACABRE

Ends of Empire does include an extended story entitled "The Last Danse Macabre," which details the return of Charon to the Underworld, the coming of the Sixth Great Maelstrom and the final fate of Stygia. The story is designed for tabletop play, but there is certainly a great deal of material in it that can be lifted and converted into a live-action scenario. In other words, it is entirely possible to run an *Oblivion* chronicle through the events of the tabletop story.

There really is only one major hang-up with translating "The Last Danse Macabre" directly, that being the fact that the story is written for a maximum of six characters. If you've got a 40 person game, trying to squeeze all of them into the conference room at the top of the Onyx Tower to witness Charon's re-assumption of power (Oops? Was that another spoiler? Silly me) might be a little difficult to narrate. On the other hand, if you have a small game, or even just a small core of players who want to put some extra time in, you can very easily let them tread the path laid out in *Ends of Empire*.

Bear in mind, however, that if you do want to translate "The Last Danse Macabre" over, it's going to be a fair bit of work for you and your Narrators. There are quite a few Narrator characters who need to be onstage or at least accounted for at various points in the plot, ranging from Deathlords to Jade Empire soldiers to Charon himself. It's also a scene-intensive story. The setting moves from Necropolis London (or whatever city you want to use) into the Tempest and then to Stygia. If



you run a game that relies on actually setting up game space to look appropriate for the action, you're letting yourself in for a ton of work here. That's not to say don't do it, but be prepared for what "The Last Danse Macabre" requires from the people running it.

IV. FALL DOWN GO BOOM

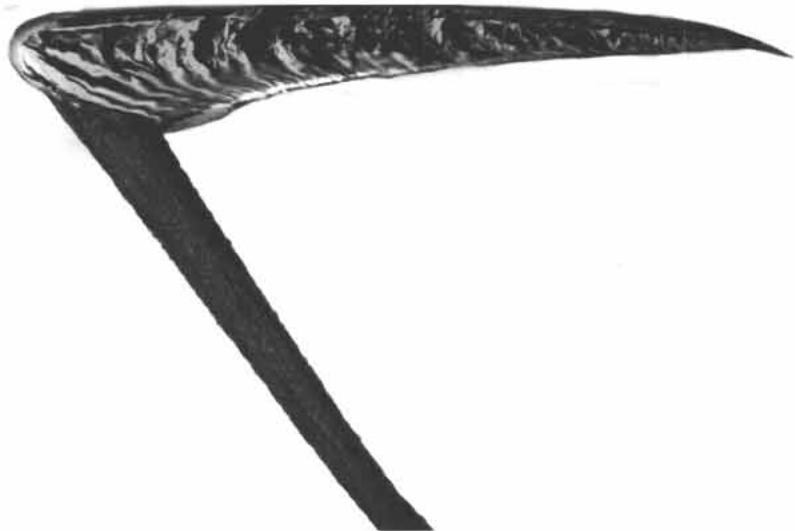
But let's say you're daring (or you've got a Spectre like Maxwell Carpenter looking over your shoulder as you read this). Let's say that you've got an appetite for destruction, a yen for wreckage and way too strong an identification with the first two *Road Warrior* films. In other words, you want to blow up Enoch, zoom past the **Ends of Empire** and set up your **Oblivion** chronicle in the still-twitching wreckage of the Underworld. What then?

That's when things get interesting.

The best thing about running a post-Enoch **Oblivion** chronicle is that you can mix and match whatever elements from traditional Wraith that you want to keep with entirely new material. By the same token, you can throw out whatever bits of wraithly back-story don't fit your idea of a game. Don't like the Hierarchy? In your Necropolis, it's gone, swept away by the storm. Hate the Dictum Mortuum? Whatever powers that be might well drop the ban, now that it's unlikely that enforcers from the Isle of Sorrows are showing up to turn violators into ashtrays. Don't like soulforging itself? The new regime outlaws it. And so it goes — the post-disaster Underworld is not a heterogeneous place. Each Necropolis is an island, and it can have its own rules, regulations and customs now that there's no overseeing body in place to enforce standards and practices. You just have to pick and choose what you want to keep.

THE SETTING

If you're going to run a game set *apres les deluge*, you have to decide precisely what happened in your setting. Did the storm utterly lay waste to your Necropolis, or did the walls hold? Were there many casualties, or did everyone get under cover





in time? Did the Jade Empire invade, or were you on the list of bypassed targets? If there was damage to the Necropolis, what's left, what was destroyed, and how did it get knocked down? Answering all of these questions and others like them (Who was lost in the defense? What resources were expended? Above all, what happened?) before you start play is a necessity. Otherwise, you're confronted with the daunting tasks of making up history on the fly and keeping it straight every time someone asks a question. Unless you start your setting with a strong foundation, everything you build on it is going to be suspect. If you start with a clear, logical outline of your setting's recent history, you keep all of your Narrators on the same page. Furthermore, you make it easy to build on what's already there. If you're unsure of how badly the Necropolis was damaged during the Maelstrom, you're going to have a hard time writing plots about Spectres hiding in the wrecked portions of the city. If you don't know if the city was invaded by the Jade Empire or not, you're up the creek when your players start demanding to know where they can find leftover True Jade Artifacts and learn imperial Arcanoi, and so it goes. If you don't know what's happened, it's that much harder to figure out what's going to happen without tripping over your own feet.

WHO'S THERE?

After you've decided on the immediate history of your setting, you have to populate it. Decide which wraiths are left as well as who was swept away by the tide of history. This question actually breaks down into other, equally vital ones. Specifically, asking who's left leads directly to asking who's in charge, which does more to set the tone of your game than perhaps anything else. Is the local Hierarchy still in place, trying desperately to hold the pieces together? Have Renegades or Heretics taken over? Is there a Spectral presence in local politics, overt or covert? And what about refugees from Stygia? With the Isle destroyed, they have to go somewhere. What are the odds that a bunch of high-and-mighty Gaunts pick your city to start over in? Figuring out who's in charge — which is primarily a function of which wraiths are left after the dust settles — determines how the Necropolis operates. A bunch of Hierarchs trying to maintain the status quo is going to insist on a Dictum Mortuum, regulated Reaping or even more unsettling practices. If Renegades are in place, they may want none of these things — or they may discover that being the new boss turns them into the old boss. Spectral authorities may lead to mysterious disappearances and the like. It's up to you; there's no right or wrong way to do it. Just make sure you have a clear idea of what you are doing before going any further.

The other aspect of figuring out the post-bellum population of your Necropolis is the general populace. Who's left? Have the surrounding wraiths huddled into the Citadel for protection, or do they choose to brave the storm on their own? Is there a strong loyal—or disloyal—opposition to the current governing body? What about small factions like Guilds, Renegade gangs or Heretic cults? Are they present, and in what strength? By the same token, you need to figure out who isn't there any more. If the city used to be a stronghold of the Grim Legion, but most of those soldiers were wiped out in one way or another, how are the survivors going to react? Will they recruit desperately, cut deals with former subordinates or try to bluff it out? And how will everyone else, especially those groups who have been waiting for those arrogant sonsabitches from the Grim Legion to get cut down to size, react with the newly downsized military presence? Will there be an attempt at compromise until the Necropolis is strong enough to stand without every wraith standing shoulder to shoulder, or will old hatreds and jealousies boil over?



Naturally, this decision leads into the following question: How do the survivors (and I use the term loosely; we are talking about dead people here, after all) feel about one another? Has the foxhole mentality of "put 'em through hell together and they'll

A QUICK GUIDE TO WHAT'S LEFT AFTER THE STORM

• The Guilds

Many of the Guilds lose their top leadership in the battle for Stygia, and thus, they are left somewhat aimless in the aftermath. Freed from Charon's ban, the survivors of various Guilds do come out from under cover as their skills are desperately needed, but lingering suspicion does remain. Five centuries of propaganda is a hard thing to overcome.

No Mnemoi are sighted after Stygia falls.

• Doomslayers

Much reduced in ranks, they're on the defensive. A great many are destroyed when the Martyr Knight commandery goes up in a cloud of Spectres, but the survivors try desperately to get their orders back together. Few have the opportunity to go back into the Labyrinth, so they content themselves with putting their knowledge to work defending Necropoli. They are treated with a mixture of admiration and undisguised loathing. The former comes from wraiths who still see them as daring heroes; the latter comes from those who saw what their arrogance wrought on Stygia.

• The Legions

Not surprisingly, the Legions are greatly reduced in strength. The Deathlords are gone, and many Legionnaires have gone to their final reward defending the Necropoli or fighting among themselves when the Smiling Lord's treachery is uncovered. Many wraiths have abandoned the Legions for fear of reprisal while others have clung to their identity in the face of potential adversity. All of the remaining Legions recruit heavily where they may for obvious reasons.

• Renegades

Renegades are hard hit, not by the Jade invasion, but rather by the Great Maelstrom. Most shelter in Haunts that are not strong enough to withstand the storm winds, and casualties are immense. Many Renegades move into the Necropoli, either establishing Renegade governments or trying to blend in with the local citizenry. Renegade politics is still highly factionalized, especially without a unifying enemy to give cause to override disagreements.

• Heretics

Heretics suffer from the storm as Renegades do. Many set out to find the Far Shores. Others move into the Necropoli en masse where they form coherent communities — and power blocs.

"come out bestest buddies" taken over for the duration of the crisis, or is each faction taking the opportunity to pounce on weakened rivals? Certainly characters' Shadows should be taken into account when you're pondering this question. A society literally fueled by strong feeling is a prime breeding ground for vendettas. Remember also that politics is not strictly a vertical exercise. There's plenty of side-to-side conflict and maneuvering to play with as well. If the group on top is weak, odds are that any ambitious factions are going to work on neutralizing or destroying the competition before making a play for the brass ring. That means that if you've got survivors of three Guilds that didn't particularly get along in town, you may find



yourself Storytelling a tricorned gang war before anyone makes a play to unseat the local Hierarchy leftovers. Then again, freed from the Hierarchy's laws, groups may find common cause with strange bedfellows. Pardoners and Heretic groups may ally, for example, or a strong surviving Legion might take Artificers and Alchemists under its wing. Not everything needs to be *reductio ad absurdum*. After all, there's every chance that the local wraiths are working together to build the Necropolis back up. Just make sure you've decided which way things are going and who's headed in which direction.

WHAT'S HAPPENING?

Once you've established what happened and who's left, the other major question is "What's going on now?" Is the city beset by external or internal strife? Are there Spectres at the gate — or inside the Citadel? Is there fighting in the streets, or order? What alliances have been formed and what enmities kindled? In other words, this is where you lay the seeds for all of your plots. By doping out what's actually happening in the Necropolis, you set up what's going to happen. If you decide that the Spectral forces haunting the outside of the city are going to infiltrate, you establish "find the traitor" and "who can be trusted?" plot lines. If you decide that there's a power vacuum at the top and various groups vying for control, you set up alliance-making and political stories.

And so it goes. By answering these questions, you're setting up your chronicle. You know where it is, where it's been and where it's going. After that, it's all just in the details.

V. THOSE PESKY DETAILS

There are certain other things you will need to take into account, aside from your setting. If you're running a game set while the Sixth Great Maelstrom is still howling outside the door, you have to take that into account with your plot lines. Odds are, your Necropolis will be isolated, which means that plotlines about squabbles with neighboring Necropoli and setting up peaceful communes outside the walls will be difficult to maintain. That isolation also limits your potential in-play origins for new characters. (If they're not dying in town, how are they getting there?) By the same token, you're getting a ready-built plot generator in the form of the Maelstrom winds. Anything from ancient relics to an endless supply of Spectres can be dashed up against the Necropolis walls to provide conflict, antagonists and story hooks.

Just bear in mind that Great Maelstroms are serious stuff, not to be turned on and off at whim. If your players lose their respect for the power of the storm outside by being able to cavort in the great unliving outdoors at will, they're going to lose much of the flavor of the setting. If, however, you just give them brief breaks in the storm, small windows of opportunity for new arrivals or escapees to appear on the scene, then you can keep the tone of *Ends of Empire*-era Wraith much better.

Also, bear in mind that certain Arcanoi — Argos leaps to mind, as does the Dark Arcanos Tempest-Weaving — are going to become problematical in a storm-bound setting. Think about these and other potential concerns that players may have, especially if their entire character concepts were built around Helldiving or conveying souls through the Tempest, and they now find themselves left on the sidelines. There's plenty for everyone to do in the post-apocalyptic Shadowlands. The trick is making sure that people find it.





A NEW BREED OF HUNTERS

by Ken Cliffe

You've certainly heard by now. Maybe you've even seen it. A new force is stalking the streets of the World of Darkness in the form of White Wolf's newest Storytelling game. The game's only been out for a month, and, already, players are probably clamoring to play them in your LARP chronicle. What do you tell them? Read what Ken Cliffe, the developer for **Hunter: The Reckoning**, has to say before you decide.

HUNTER: THE RECKONING MEETS MIND'S EYE THEATRE

The title pretty much says it all: There's a new breed of hunters abroad in the World of Darkness. They're human beings who have suddenly discovered the existence of real-life blood drinkers, wolfmen, wizards, ghosts, zombies and goblins. These people have been confronted with the realization that humanity is not at the top of the order or even in charge of things. They've learned the hard way that the lives they've always lived have been lies, spoon-fed to them by monsters intent on keeping humanity blind, deaf and dumb. These ordinary-turned-enlightened people now know that they are a subjugated race, mere cattle or playthings in unfathomable supernatural games.

With knowledge comes power and with all these revelations, hunters arise as a seemingly new force to be reckoned with. They will not stand idly by while family and friends are oppressed or killed. They will not allow people to be dominated by unearthly beings. They will not rest until humanity is free. By strength or will or reason, they will inherit the Earth they thought they always had but, in truth, have always been denied.

Hunter: The Reckoning is the latest Storyteller game set in the modern World of Darkness. It breaks the mold of previous White Wolf games in that the common man is now empowered to rise up against the forces of darkness that have reigned since the dawn of history. Creatures are the antagonists, not the protagonists, of this game. Sure, you've always had the opportunity to play mortal humans before, whether with **The Hunters Hunted**, **The Inquisition** or **Laws of the Hunt** for Mind's Eye Theatre. However, **Hunter** is not a second edition or update of any of those books. The characters of this game are completely new to the World of Darkness. Not that they were born yesterday, of course — they've always been here among the human masses. Yet cosmologically speaking, they *were* born yesterday.

In recent months, everyday people — steelworkers, temps, teachers, brick layers — have suddenly and shockingly awoken to the fact that monsters lurk in the shadows. These horrifying discoveries always come unexpectedly with no warning other than a bizarre sensation such as hearing a voice when no one is around or seeing a street sign change inexplicably from "Walk" to "Run." In that moment of disorientation, certain individuals find themselves face-to-face with the most hideous things they have ever witnessed — walking abominations, affronts to nature itself. How each person responds depends on her identity, but most endowed with such terrifying clarity act, whether to attack the creature, protect oblivious bystanders or to confront the *thing* to simply understand it. The fact that such people now wield bizarre powers of various stripes is testament to the transformation that has overcome them.



At the moment of apotheosis, called the "imbuing," a hunter is created — a person seemingly chosen to witness the truth of the world and empowered by some unknown force to contend with it forever after. Once a person is imbued, she possesses the capability to perceive monsters wherever they hide. Their illusions fade, their disguises peel away, their true faces are made manifest. The world is no longer what it was — it is now home to nightstalkers, beasts and horrors.

How a newly imbued hunter deals with all this information is, as before, based on her identity: on her will to remain sane, her capacity to accept what she learns and her ability to acknowledge that her world is not the real one. Many go mad. Others kill themselves rather than face facts. A determined few piece together their new existence and set out to do something about it. These last are the source of **Hunter: The Reckoning**.

However, these kinds of people can also belong to your **Mind's Eye Theatre** games. The imbued offer an excellent change of pace — and surprise — for a new or ongoing live-action chronicle. Imagine a chapter in which various players are assigned the roles of mortals. Players portraying anything from vampires to changelings must interact among and around the usual "cattle." Nothing new. In fact, it's just what the supernatural are accustomed to after ages of practice. Now imagine that, without warning, a handful of those mortals suddenly "wake up" — they see vampires hidden in shadows, they stand defiant against Garou in Crinos form, they look straight into the eye of the restless dead, or they pierce directly through to changelings' fae mien. Not only that, these people, the scales torn from their eyes, have powers never seen before. And whether directed by an unseen hand, granted divine grace or invested with instinctive understanding, these mortals know how to use their newfound capabilities to deadly effect. That's when the shit really hits the fan.

What becomes of these imbued people and the creatures they oppose is ultimately up to you and your troupe. Would-be hunters might be decimated. Monsters may be slain. It all depends on the kinds of characters who participate in your ongoing game. However, in the long run, a new kind of protagonist is introduced to live-action roleplaying. This kind of human might be intent on destroying all creatures and delivering the fate of any supernatural who fails to cover his tracks carefully. Or an imbued could be sympathetic to monsters, suspecting that they might have been human once and could be again; it's just a matter of bringing the creatures back over from the other side. Either way, players of vampires or werewolves are forced to be wary, either to stay alert for fear of unprovoked attack from a once-docile humanity, or for fear of being confronted with memories or thoughts of a life left behind long ago when days were still numbered or the mundane world was reality.

Mind's Eye is also an ideal tool with which to depict the development of a hunter. The days and weeks following her change are torment for one of the imbued. These characters witness monsters everywhere — on the street, at work, at church, even in the home. The worst part is that no one else sees these things, nor do they understand what your character is talking about. Is she cracking up? Has she gone mad? Suspicious co-workers look at her askance. Loved ones grow distant. Trying to explain what your character sees and knows just drives everyone away — and maybe, just maybe, your friends and family avoid you because they are not human!

Roleplaying this isolation and decline offers amazing dramatic opportunities. Imagine a seemingly crazed person making "random" appearances in an otherwise normal **Masquerade** game. Is she a newly sired Malkavian, perhaps? Clearly not when the



"madwoman" reappears in the next chapter, now reconciled with reality and prepared to contend with the beings she has seen over and over and finally understands.

Confronting solo imbued in your live-action game is just one option. Although hunters have powers and the ability to see the supernatural, they are still mortal, and they can be killed—especially solitary ones. Consider this: Questioning their own sanity, the recently imbued turn to friends and loved ones, perhaps even the police to tell their story. Their responses are shock, pity and maybe even more trouble, such as incarceration "for their own good." The rest of humanity just doesn't understand.

So who do you, witness to monstrosities and endowed with unfathomable capabilities, turn to? Some find solace among the others at the scene of the change, the other "ordinary people" who saw that first creature and wielded amazing power, too. Maybe they will understand.

Whether you return to the scene of the crime in hopes of finding the others, go online in search of people like you or simply search the city for your "companions," you might eventually discover fellow imbued. The result is typically a group of hunters: people who initially seek reassurance that they're sane but who suddenly realize that they must stick together. After all, if they're not insane, the world must be.

Imagine a group of players with mortal characters who are imbued in one live-action event. Then, two or three sessions later, they return, this time unified, trained in their capabilities and with a potentially extreme prejudice against the creatures of the night.

By introducing this element, **Hunter: The Reckoning** can make for a significant addition to your live-action roleplaying experiences. The game allows you to expand beyond the possibilities of mortal characters. It also lets you change the terms by which supernatural characters play. Not all mortals are mere pawns and food anymore. Some can turn and fight back—with amazing powers.

Of course, **Hunter** only exists in tabletop format. However, its setting is the same as that of all the other Storyteller games, **Mind's Eye** included. Thus, you can always adapt **Hunter**'s unique rules and powers over for use in your live-action games, and presto: a whole new kind of character to stalk the night. Then again, it might only be a matter of time before official live-action rules for the imbued come to light....

For now, consider translating **Hunter** characters as introducing a new kind of live-action experience. The imbued are the common people faced with the brutal extremity of the World of Darkness. That's the real fun of the game. They're not secret agents or members of some occult secret society. They're regular Joes and Janes thrust into situations way beyond their comprehension. When was the last time your live-action troupe had fun playing *regular* people?

EVENT HORIZON: UPCOMING LARP EVENTS

If you've been taking notes, you'll notice that the format of this feature is a little different. I've decided to remove the frequency listings for each of these LARP listings as the vagaries of a six-month development-to-publication cycle tend to play havoc with scheduling concerns. Everything else is pretty much the same, so help yourself to the info herein. If you'd like to see your LARP listed here (or the info I've got here on your LARP is incorrect or out of date), drop me an e-mail with the information I'm looking for.

VAMPIRE EVENTS

NORTHWESTERN US

Blood Moon Social Club; Las Vegas, NV
<http://www.bloodmoonsocialclub.com>
 (702) 877-1813

Ruby Rain Society; Mountlake, WA
 Tracy Soldan, tarot01@juno.com

Dark Necropolis; Kitsap, WA
mrdeath@u.washington.edu

Tacoma; Tacoma, WA
sheperd@darkdestiny.com
 (253) 581-8728

Of No Concern; Eugene, OR
Jmcloud@gladstone.uoregon.edu

The Outlands; South King County, WA
jasoncarl@earthlink.net

Trails End Troupe; Oregon City, OR
TheChylde@aol.com

Theatre of Roses; Portland, OR
 Kewi-Cee Chu, kc@csua.berkely.edu

Dark Salem; Salem, OR
 Preston Malone,
Coordinatrix@hotmail.com

Seattle; Seattle, WA
seattledomain@usa.net

Nox ad Infinitum; Fairbanks, AK
fsdck@aurora.alaska.edu

Ivory Masque; Anchorage, AK
glitter_boy@hotmail.com

Dark Tears; Walla Walla, WA
annapuma@hotmail.com

MIDWESTERN US

Crimson Facade; Indianapolis, IN
 Paul M. Starr, tophat@indy.net
 (317) 466-9064

SOUTHWESTERN U.S.

Domain of Mountain Shadows; Provo,
UT

Nikki McCoriston,
N.Burton@m.cc.utah.edu
(801) 363-3959

Moonlight Masquerade; Marysville, CA
Jennifer Young, kaidin@syix.com

Labyrinth of Crying Shadows (Sabbat
Game); Sacramento, CA
Adam Abramson,
vallombrosa@hotmail.com

NORTHCENTRAL U.S.

Dominion of Solitude; Topeka, KS
Jeffery P. Harrington,
harri999@geocities.com

Ground Zero; Colorado Springs, CO
Travis Page, Darkholme@kkvtv.com
(719) 328-0605

Ebon Seraph; Omaha, NE
davosburgh@aol.com

SOUTHCENTRAL U.S.

Crimson Tear Society; Jonesboro, AR
Tom McFarland, thomasmc@fastdata.net
(870) 931-0959

Legio Noctem; Dallas, TX
Billy Lucas, williamlucas@juno.com
(972) 788-1895

Fourth Tower Falling; Dallas, TX
David Doub, Brujah@gte.net
(972) 788-1895

Kentucky Fried; Dallas, TX
Lance Gillson,
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(972) 788-1895

Garden of Thorns; Clear Lake, TX
wesley_ooc@juno.com

Eighth Legion; Dallas, TX
James Potter, kingsnight@hotmail.com
(972) 788-1895

Midnight Rose; Clear Lake, TX
prefect@texas.net

Bryan/College Station; Bryan/College
Station, TX

House of the Eternal Rose; Clear Lake,
TX
prefect@texas.net

THE GREAT LAKES

Coterie of the Crimson Night; St. Louis,
MO
Jamie Schneider, jaclon@juno.com
(314) 837-3640

Impiorum Pecatta ("Sins of the Damned");
Warrensburg, MO
Storyteller: Jason Hibdon,
eugee@cyberjunkie.com
<http://www.cyberjunkie.com/eugee>

NORTHEAST U.S.

Severed Sun; Boston, MA
Sean Donnelly
(617) 656-2891

House of the Crescent Moon; Boston,
MA
giovanni@cybercom.net
(617) 576-1097

EAST CENTRAL U.S.

Bay of Blood; Baltimore, MD
<http://www.geocities.com/Colosseum/>
Sideline/5931/

Ed Adelsberger, edla@erols.com

The Dark Capital Domain
Chris Herr, mephis@juno.com
(703) 273-5530

Das Dae'Mar; State Capitol Complex,
WV
WachuDancR@aol.com

House of the Unknown; Pittsburgh, PA
cam@andrew.cmu.edu

The Most Deadly Game; Baltimore, MD
Joseph Palser, palserj@columbia.aim-smart.com

Mudge Lounge; Pittsburgh, PA
cam@andrew.cmu.edu

A Stake in the Heartland II; Northeast
Ohio
Ryan S. Cope, cedric@neo.rr.com
(330) 923-4483

Shadows on the Mall; Washington, D.C.
<http://members.aol.com/dellacruz/SotM/Index.html>
Abigail Moore Shoemaker,
ams@gwis2.circ.gwu.edu

Towson LARP; Baltimore, MD
Ryan Sachse, tsachse@ycp.edu

Vitae Aeternus; Hyattsville, MD
<http://members.home.com/stevesar/>
Royal Connell, underdog@clark.net

SOUTHEAST U.S.

Club Seraphim; Norfolk, VA
<http://www.angelfire.com/va/>
ClubSeraphim
club_seraphim@hotmail.com

Ft. Lauderdale; Ft. Lauderdale, FL
Contact: PrintError@mindless.com

Night's Children; Atlanta, GA
<http://larp.digitribe.org>
Jason Norred, hemlock@mindspring.com

Seraphim Saloon; Norfolk, VA
<http://www.angelfire.com/va/>
ClubSeraphim
club_seraphim@hotmail.com

Shades of Pale Society; Chattanooga, TN
Laura Middleton, shades@larp.com
(423) 876-4561

Succubus Club; Atlanta, GA

House of the Sanguine Moon; Tampa, FL
Hope Summerall, zandria@hotmail.com

Eclipsed Moon; Charleston, SC
Ian Betts, alisterlegare@hotmail.com

Kindred of the Shadows; Auburn, AL
boudrej@mail.auburn.edu

Shadows of Vulcan; Birmingham, AL
Sarah Riggs,
coordinator@shadowsofvulcan.com

Libertas Aeterna; Charlotte, NC
Tim Harris, harrist@cs.winthrop.edu

GAROU

NORTHEAST US

Apocalypse Rochester, Rochester NY
Chris Manos, cmanos@worldnet.att.net

NORTHWEST US

Ruby Rain Society; Edmonds, WA
Tracy Soldan, tarot01@juno.com

Tacoma; Tacoma, WA
sheperd@darkdestiny.com
(253) 581-8728

Of No Concern; Eugene, OR
Jmcloud@gladstone.uoregon.edu

Theatre of Roses; Battleground, WA
Kwei-Cee Chu, kc@csua.berkeley.edu

Seattle; Seattle, WA
seattledomain@usa.net

Olde Guard; Anchorage, AK
Tom Alexander,
nightstalker@customcpu.com

EAST CENTRAL US

The Sept of the Awakening; Washington D.C.
Mindy Williams,
terhunepayson@juno.com

NORTH CENTRAL US

Knights of Rage; Colorado Springs, CO
Dan Page, AllmityBob@aol.com
(719) 447-0399

SOUTH CENTRAL US

Crimson Tear Society; Jonesboro, AR
Tom McFarland, thomasmc@fastdata.net
(870) 931-0959

Fourth Tower Falling; Dallas, TX
Matt Ragan, matt_ragan@hotmail.com
(972) 788-1895

Bryan/College Station; B/CS, TX
Ken Reinertson, khr7057@unix.tamu.edu

SOUTHEAST US

House of the Sanguine Moon; Tampa, FL
Hope Summerall, zandria@hotmail.com Onyx Illuminatus; Charleston, SC
ian Betts, alisterlegare@hotmail.com

OTHERS (UNSPECIFIED AND MIXED GAMES)

East of the River; Vernon, CT
<http://www.geocities.com/~narrator>
D. Scott Stewart;
Storyteller@LRSGames.com

Fortress of the Mind's Eye; Lansing, MI
Aaron Ledger, ledgeraa@pilot.msu.edu
(517) 372-1452

Nox Imperium; Longview, WA
katzmeow@kalama.com
Outlands; South King County, WA
tsigane@wizards.com

Trails End Troupe; Salem, OR
Coordinatrix@hotmail.com

GAMES AROUND THE WORLD

UNITED KINGDOM

Vampire LARP; Cambridge, England
Scott Sommerville,
some@globalnet.co.uk

Mage LARP; Darlington, England
Jonnikiss@hotmail.com

Garou LARP; Darlington, England
Jonnikiss@hotmail.com

Vampire LARP; Darlington, England
Jonnikiss@hotmail.com

Vampire LARP; Edinburgh, Scotland
Kevin Drugan,
kevin@gehenna.prestel.co.uk

Vampire LARP; Glasgow, Scotland
David Evans,
misty@mudhole.spodnet.uk.com

Vampire LARP; Greenwich, England
David Young,
david_young@smokeandmirrors.freeserve.co.uk

Vampire LARP; High Wycombe by Night
Contact Ritch or Barry, +44 (0) 149 445 0570

Mage LARP; Hampshire, England
Grim@postmort.demon.co.uk

Vampire LARP; London, England
Angus Abranson,
angus@cubicle7.freeserve.co.uk
+44 (0) 181 343 4960

Vampire LARP; Manchester, England
Kyne Brooker,
Mfnx6kab@fs1.art.man.ac.uk

Mage LARP; Oxford, England
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martin@shadowgallery.freeserve.co.uk

Vampire LARP; Reading, England
Robert Baker-Self, Robert@fiddlers-green.demon.co.uk

Changeling LARP; Reading, England
Robert Baker-Self, Robert@fiddlers-green.demon.co.uk

Vampire LARP; Stafford, England
Ian Dickson, ian.dickson@gecm.com

Vampire, LARP; Stoke, England
Alan Brumpton, Finn@mcmail.com

Garou LARP; Stoke, England
Alan Brumpton, Finn@mcmail.com

Changeling LARP; Stoke, England
Alan Brumpton, Finn@mcmail.com

Mage LARP; Stoke, England
Alan Brumpton, Finn@mcmail.com

Vampire LARP; Wakefield, England
Josie Murtagh,
Josie@imhome.freeserve.co.uk

Vampire LARP; Weston-super-Mare,
England
Alex Sinclair, alex@random-thought.freeserve.co.uk

THE NETHERLANDS

An up-to-date Calendar of all Dutch games
(and European Camarilla games) can be
found at <http://www.troy.demon.nl/vampire>

CONSCIENCE / CONVICTION

OOOOO

SELF-CONTROL / INSTINCT

OOOOO

COURAGE

OOOOO

BLOOD

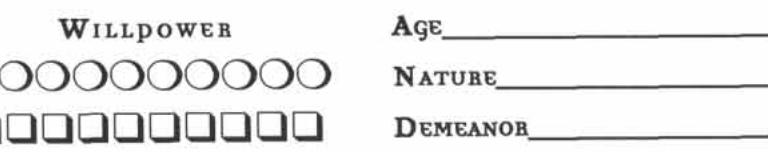
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□□□□□□□□□□

WILLPOWER

OOOOOOOOOO

□□□□□□□□□□



NAME _____

CHARACTER _____

CHRONICLE _____

CLAN _____

GENERATION _____

AGE _____

NATURE _____

DEMEANOR _____

MERITS & FLAWS

ABILITIES

DISCIPLINES

MENTAL

INFLUENCES

SOCIAL

BACKGROUNDS

PHYSICAL

DATH / HUMANITY