

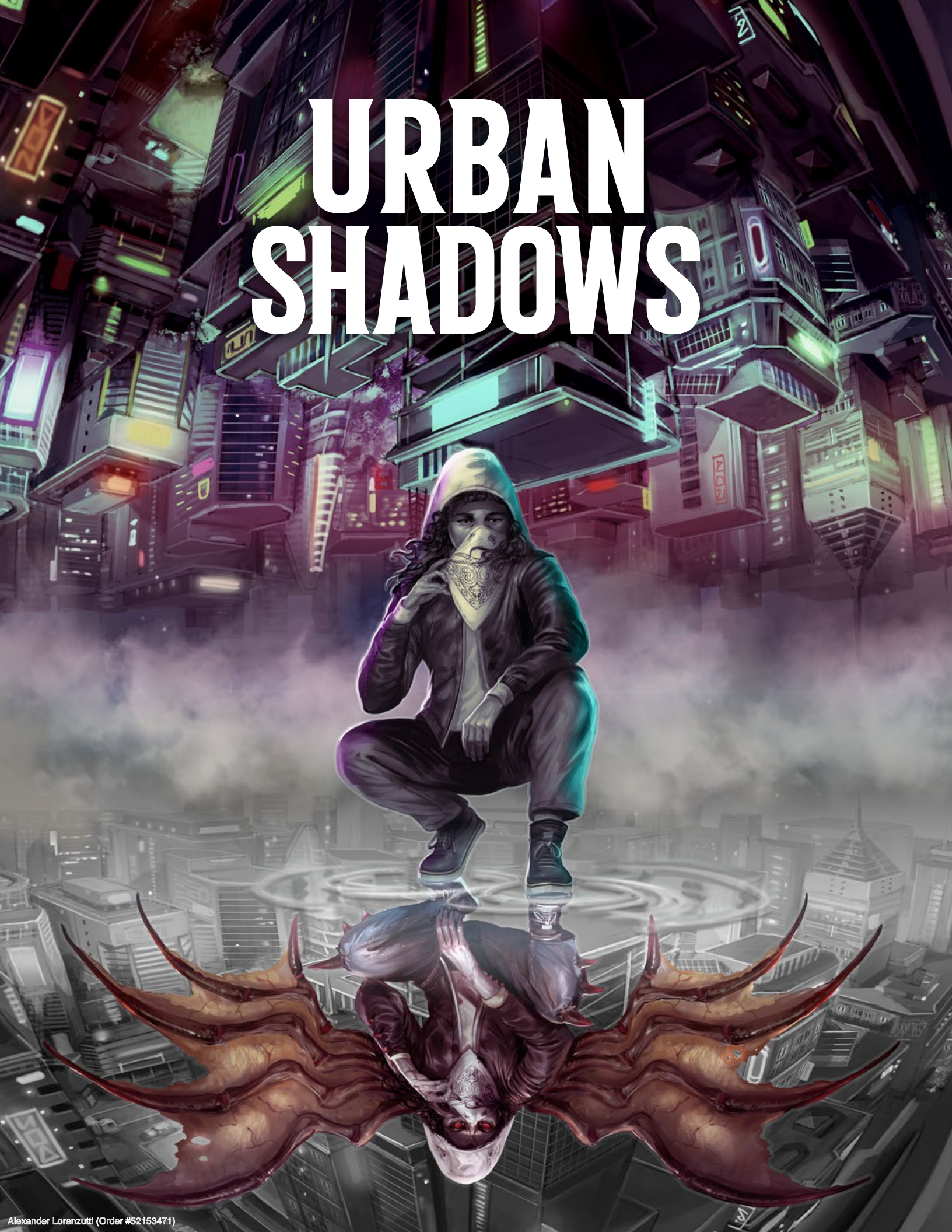
# URBAN SHADOWS



URBAN FANTASY ROLEPLAYING GAME



# URBAN SHADOWS





# CREDITS

**PROJECT MANAGER:** Elizabeth Chaipraditkul

**LEAD DESIGNERS:** Mark Diaz Truman & Marissa Kelly

**CONTRIBUTING DESIGNERS:** Miguel Ángel Espinoza, Wesley E. Anderson, Brendan G. Conway, Summer Matthews, Andrew Medeiros, Evan Rowland, Hannah Shaffer, & Sarah “Sam” Saltiel

**LEAD WRITER:** Mark Diaz Truman

**CONTRIBUTING WRITERS:** Kate Bullock, Elizabeth Chaipraditkul, Brendan G. Conway, Sarah Doom, Reyna M., Andrew Medeiros, and Helena Real

**DEVELOPMENTAL EDITING:** Brendan G. Conway

**COPY EDITING:** Monte Lin

**PROOFREADING:** Katherine Fackrell

**INDEXING:** J. Derrick Kapchinsky

**LAYOUT & GRAPHIC DESIGN:** Miguel Ángel Espinoza

**ADDITIONAL LAYOUT:** Mark Diaz Truman

**ART DIRECTION:** Marissa Kelly

**ART:** Thomas Deeny, Jaqueline Florencio, Mirco Pagnessi, Meagan Trott, Tony Washington

**STAFF SUPPORT:** Kate Bullock, Christi Cardenas, Meg Creaturo Anaya, Sarah Doom, Derrick Kapchinsky, Adam McEwen, Adriana Monroy, Valerie Osbourn, Chris Samson, Sarah “Sam” Satiel

**Printed by GameBeings**

**URBAN SHADOWS** was created by Andrew Medeiros and Mark Diaz Truman and is copyright 2015 by Magpie Games, including all text and art. All rights are reserved.

This text draws upon the material found in *Urban Shadows: First Edition*, which benefited greatly from the editing of Amanda Valentine and the proofreading of Shelley Harlan.

The mechanics of **URBAN SHADOWS** are based on the Powered by the Apocalypse framework originally developed by Vicent and Meguey Baker of Lumpley Games. You can find more of their work at [lumpley.games](http://lumpley.games).

**URBAN SHADOWS** was made possible by the more than 4,000 backers who funded the project in 2020. Special thanks to all our backers—especially Lisa Padol & Shaun Attfield—for their comments on early drafts and preview releases!



# CONTENTS

## INTRODUCTION ..... 7

A City of Stories .....	10
Playing to Find Out .....	12
What You Need To Play .....	13

## CITIES OF SHADOW..... 15

The City .....	18
Mortalis .....	22
Night .....	24
Power .....	26
Wild .....	28

## FUNDAMENTALS OF PLAY..... 31

Framing Scenes .....	34
Core Elements .....	41
Starting a Game .....	52

## CHARACTER CREATION..... 57

Picking a Playbook .....	60
Your Choices .....	61
Other Aspects .....	66
Starting Play .....	68

## CORE MOVES ..... 71

Basic Moves .....	74
Circle Moves .....	86
Debt Moves .....	90
City Moves .....	96
Custom Moves .....	105

## PLAYBOOKS..... 107

The Aware .....	110
The Fae .....	116
The Hunter .....	122
The Imp .....	128
The Oracle .....	134
The Spectre .....	140
The Sworn .....	146
The Tainted .....	152
The Vamp .....	158
The Veteran.....	164
The Wizard .....	170
The Wolf .....	176

## ADVANCEMENT..... 183

Circle Advancement .....	186
Corruption Advancement .....	192
Creating a New PC .....	193

## MASTER OF CEREMONIES ..... 195

Agendas .....	198
Principles .....	199
MC Moves .....	205
Circle Moves for the MC .....	213
Creating & Using NPCs .....	218
Behind the Playbooks .....	223
Behind the City Hubs .....	228
Dangerous Content .....	230
The First Session .....	232
Successful One-Shots .....	239
The Long Example .....	240

## LONG-TERM PLAY..... 247

Factions .....	250
The Faction Turn.....	255
Faction Moves .....	257
Changing Seasons .....	265
Faction Turn Example .....	268

## CITY GUIDES..... 273

### CHICAGO..... 276

A City of Steel & Glass .....	278
Mortalis .....	282
Night .....	284
Power .....	286
Wild .....	288

### SANTIAGO..... 290

A City of Lies & Sorrow.....	292
Mortalis .....	296
Night .....	298
Power .....	300
Wild .....	302

## APPENDIX..... 304



# AN ECHO OF VIOLENCE

Isabelle swirled the cabernet in her mouth, sighing in pleasure as the flavor of blackberries and vanilla crossed her tongue. It weakened her to manifest enough to taste it, but she so rarely had the opportunity to indulge herself. The sound of a cleared throat interrupted her reverie; Isabelle sighed and returned her gaze back to the dead wizard lying on the table in front of her.

"Vincent always did have the best wine collection." She glanced around the penthouse's office, taking in the expansive view, the luxurious modern furniture, the open bottle of wine on the desk, the sacred relics now scattered in the aftermath of violence. "Never wanted anything but the best for himself, no matter who he had to hurt to get it."

"I didn't ask you here to drink my patron's wine or comment on his things." Calas, Vincent's student, scowled from his spot beside the door. "I just want to know who sabotaged his ritual. You know I'm bound to avenge his death before I'm free."

"I know. Such a shame about that geas." Isabelle inspected the tag attached to the ritual dagger in Vincent's back. The handwriting of the magical sigil penned on it looked familiar. "I do this and we're even, Calas. His list of enemies is pretty extensive. Knowing who killed Vincent could be dangerous."

"Power has a price."

Isabelle nodded in agreement, her attention focused on Vincent's open pocketwatch, the glass shattered and the hands stopped just short of midnight. The wizard's body was sprawled out inside an elaborate circle burned into the wooden table, with fat black candles marking the cardinal points. A smoky glass laid next to a puddle of wine and another small dagger rested in front of an altar. Standard magical implements, maybe even too basic for a wizard of Vincent's standing.

"What was the ritual he was performing?"

"Communicating with someone who had passed over." Calas's answer came swift and smooth. Too smooth. Isabelle frowned at him, but the student shrugged. "The details aren't important."

"If that were true, Vincent would be pouring himself some of his fabulous wine and neither of us would be here," Isabelle shot back. "You need me."

Calas hesitated, then nodded. "If I could tell you, I would tell you."

She frowned a moment longer, but admitted that it sounded like Calas was telling the truth. Isabelle set aside her glass and raised her hands over the body. She pushed her senses out, feeling the weird resistance left over from the magic performed earlier, the faintest echo of violence. Isabelle gritted her teeth and pushed harder, willing the veil to part, and coldness beyond death seeped into her.

Calas gasped as strands of glittering matter lifted from Isabelle's form, swirling in the air and forming an image of Vincent moving through his ritual. He was adjusting the altar on the table when the knife rose up and plunged into his back. Feeling strangely numb, Isabelle directed her attention to the tag on the knife, and a new visage formed in the ectoplasm—Elora, her battle-scarred but friendly face, thick dark curls escaping her headscarf. Elora wasn't known for killing wizards, especially well-connected ones like Vincent, but her temper could have gotten the better of her. Not good, considering she'd made Isabelle swear to never interfere with her assignments.

There was something else, however, another presence that appeared as a shadowy form: medium height, muscular, with a light welling from their heart and shining along the sword they carried. Isabelle recognized her new lover, Gareth, just as Calas straightened.

"That's the knight the Wizard's Council just hired. That can't be right. They're supposed to protect the council." Calas turned to her. "Are you sure about this?"

Isabelle hesitated, torn between her affection for Gareth and her loyalty to Elora. "It looks like they may have been involved, but..."

Calas started towards her, but stopped as if he hit a wall. Isabelle looked around in alarm as colors began shining from the sigils burned into the wood. The room darkened, and the circle burst out of the wood and into the air, magical runes floating in the void and expanding out to fill the room. Calas screamed, a high sharp sound that cut off abruptly.



There was a chuckle in the darkness.

"You're a smart little ghostie, aren't you?" The voice was deep and unfamiliar. "Oh yes, Vincent was trying to reach into the afterlife, but not just to talk. No, he thought he could get rid of me."

A spike of darkness probed the edges of the circle, then spiraled towards Isabelle. She kept an eye on it, but concentrated on the voice.

"Vincent was afraid of me, of what I knew, of who I knew. He thought his magics could keep him safe, and he could keep draining people for what he wanted. He thought he could just snap his fingers and send me packing..."

The spike stabbed into the back of Isabelle's hand. Cold pain radiated through her. She cried out and backed into the center of the circle as the voice laughed again.

"Do you think you can send me into the dark, little ghostie?"











# INTRODUCTION



# Chapter 1

*Welcome, friend...*

I know it's been a long journey to get here—literally and metaphorically—but the city has time enough for all, even those of us who dallied a bit on our path. You were destined to end up here; the sinners and the saints alike have already made room.

*Welcome...*

It doesn't matter *how* you arrived, of course. Whether you crossed over from a different dimension to this meager mortal coil or caught a bus from Pittsburgh using a ticket your sister-in-law bought for you online, the effect is the same. You're here now, and that's all that matters.

*Welcome.*

If you're one of those "new" city residents who has actually been here for some time, ignorant perhaps of the true nature of the city—the supernatural world that has existed just off-screen for your *entire* mortal existence—the salutation extends all the same. It's best to give yourself time to adjust; you'll be seeing things differently now, with eyes cursed by truth unshrouded by lies.

*Welcome...*

Everyone is very much looking forward to seeing what you've brought to this fair city. Beauty? Magic? Vengeance? Don't be shy, not now. Whatever it is you've dug up inside yourself that's led you to this moment, the city has surely seen it before. In a world where pompous wizards obsess over relics of a long-forgotten age and guttersnipe vampires throw blood raves every other Tuesday...little can surprise.

*Welcome...*

But don't think you won't matter, now that you're here. The truth is...you're the most important thing to walk these streets in some time. Anyone who knows anything can see clearly that things are going to change around here. It's people like you that upset the balance and rewrite the rules; it's people like you that plunge the city into chaos and rescue it from the brink; it's people like you that make living here worth it...

*Welcome...*



## WHAT IS URBAN SHADOWS?

**URBAN SHADOWS** is a political urban fantasy role-playing game. When you play it, you and your friends (or acquaintances) tell a story together, a tale of supernatural drama and political intrigue set in a modern-day city. Some of the characters in this story are mortal, but they might also be touched by otherworldly forces, transformed into ghosts, vampires, werewolves, and wizards and locked into a world of supernatural debts and obligations.

Each of you takes on the role of one of these characters, speaking as they speak and deciding what actions they take, participating in a conversation that will push you to interesting emotional places. Your characters might be lovers, friends, enemies, or allies, but they are inextricably involved with each other, like the cast of a TV show. You sometimes get to feel what your characters feel—if you're lucky—but other times you point the characters toward disaster and delight in the fallout from a safe emotional distance.

The rules of this story involve some negotiation and chance. The conversation often requires you to roll dice to find out what happens, a way of keeping things unpredictable so that the story doesn't stagnate or deflate. The tale you're telling doesn't belong to any one person, any more than a dinner conversation or a talk over a cup of coffee belongs to the host. Everyone gets to contribute a bit, even the dice.

The story you're telling isn't random, though. Above all else, **URBAN SHADOWS** is a game about cities, the people who live in them, and the machines that make them run. It's a political game, one that challenges our preconceptions about conflicts between communities, and asks us to navigate complex identities in a demanding social structure. It is personal and political for mortals and monsters alike. It drives hard toward these ideas and asks players to reflect on their own experiences and ideals.

**URBAN SHADOWS** isn't just a game about race relations at City Hall or tax code regulations on the docket with the city council—although maybe those things will come up in your story. It's a game about monsters—creatures of legends, folklore, and modern-day myths—and the cities they inhabit. It's a game in which you get to decide if you're a hero or a villain, not just once but over and over and over. It's a game that asks "What would you give of yourself to serve your community?" and "What would you give up to get what you want?"

## HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

While everything here is useful for understanding **URBAN SHADOWS** as a whole, each chapter provides a different lens. You are unlikely to read the book cover to cover; it's often more helpful to jump to the part of the book you need to understand in the moment. For example, you might start by reading the first two to three chapters to get a sense of the game, then jump to **Chapter 6: Playbooks** to learn more about the characters you might want to play. Here's a quick guide:

- ♦ **Chapter 1: Introduction**—this chapter—briefly introduces the world of **URBAN SHADOWS** and explains what you need to play the game.
- ♦ **Chapter 2: Cities of Shadow** dives more deeply into the setting, explaining key concepts like Circles, Debt, and Status.
- ♦ **Chapter 3: Fundamentals of Play** explains the basic rules of the game, including how to frame scenes and resolve uncertainty.
- ♦ **Chapter 4: Character Creation** teaches you how to create characters, and includes an example of character creation.
- ♦ **Chapter 5: Core Moves** lays out the moves of the game, the unique mechanics that live at the heart of the game and drive the fiction of its stories.
- ♦ **Chapter 6: Playbooks** offers an in-depth look at each character type—called playbooks—and their unique features and abilities.
- ♦ **Chapter 7: Advancement** explores how characters grow and change over time, both via mechanical advancement and events that occur in the story.
- ♦ **Chapter 8: Master of Ceremonies** provides guidance and structure for the person—the Master of Ceremonies—facilitating the game and portraying the world outside of the player characters.
- ♦ **Chapter 9: Long-Term Play** gives the Master of Ceremonies—the MC—additional tools for presenting institutions and the passage of time.
- ♦ **Chapter 10: City Guides** contains two settings for **URBAN SHADOWS**—Chicago, USA and Santiago, Chile—including a conflict for each city and characters, factions, and locations.
- ♦ **Appendix** holds useful play materials like the basic moves sheet, MC worksheet, and City Hubs, as well as the index.



# CITY OF STORIES

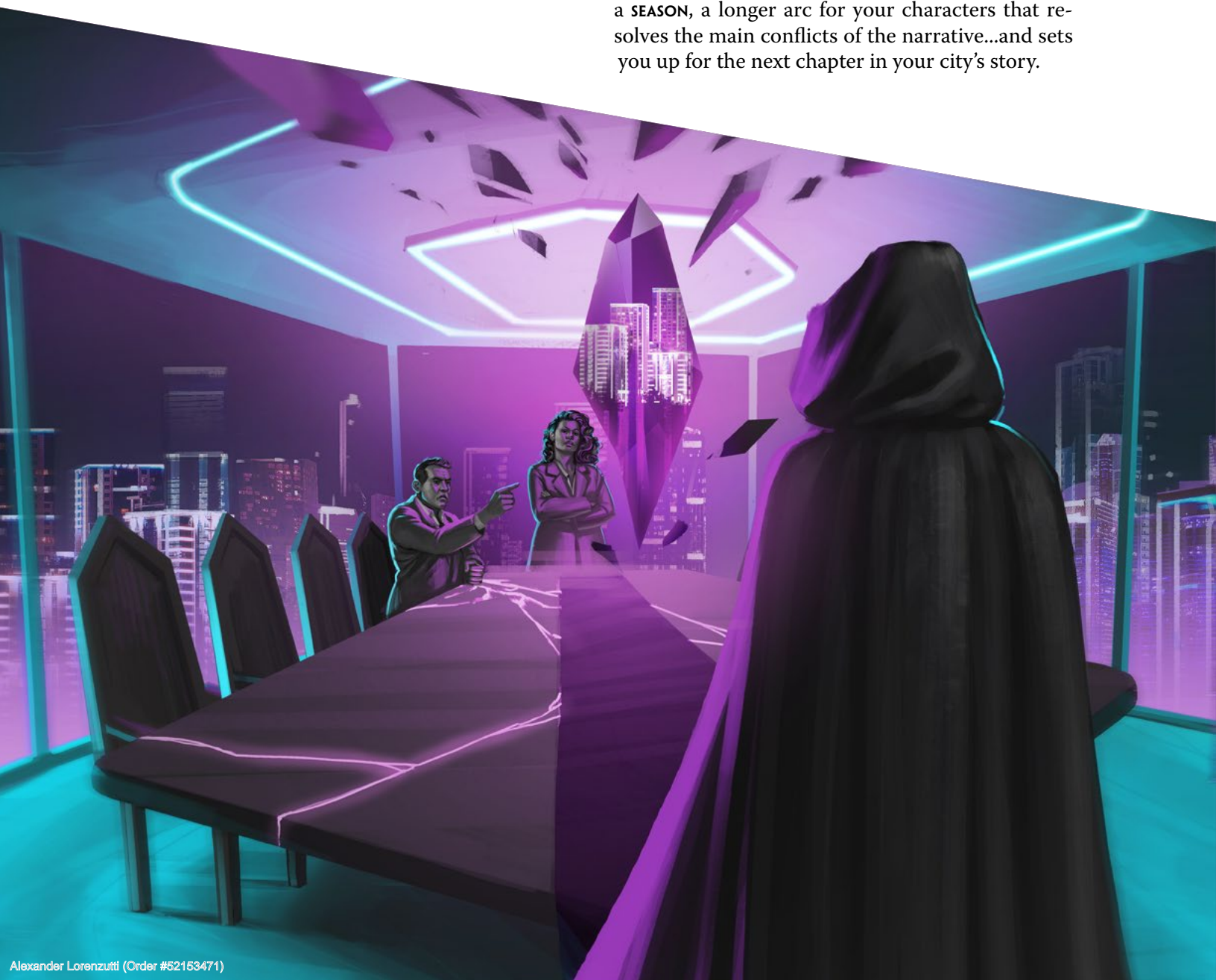
## A CITY OF STORIES

Like any urban fantasy story, **URBAN SHADOWS** tells the tale of individuals who have crossed the line between the mundane and supernatural worlds. Living together in a metropolis filled with opportunity and danger alike, the politics of these supernatural communities is the secret heartbeat underlying the truth of the city's real identity.

The city itself is divided into four **CIRCLES**, broad communities that reflect the realities of life in the supernatural community—Mortalis, Night, Power, and Wild. You can read more about the Circles on page 18, but suffice to say that each reflects a perspective on the politics of the city. For example, Night is the community of those who were once human—vampires, werewolves, and ghosts—who now seek to control the city's streets, obsessed with their own hungers and needs.

As you start to play, you and your fellow players create individual characters—**PLAYER CHARACTERS**—who are the protagonists of the story you tell together, members of those very Circles who must navigate an intricate web of debt and status to get what they need from the city and each other. You aren't necessarily friends, but you aren't hateful enemies either; your characters know each other, but they too have a history that informs how they think about their relationships.

Individual sessions of your game—**EPISODES**—play out like episodes of a television show. The MC helps to structure a story that cuts back and forth between your characters, sometimes showcasing the group and sometimes focusing on just one character. Taken together, many episodes make up a **SEASON**, a longer arc for your characters that resolves the main conflicts of the narrative...and sets you up for the next chapter in your city's story.





## RACE, GENDER, QUEERNESS

These types of stories—tales of cities and the monsters who inhabit them—have been told before, in blockbuster movies and serial television and trashy paperback novels available at your local supermarket. They shock and delight audiences by promising something dark and edgy, a glimpse into the deviant fangs of monstrous desire.

Yet for all their purported subversion, they are shockingly normative. A girl who hunts vampires convinces herself that one boy vampire isn't so bad. A wizard living at the edge of society realizes his friends are a kind of family. A werewolf finally masters his beast by falling in love with the right woman. Demons are slain by the just; the innocent escape a terrible fate. The usual.

And almost all of these stories—plastered on billboards and sold in bulk—are about straight, cis, heterosexual, monogamous, white people.

Isn't that strange? The culture of our cities isn't owned by the majority; it's the product of queer activists, outlaw breakers and graf writers, feminists of every race and creed, and immigrants from every corner of the globe. The story of cities is by default the story of *exactly* the kind of people most often excluded by urban fantasy as a genre. The weirdos. The dreamers. The different.

The boundaries that separate communities in **URBAN SHADOWS** are a metaphor for this kind of content. Your characters live at the intersection of different identities, and they have to wrestle with what those identities mean to them, both mortal and supernatural. Some of these identities coalesce into supernatural institutions like Circles and factions, governing the lives of supernatural creatures while remaining invisible to mortals; others are as “normal” as your race, gender, or sexual orientation, familiar categories whose mundane meaning carries, in part, across the divide between the mortal and supernatural worlds.

The characters in **URBAN SHADOWS**—both those you create and those the MC creates—reflect this reality. They have origins, both cultural and institutional, that stretch back into the past, their identities tied up both in who they are now and how they came to be who they are. *There is no default.* Instead, the city is a beautiful, complex, and frustrating set of overlapping communities that provides a backdrop for the stories of people trying to get what they need from the city and each other.

## DIVERSITY IN PLAY

As central as the conflicts between communities are to **URBAN SHADOWS**, you still have a role to play in embracing the diversity that lies at the heart of the city. Here are some tips for making this content a priority at your table:

- ♦ Play a character of a different race, gender, or sexual orientation from your own. You're not a wizard or a vampire in real life either!
- ♦ Establish elements of your character that are culturally inherited. How does your vampire prepare to drink blood? What church did your hunter go to as a child?
- ♦ Remember your character has origins that extend before this story began. Ask each other questions about family history, about immigration status, about the time before now.
- ♦ Drive your character toward the boundaries between communities. Explore what it means to love someone your community hates or to violate some norm of your people, mortal or supernatural. Try to live with the tensions of flawed community norms.

Don't worry about your characters being too different from each other; the mechanics of **URBAN SHADOWS** consistently push characters together. You'll owe debts to people in Circles other than your own—obligations that push you across boundaries to deal with each other's problems—and you'll have relationships, romances, and rivalries that defy the customs of your tribe. As play goes on, you'll also develop loyalties that make you question the boundaries of your identity. You might even join a different community entirely, leaving behind one set of priorities for another.

But the mechanics of the game will also remind you that you aren't alike. There are differences between vampires and wizards, ghosts and oracles, hunters and demons. Differences that can't so quickly be overcome. Old feuds. Old hatreds. Old fears. History.

And that's what cities are about: difference and boundaries, diversity and exclusion. Each community completely self-sufficient but in desperate need of what other communities have to offer. Chaos at the borders. Cities are the push and pull of progress, messy and violent when you least expect trouble, beautiful and touching in the darkest places. This is the world your characters explore together when you play **URBAN SHADOWS**.



# TO FIND OUT

## PLAYING TO FIND OUT

**URBAN SHADOWS** depends upon a crucial core idea: *play to find out what happens*.

As you play, you might be tempted to plot out where you want things to go, to drive the story and the narrative toward some place you think is interesting or fun or satisfying. But the truth is that it's not your story. It's not even your group's story.

It's *the city's* story.

Your group tells the story, of course, but it's not yours to control. You can't plan out the next dramatic scene or plot an arc for your character. The mechanics of the game push you from one conflict to the next, from one messy situation to the next difficult choice, and you only see the story in the rearview mirror. The road ahead is always dark, mysterious, and full of potential.

Playing **URBAN SHADOWS** requires discipline, a commitment to the moment at hand instead of the next ten moments you might want. The moment you know where things are going is the moment that the story feels dead. Trust that you're going somewhere interesting. **Play to find out what happens.** The surprises are most of the fun.

## SAFETY TOOLS

Following the game where it takes your story can sometimes lead to you to uncomfortable spaces, especially when the darkness of the setting threatens to overwhelm hope. It's okay to tackle serious subjects—urban fantasy is uniquely attuned to issues like race and class—provided you and your group have the tools you need to do so safely.

In general, it's always a good idea to talk about the game as a group. Figure out before you play what kind of tone you want to strike, and be willing during play to check in with each other. Try to be mature and understanding with each other as you talk about how the game affected you and others, including times in which you disagreed about what should happen or how it felt.

Beyond talking, here are a few specific tools that can help your group stay on the same page as you play together. You might have your own tools that you use, but these are reliable standards.

## LINES AND VEILS

Lines and Veils is an exercise developed by Ron Edwards—and expanded by the gaming community—to facilitate a discussion about what content you want to exclude completely (lines) and what content you want to fade to black on instead of showing it “on-screen” (veils). Before you sit down to play, ask every player—including the MC—to contribute to a shared list of lines and veils. Players should add content they don't want to see at all in the game to the list of lines and content they want to include (but not see directly) on the list of veils. Lines should never appear in your game; veiled content can be included but never shown directly. Each group's preferences for lines and veils is different!

You can read more about using lines and veils at [tinyurl.com/lines-veils-rpg](http://tinyurl.com/lines-veils-rpg).

## THE X-CARD

The X-Card is a handy tool originally developed by John Stavropoulos. Take an index card or a piece of paper and draw an X on it, and then put it in the middle of your table. That's your X-Card. If someone is feeling uncomfortable out-of-character in any way because of something happening in the game, they can point to, tap, or hold up the X-Card—whatever works for them.

In that moment, everybody in the group stops, and the player who used the card explains how they'd like to change, remove, or skip past the content that made them uncomfortable. It's up to them whether they explain why. The other players may have a few questions to make sure they understand exactly what was X-Carded. Once you're ready to start again, you can pick up where you left off, leaving out whatever was X-Carded.

In practice, the X-Card is as important just to have as it is to actually use. Players often feel more comfortable knowing that the X-Card is there, whether or not they actually have to use it, and it gives them a freedom to explore difficult content without feeling like other people can't voice their discomfort. It's an especially great tool when you're playing with people you don't know all that well!

You can read more about using the X-Card at [tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg](http://tinyurl.com/x-card-rpg).



# WHAT YOU NEED

## WHAT YOU NEED TO PLAY

In order to play **URBAN SHADOWS**, you need a few friends (or enemies) who want to explore the city with you in two- to four-hour chunks of time. Some groups play the game just once—a one-shot—but some of the best games happen with groups that get together often, following the stories of each character through multiple sessions and a variety of story arcs. It's up to you what kind of commitment you want to make to your characters.

**URBAN SHADOWS** works best with 4-5 players and a Master of Ceremonies (MC), a player devoted to portraying the rest of the world outside of the player characters (PCs). More than five players means you'll have trouble spreading the spotlight around; fewer than four players means that you'll struggle a bit to build the chemistry that comes from a rich network of PC relationships and obligations.

Before you start your first session, you also need to organize a few things that help the game run smoothly. Usually the MC prepares them before the first session, but the other players are equally welcome to contribute. You'll probably want to have this rulebook on hand as well, in case something comes up that you have a question about during play.

### A QUIET PLACE

Roleplaying games require a good deal of attention and focus from all the players, so it's a good idea to secure a quiet, private place to play the game. After all, you're going to want to listen to the other players and the MC! It can be tempting to try to run a game of **URBAN SHADOWS** in a thematic setting—a humming nightclub, a busy diner, etc.—but it's always better to have a private space.

### SIX-SIDED DICE

You need at least two six-sided dice, the kind you find in most family-friendly boardgames. You can get by with just two dice for the whole group, but it's a lot easier to play if everyone has their own set (or uses a dice roller app through their phone). After all, you wouldn't want to use up all the luck in someone else's dice...

### PENCILS AND PAPER

The play materials provide some space to take notes, but you'll want to have other paper on hand for makeshift maps, lists of Debts, sketches, etc. And, of course, you'll want plenty of pencils; you'll be erasing and rewriting things frequently throughout the course of play, altering your play materials as you take harm, acquire new powers, and keep track of the Debts you're owed!

### PLAY MATERIALS

**URBAN SHADOWS** comes with twelve core playbooks players can choose from at the start of the game, each one a different staple of urban fantasy fiction. You need to print one copy of each to play, although your group may decide to leave out some core playbooks or add in a few new ones released later. No two players use the same playbook, so one copy of each is sufficient for your group.

You'll also want to gather up a few additional materials: maps of your city, photographs and portraits of city residents, and the Master of Ceremonies worksheets. Each of these is a useful tool that you'll want to have on hand rather than scrounging for them mid-session. Of course, if you're playing online, you might distribute some of these materials in advance via email before you play!

You can find all the handouts described in this section at [www.magpiegames.com/urbanshadows](http://www.magpiegames.com/urbanshadows).

### ONLINE PLAY

Over the past decade, online roleplaying—usually over video chat—has become incredibly popular; it allows roleplayers to play games with friends who live far away, track their characters using online tools, and even connect with communities of gamers they've never met before! While this book generally references events “at your table,” **URBAN SHADOWS** works great for online play too. In fact, you can find links to online tools for playing the game at [www.magpiegames.com/urbanshadows](http://www.magpiegames.com/urbanshadows), including custom character keepers and modules for using virtual tabletops like Roll20 or Foundry.





T V





# CITIES OF SHADOW





# CHAPTER 2

The city isn't safe.

The streets are filled with horrors ready to hollow you out for their own pleasure, killers and sadists waiting for a taste of your flesh and your fear, and shadow things that reflect back your own hideous wants and desires. The streets are veins of corruption, bubbling up into skyscrapers that watch over the urban landscape like the towers of ancient kings, and the city's petty tyrants want nothing more than to consume all that you have to offer, leaving nothing behind.

And that's just the mortals.

The city is also filled with "real" monsters: vampires and werewolves, fae and wizards, ghosts and demons. They live among us and apart from us, infiltrating our corporate boards and gala fundraisers while holding their own secret gatherings and dark rituals to decide our fate. They're everywhere, but you might not notice them if you're not looking closely. Like the city itself, they are more than they appear to be, dangerous and unkind to those who overstep their bounds, wielding more power than can be dreamt of in your meager philosophy.

But the city—and the monsters that inhabit it—are not without pleasures. Where else can you hear a century-old vampire play steel string blues in a riverwalk cafe? Where else can you feel the pulse of demonic bodies grinding against each other in the heat of a downtown club? Where else can you learn to call upon the power of blood—yours? someone else's?—under the watchful eyes of a trained coven?

Nowhere. That's where. Nowhere.

The city has you now. Whether you were born here or made here or moved here or trapped here as the result of some terrible deal with the wrong people... this is where you belong. We know it. You know it. The city knows it. And as you reach for the power to make this city yours, to own a piece of it the way it owns a piece of you, remember that all those monsters—mortal and supernatural alike—were once just...like...you.



## A CITY OF MONSTERS

In **URBAN SHADOWS**, the city is a living, breathing character all its own. It hides dark desires, wicked deeds, and devious schemes, its shadowy tendrils a danger to mortals and supernatural creatures alike. Some residents have sacred sanctums or secure safehouses—places to weather the political storms that arise like clockwork—but a sprawling metropolis always lies just outside those little nooks, caring little if you prosper...or bleed out in the gutters.

But no one faces the city alone. Even the humblest of ghosts is a part of a broader community, a circle of supernatural creatures who—at the very least—share a perspective *on what matters*. For as tempting as it is to believe each monster is truly alone, left to their own devices amidst the violence and debts of the city's streets, the truth is so much worse—every one of the city's supernatural denizens is part of a society they can never escape, a fraternity of barely concealed secrets and realities that bind them together.

Thus, “the city” isn't just some physical place to the vampires and faeries and wizards that vie for control in the shadow of the massive concrete monuments to humanity's hubris. Those who live in the supernatural world know that “the city” is instead a terrible political meat grinder, the sharp and insidious machinations that lie just outside most mortals' limited view. Ordinary, ignorant humans might obsess over the latest social media trend or city council scandal, but everyone who has seen the true face of the city cannot look away or ignore the monstrous—often immortal—puppet masters pulling the strings from just off stage.

In truth, concealing the supernatural world requires almost no effort. Mortals simply *do not want* to look too deeply into the shadows or ask too many questions about the hidden realities that lie just below the surface. Like a naive inner-city schoolteacher faced with the horrifying realities of his student's chaotic lives, mortals take every opportunity to turn away from the city's truth, believing the comforting lie that there are no monsters under the bed...and even fewer monsters running City Hall.

But no matter what lies the mortals tell themselves—no matter what web of fiction they spin over their own eyes—the city still hungers. Will you sate its gnawing desires? Or will your enemies make you and yours the feast du jour?

## HOW TO USE THIS CHAPTER

**Chapter 1: Introduction** talks about **URBAN SHADOWS** as a game, including some of the supplies and safety tools needed to play, but this chapter delves into the fictional world itself, the supernatural setting in which the characters live their lives, separate from the mechanics and procedures—presented in **Chapter 3: Fundamentals of Play** on and **Chapter 5: Core Moves**—that make up the flow of play. You need to read further to understand how to play the game, but this chapter is a great place to start if you want to understand the fictional world!

To that end, this chapter opens with an explanation of the city itself (page 18), the backdrop against which all **URBAN SHADOWS** games transpire, then continues by introducing Circles (page 18)—the broad communities that define the politics of the city—and factions (page 20)—the institutions, organizations, and groups that exist within each Circle. No two cities are exactly alike, but the Circles, and their attendant factions, are universal: there exists some version of each Circle in every city. Similarly, the concepts of Status (page 20) and Debt (page 21)—the authority and power held by the elites of the city and the currency used to manage relationships between residents, respectively—are also covered in this chapter, introducing important power structures common to these shadowy metropolises.

Finally, this chapter introduces each of the Circles in greater detail, starting on page 22, including example characters and factions from each Circle that might appear in your story as you play. While there is infinite diversity and surprising nuance in every Circle, this chapter offers a broad understanding that can help you bring each Circle to life as a player or as an MC.

Because this chapter is a guide to how the people who live in this world think about their communities, it also acts as a guide to how they might talk. Mechanics like stats and dice exist in our world—the world of players and MCs telling stories about a fictional world—but the concepts in this chapter are words, phrases, and ideas the characters in these stories use in conversation and ordinary speech. Feel free to use this language as you play; just as you might say, “I think the LGBTQIA+ community is concerned about this issue,” a vampire in your game might say, “Everyone in Night is worried about what you're going to do next, my friend...”

# THE CITY

A single imp might find refuge in a rural town, but the majority of supernatural creatures live in urban metropolises. What better place to hide (or hunt!) than among a teeming mass of humans? What better place to traffic in stolen magical items than a city filled to the brim with customers? Just as mortals are drawn to the bright lights of the big city, so too are those touched by the supernatural compelled to seek solace in the cruel arms of a concrete jungle.

**The city**—as most supernatural residents call their chosen municipality—is more than just a physical metropolis; it's also the supernatural society surrounding them, the politics they can't escape, and the churning scrum of magical conflicts. Each city is unique, but those who join this world quickly learn there are truths that transcend mere geography—divisions that repeat themselves, hierarchies that manifest over and over, currencies that are constant.

No single institution or city resident could possibly rule such a city; there is no vampire king or faerie lord who claims authority over all that transpires on these dark streets. For a time, some faction or another might be ascendant, wielding greater power than others in the city's nightly struggles, but the only thing constant about the city is change. Anyone who climbs to the top of the heap finds themselves in a dangerously precarious position.

In other words, the city is large and contains multitudes, even if they contradict each other. The low rumble of a werewolf's beloved 1971 Cadillac Eldorado, the opulent corporate excess of a wizard's floor-to-ceiling penthouse windows, the prismatic lights of an underground mortal rave in a meatpacking warehouse, the cold glamour of a faerie market squeezed between two high-end fashion shops at a local mall—all of them have a place in the city.

## CIRCLE SYMBOLS

The Circle symbols found in this book are neither sacred nor steady—they are marks of presence, not declarations of a unified Circle identity. One werewolf pack may work the symbol into everything they do; a different pack may avoid the symbol altogether. When you find such a symbol in the city, know that the place (or the people) marked with it has roots in that Circle.

The mortals have their place too, mundane communities who live out their lives while the shadows churn and seethe with supernatural activity. The monsters of the darkness often engage the mundane world—even a soulless demon can enjoy the latest Hollywood blockbuster at the local theater—but ignorant mortals know better than to go poking around in the shadows. The darkness takes notice of those who gaze into it with too much interest.

And yet...the mortals enjoy a freedom most supernatural creatures envy—to join the darkness of the city is to become trapped in its politics and passions, unable to step away for fear that everything they've built will be destroyed in their absence. Ordinary mortals take vacations, fall in love, move to different cities, start new jobs, dream of better futures. They live a life—in all its crass mundanity—forever lost to those who join the supernatural world.

## THE CIRCLES

The city is a cesspool of infighting and corruption, but the connections and boundaries between groups ultimately define the city's fate. Most call these loose political associations **CIRCLES**, communities with their own internal politics and drama that revolve around the affiliations common to the supernatural world.

Circles aren't organizations or formal alliances; they are more like broad communities or subcultures. A disagreement between two members of the same Circle may be as—or more—intense than any conflict between two differing Circles. For example, a werewolf and a vampire both hail from the same Circle (Night), but that doesn't mean they get along. It only means they both understand the violence inherent in the streets they share.

Likewise, someone can only stay in a Circle as long as they share the Circle's perspective. A wizard might start in Power—joining a hermetic order and learning esoteric magic—but join Wild when he swears an oath to serve a faerie court. Other wizards might respect his magical abilities, but they know he no longer shares their focus. He might still look like them, even act like them sometimes, but he lives outside their community and their politics.

For more on the Circles, check out page 22; for now, here's a short summary of each one:





## MORTALIS

Humans who cross the boundary between the mundane and supernatural worlds to protect humanity...or steal power from monsters. Hunters, artifact dealers, and faith healers all belong to Mortalis.



## NIGHT

People who have been irrevocably changed into creatures of darkness and monsters of the shadows, obsessed with territory, blood, sex, and money. Vampires, werewolves, and ghosts all belong to Night.



## POWER

Individuals who have obtained supernatural power or gifts through training, blessing, or curse, now set on charting a course for the city's future. Wizards, oracles, and immortals all belong to Power.



## WILD

Strange beings who hail from outside our world, staking out a new home—or temporary respite—in this mortal realm. Faeries, demons, and other creatures bizarre and strange all belong to Wild.

## FACTIONS

The Circles are loose communities without consistent institutions or unified leaders, but there are **FACTIONS** within each Circle capable of acting in unison, groups that can shape the city's future collectively: hunter clubs, werewolf packs, wizard councils, faerie courts, and more. These organizations and groups claim resources and territory alike, seizing upon assets across the city to accomplish their aims. Rarely do they see eye to eye with each other—even within the same Circle—but they often build symbiotic alliances, negotiated treaties, and strong fences that allow them to coexist within the city with minimal conflict.

That said, the diversity of viewpoints in the city means they rarely agree on the rules of engagement. One werewolf pack's den is another witch coven's ley line nexus; each sees their claim as the truly legitimate one. In fact, it's common for conflicts across Circles to escalate because of this lack of cultural empathy—a vampire clan might think nothing of kidnapping a fae's mortal lover... but that same clan might be shocked when the fae court responds with a formal declaration of war against every vampire in the city. It's hard to forge a sustainable peace when there are a dozen sides to every conflict...and no one can agree on what really matters.

Factions sometimes have strong alliances with characters (or factions) from other Circles, but each faction holds the viewpoint of a single Circle. After all, a werewolf pack that stops caring about territory and fully embraces an alliance with a faction of wizards to control the long-term politics of the city has left Night to join Power; a wizard's council that rejects the long-term politics of the city, determined to hold ley lines with the help of a werewolf pack has left Power for Night. On occasion, two factions will grow close enough together—say a werewolf pack and a wizard's council—that others may view them as one faction, but they either have strong enough internal boundaries to remain two separate identities...or one has been subsumed by the other.

You can read more about factions—including how the Master of Ceremonies uses them to develop the politics of the city—in **Chapter 9: Long-Term Play** on page 250.

## STATUS

Power in the supernatural world isn't that different from power in the mundane world: everyone wants it, few people have it, and it costs more than you think. The supernatural elites of the city wield their power like a club *and* a scalpel—sometimes destroying enemies with brute force, sometimes cutting them apart before they even know what's happening. A peasant can't imagine the resources a king can bring to bear should someone so impoverished choose to be a thorn instead of a servant.

Within the city, there are few measures of power greater than **STATUS**, an informal understanding of how respected a resident is within their own Circle. Those with higher Status find their word carries more weight, their actions are viewed more favorably, and their needs are honored more quickly. There are few kings crowned in the chaos of the city, but it's always easy to know who matters more than someone else.

Status is largely earned by serving a Circle's interests and building a reputation as a trusted member of the city's secret supernatural society. In other words, those who toe the line and prove themselves useful to their community find their status rising, and those who fail to find a role or fight the system too recklessly may be marginalized by the powers-that-be within their particular Circle.

To reach the pinnacle of status in the city, however, one must do more than be merely useful. The highest Status is reserved for those who lead entire factions (page 96), who *command* the resources and attention of others of their kind. A faerie might demonstrate enough loyalty to her court to become an invaluable and potent servant, but only the court's crown can bestow the highest marker of status upon her.

Status isn't fully recognized across Circles, even if it's respected. A powerful member of Night—one who commands an entire vampire clan or gathering of ghosts—might be feared by members of other Circles, but that doesn't mean they trust her or understand her motives. Status is always most valued within a Circle; it loses some of its luster when it's carried across a cultural border into a space with different rules. That said, Status is always public, a matter of public consideration that explains what other people think about the person in question.

You can read more about how to gain (and use) Status within **URBAN SHADOWS** on page 41.



## DEBT

In a chaotic city of conflicting perspectives, there are few things anyone agrees on. But Debt—the web of formal obligations across the supernatural community—is the one currency respected by all. Money? Blood? Magical runes? All useful to some...and worthless to others. Debt is universal; it's a favor, written into the unspoken contract of the city as the only thing truly worth something to everyone.

### EARNING AND USING DEBTS

Just as in the mundane world, Debts accrue whenever someone owes another person a favor, either because something was done without proper recompense...or because someone got in the way. The former is easy to understand—if someone helps you out, you owe them—but the latter is just as important; creating trouble for other people without sufficient cause is enough to owe a Debt to the person you harmed if they decide to let things go.

No individual or institution keeps track of each Debt owed. There are disagreements at times, but the understanding held by all is enough to hold the system together. When someone wants to cash in a Debt and claim a favor, they merely bring up the moment that incurred the Debt—“remember when I saved your life?” It's hard to deny when you owe so obviously, and even harder when you know everyone else is watching to see how you handle your obligations.

There's no strict limit on what someone can ask for when they cash in a Debt, but everyone agrees a moderate favor—depending on the debtor's capacity—is an acceptable request. For most, something like an introduction to a high-status Circle leader or expensive gift is a good guideline, but cashing in a Debt with a ruthless vampire to have someone murdered might not be out of the question. There are benefits to helping out high-status members of the City; their capacity is far greater.

Debts serve immortals and mortals alike, so they don't expire or degrade. When someone owes a Debt, their creditor can call it in at any time in the future, even decades or centuries later. Some of the most powerful, high-status elites of the city have hundreds, even thousands, of Debts...and owe just as many themselves. On the other hand, Debts aren't passed down—a vampire whose sire is destroyed doesn't owe her sire's Debts. If you want to collect on a Debt, you best do it while your debtor still has the ability to pay.

## HONORING A DEBT

Holding a Debt means little, however, if it isn't honored. The economy of Debt works in the city only because everyone knows that when someone who holds a Debt comes knocking—looking for a gift, an introduction, some answers, or even just a simple favor—the Debt *will* be honored. Everyone in the city who holds any status at all knows that this rule must trump all others: *everyone* pays their Debts.

Outright denying a Debt can mean ostracization or worse for the ungrateful grifter, leaving them susceptible to violence and suffering without recourse. Who will take their side when they won't even keep their word? Who will defend them when the most important promises they could make were not kept?

### REFUSING TO HONOR A DEBT

Sometimes, a debtor can put off a Debt owed for a bit, refusing to honor it for now while claiming that it isn't the right time or the favor requested is too costly. So long as the delay doesn't threaten the system itself—everyone agrees the Debt is still owed—most creditors can agree to an extension, especially if it deepens the Debt or comes with some smaller favor. Some creditors, however, are sticklers for the rules and demand that the Debt be honored immediately.

Ironically, Debt is the one arena of city politics in which Status partially transcends Circle—it is easier for a higher Status resident to put off a Debt than it is for a lower Status resident to delay those same obligations, even when the debtor and creditor are from different Circles. After all, is anyone really surprised when a king tells a peasant—or a god tells a king—that he does not have time to perform some menial task? Does anyone really think the elites of the city would leave their bills unpaid forever?

Of course, even gods know this truth: one can wiggle out of promises made to one's lessers for a while, but eventually those who do not honor their Debts find their own Debts to be worthless. Sometimes even commoners must be honored in full, lest the whole system come crashing down around them all.

You can read more about holding and using Debts on page 42, and more on Debt moves—including *refusing to honor a Debt*—on page 95.



Caught between the mundane and supernatural, Mortalis is a Circle with many masters. Those within it are aware of the truth of the city—a supernatural world exists just beneath the surface—but have elected to keep one foot in the world of their mundane family, friends, and loved ones. Members of Mortalis have secrets they cannot share, for fear of bringing ruin to the very people they hope to protect and serve.

## ONE LIFE, TWO WORLDS

Above all else, members of Mortalis are caught between two mutually irreconcilable realities: a mundane world that—at best—ignores the supernatural and a world of shadows that sees mortals as threats, inconveniences, or prey. There is no way to live in both; yet day after day, members of Mortalis attempt to navigate the borders between them.

In truth, most eventually fail. The city's supernatural spaces aren't meant for mortals, so the members of Mortalis are often forced to choose. Some step back away from the edge, rejoining the mundane world in full and leaving all this behind; most find themselves drawn ever more deeply into the shadows, until they can't remember what it was ever like to stand in the light.



## MEMBERS OF MORTALIS

Anyone who manages to live on both sides of the border between the supernatural and the mundane can join Mortalis, but the primary constituents are:

### INVESTIGATORS

Many of the mortals who stumble upon the supernatural underworld of the city grow fascinated with it, striving to learn everything they can from this new and fantastical world. Some seek specific answers—like a cure for a disease afflicting a loved one or an answer to a religious or philosophical question—but others are driven to simply document all they can with the limited access they have.

### DEFENDERS

Some mortals find the supernatural far more scary than fascinating, often rightfully so. The city feeds on mortals, figuratively and literally, and some who become aware of the supernatural choose to fight the worst of it. Obviously, vigilante hunters are a common phenomenon—driven to exterminate some type of creature they view as a threat—but other defenders focus on breaking curses, offering salves, or even offering mediation without ever turning to violence.

### TRAFFICKERS

Some mortals focus primarily on their own welfare, bringing things from the supernatural into the mundane world...for a price. Sometimes what they bring is useful to the investigators and defenders—magical artifacts, potions and spells, even information—but their goals are radically different. They look out for themselves first and offer whatever they offer to humanity only so long as it serves them.

## SAMPLE CHARACTERS

Mortalis characters are defined by their dual life, frequently crossing the border between the mundane and supernatural worlds. Here are a few characters that might appear in your story as PCs or NPCs:

- ♦ a **darkweb blogger**, documenting the growing presence of supernatural creatures in their city through investigative journalism
- ♦ a **vigilante demon hunter**, destroying fiendish incursions that plague the local populace with temptations, violence, and corruption
- ♦ a **retired wizard**, living an “ordinary” life among the mortals after losing their powers in a disastrous ritual that saved the city
- ♦ an **excommunicated oracle**, scraping together a living as a storefront “psychic” after losing their privileges and role in Power

## SAMPLE FACTIONS

Mortalis factions are usually institutions that manage the flow of people, resources, and conflicts across the border between the two worlds. Here are a few sample factions that might appear in your story:

- ♦ a **society of magical artifact dealers**, moving goods from the supernatural world into the mundane world for rich and powerful mortals
- ♦ a **hunter’s club**, supporting and equipping mortal vigilantes as they track down demons that prey on the city’s innocent
- ♦ a **gathering of ghosts**, healing the sick and aiding the poor in an attempt to fulfill a religious obligation from their mortal lives



Ruled by vicious and violent politics, Night is a Circle torn between monstrous obsessions and mortal memories; most of its members were once human, transformed into a dark reflection of humanity by varying forces.

Now they compete over the resources of the city's streets: territory, blood, and money. Their politics are brutal for the same reason criminal enterprises often turn to violence—there is often no way to resolve their differences but tooth and claw.

## BLOOD, SWEAT, AND FEARS

Regardless of how they were transformed into creatures of shadows, most members of Night have been permanently pushed from the mundane world into the city's turbulent supernatural streets. They have needs—blood, territory, anchors—they didn't have before the transformation; they live with the horrible certainty they will have to fight to keep what's theirs.

Like Mortalis, Night is often tied up in the drama of ordinary people and their lives, even if their mortal contacts are gang members, drug dealers, and other criminal elements. The difference between Night and Mortalis, however, is that Night is ultimately parasitic, corrupting what it can reach in the mundane world to serve the rapacious needs of its supernatural members, no matter the pain it inflicts.



## MEMBERS OF NIGHT

Anyone fluent in the language of the city's streets can join Night, but the primary constituents are:

### VAMPIRES

Although they differ in feeding habits—blood, flesh, emotions—vampires all share one key characteristic: they are parasites, dependent on mortal populations for their continued existence. They often organize themselves into families or clans if lineage matters to them, but they form political alliances as well. The older the vampire, the more powerful they are; hierarchy is a key element of vampiric society.

### WEREWOLVES

Werewolves have many types and origins—multiple forms arising from ancient ritual, a single hulking cursed frame inherited from a bloodline curse, etc.—but they are always terrifyingly dangerous. They run in packs, driven to claim and hold territory with displays of violence even other members of Night loathe and fear. Worse yet, they are difficult to dislodge—the longer they hold a space, the more they corrupt and warp it into an extension of their pack and kin.

### GHOSTS

Some mortals are trapped in this plane after death, spectres anchored to an ectoplasmic half-life of fragmented memories and haunting trauma—they are the city's memories, a past not yet the past. Some degrade into monsters, violent echoes haunting abandoned spaces, but others find a measure of control that allows them to participate in supernatural society. Their anchors are vital, and they protect them at all costs from meddlers, thieves, and manipulators.

### SAMPLE CHARACTERS

Night characters are defined by monstrous needs and territorial claims. Here are a few characters that might appear in your story as PCs or NPCs:

- ♦ a **craven vampire**, transporting drugs, money, and blood for others in their clan in exchange for easy feeding and physical protection
- ♦ a **reluctant werewolf**, ruling a territory they inherited when the rest of their pack was destroyed in a street war with a vampire clan
- ♦ a **frazzled ghost**, searching for a ritual that would return them to life while protecting their anchors from vandals and squatters
- ♦ an **enthralled hunter**, serving an elder vampire after becoming addicted to the powerful effects of vampire blood

### SAMPLE FACTIONS

Night factions are usually some sort of criminal organization, warped to fit a supernatural sphere and the needs of its rapacious leaders. Here are a few sample factions that might appear in your story:

- ♦ a **vampiric crime family**, organizing the territory of the city into “blood districts” ruled by high-status vampires and their kin
- ♦ an **alliance of werewolf packs**, sharing resources and territory under the auspice of a charismatic community organizer
- ♦ a **demonic cartel**, infiltrating and corrupting the city's existing drug trade to serve their demonic lord's lust for mortal money



Driven by ravenous ambition and cursed knowledge, Power is a Circle fixated on the future.

Many members of the Circle have their own ambitions—losing themselves for months to sorcerous exploration—but the Circle itself is built on elaborate systems of political governance designed to direct the city's progress and potential. If only the members of Power, and the factions they control, could agree upon which of the many futures they foresee should come to pass...

## VISION BEYOND MEASURE

While many members of Power are—or were once—mortal, they are not beset by the hungers of Night; instead the haunting potential of the future drives them. Every Power character, from the Status-3 head of the Wizard's Council to the lowliest oracle peddling tarot readings to mortal tourists, can see the gears and wheels of the city's machine...and must ultimately face their own role in what is to come.

Thus, Power dabbles in mortal politics and magical artifacts alike, always eager to find some way to claim more authority. Yet unlike Mortalis or Night, Power cares little for lives lost or blood spilled as the Circle's plots and schemes unfurl. The future drives Power; everything else is the meaningless present, mere noise compared to the signal of Power's compelling vision for the city.



## MEMBERS OF POWER

Anyone willing to invest in shaping the city's future can join Power, but the primary constituents are:

### WIZARDS AND ORACLES

Drawing their magic from a thousand different sources, the wizards and oracles of Power wield incredible abilities—some alchemical, some inherited, and some simply stolen. A few mages and seers try to maintain a mortal life, but most sever their ties with the mundane as they cast their gaze upon the city's future, always dreaming about what is yet to come.

### IMMORTALS

Wielding few, if any, magical abilities, some members of Power are simply immortal—they cannot die unless they meet their end in a highly specific way, i.e. stabbed by their true love, drowned in motor oil, etc.. The reasons for their immortality are diverse and strange; they are as likely to be cursed as to have sought out this fate. Their influence is thus strangely tenacious. How does one overcome a piece that can never be removed from the board?

### LOYALISTS

Power factions are deeply stratified; most of the Circle's membership is made up of deputies and ministers, all operating on behalf of the ruling elite. Unlike the enthralled servants of Night or the oath-bound emissaries of Wild, those who serve Power do so because they *believe* in the cause to which they are sworn. They may wield magical abilities or unique artifacts—granted by their masters—to conduct their duties, but it is their faith in the factions they serve that defines their role in the city.

## SAMPLE CHARACTERS

Power characters are enamored with the future—what it holds *and* how they might shape it. Here are a few characters that might appear in your story as PCs or NPCs:

- ♦ an **industrious wizard**, manipulating the scrum of city politics to advance her interests and secure a future for her hermetic house
- ♦ an **exhausted seer**, suffering under the yoke of his prophecies...and yet still driven to do what he can to avoid the worst futures he foresees
- ♦ a **sentimental immortal**, protecting the mortal descendants of a long-lost love in honor of his beloved's dying wish
- ♦ a **knighted troll**, investigating—and thwarting—threats to a potent Power faction to which he has sworn his service

## SAMPLE FACTIONS

Power factions are usually tightly organized, designed to exert control for decades and centuries. Here are a few sample factions that might appear in your story:

- ♦ an **immortal cult**, serving the interests of a single immortal who has collected people, money, and power for hundreds of years
- ♦ an **council of wizards**, demanding fealty and structure from hermetic mages and punishing rogue wizards who traffic in dark magic
- ♦ a **mortal political conspiracy**, arranging the city's mundane politics to fulfill ancient prophecies passed down for centuries



Consumed by strange obligations and inhuman desires, Wild is a Circle ruled by the city's most alien residents. Most members of Wild hail from *somewhere else*—whether that be utopian Faerie, a despotic inferno, or the lands of death—and they have brought their customs and traditions with them to the city. Members of Wild most often seek places where the walls of reality are thin, tending to their business in both this plane and the one from which they hail.

## MASTERS OF THE MARGINS

Those who live at the margins of the city are anything but marginalized. Wild is as powerful as other Circles, commanding resources that can rival (or even exceed) the most dedicated wizard cabal or potent vampire clan. From faerie magics and troll knights to fiendish rituals and demonic legions, the leaders of Wild can marshal whatever they might need to accomplish their strange and fantastic goals.

But these alien ambitions define them; Wild cares only for what matters to Wild, be it the traffic of human souls in the service of a demonic lord, the preservation of public art dedicated to a Faerie Queen, or the quest to become human and join the mortal world itself. Wild makes no sense to the other Circles...and perfect sense to anyone from within the Circle looking out on the city's politics.



## MEMBERS OF WILD

Anyone willing to serve alien masters at the city's margins can join Wild, but the primary constituents are:

### FAERIES

Mortals have called all manner of creatures faeries, and Wild is home to them all. The most common type of city fae are organized into courts—the Sun Court, the Court of Shadows, etc.—which embody a central concept to which the court is drawn in a hierarchical expression of devotion. Faeries are known for their promises and obligations, deriving power from contracts and agreements with both mortals and each other.

### DEMONS

There are few gates from Hell to the mortal world, few doors for demons to cross over and take root. Instead, demons must fight to remain in the city, possessing mortal bodies or performing dark rituals to secure passage. Once in the city, demons serve the masters they served in Hell, but not all fiends are slaves; some demons (known as imps) find a way to escape such servitude, taking advantage of contractual loopholes to earn their freedom from their demonic lords.

### CONSTRUCTS

Wild is also home to those who have no home or history, constructs forged by others' hands. A dead body sewn together and reanimated; a statue imbued by ritual and rite—without families, orders, or institutions, constructs find homes amongst the city's outsiders. Some seek to become human (or to reunite with their creators), but most constructs are perfectly content to remain themselves, free of the burdens mortal associations bring to their “new” lives.

## SAMPLE CHARACTERS

Wild characters are outsiders, anchored to the city's margins and shadows. Here are a few characters that might appear in your story as PCs or NPCs:

- ♦ a **naive faerie**, revisiting the city for the first time after a century spent serving her Faerie Queen as an advisor and handmaiden
- ♦ a **reckless imp**, pushing a dozen schemes to their limit to avoid the closing noose of their former master's plan to recapture them
- ♦ a **commanding construct**, living among the city's transient population while searching for the scientist who created them decades ago
- ♦ a **devoted werewolf**, safeguarding a Faerie King after abandoning his pack in order to join his faerie love in the service of Wild

## SAMPLE FACTIONS

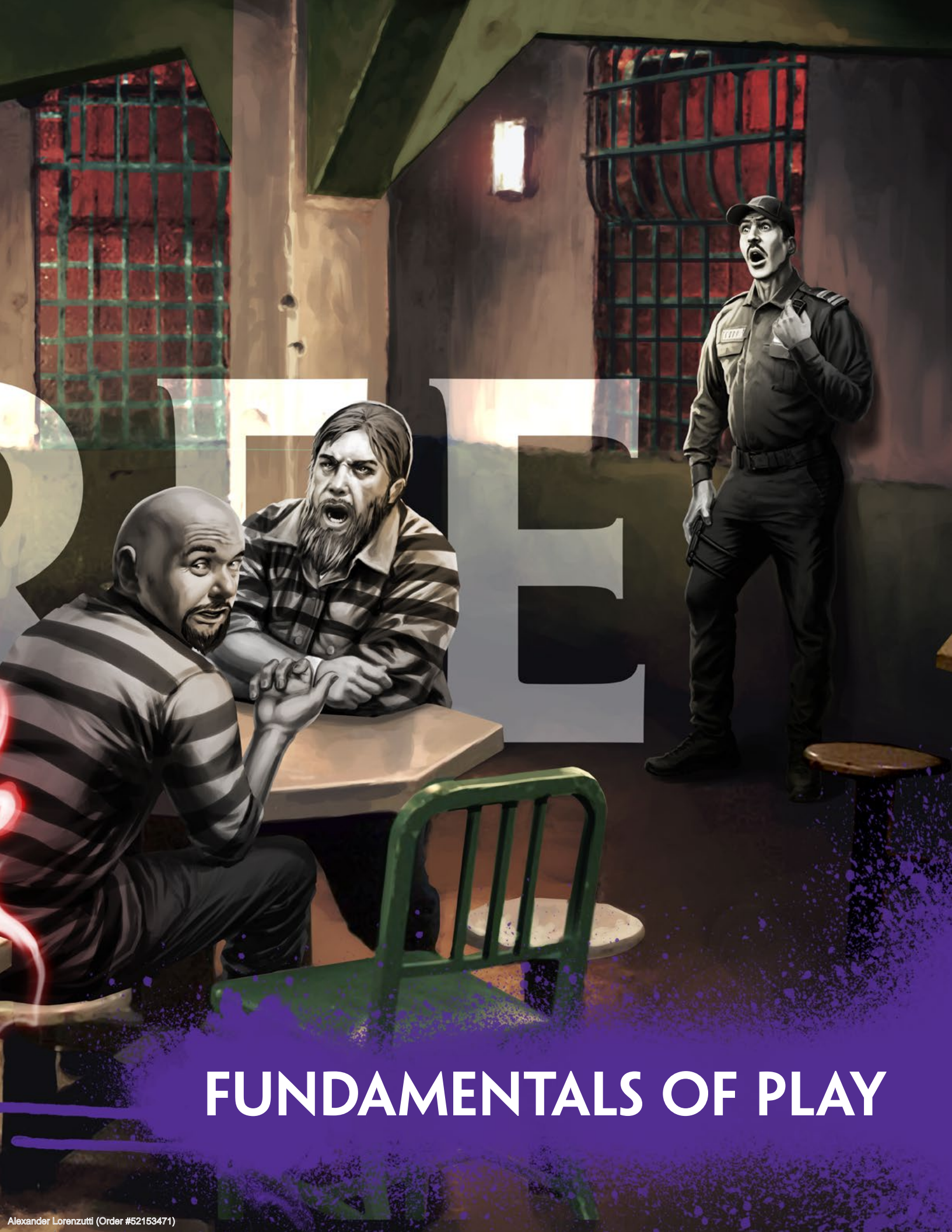
Wild factions are chaotic, shifting, and unstable even when they claim to love hierarchy and order. Here are a few sample factions that might appear in your story:

- ♦ a **faerie court**, reenacting the endless change of seasons from summer to winter as royalty, knights, and courtiers backstab and conspire
- ♦ a **band of constructs**, supporting each other in their individual quests for morality, mortality, and meaning
- ♦ an **order of oracles**, granting prophecy and guidance to members of the Wild Circle in order to bring about a secret faerie prophecy









# FUNDAMENTALS OF PLAY





# CHAPTER 3

Do you want to know where to find happiness?

If you listen to the radio jingles and midnight infomercials, you'd head to the bastion of American progress—the shopping mall. You'd camp out next to a jewelry store, perhaps, hoping to catch a glimpse of a smitten couple about to spend a few months' salary on a gimmick dreamed up by apartheid diamond barons.

But you'd still be a mile away from a truly happy heart.

Think back, friend. No, further than *that*. All the way back...to your days of make believe.

You—like every other human being who has ever graced this good earth—once knew how to *pretend*. You did it with sticks and rags and pots and pans; you laughed, truly laughed, at jokes you told yourself, and you cared about people that didn't exist, not for a second. You were *happy*.

And then, one day, you *forgot*. You stopped *pretending*. You let the wall fall between *this world* and *all the other worlds* you could ever dream up.

Maybe you forgot because they made you forget. Or maybe it was to protect yourself from the things you saw at night in the closet or under the bed. Either way, disbelief took root, and like a rotten weed it choked off all the parts of you that dreamed of *other things*.

But when you play a game...maybe that disbelief gives way a bit. Maybe then you can grab up new sticks and new rags—let's call them "rules and procedures"—and throw yourself beyond your own cynicism back into one of those other worlds. Maybe a game *just like this one* can help you, an adult, vault your walls and reach a space once lost...but may yet still be found in the clatter of dice and the smiles of a few of your closest friends.

The door inside you, the one that was once a portal to all those other worlds? It might be locked, but it isn't sealed shut. All you need is a key, something to open it back up again. Something just like this book you're holding here...



## THE CONVERSATION

Roleplaying is a **conversation**. That means it's easy! You sit down at a table—or start a video call online—with dice and pencils and sheets of paper, and...talk to each other. You might take turns talking, interrupt each other at times, or even all go silent for a moment, but the conversation keeps moving, each of you pushing it forward by adding your own contribution, your friends' words working alongside yours to knit together a fictional world.

For the most part, your conversation revolves around your characters: you say what they do when they face a problem, how they react to the other characters, and what parts of the city excite and enthrall them. Since the other players don't live in your head, you also sometimes convey your character's thoughts, emotions, and feelings directly as a narrator, like when you say, "My character looks away, turning his face toward the window, and you can tell he feels guilty for what he said all those years ago."

There are also times in the conversation when you slip directly into your character's shoes, no longer narrating but actually taking on your character's persona. You make the gestures your character makes; you say things as your character without preface. You don't have to do funny voices or accents to embody your character—most people do it without even thinking, simply saying things as their character, such as "Are you freakin' kidding me? I came all the way here for *this*?"

In fact, it's pretty natural to virtually become your character while you play, to want what they want, to fear the outcome of the dice at crucial moments or to be elated when they catch a lucky break. Some of the best moments in any roleplaying game occur when the real world falls away and you experience the importance and meaning of the fictional world firsthand.

The conversation in a roleplaying game evolves naturally over the course of the session as you go back and forth between narrating and embodying your character. But it's your job—as a group—to keep the conversation interesting. The rules, the playbooks, and everything else you bring to the table drives that conversation toward interesting places. Dark alleys. Dangerous places. Murderous moments. Wherever the fiction takes you.

## HOW TO USE THIS CHAPTER

While it's useful to read the introduction and **Chapter 2: Cities of Shadow** before continuing, much of what is presented within this chapter is (obviously) fairly fundamental. If you're looking for a section that covers the basics of what makes **URBAN SHADOWS** work as a game, you've come to the right place!

This chapter contains the fundamental rules of **URBAN SHADOWS**, the mechanics and procedures that govern how to play the game. The chapter opens with advice on framing scenes (page 34)—the most basic unit of story in most roleplaying games—and goes on to talk about fictional positioning (page 36) and rolling dice (page 38), two important topics that govern how play proceeds at the table from scene to scene.

In addition to covering the flow of play in general, this chapter also covers the essential mechanical systems of the game, the core elements of play which you and your group will return to again and again as you play **URBAN SHADOWS**, including Circle Status (page 41), Circle ratings (page 42), Debt (page 42), intimacy (page 44), corruption (page 45), and harm (page 46). These systems are vital! Alongside the basic moves (page 74) covered in **Chapter 5: Core Moves**, these tools structure how (and often why) your character interacts with everything else in the fiction, including other player characters and non-player characters.

Finally, this chapter closes with advice on launching a new "season" of **URBAN SHADOWS**—a set of sessions dedicated to the same characters and conflicts—introducing the idea of episodes and seasons (page 52) as tools for structuring your group's story. In addition, we also offer some advice on selecting and introducing a City Hub (page 53) as a focus for your new season and working as a group to set expectations (page 54) about play well before you roll any dice.

It might be tempting—especially if you're an experienced player—to skip this section. After all, the Master of Ceremonies is the one who keeps track of all these rules, right? That may be true, but much of what's presented here is just as useful to you as a player as it is to them as a Master of Ceremonies. Even if you can't quote them chapter and verse, the fundamentals of **URBAN SHADOWS** will serve you well!

# FRAMING SCENES

The best way to keep the conversation moving toward interesting places is to **frame scenes**—situations that put the player characters in the middle of interesting conflicts and opportunities. Instead of sitting around the table talking about Machiavellian characters and the tense political history of the city, put your characters into concrete locations with concrete objectives. Don't just say, "Vampires are evil, always trying to take out the opposition." Instead, frame a scene in which a player character is chased through the city by a pack of ravenous bloodsucking vampires!

The MC has the most responsibility for framing scenes—as the facilitator of the game, they ultimately choose which scenes get played out—but everyone in the group can help ensure scenes start in a compelling place and push them towards a meaningful or exciting resolution. In fact, everyone can contribute to the overall narrative by suggesting scenes to drive the story forward.

*Marissa is MCing URBAN SHADOWS for a full table of PCs, so she decides to try to frame a scene that gets lots of them involved with each other right away.*

*"How about we get started with a few characters getting together at a club?" Marissa says. "I know that Sasha and Harley's characters are still looking for the missing faerie, Onyx, so maybe you all can meet up with Elizabeth's character, Eve, to learn what she's found out about the case since she first heard that Onyx was missing."*

*Sasha and Harley both nod. That sounds good to them.*

*Elizabeth says, "I don't know. I think Eve probably would have contacted them immediately when she learned that Onyx was kidnapped. Can we do the scene at Harley's character's apartment instead? I feel like she wouldn't want to wait until they had time to come by the club"*

*Everyone nods at that too. Makes sense to do the scene at the apartment instead of the club.*

*"Great. Tell us what your character's apartment looks like, Harley; we've never seen it before," says Marissa.*

As you play, remember that every single person at the table has a responsibility to make scenes interesting. Don't like the scene someone suggests? Push back and explore other options. After all, multiple points of view keep things much more interesting than one person hogging the spotlight.

## SCENE VARIETY

One of the strengths of **URBAN SHADOWS** is the diversity of scenes that make sense for your story. True, there are plenty of exciting and tense moments as characters tail a lead down foggy streets or get in bloody fights in dark alleys. But the game also makes room for political negotiations in private booths above hazy nightclubs or two characters with a long-standing feud realizing their romantic feelings while tending to each others' wounds. Just like your favorite urban fantasy tale, your **URBAN SHADOWS** game has room for romance, politicking, *and* violence, all supported by the core moves (page 73) and core elements (page 41) of play.

But just as action-packed violence and desperate chases have clear stakes and relevance, these interludes and intimate vignettes help set up the next big thing in the story: What are the repercussions of the alliance brokered in that club? What happens when those new lovers' romance is revealed or tested? No matter how they play out, these scenes work because they set up the next big thing in the story—even if it's a slow-burning fuse you keep in the back of your mind, wondering when it'll go off and lead to a whole new conflict around the player characters' choices.

## MATCH THE PACING

All of this scene framing might seem complicated but once you start playing, the rules (and the MC) help keep everything running smoothly. Think about the game like an episode of an urban fantasy show or novel and try to match the pacing. Jump straight to the good parts—the tense dealings between rival factions, the confrontations on moonlit rooftops, the magical rituals that shape the fate of the city, or the quiet moments that show what's under the surface of each character. **Skip the boring stuff and focus instead on the core of what's happening or what's going to happen.**

And no matter what kind of scene is at stake, remember that scenes end when they aren't interesting any more. The MC might call for a scene to be over, or the players in the scene might realize that the scene's played out. Either way, it's better to cut a scene short than let it run too long. Leave everyone—including yourself—always wanting more.



## HARD SCENE FRAMING

Sometimes the MC wants to move things along quickly or jump right into a tense or difficult situation. Maybe the consequences of an earlier decision have come to bear, hard and fast—your fae monarch commands that you perform a service you owe them at the worst possible time—or maybe the tone of the story calls for a more aggressive scene—a pack of vengeful wraiths ambush your hunter society’s meeting. Whatever it is, the MC tells you what’s happening and what’s at stake, and how you react in the moment drives the scene forward.

We call this technique **hard scene framing** because there’s less room for negotiation: the scene starts and the characters must react as best as they can to the unfolding drama. Sometimes the tension or drama of a scene builds slowly as it plays out, but sometimes a character knows they’re in too deep from the jump and everybody watches to see how they get out of this one...

*Kai’s character, Kashida, is a third-generation wizard living in the Hyde Park area of Chicago. After Sasha, Harley, and Elizabeth’s characters talk about the missing faerie, Marissa decides that she needs to move things along for Kai a bit more quickly.*

*“Okay, Kashida. You’re probably headed home after a long day of classes, right?”*

*“Yeah, I usually check on my uncle after school before I do anything else.”*

*“Awesome,” Marissa says. “When you step off the elevator onto the 8th floor of your apartment building, you immediately know something’s wrong. There’s trash littered all over the floor—fast food wrappers, paper, all stuff that looks like it’s from a dumpster—and you can hear some growling coming from down the hall. It looks like someone has knocked in the door to your apartment.”*

*“Oh shit.”*

*“Yeah. Looks like your uncle’s in danger. Probably. Might be dead already. You don’t know what the hell kind of trouble he’s gotten himself into this time. What do you do?”*

If you’re facilitating **URBAN SHADOWS** as the MC, turn to **Chapter 8: Master of Ceremonies** for more advice on framing and running effective scenes in your game. Everyone has a responsibility to push for dynamic scenes and conflicts, but the MC has a special role in keeping the game moving forward.

## “WHAT DO YOU DO?”

The question “What do you do?” comes up again and again and again in **URBAN SHADOWS**. The city demands that you take action, that you respond to creeping darkness and bloody plots; there’s little time for you to plan or plot and often you have to decide what matters in a moment. The game isn’t trying to rush you, but it demands you establish what your character is doing, each scene building up a fictional world in which your choices matter.

Scene framing is all about getting the PCs to a “What do you do?” moment as quickly as possible; hard scene framing means that the “What do you do?” moment is already upon you. In either case, the purpose of framing a scene is the same in **URBAN SHADOWS** as it is in any work of fiction—the audience wants to see the characters make choices and confront conflicts! Even if the obstacles are emotional, social, or political, the urgency of the situation gives you—and the rest of your group—a chance to discover what your character cares about and what they are willing to do to get what they want.

You might find it interesting to have long conversations about where your characters want to go eat or to reminisce about old relationships with undead lovers, scenes that meander instead of driving toward interesting resolutions. For the most part, though, **URBAN SHADOWS** isn’t about that kind of conversation: the rules push you to make decisions, act on your impulses, and deal with the fucking consequences. The city moves forward, and you just have to try to keep up. You can have those conversations—emotional moments that fill in the spaces between dramatic action—but know that they’re fleeting and precious.

## MOMENTS OF INTIMACY

**URBAN SHADOWS** focuses on conflicts and consequences, but that doesn’t mean emotional moments can’t drive the story. Just the opposite! Each playbook has a special move that triggers when your character experiences **A MOMENT OF INTIMACY**, an emotional beat in a scene in which they connect with another character emotionally or physically. You can read more about these moves on page 44 in this chapter and check out each playbook’s individual intimacy move in **Chapter 6: Playbooks** on page 109.

## FICTIONAL POSITIONING

The setup of scenes is important because it establishes the **fictional positioning** of the characters—the place they occupy in the story you create together. A streetwise character who has trained their whole life to battle demons starts off a fight in a different position than a college professor who only recently learned the supernatural world exists! Your group's collective understanding of who your characters are, what they're doing, and what they're feeling all matter as much as any other mechanic.

The world you all create together during play is called **the fiction**, the collection of everything happening—and that has already happened—in your story. The fiction includes the setting of the game—from the history of your city to your current City Hub—as well as everyone in it. It's things you've agreed on in the story: everything you say about your characters, every action and interaction, every bit of revealed history. You won't write all of this down, but your group has a collective understanding of what's true about the world you've created together.

Sticking to the fiction—and the fictional positioning you've established—takes discipline, especially if new consequences come to bear that you didn't see coming. It takes practice to commit to what you've established, even if it makes things harder or more challenging for your character. But part of what makes roleplaying games exciting is seeing how stories play out in ways you didn't imagine and how characters change in the face of adversity.

*Kai says, "My uncle's in danger, right? I drop my backpack and run into the apartment."*

*"Are you just charging right in? Ready for action?" Marissa asks.*

*"Yeah. I'm a wizard. I figure whoever broke in here probably isn't that dangerous."*

*"As you round the corner, you see a mound of trash lift up a desk from your uncle's study and dump the contents onto the floor. It looks up and roars at you, casting the desk to the side."*

*"Shit. Maybe I don't want to run in there after all..." Kai says.*

*"Too late. It's already spotted you. What do you do?"*

Because the things your character does during the game have repercussions—some of which are immediate and some of which might take a while to surface—you might want to try and make the "best" decision in every scene. But the truth is there aren't perfect decisions. Try not to slow the game down by asking too many questions or trying to have perfect information all the time. Practice letting go of making the *right* choice and focus more on making a choice that feels *authentic* to your character.

That said, you might want to **clarify** a situation or hone in on a detail before setting things in stone. Both the MC and the players can always ask each other questions to make sure everyone's on the same page and understands the fictional positioning of the moment. For example, you might ask "Is anyone holding a gun?" before leaping into a street fight with nothing more than your bare fists, or "Have I met this oracle previously?" before you start a tense interrogation that hopes to uncover the truth.

But clarifying is different from rewinding—you can't get your character into trouble and then go back because you don't like the consequences of your actions! The fallout of these moments is a big part of what makes the game fun, and the group needs to keep everyone honest about sticking to what happens in the fiction, even when your character's choices end up creating a mess of complicated consequences.

*Kai asks, "Do I see any sign of my uncle? Can I look around the room before this thing gets a shot at me?"*

*Marissa thinks for a moment—the intruder isn't exactly agile or speedy, and it's got to cross the whole room before it can get its hands on Kashida.*

*"Yeah, it's not that quick. You glance around...and don't see any sign of your uncle. What do you do?"*

*"I think I just need to get out of here," Kai says. "I'm going to see if I can cast a spell to teleport myself out of here before this thing gets any closer..."*

**URBAN SHADOWS** works best when the MC and the players share responsibility for sticking to the fiction and keeping the story moving forward, building on what's been established instead of rewriting the story to fit the current moment. It can be tempting to revise some past action to make the situation at hand easier—or to introduce some tension when things get slow—but you have to trust you're building a story together that always has places to go.



## MOVES AND DICE

Framing scenes is the first step in building an interesting conversation, but it's the **moves** that connect your characters to the fiction in exciting ways. Each move is a small set of rules that helps resolve conflicts, answer questions in the fiction, and push the story forward. Moves are like the programming language of the game—"When you do x, then do y"—shaping and defining the fiction when your characters take meaningful actions.

What's exciting about using moves to define the fiction is that nobody—not even the MC—knows what will happen next in the story. Can the Tainted convince a gargoyle to spy on an enemy for them? Can the Wizard pull aside magical wards to enter an area undetected? In these moments, the moves take center stage, helping you and your group decide what happens to resolve the uncertainty. You don't just decide what happens as a group or turn to the MC for an answer—you **persuade an NPC** (page 77) to enlist the gargoyle's aid, or **let it out** (page 82) to reshape the nature of the protective spells, then look to the move to see where the fiction goes from there.

Every player character has access to the **basic moves** and can use those moves freely. Each player character also gets their own **playbook moves**—specific moves that point the characters in distinct directions—and can add more moves over the course of play as they develop, change, and grow. You can read more about the basic moves starting on page 74 in **Chapter 5: Core Moves**, and you can find the full list of playbook moves for each playbook in **Chapter 6: Playbooks**.

In general, basic moves cover situations that come up all the time in **URBAN SHADOWS**, while other moves cover more character-specific or rare situations (like handling Debts, interacting with Circles, or making city-wide moves during the faction turn). Most scenes involve player characters making multiple basic moves in a fairly short span of time—**persuading** or **misleading** NPCs, **letting out** their unique powers, and more—but the other moves likely trigger less frequently. Some only come up once every couple of scenes, like **cashing in a Debt** with someone who owes you, and others only once a session, like **hitting the streets** to find a resource your character needs.

## TRIGGERING MOVES

Moves don't fire off whenever you think it might be interesting; they are instead **triggered** by something you say in the conversation, usually an action your character takes in the fiction. **If you want to trigger a move, you have to do the thing that triggers it.** You can always avoid a move, but then you have to avoid taking that action in the fiction. Because every move ties directly into the fiction, all moves are governed by the same idea: *to do it, you do it.*

It's not enough to say "I want to **turn to violence**"—you need to do something in the fiction to meet the move's trigger first, like breaking a beer bottle over the head of another character. And if you decide to drive a knife into someone's ribs to keep them from hurting you, you're **turning to violence** and the move triggers...whether you like it or not.

*Ram's character, Rashid, is an Iraqi insurgent who fled the Middle East after the Sunni Awakening and ended up as a sociology graduate student at the University of Chicago. Their research exposed them to the supernatural, and now they're struggling to keep their mortal life together as they get more and more involved. When they leave campus in the middle of the day to investigate some strange fae sightings in Hyde Park, they run into their advisor, Dr. Pruett.*

*Marissa says, "Dr. Pruett looks concerned when he sees you. 'Rashid, I thought we talked about you wrapping up the grading for my class this week. Where are you off to now?'"*

*Ram rolls their eyes. Pruett is a pain. "Right, Dr. Pruett. I'm just going out to pick up some surveys from the field team."*

*Marissa grins. "I think you're trying to **mislead** Dr. Pruett, right? You're headed to a totally different part of town from where we established the field team is working."*

*Ram is a bit surprised—"Oh, really? I was just trying to blow him off. I didn't think it would trigger a move. Could I maybe instead just try to **escape the situation**? I don't really want to deal with him right now."*

*"It's possible you could just run off and **escape**, but he would probably think that's pretty weird since the two of you are already talking. Are you okay with him getting suspicious?" Marissa wants to make sure Ram knows the full consequences of their actions, so she's giving them a lot of detail about Pruett's likely response.*

*"No...that would be messy. I'm going to **mislead** him. I don't want him to know what I'm up to right now."*

*Marissa and Ram look at **mislead, distract, or trick**—a basic move—to find out what they should do next.*

## ROLLING DICE

When you commit to a course of action that triggers a move, you usually end up rolling dice. You don't roll dice at any other time. If a move calls for dice, roll them and consult the move to see what happens next. You might be ready to scoop up the dice and dive headfirst into danger or get your character's hands dirty, but remember to always follow the fiction—you need to trigger a move before you roll. Say what you do, then figure out which move follows.

Of course, it's fine to decide on a move you want to make *first* and then figure out how you want to trigger it in the game's fiction. Maybe you look over the basic moves sheet (page 305) and decide you want to **persuade an NPC** ghoul to give you some dirt on their vampire master. It might take you a minute to figure out *how* you want to persuade them, but you can't roll the dice until everyone's on the same page about what's happening—you need to seduce, threaten, or promise them something in order to **persuade an NPC** and roll!

Not all moves use dice. Some moves, like the Veteran's **workshop** (page 166) or most of the **Debt moves** (page 90), tell you and the MC what should happen when they're triggered. Things just *happen*, no dice rolled.

## WHEN DOES THE MC ROLL DICE?

After or between sessions, the MC actually does roll dice to conduct the faction turn (page 255), determining the outcome of the actions that the city's political organizations take when time passes. The MC might also roll dice to make use of the location, faction, and NPC generators attached to each City Hub!

## HITS AND MISSES

If a move asks you to roll dice, roll **two six-sided dice (2d6)**, add the results together, and follow the outcomes listed in the move. Traditionally, moves ask you to roll with something—like “roll with **BLOOD**” or “roll with **POWER**”—which means that you add that stat or Circle rating to the roll. A character with **BLOOD +2**, for example, adds 2 to the dice total when “rolling with **BLOOD**,” while a character with **POWER -2** subtracts 2 from the total when “rolling with **POWER**.” There are ways to get other bonuses—or suffer penalties—to your roll, but **you never roll with more than a +4 or less than a -3**, no matter what bonuses or penalties you have.





## WEAK HITS AND STRONG HITS

Move outcomes are straightforward: anything 7 or more is a **hit**, and anything 6 or less is a **miss**. Some moves give additional options on a 10+ or give you more description for what happens on a 7-9 or a miss. Each move is unique, so read the move closely before you roll the dice to find out what kind of outcomes you can expect to find on the other side of the roll.

In general, a hit means that you get what you want. It's not always perfect, but you at least get the baseline of what you were trying to do; 7+ is almost always preferable to rolling a 6 or less. If you're trying to **mislead, distract, or trick** someone, for example, then a 7+ means they are fooled, at least for a few moments, probably long enough for you to accomplish your broader goals in the scene.

Even though you get some of what you want on a hit, though, it's not always pretty. When you roll a 7-9—a **weak hit**—there might be some serious costs or complications, but your roll is not a failure. Sometimes those costs are direct—like marking harm or incurring a negative consequence along with your success—but sometimes a 7-9 simply means you get fewer positive results from the move you just made. You get what you want, but not the best, most advantageous version of your ideal outcome.

A 10+ is usually described as a **strong hit**—you get everything you want or even some sort of bonus, well beyond what you get if you roll a 7-9 result. You might avoid a consequence—you don't mark corruption or avoid some harm—or you might get a greater result or choose additional options from a list. Most of the time, you're hoping for a 10+ when you pick up the dice and roll, especially if you want to avoid the costs of a weak hit!

In rare circumstances, moves have even greater outcomes if you roll a strong hit with a 12+. These are primarily **advanced moves**, upgraded versions of the basic moves you can unlock through advancement. These improved basic moves offer bonuses beyond a 10+, like converting someone to a real ally when you **persuade** them or manifesting new abilities when you **let it out**. You can read more about advanced moves on page 188 in **Chapter 7: Advancement**.

## MISSES AND FAILURES

A miss isn't always a failure: it means something interesting occurs...and the MC is about to tell you what interesting thing happens. It's likely your character won't like what happens, since the MC's job is to push the story in interesting directions, but—as a player—you'll often find yourself enjoying the way the story twists and turns. There's no rule that says the results of a miss have to be awful or the worst result you can possibly imagine—sometimes the most interesting miss means you get what you want but in the worst possible way.

*Ram decides that Rashid will lay it on thick for Pruett. "I'd love to stay and talk, Dr. Pruett, but those field teams are waiting for me." They pick up the dice, note that they're rolling with **MIND**—their highest stat at +3—and roll.*

*Snake eyes. Ram's total is 5. Short of the 7 they need to hit.*

*Marissa says, "Dr. Pruett looks excited. It dawns on you too late that he was demanding you take a more active role in fieldwork. Before you can say anything more, he claps you on the shoulder and says, 'Wonderful! I'll head out with you. I haven't seen anyone on the field team recently. It will be good to get off campus.'"*

*Ram groans. Now they've got to figure out a way to get rid of Pruett before they can do any snooping at all in Hyde Park. Not to mention that no one from the field team is actually expecting them...*

The MC isn't playing *against* you, but one of their main jobs is to push the story forward with dangerous twists and hard choices. The MC has to introduce down beats to make the stakes of the story real, to remind you that your misses have real consequences. They might not be failures, but they will be challenging outcomes that push you to rise above them. And even when failure occurs, something still happens that advances the narrative and changes the stakes or terms of the conflicts and challenges.

The MC almost never rolls dice in **URBAN SHADOWS**—except in specific circumstances (see **When Does the MC Roll Dice?** on page 38). Instead, they tell you what's happening and respond to your actions. They make their own moves when a player rolls a miss, when a move calls for them to do so, or when the conversation stalls out and everyone looks to them for what happens next. If you're the MC, see **Chapter 8: Master of Ceremonies** for more info on your role, including your MC moves and resolving conflicts between players.

## MOVES AND UNCERTAINTY

If you're new to roleplaying (or at the very least new to roleplaying games that use moves), you might look at these mechanics and feel a bit restrained. After all, there are only seven basic moves, plus a handful of additional moves that address Debts, interacting with the Circles, and broader city politics. Does that mean that's all your character can do? What if you want to do something that isn't covered by those moves?

The answer is simple: **the moves are for when no one—neither the players nor the MC—knows what happens next.**

If you want to do some everyday task like driving across town or cooking a simple meal—no urgency, no danger, no risk—then there is no uncertainty. The players and the MC all know what happens next. By the same token, if you want to say something funny to make other players laugh—without expecting anyone to respond in a particular way—then there is no uncertainty. Everyone can respond however they like!

But when you try to drive across town to save an ally from certain doom or perform a magic trick to impress a faerie king, uncertainty mounts quickly. In those moments, no one knows what happens next. *That's* when a move triggers, when you and your group need help from the mechanics to find a way forward.

*Booker, the Hunter, is a ghost hunter who does her best to keep to herself and her hunts. But when her kid sister gets kidnapped by a ghost that got away from her, she's going to have to get her hands dirty to get her back.*

*"Booker knows where she's being held, right?" Briana, Booker's player, asks Mark, her MC. "Last session, I cashed in a Debt with Watanabe to get that info."*

*Mark nods. "Yup. A toy store on 2nd street. Do you want to stake the place out or just kick down the door?"*

*"I want to play this cool. Can I figure out what's going on here?" Briana picks up the dice, ready to roll.*

*"There's no one to figure out yet. Do you want to wait around until you see someone coming or going?"*

*"Yeah. Do I have to roll to stay hidden or something?"*

*"Nope," says Mark. "You're a hunter! This is what you do. I think you can probably run a stakeout without any issues. You wait for a few hours—no one leaves or enters—until you see a vampire pull up in a convertible right in front of the place. Do you want to figure him out?"*

## UNCERTAINTY STRUCTURES PLAY

Moves are limits that encourage creativity; they're a structure for uncertainty, a way of signaling what kind of conflicts drive the story. You'll notice that there aren't any moves for hailing a cab or using an elevator in **URBAN SHADOWS**. Your group doesn't need moves to figure out what happens when you do those things. You say what you want your character to do, and the MC tells you what happens because of it. No moves needed.

But when things get uncertain? When you try to perform a magical ritual to banish a crazed spirit to the abyss? When you try to persuade your husband that you aren't sneaking out at night to hunt vampires? When you let out the beast inside you to summon the strength you need to survive the night? Moves help you resolve those moments.

The interesting thing here is that the kind of uncertainty fundamental to moves isn't one-dimensional. For a move to be triggered, **both the player and the MC need to be uncertain about the outcome of the action.** Player uncertainty is common; players need to go to the MC all the time for how things look, how things taste or smell, and—above all else—what's going to happen. But the MC calls for a move when it's not clear to the MC how things are going to turn out from here.

And uncertainty is a constant theme when playing **URBAN SHADOWS**. The MC (like the players) is playing to find out what happens while staying true to the fictional positioning of the situation. If a PC knocks an evil demon unconscious and moves to kill him, we're all pretty certain what's going to happen: the demon is toast. On the other hand, knocking that damn demon out in the first place is a mystery for both the player and the MC. What will it take? Will there be any consequences? Will the group's clever plan work? Time for a move.

But remember that the moves aren't just natural points of conflict and drama; they are also prescriptive tools for discovering uncertainty in the story. The moves themselves *tell you what's uncertain* in your story, and when those moments arise—when you try to **escape a dangerous situation** or **mislead** an old friend or **let out** the monster within—allow that uncertainty to grow and flourish in the moment...and let the move drive the fiction.

For more on moves, including examples of the basic moves, see **Chapter 5: Core Moves**.



# CORE ELEMENTS

## CORE ELEMENTS

In the chapters that follow this one, you can find the rules for the conversation—the core moves (page 73), the playbooks (page 109), and more. But before you read those specifics, however, it's helpful to understand a few core elements of **URBAN SHADOWS** that show up in almost every single session.

### CIRCLE STATUS

Clout. Respect. Social capital. Whatever you call it, all those who live in the city have some degree of status and reputation within their communities. The more influence you have, the more power you wield...but climbing the ladder is never an easy task.

**Circle Status** represents your current reputation in the city, how members of each Circle view your character on a scale from Status-0 to Status-3. The Status you hold in your own Circle is the most important one—when you say that someone is “Status-3,” you mean “they hold Status-3 in their Circle”—but all four of the Circles have an opinion about you and your power and prestige.

All PCs start with Status-1 in their Circle, but can earn more in play (page 187), growing your reach and extending your influence as you rise up in the social hierarchy. For the most part, you can't hold greater Status than Status-1 in a Circle outside your own; other communities might respect you, but they'll never trust you like one of their own. There are some exceptions—like **Dual Loyalty** (page 138)—but most characters are either mistrusted by other Circles (Status-0) or grudgingly respected (Status-1).

Of course, only those involved with the supernatural world have Circle Status at all, and only relatively major players have a Status higher than zero: ordinary mortals don't have Status, and most of the minions that serve the powers-that-be in the city are Status-0 across the board. Any Status, even Status-1, implies a significant amount of respect within the supernatural community.

### STATUS-3 PLAYER CHARACTERS

Most Status-3 characters are NPCs but...PCs can occasionally reach this level of respect and power, although it's rare and difficult to do so. Learn more about claiming Status-3—and **establishing your own faction**—on page 104!

### LEVELS OF STATUS

Here's a quick guide to what the different levels of Status mean for the city's inhabitants:

- ♦ **No Status** characters are the ordinary mortals of the city, those who don't have any regular interactions with the supernatural world. They can't hold or offer Debts; no one views them as part of the “real” society of the city.
- ♦ **Status-0** characters are nobodies or goons. A Status-0 NPC can hold Debts and pass through most supernatural spaces freely, but their reach and influence are extremely limited.
- ♦ **Status-1** characters are established within the city; their name is known, their Debts are (mostly) honored and they command some degree of attention. All PCs have Status-1 within their Circle at the start of the game.
- ♦ **Status-2** characters are movers and shakers within the city. They carry political power and can use it to manipulate factions, claim assets, or recruit outside allies to their cause. Status-2 characters are powerful enough to be feared, and often hold Status-1 in another Circle as well.
- ♦ **Status-3** characters are the apex predators who wield true power and hold the utmost respect within their Circles—whether that's out of fear, love, or political alliances—controlling their own faction without significant internal rivalries. They might be an angel leading an order of devotees, an ancient vampire with a network of ghoulish spies, or a crime syndicate boss keyed into the supernatural.

It's possible—but rare—to lose status once you've earned it. Ironically, the most fragile status is Status-3; you must work to maintain your position on top. Status-1 and Status-2 are relatively easy to hold once you've acquired them; only rarely would someone commit an offense so grievous that it changes how the rest of their community views them. That said, there are surely a few outcasts—Status-0—in every city who were once held in much higher regard.

In addition to broad fictional positioning, Status also determines how good you are at **refusing to honor your Debts** (page 95) and influencing the city through City Moves (page 96). You can read more about both in **Chapter 5: Core Moves**.

## CIRCLE RATINGS

While Circle Status reflects the degree of influence and respect you command within a Circle, **Circle ratings** measure how well you understand that Circle's politics and members. Most high-status members of a Circle likely also have a high Circle rating, but it's not guaranteed. It's one thing to earn the respect of your community, and a far different thing to keep up with that community's current politics!

While Status is always zero or greater, Circle ratings can be negative, reflecting a misunderstanding or lack of competency in regards to a given Circle. A member of Mortalis might have a poor understanding of Power, for example, not grasping the long-term political view held by a community of wizards and oracles. On the other hand, a member of Power may be so far removed from day-to-day mortal life that they have a negative Circle rating with Mortalis, forgetting what it's like to have to hold down a job and worry about a mortgage.

Either way, Circle ratings range from -3 to +3. A character with a high Circle rating has contacts and connections within that Circle, easily interpreting political information about the Circle; a character with a low Circle rating doesn't understand how that Circle works or who the power players are within that particular community. The primary use of these Circle ratings is through Circle moves (page 86). When you roll one of the moves that calls for a Circle rating, you use your current rating in that Circle as your bonus.

*Leland, the Spectre, began play with Mortalis +0, Night +1, Power +1 and Wild -1; Leah, Leland's player, elected to add 1 to Mortalis to reflect Leland's service as a parish priest in the local neighborhood. Most parishioners don't know that Leland is, in fact, a ghost, and within that role he's able to keep up with most of the news in the Mortalis community (+1).*

*When Leland **hits the streets** to find an ally to help him track down a missing child from his congregation—one of his anchors—he decides to go to a local hunter he worked with before his death, a woman named Elodie. Leah rolls with Mortalis (+1) and scores a hit!*

Unlike Status, your ratings with each Circle shift constantly, reflecting the impact your character's experiences have on their understanding of these various communities. Check out the end of session move on page 85 for more on your changing relationship with each Circle.

## DEBT

In the supernatural underworld of the city, there is no greater currency than **DEBT**—the obligations that bind the characters to each other amidst the chaos of the city. Everyone, from the most powerful wizards to the lowliest imps, collects and spends Debts.

During character creation, your group assigns Debts between each of the player characters to link them together—past alliances, struggles, and other messy connections (page 68). But Debts aren't just for player characters; every single other character in the city—except No Status mortals—relies on Debts.

But a Debt isn't something you can physically hold—it's intangible, a connection between a debtor and their creditor known to all...and unlikely to be forgotten. Those whom you owe can quickly become an obstacle to your goals...or make you a pawn in their bids for real power and prestige. And those who owe you are the closest thing you have to real allies.

### EARNING DEBTS

Debts are not given lightly. But if you do someone a favor without asking for anything in return? They now owe you a Debt. Stick your nose into someone else's business without cause? You owe *them* a Debt if they let it go. Because your character's interests will often bump into or against those other PCs and NPCs, you'll quickly start racking up Debts just by pursuing your goals. Sound messy? It is—that's the way life works in the city, the way everyone gets by without killing each other in the streets.

*Hanako, the Veteran, retired after losing his wizard powers ten years ago. But recent events dragged him into conflict with a pack of werewolves of his neighborhood—The Crimson Kings—and he's not backing down from the fight.*

*After Hanako runs off two members of the Kings when they try to shake down a bodega trafficking in magical items, Marissa, his MC, tells his player, Harley, that he's going to owe a Debt to Carla, the alpha of the Kings, because Carla is willing to let the conflict go for now.*

*"But this is my neighborhood! It's my business who owns territory here," says Harley. "If anything, the owner of the bodega, Irvin, should owe me a Debt for protecting him."*

*Marissa thinks for a minute, then says, "Yeah, Irvin does owe you a Debt for running them off, but you've never established that you're back in the game or that this is your territory. I think you owe Carla a Debt; you embarrassed her guys and they aren't going to pursue it. Cool?"*



## CASHING IN DEBTS

Debts are mainly used during the game when a character—PC or NPC—cashes in the Debt to compel another character to action. Often, PCs are the ones cashing in Debts, but NPCs can cash in Debts with PCs—pushing that character to action—or even with other NPCs if there’s something specific they need done! That said, cashing in a Debt with a player character is different than cashing in a Debt with an NPC.

When you cash in a Debt with a player character, you can make them:

- ♦ answer a question honestly
- ♦ do you a favor at moderate cost
- ♦ lend a hand to your efforts
- ♦ get in the way of someone else
- ♦ erase a Debt they hold on someone
- ♦ give you a Debt they hold on someone else

When you cash in a Debt with a non-player character (NPC), you can make them:

- ♦ answer a question honestly
- ♦ arrange a meeting with an NPC in their Circle
- ♦ grant you a worthy boon or useful gift
- ♦ erase a Debt they hold on someone
- ♦ give you a Debt they hold on someone else

*Leland’s conversation with Elodie is going poorly—he managed to find her at a local dive, but she’s not particularly interested in helping him track down a missing kid, even if it is one of the anchors that keeps him on this mortal plane.*

*“I have a Debt on Elodie from that time she hid out in my church when the cops were looking for her, right?” says Leland’s player, Leah. “I’m going to **cash in a Debt** to get her to take me to the head of the organization she works for.”*

*Mark’s a bit surprised—he expected Leland to try to **persuade** Elodie to help him find the missing kid, but going straight to her boss is an interesting move. Leland might just get the whole of a hunter faction on his side!*

*“Elodie grimaces and sighs. ‘Fine. You want to talk to the boss about some dumb kid, I’ll take you. But don’t expect me to try to convince him to get involved in this mess. You have to do that all on your own, okay?’”*

More about cashing in Debts (or attempting to refuse a Debt that’s been cashed in with you) is on page 92 of **Chapter 5: Core Moves**. You can also read more about Debts as a sociopolitical structure on page 21 of **Chapter 2: Cities of Shadow**.

## CORE ELEMENTS FOR NPCs

NPCs take harm, acquire Debts, and hold Status just like PCs. Some things work a little differently for them but you can think of them as simplified versions of PCs. NPCs don’t have playbooks or lists of moves—the MC never rolls dice for them (outside of a faction turn), but instead tells the PCs how the NPCs react to the PCs’ moves and actions in the fiction.

All major NPCs have a name, Circle, and Circle Status. NPCs can gain and cash in a Debt just like the PCs, but they don’t have their own intimacy moves or mark corruption. The MC tracks these Debts, but it helps if players also track the Debts they owe to NPCs (and that NPCs owe them) to make sure everyone is on the same page.

When a mortal NPC takes harm, it hits them worse than it hits a PC—they’re not the main characters, after all! Inflicting 2-harm is serious damage and 3-harm is usually fatal for most mortals. Armor can mitigate harm but the average person doesn’t have access to riot gear armor; magical resistances are even more rare for mortals, but members of Mortalis sometimes have surprising capabilities. Nevertheless, if a mortal survives a serious attack that inflicts more than 2-harm, they’re going to need help fast.

Supernatural NPCs exist, of course, and a lot of how they handle harm comes down to fictional positioning. Vulnerabilities mean they take more harm, resistances act as armor, and some NPCs can simply take more punishment than a mortal NPC (or even a PC) and heal faster than average. It’s common for a vampire or werewolf NPC to have six or more harm, and some demons or otherworldly creatures might have even more than that, taking ten or more harm to kill.

Neither mortal nor supernatural NPCs have scars, however, so marking their final harm box means they are always on death’s door. If they don’t get help right away—that’s it.

More detailed information about creating and managing NPCs is on page 218 of **Chapter 8: Master of Ceremonies**.

## INTIMACY

**Intimacy moves** are unique to each playbook, reflecting how your character connects with others during moments of closeness. Intimacy isn't a rare thing in the city—characters have all sorts of connections with each other, including romantic, familial, or other intimate relationships—but intimacy between characters in an **URBAN SHADOWS** story is worth taking a moment to appreciate in the fiction. It's an opportunity for the group to learn more about the characters—what do they care about? What makes them tick? What are they willing to share when vulnerable?

What defines a moment of intimacy is up to the parties involved, but the MC might ask, "Is this a moment of intimacy?" if no one brings it up. Regardless of who raises the idea, intimacy requires both (or all) parties to agree it occurred: it means they've shared a poignant and personal moment with one another based on real vulnerability and connection. It's not possible to force intimacy on anyone; if someone doesn't want to open up, they clearly aren't engaged in intimacy!

There are obvious moments of intimacy—sex, ritual magic, transcendental psychic experiences—but urban fantasy is filled with a variety of emotional connections. Two characters might get drunk together or tell each other painful secrets or open up about their real desires in the face of the city's unending grind. Any and all of these moments are triggers for the characters to go deeper into their connection by activating their intimacy moves, exploring the emotions that result from this kind of genuine closeness.

When you trigger an intimacy move, read the text of your intimacy move out loud and follow the instructions given. Most of the time, your move gives you an opportunity—like the Oracle's visions—or a link to the character with whom you just shared a moment of intimacy—like the Wolf's primal bond. If an intimacy move requires you to hold one or take down another move or bonus, note that on your playbook.

The effects of any intimacy move activated in play are more or less permanent. If a move offers you hold, it's yours until it expires; if you mark corruption or claim a Debt because of a moment of intimacy, mark or claim those just as if you had acquired them through some other non-intimate method.

## INTIMACY AND SAFETY

Moments of intimacy can be tender and vulnerable but they don't have to be physical or sexual. Any moment of deep emotional connection can trigger an intimacy move. But whenever you have any of these moments—especially if they involve two or more characters engaging in physical intimacy—it's important to make sure everyone at the table feels comfortable out-of-game as well.

There are a wide variety of safety tools you can use to ensure everyone enthusiastically consents to intimacy while working together to avoid unsafe or triggering content. You can read more about recommended safety tools for **URBAN SHADOWS** on page 12.

*Paris, the Oracle, is snooping around Juno's apartment when he finds Juno, the Wolf, huddled in a ball near her car, unconscious after barely escaping a vicious beating at the hands of local demons. Paris gets her upstairs to safety.*

*Mark, the MC, says, "Juno, you start to wake up. You're a bit defensive, but you see that it's Paris who saved you."*

*Jamila, Juno's player, nods and says, "Juno chokes out, 'Thank you...' and you can see she's really grateful. You've never seen her this vulnerable."*

*Mark jumps on that statement. "Great! Sounds like a moment of intimacy to me! Right?" Both players nod. "Let's have you both read your intimacy moves aloud and then we'll see how they turn out."*

*Jamila says, "Okay, I form a primal bond with you until time passes. We both always know where to find each other and when the other is in trouble. I think we look into each others' eyes and you truly see the beast inside me." Jamila and Pytha mark that down both on their sheets.*

*Pytha, Paris's player, says, "My move says that I get a 'specific and clear vision' about Juno's future, and that I can mark corruption to ask more questions. What do I see?"*

*Mark thinks for a moment, then says, "You see Juno towering over Zara, the Tainted! They're in a dark room, and Zara is holding a hand up, as if she's pleading with Juno. Do you want to mark corruption to ask two more questions?"*

*"Yeah, I want to know 'When is this going to happen?'"*

*"Tonight. You know it's tonight. Ask another!"*

*"Why does Juno want to hurt Zara?"*

*"She's full of rage," Mark says, "and thinks Zara had something to do with the demons who jumped her..."*



## CORRUPTION

The darkness of the city's streets isn't just about shadows and monsters; it lives in your heart, burrowing its way into your psyche each time you look for answers and solutions in the worst parts of your soul.

*Sin. Darkness. Taboos. Corruption.*

A whisper in the dark when you aren't expecting it. A sudden flush of lust and greed in a vulnerable moment. A feeling—all too certain—you're better than all this, that you should be ruling this city of weak-willed sycophants. **Corruption** eats at you when you're alone, promising power in exchange for a bit more control. And it's there when you desperately need an out, ready to trade everything you need for just a piece of your soul.

Until one day, you wake up to find there's nothing left to give up. The darkness has it all; it's gobbled you up a piece at a time. And now you're the danger and the darkness...and a threat to everyone else.

### GAINING CORRUPTION

Corruption is an advancement system, albeit one that emphasizes personal power and self-driven motives. When you're told to mark corruption, check off a box in the **corruption track**; when you've checked off all five boxes, you unlock a **corruption advance** and clear your corruption track to start anew. Corruption advances, like standard advances, offer your character new abilities, but they usually come at a high price: more corruption.

There are only a few ways to mark corruption:

- ♦ Hitting your playbook's corruption trigger
- ♦ A move tells you to mark corruption
- ♦ The MC tells you to mark corruption

The main way PCs gain corruption is through a corruption trigger—a unique circumstance that represents your character stepping further away from a mortal life or giving in to their supernatural urges.

*Darius, the Vamp, decides to feed on a bartender to heal his wounds. He lures the man up to his haven for some drugs and proceeds to feed on him while he's passed out.*

*Marissa, his MC, says, "Yeah, I think that triggers your corruption move. He's an unwilling victim."*

*Darius's player, Dominic, argues a bit: "He knows I'm a vampire! And I took him up to my haven."*

*"Yeah, but you didn't get consent. Mark the corruption."*

## CORRUPTION ADVANCES

Corruption is more than just *darkness* or *evil*. It represents your character slipping toward the worst parts of their nature, becoming that which should be feared instead of respected, hated instead of loved. Yet, as your corruption mounts, your powers only grow...

Corruption advances **unlock additional corruption moves** or **add +1 to a stat (max +3)**. Corruption moves are powerful, but they generate corruption when you use them, a downward cycle that pushes your character further down a dark path.

*Paris tells his brother to leave town because he's seen his death, a false prophecy. Since he's the Oracle, he marks corruption, his fifth on the track. His player, Pytha, decides to **take a corruption move from another playbook** as Paris's corruption advance: **Telekinesis** from the *Spectre*. Now Paris can move objects with his mind...*

### RETIRING AS A THREAT

Eventually, your character no longer has any more corruption advances left. Instead, you'll be left with only one, ugly option: **retire as a threat**. If you unlock this advance, your PC is no longer yours; they belong to the MC, who can use your character like a weapon against the other players' characters. You slipped over the edge, grew too close to the darkness, and your friends and allies now pay the price.

*Juno finishes her bloody war against the demons moving in on her territory, triggering her Wolf's corruption move and marking her fifth corruption. She's already marked off all other corruption advances; the only option left is to retire her character. She hands her playbook over to her MC, Mark. Now Juno, Jamila's Wolf, is an NPC, a dangerous threat seeking revenge on those who have harmed her loved ones.*

There's no hard and fast rule about what it looks like for your character to fall to darkness. Your new moves will drive you toward marking more corruption, but that doesn't mean that you have to give in all at once; some characters fight the darkness, hoping to save themselves and the city all at once.

But some characters revel in the thrill—marking corruption whenever they can as they rush toward the cliff and hoping to accomplish as much as they can before the fall. But judge not lest you be judged; as Lucifer himself once said, "It's better to reign in hell than serve in heaven."

## HARM

Characters in **URBAN SHADOWS** are no strangers to violence. The supernatural world is like any community that focuses on illegal or illicit activity: violence is a substitute for all the other forms of communication that are excluded by the nature of the business. You can't, for example, sue another werewolf pack in municipal court for taking your territory or call the cops to tell them that an undead vampire lord murdered and ate your brother. You've got to handle all that shit on your own.

There are methods that help supernatural communities resolve conflicts without resorting to physical force—ancient faeries who serve as neutral arbiters or demonic contracts that magically enforce nonviolence—but they only delay the inevitable. The language of the streets is violence. Always has been, always will be.

### TRACKING HARM

When your character suffers injury or trauma, you take **harm**. If you take too much harm, you die.

The harm track consists of five boxes moving through three tiers: one **faint**, two **serious**, and two **critical**. When your character suffers harm, check off a number of boxes on your harm track equal to the harm suffered. A weapon like a gun usually does 2-harm, so getting shot usually requires you to check off roughly two boxes.



You always begin by marking harm in the faint tier and moving down the track into serious and then critical. When you mark a box of harm in a new tier, write a short description of the injury on your sheet in the space beside the boxes to remind yourself what harm your character has suffered (and how best it might be treated later). If you ever need to mark harm and can't—because all your other boxes are full—you die. Death usually triggers your end move (page 50)!

*Marcos, Miguel's Sworn, is trying to run down a vampire, Rictus, who left him for dead at the bottom of an elevator shaft in the projects. When Marcos **hits the streets**, he gets word that Rictus is out hustling drugs on a local corner. Within a few moments, Marcos is sitting in his car, watching Rictus from a dark alley.*

*"You see Rictus calling to cars rolling by, offering up something in his left hand, probably heroin. Do you get out and start shooting?" Mark, the MC, asks.*

*"Nah. I think I'll just hit him with my car."*

*Mark laughs. "Yeah, okay. That sounds like you're **turning to violence** (page 74) with the car as a weapon..."*

*Miguel rolls a 10. "I'm going to inflict terrible harm. I figure he's got corner boys around that might give me some trouble, but maybe if I really mess Rictus up, they'll back off."*

*Mark nods. "Right. He's going to inflict harm on you in turn, but you're going to have the upper hand. You gun the engine and turn on the hi-beams, racing toward Rictus. He turns and bares his fangs, then withdraws a sub-machine gun from his jacket and opens fire. Usually it does 2-harm, but you're in a vehicle, so let's make it just 1-harm from all the glass flying around from the broken windshield; he doesn't have much chance of actually hitting you directly."*

*Miguel marks in the first box of his harm track on his sheet and writes "Glass Cuts" next to the faint harm box.*

*Mark continues: "You don't slow down at all. Rictus realizes your plan too late and fails to jump out of the way in time. You catch him full on with the weight of the car, and he goes directly under. You hear bones crunch as he falls under the wheels of your ride. You skid to a stop, and throw the car into reverse, crushing him a second time under your wheels while his goons scatter. Let's call it 3-harm: 2-harm for the car and 1-harm for choosing to inflict terrible harm."*

*"You're pretty sure that would have mortally wounded a mortal, but a vampire like Rictus is almost certainly still alive. Do you stop the car and check?"*

*"Nah. I think he'll remember me now. We're good."*

NPCs suffer harm just like PCs, marking their harm track an equal amount when shot, stabbed, or hit by cars, but the amount of harm they can take varies greatly. Check out page 43 for more on how harm—and other core elements of play—work for non-player characters!



## HEALING HARM

The different levels of harm reflect how badly your character is hurt, moving from minor injuries to wounds that require immediate medical attention:

- ♦ **Faint harm** is minor—getting stabbed in a non-vital area or getting into a fist fight that doesn't last too long. Most characters can shrug off faint wounds by getting some rest.
- ♦ **Serious harm** is dangerous stuff—getting shot in the shoulder or hit by a car. If you suffer serious harm, you need medical attention to keep things from getting worse, but you'll be (more or less) back on your feet in a few days.
- ♦ **Critical harm** means you're on the verge of dying, like getting shot in the stomach or beat in the head with a metal bat. If you don't get to a hospital—or find some magic to patch you up real quick—you're going to die.

If your character suffers faint harm, they heal naturally without any special treatment; when your character suffers serious or critical harm, your injuries need special attention. You might need to *hit the streets* to find a vampire doctor who can patch you up, a faerie healer who can magically close your wounds, or—at the very least—an old friend to pull the bullets out.

How long before your serious or critical injuries worsen is entirely up to your MC. They make the decision based on the injuries you've sustained, the conditions in which you find yourself, and the dramatic tension of the scene. In other words, your MC will tell you when to mark another harm when your wounds get worse.

Once you've gotten medical attention or magical assistance, healing happens slowly while you rest, removing one faint or serious harm every few days and one critical harm every week. Your MC tells you when you heal harm; mortals can't walk off a bullet wound in a day or two, but some supernatural creatures recover faster. Rest is key; too much activity negates any healing.

When you erase harm, begin with the harm in the critical tier and move up the track, removing the critical conditions before the serious and faint conditions—your worst injuries heal first while the less severe ones don't start healing until your body is stable. Of course, this means that any new harm you take can be lethal while you wait for the critical injuries to heal; your body is fragile when healing from such grievous wounds!

## EXAMPLES OF HARM

1-harm is rough but blunt trauma: fists and baseball bats, punches thrown at a rock concert, the kind of thing people sleep off after a bad night.

2-harm is painful and obvious: a gunshot wound, a bad car wreck, wounds impossible to hide without bandages and slings.

3-harm is worse than all that: a bullet at point-blank range, a sword cleaving tendon and bone, a beating that leaves you unrecognizable for a week.

4-harm means instant death to a mortal human: a grenade blast at close range, losing a limb or internal organ, falling off the top of a ten-story building.

*Weakened and wounded, Rashid is on the run from a hunter, Tiana, who believes that Rashid's grown too close to their werewolf lover, Matt. As Rashid flees, Tiana shoots them in the back. Marissa, Rashid's MC, says, "You feel a sharp pain...and then hit the ground. Hard. Take 2-harm."*

*"Hmm. That's it. Those are my last two boxes of harm."*

*"You hear Tiana yell, 'I'm sorry, kid. It's not personal.' You half expect her to shoot you again, but instead you hear her walking away. Maybe she's leaving you here to die..."*

*"Fuck that. I took **If You Can't Beat 'Em** last session as a corruption advance. All this time spent screwing my werewolf boyfriend has to mean something. I'd like to **let it out** and use my new Wolf ability to heal some harm."*

*Ram, Rashid's player, rolls a 10 to **let it out**. "Yes! I heal 2-harm instantaneously, starting with critical harm. I'm going to ignore any complications and mark corruption. Is that enough to keep me alive?"*

*"Sure! You're filled with adrenaline as your flesh starts to knit back together. You feel the bullet push out of your body, and you hear the metal slug hit the asphalt. You're hungry as hell, but at least you're not dying. What do you do?"*

*Rashid erases both of their critical harm boxes. They're still hurt, but they've bought some time. "I call Matt. He and his pack aren't far, right? They should be able to get me."*

*Marissa says, "Yeah, that makes sense. Matt's pack helps you to the hospital. Let's skip forward in time a day or two. They've treated you—go ahead and heal two more harm—but the authorities definitely have some questions about who shot you. A few detectives who've been waiting patiently while you were going through surgery come into the room. What do you do?"*

## ARMOR

Characters wearing **armor** (a Kevlar vest, stab-vest, chainmail shirt, etc.) receive a layer of protection from most physical attacks. If they suffer harm from which their armor would protect them, they reduce the harm suffered by the rating of the armor.

Most armor is rated at 1-armor or 2-armor. Typically, **1-armor** is lighter and less conspicuous—bulletproof vests, heavy leather jackets, etc.—whereas **2-armor** is obvious to all—riot gear, plate mail, etc.—and bound to attract attention; anyone who sees someone walking around the city with riot gear armor is probably calling the fucking cops.

Playbook moves can grant an armor bonus or rating without the need to wear actual armor. This armor is usually supernatural (or situational), and may not appear to the naked, mundane eye. That said, most mortals notice if someone unloads a full clip from a 9mm at close range and you escape unharmed.

If a character's armor reduces the harm suffered to zero, the attack inflicts no harm at all; the armor has absorbed the damage, even if the attack succeeded. Attacks that inflict no harm can still have consequences! If a fae troll knocks you off a bridge while you're wearing riot gear, you might avoid damage from the blow, but you'll have to find your way back to the bridge before you can defend your friends.

*Booker and Marcos are trapped in a burning rowhouse, confronting a demon that Marcos's masters want brought to heel. Marcos, desperate to get this done quickly, opens fire on the demon with his 9mm, inflicting 2-harm. Mark, as the MC, thinks it matches the fiction if the demon has 2-armor and says, "The rounds glance off the demon's skin. It looks like his hide is made of magma. What do you do, Booker?"*

*Booker's player, Briana, thinks for a minute as she consults her arsenal. "I have a blessed magnum with the +holy tag. Shouldn't that help out here somehow?"*

*Mark smiles. "Yup. It's armor piercing against demons."*

*Briana smiles back. "I think I'll draw that and **turn to violence**, then."*

*Briana rolls a hit and inflicts 3-harm on the demon with Booker's magnum, casting the demon back to hell. However, Mark chooses to put Booker in a bad spot—the demon caves in part of the wall with its wild strikes as it dies, trapping Booker under a pile of burning debris. Marcos needs to act fast if he wants to save Booker from this collapsing inferno...*

Armor is written out in one of two ways: x-armor or armor+x. X-armor is the base value of a source of armor; armor+x is the value added to a character's base armor by a supplementary source. Thus, x-armor won't stack with another x-armor. Only armor+x can combine with other armor effects to increase the amount of armor a character wears.

Armor piercing (ap) weapons ignore armor. If your character is wearing a 2-armor bulletproof vest and suffers 3-harm from a shotgun blast, you would normally reduce the harm to 1-harm instead of 3-harm. If you suffer 3-harm from an armor piercing sniper rifle, you suffer the entire three points of harm, even if the armor results from a supernatural source.

## STUN HARM

Some weapons and situations inflict **s-harm**, a type of harm that incapacitates or disables characters. Tear gas, tasers, and concussive blasts may knock you off your feet and unconscious long before they kill you.

When you suffer s-harm, your MC will tell you what effect it has. Sometimes you may lose your footing or drop something or you may need to **keep your cool** to stay on your feet. Regardless, s-harm doesn't cause you to mark harm on your sheet, unless you fall down and hit your head while passing out.

*Leland and Zara are breaking into an office complex when they trigger an active security system. Mark, as MC, says, "The floor all around you crackles with electricity. You both take s-harm as the voltage runs up your legs into your body. You both need to **keep your cool** to stay on your feet."*

*As the Spectre, Leland normally wouldn't be affected, but he's chosen to physically manifest in this scene. Leah, Leland's player, rolls with **SPIRIT** and comes up short: snake eyes. Even though Leland has **SPIRIT** +3, he gets electrocuted, breaking his manifestation. "Ouch." Mark lets Leland know that it's going to take some time for him to manifest again after that shock, although he doesn't need to mark trauma (page 143) since he didn't actually take any harm.*

*Zoe smiles. She's recently picked up **Tough as Nails** (page 156) for Zara. "It says here that 'Weapons designed to stun or impair you have no effect unless blessed or holy.' What happens?"*

*Mark says, "Nothing! The electricity surges over your body, but it has no effect. You see Leland jolt for a few seconds and then dissipate. What do you do?"*



## SCARS

When you suffer harm, you may always ignore that harm by marking a **SCAR**. Scars represent your character pushing through the immediate situation at some permanent cost, ignoring harm suffered by immediately reducing one of your main stats. In other words, you get to decide when your character dies from massive trauma by choosing (or not choosing) to negate lethal injuries before they happen at a steep price.

Your character has four scars available to mark:

- ♦ **Shattered** (-1 **BLOOD**) means frightened, weakened, and overly cautious. Shattered characters hesitate when they should act.
- ♦ **Crushed** (-1 **HEART**) means traumatized, timid, and uncertain. Crushed characters bear the full weight of the wounds they've suffered.
- ♦ **Fractured** (-1 **MIND**) means confused, adrift, and disjointed. Fractured characters are unstable and unsure or unfocused and imprecise.
- ♦ **Broken** (-1 **SPirit**) means hopeless, forlorn, and cowardly. Broken characters have little capacity to push through obstacles and dangers.

Marking a scar does more than just soak the harm you almost took; it seizes the momentum for your character and puts you in a position to say what happens next. You may not emerge triumphant in the conflict at hand, but marking a scar is a notable moment in your character's story—you've weathered something impossible at the cost of something precious.

*Despite his best efforts to hide in the city's dark alleys, Darius finds himself trapped by Okai, a vampire hunter intent on killing him to "save his immortal soul." Darius is not amused.*

*After a few exchanges, Darius finds himself with only one box of harm left to mark. When he misses while **turning to violence**, Marissa, his MC, says, "Okai knocks you to the ground and shoves a stake into your chest. 2-harm."*

*That's enough to kill Darius. "I'll mark a scar—Fractured. I don't want to die here to this delusional thug. I think Darius is going to be a bit paranoid and confused if he finds a way to survive this." Dominic marks Fractured and reduces Darius's **MIND** by 1.*

*Marissa nods. "Great. As Okai starts to drive the stake into your chest, you roar and headbutt him. You pull the stake out of your chest and stand up. Okai is scrambling backward, trying to get away. What do you do?"*

Some playbooks can heal scars through advancement, restoring the stat and erasing the scar, but many playbooks must live with the scars they've marked in play—the battles they've fought stay with them until they retire to safety, change playbooks, or meet their end. That said, healed scars may be marked a second time. Once you've reclaimed your fractured psyche, for example, you can fracture it all over again to survive new horrors.



## END MOVE

Death comes for all, eventually. The city may be eternal, but everything (and everyone) else inevitably ends. When your character reaches such a conclusion, read your **end move** aloud and follow its instructions...

*Kashida's in a bad way. She's stuck on the 15th floor of an office building that houses a secret wizard club, caught in the middle of a turf war between Wild and Power. She's suffered five harm, completely filling up her harm track, and it doesn't look like there's any way out of the place.*

*Marissa tells Kai, Kashida's player, "Okay, Kashida. There's no medical attention in sight, and you're knocking on death's door. Time for your end move."*

*Kai smiles. "Let's see... 'When you die, you may place a devastating curse on someone nearby. Specify the effects of the curse and how they may end it.' How close is Belanzaer? I can curse her, right? Even though she's a demon?"*

*"Yeah, she's fighting with Darius now. He seems to be having some trouble with her. You see her throw him into a wall as things start to go dark. She's still fair game."*

*"Perfect. I curse her. I say 'I curse you, Belanzaer, to be mortal until you repent for your sins.'"*

*"Whoa. Nice." Marissa is impressed. She didn't see that coming. "Belanzaer screams. You see her horns pulling back into her head, her eyes turning from solid black to a soft blue. She's definitely vulnerable. Darius, what do you do?"*

*Dominic smiles. "She's mortal now? I eat her."*

Each playbook has its own unique end move. Some pass on moves, resources, or responsibilities to other PCs or NPCs; others offer a chance for the character to shape the city in a lasting way. Work with your MC to decide exactly how your end move comes to pass in the fiction of your final moments.

That said, character death in **URBAN SHADOWS** is exceptionally rare—between scars, armor, and other harm-reducing tools, it's uncommon for a player character to die unexpectedly or meaninglessly. Most PCs die when a player decides the end at hand is fitting! End moves are less a sudden consequence of an untimely death than a mechanical guidance for framing the end of your character's story.

## GROUPS

Much of the violence in **URBAN SHADOWS** is personal and intimate, but some conflicts involve gangs of people all fighting for what they want. These gangs of people are called **groups**, and the rules around violence work a bit differently when groups engage in the conflict.

### GROUP SIZE

A group is treated as a single NPC when they fight as a unit; there's no need to take the time to resolve what each person does with a dozen or more people in the group. In general, larger groups can take more damage and inflict more damage; smaller groups tend to favor indirect confrontation or smaller opposition because they are weaker and prone to serious harm. There are four sizes of groups:

- ♦ small (8 or fewer people)
- ♦ medium (9–16 people)
- ♦ large (16–30 people)
- ♦ huge (30+ people)

A small or medium group can operate without attracting too much attention, but large and huge groups almost always cause nearby civilians to notify the police, call the news, etc. Thirty or forty gun-wielding people are terrifying!

Groups can suffer up to 6-harm, regardless of their size. The MC and the nature of the group determine how much harm they can endure before retreating or surrendering. Mindless undead might fight to the last; human hunters generally cut their losses and flee after a few fatalities. Groups with strong leaders, especially player characters, are more likely to keep fighting. Here's a guide to how that harm progresses:

- ♦ **1–2 harm:** some injuries, a few minor to moderate, no fatalities
- ♦ **3–4 harm:** many injuries, several serious, possibly a couple of fatalities
- ♦ **5–6 harm:** widespread serious injuries, many fatalities

Groups don't change size as they take harm, but any group that suffers six (or more) harm is broken and unable to fight. At that point, the group dissolves; there are too many injured and dead to fight on. Characters leading groups that suffer six or more harm can't rely on the group any longer, even if the characters can keep fighting alone.



## GROUP HARM AND ARMOR

The harm a group inflicts is based on the average weapons they wield. Mercenaries bearing assault rifles (3-harm) are deadlier than some bikers with bats and chains (1-harm). Untrained groups—corner boys wielding katanas (normally 2-harm)—or groups with inconsistent weaponry—a street crew with a few submachine guns and no other weapons (normally 1-harm)—inflict one less harm than a trained group with consistent weaponry.

Groups can be armored just like a character: if most of the group wears armor, the group gains the armor value of that armor. The aforementioned mercenaries probably have advanced military armor (2-armor) while the bikers probably have little more than leather jackets and a few bulletproof vests (1-armor).

When a group inflicts harm on a person or another group, compare the size of the attacking group to the target. For every size category greater the attacking group is than the defending group, increase the harm inflicted by one. Conversely, reduce all harm inflicted by the smaller group on the larger group by one for each size category (minimum 0-harm). As always, armor soaks up harm, one for one, but can be penetrated by armor piercing weaponry.

*While Leland and Zara are recovering from the active security system that dematerialized Leland, a small group of security guards—about a half-dozen guys armed with pistols and nightsticks—fill the hallway ahead of them.*

*“Fuck it. I’m crashing right through them,” says Zoe, Zara’s player. “I’ve got armor from my demon form and these guys aren’t going to know what hit ‘em. That’s turning to violence (page 74), right?”*

*Mark nods, and Zoe rolls. She’s lucky—boxcars! Mark says, “Okay, the guards are barely ready for you when you hit them. Yet despite their surprise, they still inflict harm on you as well. They are a small group, one size bigger than you as an individual, so... 3-harm: 2-harm for the pistols and 1-harm for the group size.”*

*“Fine by me,” says Zoe. “Zara has 2-armor—one from Tough as Nails (page 156) and one from my demon form, so I only take 1-harm. I’ll mark that down as “bruises” on my faint harm line. I’m going to create an opportunity for my ally—maybe Leland can slip through unseen?—and inflict 3-harm using my demon form claws.”*

*“Great! That’s 2-harm because of the group size, but it’s still terrifying. Tell us what it looks like as you tear into them!”*

## FICTIONAL TAGS

For the most part, gear and equipment provide fictional positioning (page 36). Want to hack a mainframe? You need a laptop (or some magical equivalent) to make your moves! In some cases, it’s useful to have more description about the items you use beyond a fictional position. These additional features are called **TAGS**; they cover everything from weapon ranges to special abilities to features of groups.

Check out page 311 for a full list of tag, but don’t think of the lists as definitive—if your group thinks an *extreme* range tag or *precious* item tag is useful, add it!

### RANGE TAGS

Every weapon has at least one range tag that describes the distance at which it can be used with reasonable accuracy. Outside of the tagged range, the weapon does less damage (-1 harm) or can’t work at all:

- ♦ **Hand:** useful within an intimate range, such as touching or striking someone with your bare hands
- ♦ **Close:** useful within a meter or two, probably about the length of the weapon you’re holding
- ♦ **Near:** useful in relative proximity, somewhere between two to six meters
- ♦ **Far:** useful more than six meters away (or farther in good conditions)

Some weapons work at multiple ranges. A *near/far* handgun likely has some sort of sight, while a *hand/close* chain can be used to effectively choke someone or strike them from a meter or two away.

### ITEM TAGS

Some items have tags that offer special rules or clarifications. For example, *+area* means an item can affect an area, like a magical amulet that can compel a group or a gun that deals harm to groups as easily as it deals harm to individuals. Some tags are effectively negative, reminding you of an item’s weaknesses or limitations. For example, *+fragile* items likely break or fail after they are first used.

### GROUP TAGS

Groups can also have tags, usually as a reminder to the MC of the group’s nature, abilities, and limits like *+demonic* or *+trained*. These tags are often custom—created by the MC for the NPC group at hand—but a few show up repeatedly to describe groups that can be led by the PCs.

# STARTING A GAME

Before you play **URBAN SHADOWS**, there are a few things you need to prepare and a few things you need to think about as a group. This section outlines some of the major topics to consider before your first session—everything from getting your play materials in order to structuring multiple sessions and choosing a City Hub for your game!

## PREPARING TO PLAY

You need a space to play the game. If you're playing face-to-face, get a table big enough for everyone to sit around it, spread out a bit, put their playbooks out, and roll dice. Make sure you've got printed copies of the basic moves and the playbooks, along with a pair of dice for each player, some index cards or sticky notes, and a bunch of pencils. You may also want to print out materials for the Master of Ceremonies to keep track of the Circles, NPCs, Debts, and city factions. You can find everything you might want to print for use during the game at [magpiegames.com/urbanshadows](http://magpiegames.com/urbanshadows).

If you're playing online, make sure you've got everyone included in the audio or video call and some tools for keeping everyone on the same page: an online character keeper or shared document, an online dice roller, and all the PDFs of the basic moves and playbooks. You can learn more about the online tools specifically designed with **URBAN SHADOWS** in mind at [magpiegames.com/urbanshadows](http://magpiegames.com/urbanshadows), but many online groups already have established processes for bring their game to life in an online environment.

Don't be afraid to take breaks as you play! While it's tempting to push through for just one more scene, it's often better to pace yourselves as a group and make plenty of room in your sessions for breaks and snacks. Some people find that a four hour session is ideal, playing out a dozen or more scenes in a session and moving the story forward in big chunks, but other groups prefer shorter sessions—two or three hours—to keep everyone from getting exhausted over the course of play. There's no right answer! Take the time to figure out with your group what expectations everyone has for the structure and cycle of the time you all are spending together, and you'll all be happier for it.

## EPISODES & SEASONS

**URBAN SHADOWS** is best thought of like a television show, an ongoing drama that features a consistent cast of characters with an evolving story. Each game session is therefore an **episode** that highlights a different issue or character beat, building the fiction gradually over the course of multiple episodes to form a **season**. When the central conflicts of the season come to a head, there's a season finale—one final session where things explode and the drama resolves (for better or worse), leaving new situations in its aftermath. From there, it's up to you—the authors of this story—to decide if the game gets renewed for another season or if you've reached a satisfying conclusion to the series.

There aren't formal rules about what constitutes a season or episode—it's more of a way to help frame gameplay for you and your group. If you think of the current narrative arc as your "season"—and each session you play as an episode in that season—players can stay focused on specific conflicts and the MC can introduce friends, foes, and complications to build those conflicts into a satisfying story.

If you want to read more about how seasons end—and how new seasons start—check out page 265 in **Chapter 9: Long-Term Play**.

## SHARING SPOTLIGHT

Another reason that television is a more useful framework for your game sessions than movies or novels is the way that **spotlight**—the current focus of the story—gets shared between the player characters. While some television shows focus on just a single protagonist, many invest in a robust cast of characters who each get scenes and stories that focus on their conflicts.

It's the same with **URBAN SHADOWS**—the spotlight moves from character to character, showcasing the full set of conflicts the entire cast engages with in the fiction. Again, there aren't any formal rules for how much spotlight one character should get...but work together as a group to ensure everyone gets an episode or two in which they are the focus. Even if the player characters find themselves working together on a common goal, their experiences are diverse enough to demand a rotating focus.



## CITIES & HUBS

Before you pass out any playbooks or start framing scenes, choose a city—and a City Hub—for your setting. The city is the larger backdrop of your story, the bigger frame for the politics of all the Circles and their factions, while the City Hub is the neighborhood or area that acts as a focus for the actual story you're telling together.

### CHOOSING A CITY

You can play **URBAN SHADOWS** in a fictional city, but the stories told in real cities are often more interesting. There's history in actual cities—tragic suffering and unfulfilled hopes wrapped up in the shitty reality of the dark streets of any large urban area. It's a shame to waste the pain and promise of Atlanta, Los Angeles, Moscow, Paris, or Seattle when so many great resources exist for bringing those cities into your game.

- ♦ **Wikipedia:** It's hard to beat the ubiquitous, easy-to-access online encyclopedia. You can find info about any city in the world, including maps, old history, and current conflicts.
- ♦ **Local Newspapers:** Local newspapers are a great way to bring a city to life, and the Internet makes it easy to access them. Grab a few of the local headlines and you're on your way.
- ♦ **City Guides:** In addition to resources you can draw on in the real world, this book contains two complete City Guides starting on page 275—Chicago and Santiago. Both have everything you need to run a full season in their respective cities.

At the same time, don't get trapped by the reality of your city. **URBAN SHADOWS** is a world filled with undead monsters and supernatural negotiations, a dark reflection of the real world with politics that transcend human dealings. The real Atlanta might be going through a contentious runoff election, but your version of Atlanta might have a vampire mayor who's been running the city for forty extremely suspicious years.

And if you don't know something about the city you're using, make it up. You know the truth behind the lies, after all. The supernatural creatures who lurk in the darkness pulling strings. The sacrifices made by those who wish to keep the peace. The bodies that just won't fucking stay buried, not even when you hex them, bind them, and banish them to another dimension.

## ADDITIONAL HUBS

Want more City Hubs? You can find more at [magpie-games.com/urbanshadows](http://magpie-games.com/urbanshadows), including the Docks, Skid Row, the Financial District, and the Block!

### CHOOSING A HUB

One of the most important decisions you'll make as a group when starting a new season is which **City Hub** to use for your story. **URBAN SHADOWS** includes four hubs, each of which focuses on a specific controlling Circle:

- ♦ The Art District (Wild)
- ♦ City Hall (Mortalis)
- ♦ Downtown (Night)
- ♦ The University (Power)

Each Hub is unique—a character unto itself—just like districts and neighborhoods in real cities. The Art District, for example, is a melting pot where people and communities are constantly in flux; the University, on the other hand, is a seat of tradition, power, and influence, emphasizing long-term politics and the constant pursuit of something greater.

At the same time, a City Hub isn't a limit on your characters' interactions with the rest of the city. It's likely your characters will leave whatever Hub you've chosen, venturing out to conduct all sorts of business. But the Hub is where you'll come back to over and over, like an anchor for your characters that brings them back together over and over.

Decide as a group on your City Hub. The MC might have an idea for which Hub might be a good fit, but choosing the Hub together ensures everyone has a say in the kind of story your group wants to tell. If your group likes the idea of secret meetings behind closed doors and mortal political intrigue, you might decide to play in City Hall. If your group wants to deal with more immediate threats and danger around every corner as everyone fights for a slice of the pie, you might pick Downtown instead.

If you're playing a short game—a one-shot or a few sessions—focus on a just single Hub. It takes at least 30 minutes to flesh out a full City Hub; save as much time as you can to play the game together. In a longer game, however, you are likely to shift the focus of your story to different areas of the city as you play, like a TV show changes its backdrop between seasons. Start with one, but don't be afraid to add one or two more over the course of two or three seasons.

## SETTING EXPECTATIONS

Finally, your group should talk about the kind of stories **URBAN SHADOWS** is built to tell before you dive into your first session. Sometimes folks come to the table expecting their game to be *Interview with the Vampire* and get disappointed when they end up with *Underworld*. Here are elements that help focus that conversation:

### OPEN SECRETS

In **URBAN SHADOWS**, supernatural creatures exist just outside the mortal world, but it's a thin veneer. Very few supernatural communities spend energy and effort in hiding their true identities, and everyone expects most mortals to simply steer clear of the city's dimmest alleys and strangest street corners. Mortals don't know what haunts the darkness because they don't *want* to know what haunts the darkness.

But very few secrets stay secrets in this world. Everyone knows who is a werewolf and who is a vampire, who struck an alliance with the fae and who betrayed the wizards. A lot of mortals have their hands in the pot too, including a few who make their living providing goods and services—blood, drugs, medical attention—to supernaturals who would rather trust a neutral third-party than their own people.

## CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The best **URBAN SHADOWS** stories aren't about the threat of exposing the supernatural. Instead, they are about the mess of social and political alliances at the city's heart crashing down on the heads of the PCs. They're about how communities work together or clash, and how those interactions change the city over time. Unlike other RPGs, this means the PCs aren't necessarily on the same side all the time. That tension is where things get juicy!

**URBAN SHADOWS** is not a pure PvP (player-vs-player) game, nor is it a game of "party"-based adventure. Like your favorite urban fantasy or crime fiction protagonists, the characters often share goals but want to accomplish them in different ways or for different reasons. The Hunter wants to take out a vampire on a feeding frenzy and the Vamp might offer to help—mostly, though, to create a power vacuum and then fill it. Then again, the Hunter's target might be the Vamp's sire or protégé whom they want to protect, putting them at odds.

One of the MC's main goals is to **be a fan of the characters**. Players should be fans of each other's characters too! Keep in mind when your characters get caught up in each others' schemes and cross-hairs that you're all telling a story together, rather than trying to "win" the game. Make sure that everyone at the table is having fun, and you'll enjoy the moments when your characters are at each other's throats even more.





## POWER AND CONSEQUENCES

Regardless of the conflicts at stake, **URBAN SHADOWS** is really about power. Does your character actively want control or is the idea of power repulsive to them? Are they willing to pay the price to get what they want or would they rather let the powers-that-be determine the outcome of whatever situation they are mired in?

**URBAN SHADOWS** reflects this temptation to strive for power through corruption. Need to get stronger? Mark corruption and take an advance to get a leg up on the competition. The only cost, of course, is that you've taken one more step down the path of self-destruction, marked one more box that eventually culminates in retiring your character as a threat (page 45). How your character responds to this downward slide, however, is totally up to you; you might decide in the moment that a taste of power only makes your character hunger for more, or it might leave a bitter taste in their mouth...and make them promise to find some other way forward the next time the devil comes knocking at their door.

## YOUR SUPERNATURAL WORLD

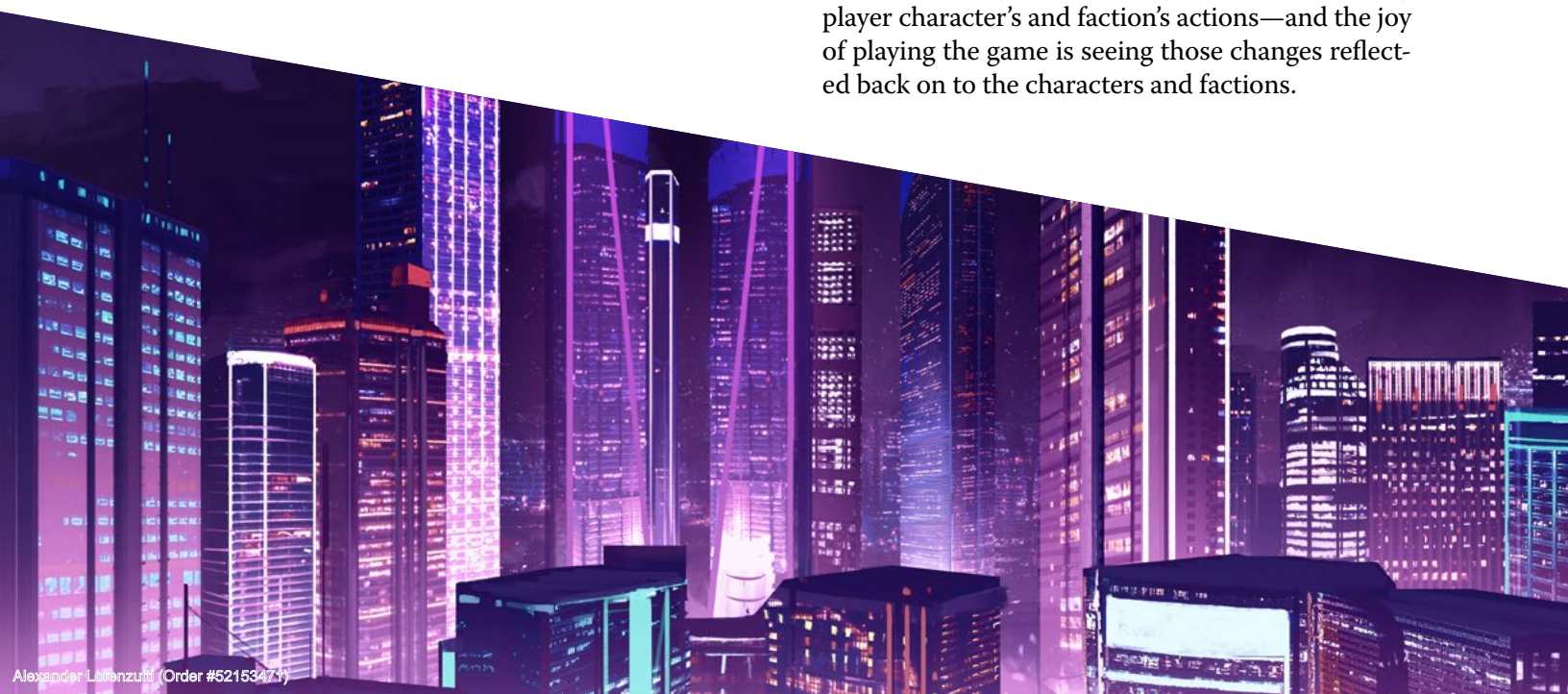
You'll notice that each playbook has some familiar baseline assumptions—the Vamp has a ceaseless hunger, the Wolf can transform in moonlight, and so on. Beyond that, though, it's up to each player (and the group as a whole) to determine the way *your* game world works. The Wolf doesn't have to be weak to silver, for example, and the Vamp might feed on emotions instead of blood. It's up to you and your group! The city features infinite diversity, and your characters and world should reflect it.

Each time you play **URBAN SHADOWS**, your group creates your own unique take on urban fantasy influenced by the choices, decisions, and interests of everyone at the table. The player controlling each playbook puts their own spin on that character with their choices and the fiction they establish through play. The MC and the players work together to make decisions about how things function in the moment. Maybe your city has supernatural creatures specific to the local culture! Maybe your city has a big community of warring wizards but little to no fae presence. All of these things are based on the choices everyone makes during setup and what you talk out during play. Make the city your own.

## THE CITY AS A CHARACTER

Your characters are the protagonists of your story—they shape the narrative as they pursue their goals, get in each others' business, and make moves within the city. But the city itself is just as much a main character as any of the PCs. It changes in response to your actions, with every faction turn and city move, every Circle that gains or loses influence, every character that enters the fiction, and every character that *retires as a threat*.

In other words, the city is a living, breathing thing that affects your story as much as your characters' actions affect the city. **URBAN SHADOWS** is a game about supernatural characters getting into trouble and vying for power, but it's also a game about *communities* and how they interact. The city shapes each of the Circles, as well as its mundane inhabitants, just as much as they shape it. You and your group make the city your own—you'll see that if you remember to zoom out and see how the landscape shifts, physically and politically, in response to every player character's and faction's actions—and the joy of playing the game is seeing those changes reflected back on to the characters and factions.











# CHARACTER CREATION





# Chapter 1

But enough about the city and its rules. Enough about the petty dreams of clumsy goons laboring under the authority of their betters, hoping to one day rise to the top. Enough about the grandiose schemes of towering titans shaping the city's future one murder at a time, convinced of their righteous moral decay. Enough about *everyone else*. Let's take a moment to talk about *you*.

That's why you're here, isn't it? To throw your hat in the ring? To hurl down the gauntlet and dare the city—a truly perfect beast that hungers more purely than you ever will know—to make space for you to find your way in the world?

Of course. It's time. Time for you to forge your own ruthless fixer or hopeless martyr; time for you to try to give the city what it wants and rise above the fundamental chaos of its streets; time for you to make a character hopelessly and forever entwined with the city's tragedies and miracles alike.

Will you embrace the darkness within you to lay claim to the reins of power? Or scramble in the night, lost and confused, bound to another's whims? Probably both—if experience is any guide—at different times, in different moments, for different reasons that only make sense in the moment in which they occur.

For there is one truth to be found amidst the steel structures wrought by human hubris and callous capital: every creature striving to survive in the city's hidden places is both the hero of their own story *and* the villain in someone else's tale of woe. To envision a simpler future for yourself is to dabble in delusion.

But it's time. Time for you to write your own story in the city, time for you to raise up your hopes and dreams and pit them against every other soul who wishes to find themselves before the city eats them whole. We hope you dip deeply into the well of your own blood and find something to feed the city's gaping maw. Surprise us.



## YOUR CITY, YOUR STORY

As you create characters for **URBAN SHADOWS**, you'll find yourself needing to answer questions about the way the world works: How do vampires react to sunlight? What kind of magic can wizards wield? What vulnerabilities do faeries have? Questions, questions, questions.

When these questions come up, answer them as a group. Be thoughtful about what's already been established by the playbooks—the Sworn serves a powerful faction, the Vamp has to feed, etc.—and your group's previous answers, but don't be afraid to decide what's true about your city. If the questions are about a particular Circle, NPC, or faction a character should know well, you can ask that character's player for their insight; other times the whole group needs to coordinate to figure out what works for your table.

That said, your answers aren't ever final or complete; the city still has plenty of surprises. Some characters and situations defy the baseline—a vampire strangely immune to sunlight! There's also a whole set of questions—How many hunters live in the city? Which Circle is the most powerful?—for which your answers are merely a snapshot, a limited look at what your characters only partially understand. What you offer at the beginning is a starting point, a place for the MC and your group to build on as the story grows.

In addition, your group's answers might be a bit contradictory; you have to work together to figure out how both contributions can be true. Are most vampires vulnerable to sunlight, but one group of them is not? Is the city full of hunters, but no one really knows how many? The city is full of inconsistencies and chaos, as are the people who live within it; the *contradictions* make the world more real.

After all, you're playing to find out what happens. The city has a will of its own, a heartbeat that pulses through every session of **URBAN SHADOWS**; let the answers to the questions you raise leave room to tell the stories you still have ahead of you.

## HOW TO USE THIS CHAPTER

Before you make your character, read **Chapter 2: Cities of Shadow** and **Chapter 3: Fundamentals of Play** to make sure you understand the setting of **URBAN SHADOWS** and the mechanics of the game itself. It's tough to make characters if you are totally unfamiliar with the world and the rules!

This chapter contains a step-by-step guide to character creation, including choosing a playbook (page 60), choosing your character's stats (page 62), answering your character's intro questions (page 63), choosing your character's moves (page 64), and addressing your character's core feature (page 64), a narrative center for your character, like the Imp's **establishment** or the Wizard's **sanctum**.

After the explicit steps of character creation, we cover integrating your character in with the rest of the group through introductions and Debts (page 68) as well as dealing with the fixed pieces of each character: **let it out** abilities, corruption, intimacy, and end moves (page 66).

Alongside explanations for each step of character creation, we've provided an extended example of one player—Sasha (they/them)—creating their own character using the Fae playbook (page 116). If you are making a character for the first time, you can follow along with Sasha from start to finish to see their character come to life!

### USING CITY HUBS

If your group is using a City Hub (page 53), make sure to select your City Hub before making your characters. Your character is going to be tied heavily to that district of the city, and you are likely to find that starting with the City Hub in mind helps you create a much more cohesive cast of characters. It's hard to have scenes together if all of the player characters are spread throughout the city!

## PICKING A PLAYBOOK

Creating characters for a roleplaying game is essentially casting your own television show: each player character must be a key part of an ensemble cast with their own enthralling story...and still have enough messy entanglements with the other characters to create a web of rich opportunities for plot and conflict.

In **URBAN SHADOWS**, your group creates your cast of characters using **PLAYBOOKS**, templates that capture specific character types and narrative beats found in urban fantasy fiction. This book includes twelve core playbooks—the Aware, the Fae, the Hunter, the Imp, the Oracle, the Spectre, the Sworn, the Tainted, the Vamp, the Veteran, the Wizard, and the Wolf—but there are other playbooks available elsewhere that focus on different stories.

Each player (except for the MC) chooses a playbook at the start of play and uses it to create their character. No two players can pick the same playbook; there might be vampires all over your city, but there can only be one Vamp. Each playbook frames a specific story arc—if two players use the same playbook, they're (at some level) telling the same story. **URBAN SHADOWS** is about the tensions between metropolitan communities; your starting cast needs to be as diverse and conflicted as possible, just like the city itself.

Playbooks are flexible structures for your imagination rather than painful limits; you bring your character to life through the choices you make and answers you give that build on the tools the playbook provides. Your Wizard, for example, might be a member of an ancient hermetic order seeking untold eldritch power, or she might be a modern-day Tesla who crafts etheric machines in her sanctum, striving to end humanity's pain and suffering.

When you select a playbook, there are a few ways to decide which you choose. You can always pick one that resonates with you—maybe you love scheming hustlers like the Imp—or you might choose one that goes against what you normally play to challenge yourself and try something new. Or you might find yourself drawn to the supernatural type, like choosing the Vamp because you love vampire stories or the Wizard because you've always wanted to wield magical spells and artifacts.

## CREATING A DIVERSE CITY

It's tempting to make something up instead of choosing a playbook or relying on lists of looks and demeanors. But picking from the options provided helps you build a diverse cast, challenging your own ideas of race, gender, class, and sexuality in productive ways that undermine the default.

You may be nervous about playing someone from a different culture or portraying a character with a different gender, but remember that every person is just that—a person. Play them like you play any other character! Give them hopes and dreams and fears; make foolish choices and take bold risks! The world and the city are diverse and fascinating. Your game shouldn't be any less so.

There are no wrong choices! Each playbook is a collection of character hooks and conflicts designed to thrust you immediately into dramatic situations filled with problems and opportunities. Your experience will also be shaped just as much by the choices of your fellow players as your own; a Hunter in a game alongside two fellow mortals (say, the Aware and the Veteran) is very different from a Hunter contending with characters from two different Circles like the Tainted and the Oracle.

If you need more insight into each playbook, take a look at their playbook intro questions, moves, and features (page 63). These elements can reveal how the playbook plays and the kind of conflicts—like the Sworn's divided loyalty between their ideals and their oath or the Fae's "stranger in a strange land" vibe—inherent to the playbook. You might feel drawn to some conflicts more than others; some might actually be unappealing!

*Marissa is MCing for a few friends—Dominic, Ram, Sasha, and Elizabeth. Both Sasha and Elizabeth are drawn to the Imp as they select playbooks; since Elizabeth has never played a roleplaying game before, Sasha lets her take the Imp.*

*Marissa suggests another option for Sasha: "Maybe you should take a look at the Fae; it's another Wild playbook that focuses on what it means to be an outsider in the city." Sasha takes a look and agrees—it looks like a good fit!*

See **Chapter 6: Playbooks** for a full list of the playbooks, including descriptions of each, more detailed explanations of their moves and features, and tips on how to play them during the game.



# YOUR CHOICES

In order to create your character, you need to both decide on the truths of your character's story—their identity, their look, their abilities—and on their position in the fiction. After all, you're creating the central character of your very own story!

## NAME, LOOK, DEMEANOR

Once you've selected a playbook, begin crafting your character by selecting their **NAME**, **LOOK**, and **DEMEANOR**. These three elements are a starting point for your imagination, helping you envision your character long before you start nailing down specific mechanics.

Start with your character's name. Characters in urban fantasy stories often have mundane or everyday names, but nicknames aren't uncommon. You might want to consider your character's look when choosing a name, especially if your character hails from an ethnic or cultural group with distinctive naming traditions. Feel free to draw on any source you like for your character's name, but you might look to online name generators for ideas.

Move to your character's look next: your choices here determine how others see your character when they encounter them on the streets of the city. Do they have an obvious gender presentation? Do they appear to be from a particular ethnic group? What's their style of dress on a typical day? Pick as many from each list as you like, and think about how your character's look has influenced their life in the city. Remember that choosing a look doesn't define any particular "truth" about

your character; it's possible for your character to appear one way—say "conforming" or "White"—and have a very different internal sense of their identity and culture.

Finally, decide what demeanor your character presents to others. Each playbook has a unique set of demeanors keyed to the playbook's specific conflicts and issues; choose from the list provided and integrate it into your understanding of your character.

You can interpret the meaning of a given demeanor broadly—a werewolf who picks *Aggressive* might be eager for a fight or a fast-talking car sales rep—but be specific in how your character embodies their demeanor. Tell everyone—and show them during play—what your character's demeanor says about them. At the start of play, your fellow players won't know much about your character; your demeanor gives them a chance to play off of you, quickly building a dynamic between your two emerging personalities.

*Sasha decides to go with a nickname for their Fae—Sunny—instead of a traditional full name. Sasha picks an androgynous gender presentation; Sunny uses they/them pronouns and appears to be a human in their mid-30s who wears fancy outfits (expensive clothing) wherever they go, even just to see the movies or get a hot dog (eccentric demeanor). Sasha circles Black and South Asian, but doesn't make any decisions about Sunny's actual ethnicity; after all, Sunny isn't really human.*



## CHARACTER STATS

After you select a name, look, and demeanor for your character, determine their starting **CHARACTER STATS**. These stats describe your character, but not in the way you might expect. Rather than focusing on how tough or fast your character is in absolute terms, your character's stats describe broad strengths and weaknesses.

There are four character stats: **BLOOD**, **HEART**, **MIND**, and **SPIRIT**.

- ♦ **BLOOD** is the measure of your character's toughness, instinct, and physical ability. It tells us how quickly your character acts in a dangerous situation and how well they can weather violence.
- ♦ **HEART** is the sum of your character's passion, charm, and charisma. It tells us how proficient your character is at getting what they want through negotiation and discussion.
- ♦ **MIND** is a reflection of your character's intellect, trickery, and perception. It tells us how observant your character is and how good they are at manipulating others through deceit.
- ♦ **SPIRIT** is the level of your character's magical aptitude, inner strength, and willpower. It tells us how focused and determined your character is under pressure, and how potent their supernatural powers might be.

Your character's main stats can never fall below -3, and only in rare cases will one ever exceed +3. It's possible to get incidental, small bonuses (+1) to your rolls during play, but your main stats are the biggest influence on most of your dice rolls: any time you make a basic move (page 74)—and many playbook moves (page 64)—you add (or subtract) one of your character's main stats from your roll.

Each playbook comes with a set of predetermined stats, usually one rated at -1, one rated at +0, and two rated at +1. Add +1 to any one of the stats and write the numbers in the provided boxes on the front of your playbook.

Before you finalize your character stats, look over the basic moves and your character's playbook's moves so you're familiar with which stats are important to your character and their abilities. Each playbook has moves that rely on specific stats that make sense for their abilities and story, stats that you're likely to use more often during play.

For example, a Hunter has a higher **BLOOD** stat because hunting deadly supernatural creatures is messy, physical work; an Oracle has a high **SPIRIT** because they draw upon an inner well of power to see what disaster looms on the horizon. Noting what stats are likely to be used more often can guide your choices during character creation.

*As a Fae, Sunny's starting character stats are **BLOOD** -1, **HEART** +1, **MIND** +0, and **SPIRIT** +1. Sasha wants Sunny to be better at escaping dangerous situations; they start by placing +1 into **BLOOD**, raising that stat to a +0. Sunny isn't great at dealing with physical situations, but moving **BLOOD** from a -1 to a +0 greatly reduces the risks Sunny takes when they need to get out of trouble or hold their own in a scrap.*

## CIRCLE RATINGS

After selecting your main stats, determine your character's **CIRCLE RATINGS**, stats that represent how well your character understands each specific Circle. A character with a high rating in a Circle has contacts and connections, easily navigating that Circle and its politics; a character with a low rating in a Circle doesn't understand how that Circle works or who the players are within that community.

Your playbook defines your character's starting Circle ratings; add +1 to any one of them and write the final numbers in the middle of your playbook. Consider which Circles your character might be entangled with when adding your +1; is your Spectre entrenched in a fae court's politics? Do you answer to a hunter who keeps your Tainted on a short leash?

Because communities and your character are ever evolving, your character's relationships with these Circles will change during play. Keep an open mind in how your character interacts with each Circle, knowing that relationships in the city usually grow more complicated and nuanced over time.

*Sunny's starting Circle ratings are Mortalis +0, Night -1, Power +1, and Wild +1. As a Fae, Sunny has regular dealings with others like them from Wild and the wizards, immortals, and seers who carry the mantle of Power. Sasha decides that Sunny also greatly enjoys the company of mortals—they are so interesting and short-lived!—and adds +1 to Mortalis. Their Circle ratings at the start of the story are thus Mortalis +1, Night -1, Power +1, and Wild +1. Overall, Sunny is familiar with many communities in the city, but Night is still largely a mystery to them.*



## INTRO QUESTIONS

Once you've finished choosing your character's stats and Circle ratings, take a look at their **INTRO QUESTIONS**. Each set of questions is an invitation to explore your character's motivations and history in the city. Answering these questions entrenches you in the drama of your character's life and gives you (and your group) some starting fiction!

Keep the answers brief—leave room in your story for relationships with the PCs and NPCs that haven't yet been introduced. It's important you have a good sense of who your character is, but stay flexible enough to include the other PCs in your story by leaving intentional spaces for them to fill.

As you answer your intro questions, you may also want to take a look at your starting Debts (page 68) to see the kind of relationships you'll eventually establish with the other PCs. These Debts can give you an idea of what kind of interactions you've had in the past, and might give you ideas for how you feel about the other characters.

Some starting questions ask about specific people—like the Imp's question “Who do you call family in the city?” When answering these types of questions, name an NPC (or several NPCs). You use your starting Debts after all the PCs have been introduced to connect you to other PCs, but naming a few NPCs now gives your MC some great characters to include in your story right from the start.

*Sasha decides to start with one of the questions in the middle of the list: “What do you love most about humanity?” Their answer—“I’m fascinated by the drama of their ordinary lives!”—lines up nicely with the +1 Mortalis Sasha added to Sunny’s Circle stats. Sasha also decides that Sunny had to “leave their homeland” because they were banished for a crime they didn’t commit fifty years ago, and they now “desperately need” to find a way to return home in good standing. Sasha finishes the questions by noting that Sunny has a lover—a witch known as Laurel who works Downtown at a new age magic shop.*

## GEAR

All the PCs in **URBAN SHADOWS** start with **GEAR**. Some playbooks have weapons to keep the darkness at bay; other playbooks have gear that helps them connect with the supernatural forces that lie just outside of mortal sight. Either way, follow the instructions on your playbook to select your character's gear.

Sometimes this gear comes from a list, like the Oracle's “set of unique items” or the Wolf's “two practical weapons.” In these cases, pick as many off the list as indicated as your starting gear. Such a list isn't comprehensive or final; you probably have stuff not on this list, like additional changes of clothes, and you can always grab additional gear during the story.

Some gear focuses on narrative prompts, e.g. the Spectre has “Whatever was on your person when you died, albeit spiritual versions of each.” In these cases, describe whatever makes sense for your character to have at the start of the story. Be bold—choose elements that the MC and other players can weave into the narrative, like *a plane ticket to Mexico* or *a bloody knife*, but don't feel like you have to name every last thing; some details about your strange gear can emerge during play.

Finally, a few characters have gear that tells them to detail the gear more explicitly, like the Hunter's **arsenal** or the Veteran's **workshop**. These features require a bit more work—you can read more about them on page 64.

Keep in mind your character's relationship to their stuff. If it's just a gun to you, say it. If it's a gun your dead lover left to you so you could avenge their murder, say that too.

*Sunny gets a comfortable apartment, a nice car, and a smartphone by default, but Sasha still has to pick a relic from Sunny's homelands and a symbol of their court. Sasha decides the relic is a hammer used to forge faerie objects, a tool from their work as a fae smith fifty years ago. For the symbol, Sasha selects a bronze bracer etched with a rising sun. Sunny doesn't wear it every day, but it's an important gift from the royalty of their faerie court.*

## PLAYBOOK MOVES

Finally, choose your character's **PLAYBOOK MOVES**, unique moves available to your playbook that emphasize the talents and themes of your character's archetype. Unlike the basic moves—which all the PCs use regularly throughout play—your playbook moves are special abilities and advantages that set your character apart from the other player characters. Some of these might be obvious extensions of your character's supernatural type, like demonic armor or werewolf tracking, but playbook moves can also add exciting nuance to your character's history or role in the city by offering new ways to engage problems.

Each playbook has special instructions for how many playbook moves you select at the start of play. Follow the instructions provided, but also remember to look at how the playbook moves match up with the character stats you selected earlier (page 62). It's okay to go back and change those stats before you introduce your characters, if you find a move you love or realize that you want to emphasize something different about your character.

Choose moves that reflect both what you want your character to be able to do *and* what kind of fiction you want to see happen. If you're playing the Oracle and choose **Dual Loyalty**, you're telling the MC you want a story in which your character is pulled between two Circles while moving within both of them. Moves aren't just abilities or feats, they're some of the core ways you can shape the story of your character.

Over the course of play, you may take moves from other playbooks through advancements or as the result of events in the story (page 185). We left some room for you to write new moves on each playbook under the section Gear & Notes.

*The Fae gets **Faerie Magic** and two more moves of their choice: Sasha takes **Scales of Justice**, a move that allows them to use **Faerie Magic** by spending Debts instead of paying the usual costs, and **Words Are Wind**, a move that gives them Debts on people that lie to them or break promises. Sasha thinks about instead taking a move that helps Sunny escape—**Draw Back the Curtain**—but decides the other choices better reflect the fact that Sunny was banished and has had to navigate the city without much support.*

## CHANGING THINGS UP

Once you start playing your character, you might find you've made a mistake. Maybe you put your +1 into a stat you're not using that often or took a move that doesn't really reflect your character's emerging personality.

In general, you can make small adjustments that don't change the fiction much if your MC agrees; if you haven't used a move, for example, it's usually fair game to swap it out for another move. Most MCs, however, expect you to lock everything in by the end of the first session. Your wolf can change her **BLOOD** stat after she gets in her first fight, but three sessions in that same **BLOOD** stat is staying where it's at.

## PLAYBOOK FEATURES

Once you've finished looking over your character's stats, gear, moves, and intro questions, fill out your character's **features**, constructing the NPCs, locations, weapons, and obligations that take your character from an ordinary werewolf or oracle to the center of the story—the Wolf or the Oracle—you're telling together.

Each playbook has its own unique features, ranging from the Wizard's **spells** and **sanctum** (page 174) to the Sworn's **oath** and **legendary weapon** (page 148) to the Vamp's **harbor** and **web** (page 160). These features flesh out the playbook's role in the city and give the MC new plot hooks and structures with which to challenge your character.

When filling in the details of your features, remember they are major elements of your character's story; offer interesting answers and make provocative choices that add nuance and drama to your character's life. Even a Hunter—whose **arsenal** consists solely of deadly weapons—can reveal who they are with the weapons they choose. Do they have a sawed-off shotgun that makes a hell of a lot of noise each time they pop off at an angel? Or is it a silent compound crossbow that slings arrows tipped with fae-killing cold iron? Are their weapons gifts from old mentors, trophies from challenging foes, or tokens of respect earned from their hunter organization?

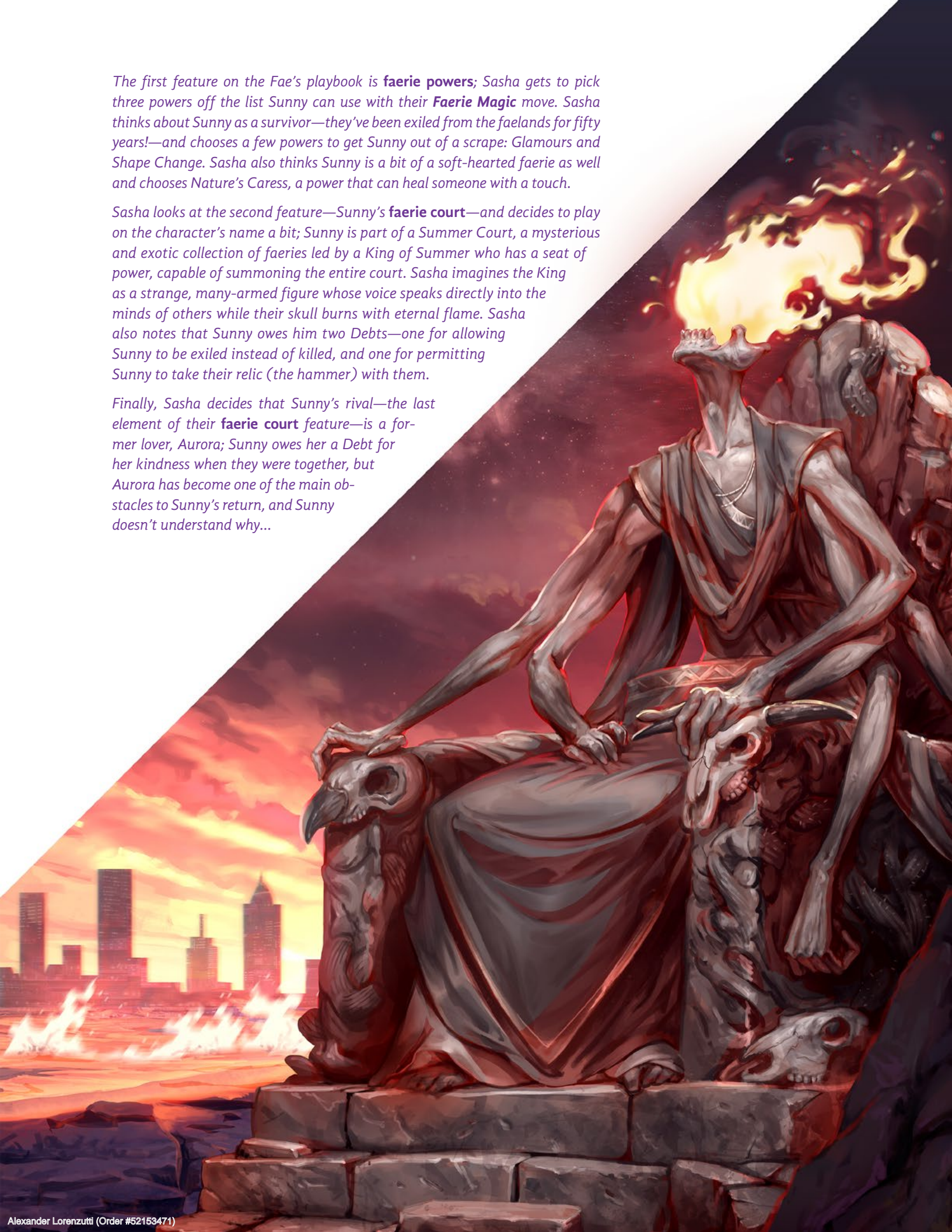
Every feature is an opportunity to enmesh your character in the city, to give your character a backstory and position worthy of the story you're about to tell. Don't miss your chance.



The first feature on the Fae's playbook is **faerie powers**; Sasha gets to pick three powers off the list Sunny can use with their **Faerie Magic** move. Sasha thinks about Sunny as a survivor—they've been exiled from the faelands for fifty years!—and chooses a few powers to get Sunny out of a scrape: Glamours and Shape Change. Sasha also thinks Sunny is a bit of a soft-hearted faerie as well and chooses Nature's Caress, a power that can heal someone with a touch.

Sasha looks at the second feature—Sunny's **faerie court**—and decides to play on the character's name a bit; Sunny is part of a Summer Court, a mysterious and exotic collection of faeries led by a King of Summer who has a seat of power, capable of summoning the entire court. Sasha imagines the King as a strange, many-armed figure whose voice speaks directly into the minds of others while their skull burns with eternal flame. Sasha also notes that Sunny owes him two Debts—one for allowing Sunny to be exiled instead of killed, and one for permitting Sunny to take their relic (the hammer) with them.

Finally, Sasha decides that Sunny's rival—the last element of their **faerie court** feature—is a former lover, Aurora; Sunny owes her a Debt for her kindness when they were together, but Aurora has become one of the main obstacles to Sunny's return, and Sunny doesn't understand why...



# OTHER ASPECTS

In addition to making choices about your character's identity, history, and features, it's also a good idea to check out the other aspects of your playbook: your **let it out** abilities, status, advancement, and more...

## LET IT OUT ABILITIES

You can always invoke your character's supernatural powers as fictional positioning for a move—your vampire's teeth are a good tool for **turning to violence**!—but each playbook also has a set of **ABILITIES** tied to the **let it out** basic move that cover a wide range of supernatural powers and intrinsic advantages your character might possess.

You don't choose these abilities during character creation; you get all of them as you start play, and it's possible you might pick up more through advancement and corruption. The set you start with is unique to your playbook, reflecting the themes and traditional narratives your archetype is known for in urban fantasy fiction. During play, you can use these abilities—by **letting it out**—to get out of trouble, manipulate your enemies, and generally make your way in the city!

*Sasha reviews the Fae's abilities and notes that Sunny has a number of ways to get out of trouble and get information. Sunny didn't start play with any weapons, but they do have the ability to summon an elemental storm!*

For more on using **let it out** to activate your character's abilities, see page 82.

## INTIMACY

When your character is vulnerable and open with other characters, their **INTIMACY MOVE** is triggered. Intimacy can be physical—a night of passion!—but it can also be any other moment of connection: meaningful conversations, moments of emotional vulnerability, the tending of wounds, etc. Intimacy moves, like abilities, are unique to each playbook.

*The Fae's intimacy move says to demand a promise from the other person; if the person refuses or breaks the promise, Sunny gets a Debt!*

For more on intimacy, see page 44.

## CORRUPTION

The city eats away at everyone, dragging you down into a mess of compromises and lies. Your character's descent is tracked by **CORRUPTION**, a measure of how far you have fallen to the monstrous or darker side of your playbook's arc. Corruption isn't solely negative, though—as you mark corruption, you'll get new, powerful moves...most of which require you to mark more corruption as you use them.

Pay attention to your playbook's **CORRUPTION TRIGGER**—the moment at which you have to mark corruption on your **CORRUPTION TRACK**. Each playbook has a unique trigger, something that reflects the tensions inherent in the playbook.

*The Fae's corruption trigger is "When you break a promise or tell an outright lie, mark corruption." Sasha takes note of the trigger; Sunny is likely to have to tell a few lies during play, but Sasha knows each one comes with corruption as well.*

For more on corruption, see page 45.

## END MOVE

In the event your character dies (or retires to safety), your **END MOVE** tells you and your group what happens to resolve your story. Some end moves involve leaving gear behind to other characters; others are more about how things go when you finally pass on. Either way, your character's end move is a binding contract! If your character dies, the end move spells out what happens next.

*The Fae's end move is simple—Sunny can pass on a few special powers, including **Faerie Magic**, to someone if Sunny dies. Sasha notes the move (and briefly considers what kind of character would be worthy of such a gift), but hopefully Sunny isn't dying anytime soon!*

You don't need to be familiar with your end move at the start of play, but reading it gives you an idea of what kind of ending might await your character if the curtain falls during play.

For more on end moves, see page 50.



## CIRCLE STATUS

While Circle ratings (page 42) indicate your character's familiarity with a Circle's politics, important figures, and traditions, **CIRCLE STATUS** reflects your character's influence and reach within a particular Circle. Only relatively major players in the supernatural world warrant Circle Status: most of the minions and goons that serve the powers-that-be in the city have Status-0, and ordinary mortals don't have any Status at all (not even Status-0).

All playbooks start with Status-1 in their Circle, but can earn more in play—including Status in other Circles—through advancement. That said, you can never have a greater Status than Status-1 in a Circle outside your own without some special move or ability; people outside your community might respect you, but they'll never truly trust you like one of their own.

*Sunny has Status-1 in the Wild Circle; as a well-known fae, Sunny is trusted most by the outsiders who live in the city.*

For more on Circle Status, see page 41.

## HARM & SCARS

Words might not ever hurt you, but sticks, stones, and bullets leave all sorts of serious injuries. Whenever you are asked to mark **HARM**, check off one of the boxes on your **HARM TRACK**, starting with faint then proceeding to serious...and finally critical. Your body heals in reverse—you have to recover from the critical harm before the faint harm can truly heal.

If your character has any armor from their gear, write it into the armor box on your playbook. Whenever you mark harm, reduce the harm you suffer by the amount of armor you have, e.g. if you're wearing an armor-1 jacket and get shot with a 2-harm weapon, you only suffer 1-harm.

If you need to mark harm and can't, you either die—triggering your end move—or take a **SCAR** (page 49). The choice is always yours, but living to fight another day has a serious cost; a scar usually stays with your character for the rest of their story.

*The Fae doesn't usually get any armor, but Sasha did select a bracer as Sunny's courtly symbol; Sasha marks down armor-1 in the box next to Sunny's harm track.*

For more on harm, armor, and healing, see page 46.

## ADVANCEMENT

Your character isn't static or unchanging; the events of the story inevitably lead to shifts and changes, new opportunities and new challenges alike. While you might acquire some new abilities from your corruption track (page 192), the primary way you add new stuff to your character is through **ADVANCEMENT**.

When you engage with a Circle in a significant way, such as *cashing in a Debt* with a member of that Circle (page 92) or using a Circle Move (page 86), mark the appropriate Circle on your **ADVANCEMENT TRACK**. When you've marked all four Circles, **ADVANCE** and select one of the available advancements for your character. Initially, you can only choose from the first list; you need to get five full advances before you can choose from the second list.

The playbooks have some shared advancement options—unlocking new moves from your playbook, adding +1 to Circle rating or status, taking a move from another playbook—but many have unique options that help to highlight the themes and arc of that playbook. The Oracle, for example, can *obtain a sanctum* from which to do advanced magics while the Tainted can *erase a scar* or *hire Fiendish Underlings*.

If you're curious about what kinds of stories a playbook tells well, glance at the playbook's advancement options to get a sense of where your story might take you! Some playbooks, for example, find it easier to *raise their Status* or *gain additional minions*, while other playbooks have a harder time *changing playbooks* or *retiring to safety*.

*Sasha takes a look at the advancement options for the Fae and sees that Sunny can gain Status, take new moves, and even change Circles right from the start. After five advances, however, Sunny could also claim a knightly title or raise their Wild Status to Status-2. Sunny's going to need to choose if they are still loyal to their court and king, and the advancement options give Sasha some different options to represent that choice in the story!*

For more on advancement, see page 185.

# STARTING PLAY

## STARTING PLAY

Once everyone has finished filling out their playbooks, it's time to introduce the player characters and assign starting Debts, a network of favors and obligations that bind the PCs to each other amidst the chaos of the city.

### INTRODUCTIONS

First, each player introduces their character, sharing their character's name, look, demeanor, and answers to the intro questions, as well as any additional information that the other characters might know about them. You can answer each question or summarize the information in a brief backstory. Include anything you feel is important, especially if your character has a reputation that others would know about. Other players, especially the MC, might ask you a few questions about your character to help the group get a better grasp of your life in the city.

### STARTING DEBTS

Once each character has been fully introduced, assign starting Debts. Begin with the person to the left of the MC and go around the circle, each player reading aloud one of the starting Debts listed on their playbook, then assigning another character to that Debt.

Each starting Debt establishes a connection between the PC and another character in the form of backstory and ongoing relationships. These relationships should be with other PCs, but it's fine for a few Debts to be directed at NPCs if there are a small number of PCs or if a given Debt doesn't fit any of the other PCs.

When it's your turn to assign a Debt, choose one of the starting Debts listed on your playbook, read it out loud, and decide which character the Debt describes. You can choose someone you think fits, or ask if anyone wants to be part of that starting Debt. Work with that player and the MC to make the Debt make sense given what you already know about the characters.

When someone owes you a Debt, write down both who owes you and what you did for them. In order to **cash in a Debt** later (page 92), you need to remind them why they owe you. The person that owes the Debt doesn't have to mark down anything, but they might want to keep a record anyway of the Debts they owe other PCs and NPCs.

*Sasha decides to start with the first Debt on the Fae playbook: "I think I entrusted Darius, the Vamp, with an important and dangerous task. It says here I'm supposed to ask him if it succeeded or failed." Sasha looks to Darius's player, Dominic, to see what he thinks of that Debt. Sasha liked his introduction, and he thinks that Sunny is drawn to Darius's seductive demeanor.*

*Dominic grins. Darius is a charming hustler, a vampire determined to move up in the world; taking on dangerous work for a fae matches his ambition. "I think it didn't work out. Maybe I promised you some protection when a few nasty demons were looking for you, but I never actually showed up when you called?" Dominic put a stat point in **BLOOD** for Darius; he likes the idea that the other PCs come to the vampire for protection.*

*Sasha notes the Debt: "Darius owes me for failing to offer the protection he promised." Sasha and Dominic assign other Debts as well, but they both know that Darius owes Sunny a favor. Sasha looks forward to cashing in that Debt later when Sunny needs some muscle!*

Think carefully about what kind of relationships you want to establish when you assign Debts. Debts tie characters together and entangle them in each other's business, so look for opportunities to get mixed up with characters you find compelling and intriguing at the start of play. While you can pick an NPC for one of these relationships, remember that your fellow PCs are the protagonists; their contributions to your story are always more interesting than anything NPCs have to offer.

When you introduce and entangle your characters, don't be overly protective of your character. Make it messy and meaningful. Owe people. Have people owe you. The world and your story will be richer if you don't try to keep your character safe.

### X-CARDING DEBTS

If someone X-Cards a Debt because it makes them uncomfortable or upset, work together to create a new Debt that makes sense in the fiction and scratch out the old one, keeping the Debts exchanged at the same number. The specific fiction of the Debt matters less than the messy and continued entanglement between the characters!





## FINISHING YOUR CITY HUB

Your group should pick your City Hub before you make your characters, but you've still got a bit of work to do to finish setting up your Hub after you've introduced yourselves.

### RESIDENTS

First, select one of the **RESIDENTS** from the City Hub and establish why they owe your character a Debt. It's up to you to say why they owe you; it might be because they needed your help at a crucial moment or because they got in your way without cause and never made it up to you!

*Sasha's group selected the Downtown City Hub for their game, so Sasha selects Maya Lopez, an oracle, as their resident. Sasha decides that Maya owes Sunny a Debt for failing to warn Sunny about their coming banishment fifty years ago; as a young oracle, Maya kept a vision to herself that would have saved Sunny a few decades of heartbreak...*

The residents no one picks may or may not be a part of your story; that's up to the MC. If you really want to see a particular NPC appear, choose them as your resident!

### RELATIONSHIPS

Once you've selected a resident, choose one of the City Hub's **RELATIONSHIPS**, assign another PC to the blank, and read it aloud. These relationships can be filled by NPCs too, but it's always richer to focus on other PCs, layering additional drama onto the existing Debts you established as a group.

Debts tend to focus on your political engagements, but City Hub relationships are always personal—lost lovers, heated arguments, and old friendships are all fair game.

*Sasha decides to tie Sunny a bit more deeply to Darius and establishes that the two of them got into a fight recently about Sunny's relationship with Darius's manipulative, toxic sire. Sasha tells the group Sunny had to make a false promise to get Darius off their back—Sunny promised Darius to never see the sire in question again... but has no intention of keeping that promise.*

Once you've established the City Hub residents and relationships, you're ready to play **URBAN SHADOWS!**









# CORE MOVES





# Urban Shadows

Look at you! Filled to the brim with promise and problems, ready to find your way in this concrete monument to humanity's worst angels and better demons. Others may be content with petty placid places and humdrum hovels, but you've chosen the lights and leisures of a real city.

A fine choice indeed. But not your last.

You see, people come to the city for bright lights and flashy signs, but it is the shadows that make them stay. The uncertainty of what is to come, the secrets and mysteries that draw them further into the messy maw of a future they cannot control.

For it is the darkness that lies ahead that drives us on. Admit it! The places you've been before—the things you've done before!—grate like nails on the chalkboard of your youth. To be human is to be compelled toward the new: no matter what it costs us, no matter where it leads us. We crave it. Thirst for it. Die for it.

And the choice to embrace that which is not known is a choice we must make over and over and over. As you spin this tale together, you'll find those moments of choice throughout, flashes of uncertainty that arise like smoke from the burning embers of all the choices you've made up until now.

**URBAN SHADOWS** affixes a name to these crucial moments of choice, of uncertainty: moves. These are the beats of your story in which no one quite knows what will happen next. Whether it's leaping from a fourth-story window to escape a murderous fae or hustling a thousand-year-old immortal out of his most prized possessions, the moments you live for in the city are the moves you make.

So...go ahead! Make your move. And when the blood is spilled and the deal done, make another. This is your tale to tell, is it not? There is no profit in praying for rain to bless your fields when you're standing there with a bucket of water all your own...



## TO DO IT, YOU DO IT

The golden rule of moves is simple: *to do it, you do it*.

No move triggers without an action. Want to **turn to violence**? You've got to start swinging fists or shooting bullets with the goal of inflicting harm on another character. Want to **figure someone out**? You've got to watch them closely, long enough to get your bearings. Want to **hit the streets**? You've got to get out of your apartment, and track down whatever you're looking to get your hands on. To do it, you do it.

Sometimes moves can prompt you to think about pushing your character to action. You might be sitting there thinking that you've had enough talk, that it's time to get the hell out of this bad situation...when you spot **escape a situation** on the basic moves sheet. Next thing you know, you're telling the MC you want to try to make a break for it at the next opportunity, that you want to push past the opposition and get the hell gone.

**URBAN SHADOWS** encourages this kind of thinking, provided you turn your desire to make a move into some action in the fiction that triggers the move. You can't simply say "I **escape**!" or "I **mislead** them!" and expect to roll dice. But you can say "I want to **escape** into the crowd to get away from these werewolves!" or "I want to **mislead** this wizard about how much I know by lying to him." As long as you (and the MC) have clear enough fiction in mind to trigger the move, the mechanics take you through the rest.

At the same time, one of the MC's primary jobs is to watch for those moments when you trigger a move without thinking about it: when you start watching another character closely enough to **figure them out**, or when you try to **keep your cool** in a tense situation. You don't have to worry too much about what moves your character might be triggering; say what you want to do, and the MC will ensure the mechanics of the game kick in when they're needed.

Remember that moves are ultimately a tool to productively adjudicate uncertainty, the moments in the fiction when no one—not even the MC—knows what will happen next in the story. If you do something that might normally trigger a move in such a way that all uncertainty is removed—stabbing a sleeping human with a knife—you may not be triggering a move at all...and the MC will tell you what happens as a result of your actions.

## HOW TO USE THIS CHAPTER

This chapter focuses on a key element of play: the core moves of **URBAN SHADOWS**. While **Chapter 3: Fundamentals of Play** discussed the broad frameworks of play, including move triggers (page 37), hits and misses (page 38), and when to roll dice (page 40), this chapter delves deeper into each set of core moves to offer explanations, context, and examples to help you use them during play.

The first set of those core moves—the basic moves (page 74)—are the mechanics your group will use often, like **turn to violence** or **keep your cool**, that come up repeatedly in the fiction. This chapter opens with an in-depth explanation of each basic move, then proceeds to explore the other core moves: Circle moves (page 86), Debt moves (page 90), and city moves (page 96), the actions players can take to engage the broader city during the faction turn (page 255) more fully described in **Chapter 9: Long-Term Play**. Finally, this chapter closes with a short discussion on custom moves (page 105), a way for your group to add new mechanics during play.

More than any other chapter in this book, this chapter is a reference you can use while you play to address uncertainty or confusion about the moves you're using during a session. Don't be afraid to keep the book with you at the table, ready to look up one of the moves in this chapter to get the additional info or detail that can help you make these mechanics work better for you and your group!

### HOLD, FORWARD, AND ONGOING

Some moves describe your character getting hold, such as "hold 1" or "hold 3." These are move-specific resources that you can spend according to the move—such as "spend the hold 1 for 1 to ask the MC questions"—but once hold is spent it's gone. Usually hold only lasts for a given conversation or scene, but moves tell you how long you have before the hold expires. If there's some ambiguity as to how long hold should last, ask your MC for clarification.

Other moves describe your character "taking +1/-1 forward" or "taking +1/-1 ongoing." +1/-1 forward means your character adds +1 or -1 to the next applicable roll; +1/-1 ongoing means your character adds +1 or -1 to all rolls fitting the situation the move describes. Like hold, these bonuses—or penalties—only last as long as the move indicates.

# BASIC MOVES

Every player character in **URBAN SHADOWS** can use **BASIC MOVES**, the core mechanics that move the story forward from moment to moment. While many different types of moves can be used throughout a single session—Circle moves, city moves, etc.—basic moves show up in scene after scene after scene, the constant drumbeat of mechanics your group will come back to again and again and again. Your playbook has additional moves unique to your character, but these basic moves—shared by all the PCs—are the majority of moves used every session.

There are seven basic moves:

- ♦ *turn to violence*
- ♦ *escape a situation*
- ♦ *persuade an NPC*
- ♦ *mislead, distract, or trick*
- ♦ *figure someone out*
- ♦ *keep your cool*
- ♦ *let it out*

All of these moves are explained in more detail in this section to help you use them in play. In addition, an example of each move is presented alongside the explanatory text, offering an instance of use by a player during a session. If you have a question about how a move should work, this section can often act as a guide, clarifying points of contention or offering broader ways to think about the options and how they might better fit the fiction at your table.

In addition to these seven basic moves, this section also covers moves for helping and interfering with other player characters—*lend a hand or get in the way*—and the end of session move, a way for your group to reflect on the action that occurred and what it means to the player characters. While these moves are used less regularly than the rest of the basic moves, they are key components of play.

Remember that only player characters make moves and roll dice during a session. The NPCs instead act according to the MC's moves (page 205); they never roll dice outside the faction turn (page 255), and they never use these basic moves to resolve their actions. If you want to read more about how NPCs take action, check out **Chapter 8: Master of Ceremonies** for more on using NPCs in play!

## TURN TO VIOLENCE

When you **turn to violence**, roll with **BLOOD**. On a hit, you inflict harm as established and your opposition chooses 1:

- ♦ they inflict harm on you
- ♦ they put you in a bad spot
- ♦ they create an opening to flee

On a 10+, you also choose 1:

- ♦ you inflict terrible harm
- ♦ you take something from them
- ♦ you create an opportunity for an ally

**Turn to violence** triggers when you choose force as your path—breaking bones, pulling triggers, and fucking up your opposition before they do the same to you. No threats or grandstanding here! **Turning to violence** means you're committed to hurting someone, usually with a weapon in hand and some malice (or vengeance!) in your heart.

On a hit, you inflict as much harm as makes sense for what's happening in the fiction. If you're fighting with nothing but your empty fists (1-harm), you do a lot less damage than someone holding a katana (3-harm) or a rocket launcher (4-harm). See page 46 for more on established harm and harm ratings, but blunt weapons like fists and baseball bats do 1-harm, lethal weapons like handguns do 2-harm, and powerful or destructive weapons like shotguns do 3-harm.

Your opposition suffers your harm on a hit, but also gets to make a choice off their list—striking back, redefining the fight, or getting away from you. Regardless of their choice, you still inflict your full harm as established; they get to decide how they react to the way you're hurting them. Killing or incapacitating them doesn't negate their choice; someone who dies to your blow may still *inflict harm on you* or *put you in a bad spot*.

On a strong hit, you get to respond to their choice in turn—escalating the harm, seizing something from them, or enabling an ally's action. You always pick after they pick, knowing both how much harm you've inflicted and what choice they've made off the list.



## OPTIONS FOR TURNING TO VIOLENCE

When *they inflict harm on you*, they get a chance during your attack to get a few knocks in as well. This harm is also as established; it follows what makes sense in the fiction, including whatever weapons they use, their strength and training, and harm their nearby allies might inflict upon you. The MC tells you how much harm you suffer.

When *they put you in a bad spot*, you find yourself in a worse position than you held prior to **turning to violence**. Work with their player to figure out how they gain the upper hand. You might be physically threatened by new forces or some clever trick, but you can also end up socially or emotionally vulnerable after striking out. When in doubt, look to the MC for the degree of trouble the bad spot entails.

When *they create an opening to flee*, your opposition discovers a path, however fleeting, to freedom. Of course, an opportunity doesn't guarantee success; you can try to thwart them...or let them retreat without further opposition. If your target is a PC, they get a chance to **escape a situation**—and you get a chance to **get in their way** to stop them.

When *you inflict terrible harm*, you escalate the ferocity of your attack, dealing +1 harm. If you're punching someone out, you keep punching even when your target curls up in a ball; if you're shooting someone, you keep shooting even when they fall. People who watch you commit this kind of violence are often shocked at the brutality and force.

When *you take something from them*, the scope is broad; it can represent literally taking an object they're holding or something more conceptual, such as seizing the high ground, unseating their footing, or capturing their complete attention. Work with the MC to determine how the situation changes when you rob them of their position.

When *you create an opportunity for an ally*, you give an ally a chance to act before your opponent can react. You might stagger your target long enough for someone to also **turn to violence** against them before they can act, or physically seize them to give an ally a chance to **escape the situation**, cast a spell, or call for help. Feel free to tell the MC what opportunity you're hoping for, but what opens up is ultimately their call. If you don't like what they offer you, you aren't committed to the choice—feel free to change your pick.

*While investigating the disappearance of a close friend in the sewers under the city, Booker comes face to face with a feral vampire, a bloodsucker lost to hunger and woe. She draws her wooden stake and charges forward....*

*The MC, Mark, asks, "What's your plan here? Trying to scare him off or actually drive that into his heart?"*

*Booker's player, Briana, says, "Scaring him off would probably be **persuade**, right? Nah, my **HEART** sucks. I think I just want to **turn to violence** and go straight for the kill."*

*Mark nods, and Briana rolls to **turn to violence**, scoring a 12! Mark says, "Okay, the stake inflicts 2-harm; you manage to catch the creature off guard and drive it backward up against the wall, the stake shoved firmly into its chest. But he's going to put you in a bad spot—his guttural cries echo through the tunnel, and you can hear others of his ilk scurrying toward you, their hunger piqued by his call."*

*"Shit. Okay, I guess I'll inflict terrible harm on him. I don't want to be surrounded by these things. That makes it 3-harm, right?"*

*"Sure. What does terrible harm look like here?"*

*"I slam his head against the bricks of the sewer wall repeatedly, dazing him long enough to shove the stake in deep, hoping to reach his heart..."*

*"You get there," Mark says, "and the vampire slumps onto the floor shuddering in pain, slowly turning to ash. You see shadows moving close by now, more of them drawn to you. It won't be long now until they're on top of you, but killing the vamp gives you an opportunity to flee. What do you do?"*

## PULLING PUNCHES

When you inflict harm by **turning to violence**, you always inflict the full harm as established—you can't "pull your punches" with a shotgun aimed at someone's chest (3-harm) and try to inflict just 1- or 2-harm. The action in **URBAN SHADOWS** is fast, furious, and uncertain; trying to "just shoot someone in the leg" might just sever an artery! Whatever tool you use when you turn to violence—whether it be knives, fists, guns, or magic—is real in the fiction, inflicting the harm inherent to your attack in full. Think carefully about what tool you select, and remember that other moves (such as **mislead**, **distract**, and **trick** or **persuade** or even **let it out**) can get you what you want with less blood on your hands.

## ESCAPE A SITUATION

When you **take advantage of an opening to escape a situation**, roll with **BLOOD**. On a hit, you get away and choose 1. On a 7-9, the MC chooses 1 as well:

- ♦ you suffer harm during your escape
- ♦ you end up in another dangerous situation
- ♦ you leave something important behind
- ♦ you owe an NPC a Debt for their aid
- ♦ you give into your base nature and mark corruption

**Escape a situation** is your best chance to get out of trouble before the hammer falls. Whether you're running for your life from a feral ghoul or fleeing a faerie gala with stolen goods in hand, you're **escaping a situation** whenever you try to flee before things escalate. Not all escalations are physical, of course—escape also covers leaving a tense negotiation or difficult emotional situation. If you want to vanish before your boss can fire you, you're still escaping.

In order to trigger this move you need to either create or take advantage of an opening—a difficult task when you're cornered and have no clear avenue of escape. **Turning to violence**; **misleading, distracting, or tricking**; and **letting it out** are all excellent ways to create the opening you need to **escape a situation**.

On a hit, you get out of the immediate situation before things get worse, and the scene comes to an end. You might find yourself in new danger—on both weak and strong hits, you're going to have to deal with some consequences—but the urgent threat is resolved.

Note that you don't have to make this move if you find some other way out of danger. For example, if you murder everyone who might be a threat or **cash in a Debt** with whoever is pursuing you, then you are free to walk out of the situation. **Escaping a situation** only covers instances where something obstructs your safe retreat.

### OPTIONS FOR ESCAPE A SITUATION

**Suffering harm during an escape** might be the result of your opposition attacking you on your way out or because you run into something else blocking your path; the MC tells you how much harm you take. You suffer harm as established, which makes choosing this option more dangerous when those chasing you are firing automatic weapons or the path in front of you is riddled with deadly magical traps.

**Ending up in another dangerous situation** puts your fate into the hands of the MC. The new danger may be an old foe catching up to you or some novel threat presenting itself for the first time. The type of conflict may change as well; you might flee an argument with a friend only to run into armed thugs sent by a rival.

**Leaving something important behind** means that you drop, forget, or leave something (or someone) on your way out. Note that this doesn't give the MC carte blanche to ruin your day; you're more likely to leave something incriminating or personally significant than a priceless magical item or the very object you secured through your escape.

**Owing someone a Debt** signals that someone—perhaps a character who wasn't present before—provides a crucial resource or opportunity that enables your escape. Often this is an obvious choice, especially when an NPC in the scene helps you get out the door by covering your escape or an offscreen NPC calls in a favor to protect you, but it's the MC's final call who you owe. Perhaps one of your enemies within the city is suddenly eager to help at just the right moment... knowing you'll owe them when it's done.

**Giving in to your base nature and marking corruption** means you call upon whatever darkness lurks inside your character to get to safety. Such a cost may seem cheap compared to suffering harm or owing Debts, but corruption has its own long-term costs. You can read more about them on page 45!

One final note: on a 7-9, the MC cannot choose the option you chose. They must always pick another.

*Eve has freed Rashid, the Aware, from a warehouse where they've been held captive by an azcatl. As the two PCs start to leave, they hear the roar of the monster approaching. Eve tells Rashid to run while she holds the creature off!*

*Marissa, the MC, says, "That definitely gives you an explicit opening for the **escape**. What do you do, Rashid?"*

*"I book it. Eve is a demon; she's way more prepared to fight this thing than I am." Ram, Rashid's player, rolls with **BLOOD** and gets an 11; they flee the scene, but Ram must choose one option from the list. They decide to give in to their base nature and mark corruption.*

*Marissa asks Ram, "What does that look like?"*

*Ram describes Rashid stumbling forward, a selfish desire to live overwhelming and exhilarating them. They are slipping further into this supernatural world, and they aren't sure they ever want to go back to an ordinary, mundane life...*



## PERSUADE AN NPC

When you **persuade an NPC with seduction, promises, or threats**, roll with **HEART**. On a hit, they see your point and do as you ask. On a 7-9, they counter your offer or demand payment—a Debt, a favor, resources—before agreeing to follow through. If you invoke a Debt with the NPC before you roll, add +3 to your total (max+4).

**Persuade an NPC** triggers when you try to get an NPC to do something they don't want to do by seducing them, promising them something, or threatening their interests. Simply reasoning with them isn't enough here; you have to have some leverage for the move to trigger. In other words, they have to want something you're offering or be afraid of the consequences you can bring to bear. At the same time, your request has to be proportional to your leverage; you can't mind control an NPC with this move just because you have a high **HEART**, i.e. an NPC won't betray a close friend just because you offered a minor favor. The MC is the final judge on what counts as proper leverage.

On a strong hit, NPCs generally accede to your wishes, albeit with their own idea of how to give you what you want. If you ask a violent werewolf to find someone for you, there's no guarantee they're going to play nice with that person unless you make an excess of kindness a part of your request. Wolves be wolves, after all. Nothing changing that.

On a weak hit, the NPC has some more input on the deal itself. It's their choice: they can either modify the terms of the deal—essentially making you a reasonable counteroffer on the spot—or demand some immediate payment upfront. With this result, NPCs negotiate in good faith; they won't ask you for something truly impossible or modify the deal without cause. A hit means the NPC wants to follow through, even if the two of you can't agree on a price.

Either way, you don't have to agree if you don't like the modifications or requirements of their counteroffer. You're free to walk away from the deal anytime before you both agree to the terms. That said, once you've offered a deal (and they've countered your offer) you can't **persuade** them again about this issue until the situation changes or time passes.

When you *invoke a Debt to add +3 to your roll*, explain how you're bringing that Debt into play as if you were **cashing in the Debt**. Just saying "I spend the Debt" isn't enough; you have to include it directly, reminding them why they owe you. Invoking a Debt always counts as providing moderate leverage—such that most NPCs will consider your moderate favors and demands—and the Debt is considered resolved if you both agree to an eventual deal.

If you roll a miss after invoking a Debt, the Debt is not spent. Instead, the NPC in question finds a way to weasel out of what they owe (for now) alongside whatever else happens as a result of a miss. You still hold the Debt, but you can't ask the NPC for a similar favor until the situation changes or time passes.

*Marcos, the Sworn, is trying to convince the head of his faction, Calliope, to follow up on a recent kidnapping. He decides to approach her lieutenant, Aeris, for help.*

*Mark, the MC, says, "You find Aeris at The Radiance, filling his regular seat at the hotel bar and holding court with two young gentlemen. He sees you coming..."*

*"Get moving, Aeris. Morrigan is still missing, and I need your help to convince Calliope to act. Now."*

*"Sounds like you're trying to **persuade** him already," says Mark. "Go ahead and roll—your position as the Sworn means he has to at least hear out your request."*

*Miguel, Marcos' player, rolls with **HEART** and gets a 9, not quite enough for a strong hit. Mark says, "Aeric counters—he says, 'Calliope's so busy these days. How about you and I work it out? You can borrow these two lovely assistants and search the city together..."*

*Miguel thinks about it—he knows having a few NPCs dedicated to the search would help—but he shakes his head. "It's not good enough. And I know Aeris's goons are going to report back to him anyway. I'm going to take my case to Calliope alone and see what comes of it..."*

## THE ART OF SEDUCTION

Seducing an NPC you are trying to **persuade** means much more than merely offering sex. Instead, seduction covers any kind of persuasion that draws an NPC into their vices, lusts, and desires. A wizard might long for sex, of course, but he might also be convinced to help you in order to further his own ambition. So long as you're trying to get the character to give into their baser nature, you're seducing them!

## MISLEAD, DISTRACT, AND TRICK

When you try to **mislead, distract, or trick** someone, roll with **MIND**. On a hit, they are fooled, at least for a moment. On a 10+, pick 3. On a 7-9, pick 2:

- ◆ you create an opportunity
- ◆ you expose a weakness or flaw
- ◆ you confuse them for some time
- ◆ you avoid further entanglement

**Mislead, distract, or trick** is triggered whenever your character tries to gain the upper hand over another character through deception. You might want to deflect someone's attention away from or toward something, convince someone that the lie you're offering them is the whole truth, or fool them into taking an action—or not taking an action.

Triggering this move, however, involves offering a *plausible* lie, distraction, or trick. You can't walk into a gathering of ghosts and pretend to be one of them...unless you've got a magic spell that makes you look, sound, and feel like a ghost. You've got to offer some reasonable falsehood that makes it possible for your target to believe in your deception, especially when you're facing long odds of successfully fooling them. You haven't reached the point of uncertainty—the point at which a move triggers—if it's obvious you're not telling the truth.

That said, the move has a broad trigger based on intent: throwing a rock at the cops to distract them is definitely **misleading, distracting, or tricking** them, but throwing rocks at those same officers with the intention of inflicting harm just means you're **turning to violence** with the rocks as your weapon. **Mislead, distract, or trick** focuses on deceit! If the goal is something else, then use a different move.

On a hit, remember that your target is tricked! You get to choose a few options from the list, but the core deception you put forward succeeds. If you are fleeing from a dragon and **trick** her by quickly ducking down an alley, a hit means she is fooled for at least a few moments—the options you pick tell the MC how long the deception lasts, how quickly your opposition recovers, and what other benefits or opportunities your deception offers you. Sometimes that means you may inflict harm or other effects as a direct result of your deceit; if you **trick** someone into walking into a trap, they suffer the consequences!

## POWERFUL OPPORTUNITIES

Sometimes the fiction of an opportunity created by a move sets up a PC to act without uncertainty. For example, sneaking up on a patrolling goon is an opportunity to knock him out or kill him without needing to **turn to violence**. Unless there's some other circumstance that makes the attack uncertain—the goon is especially tough or the PC taking the action is unskilled at violence—there's no need for another move. That said, many opportunities merely give PCs a chance to take another uncertain action—like **escaping a situation** by jumping through a previously secured window after you've picked the lock.

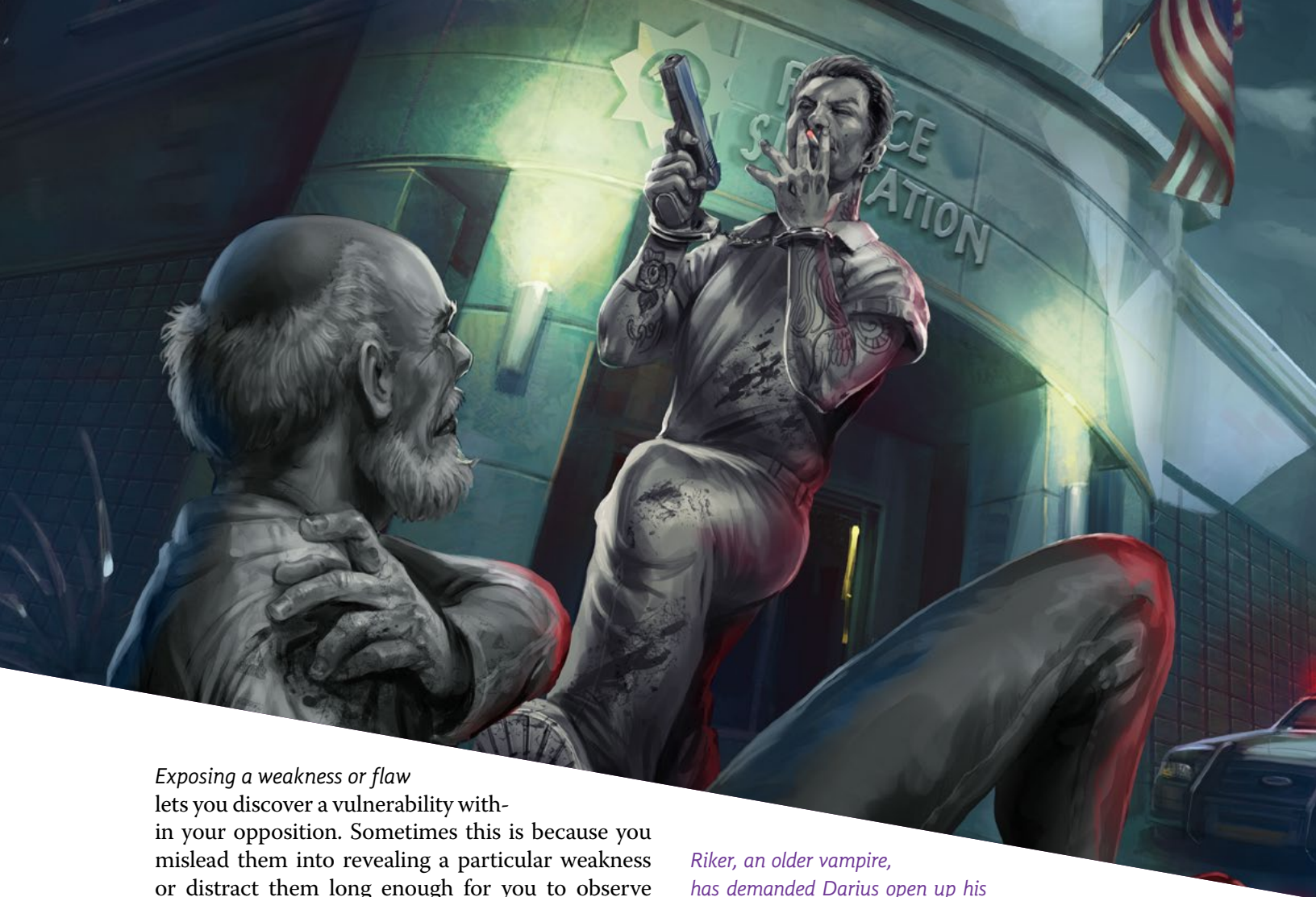
If you're trying to be sneaky while accomplishing another goal—like striking out at someone from a concealed position—you can use this move first to gain the benefits of surprise, use the move after another move to avoid the consequences, or both. Simply jumping into a move like **turning to violence** or **letting it out** means you're openly pursuing your goal, even if the opposition sees you coming, instead of carefully setting up an ambush or taking advantage of a target's distracted state.

Finally, there is no difference in outcomes if you target a PC or an NPC; **mislead, distract, or trick** is equally binding in both cases. Player characters do get a chance to **get in the way**—and may successfully stop you from fooling them—but if you get a hit, the results are binding. Of course, you can only **mislead, distract, or trick** another player character with a plausible lie or deception; the MC is the judge of whether your deceit is believable in the case of NPCs, but players get to make up their own minds about whether the tale you're spinning could reasonably fool them.

### OPTIONS FOR MISLEAD, DISTRACT, OR TRICK

*Creating an opportunity* gives you a chance to act when you otherwise wouldn't be able to act—an escape route in tight quarters or an opening in someone's defenses—or gives you some beneficial circumstance not already on the table, like an overlooked ally or resource. When you choose this option, your MC tells you what opportunity you get as a result of your trickery, but feel free to suggest ideas that fit the fiction. If you don't like what they offer you, you aren't committed to the choice—feel free to change your pick.





### *Exposing a weakness or flaw*

lets you discover a vulnerability within your opposition. Sometimes this is because you mislead them into revealing a particular weakness or distract them long enough for you to observe something meaningful that they would rather keep secret. It's up to you to act on the weakness, which may lead you to trigger another move. In some cases, the weakness or flaw is so significant the MC may allow you to take advantage of it without making another move!

*Confusing them for some time* means your gambit lasts longer than normal. The deception may last until you're ready to act on it, or may extend for several scenes or sessions. Note that not picking this option means that your opposition is only fooled for a short time. If you want your tricks to stick, you need to give up one of the other options.

*Avoiding further entanglement* allows you to get away more or less clean. After this, the attention is no longer on you and unlikely to return; your enemy can't quite pin you down. Your opposition may blame someone else or simply overlook you, but their focus falls elsewhere. Further engagement might reopen their interest, but you're in the clear for now! If you don't pick this option, it means they will eventually take a harder look at whatever lie you've told them.

*Riker, an older vampire, has demanded Darius open up his territory to their whole clan. Darius says, "Come on! My territory is tiny. The clan would drink it dry."*

*Marissa, the MC, says, "That's a lie, right? You just heard someone is building new apartments. You **tricking** him?"*

*Dominic, Darius's player, smirks. "Totally a lie!" He rolls, and gets a 9. "I'll take create an opportunity and confuse him for some time. I don't need to expose a weakness or avoid entanglement, so long as he gets off my ass right now."*

*Marissa says, "Cool. Riker says, 'I heard rumors things were getting thin around here. Just didn't want to believe it.' You're pretty sure he's going to bring it up again, though."*

*"What about my opportunity?" Dominic asks.*

*"Right. I think Riker feels bad for you. If you ask him for help, he'd probably give you a place to feed tonight."*

*"Meh. I'm not actually going hungry. I'll take expose a weakness or flaw instead."*

*"Got it. As Riker backs down, you notice another vampire, Celina, eyeing him like prey. It looks like Riker doesn't have as tight a grip on his gang as he thinks. There's some dissent lurking just under the surface..."*

## FIGURE SOMEONE OUT

When you try to **figure someone out**, roll with **MIND**. On a hit, ask 2. On a 7-9, they ask 1 of you as well. If you're in their Circle, ask an additional question, even on a miss.

- ◆ who's pulling your character's strings?
- ◆ what's your character's beef with \_\_\_\_\_?
- ◆ what's your character hoping to get from \_\_\_\_\_?
- ◆ what does your character worry is going to happen?
- ◆ how could I get your character to \_\_\_\_\_?
- ◆ how could I put your character in my Debt?

**Figuring someone out** involves learning another character's motivations and worries by scrutinizing their body language, tone of voice, or other telltale clues. In order to trigger the move, you have to narrate how you're studying the other character, including what kinds of things you're looking for in their behavior and appearance. Such investigation demands focus and patience; it's not something you can do while you're crashing through a plate glass window.

This move usually requires interacting with your target, but there may be cases where you can trigger the move by watching them at a distance or rifling through their belongings. As with other moves, the way you trigger the move shapes the outcomes, so the answers you get may be more vague at a distance.

On a strong hit, you're in control of your observations. You get to ask two questions from the list, revealing little to nothing about yourself as you do so. Tell the player of the character you're **figuring out** what you do or say and which questions you select; they must respond truthfully, even when you're **figuring out** an NPC and their player is the MC. Whatever you do or say, however, remember that the questions must come from the list; talk to your MC if there's something you want to know and nothing seems to fit.

On a weak hit, you still get to ask two questions, but you also let something slip about yourself, giving your target a chance to ask questions about you as well. Often this means your target realizes you're reading them and turns their attention toward you as well. If you're reading them at a distance, however, you might leave something behind at the scene or disturb the location in such a way that your target gets some information about your plans and loyalties.

Note that you get to ask the player of the character your questions, so the focus here is on the data your character takes in from their overall observations—info that might be unspoken or subtle. If you ask "Who's pulling your character's strings," the revealed information might stem from a lapel pin or choice of phrase in your target's speech. You can always ask the question in character if you'd like, but all that's required for you to get the information is to select the questions from the list.

If the character you're **figuring out** is in your Circle, you get to ask an additional question, even when you roll a miss. You know a bit more about how people from your own community act and think, so it's easier for you to piece together what they're up to, even when you don't get a full read on them.

*Hanako is questioning the NPC owner of Club Café, Yolanda, regarding a shooting outside the club. She seems nervous but answers his questions curtly, giving him very little useful information.*

*Hanako's player, Harley, describes Hanako as skeptical of Yolanda's answers. "I'm going to watch her breathing and eye movement closely, searching for any signs of deceit. I'm the Veteran, so I'm going to rely on my police training from when I worked homicide." He rolls to **figure someone out** and gets a 14—two questions!*

*Harley starts by asking, "What does your character worry might happen?" Marissa, the MC, says Yolanda's clearly worried that if she tells the truth she'll be in danger.*

*Harley wants to know who is making her afraid, and chooses "Who's pulling your character's strings?" as his second question.*

*Marissa says, "She saw something monstrous, something out of the ordinary. It scared her and gave her the impression that she should keep her mouth shut or else."*

*Harley says, "Don't I get one more question because she's a member of Mortalis? There's a lot of strange stuff at Club Café, so it feels like she's actually a member of the Circle and not just some random mundane mortal."*

*Marissa nods; it makes sense! Harley asks his final question: "How could I get your character to tell me exactly what she saw?"*

*Marissa says, "You'd need to give her a sense of safety, that the thing she saw tonight can't hurt her anymore..."*



## KEEP YOUR COOL

When things get real and you **keep your cool**, tell the MC the situation you want to avoid and roll with **SPIRIT**. On a 10+, all's well. On a 7-9, the MC will tell you what it's gonna cost you.

**Keep your cool** triggers when your character's focus and willpower are needed to accomplish an important goal or avoid serious danger. Note that the move only triggers when the pressure is on, so you won't have to **keep your cool** unless something else in the scene has already brought some strain to bear on your character.

**Keeping your cool** means trying to stay in control when the situation gets messy, but only when no other move seems like a perfect fit. If another move fits, use it! If you're trying to sneak past a guard, you're likely **distracting** him; if you want to inflict harm on someone, you're probably **turning to violence**. **Keep your cool** is for those moments where nothing else truly fits, like dodging a moving car, hacking a computer, or disrupting a spell.

When you **keep your cool**, you set the stakes by declaring what situation you're trying to avoid. If you're worried about the guns already drawn in a gunfight, you might say, "I don't want to get shot"; if you're nervous about your spouse's reaction to some terrible news, you might say, "I'm trying to avoid a misunderstanding about what happened last night."

When you roll a strong hit, you see the stressful situation through, dodging bullets, avoiding calamity, and generally coping with shit. Whatever you set out to avoid doesn't come to pass! That said, there may be other consequences of your actions—avoiding a misunderstanding with your spouse doesn't mean that he has to like whatever news you just delivered.

On a weak hit, you find yourself under more pressure than you expected—but the MC will always provide a way out...and the cost for taking advantage of that opportunity. Remember, though, a hit is a hit! A 7-9 result here offers a real chance to avoid your chosen situation, and the MC is obligated to give you a cost that's both within your ability to pay and doesn't invalidate that you're seeing the danger through.

For example, the MC can't say "There won't be any misunderstanding if you never talk to your spouse again" because it invalidates the very relationship you were trying to protect, but they can offer to let you off the hook with your spouse if you're willing to lie about the messier details. A cost you pay to **keep your cool** now may resurface later as a new problem—your spouse may discover the depth of your lies!—but you dodge the consequences for now.

On a miss, the MC isn't obligated to bring the threat you were avoiding to bear. It's possible the thing you feared comes to pass, but it's also likely that there are other outcomes that make sense in the fiction too. Just as with the other basic moves, a miss while **keeping your cool** means the MC says what happens next, and they aren't bound to respond in the obvious way you established when you tried to **keep your cool**.

*Pytha is playing Paris, an Oracle who has delved deep into the ethereal plane to find out the truth behind his mother's murder. After a long journey, he finally comes face to face with Fenrir, the Norse wolf of myth and legend, and begins to demand answers.*

*"I walk as close to him as I can, shouting, 'Tell me what you know, wolf! No more secrets.' I'm probably **persuading** him, right?"*

*Mark, the MC, grimaces. "That's tough. Fenrir is enormous. His teeth look like they're each a foot long, at least. He growls as you approach. I think you're going to have to **keep your cool** to approach him with this kind of confidence and swagger."*

*Pytha rolls with **SPIRIT** and gets a 7—"What's the cost?"*

*Mark says, "He's a spirit lord, and you're showing him a lot of disrespect. Fenrir will take a Debt against you—he's not likely to forget this insult—or you need to show weakness and submission before his majesty. Your choice."*

*Pytha doesn't hesitate. "Take the Debt. I want my answers on my terms."*

*Mark laughs. "Very well. Fenrir snorts, and turns toward you. You've got his attention, and he looks mildly interested. What do you say to persuade him to give you the answers you seek?"*

## LET IT OUT

When you **let out the power within you**, choose an ability from your playbook and roll with **SPiRiT**. On a hit, mark corruption and activate the ability; the MC will tell you how the effect is costly, limited, or unstable. On a 10+, ignore the corruption or the complications, your choice.

**Let it out** triggers when you turn to the darkest forces within you for power, allowing the lurking shadows to fuel powerful supernatural and preternatural abilities. But **letting it out** isn't merely activating magical feats; you're actively letting out the darkness within, giving it control to get what you want.

When you trigger the move, select one of the abilities from your playbook *before* you roll—you aren't just **letting out** some random part of yourself! Instead, you're **letting out** a specific ability, like *appear to others as someone you have previously touched* or *let loose a psychic blast of ectoplasmic energy*. Each playbook starts with four abilities, but you may gain more as your character matures and grows.

On a weak hit, you activate the ability (and mark corruption), but the outcome is imperfect. The MC tells you which complication—cost, limitation, or instability—affects your efforts. Sometimes the messy consequences are obvious, drawn from the fiction right in front of you, but other times the complications reveal new elements in the scene or previously hidden limits to your powers or abilities.

For example, trying to impress someone with knowledge of their past might upset an onlooking crowd (unstable effect), while attempting to shatter a magical spell might reveal certain magics can only be weakened (limited effect). Whatever is established in the fiction affects more than just this move—it's a part of the fiction moving forward, shaping what's possible in the future and informing the new conflicts arising from your actions!

On a strong hit, you have a choice: you can overcome the complications that come with activating your ability or you can avoid the corruption and accept that diminished or messy effect. If you choose to overcome the complication, you're putting special effort into avoiding the cost, breaking through the limitation, or stabilizing the effect, turning to the darkness inside you to push through and achieve the full effect.

## OPTIONS FOR LET IT OUT

*Costly abilities* fully activate, but they impose physical, emotional, or social costs. You might suffer harm as magical energies course through your body...or find that your ability caused collateral damage to your allies. These costs are often about the conflict at hand—the result of your opposition's resistance or the exertion required to use the ability—but they can also stem from how others view you when they see what capacities you wield.

*Limited abilities* don't demand more from you, but they also don't manifest in full. Their range or effect may be restricted—for example, affecting some characters you targeted, but not others—or they may simply be incomplete, leaving you with partial answers or flawed defenses. A limited ability still works, though, even if it inflicts less harm or doesn't answer all your questions.

*Unstable abilities* manifest in full, but they are inherently temporary or dangerous. Magical powers may begin to fade as soon as they take effect; physical feats may create additional problems, threatening to spiral out of control. An unstable ability achieves its effect, but you must act quickly before you miss your moment or the situation becomes more complicated.

Yet...a hit is a hit; the complication doesn't invalidate your chosen effect. If you're performing a ferocious feat of lupine strength and speed—tearing the door off a car to get at someone inside the vehicle—the outcome is more likely to be costly (you take harm) or unstable (you damage the car to the point that it's leaking gasoline) than limited. You either tear the door off the car or you don't!

If you feel the complication chosen by the MC undermines your intent—inflicting lethal damage on the friend you were trying to protect, offering partial answers that don't offer a way forward, etc.—let them know. The MC must honor the hit; the problems need to complicate your efforts instead of invalidating them.

Marking the corruption—and getting the full effect you wanted—may sound tempting, but remember that it means you're letting in a bit more of the darkness to fuel your dominance. Check out **Corruption** on page 45 to learn more about the costs of marking corruption!



Zara is trying her best to deliver a message for her demonic patron, but the idiot she's been sent to intimidate is hard to reach. So far, Zara hasn't had any luck getting past the security at the guy's office. After a few more subtle attempts fail, she decides to take a forward approach.

*"I walk right up to the security staff by the front door and summon some fire from a hellplane. I want to scare the shit out of them, so they clear out and I can finally get to this guy."*

*"You **letting it out** or activating your demon form through **The Devil Inside** (page 156)?" asks Mark, the MC.*

*"**Letting it out** for now; I'm not ready to activate my full demon form yet. I want to save that move for when I'm actually going to get into a fight or something."*

Zoe, Zara's player, looks down at her **let it out** abilities for something that fits and finds exactly what she's looking for on the list: "I want to impress, dismay, or frighten someone with a display of demonic fury!"

*"Yup, that should scare the shit out of these ordinary mortals. What does it look like for you to **let it out** right now? Is it obvious?"*

*"I think it's kinda subtle until it happens. I start chanting in this dark tongue, a language I don't even really speak. I just open up the connection inside myself to my dark patron and say the words as they spill out."*

Mark laughs, and says, "That's awesome. I can just see you walking down the hall toward them in your hoodie, muttering the words as they get more and more uneasy. They look around, but you aren't obviously grabbing their attention yet. Go ahead and roll with **SPRIT!**"

Zoe rolls and hits a 7, barely enough to get a hit. She marks corruption, and looks to Mark for whatever complication is coming her way along with the ability. She knows she's activated it, but she might have to pay a cost...

Mark says, "Your hands catch fire, brimstone and darkness swirling around them. The two guards finally realize the source of the unease is...you. They take one look at you and bail, shouting and running away as fast as they can. They don't even draw their weapons! I'm gonna say the effect is unstable, though—all their shouting is drawing attention, and it's a matter of time before someone calls the cops. What does the corruption feel like?"

Zoe says, "I think it feels good! I can feel my connection with my dark patron getting stronger, and the words I spoke make more sense to me now, like I've always known them in my heart..."

## LET IT OUT ABILITIES

Some of the **let it out** abilities are quite specific—*heal 2-harm*—but others are broad and open to interpretation, capturing your playbook's nature or capacities in ways that give you room to make them your own. For these malleable abilities—such as *impress, dismay or frighten someone with a display of demonic fury*—work with your MC to figure out how the outcome of the move will manifest in the fiction before you roll the dice.

Some of these abilities overlap with other basic moves or playbook moves, so look carefully at the effects before you decide which move to make. An Oracle with **Soothsayer** (page 138) can turn to her prophetic tools to read someone's fortune, receiving information from the MC about what lies ahead. But that same Oracle could also **let it out** to *channel a powerful prophecy from beyond concerning a present character*. The former gets her some information with little risk; the latter may alter the very fate of the character in question and exposes the Oracle to complications and corruption.

If none of the **let it out** abilities on your playbook fit what you want to accomplish in the fiction with your powers, you're likely invoking your fictional position to make another move, like attempting to **persuade** someone with your vampiric charm or **figuring someone out** with the keen senses of an experienced hunter. If nothing fits, then it's likely you're **keeping your cool** to overcome some obstacle or avoid trouble.

The scope of the **let it out** abilities also goes far beyond "supernatural" powers. Mortalis playbooks can still harness their inner strengths and hard-fought skills to reach beyond their limits by letting out the forces inside them. For example, the Aware can wield their innocence like a weapon to *convince an NPC to act on their kindness, role, or own best interest*, and the Hunter can throw themselves into the hunt to *track someone or something through the city with limited information or trail*. While not "magical" in nature, these abilities are still powerful tools, allowing Mortalis to keep up with the monsters and mages...at the cost of losing their humanity to the same darkness of corruption.

## LEND A HAND OR GET IN THE WAY

When you **lend a hand or get in the way** after a PC has rolled, roll with their Circle. On a hit, give them a +1 or -2 to their roll. On a 7-9, you expose yourself to danger, entanglement, or cost.

Each move in **URBAN SHADOWS** is a moment in the fiction, an event that needs to resolve before you can move on to the next one. Only one character can have that kind of spotlight at a time, so you resolve one move at a time. If you try to **escape a situation**, we need to see how that resolves before you can **turn to violence** against the opposition. One move at a time.

After a player rolls, however, other players can jump in to help or interfere with their plans, provided they can fictionally do so. Helping or interfering requires you to be able to directly affect the action in question; you can't help someone **turn to violence** against a demon while you're on the phone with them, but you can help if you're in the same room holding a baseball bat! Some of these actions might normally trigger a basic move, like trying to deceive another character or beat them up, but since you're acting while another player has the spotlight, you roll with their Circle—hoping your knowledge of their community can point to the best way to aid or hinder them—instead of rolling any other basic move.

The bonuses and penalties you can offer tell you when this move is useful—you can't help (+1) when someone has rolled a 4, and you can't interfere (-2) when someone has rolled a 12. Your character can obviously undertake whatever fictional action they deem appropriate, but this move only triggers when it makes sense for the situation and has mechanical meaning. Otherwise, you instead trigger a new move after the current one is resolved, **turning to violence** or attempting to **persuade** the NPC as you like.

On a strong hit, things go smoothly; you modify the other player's roll without cost, applying a +1 or -2 to their total. On a weak hit, you still get to affect their roll, but you also find yourself in a tough spot as a result of your interference, perhaps suffering the same consequences as the character you impacted or stumbling into new consequences you didn't foresee. On a miss, the MC says what happens, as with any other basic move.

This move is crucial when the players oppose each other. Since **turning to violence** isn't an opposed roll, whoever lashes out first might do a lot of damage before the other player's character can react. **Getting in the way** allows targeted players to weaken attacks and resist trickery without everyone rolling dice all at once. If you'd like to read more about these kinds of conflicts in **URBAN SHADOWS**, check out **PC vs. PC Conflict** on page 211.

Only one character can successfully **lend a hand** and only one character can successfully **get in the way** on any given roll. All the characters can try, but you can't keep racking up +1s as every other PC **lends a hand** (or -2s if everyone jumps in to **get in the way**). If a player misses, however, other characters can jump in, exposing themselves to the potential costs and complications that result from these kinds of rolls.

*Kashida has agreed to help Eve deal with a gang of werewolves who are demanding protection money. When Eve locks her place up and tells the wolves to get lost, two of them break down the door, ready to destroy Eve's place with tooth and claw.*

*Elizabeth, Eve's player, says, "I blast them with my shotgun!" Mark, the MC, nods; she rolls to **turn to violence**, but her total is a 9, just a weak hit.*

*"Can I **lend a hand**?" asks Kashida's player, Kai.*

*"Of course! How are you helping?"*

*"I let loose a spell I prepared just as they come in the front door; their vision is obscured for a few crucial seconds while they are entering!"*

*"Sounds great. You're helping the Imp, so roll with **WILD**." Kashida gets a 9. Eve gets to add +1 to her roll—making her result a 10+—but Kashida has exposed herself to danger, entanglement, or cost by **lending a hand**.*

*Mark says, "One of them takes the blast to the chest and stumbles backward, bleeding. The other moves like lightning, putting Eve in a bad spot by knocking her to the ground and inflicting 2-harm. Which option do you want from the 10+ list, Eve?"*

*"I want to give Kashida an opportunity! I grapple with the werewolf and buy some time!"*

*"Makes sense," says Mark. "Now...you're exposed here, Kashida; the other wolf is getting up and sees you as the clear threat. You can **turn to violence** against the wolf Eve is grappling with as if you rolled a 10+, but the other one will be on you right away. What do you do?"*



## END OF SESSION

At the end of every session, decide if you've grown closer to a Circle you engaged with this session: increase your score in that Circle and decrease your score in a different Circle. Tell the MC how your relationships to these communities have changed because of the events of the story, and mark one of the two Circles involved in those changes.

In addition, think about any Debts you may owe—or Debts owed to you—as a result of the session. Tell the group and note them down for next session.

The end of each session offers you a chance to reflect on both what happened in the story and how it affected your understanding of the city. Your character's status changes rarely, but the knowledge your character holds about each community is dynamic, dependent on your continued engagement with each Circle and its members. If you don't spend enough time with a given Circle to know what's going on within it, then your familiarity with that Circle as a whole weakens and fades; if you get mixed up in a Circle's business, you learn more about that Circle's current position and politics.

Deciding that you've grown closer to a Circle means your interactions with them have helped you to better grasp that Circle's conflicts and perspectives; raise your Circle rating in that Circle to reflect your new understanding and use that new Circle rating moving forward. Your interactions that lead to this increased knowledge don't have to lead to profound insights—merely spending time with a gathering of ghosts or a connected vampire is reason enough to raise your rating in Night.

Of course, learning more about one community means you're also likely losing touch with a different community. When you raise one Circle rating, you lower a different Circle rating to represent how you've grown apart from one part of the city as you grow closer to another. It's hard to keep up with the politics of Wild or Power when you're spending all your time with vampires and ghosts! Circle advances (page 186) can increase your overall Circle ratings, allowing you to keep track of more communities at the same time, but your base of knowledge is always in flux. It's extremely difficult to reach a point of stasis because the various communities push and pull you night after night.

In addition to thinking about your changing relationships with the city's Circles, reflect on any Debts that you may have overlooked during the session. Did you help someone without demanding something in return? Did you fuck around in someone's business? Did someone fuck around in yours? It's easy to overlook a moment in play that triggered one of the Debt moves (page 90), so take the time to look over your interactions and note any Debts that accrued without you writing them down.

If you help out someone you care about, you still have the right to claim a Debt on them; if you fuck over a close friend, they still have the right to claim a Debt on you. You might be a generous fool and let a Debt owed to you slide, but don't be surprised when you ask your friend for a favor later and find they have other priorities than your friendship.

As always, Debt is an agreement between you and your debtor or creditor. If you both can't agree on the Debt, have the MC weigh in and work things out. Remember that the rest of the city is always watching; if someone helped you out (or you screwed something up for them), then a Debt is owed, even if you feel like maybe you could weasel out of your obligation to them.

Finally, it may be the case that you didn't grow closer to any Circle or accrue any Debts. That's fine! This move exists to capture the action of the session; if nothing pushed you toward or away from any communities and no Debts were overlooked, then there's no need to adjust anything.

*At the end of the session, Leah—Leland's player—reflects on what happened. Leland spent most of the session trying to find one of his missing anchors, but he also got roped into helping Zara, the Tainted, break into an office complex to deliver a message for her patron.*

*"First, I think I'm going to grow closer to Mortalis and away from Night," Leah says. "I think that all this time tracking down the kid means I haven't kept up with anyone in Night. And I'm learning a lot about Elodie's hunter faction and their politics."*

*Mark, her MC, nods and asks, "What about Debts? You did a lot for Zara—you only came along as a favor."*

*Zoe, Zara's player sheepishly agrees—"Yeah, you really came through for me; I asked you for help and you didn't get anything out of it. I guess I owe you a Debt..."*

# CIRCLE MOVES

Circle moves complement the basic moves, allowing your character to interact more broadly with the Circles that vie for power within the city. Instead of rolling with a main stat when you trigger one of these moves, you roll with a Circle stat that describes your relationship with the community you're engaging.

The three core Circle moves are **put a face to a name**, **hit the streets**, and **study a place of power**. Other moves might also make use of the Circle stats on your playbook, but only these three moves count as Circle moves. When you make a Circle move, don't forget to mark the Circle in question even on a miss! You can see more on marking Circles and advancement on page 186.

## PUT A FACE TO A NAME

When you **put a name to a face or vice versa**, roll with their Circle. On a hit, you know their reputation; the MC will tell you what most people know about them. On a 10+, you've dealt with them before; learn something interesting and useful about them or they owe you a Debt, your choice. On a miss, you don't know them or you owe them, MC's choice.

The city is filled with more people than anyone can possibly know, but your character is bound to have met—or at least heard of—most of the movers and shakers in the city. This move lets you establish history or learn someone's reputation upon seeing them or hearing about them for the first time. The question "What do I know about them?" or "Have I heard of this person?" is going to come up often while playing **URBAN SHADOWS**; this move lets you answer the question and build on the answer quickly.

You only roll this move the first time you meet someone new or hear a new name. It's not something you can trigger later when you sit down to really think about the person you met earlier. Either the name (or face) hits you and you remember something, or you proceed in the fiction to build a new relationship with that character. It's always an option to say, "I don't know this person" and skip the roll, but the city's gossip carries far and wide. You can always take a shot at **putting a face to a name** when someone new appears in the story, especially if it's a character you want to engage with more deeply!

If you get a hit on this move, you're familiar with the person in question, but they might not know who you are at all. They've got a reputation, but information isn't always a two-way street. It's possible, even likely, that someone important enough to be known in the city might not yet know who you are.

On a strong hit, you've got a standing reputation with them; you get their reputation and a bit more—a Debt or a deeper insight into their story. If you choose they owe you a Debt, work with the MC to determine how you earned it. Perhaps you did them a favor or helped them out directly with a problem...or maybe they got mixed up in your business without sufficient cause.

On a miss, the MC tells you if they're a stranger or someone you owe. If they hold a Debt over you, talk with the MC to determine the circumstances in which they ended up holding said Debt. It's possible they traded someone a Debt to get a Debt on you, but most Debts are the result of a direct engagement with the character you owe.

*Hanako is scoping out a conclave between some wizards and some werewolves, a peace meeting he's worried might turn ugly. He's found a safe space in a building across the street from which he can observe the meet.*

*Marissa, the MC, says, "You see a car pull up to the building. A tall woman gets out, lanky and thin, her red hair cropped short, wearing a white suit. She says something to the driver and starts to walk up the stairs to the front door."*

*Harley, Hanako's player, says, "I'd like to **put a name to a face**. I want to know if I know her." Marissa nods and tells Harley the woman is in Wild; Harley rolls with **WILD** and gets an 11.*

*"Yup. You know her. Do you want a Debt or info?"*

*"I'll take the info."*

*"Got it. Her name is Raquel. She's a werewolf, but she left Night a long time ago to join Wild. She represents the demon Ortalex in business dealings here in the city. You've probably seen her around a number of times, and she always wears the same exact outfit. What most people don't know about her is that she's eager to get out of her service to Ortalex; you overheard her talking on the phone once about some scheme to return to her pack and leave Wild in her past..."*



## HIT THE STREETS

When you **hit the streets to get what you need**, name who you're going to and roll with their Circle. On a hit, they're available and have the stuff! On a 7-9, choose 1:

- ♦ whoever you're going to is juggling their own problems
- ♦ whatever you need is more costly than anticipated

**Hit the streets** lets you seek out contacts and connections within the city to help you get what you need: a safe place to crash, magical items, information, your nightly fix, whatever. Any time your character grabs their coat and hat to get out and pound the pavement for resources, you're **hitting the streets**.

You must say to whom you're paying a visit before you trigger the move; it must be reasonable that they can provide you with whatever you need. An ancient immortal might just have a spear in their armory that can kill an incarnated god, but it's unlikely the local vampire drug dealer has a stock of such weaponry on hand. You can't **hit the streets** to get something from someone who definitely doesn't have it.

Whenever possible, try to circle back to existing characters with this move: the city gets crowded if there's a knowledgeable demon hunter on every corner. Better to go to the person everyone knows, the character you've established as the most likely to have what you need on hand. If you get stuck, talk to your MC; they'll help you figure out who might be willing to help you out in your time of need.

Notice that you actually have to get out into the city to trigger this move. It's not enough to make a few phone calls or post on an internet forum and hope that the goods come directly to you. Supernatural creatures—and the mortals who deal with them on a daily basis—are always skeptical of impersonal communication. Phone calls are too easily monitored by their enemies; emails are vulnerable to hackers and police. Best to see someone in the flesh. Safer. Good deals are often sealed with handshakes and oaths.

**Hitting the streets** is also an excellent way to mark a Circle for advancement; you don't have to have a Debt or an established onscreen relationship with someone to pay them a visit and ask for a favor. Haven't been able to mark Wild this session? Perhaps a visit to a faerie queen might get you what you need...

## OPTIONS FOR HITTING THE STREETS

If *whoever you go to is juggling their own problems*, it doesn't mean they can't or won't help you; your request is certainly messier when you catch them in the middle of their own troubles, but they have whatever you're looking for at the moment. That said, you do find them mired in some situation that they can't resolve on their own because they lack the resources or skills needed to get out from under the rock. But a friend in need is a friend indeed, as they say—you might just find them more amenable to making a deal if you can help them resolve a ticking time bomb or aid them with a messy situation.

If *whatever you need is more costly than anticipated*, then either your contact knows something you don't know about what you need or you don't know the real value of what you're requesting. Maybe whatever you're looking for is more dangerous than you realize or you overlooked something obvious about the costs of the thing in question. It's also possible the thing is just scarce or rare: your contact may need you to pay with more than just Debts or money, like immediate favors or priceless items, magical or mundane. They have it, but it's going to cost you.

*Rashid, the Aware, has been searching the city for information about their missing werewolf lover, Matt. Left without any leads at all, they aren't sure what to do next.*

*Marissa, their MC, says, "Maybe you should **hit the streets** and see if someone you know might be able to help."*

*"Okay...can I introduce a new character? I feel like I've already talked to everyone we've established" says Ram, Rashid's player. Marissa nods, and Ram continues—"How about someone in Power, maybe a wizard?"*

*"Sure," says Marissa. "Let's call him... Jean Paul?"*

*"Yeah! That's great. And...he has an apartment downtown near a subway stop. It's not far from my place. I think we'll say he also teaches at the university." Ram rolls with **POWER** and gets a 9. Even though they are close to a 10+, they can't get help on a Circle roll. Ram chooses the cost will be higher than he anticipated.*

*Marissa smiles and describes Rashid reaching Jean Paul's spacious apartment. "His staff lets you in, telling you he's inside his study. As you walk to that part of the apartment, you get a sudden telepathic flash—Jean Paul's voice in your head! He says, 'Be careful what you say in my home, Rashid. They are listening, even here. I want to help, but...there are dangers. Tread carefully...'"*

## STUDY A PLACE OF POWER

When you **study a sanctuary, gathering spot, or place of power**, roll with the Circle that controls it. On a hit, you see below the surface to the reality underneath; the MC will reveal an area, NPC, or item located within that is not what it seems. On a 10+, your insight reveals much about the Circle's politics and schemes; ask the MC a relevant question about the Circle and take +1 forward when acting on the answer

**Studying a place of power** comes in many forms: you might literally dig for secrets in an oracle's hidden library or subtly observe the politicking during a faerie court's equinox gala. In order to trigger the move, however, you have to look for answers beyond what you can see with a quick glance. **Studying a place of power** requires you to slow down and engage your senses to understand the hidden truths, pulling back the veil by leveraging what you know about the Circle in question and the way it operates.

A place of power, sanctuary, or gathering spot is any spot that members of that Circle consider important: a werewolf bar, the law office owned by a demon lord, a faerie tattoo parlor, a mortal synagogue, you get the idea. The location doesn't have to be magical or supernatural in nature—you can learn plenty from a place immortals hang out, even if they keep their magical activities there to a minimum. So long as it's important to the Circle, you can trigger the move at that location.

The kind of place it is both informs how you **study** it, and what secrets your investigation might reveal. You can openly wander around a vampire nightclub, eavesdropping on the bloodsuckers' secrets and schemes, but a wizard's council antechamber might require you to ransack the place to **study** it effectively; either way, neither of these places of power will tell you much about Wild or Mortalis.

At first blush, **figuring someone out** and **studying a place of power** might seem similar—you can trigger both by exploring a physical space. The former, however, focuses on a single person and their individual property; the latter is for whenever you want to look at a space that's important to a larger group of characters than just one.





On a hit, the MC pulls back the curtain on some truth amidst the chaos, revealing something that is *more than it appears*—a secret treasure, a concealed assassin, or maybe even just a conflict between two other characters you might have overlooked. It's up to you to address what you've learned! You can ignore it, play upon it, or use it to your advantage as you see fit, including parlaying what you've discovered into triggering another move, like **hit the streets** to get more answers from relevant parties or **figuring someone out** now that you know who you're most interested in learning more about within the space.

On a strong hit, you reach a deeper understanding; you get to ask the MC a relevant question about the Circle and its politics. If you're investigating the vampire nightclub, for example, you might ask, "What here might get the owner in trouble with his sire?" You can't ask irrelevant questions—"Does anyone here teach magic?"—unless it's been set up before in the fiction—maybe some vampires are regular blood magic practitioners and instructors—and you can't ask questions that focus entirely on other Circles, ignoring the Circle that controls it. The +1 forward you gain applies to the next roll you make that relies on the information you've discovered!

Note that choosing to **study a place of power** names that place as important to the fiction. Ultimately, the MC has final say on whether a sanctuary, gathering spot, or place of power is sufficient for you to trigger the move—it's hard to glean much from a dive bar no Circle cares about—but they will do their best to give you the benefit of the doubt! If it makes sense to you that the rune-marked and eerie section of a local park might be a gathering spot for Power, try to **study** it and see what you learn!

Sometimes other moves might offer you unique opportunities to **study** important locales, triggering the move when it would otherwise be impossible. For example, a vampire might **let it out** to extend their vampiric senses (page 82) while tied up and blindfolded in the basement of a werewolf bar, **studying the gathering spot** by eavesdropping through several feet of concrete; only by extending their vampiric senses can the character in question even trigger the move!

*After weeks of searching, Booker has located the nest of the demons that have been preying upon the local neighborhood; one of her contacts gave her the location when she **hit the streets** and started demanding answers. When she arrives to investigate the abandoned apartment building the demons are occupying—and possibly deal with them—she finds no one is home. She breaks in anyway, and starts looking around the place.*

*The MC, Mark, asks, "Are you looking for something in particular or just snooping around?"*

*Briana, Booker's player, says, "I'm mostly looking for information about their dealings. Why are they here? What are they trying to do? Any sign of what they are up to?"*

*"You could try to track them down through the city with limited information or trail by **letting it out**. There's certainly enough evidence here for that," says Mark.*

*"Yeah, that's a good idea...but I really want to see what I can learn here first. I start ripping the place apart, going through their stuff to see if there's anything here that might help me learn about their schemes before chasing them down."*

*"You could **figure someone out** if you were looking for info about just one of them, but I think your actions here are actually **studying a gathering place**," says Mark.*

*"Yeah!" Briana rolls with **WILD** and gets a 10; she's going to both see beneath the surface and get a follow-up question about whatever Mark tells her.*

*"This place is a mess—the whole room is filthy. They are living here as squatters, treating the place like a garbage dump, not a home. When you lift up a few pizza boxes, however, you realize they're preparing a ritual here. An altar is tucked away in the corner; pieces of flesh and bone scattered around it. Whatever it is, you can tell even the demons don't like the power it holds."*

*"Jesus. I get a question, right? How about 'How can I stop this ritual?' Is that about the Circle?"*

*Mark nods. "For sure! This is their ritual, after all. You see that the altar bears the mark of one of the demons who lives here, Erakthu. If you kill him, this whole ritual falls apart. Easier said than done, though; he's a tough one. What do you do? You gonna track him down now? You get a +1 forward to your roll..."*

# DEBT MOVES

## DEBT MOVES

Nothing is free in the city, friendship least of all. When you need help, your best chance of convincing other characters to aid you is calling in the Debts you're owed. You can always try to push people around or talk them into helping out, but Debt is the only currency that compels every member of every Circle (page 21).

Because once people owe you, you can ask them for all kinds of things. And when you put the weight of a Debt behind your request, it carries all new meaning. If they want to be taken seriously in the city, then they need to pay what they owe. Only someone who can't be trusted—who isn't worth saving when the chips are down—goes back on their accounts.

Debt moves deal with interactions fueled by Debt: **do someone a favor**, **overlook a harm**, **cash in a Debt**, and **refuse to honor a Debt**. None of these moves come up as often as the basic moves, but you'll see them multiple times a session, especially when the PCs themselves come into conflict.

## DO SOMEONE A FAVOR

When you **do someone a favor**, they owe you a Debt.

Anytime you help someone out without recompense, you get to claim a Debt from them that can be **cached in** at a later time. You can claim Debts from both PCs and NPCs, provided you do something useful for them, and **cashing in** such Debts is the single most powerful way to compel both PCs and NPCs to action.

Such a favor, however, has to be real and meaningful or it isn't a Debt. If you do something for someone that does little to help them or their agenda, then they don't owe you. Bringing a wizard the severed head of their wizarding rival—unsolicited!—isn't a favor; you've likely made their life far more messy and difficult. Genuine favors clearly benefit the recipient.

At the same time, the city has little patience for disingenuous dismissal of Debts earned. If the same wizard made it known they wanted their rival killed, then they can't backtrack when it happens and say that the resulting mess means they don't owe the killer a Debt. The city knows—and remembers—when a real favor is done.

Sometimes you might work out a Debt in the fiction in advance—"Yeah, I can totally help you out, but you're going to owe me"—or step out of character and draw attention to something that happens in the moment—"I just saved this faerie's life. I think she owes me a Debt." Either way, everyone agrees the favor was done, and the Debt is a consciously acknowledged part of the events that occurred.

If you help someone as part of an even trade, it doesn't count as **doing them a favor**; you have to go above and beyond the original deal to claim a Debt. You aren't **doing someone a favor** when you simply uphold your end of the bargain! That said, one-sided deals—"Rat out your friends, and I'll give you a ride across town"—don't count as even exchanges. You can't avoid a Debt by offering something paltry when someone is obviously **doing you a favor**. You still owe a Debt when they've paid in full for a shared, expensive meal and you merely offer to tip the server.

Finally, you have to actually do the favor in order to claim the Debt. If it turns out later that you didn't actually do anything—perhaps because you lied about what you accomplished or just didn't understand what happened—the Debt is resolved. You can't **cash in a Debt** for a favor that never occurred!

If you forget to call out a Debt in the moment a favor is done, don't fret. You have a chance at the end of each session (page 85) to collect Debts you think you're owed if you miss them during play.

*During a lengthy negotiation with some local demons, Sunny uses their faerie magic to distract them long enough to steal a cell phone off one of their goons. Later, Sunny brings the cell phone to Rashid, hoping to push the Aware further into Sunny's Debt by sharing information.*

*"I'll give you this phone, but you owe me, right?" says Sasha, Sunny's player.*

*"I want the phone...but I asked you to negotiate with the demons for me; shouldn't this just be part of that?" says Ram.*

*Marissa, the MC, says, "But Sunny did that too. The demons have agreed to leave your brother alone. This phone is extra, something on top of the negotiation." Ram nods and agrees; Sunny did come through twice in the scene.*

*Sunny gives the phone to Rashid, and Sasha writes the Debt down on Sunny's sheet, planning to call it in later when it's useful!*



## OVERLOOK A HARM

When someone **agrees to overlook a harm you've done to them**, you owe them a Debt.

Not all Debts accrue from favors done; some Debts stand in for losses that occur when a meddling fool negatively impacts someone else's affairs. Of course, the person harmed can always enact their revenge on whoever wronged them, but agreeing to **overlook a harm** lets them claim a Debt from said fool so everyone can move on to deal with other business.

Just as when a favor is done, the harm in question must be real and meaningful. Murdering someone's business partner is a serious infraction; you've made it hard for the person impacted to do business in the city, and the Debt keeps the scales even when you dump red ink onto their clean balance sheet. But merely insulting that same business partner isn't serious enough to accrue any Debts. The city isn't going to hold anyone accountable for petty niceties.

If you're mixed up in someone's business for good reason—maybe they've kidnapped someone close to you, and you're just doing everything you can to rescue the victim—then you don't owe a Debt when you break things trying to make it right. Smashing your way through their defenses isn't a harm they can overlook; it's the consequences of their decision to fuck with you and yours.

But if you muck about in someone's affairs because you're bored, reckless, or selfishly stand to gain, then you're almost certainly harming them. A faerie who loses their cool inside a vampire's haven—triggering the sprinkler system with a needless elemental display and ruining the vamp's prized vinyl record collection—owes the vampire a Debt if the bloodsucker agrees to **overlook** the mess they made. Even if they are friends, a harm was done.

Of course, none of this matters if the person who was harmed refuses to **overlook** the transgression. Someone you harmed can't claim a Debt from you and still demand vengeance for your actions. The Debt makes things even, and accepting that you owe them means accepting that the Debt covers the loss, at least enough to drop the issue. If they don't want your Debt, they are free to do as they like...but they don't get to claim a Debt and still try to murder you for what you did to them. They didn't **overlook** anything if they are still acting on the harm you did!

Similarly, a Debt arising from a lie or error about the harm you've done is erased as soon as the truth comes to light. If someone thinks you caused an explosion that killed their husband—a harm they are willing to **overlook**—they can demand a Debt from you. But if it's later revealed that their husband was alive the whole time, the Debt is resolved without any further payment on your part. You don't owe if they weren't actually harmed by your actions.

Such a situation is quite different than one in which their husband is brought back to life by a helpful wizard after the explosion. The Debt you owe stands in that case, covering the damages you did that had to be rectified by someone else. Only when the event that caused the Debt is revealed to be a lie or error does the Debt itself get erased.

*Following her victory in a fierce battle in the park against trolls loyal to the Court of Shadows, Juno hears from her contacts that the Twilight Order, the faerie knights most dedicated to the Queen of Shadows, is discussing how to respond to her pack. Wary of escalating conflict, Juno decides to try to make peace before things get worse.*

*Jamila, Juno's player, says, "I need to get a message to the Queen, right? She's the only one who can settle this."*

*Mark, the MC, nods, and says, "Do you want to speak with her directly or just make it known that you want to be done with the conflict between your pack and her court?"*

*"I'd love to talk with her directly, but I'm worried that might expose me to too much danger. Maybe I can just call up that lackey of hers that called me last session and threatened us? I bet I still have his number."*

*"Her courtier? Yeah, for sure. He answers on the first ring, his tone unfailingly polite—'Hello, Juno. What can I do for you on this fine evening?'"*

*"Listen..." says Jamila, "...things got heavy last night, and I wanted to call and offer my apologies. I was trying to send a message to your troll friends, and my pack spilled more blood than we wanted spilled."*

*"I see. And you're hoping Her Majesty is willing to let this go and move on without further bloodshed?"*

*"Juno says, 'Fuck yeah, I am. I don't need a war.'"*

*"You think he sounds pleasantly surprised: 'Very well. I will see to it the Queen overlooks this little dispute, provided you acknowledge her largesse. Agreed?' Sounds like you got your wish, but you're going to owe the Queen a Debt for overlooking her losses in the battle. Sound good?"*

## CASH IN A DEBT

When you **cash in a Debt**, remind your debtor why they owe you in order to...

...make a PC:

- ♦ answer a question honestly
- ♦ do you a favor at moderate cost
- ♦ **lend a hand** to your efforts
- ♦ **get in the way** of someone else
- ♦ erase a Debt they hold on someone
- ♦ give you a Debt they hold on someone else

...make an NPC:

- ♦ answer a question honestly
- ♦ arrange a meeting with an NPC in their Circle
- ♦ grant you a worthy boon or useful gift
- ♦ erase a Debt they hold on someone
- ♦ give you a Debt they hold on someone else

Whenever you want something from someone who owes you a Debt, you can **cash in the Debt** by reminding them why they owe you and telling them what you want from the list provided. Assuming they honor your request, the Debt is used up and erased.

You don't need to quote the exact reason for the obligation when you cash in a Debt; alluding to the favor owed is enough to trigger the move. What matters is that both parties recall the Debt and acknowledge it, and that they both know it's resolved if the debtor honors the Debt. That said, **cashing in a Debt** isn't merely mechanical; you still have to say what you want in the fiction, making an open demand of the person who owes you the Debt in question.

You can **cash in a Debt** whenever you want, even in the middle of a conflict or chase. It's hard to get someone to answer a question honestly in the middle of a loud gunfight, but so long as you can communicate—text messages? telepathically?—**cashing in a Debt** can get you the answers you seek. So long as it makes sense in the fiction, you can **cash in a Debt**.

Finally, remember to mark the Circle of the person with whom you **cashed in the Debt**, even if they weasel out of it or outright refuse it. Your reputation advances within the city when you leverage your holdings, even if the person in question tries to deny you what you're owed. See page 186 for more on honoring Debts and Circle advancement!

## OPTIONS FOR CASHING IN A PC DEBT

*Demanding a PC answer a question honestly* is perhaps the only way to get the absolute truth from another PC. **Figuring someone out** can't tell you if a character is lying about any particular statement—the move focuses on the political situation a character is in, not the truth—but you can force another PC to be honest by cashing in Debts. If the PC honors the Debt, their answer to the question must be both spoken aloud and complete: no obfuscation, deception, or half-truths!

*Asking for a favor at moderate cost* is a broad option, encompassing all sorts of demands not already on the list. You might ask someone to hide something sensitive for you, steal something valuable, or back you up in a tough situation. What is considered a moderate cost always depends on the skills and talents of the character who owes you the Debt. For some characters, killing someone is a favor they can perform at moderate cost. As always, the MC arbitrates any disputes on what's moderate, but look to the fiction to get a sense of what might be considered a moderate cost for any given character.

*Lending a hand or getting in the way* both involve securing another PC's aid. If you want another PC to help you—or interfere with someone else—in the moment, this is the option to choose. Note that you might resolve **cashing in a Debt** in the middle of another move to determine if someone **lends you a hand or gets in the way of someone else**. As long as they try to help you or hinder your target, the Debt is cleared, even if they don't succeed. Note that NPCs can't **cash in a Debt** and select this option; they don't have a roll that can be affected by **lending a hand or getting in the way**.

*Erasing a Debt* means spending a Debt to erase a Debt they hold on someone else (including you), effectively clearing the books. You lose a bit of control over the person who owes you, but in exchange you give yourself—or a friend who's worth it—some breathing room.

*Transferring a Debt* requires that you know about the Debt in question. Most people are pretty open with who owes them, but you've got to get the information before you start asking people to hand over their Debts to you. You might transfer a Debt to get a friend out of trouble, but it's even more useful to get leverage on an asshole who's been screwing with you.



On the run from a powerful vampire, Paris finds Marcos at *The Radiance*—the extravagant hotel that belongs to his masters—just before Marcos is called in to meet with Calliope, his masters' Status-3 leader. Marcos isn't happy to see Paris: any "incident" on the hotel grounds tied to one of his friends would undermine his standing with his faction. Yet, as Paris tries to explain his situation, several vampires enter *The Radiance* looking for someone...

"I try to climb out the window onto the fire escape. I gotta stay on the move," says Pytha, Paris's player. "The hotel is pretty busy, right? No one will notice?"

Mark, the MC, nods, and looks to Miguel, Marcos's player—"I don't want any trouble here. Don't get me involved in this situation."

Mark says, "Got it. You're neutral. Go ahead and try to **escape the situation**, Paris!"

Pytha rolls to escape and hits a 6. Not quite enough.

Pytha turns to Miguel and says, "Maybe you could **lend a hand** here? Just go down and keep them occupied or something?"

Miguel shakes his head. "I've got to go to this meeting. The last thing I need is to start a fight with some fucking vampires and make a mess in here."

Pytha isn't deterred. "I'm **cashing in a Debt** to make him **lend me a hand** here."

Mark says, "Okay. What do you say? Remember you've got to make reference to the Debt he owes you."

"Pythia says, 'Dammit, Marcos. Do you remember when I used my second sight on that gun you found? It led you right to the murderer. You gotta help me out here.'"

Miguel nods and sighs. "Fine. I'll **lend a hand**."

Mark says, "How? What do you do to help him out?"

"I head down toward the vamps; I'll get in their way and see if I can get security to throw them out."

Miguel rolls with Paris's Circle—Power—and gets a 7; enough to help, but not enough to get away clean. Paris suffers a few complications of his own—he chooses to mark corruption and Mark chooses for him to suffer harm—but Marcos is on the hook for some serious drama. The vampires aren't taking his interference lightly, and it looks like he might not make that meeting with Calliope after all...

## WHEN IS A DEBT RESOLVED?

For the most part, it's fairly easy to see when a Debt is resolved. If a creditor goes to one of their debtors and asks for a favor in exchange for a Debt held over the debtor, the Debt is resolved as soon as the favor is done. Debts are binary; so long as the agreement between the parties is acceptable to both sides—creditor and debtor—the Debt is cleared off everyone's books and forgotten.

But if you try to do a moderate favor for your creditor—like murdering a rival—and fail, does the Debt get erased? Or is it still hanging over your head, unpaid until you finally complete the murder you agreed to commit? And what if you didn't even try?

Usually, the creditor is the one who decides if the Debt is resolved. Some noble souls feel that an honest attempt at the moderate favor is enough, especially if the debtor would have a much harder time—due to circumstance or notoriety—attempting the favor a second time. Others, however, are more strict in their understanding of the credit they extend. For them, anything short of a success means the Debt stands.

Of course, this has limits. If a creditor asks for a reasonable favor and the debtor delivers in a messy or complicated way, virtually all of the city will stand with the debtor and declare the Debt resolved. The system would quickly collapse if creditors felt they could nickel-and-dime their debtors in an endless string of recursive requests.

Ultimately, the resolution of Debts is a matter for the two people involved in the transaction. Yes, Wild and Power tend to be more strict in their practice, but everyone in the city knows a soft-hearted faerie or generous wizard. And many vampires, despite their chaotic and uneven record keeping, are masters at keeping someone on the hook time after time—but they can only push things so far and stay in good standing with the rest of the city.

## OPTIONS FOR CASHING IN AN NPC DEBT

Demanding an NPC *answer a question honestly* works just as if you were making a similar demand of a PC; the NPC must give a straight answer to the question without lying, obfuscating, or tricking you in order to fully honor the Debt. If there's a particularly slippery NPC who thwarts your attempts to glean the truth, this is a great way to spend a Debt!

Asking an NPC to *arrange a meeting with an NPC in their Circle* gets you an opportunity to stand face-to-face with someone you might not otherwise reach; even if your status is low or your relationship with the NPC is hostile, the debtor NPC must ensure safe access to the NPC in question, provided they have a relationship that makes such a meeting possible. Often this means that they have to vouch for you, promising that you won't bring any violence to the situation, and they may include stipulations on the visit, such as "leaving your weapons at the door" or "promising to come alone." That said, if you (or your counterpart) escalate the situation, the debtor NPC may not be able to contain the violence.

*Demanding a worthy boon or useful gift* means you're offering the NPC a chance to pay off their Debt by giving you goods or services. NPCs don't have to honor requests for specific items or blessings, but they do have to give you something you actually want. A wizard may not bestow upon you the protection spell you requested, but they might give you a ring or amulet that does something in the ballpark.

*Erasing and transferring Debts* with NPCs works exactly the same as it does with PCs. You have to know a Debt exists in the fiction before you can cancel it or get the NPC to give it to you. You're free to ask, "Got any Debts I might want?" but the NPC doesn't have to give you a full list of their debtors.

Remember that you can also invoke a Debt to add +3 to your efforts to **persuade an NPC**. For example, if you want a specific good or service from the NPC—not just whatever they feel is a worthy boon—then you're better off trying to **persuade** them for that particular thing. You can read more about using Debts to **persuade NPCs** on page 77!

## MODERATE FAVORS

In general, NPCs honor anything on the list without hesitation; if you want something that's not on the list—like a moderate favor—you can invoke a Debt for a +3 while you **persuade** them (page 77). If the move yields a deal, the Debt is resolved; if you miss, the NPC weasels out of the Debt for now, alongside whatever else happens as a result of the miss.

In contrast, you can always ask a PC directly for a moderate favor. PC debtors always have the option of **refusing to honor a Debt** (page 95)—no matter what you requested—with all the cost and consequences that come with going back on their word.

*Leland, the Spectre, has a final anchor to resolve before he can move on to the other side—a house in downtown that he can't remember at all. Leland decides that the best path forward is to contact an oracle he knows, Carlos, who might be able to peer back into the past and help him understand his last anchor.*

*Carlos isn't having it: "I told you, cabrón, I don't do that shit. The future solamente."*

*Leland is insistent: Leah, Leland's player, says, "'You remember that time I backed you up when the cops tried to close your store? You owe me. Time to pay up.'"*

*Mark, the MC, says, "Sounds like you're invoking the Debt to **persuade** him, right?"*

*"Yeah. I need this." Leah rolls, but comes up short—even with her +3, she only gets a 6.*

*"Carlos shakes his head. 'Sorry. I can't do it. You'll have to find someone else. Looking backward is dangerous business. I can't pay you back in full if I'm dead, right?' His rejection stings as the hopelessness overwhelms you for a moment—mark a trauma."*

*"Damn. Do I lose the Debt too?"*

*Mark says, "No, Carlos still owes you. He just weaseled his way out this time. You can invoke the Debt again later to try to get him to do it, but his refusal stands for now."*

*Leah says, "Can I **cash in the Debt** for something else? I want an introduction to someone in his Circle. I want him to take me to an oracle who does look into the past, someone willing to do what he won't."*

*Mark laughs. "Okay, that's pretty clever. Carlos says, 'Fine. I know just the person. But you aren't going to like her, güey. She doesn't care about the little people like you and me...' Mark the Debt off your sheet!"*



## REFUSE TO HONOR A DEBT

When you **refuse to honor a Debt**, roll with the difference in Status between you and your creditor. On a hit, you weasel out of the obligation for now, but you still owe the Debt. On a 7-9, you owe them an additional Debt or mark corruption, your choice. On a miss, you can't avoid the hammer: either honor the Debt in full or erase all the Debts owed to you by their Circle and take a -1 ongoing to Status with their Circle until after time passes.

When a PC or NPC comes to **cash in a Debt**, you might find yourself in a tough spot. Maybe it's not a good time for you—or the thing they want is more costly than they realized. People sometimes ask for “reasonable” things that are likely to make a mess of your other relationships...or your political ambitions. **Refusing to honor a Debt** lets you (temporarily) try to slip out of your obligations. The Debt stands—even if you succeed in putting off your creditor—but you can try to delay the payment until the time is right or the request is less costly.

Whenever you **refuse to honor a Debt**, you're rolling with the difference between your highest Status and your creditor's highest Status. Low status NPCs and PCs (Status-0 or Status-1) are relatively easy to put off, especially as your Status in the city grows. Status-3 elites are harder to deny when they come to collect on what they are owed; the difference between your Status and their Status means you're often rolling with a negative modifier.

On a hit, you manage to put them off for now...but you still owe them. That said, they can't **cash in** a different Debt to try to get you to do the same thing right away. You've already said “no” once. They can, however, ask you for a different favor—**cashing in a Debt** for a different request—or come back when the situation changes (or time passes). After all, the Debt stands and they might still have needs!

On a weak hit, you put them off, but your flakiness costs you: you either owe them an extra Debt—interest on the credit they're continuing to extend—or have to mark corruption and let the darkness take a bit more of you. In other words, you've got to make promises, putting yourself in deeper hock to someone you didn't want to pay, or harden yourself to the needs of others. Of course, you can always simply decide to honor the Debt and avoid these costs, even after your roll.

When you try to **refuse to honor a Debt** and miss, you face a tough choice: honor the Debt in full or face the consequences. If you're dead set on saying no, the costs are steep—you erase all Debts owed to you by members of their Circle, and you take a -1 ongoing to Status within their community. If you outright refuse a Debt owed to a hunter when she comes calling in a moment of need, the rest of Mortalis will remember your broken word, refusing to honor what they owe you and limiting how much they trust and respect you. But a demon or a vampire may not care much about the whole situation!

Delays and excuses are part of the system—no one bats an eye when a debtor says it's “the wrong time” or “the price is too steep” when a creditor tries to cash in a Debt. Everyone expects a little pushback in the course of doing business! But outright refusing a Debt when you roll a miss can make you a social pariah. If you won't honor your Debts, then why should anyone honor their Debts to you?

*Rashid and Darius manage to get close enough to Watanabe—the vampire lord they both want to kill—to capture one of his thralls, a woman named Chausiku. Darius moves to feed on her, hoping to heal some of the injuries he sustained getting past Watanabe's goons.*

*“Stop,” says Ram, Rashid's player. “We need her alive.”*

*“Fuck that!” says Dominic, Darius's player. “I took like... 4-harm. I need to heal up if you want to be able to fight our way out of here. I eat her.”*

*Ram doesn't back down—“We'll find another way. I'm **cashing in a Debt** to keep you from feeding on her.”*

*Marissa, the MC, jumps in to clarify and says, “What do you say to **cash it in**? Which Debt?”*

*“Remember when I went and vouched for you to the hunters? I told them you didn't kill those two college kids. You owe me for standing up for you.”*

*Dominic says, “I'm hungry! I **refuse to honor the Debt**.” He rolls...and comes up with a total of 7.*

*Marissa says, “Ouch. You can blow off Rashid's Debt for now, but you're going to owe them an additional Debt or mark corruption. You could also just honor it...”*

*“I don't want to be pushed around. I keep my eyes locked on Rashid as I sink my teeth into her neck...”*

*Marissa says, “Mark the corruption. And since this is an unwilling victim, you're going to mark a second corruption as well. Go ahead and roll **Eternal Hunger**...”*

# CITY MOVES

The frenetic pace of the fiction takes your character through conflicts that occur moment to moment. Eventually, the story will slow down. Maybe you're following up on leads for a week or waiting on someone else to come through with help. Either way, the MC will eventually decide the story needs to move forward in weeks instead of days...and time will pass.

When time passes, the MC conducts a faction turn (page 255), determining how the most fictionally relevant factions in the city pursue their goals. While those factions toil, the PCs get a chance to say what they do during the interim, making CITY MOVES like tracking down those leads or consulting NPCs for information and support.

PCs can make a number of city moves up to their highest Status each faction turn. A PC with Status-2 in Mortalis can make two city moves, including moves that require Status-1 or Status-2. For each move you make, you establish the fiction and make the roll, then wait for the MC to come back with the results after the faction turn ends. If you want to learn more about the faction turn, check out **Chapter 9: Long-Term Play**.

When you make a city move, use your Circle Status unless the move in question tells you otherwise. Building up Status in Circles other than your own—through Circle advancement (page 186) or moves like *Dual Loyalty* (page 138)—can give you greater reach when making city moves that rely on what other Circles think of you and your reputation.

## STATUS-1 MOVES

At Status-1, your character is known by most—an established actor whose Debts are honored by the rest of the city. When you ask for help, people do their best to get you what you need, assuming you're willing to pay a fair price. Status-1 PCs have access to four city moves: *weaken someone's standing*, *put out the word*, *consult your contacts*, and *tend to your business*.

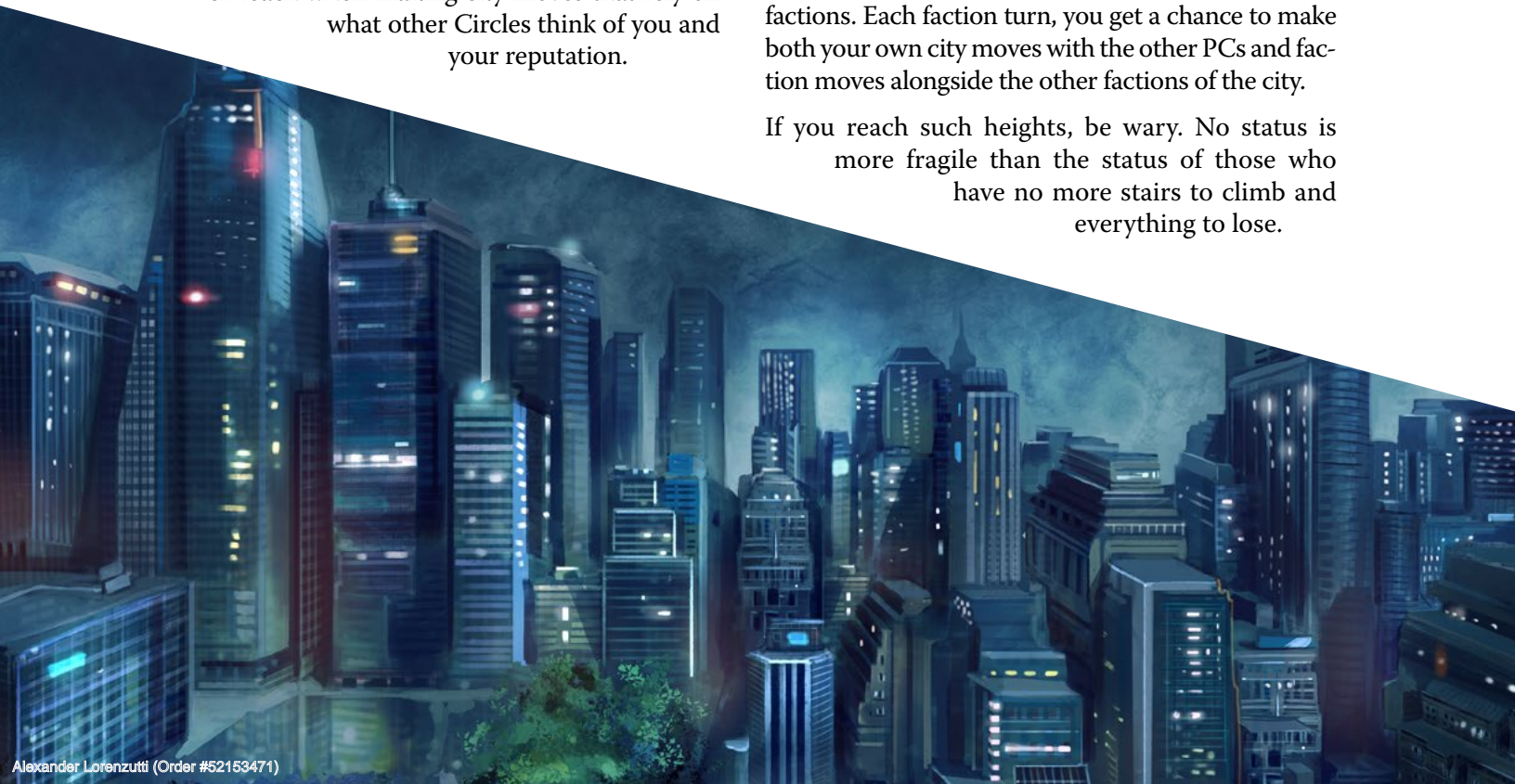
## STATUS-2 MOVES

When you reach Status-2, you've moved from established "citizen" to a potent political force; you can move factions to action, claim assets, and more. You don't command a faction of your own, but you're important to your Circle. Status-2 PCs have access to all the Status-1 city moves and three additional options: *marshal forces*, *lay claim*, and *recruit new allies*. In addition, Status-2 characters can also attempt to *establish a faction* of their own.

## STATUS-3 MOVES

Successfully reaching Status-3 is rare for even the most ambitious politico, requiring a PC to either seize control of an existing faction or *establish a faction* themselves. No advancement option exists to gain Status-3. That said, Status-3 PCs gain access to the full set of faction mechanics the MC uses for NPC factions. Each faction turn, you get a chance to make both your own city moves with the other PCs and faction moves alongside the other factions of the city.

If you reach such heights, be wary. No status is more fragile than the status of those who have no more stairs to climb and everything to lose.





## WEAKEN SOMEONE'S STANDING

When you try to **weaken someone's standing in a Circle with rumor and gossip**, roll with Status in their Circle. On a hit, the rumors take hold; they take -1 ongoing to moves during the faction turn until they find some way to dispel the whispers. On a 10+, one of their enemies catches wind of your gossip and approaches you with damaging information about your target or their interests. On a miss, your target traces the stories directly back to you...and catches you in a vulnerable spot before you can react.

**Weakening someone's standing** allows you to spread destructive gossip throughout the city in an attempt to tarnish your target's reputation and diminish their power. Do you have enemies making your life difficult? Go low. Make their life harder by revealing their secrets, testing their relationships, and embarrassing them. Even if the rumors aren't true, there's a good chance your words disrupt their capacity and sow chaos among their trusted allies.

That said, only damaging (and believable) rumors trigger this move. Gossip about a wizard's romantic life is unlikely to undermine her standing within Power; if you spread the rumor she's in love with a mortal and renouncing her role on the council... then you're **weakening her standing** in her Circle.

If you want to make this move and you're stuck, feel free to work directly with the MC (and the other players) to think of something that makes sense in the fiction. Some rumors will be obvious, easy conclusions to jump to in the fiction based on messy relationships, public secrets, and insider knowledge, but sometimes you need to target someone you don't know that much about. A truly spurious rumor can work, provided it's both sensational and true to the target's reputation.

On a hit, the rumors you've spread find fertile room to grow and directly damage your target's standing in the city. Until they find a way to dispel the rumors and reclaim their reputation, they take -1 ongoing to any move they make in the faction turn. The -1 ongoing applies to any faction a targeted character leads. If you want to keep a vampire clan from killing your friend, spread a rumor that a trusted Status-2 enforcer within the clan is enslaved by sorcerous magic to a wizard. Of course, any PCs affected by such rumors suffer the -1 ongoing when making city moves as well.

On a strong hit, your rumors secure you new—albeit temporary—allies, enemies of your enemy who bear the most precious of gifts: damaging information. It's up to you how you put it to use, but it comes without strings or conditions. Even better, this new info is always true and impactful. Your rumors may be silly speculation, but the information you get on a strong hit is always verifiably true and, if exposed, damaging to your target's alliances, status, or standing.

On a miss, your rumors do little but expose you. Your target shrugs them off—even if the rumors' details are true, the impact is minimal—and quickly determines the source. Worse yet, they (or their goons) catch you in a vulnerable spot before you can get yourself out of their way, perhaps arriving at your apartment while you're alone or confronting you at a location where they hold the power.

*Kashida has been trying to keep the Wizard's Council from attacking the Futurist Union, a fledgling Mortalis faction who have run afoul of the larger Power faction. At the start of the faction turn, Kai—Kashida's player—decides to **weaken the standing** of a major player in the Council, a wizard named Rika.*

*"I'd like to spread the rumor that Rika is thinking about calling for a vote of no confidence in the High Council. Since we're close, I think people will believe it."*

*Marissa, the MC, is unconvinced. "Why is that a damaging rumor? That's just regular wizard politics."*

*"Rika is the daughter of the High Elder...it would throw all of the current alliances into disarray. No one would know who to trust if she is fighting her own family."*

*"Okay, that's pretty good actually. Roll it!" Kai rolls with his Status-1 in Power and gets an 11, enough for the rumor to stick—causing the Council to take a -1 ongoing—and for someone to bring him some damaging info.*

*After the faction turn, Marissa frames a scene: "The 'impending conflict' on the Council got everyone's attention. A few days later, however, you receive a package on your doorstep. It's a cassette tape, and a note from one of Rika's rivals—Oun."*

*"What does it say?"*

*"Listen to the tape to see what Rika's really planning for her father. It's not pretty.' What do you do?"*

*"Oh, I'm going to call Rika. I think she might be more interested in legitimizing the Union now that I have some new way to motivate her..."*

## PUT OUT THE WORD

When you **put out the word to your Circle that you need something**—a magical tome, secret information, a skilled bodyguard, etc.—roll with Status. On a 10+, it shows up in the hands of an ally; it's yours for a Debt. On a 7-9, it ends up with a rival; they want a favor or gift—their choice—in addition to a Debt before they hand it over. On a miss, the thing shows up on your doorstep with wicked strings attached, exposing you to the wrath of a Status-3 NPC from another Circle.

Members of your own Circle aren't always friends, but you do understand each other's needs. **Putting out the word** allows you to ask around within your own Circle during the faction turn, looking for something you want by tapping into the network of people who know you best.

**Putting out the word** doesn't work for any item you can possibly imagine; it has to be something people are willing to trade away, something inexpensive enough that it could move through the city's marketplaces to you instead of getting caught up in the hands of someone who tucks it away forever. Requests akin to a moderate favor are always appropriate, but you might stretch that a bit to more exotic inquiries if the request isn't too precious.

The scope of your Circle is also a major factor in what this move can bring you. If you're a wizard looking for a magic tome, putting out the word to the other members of Power is likely to yield results. But if you're a wizard looking for a werewolf bodyguard, you'll have to **recruit new allies** (page 103) in Night to get what you need; few other members of Power have a set of loyal werewolf bodyguards they can sign over to you for a few weeks of work.

That said, you can usually find something close to what you're looking for among your own people if you compromise a bit. For example, another wizard might be able to summon up a bodyguard for you—a spirit perhaps, or a conjured construct. The fictional position of these resources matters a great deal, however. You may pay the same price, but the vulnerabilities and strengths will be quite different.

On a strong hit, what you were looking for ends up in the hands of an ally. They are happy to part with it for a Debt, a small price to pay among friends. The MC will frame a scene for you after the faction turn in which you can collect from said friend.

On a weak hit, a rival within your Circle has what you need. They want a Debt...and something more as well. The MC will tell you what they want, but you're under no obligation to pay their price. You're welcome to turn down their offer, make a counter-offer, or even try to take it from them by force if you choose violence over diplomacy. Tell the MC how you want to approach the situation, and they'll frame an appropriate scene after time passes.

On a miss, the thing you were looking to find comes crashing into your life with terrible consequences. You get exactly what you wanted, but the circumstances are deeply unfortunate or damaging. Perhaps the item was stolen from someone powerful or the person offering it to you is on the run from terrible enemies. Either way, you've made an enemy of a Status-3 NPC from another Circle, and the MC will tell you how this new danger inflicts itself upon you! Of course, you can always try to avoid the worst of it by *refusing* the very thing you requested...but that's not always possible.

*Paris, the Oracle, has been trying to stay one step ahead of Cora—a Status-2 vampire—but he feels her closing in. Worse yet, he's angered his benefactor at the wrong time; Wren is now offering little in the way of protection.*

*When the faction turn starts, Pytha, Paris's player, decides to **put out the word** that Paris needs an ally who can intervene in this conflict and get Cora to back down; Pytha rolls with Paris's Status-1 in Power, but ends up with a miss!*

*After the faction turn, Mark—the MC—comes back to Pytha with the outcome: "You get a call from a friend, Paris, another oracle named Tomas. He has something that might help you with Cora. I assume you meet?"*

*"He's a friend, right? I trust him?" Mark nods. "But Paris would pick the place," Pytha says, "since he's paranoid. Maybe a diner downtown, really public."*

*"Makes sense! You arrive to find Tomas sitting with a vampire you don't know. As you join them, Tomas can't contain himself—'Paris, this is Emilia. She's a broodmate of Cora; they share a sire...'—but Emilia cuts him off. She says, 'I'd be happy to put Cora back in her place...'"*

*"Um... I don't know..." says Pytha.*

*"Emilia smiles, her fangs peeking out from behind her lips; you can tell there's a history here you don't quite understand. And you suspect her 'father' might be angry to see you fanning the flames of a conflict between his two 'children' like this. What do you do?"*



## CONSULT YOUR CONTACTS

When you **consult your contacts** in any Circle, roll with Status in that Circle. On a hit, ask 3; your contacts will answer to the best of their ability. On a 7-9, hold 1. On a 10+, hold 2. Spend your hold—1 for 1—to take a 10+ instead of rolling when the information you gained would aid you on a move.

- ◆ What conflict is everyone talking about?
- ◆ What happened to \_\_\_\_\_?
- ◆ What has \_\_\_\_\_ been up to recently?
- ◆ Who is responsible for \_\_\_\_\_?
- ◆ Who has a Debt on \_\_\_\_\_?

On a miss, ask 1 and hold 1, but one of your contacts has a tough question about your loyalties and allegiances as well. Answer it honestly, mark corruption, or owe them a Debt, your choice.

While you might learn about the city's politics through your ordinary interactions with knowledgeable NPCs, you may need to **consult your contacts** to stay abreast of the drama within specific communities. You can always **hit the streets** or **cash in a Debt** during a session to get some answers, but the faction turn offers you an opportunity to learn what's going on in regards to specific actors or conflicts, asking around over time without arousing too much suspicion.

When you make this move, tell the MC which Circle you're going to for answers—and what kind of contacts you have within it—then roll with your Status in that Circle. **Putting out the word** (page 98) is better for getting you a single piece of secret information, but you can **consult your contacts** in any Circle to get the gossip people are already talking about, even if you have Status-0 in that Circle. People may not trust you, but they still like to gossip and talk about other people.

On a hit, you get to ask three questions from the list provided; your contacts give you honest answers within the scope of their own knowledge and access. They may not know everything about a given situation, but they do their best to share what they know out of respect for your relationship with them. Just as with **figuring someone out** (page 80), explicit dialogue isn't the only way to get information. The MC may reveal things to you as a result of your contacts' physical appearance, body language, etc.

Both weak and strong hits while consulting your contacts yield hold in addition to answered questions. During future sessions—but before time passes again—you can spend this hold, one for one, to take a 10+ instead of rolling when the information you've gained offers you some guidance. For example, you might take a 10+ instead of rolling when you **refuse to honor a Debt** to a vampire who you know has been excommunicated by their clan; after all, how much pressure can they bring to bear now that they're all on their own!

On a miss, one of your contacts asks you some dangerous questions about your loyalties and allegiances, testing your limits and possibly revealing your own secrets. You can tell the truth, refuse to respond in kind to what they've revealed to you—owing them a Debt—or lie. If you choose deception, you must mark corruption to do so convincingly.

*Sunny, the Fae, starts off the faction turn by consulting their contacts in Wild, looking for information about the Summer Court's response to the Winter Court's rise among the other fae in the city. They roll with their Status-2 in Wild and get an 8! After the faction turn, Sasha, Sunny's player, gets to ask 3 questions from the list.*

*"I want to know 'What happened to the Summer King?'"*

*Marissa, the MC, says, "You hear that he's actually returned to Faerie, trying to hide himself away from the Queen. He has plans to return, but demands some sort of truce first."*

*"Okay... 'What has the Queen been up to recently?'"*

*"She's been taking territory and expanding, forcing Summer Court fae to leave their lives here in the city or swear fealty to her. It's a mess."*

*"Who has a Debt on the Queen?"*

*"Your friend Oliver says she owes him for providing the food and drink at her last courtly ball. Apparently, he went above and beyond her expectations. He's just trying to keep her happy, you think, and not actually loyal to her."*

*While trying to persuade Oliver to help Sunny sneak into the next ball in the next session, Sasha decides to use the 1 hold from this move, taking a 10+ instead of rolling by telling Oliver what Sunny had learned about the King of Summer. Swayed by the depth of the conflict, Oliver agrees to help...but Sunny has no further hold to spend until the next faction turn.*

## TEND TO YOUR BUSINESS

When you **tend to your business instead of meddling in city affairs**, tell the MC how you pass the time and roll. On a hit, you tend to your affairs...but an old friend or new ally approaches you with a request for help; mark a corruption if you turn them down. On a 10+, ask the MC a question about the situation; they will answer it honestly. On a miss, an NPC interrupts your day-to-day business to **cash in a Debt** you hoped they had forgotten about, mixing you up in a mess within your Circle you'd rather have avoided.

City politics aren't for everyone. If you'd rather just stay out of trouble and mind your own affairs—or if things have gotten too hot for you to handle—**tend to your business** gives you a chance to lay low while the rest of the faction turn grinds on around you. Of course, everyone who lives in the city knows there's only so much you can do to keep from being drawn into the city's messy conflicts...

When you **tend to your business**, work with the MC to figure out what you're up to during the faction turn. Are you running an underground vampire club? Working in your sanctum on magical research or a lengthy ritual? Trying to hold down a steady job as a social worker? Whatever “normal” looks like for your character is an important part of the move, so clarify what you're doing before you roll!

Unlike the other city moves, **tending to your business** gets no bonus to your roll: you don't add any Status or other modifiers at all. Instead, you roll the dice and total the result. No one cares about your Status if you're trying to keep your head down and avoid the attention of the powers-that-be and their minions.

On a hit, you mostly keep to yourself...but someone you care about comes calling with a request for help. You can turn them down if you want, but you have to mark corruption to do so. Your selfishness may shield you from the city's storms, but you know you turned down a friend in need! An old friend may be someone you haven't seen in a while or someone you work with all the time; a new ally is someone you've met only recently, a burgeoning relationship that would be put to the test by your refusal. In either case, the MC will frame a scene for you introducing their request that occurs as soon as the faction turn ends.

On a strong hit, you also get to ask the MC a question. You might want to know what the person in need is feeling or thinking, but you might also ask for more information about the situation or opposition. Either way, the information doesn't always come to you directly through dialogue; you may observe something through body language or even just have an intuitive understanding of the dangers and problems inherent to working with this person. You get to ask your question before you decide if you're going to follow up on their request.

On a miss, your routine gets interrupted by an NPC—perhaps a character never before seen in the story—in urgent need of your help...and holding a Debt they can **cash in** to compel you to assist them. You can **refuse to honor the Debt** if you don't want to help, but you'll have to wait for the MC to frame the scene for you as soon as the faction turn is over.

*When the faction turn arrives, Zoe—Zara's player—says, “I don't need trouble. I just keep my head down and do my demon jobs. I think that's **tending to my business**?”*

*Mark asks, “What does that look like? Do you just go where you're told to go when your dark patron gets around to it?”*

*“I'm fairly proactive. I've probably got a backlog of messages to deliver, so I'll start there and see how far I get.” Mark nods, and Zoe rolls—a 12!*

*“Nice! Okay, I think you should mark Wild and get a Debt from your dark patron—you finish at least one job during the faction turn. We'll cover the rest later.”*

*After the faction turn, Mark returns and sets a scene: “Your work goes quietly for the most part. You deliver a few messages, complete at least one job totally, and generally look like a model indebted servant. That said, a demon named Iseul approaches you when you're out one night at a bar...she's clearly got something on her mind.”*

*“Zara says, ‘What the fuck do you want?’” says Zoe.*

*“I hate to ask this Zara, but...I need a body. My contract is up, and I don't want to leave. Can you help? They don't have to be alive, man. A dead body would be great.”*

*“I get a question, right? I'm going to ask, ‘Why didn't your contract get renewed?’”*

*“Iseul hems and haws, but one thing is clear. She fucked something up. You wanna help her out?”*

*“Nah, fuck that. I'll mark the corruption. I don't need to get on her lord's bad side by making more of a mess...”*



## MARSHAL FORCES

When you try to **marshal forces** in your Circle to undermine a faction or their holdings, roll with Status. On a hit, you can give a Debt to a powerful NPC of your Circle—MC's choice—to reduce your target's Strength or weaken their hold on a specific asset, your choice. On a 7-9, your allies are slow to move; give them another Debt or publicly push them into the conflict to speed things along. On a miss, your attempt to secure support falls short...and creates an opportunity for your enemies; tell the MC how you've left yourself vulnerable to them.

Status-2 PCs are respected power players, capable of calling their Circle to action. **Marshal forces** lets you draw high-status NPCs of your Circle into your conflicts, offering Debts to secure their support for your interests. Status-1 PCs might **cash in a Debt** with a particular NPC to get their help with a particular problem, but only a Status-2 character can broadly make it known they need support and find such support in their Circle.

On a hit, you find a powerful NPC willing to do your dirty work; the MC will tell you who answers your call and makes their forces available. Provided you give them a Debt, they use their resources to directly undermine another faction's operations—reducing their Strength—or weaken the faction's hold on a particular asset, thereby making the asset vulnerable (page 252), your choice. Often, the NPC in question is Status-3, but it's possible a particular Status-2 NPC might be in the right position to get the job done for you.

You get some say in how they approach the problem, but their plan must fit the fiction of their own resources. A Status-3 wizard is much more likely to perform a ritual than launch a direct attack, and a Status-3 werewolf will always turn to their pack before trying to invoke financial embargos or clever social traps. Either way, a faction working in this way still gets their allotment of faction moves (page 255); their work for you doesn't interfere with their capacity to handle their own schemes and plans.

The plan is also always effective—once you move the high-status NPC to action, their efforts are successful. Better still, the targeted faction won't necessarily tie the attack to you; so long as you don't broadcast your involvement, the attacking faction likely takes most of the heat for the conflict.

On a weak hit, your new allies move much more slowly than you hoped; you need to push them to action by offering them an additional Debt or moving things along by publicly antagonizing both sides. The former is costly—Debts owed to Status-3 NPCs are hard to refuse—but the latter is dangerous; you can't conceal your involvement once you're on the front lines of the press tour for the attack. Note that you can simply work on your allies' schedule and wait—the MC will tell you how long it takes them to get their shit together and follow through.

On a miss, your plan backfires: you find little support among your Circle for your battles, and your enemies—be they internal to your community or the very people you were targeting—get an opportunity to strike back at you. That said, it's up to you where they find an opening; you get to tell the MC how you've left yourself vulnerable. Perhaps you were a little too open with your desire to move against your target—or your focus on **marshaling forces** led you to drop your guard at a crucial moment. Either way, the vulnerability has to be real; you have to give the MC a real opportunity for your enemies to act against you.

*After a werewolf attack nearly burns down her bar, Eve decides she's done trying to make peace. It's time for war. She chooses to **marshal forces** in her Circle during the faction turn, hoping to find someone who can put the hurt on The Crimson Kings and weaken them considerably.*

*Elizabeth, Eve's player, rolls an 8. After the faction turn, Mark—the MC—comes back to her: "You hear that Raquel, the werewolf in Wild that works for Ortalex, is open to a scrap with her old rivals. Alongside the demons she commands, she can definitely reduce their Strength or weaken an asset. Which one do you want?"*

*"I want to see them weakened overall. Hit the Strength. And I have to wait or pay, right? I don't want to owe Raquel a Debt, but I would be willing to push publicly."*

*"How do you push? What does that look like?"*

*"I think Eve would go to a few different Wild locations or gathering spaces and start talking about how much damage the Kings have done, how much trouble they are, and...how much I'm hoping that Ortalex and Raquel come through for me. I want everyone to know that I'm waiting on the demons to deal with this problem."*

*"Great! I think that pushes their forces into moving a bit more quickly—the Kings have their Strength reduced, but they also know that you're the one that planned it..."*

## LAY CLAIM

When you **publicly lay claim to an asset you've seized**, roll with Status. On a hit, your claim is recognized across the city; the MC will tell you what benefits the asset itself now brings. On a 7-9, pick 1. On a 10+, all 3.

- ◆ your claim chokes off factional retaliation
- ◆ your claim unites your allies behind you
- ◆ your claim doesn't cost you a Debt

On a miss, your claim falls short as you end up in the crosshairs of a Status-3 NPC who desires the asset as well; the MC will tell you which of your allies or assets they are targeting in an attempt to scare you off.

Most assets (page 251) are held by factions, but Status-2+ PCs can hold them too; you must both take control of the asset—seizing it with physical violence or clever tricks during play—then **lay claim** to your new holding with a public pronouncement of your authority during the faction turn.

On a hit, your claim stands; whoever owned the asset before loses or withdraws their stated interest, and no new claimants arise. However you ended up with the asset—by hook or by crook—it's yours now, and the rest of the city broadly accepts your ownership. On a strong hit, the claim you made is clean: you neuter your enemies, impress your allies, and owe no further Debts. But on a weak hit, the city as a whole still respects your claim...but you only get to pick one option; whatever options you don't pick become the problems still plaguing your new holding.

Either way, work with the MC to establish what the asset does for you: a crew of **+demonic soldiers** might ensure you have a reliable bodyguard, while a set of **+blood magic reliquaries** might offer you access to **spells** from the Wizard's playbook. If you rise to Status-3 you can transfer the asset to your faction's holdings and use them to make faction moves (page 257), but while you hold the asset as an individual it brings you whatever makes sense in the fiction.

On a miss, your claim runs afoul of a Status-3 NPC who is eyeing the asset in question despite your seizure, someone already scheming to take the asset from you. But if you still hold the asset in the next faction turn, you can make your claim again. You don't have to resolve the conflict to make a successful claim down the road, but if you don't resolve it, expect them to keep coming for what you have.

## OPTIONS FOR LAYING CLAIM

If *your claim chokes off factional retaliation*, you cut off any faction from acting against you; your claim is so absolute that they concede the issue, even if you stole the asset. That said, individuals can always hold a grudge or act on their own accord! If you do not pick this option, the faction that used to own the asset is likely to come after you in full, seeking revenge.

If *your claim unites your allies behind you*, you've impressed your usual partners and friends, despite any messes you might have made getting your hands on the asset in question. If you don't choose this option, your allies are wary of that path you've chosen; the MC will let you know who expresses reticence in the face of your seizure and claim.

If *your claim doesn't cost you a Debt*, then you don't have to owe a Debt to earn enough support for your claim to stand—your Status and reputation are enough to secure the asset without any external support. If you don't choose this option, work with the MC to determine which Status-2 or Status-3 NPC could be convinced to support your claim via a Debt.

*After driving off a nest of demons, Juno finds a hellportal in her territory. The MC, Mark, tells Jamila, Juno's player, it's an asset, and asks if she wants to **lay claim** to it.*

*"Yeah, I just got Status-2. During the faction turn, I go around to the demon bars and let them know everything in my territory—including the hellportal—is mine."*

*Mark nods, and Juno gets a total of 8 on her roll. Jamila says, "I want to choke off factional retaliation; I don't want any blowback." Mark suggests that Juno owe Raquel, a Status-2 member of Wild, a Debt for helping smooth things over, and they agree the asset gives Juno access to all of the Tainted's **let it out** abilities (page 153), provided she regularly communes with it.*

*After the faction turn ends, Mark says, "As word spreads, you get the sense that the demons are largely going to let this go. It's your territory after all. One demon, Ryglax, is pissed though—he put a lot of time into opening the portal, and you hear he may try to make trouble for you."*

*"I thought no faction could contest my ownership?"*

*"No faction is contesting your claim, but this one demon is pissed and might act on his own. The rest of the demons acknowledge it's yours, and no faction is backing him. Other packs in the city are also impressed with your claim; you can expect at least one or two other alphas to come calling with offers of a more permanent alliance."*



## RECRUIT NEW ALLIES

When you **recruit allies from another Circle**, tell the MC what assistance you require and roll with your Status in that Circle. On a hit, the MC will tell you who is available for hire; offer up a Debt, and they'll be on call until after the next faction turn. On a 10+, pick 3. On a 7-9, pick 2:

- ♦ they are unfailingly honest
- ♦ they are exceptionally skilled
- ♦ they are notably discreet
- ♦ they are aggressively focused

On a miss, before you can connect with anyone, someone in your own Circle catches word of your request and spreads rumors of your weakness; take -1 ongoing to your Status until you prove your strength to your own people.

Status-2 characters command enough respect in other Circles to **recruit new allies**, reaching out for help within another Circle by spreading the word that they're looking for someone to take care of some business. If you need some tough muscle from Night or a member of Power who can perform a ritual, **recruiting new allies** lets you reach beyond your own community to get what you need.

Before you roll, declare which Circle you're going to for assistance and roll with the Status you hold in that Circle. You can't select your own Circle—try **putting out the word** for allies if you need help from your own people—but any of the other Circles is fair game, even one in which you have Status-0.

On a hit, the MC lets you know who is interested in working with you; provided you offer a Debt, they'll be on call to do the work when the time comes. On both a strong and a weak hit, you also get to make some choices to help define this new ally. Choose wisely! Whatever options you don't pick might arise as problems in the course of your work together.

On a miss, someone in your own Circle gets in the way. Proving your strength to your own people—and ending the -1 ongoing to Status—may mean putting your meddlesome rival in their place...or worse.

This city move is explicitly for building new relationships. If you want to offer a Debt up to someone you know for help, you can **hit the streets** during a session to get a chance to make a deal. **Recruiting new allies** allows you to go beyond your current relationships to seek out new opportunities.

## OPTIONS FOR RECRUITING NEW ALLIES

*Unfailingly honest allies* always tell you the whole truth—no half truths, obfuscation, or lies. Choose this option if you want to be sure they are completely straightforward in their dealings with you, eschewing other agendas and revealing conflicts of interest.

*Exceptionally skilled allies* do what they do extremely well—they are notable in their chosen field. Select this option if you want your new allies to be truly great at the tasks to which you set them.

*Notably discreet allies* do their work without getting noticed—even by others who know their trade. Pick this option if you want your alliance to go unnoticed or their work for you to go overlooked.

*Aggressively focused allies* conduct business without distraction—they have a narrow focus. Opt for this option if you want them to do what you ask of them on a tight timeline, before tending to other matters.

Failing to choose a particular option doesn't mean the opposite is true—*allies who aren't unfailingly honest won't outright double-cross you; allies who aren't exceptionally skilled don't fail at every task you set before them. But don't be surprised if an ally who isn't aggressively focused has other business that demands their attention when you finally put in a call for their help.*

*After a falling out with Rashid, Darius decides to find someone new to represent his interests to the hunters of the city—he can't trust Rashid to advocate for him.*

*Darius's player, Dominic, says, "During the faction turn, I want to recruit a new ally in Mortalis, someone willing to go talk to the hunters and get them off my back. I'm Status-0 in Mortalis, so I roll flat?"*

*Marissa, the MC, nods; Dominic's roll is a 9, not quite enough for a strong hit. Dominic says, "I don't care how discreet they are—I want people to know they work for me!—so I'll take skilled and focused. I kinda expect them to be working their own angle anyway; honesty isn't important to me."*

*After the faction turn, Marissa comes back with the outcome: "You let folks in Mortalis know you're looking for someone, and a young hunter named Esperanza comes looking for you. She's a Status-2 political player who likely has her own schemes in the works, but she says she'll work for you for a Debt..."*

## ESTABLISH A FACTION

When you **attempt to establish a new faction**, roll.

- ♦ If you have significant influence over a different Size-2+ faction, add 1.
- ♦ If you have six Debts over Status-3 NPCs from at least two different Circles, add 1.
- ♦ If you have Status-0 in more than one Circle, subtract 1.
- ♦ If you personally control fewer than two assets, subtract 1.

On a hit, raise your status to Status-3 and work with the MC to create a new faction you lead. On a 10+, your rise to power begets new alliances and opportunities; make an additional city move for the next two faction turns. On a 7-9, your rise leads to animosity and jealousy within your own ranks; someone you expected to join you instead betrays you, seizing crucial resources for themselves. On a miss, a Status-3 NPC disrupts the founding; you cannot try again until you win them over...or eliminate them directly.

While you can acquire Status-2 through advancement (page 187), you may only rise to Status-3 by seizing control of an existing faction in the fiction or founding a new one with this move. You may attempt to **establish a faction** as soon as you gain Status-2, but your success or failure depends on resources you've gathered. If you hold important Debts and the support of other factions, you earn bonuses, but if you aren't widely respected in the city or don't control enough assets of your own, you have to contend with penalties. Most who plan to ascend take the time to plot and scheme, **marshaling forces** and **recruiting new allies** in preparation.

On a hit, your new faction springs into existence and you rise to Status-3. Work with the MC to create the new organization—is it a completely new faction? An offshoot of an organization that trusts you? Most new factions are Size-2, Strength-2, but the MC may adjust those starting values. Remember that you and your faction are deeply intertwined; they look to you for leadership, and your new status relies on their continued support.

On a strong hit, your ascent is noticed by all, and your newfound authority attracts resources and opportunities. You get to make an additional city move—not faction moves—for the next two faction turns, as your reach and status compel others to offer you resources, support, and attention.

## STATUS-3 CITY MOVES

Any PC who reaches Status-3—either by seizing control of an existing faction or establishing a new faction—gets to make faction moves alongside NPC factions each faction turn; their faction is always considered to be striving unless the PC abandons the faction (collapsing) or hands off control to someone with instructions to merely preserve the status quo (maintaining). See page 250 for more on factions, faction moves, and the faction turn.

On a weak hit, however, your faction fractures as it coalesces! Someone you hoped would join your new faction betrays you instead, taking some portion of the faction's resources with them, e.g. a useful ally, a priceless weapon, a guarded secret, etc. You still maintain authority over your new faction, but the split arising from your rise is costly; the faction starts with one fewer asset than it otherwise would. Check page 251 for more on assets and how they function.

On a miss, an influential NPC blocks the founding and your rise. You must get them on your side—despite their opposition—or destroy them before you can attempt to establish the faction again. Once you resolve the conflict, however, you make the roll as you did the first time, assessing the bonus and penalties based on your current position in the fiction. You don't suffer a penalty for trying more than once!

*Frustrated by Calliope's failures, Marcos decides to establish his own faction. Because he's the Sworn, leaving the Old Gods means changing playbooks (page 191), so Miguel, Marcos's player, suggests he switch to the Veteran and establish a Mortalis order focused on protecting ordinary mortals.*

*"I love it!" says Mark, the MC. "I know you have at least six Debts on Status-3 NPCs and have Status in every Circle, but you don't control your own assets. What about influence over a Size-2+ faction?"*

*"I'm still pretty important in the Old Gods, right? I'm not opposed to them, just charting my own path."*

*Mark thinks about it for a minute. "Yeah, that's a good point. I don't think they will be happy with you leaving, but you aren't necessarily their enemy. Roll with a +1!"*

*Miguel rolls snake eyes—a miss. Mark says, "I think Calliope steps in to stop you. As you start talking about your plans, she makes it clear to the rest of the Old Gods that she views your departure as a personal betrayal. You'll have to deal with her first, one way or the other."*



# CUSTOM MOVES

Now that you've seen how the core moves work, you might be interested in creating custom moves of your own for your table! The existing moves are all that's needed to play **URBAN SHADOWS**, but custom moves can expand play through specific mechanics for locations, gear, magical powers, and more.

## BUILDING MOVES

Generally speaking, moves have this structure:

- ♦ A trigger: "When X happens..."
- ♦ An outcome: "...then Y happens." Sometimes this involves a roll, but other times players just ask questions or get static outcomes.
- ♦ Stakes: If the move requires dice, you need to define the outcomes—a 10+, a 7-9, and a 6-.

Building out new mechanics in this structure can create countless custom moves, but remember that the key to moves is meaningful fictional uncertainty *and* meaningful fictional outcomes. If you can't identify what interesting situation you want to encode into the move—and where the move might go—then you probably don't need a new move at all. But a good custom move can do something astounding—it can focus your group's play on a part of the fictional world you've created together with real stakes and meaningful outcomes.

## TRIGGERS

The first half of any move is the trigger, the part of the mechanics that sets up when the move should be used. Triggers need to be clear and specific—avoid generic triggers or boring triggers like *when you worry about the future* that go off constantly and don't advance the fiction in an interesting way. Here's an example of a custom move with a specific, evocative trigger:

When you **seek the counsel of the Gray Lake**...

The trigger—going to a named lake and asking for advice—is a clear moment in the fiction, an action that moves the story forward all by itself. Even better, this custom move sets up the Gray Lake as fictionally important to your setting, a location that now matters much more because it has a move attached.

## OUTCOMES

A clear, evocative trigger is only half of a good custom move; you also need to create outcomes that generate new opportunities or avenues for change in the fiction. If **seeking the counsel of the Gray Lake** doesn't do anything interesting, it doesn't really matter! Writing custom moves means developing your understanding of the world your group has built and creating mechanics that invoke that world, like this:

When you **seek the counsel of the Gray Lake**, she speaks of the city's secret sins; mark corruption to learn a secret about an NPC of your choice.

Outcomes appearing in **URBAN SHADOWS** include:

- ♦ **Direct fictional effects**, like turning an NPC from a bothersome threat to a helpful ally.
- ♦ **Shifts in harm, corruption, or Debts**, like offering PCs what they want at a cost.
- ♦ **Opportunities and information**, like the PCs asking questions and getting honest answers.

## STAKES

Custom moves always need stakes, especially when rolling dice! Differentiate a hit from a miss within the move—remembering the usual 10+ / 7-9 / 6- tiers (page 39)—and give the players different opportunities or outcomes. One useful difference is flexibility: strong hits tend to give players more options:

When you **seek the counsel of the Gray Lake**, roll with **HEART**. On a hit, the lake gives you useful advice; choose 1. On a 7-9, she also asks for a secret in return. On a miss, the MC chooses 1 for you, and the Lake extracts a secret directly from your soul.

- ♦ She reveals a truth behind an NPC's lies
- ♦ She uncovers a secret best left buried
- ♦ She offers a vision of a potential future

If your move doesn't involve rolling dice, think carefully about the implied stakes inherent to the fixed outcome. Such a custom move still needs to make a change in the fiction, affecting characters involved or the narrative itself. If a move's outcome doesn't have any stakes, then it's unlikely to contain a meaningful impact that justifies its existence.





SIX





# PLAYBOOKS





# CHAPTER 6

You aren't *alone* in the city.

It's not the crowds that should worry you, though. You can be all by yourself surrounded by a million strangers, each of them ignorant of your schemes and desires, your tragedies and triumphs. People are too wrapped up in their own meager lives to notice you walking among them, no matter what magics you wield or curses you bear. You might as well be invisible to most of them, for all they care.

No, it's the other monsters that should trouble you. They see you from behind the counter as they sling burgers at the local diner; they watch you from their penthouse when you pass off your keys to the valet at your fancy apartment. They are *legion*, and they notice your comings and goings because one day they might have reason to care. One day.

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a supernatural creature hiding in plain sight has no truer enemies than the other monsters who are hiding just the same. Even those mortals who pretend to belong solely to the mundane world stand out like a sore thumb to a vampire who has spent several lifetimes looking out for mortal hunters, scammers, and vigilantes.

So study them, friend. Watch them just as they watch you. Don't for a second believe that a friend can't become an enemy or an enemy will forget you exist. By the time you come to regret your ignorance, it will be far too late to do anything about it. The best time to plant a tree is twenty years ago, and even the greatest of wizards has trouble reaching back that far.

Of course, you might want to take a hard look at yourself, to see what they see when they look at you. The city is a mirror, a darkness that gazes back with perfect accuracy, revealing unto you that which you should *already* know—yourself. You may not like what you see, but it's time to gaze into that internal abyss. To thine own self be true, right? No time for lies.



## THE PLAYBOOKS

**URBAN SHADOWS** features twelve playbooks, three from each Circle. While some appear to be obvious supernatural types—the Vamp, the Wizard, etc.—others are focused on a social position or role. A Sworn might be a demon who left Wild for Power, seeking to serve a higher calling, while a Veteran might be an ex-wizard, stripped of magical titles and abilities.

- ♦ **The Aware (Mortalis)**—Inquisitive and clever, the Aware is a mortal investigator who has seen the truth of the city’s supernatural streets.
- ♦ **The Fae (Wild)**—Fickle and enigmatic, the Fae is a creature from a distant faerie homeland who values promises and oaths above all else.
- ♦ **The Hunter (Mortalis)**—Determined and deadly, the Hunter is a mortal who has joined a secret order to “protect” humanity from the monsters.
- ♦ **The Imp (Wild)**—Driven and scheming, the Imp owns an establishment in the city that caters to supernatural clientele.
- ♦ **The Oracle (Power)**—Prophetic and cursed, the Oracle is a seer whose benefactor protects them in exchange for the use of their psychic powers.
- ♦ **The Spectre (Night)**—Shattered and alone, the Spectre is a ghost who is anchored to this world, searching for meaning in life after death.
- ♦ **The Sworn (Power)**—Loyal and capable, the Sworn has taken a sacred oath to serve an influential faction within Power.
- ♦ **The Tainted (Wild)**—Brutal and manipulative, the Tainted is a foolish mortal who sold their soul to the dark patron they must now serve.
- ♦ **The Vamp (Night)**—Seductive and merciless, the Vamp is a creature that must feed on humanity to survive from night-to-night.
- ♦ **The Veteran (Mortalis)**—Experienced and clever, the Veteran was retired...until something dragged them back into the city’s deadly politics.
- ♦ **The Wizard (Power)**—Potent and skilled, the Wizard can channel intense magics in the service of their obligations...and their ambition.
- ♦ **The Wolf (Night)**—Primal and unstoppable, the Wolf has claimed a territory in the city, but must now confront the troubles of their holdings.

Every playbook is ultimately bounded by the conflicts, abilities, and problems inherent to the archetype! You might decide your Hunter is a daywalking vampire who has vowed to protect humanity...but that doesn’t mean you automatically get the Vamp’s **let it out** abilities, features, or playbook moves.

## HOW TO USE THIS CHAPTER

This chapter offers a deep look at the complete set of playbooks for **URBAN SHADOWS**. While **Chapter 5: Core Moves** focused on the broad mechanics used by every player during play—and **Chapter 4: Character Creation** covered the steps for creating an individual character—this chapter dives deep into each specific playbook, offering advice about how each archetype works best and clarifying some of the mechanics that might be misunderstood during a session.

Each playbook opens with a short description of the playbook itself—and why you might want to play that kind of character—along with a broad description of the playbook’s fictional position and a summary of all the stats, Debts, and questions used in character creation for that playbook. If you’re looking for a playbook to portray in your next campaign, the first two pages of every playbook in this chapter is a great place to start!

After that, the features of each playbook are explored deeply, offering advice and tips on how to make the most of your character’s unique features. If you’re looking for info about the Fae’s **faerie powers** or the Veteran’s **workshop** or the Wizard’s **spells**, you’ve come to the right place!

Finally, the playbook moves and corruption moves are explicated in full, alongside advice for each playbook’s intimacy move, end move, and advancement. If there’s something confusing about the playbook that isn’t covered in the first few pages, you can probably find it on the last two.

### NOTES ON LET IT OUT ABILITIES

While this section covers each component of the playbooks, it does not offer further notes on **let it out** abilities. Since those powers are invoked by a basic move, players need to work with their MC each time they use an ability, navigating what they want to do in the fiction along with the consequences of the roll. In general, such abilities should be used broadly; if the Aware tries to *convince an NPC to act on their kindness, role, or own best interest*, then they have the capacity to move virtually anyone to action through such a plea...but the MC might impose restrictions or conditions for the NPC’s agreement on a 7-9 that complicate the situation greatly. Check out page 82 for more on using **let it out** during play!

# MORTAL IS *THE* AWARE

*Inquisitive, resourceful, naive, lucky. The Aware is a mortal investigator who has come to see the truth of the supernatural world. They know humanity isn't alone in the city...and they're enthralled by the shadows.*

*Play the Aware if you want to dig up the city's secrets...and build messy relationships with the supernatural creatures you meet along the way.*





## SEEING THE UNSEEN

It started with a question. Something innocent, perhaps, like “Is that house really haunted?” Or perhaps it was something personal, a murdered loved one whose case went unsolved or a missing sibling who reappeared years later professing to have been drawn into a distant, fantastical realm. Either way, you found an answer you can still only barely believe—there is a world of monsters just behind the curtain which shelters mortals from the truths they cannot embrace.

Yet, the world you found is more inviting than you could have imagined. You’ve made friends among the monsters, learned their secrets, and gotten involved in their politics. And now *you* must keep the city’s secrets from the people in *your* life, protecting them now from the awful and amazing truth you’ve uncovered that they can never understand.

Your mortal relationships, however, are more than a liability—they are a lifeline, a reminder that no matter how far you go down the rabbit hole, there’s something real for you back at home. You have a family, a life, a job, some place where people don’t see you as a pawn in a game you barely understand.

The only problem? You feel less like them every day. They think the world is run by billionaires and politicians; you know the people who pull the real strings. And as you feel yourself growing apart from them, taking root in this new world you’ve found, you can’t help but acknowledge that the person you’re becoming may not be someone you’d want to be too close to the people you love.

But you can’t look away. You can’t stop, even when you feel the bonds of your mortal life weaken under the strain. Like a moth to a flame, you are drawn to the seedy werewolf bars and the glimmering faerie balls, compelled to seek out the city’s secret seances and midnight strategy meetings. You’ve seen the city’s true face—blistered and broken, blessed and beautiful—and you can never go back to who you once were...or how little you once knew.

That’s the problem, of course. You *know* too much. You’ve *seen* too much. And sooner or later, the new friends you’ve made, the new alliances you’ve forged, are going to force you to pick a side. Do you really stand with Mortalis, the foolish mortals who spend their lives navigating the boundary between these two worlds? Or are you destined for something greater in a Circle that could unlock and unveil your true worth?

## DEMEANOR OPTIONS

aggressive, charming, composed, paranoid

## STARTING CHARACTER STATS

Blood 0, Heart 1, Mind -1, Spirit 1

## STARTING CIRCLE RATINGS

Mortalis 1, Night 0, Power 1, Wild -1

## STARTING CIRCLE STATUS

Mortalis 1, Night 0, Power 0, Wild 0

## INTRO QUESTIONS

- ◆ How did you discover the supernatural?
- ◆ How long have you been in the city?
- ◆ What mortal commitment keeps you from leaving your old life behind?
- ◆ What mortal aspiration have you given up?
- ◆ What powerful faction or person are you currently investigating?

## STARTING GEAR

A small apartment, a used car, a smartphone. Your kit (detail). A self-defense weapon:

- ◆ 9mm Beretta (2-harm near loud concealable)
- ◆ Taser (s-harm hand)
- ◆ Switchblade (2-harm hand concealable)

## STARTING DEBTS

- ◆ Someone befriended you long before you discovered the supernatural...and purposefully hid its existence from you when it mattered. They owe you a Debt.
- ◆ Someone puts up with your questions about the supernatural. You owe them a Debt.
- ◆ You’re leveraging dirt you have on someone to get their help dismantling a supernatural scheme that targets innocent mortals. You owe them a Debt.

## LET IT OUT ABILITIES

- ◆ gain access to a secure or locked-down location
- ◆ draw immediate mortal attention to a person or situation
- ◆ spot a previously overlooked clue or advantage in the immediate area
- ◆ convince an NPC to act on their kindness, role, or own best interest

# FEATURES

## YOUR MORTAL RELATIONSHIPS

While you ride the line between the mortal and supernatural worlds, your friends and family are stuck firmly in the mundane realities of everyday life.

### Choose 3:

- ☐ A younger sibling who relies on you for transportation and advice
- ☐ A loyal significant other who expects you home by midnight
- ☐ A struggling best friend who's always getting into messy altercations
- ☐ A demanding boss who calls you into work at inconvenient times
- ☐ An elderly parent who always knows when you're lying to them
- ☐ An overbearing ex-partner who constantly worries about you

When one of your mortal relationships comes to an end for any reason—they cut you off, they die, they leave the city, you tell them to stop contacting you, etc.—immediately mark a corruption advance. If losing a mortal relationship causes you to retire your character due to corruption, tell the MC whom you most blame for the loss; your character will pursue the person responsible as a Threat until “justice” is served.

### TENDING TO YOUR RELATIONSHIPS

When you tend to your mortal relationships during the faction turn, make no other city moves and roll with **HEART**. On a hit, one of the mortals closest to you offers you a way to deepen your bond; clear a corruption advance if you agree to what they propose. On a 7-9, agreeing isn't so simple; what they ask of you threatens to expose them to the part of your life you've kept hidden. On a miss, one of your mortal ties demands you sacrifice part of your new life to keep them around; manage the conflict or lose the relationship.

## NOTES ON YOUR MORTAL RELATIONSHIPS

You have a few relationships with ordinary mortals—people ignorant of the supernatural world and its influence—that demand attention, bonds impossible to sever without losing a part of yourself. At the start of play, work with the MC to create these NPCs. You don't have to work out every detail before they appear “on screen,” but you need to know how you know them, how often you see them, and what your relationship is like as your story begins.

It's essential that these people actually appear in the story! If you select *a younger sibling*, you have an on-going, close relationship with at least one member of your family who lives in the city; they aren't off at college, ignoring you and your drama. The specific details are less important—perhaps they are a half-sibling or someone you consider a sibling by circumstance—than the broad obligation: they must regularly come to you for advice on things that matter to them...and the occasional ride to the mall.

*Tending to your relationships* means taking the time to nurture your remaining **mortal relationships**—helping a *younger sibling* with a science fair project, visiting a *struggling best friend*, etc. As a city move (page 96), these scenes happens off-screen or in a montage; tell the MC what you want to do but don't get bogged down in specifics. On a hit, whatever one of them proposes to deepen your relationship will likely draw you away from city politics, but you clear a corruption advance if you make it work, losing whatever stat bonus or corruption move came with it. On a miss, one of them instead demands you cut out part of your connection to the supernatural and make them a priority; you can lie to them, give into them, or try to talk them out of it, but if you can't manage the conflict...the relationship ends.

Of course, this isn't the only way a mortal relationship comes to an end. They are fragile, ephemeral things! You mark a corruption advance no matter what straw finally broke the camel's back, be it a long-drawn out fight about your secrets or a bullet in your loved one's gut. It is possible to add new mortal relationships to your playbook, either in the fiction or through advancement, but it's rare.

Finally, if you corrupt out because one of your mortal relationships ends, the MC will portray your character—as an NPC—pursuing “justice” against whoever you say is to blame, even if that person is a PC.



## YOUR KIT

You have some gear you've picked up since becoming aware of the supernatural world, mostly stashed away in the trunk of your car or in a bag you carry with you.

When you go to your kit for some mundane gear—road flares, first aid kit, etc.—useful to the situation, roll with **SPIRIT**. On a hit, you find something you can use that pretty much fits the bill. On a 10+, it's perfect; take +1 ongoing to putting it to use in the scene. On a miss, the situation escalates while you're trying to prepare—brace yourself!

## NOTES ON YOUR KIT

Over the course of your time as a member of Mortalis, you've acquired a good amount of gear, all of it useful for getting out of a tough spot. Whenever you need to see if you have something mundane on hand that could be useful, you can see what's available in your **kit**. Work with your MC to discuss where you keep it, and remember that you've got to be near it to trigger the move.

On a weak hit, whatever you find isn't a perfect fit for the job at hand—you might find a wrench that's just a little too big or a road flare when you're looking for a flashlight—but you're scrappy enough to make it work. It might provide an opportunity to **escape a situation** or a makeshift weapon to **turn to violence**; work with the MC to figure out how the gear changes your fictional position or improves your effectiveness in the moment.

On a strong hit, what you find in your kit is exactly what you need; you take +1 ongoing to any moves you make that rely on that piece of gear. For example, you might take +1 to sabotaging something—probably **misleading, distracting, or tricking** someone—with the perfect wrench. The bonus lasts as long as the conflict you were trying to address; the wrench doesn't carry the +1 ongoing into other projects!

That said, the gear you're looking for has to be mundane in nature—stuff you can find at a big box discount store or a local flea market. You aren't going to find any magical amulets or lost spell books or advanced technomagic in your kit, even if it's exactly the right kind of gear for the moment. It's hard to find that kind of stuff at the local antique shop!

Finally, remember that a miss here escalates the situation. While you were scrounging through your bag, trying to find the perfect tool...things got worse. There's a cost to be paid sometimes when everything is on fire and you're caught looking for the right-sized water bucket.



# MOVES

## AWARE MOVES

Choose three:

### ☐ I KNOW A GUY

When you *hit the streets* to get what you need from a member of your Circle, roll with **HEART** instead of their Circle. On a 7-9, add this option to the list:

- however you find them requires you to offer a Debt to an intermediary

### ☐ CHARMING, NOT SINCERE

Take +1 **HEART** (max+3).

### ☐ THE LION'S DEN

When you gain access to a secure area within a sanctuary, gathering spot, or place of power, you can *study* it as if you rolled a 10+. If the location is controlled by a Circle other than your own, you also find incriminating evidence implicating a powerful NPC (your choice) within that Circle; handing the documents over to them—or one of their enemies—counts as *cashing in a Debt*.

### ☐ THIS IS MY CITY

When you set up a meeting with a powerful or dangerous individual in a crowded mundane space (museum, restaurant, etc.), hold 2. You can spend your hold, 1 for 1, to:

- create an opening for you or another character to *escape a situation*
- take +1 forward to *escaping a situation*
- choose for the MC when you *escape a situation* and roll a 7-9

### ☐ IN SHEEP'S CLOTHING

When you *mislead, distract or trick* someone you've previously shared a moment of intimacy with, roll with **HEART** instead of **MIND**.

### ☐ ONE WAY OR ANOTHER

When you plead with a member of your Circle for help with a pressing situation, roll with **HEART**. On a hit, they either agree to help or owe you a Debt, their choice. On a 10+, their guilt is palpable: if they decline and owe you a Debt, you take +1 ongoing against them as long as you hold that Debt. On a miss, you are exposed and vulnerable; they are free to do as they like...but if they do agree to help, treat it as if they *cashed in a Debt* with you that you can't refuse.

## MOVES ADVICE

*I Know a Guy* might not seem useful at first, but your Mortalis Circle rating will fall as you get mixed up in city politics; this move lets you keep up with the important members of your Circle despite that distance, while also offering you an additional option for the costs on a weak hit. The MC decides who acts as an intermediary for the meet, but they are likely from your Circle. Despite rolling with **HEART**, you still mark your Circle when you make this move.

You must bypass some guard, lock, or barrier to trigger *The Lion's Den*; it's not a secure location if you can just waltz right in and start poking around. The evidence you find is concrete and tactile—a flash drive, photographs, etc.—and someone will come looking for it when it goes missing. If you turn over the documents to the implicated NPC as if you were *cashing in a Debt*, they may want assurances you haven't made any copies, but their enemies likely won't care so long as they have the originals. You can always try to use the threat of revealing the information to instead *persuade* the implicated NPC, but blackmail is a dangerous game to play with powerful enemies. Even though you don't roll, you still mark the appropriate Circle when you make this move.

*This Is My City* triggers when you meet a powerful or dangerous character—PC or NPC—in a mundane place. You don't have to suggest the meeting spot either; if they say, "Let's meet at the museum at 2pm," the move still triggers. Your hold lasts from the start of the meeting until you get somewhere safe.

*In Sheep's Clothing* can be used any time after you share a moment of intimacy with the target, even many sessions (or even seasons) later in the story.

*One Way or Another* is one of the few ways you can ask another character for help without *cashing in a Debt* or *persuading* them. Of course, you have to present the problem as pressing and their help as meaningful to trigger the move! You can target PCs or NPCs; as long as they are part of your Circle, you can pull on their heart strings. On a miss, they get to choose if they help, but agreeing to assist you means they act as if they had just *cashed in a Debt* with you—like *asking for a moderate favor*—and you can't say no.

Both *I Know a Guy* and *One Way or Another* reference your Circle, not Mortalis. If you change Circles, the characters you can target with those moves change as well; the people you know—and the people you can sway—change dramatically when you change Circles.



# CORRUPTION

**TRIGGER:** When you ignore your mortal commitments or relationships to deal with the supernatural, mark corruption.

## ■ IN TOO DEEP

Mark corruption to **get in the way** of someone from another Circle as if you rolled a 10+.

## ■ IF YOU CAN'T BEAT 'EM

Take one ability from a playbook from another Circle. Whenever you **let it out** and roll a 12+, mark an additional corruption.

## ■ FREE AGENT

Mark corruption to **refuse to honor a Debt** owed to someone outside your Circle as if you rolled a 10+.

## ■ STICKY FINGERS

Mark corruption after meeting with a powerful NPC to reveal that you took something of import from them. Mark corruption again to conceal your role in the theft for some time.

Your corruption trigger makes you mark corruption whenever you blow off your mortal life—or the people in it—in favor of the supernatural side of the city. Your mortal connections are often a source of these commitments, but you might find yourself with new obligations—work, romantic relationships, etc.—as your story develops. It doesn't matter why you choose the supernatural over the mundane; even in cases of life and death, focusing on the supernatural at the expense of your mortal life causes you to mark corruption.

You're free to take any ability from any playbook outside your Circle when you take **If You Can't Beat 'Em**, but you must mark the additional corruption whenever you roll a 12+, not just when you invoke that particular ability. When you take this advance, work with your MC to explain how you've developed this new ability.

You don't have to decide in advance what you want to steal to use **Sticky Fingers**—you and the MC can work out what you stole when you mark the corruption after the meeting. If you mark corruption again to conceal the theft, you manage to defeat high-end security systems, magical wards, etc., even if it seems impractical or impossible for you to do so.

## INTIMACY

When you share a moment of intimacy—physical or emotional—with someone new who isn't mortal, mark corruption. When you **figure out someone** you've previously shared a moment of intimacy with, roll with **HEART** instead of **MIND**.

Most of Mortalis is still mortal, but anyone who could be considered a supernatural creature—including wizards, witches, and oracles—isn't "mortal" anymore. The stat swap from **HEART** to **MIND** for **figure someone out** applies to anyone with whom you've shared a moment of intimacy, including mortals.

## END MOVE

When you die, ask another PC to look after up to three of your **mortal relationships**. If they agree, they immediately advance. If they refuse, they take a corruption advance instead.

It's up to you which of your mortal relationships you try to pass on from your feature, but you must choose at least one. If the PC agrees to look after them, they inherit your **mortal relationships** feature, including the **tending to your relationships** move; if they refuse to look after even one of the relationships you name, they are refusing in full and take a corruption advance.

## ADVANCES

If you **open a new mortal relationship**, select a new option from the list in your feature, then work with the MC to determine how that person has come into your life. They may have moved back to the city after an absence or they might work at your new job; either way, they fill the same role in your life as your other mortal relationships.

If you decide to **change Circles**, the circumstances might also warrant a change in playbook—like joining Power with an oath that would make you the Sworn—but you can stay the Aware so long as your mortal relationships are still key to your character's life in the city.



# WILD THE FAE

*Fickle, enigmatic, cold, strange. The Fae is a figure from beyond, able to draw upon the magic of another realm. Oaths are more than pretty words to them; such promises are sources of power all their own.*

*Play the Fae if you want to portray a stranger in a strange land, caught between the needs of your court and the beauty of the city's streets.*





## PROMISES, PROMISES

Once upon a time, you set out on a journey, a trip that led you to settle far from your faerie homeland. Perhaps you simply desired to see the human world—the mortal world, the one in which things grew and changed and died. Or maybe you were banished, expelled by some monarchical decree after a dreadful faux pas at court. Either way, you left. And, after some time, you found yourself here.

When you first arrived in the city, securing a place for yourself in the hustle and bustle of modern, mortal life, you found something quite strange—humanity is, as you expected, selfish, violent, and cruel... and somehow utterly fascinating. Despite their flaws—their rampant disregard for the rules, their flagrant disinterest in their own safety—you could not help but fall completely in love with them. They delight you and inspire you, and you marvel at how you lived so long without truly knowing them.

Yet the longer you stay in the city, the more you find yourself *thinking* like them, *acting* like them, *feeling* like them. The ways of mortals, once foreign and strange to you, have begun to make sense, and you know something in you is changing. You may never be accepted here, never be fully human, but your homeland seems farther and farther away every day, a memory you can no longer trust.

You visit, of course, for there are infinite doors in the city that lead to your home—in the back rooms of bookstores, in deserted sections of the subway, in brick-laid keyhole windows in pristine parks. Your monarch and your court often call you back, or visit you directly, to remind you that your current residence doesn't mean you've been forgotten. You're simply too important, too beloved, too central for you to be completely ignored...even if they banished you! But visiting home isn't the same as *returning* home, and you know that particular door has not opened for some time.

But surely your court—and your monarch—must see the cracks in your facade, the way your bindings have frayed after so many years among humanity. You feel a raw power, a churning version of yourself leaking through the edges of your once rigid identity. For what are you loosed from the bounds of your court? Who would you be if you didn't belong to them first and foremost and forever?

You would be free. And *that* scares you most of all.

## DEMEANOR OPTIONS

alien, eccentric, seductive, untamed

## STARTING CHARACTER STATS

Blood -1, Heart 1, Mind 0, Spirit 1

## STARTING CIRCLE RATINGS

Mortalis 0, Night -1, Power 1, Wild 1

## STARTING CIRCLE STATUS

Mortalis 0, Night 0, Power 0, Wild 1

## INTRO QUESTIONS

- ♦ Why did you leave your homeland?
- ♦ How long have you been in the city?
- ♦ What do you love most about humanity?
- ♦ Who is your closest confidante or lover?
- ♦ What do you desperately need?

## STARTING GEAR

- ♦ A comfortable house or apartment, a decent car, a smartphone
- ♦ A relic from your homeland
- ♦ A symbol of your court (sun, moon, storm, winter, spring, etc.)

## STARTING DEBTS

- ♦ Someone disrupted a rare ritual of your court for personal gain, besmirching your reputation with your monarch. They owe you a Debt.
- ♦ You are keeping something hidden on behalf of someone else from a powerful member of their Circle. Ask them why. They owe you a Debt.
- ♦ You entrusted someone with an important and dangerous task. Ask them if they succeeded or failed. If they succeeded, you owe them a Debt. If they failed, they owe you a Debt.

## LET IT OUT ABILITIES

- ♦ summon an elemental storm of your court (2-harm close area ap)
- ♦ appear to others as someone you have previously touched
- ♦ compel the elements of your court to reveal what they have seen
- ♦ create a telepathic link between yourself and another for a scene

# #FEATURES

## FAERIE POWERS

### Choose three:

#### ☐ NATURE'S CARESS

Your touch heals 2-harm, starting with critical harm; wounds close, bones knit back together, etc. You cannot use this power on yourself.

#### ☐ WITHER

You imbue your touch with the power to kill (3-harm hand ap). The effect is instantly understood by the target as an attack and leaves behind a nasty mark or scar at the point of contact.

#### ☐ GLAMOURS

You create illusions to fool the senses. The effects don't last long, but they are compelling. You cannot disguise or conceal yourself or your actions with these tricks.

#### ☐ SHAPE CHANGE

You change your shape into that of a small animal—a bird, a mouse, a snake, a fish, etc.—for a scene. Up to three people you designate can still understand your speech, but everyone else perceives you to be barking, chirping, etc.

#### ☐ BEDLAM

You can touch a vulnerable target to place them in a specific emotional state (your choice) for the scene. Mark corruption to have that emotion directed toward a target of your choosing.

## NOTES ON FAERIE POWERS

While you live in the mortal world, you contain within you a shard of your homeland, a link that can never be broken to a magical realm beyond human comprehension. As such a creature, you have **faerie powers** that require no incantations or rituals, no external sacrifices or training; they are always accessible to you, provided you're willing to pay the cost (corruption, Debt, or harm) imposed by the move—**Faerie Magic** (page 120)—used to release such forces into the world.

Your monarch can fuel your powers when you *offer them a Debt*, but that doesn't mean they gifted you magic. Instead, the Debt given is a promise from which you both draw power, offered at any distance without spoken communication. Similarly, *suffering 1-harm ap* or *marking corruption* means you turn your own flesh and blood—or your very soul—into the power needed to perform such feats of fae magic, fueling your powers by other means.

While you cannot use **Nature's Caress** on your own body, the power heals 2-harm on *any* other person or creature, including those made of stone, ghosts, undead vampires, etc. So long as the target has suffered harm, this power can heal it. In the case that you are healing someone who is dying, i.e. all of their harm boxes are full, this power counts as receiving full medical treatment, and they can heal normally from that point forward without needing further medical assistance, even if it takes a few weeks.

**Wither** cannot be used on the same target more than once per day. You may need to **mislead, distract, or trick** your target into accepting your touch or **keep your cool** to get close to a resistant target. Most ordinary mortals can only take 1- or 2-harm, so do not be surprised if **Wither** actually kills them. Anyone affected by this power, including those who were *confused for some time* by **mislead, distract, or trick**, instantly know that you attacked them, even if they aren't clear how you did it.

**Glamours** don't last long, but they are extremely effective, especially on mortals. A generous MC might allow you to **mislead, distract, or trick** such a person with your glamours as if you rolled a 10+. Note that you cannot alter your own form or conceal yourself with such tricks, but you can alter others' perceptions of you if you instead use **let it out** to *appear to others as someone you have previously touched* or **Shape Change** to appear as an animal.

Any small animal, including those that can fly or swim, is an acceptable shape when you use **Shape Change**. In fact, whatever is true about the animal in question is true for you so long as you maintain the shape—you can only breathe underwater, your bite is venomous, you can see in the dark—and some moves may be harder or easier to trigger. If you designate someone to understand you, they do not necessarily understand you are a faerie pretending to be an animal, especially if they are a mundane mortal. You can release the form at any time.

As with **Wither**, you must touch your target to use **Bedlam**; choose any emotional state you want them to experience—love, lust, anger, fear, etc. Note that the target must be vulnerable in some way for the power to take effect; most mortals are always vulnerable, but a wizard or demon may need to be caught off guard or weakened first. The MC will tell you how NPCs act on their new emotions; PCs act as they wish, but may need to **keep their cool** to stay in control.



# YOUR COURT

You belong to a faerie court, presided over by a monarch to whom you have sworn loyalty. Your monarch holds 2 Debts over you; tell the MC what favors they granted you to earn such holdings.

## Your court is...

- ☐ baroque and formal
- ☐ savage and unruly
- ☐ aloof and cold
- ☐ mysterious and exotic

## Your monarch's standing is represented by...

- ☐ a crown, magically imbued with your court's royal authority
- ☐ a scepter, forged from the elements of your court
- ☐ a magical aura, unconcealable by even faerie magics
- ☐ a seat of power, capable of summoning your entire court

## Your rival is...

- ☐ a jealous sibling; you owe them a Debt for their loyalty
- ☐ a former lover; you owe them a Debt for their kindness
- ☐ an old mentor; you owe them a Debt for their tutelage
- ☐ a contemptuous peer; you owe them a Debt for their patience

## NOTES ON YOUR COURT

Your **faerie court** is both a society and a regency; everyone within it has sworn an oath to your monarch, a fealty that does little to staunch the gossip and speculation that blossoms and flourishes around every disagreement or romance. The court you serve may be organized around a specific concept—Summer, Technology, Autumn—or may exhibit a more traditional focus like Seelie/Unseelie, but the court's central theme always warps you and all others who serve it.

Your choices give the MC tools for portraying that court in the fiction—the characters within it embody these descriptors and your monarch's rule is typified by whatever it is that represents their standing and authority. Work with the MC to make your court feel real to the point that you find yourself compelled to honor and venerate whatever lies at the center of your fealty, and you find the things opposed to it irritating, frustrating, and even dangerous.

The MC tracks the Debts you owe to your monarch; they start with just a few, but that number is likely to grow as you play. Unlike other characters, your monarch doesn't have to be in your presence or in direct contact with you to **cash in a Debt**; they can merely make their will known to you telepathically, even while they remain in your homeland and you reside in the city. They do not doubt your loyalty—at least to start—but only a fool trusts everyone.

You may no longer regularly visit your monarch's court, but there is at least one NPC there who thinks of you often—your rival, another faerie whom you find opposes you too regularly for their resistance to be mere happenstance. They too may find a home in the city, but they may also stick close to your monarch and their court; work with the MC to determine who they were to you and why you owe them a Debt.



# MOVES

## FAE MOVES

You get this one:

### ☒ FAERIE MAGIC

You have access to gifts of your court, powers that call upon your homeland's magic and wonder. Select your powers from the list provided. Whenever you use a faerie power, choose 1:

- suffer 1-harm (ap)
- mark corruption
- give your monarch a Debt

And choose two more:

### ☐ A DISH BEST SERVED NOW

When you commit to enacting revenge on behalf of someone (including yourself) wronged by another, gain +1 ongoing against the target of that vengeance. For every scene in which you do not pursue vengeance after committing to it, suffer 1-harm (ap).

### ☐ IN OUR BLOOD

When you *mislead, distract, or trick* someone from a different Circle through lies of omission or clever misdirection, roll with **HEART** instead of **MIND**.

### ☐ SCALES OF JUSTICE

*Cash in a Debt* with someone to target them using a power from **Faerie Magic**—including powers not normally available to you—at no additional cost.

### ☐ DRAW BACK THE CURTAIN

When you *escape a situation*, add this option to the list:

- you escape to your homeland, for better or worse

### ☐ WORDS ARE WIND

You know instantly if someone has broken their word to you or reneged on a deal you've made; take a Debt on them and +1 ongoing to claim what you deserve from them or their allies until they've made things right.

## MOVES ADVICE

**Faerie Magic** is covered in full under the **faerie powers** feature on the previous spread (page 118). The only powers you can access through this move directly are those that you've already obtained.

There must be a wrong—however slight—in order for you to trigger **A Dish Best Served Now**: the vengeance in question must be rooted in (and proportional to) the wrong that was done. Vowing to kill the vampire that killed your friend's son is both rooted and proportional, but committing yourself to murder the vampire who wrote a scathing review of your friend's movie is not. You have failed to pursue vengeance in any scene in which you did not make it your primary concern. Remember that you can never have more than a +4 to any roll.

You must deceive your target with subtle falsehoods or inventive tricks to trigger **In Our Blood**; you can't just outright lie to their face or throw a rock to distract them. This move relies on some degree of imagination and sleight-of-hand, the moment in which your faerie nature leaps to the surface to confront someone with smoke and mirrors.

**Scales of Justice** can only be used if you have a Debt on the target; you can *cash in a Debt* with someone to make them give you a Debt owed to them if you can't get a Debt on your target yourself. All of the other limits of the faerie magic you use still apply. Mark your target's Circle whenever you use this move, as if you *cached in a Debt* with them.

You don't have to decide to use **Draw Back the Curtain** until after you've rolled to *escape a situation*—it merely adds an additional option to the list that you can choose if you wish. Note that only you can choose this option; the MC cannot force you to *escape to your homeland* on a 7-9, although you may end up there anyway on a miss! When you select this option, however, the MC can select *you end up in another dangerous situation* and set the scene for that dangerous situation in your homeland.

If you have taken **Words Are Wind**, you always know the moment someone has broken their word or reneged on a deal—the MC will tell you if either happens off-screen, but often it will happen when you are the audience member for another PC's scenes. The person who broke their word to you also knows you know—they owe you a Debt—but only you get to say, within reason, what it will take to make things right. Again, you can only ever have at most a +4 to your roll.



# CORRUPTION

**TRIGGER:** When you break a promise or tell an outright lie, mark corruption.

## ■ AIR AND DARKNESS

You gain the remaining faerie powers. When you use *Faerie Magic*, you may no longer choose to suffer harm.

## ■ SHREWD NEGOTIATOR

When you *refuse to honor a Debt* to someone of lesser or equal Status, you may mark corruption to take a 12+ instead of rolling.

## ■ UNEARTHLY GRACE

You get +1 **HEART** (max +4). When you roll with **HEART** and roll a 12+, mark corruption.

## ■ EVERYONE'S GOT ONE

Touch someone and mark corruption to curse them with an elemental vulnerability. All damage they suffer from a source you select (fire, steel, iron, etc.) is treated as +1 harm and ap.

Your corruption trigger hinges upon the letter of your agreements, not the spirit; you are free to attempt to weasel out of what you agreed to on technical grounds or *mislead* someone with the truth. But if you ever intentionally fail to meet the terms of an agreement or tell a direct lie, mark corruption.

When you take *Air and Darkness*, you gain all of the faerie powers you don't already have, but you lose one of the options in *Faerie Magic*—you can no longer choose to *suffer 1-harm (ap)* when you activate one of your powers. From that point forward, you must always *mark corruption* or *give your monarch a Debt*.

Both you and your creditor rely on your highest Status to determine if they are of lesser or equal Status for the purposes of *Shrewd Negotiator*; if you are Status-3, for example, no one can be of greater Status than you.

After you take *Unearthly Grace*, any **HEART** roll—for any move—forces you to mark corruption if you roll a 12+.

Whatever you declare as a vulnerability using *Everyone's Got One* does +1 harm and becomes armor piercing, even if the target wasn't previously vulnerable to that attack. The vulnerability lasts until the end of the scene, but some damage has to occur to add the additional harm.

## INTIMACY

When you share a moment of intimacy—physical or emotional—with another person, demand a promise from them. If they refuse you or break the promise, they owe you a Debt.

The promise you demand can't be impossible—or suicidal—for them to keep, but it can be demanding. For example, you can't ask an ordinary mortal to promise to turn lead into gold, but you can ask that same character to rob a bank for you. As long as the promise is reasonably within their capacity, you earn a Debt if they refuse to make the promise or break the promise they make.

## END MOVE

When you die or retire your character, bestow the favor of your court upon someone. They can take *Faerie Magic* and two of your faerie powers or advance *persuade an NPC*.

Your death bestows the favor of your court; no one, not even your monarch, can stop you from granting it to your chosen vessel. The choice—*Faerie Magic* and two powers or advancing *persuade*—is up to the person on whom you bestow the favor. If you choose an NPC, the MC will work with you to determine how the gift they choose appears in the fiction.

## ADVANCES

*Acquiring a knightly title* means you are knighted by your monarch and gain the following move:

At the start of each session, hold 3. Spend your hold, 1 for 1, to:

- ♦ gain armor+1 against enemies of your court for a scene
- ♦ take +1 to *turning to violence* in the service of your court
- ♦ heal 2-harm inflicted by the enemies of your court

All of your unspent hold is lost at the end of each session.

So long as you hold your knightly title, treat any formal request from your monarch as if they are *cashing in a Debt* with you.



# MORTAL IS *THE* HUNTER

*Disciplined, deadly, tenacious, tragic. The Hunter is a mortal devoted to the kill. To them, each night is one more chance to make things right.*

*Play the Hunter if you want to burn bright on the city's dark streets, striking back at those who made this fallen world.*





## STAKE YOUR CLAIM

The city may have sharp fangs and ragged claws, but you are the knife's edge of mortal will, the same force that beat back the monsters at the dawn of humanity. In the time of darkness—before language, before culture, before skyscrapers and cell phones—mortals like you carved a place for humankind with their own flesh and bone, wielding sticks and rocks and whatever else they could find to hold the monsters at bay.

But just as the ordinary mortals of the city have forgotten what it cost to rise from that darkness, so too have the monsters of the world forgotten the terrible violence lurking within the human soul. In this world of shadows and corruption they have made—feeding on the innocent, corrupting the good, destroying the faithful—you intend to remind them.

Over and over and over. As long as it takes.

You would never have walked this path alone. Along the way, you found others like you—a whole society of mortals sworn to this bloody cause. You joined them, earning their trust through struggle and sacrifice, learning from the veterans who know all too well the horrors that lurk in the shadows, and mourning those who fell in the line of duty. You've seen first hand that each day is a chance to give voice to the voiceless, to stand for those who can't stand for themselves. Together, you will make the monsters afraid again.

Yet the longer you fight, the less clear it is which “monsters” to hunt. At first, it was simple—you protected ordinary people from the predators of the night. But the city isn't so neatly divided into saints and sinners. You have friends among the monsters, lovers and family even, and you sometimes struggle to reconcile your cause with what you have seen. In your darkest moments, a thought haunts you: am I not the monster now?

You have long ago lost whatever ties bound you to an ordinary mortal life...but the questions you ask now threaten your bonds with the very people who you used to trust the most. You see yourself in the darkness and the light, caught between them on a tightrope of certainty. You had to become something else to fight what you fight, and you can never go back, only forward. What lies ahead for you?

## DEMEANOR OPTIONS

calculating, detached, friendly, volatile

## STARTING CHARACTER STATS

Blood 1, Heart -1, Mind 1, Spirit 0

## STARTING CIRCLE RATINGS

Mortalis 1, Night 1, Power 0, Wild -1

## STARTING CIRCLE STATUS

Mortalis 1, Night 0, Power 0, Wild 0

## INTRO QUESTIONS

- ◆ What personal tragedy led you to hunt?
- ◆ How long have you been in the city?
- ◆ What impressive kill are you infamous for?
- ◆ What do those you hunt call you behind your back?
- ◆ Who inflicted the wound that still haunts you?

## STARTING GEAR

- ◆ A shitty apartment, a pick-up truck or muscle car, a cell phone
- ◆ A symbol of your society (i.e. tattoo, coin, inscription)
- ◆ Your arsenal: 3 custom weapons (detail)

## STARTING DEBTS

- ◆ Someone helps you unwind and keeps you sane, despite the horrors of your hunts. You owe them a Debt.
- ◆ Your hunts incurred the wrath of a powerful person; someone helped smooth things over. You owe them a Debt.
- ◆ Someone has enlisted you to protect them from something dangerous. They owe you a Debt.

## LET IT OUT ABILITIES

- ◆ track someone or something through the city with limited information or trail
- ◆ treat a mundane object as a weapon (2-harm messy) or 1-armor for a scene
- ◆ jury rig an explosive (3-harm loud fire) or smoke bomb (s-harm loud smoke)
- ◆ force a vulnerable foe to flee your presence and deliver a message



# FEATURES

## YOUR ARSENAL

Create three custom weapons for your hunts; choose a base and two add-ons for each weapon.

### RANGED WEAPONS BASE

- ◆ Bow (2-harm near/far reload)
- ◆ Shotgun (2-harm close/near loud reload messy)
- ◆ SMG (2-harm near autofire loud)
- ◆ Pistol (2-harm near loud concealable)
- ◆ Rifle (2-harm far loud reload)

Add-ons (choose 2 for each weapon):

- ◆ Silenced (-loud)
- ◆ Big (+1 harm / -concealable)
- ◆ Semi-automatic (-reload)
- ◆ Automatic (+autofire)
- ◆ Antique/Ornate (+cherished)
- ◆ Blessed (+holy)
- ◆ High-powered (+1 harm)
- ◆ Scoped (+far or +1 harm at far)
- ◆ Silvered (+silver)
- ◆ Magically resistant (+cold iron)

### HAND WEAPONS BASE

- ◆ Club (s-harm hand)
- ◆ Chain (1-harm close area exhausting)
- ◆ Knife (2-harm hand)
- ◆ Staff (2-harm close)
- ◆ Sword (3-harm close messy)

Add-ons (choose 2 for each weapon):

- ◆ Collapsible (+concealable)
- ◆ Exclusive (+booby-trapped)
- ◆ Famed (+reputation)
- ◆ Enchanted (+anchored)
- ◆ Silvered (+silver)
- ◆ Cold-forged (+cold iron)
- ◆ Blessed (+holy)
- ◆ Thick (+s-harm)

## YOUR ARSENAL NOTES

Building out your **arsenal** allows you to customize whatever tools your hunter uses on a nightly basis—start with a base, then two add-ons per weapon. There aren't any wrong choices: an SMG that's scoped still gains *far* as a tag, and a chain that's *concealable* and *thick* can both be hidden in a jacket and deliver s-harm. That said, you can only remove a tag if it's on the base weapon; *semi-automatic* doesn't do anything for the SMG.

Think about how your weapons fit together as you build them. Do you have a weapon that's your nightly standard, something you can use everywhere? Do you have something that's only used in special situations or against specific prey? Take the time to make your **arsenal** reflect how you hunt.

For more on equipment and more on each of the tags, check out page 311 in the Appendix.





# YOUR SOCIETY

You belong to a society of hunters, an affiliation of fellow mortals who stalk dangerous prey to protect the mortal world from the supernatural. Tell your MC to stat up your society as a Size-2, Strength-2 faction within Mortalis.

## What is your prey?

- ☐ vampires who feed on the weak and coerced
- ☐ demons who corrupt the good and the just
- ☐ angels who subjugate the will of the faithful
- ☐ ghosts who plague the lives of the innocent
- ☐ wizards who abuse their power and authority

## What did you sacrifice to join?

- ☐ my soul, forever tainted by magic ritual
- ☐ my family, forever excised from my life
- ☐ my childhood, forever lost to my training
- ☐ my body, forever scarred by ceremony

## Where does your society gather?

- ☐ a swanky, expensive hotel
- ☐ a dive bar or gambling den
- ☐ a union or veterans hall
- ☐ hallowed religious ground

## NOTES ON YOUR SOCIETY

While you often work alone, you also belong to a larger organization of hunters—a faction that wields enough power and prowess to contend with werewolf packs, wizards' councils, and demonic principalities. You are not large (only Size-2) or particularly well-organized (only Strength-2), but there are thirty or so hunters that can be called to order by your faction's leaders when there is a need.

Your MC will make most of the decisions about your **society**, but work with them to describe the day-to-day realities of the order. Is it an ancient fraternity, sworn to secrecy and dedicated to the hunt? Or is it an online club of anonymous mortals, desperately pushing back against the darkness? Part of this description involves your choice of gathering location as well—a union hall and religious sanctuary suit very different groups.

Since you're already a member of the faction, it's possible that you may one day rise to Status-3 and lead it yourself. Check out page 250 to read more about factions and faction moves, and decide for yourself whether your **society** might need new leadership as you rise through its ranks!

In order to join such an organization, however, you had to make sacrifices. Not only did you have to discover some way to keep up with the supernatural creatures you hunt and kill, but you also needed to prove your loyalty to the rest of your brethren. Pick from the list and tell the MC what it cost you. Was it your spirit perhaps, now forever changed by the magic done to you? Or was it your childhood, given up to train you in the art of the kill?

A final key element of your society, of course, is what you hunt. A society that targets vampires or demons tends to prize physical force, while a society that focuses on angels, ghosts, or wizards has to contend with the supernatural abilities of prey that can warp reality around them. Pick one prey as your primary target, and work with the MC to describe why the society is particularly capable of hunting such capable monsters.

It's possible you may choose a prey to hunt that could put you at odds with one of the other PCs. After all, if you hunt vampires, then isn't the Vamp automatically on your list? How could you possibly work alongside someone you've sworn to kill?

First, remember that you aren't hunting every single vampire you come across—only the *vampires who feed on the weak and coerced*. There are far too many bloodsuckers in the city for every hunter organization to declare open war against every last vampire; hunter organizations can only survive if they choose their targets wisely and act carefully.

Second...you're only human. It may be that you are in a relationship that puts you at odds with your hunter society, your mission, and your own morality. You wouldn't be the first hunter to fall in love with a vampire because you realized too late who they really are and what they've really done.

That said, it may be the case that you do find yourself hunting another PC, perhaps when you discover they misled you about who they are or they do something you simply cannot tolerate. At that point, you can pursue them as you would any other prey... but the situation is really no different than any other player character eventually deciding to kill a PC who has betrayed them, wronged them, or simply become inconvenient. If you're nervous about tangling with another PC, you can check out page 211 in **Chapter 8: Master of Ceremonies** for advice on how the MC should handle such conflicts.

# MOVES

## HUNTER MOVES

Choose three:

### ☐ DEADLY

When you inflict harm, inflict +1 harm. You cannot choose to reduce this harm.

### ☐ SAFE HOUSE

You have a secure location that you can hole up in. Detail it and choose 3:

- high-tech surveillance equipment
- a mystical or magical prison
- fortified walls/windows/doors
- stockpiles of food and water
- explosives set to blow the place

### ☐ THIS WAY!

When you lead people out of danger, roll with **BLOOD**. On 10+, you all get away safely. On a 7-9, you get hurt or one of them gets hurt (your choice). On a miss, everyone's safe but you; you're left behind...and the way out is closed to you.

### ☐ WORSE THINGS OUT TONIGHT

When you *persuade an NPC* by promising to protect them from harm, roll with **BLOOD** instead of **HEART**.

### ☐ PREPARED FOR ANYTHING

You have a well-stocked armory, full of modern and ancient weapons. Take another two custom weapons and select one additional add-on for every custom weapon you own.

### ☐ WATCH THEM CLOSELY

When you closely observe a supernatural person or creature, roll with **BLOOD**. On a hit, the MC will tell you a bit about their nature and at least one unusual weakness or flaw; take +1 ongoing when you take advantage of these unique vulnerabilities. On a 10+, ask a follow-up question, the MC will answer it honestly. On a miss, someone takes advantage of your diverted attention and acts against you before you see it coming.

## MOVES ADVICE

**Deadly** applies to all the harm—not including s-harm—you inflict on other NPCs and PCs, even if you just use your bare hands (which are now 2-harm) to attack them. You cannot reduce or mitigate this additional harm; if you strike someone, you do so with deadly force.

Work with the MC to detail your **Safe House** so that everyone is on the same page. It's up to you who knows that you have it; it's possible you're the only one—at the start of play—who knows about its existence. If you choose *explosives set to blow the place*, remember that you are sacrificing the safe house in full if you ever use them. See **Chapter 7: Advancement** for more on how such radical changes in the fiction affect your playbook!

In order to trigger **This Way!** instead of *escape a situation*, you must be leading a group of at least 2-3 people—any fewer and you're all just *escaping*. That said, you don't need an opportunity, just a group of people and your raw will. You get to choose if you get hurt or one of them gets hurt on a 7-9, but if you choose to avoid the harm the MC is the one who ultimately says who takes it. As always, the harm inflicted is established by the danger itself.

You can't use **Worse Things Out Tonight** to threaten or seduce people with **BLOOD**; you're making a promise to whoever you're persuading that you're going to keep them safe, and your success is predicated on their belief that your prowess will do so. You can't lie to trigger this move either! You have to be making an honest offer to *persuade* them or you're just *misleading, distracting, or tricking* them.

You likely already know quite a bit about your society's prey, but remember that **Watch Them Closely** is much more about the individual person or creature than the broad category; on a hit, you understand both their nature and learn of some specific weakness or flaw you can use against them. For example, you might realize that one particular troll has a blind spot on her right side or that one particular imp doesn't have any inherent immunity to fire. Whatever weakness you discover doesn't necessarily apply to others of their kind.



# CORRUPTION

**TRIGGER:** When you injure or greatly endanger an innocent bystander, mark corruption.

## ■ DIVIDED I STAND

When you enter a dangerous situation alone, mark corruption to advance all your moves and take +1 ongoing to **BLOOD** for the scene.

## ■ HARD TO KILL

Mark corruption to gain armor+1 until the end of the scene.

## ■ EXPECTING COMPANY

Mark corruption to have a backup team of mortal hunters arrive in the scene (3-harm small 1-armor trained). Mark a second corruption for them to show up in a superior position.

## ■ DEATH WISH

If someone nearby is about to suffer harm, mark corruption to suffer the harm instead.

Your corruption trigger forces you to mark corruption whenever you harm or greatly endanger innocent bystanders, whether you're on a hunt or just chasing down personal business. Shooting into a crowd of people definitely counts as endangering them, even if your shots largely strike true; reckless behavior that could result in serious, even fatal, injuries is always considered to be greatly endangering whatever the outcome turns out to be in the end.

You can still trigger **Divided I Stand** if you are secretly followed by an ally or know an ally is on the way. As long as you reasonably believe you're going into the situation by yourself (for now), you can mark corruption to get the benefits.

Marking corruption for **Expecting Company** implies that you've already worked out a plan with the backup team in advance; they may be established characters in the fiction or new NPCs that are appearing on screen for the first time. Gaining a *superior position* means they enter with better weapons, better gear, or even just the high ground when it counts.

When you use **Death Wish** to suffer harm for someone else, your armor reduces the harm you would suffer; it's possible that you suffer no harm at all if your armor is sufficient.

## INTIMACY

When you share a moment of intimacy—physical or emotional—with another person, ask them a question; they must answer it honestly. They will ask you a question in return; answer it honestly or mark corruption.

The question you ask and the answer you get both happen in the fiction; your partner can't get away with body language or other nonverbal communication. They must answer the question you ask in full! In contrast, whatever answer you give seems like the truth. The corruption you mark when lying represents the cost you pay to keep your secrets.

## END MOVE

When you die, give another PC one of your custom weapons and one of your Hunter moves. Both are theirs for keeps.

When this move triggers, you decide which weapon and move you pass on, not the person receiving your gifts. The other weapons might turn up sooner or later, but at least one makes its way to the PC of your choice, no matter how improbable. If you pass on **Prepared for Anything**, the PC you select gets to build another two custom weapons with three add-ons each, in addition to the custom weapon you bestowed upon your death.

## ADVANCES

If you take *get a workshop*, you gain all the benefits of the Veteran's **workshop** feature (page 166), including the usual protection any item you make in the workshop has from the MC; i.e. the items you create cannot be destroyed or taken without your permission. Remember to choose three resources your workshop includes, just as if you were starting play with the feature, and work with the MC to describe where you're putting all your new toys and tools. You can create new weapons using the workshop, if you so wish!

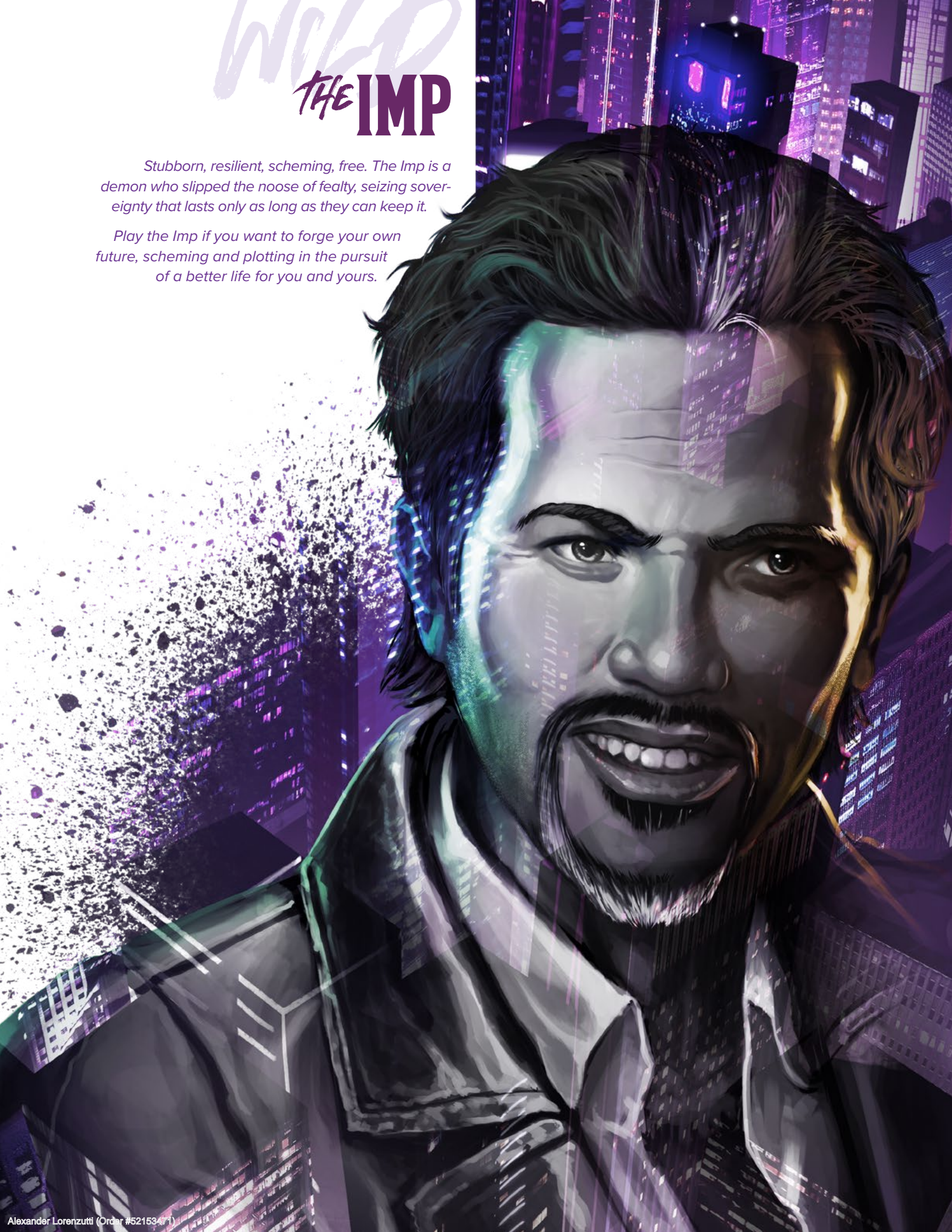
Your playbook does not allow you to *retire to safety*. Die, corrupt out, or change. Your pick.



# WILD THE IMP

*Stubborn, resilient, scheming, free. The Imp is a demon who slipped the noose of fealty, seizing sovereignty that lasts only as long as they can keep it.*

*Play the Imp if you want to forge your own future, scheming and plotting in the pursuit of a better life for you and yours.*





## A DEAL, STRAIGHT UP

You know slavery and servitude, the sharp crack of the whip and the cruel sizzle of the brand. You have lived a whole life as the agent of another's will, a lowly servant to demonic principalities and diabolic feudal regimes. You dreamed of freedom, but it was an ephemeral wish, a desire that knew no outlet for there was no hope for someone like you.

And then...a miracle.

You discovered a loophole, an error, an opportunity, something you could twist and turn to escape the certainty of bondage and the yoke of servility. Perhaps it was an assignment from your masters you could extend without end; maybe it was a deal you struck that somehow superseded their hold on you. Whatever you found, it was enough to escape that life and build a new one: the life of an imp, a demon that serves no master but their own will.

Your sovereignty, however, is conditional. It relies on you continuing to exploit that loophole or maintain that deal. Even as you've found a community—fellow imps, trusted friends, lovers, and family—you've known the truth: you have exchanged the servitude you hated for a beast that is never satisfied. You must always feed it; if it dies, so too does your self-governance and freedom.

Even worse, your community has come to count on your services. They expect you to shelter them from the storm or help them find what they need. You take a piece for yourself sometimes, but you sometimes worry that there will not be enough left for you when everyone else takes their piece. The temptation to turn your back on them—to seize what's yours after serving others for so long—is almost too great sometimes. Why shouldn't you look out for you first and foremost...and always? Will those you helped be there for you if your schemes fail and your old masters come calling?

You know there's a balance to be struck, a way to plot an even course through the nightly hum of the city's secret markets, but you find yourself dreaming of a new freedom—a retirement perhaps. For as good as this life can be, maybe there's something like true freedom outside of everything you've built...

## DEMEANOR OPTIONS

beleaguered, charming, frenzied, shrewd

## STARTING CHARACTER STATS

Blood -1, Heart 1, Mind 1, Spirit 0

## STARTING CIRCLE RATINGS

Mortalis 0, Night 1, Power -1, Wild 1

## STARTING CIRCLE STATUS

Mortalis 0, Night 0, Power 0, Wild 1

## INTRO QUESTIONS

- ◆ How did you escape your servitude?
- ◆ How long have you been in the city?
- ◆ Whom do you call family in the city?
- ◆ Whom do you turn to when you're in trouble?
- ◆ Whom did you scam that still holds a grudge?

## STARTING GEAR

- ◆ An upscale house or apartment, a car or utility van, a smartphone
- ◆ A sentimental gift from a family member
- ◆ A ritual object binding you to this realm (e.g. the first dollar spent at your business)

## STARTING DEBTS

- ◆ Someone is a consistent patron or customer of your establishment, regularly relying on you for your services or assistance. They owe you 2 Debts.
- ◆ You offered someone work when no one else would give them the time of day. Ask them if it worked out in your favor. They owe you a Debt either way.
- ◆ You partner with someone on your schemes, both of you profiting in equal measure. You owe each other 2 Debts.

## LET IT OUT ABILITIES

- ◆ sniff out a secret stash, even when expertly concealed or hidden
- ◆ infiltrate a hostile area by appearing unworthy of concern
- ◆ teleport into your establishment from any distance or position
- ◆ inflict 4-harm (ap) on a vulnerable target who underestimates you



# FEATURES

## YOUR ESTABLISHMENT

You once served a powerful demon, but you seized upon a loophole in your contracted fealty and won your freedom. Now you cater to supernatural clientele from all four Circles, securing your place in this world...for now. By default, your establishment has a permanent location, a small but loyal staff, and many regular customers.

### Choose two services you offer:

- ☐ Transporting and selling otherworldly creatures
- ☐ Appraising and auctioning magical relics and artifacts
- ☐ Creating forgeries, disguises, and stolen identities
- ☐ Providing news, gossip, and rumor to the city at large
- ☐ Operating a gathering place;  
name the relevant Circle

### Choose two investments you've made over the years:

- ☐ A skilled bodyguard dedicated solely to your security
- ☐ An expansive, expert staff appropriate to your services
- ☐ A secure venue, impenetrable by intruders and thieves
- ☐ A magical dead zone secured by wards and ritual
- ☐ A Status-3 regular in another Circle;  
take three Debts on them

### Choose two problems that plague your business:

- ☐ A dangerous competitor edging in on your market
- ☐ A hard-to-move acquisition attracting unwanted attention
- ☐ A besmirched reputation complicating any new deals
- ☐ A demonic ex-liege seeking your immediate return
- ☐ A severe state of disrepair endangering your staff

## NOTES ON YOUR ESTABLISHMENT

Your **establishment** is more than just a place of business; it's a metaphysical key to your continued freedom, a crucial part of the loophole you seized upon to get out from under the thumb of your master. As long as your establishment is running, you're free to do as you please; if it were to ever fail, the people you escaped might once again have a claim to their ownership of you and your services.

But your establishment's location isn't what's most important; it's a business, after all. You've got a staff and customers, regular services, and investments you've made over the years. In fact, your central area of operations may be little more than a warehouse in which you store contraband and take orders. As long as you're operating, providing services and taking payments, you're secure. You might be up to your eyeballs in problems, but so long as your establishment is running you've left behind the servitude that once defined you.

That said, you don't have to keep track of the books or payments owed to you. Instead, use **Business as Usual** (page 132) to check in on the business when you first start playing, and then again after each faction turn. So long as your establishment is running as normal, you can get Debts, secrets, and opportunities, all by handling your day-to-day operations.

Your investments—the advantages you've carefully built up over the years—and problems are important aspects of your establishment's fictional position. If you chose a *skilled bodyguard*, they are always on-hand when anyone tries to rough you up; if you chose a *magical dead zone*, even other PCs can't fire off spells inside your place of business. At the same time, the troubles that haunt you are going to show up repeatedly. If you chose a *demonic ex-liege seeking your immediate return*, then the demon in question is likely a Status-3 NPC who lives in the city and regularly sends goons to mess with you in the hopes of disrupting your usual operations.

You can secure new investments (and run into new troubles) as the story progresses, but don't forget your schemes—the deals you handle outside of your usual operations—can also improve your establishment. If you *secure a new investment*, pick a new one from the list provided or work with your MC to outline something similar; if you resolve a trouble, then cross off one of the troubles you selected at character creation, and know it will no longer trouble you!



# YOUR SCHEMES

Schemes are risky deals and shady cons designed to expand your business. When you generate a scheme, choose a primary Circle, one of your services, and two complications—the MC will tell you what opportunity you’ve seized upon. When you accomplish a scheme, select two boons and a payout; the MC will detail how they arrive. Generate a scheme whenever a boon or a move tells you to generate a new scheme.

## COMPLICATIONS

- ♦ you promised someone involved something you don’t yet have
- ♦ you require an unreliable or untrustworthy co-conspirator
- ♦ you must fool or deceive a powerful and dangerous NPC
- ♦ you need to steal something from a secure location
- ♦ you need to wait for a predetermined time or event
- ♦ you have attracted the attention of dangerous opposition

## BOONS

- ♦ attract new business; generate a new scheme
- ♦ pay down your debts; cancel a Debt you owe
- ♦ throw your weight around; take a Debt on an NPC
- ♦ grow your reputation; mark a Circle affected by the deal

## PAYOUTS

Available at the start of play:

- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ hire *Fiendish Underlings*
- ☐ acquire an *arsenal*
- ☐ secure a new investment
- ☐ secure a new investment
- ☐ resolve a problem

After 4+ payouts:

- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ +1 Status (max+2)
- ☐ acquire a *legendary weapon*
- ☐ acquire a *sanctum*
- ☐ get 2 new *let it out* abilities
- ☐ retire your character to safety

# NOTES ON YOUR SCHEMES

Starting a **scheme** means you’ve found an opportunity which might yield a payout: choose a Circle as a focus, the service you’re providing, and two of the complications that have already arisen—the MC gives you the details of the deal. For example, if you choose Power, *selling magical relics and artifacts, you must fool or deceive a powerful and dangerous NPC and you require an unreliable or untrustworthy co-conspirator*, the MC might tell you “a Status-3 wizard has hired you to broker the sale of an ancient artifact, but requires you to work closely with his untrustworthy enforcer to deceive the appraiser of its true value” or “a vampire is in need of a rare magical component, one which you can only procure from an unreliable oracle who is currently in hiding from a relentless inquisitor loyal to Power.”

The complications might be the sole focus of the scheme—like the unreliable dealer—or they might be mere obstacles to the final goal—like the untrustworthy enforcer—but they are a permanent feature of the deal. If you *attract the attention of dangerous opposition*, that opposition will persist until you complete the scheme (or utterly destroy the opposing force); if you require an unreliable co-conspirator, the person the MC describes at the start of the scheme is crucial to the scheme’s function throughout.

You don’t have to pursue a scheme you’ve started, especially if things get messy, but you might have to explain to whoever is involved—your client, a fellow con artist, etc.—why you’ve decided to abandon your plans and pursue other opportunities.

Finishing a scheme nets you boons and a payout. The former allows you to start new schemes, take or cancel Debts, and grow your reputation; the latter unlocks unique and powerful advancements. In addition to getting new assets (and resolving troubles) for your establishment, you can use payouts to obtain other playbook’s features or abilities, like an **arsenal** (The Hunter), a **legendary weapon** (The Sworn), a **sanctum** (The Wizard), or **let it out** abilities. Payouts arrive without strings; you don’t owe anyone for them and there are no extra requirements for using them. Work with your MC to describe and detail them as needed, especially when gaining new **let it out** abilities!

Note that you can only *retire to safety* through a payout; if you want to get out of the game for good, you’re going to have to do one last job...

You get this one:

### ☒ BUSINESS AS USUAL

When time passes—or at the start of the game—roll with **MIND**. On a hit, your usual operations generate a new scheme or provide an opportunity to advance one of your existing schemes, your choice. On a 10+, you also pick 1:

- A loyal customer reveals the secrets of a powerful NPC, your choice
- An NPC who owes you a Debt shows up to make good on their obligation
- A Status-3 NPC of your Circle offers you a Debt for your services

On a miss, a family member or close friend drags you into a scheme you'd rather have avoided; generate a new scheme with three complications, and the MC will tell you what terrible fate could befall your ally should you fail to deliver.

And choose two more:

### ☐ MEASURE YOUR MARK

When you **figure someone out**, add the following questions to the list:

- What pressing need do you have that I might be able to address?
- What's the most valuable thing you'd offer for sale?

On a miss, ask 1 from this list, but you come off as suspicious or sleazy, your choice.

### ☐ FRIENDS IN LOW PLACES

When you get a hit while **putting a face to a name** with a Status-3 NPC, also name a low-level minion or assistant who works for them and describe how this underling recently came to owe you a Debt.

### ☐ I'M A FUCKING DEMON

Ignore all harm the first time someone—or something—inflicts at least 2-harm upon you in a scene. At the end of each scene, clear your Faint harm box.

### ☐ WEASEL WORDS

When you **refuse to honor a Debt** by fast-talking your way out of the obligation, roll with **MIND** instead of the difference in Status. On a hit—in addition to the normal effects—mark your creditor's Circle as though you had honored the Debt.

## MOVES ADVICE

Your **schemes** are covered in full under the schemes feature on the previous spread (page 130)—including what it means to generate a scheme—but **Business as Usual** assumes you're operating your establishment as normal; if something has interfered with your operations, the move doesn't trigger. If an *NPC shows up to make good*, they show up with something—or having done something—that clears their Debt to you; if a *Status-3 NPC offers a Debt for your services*, you get the Debt as soon you finish doing whatever it is they need.

If you miss while **figuring someone out** using **Measure Your Mark**, the choice between coming off as *suspicious* or *sleazy* reflects their perception of your reputation and intent. *Suspicious* means they think you are up to something *right now*, but their broader opinion of you remains unchanged; *sleazy* means they come to think of you as a generally unpleasant and dislikable person as a result of this interaction, but don't think too much about your immediate requests or plans. Either way, the MC still makes a move in addition to whatever you have chosen, perhaps even drawing upon your choice!

For **Friends in Low Places**, you can choose an existing NPC who could believably work for the Status-3 NPC or create an entirely new NPC on the spot. Either way, you don't get to **put a face to a name** with them; you already know that you know them, and that they owe you a Debt.

You don't get to choose which attack **I'm a Fucking Demon** cancels—it's always the first attack in a scene that inflicts 2-harm or more. That said, the move can trigger once in each scene; if you get in a fight in one scene, then get dragged into a different fight in the next scene, you can ignore all harm from two different attacks. Injuries caused by environmental effects or attacks with unclear origins, like a car crash or a bomb, are also covered by the move.

In order to trigger **Weasel Words**, you've got to offer an explanation for why you can't honor the Debt that has a reasonable chance of bamboozling your creditor. You might, for example, claim that the favor is too great based on how much it will cost you to perform—"I'd love to do that for you, but look at what its going to cost me!"—or pivot to a different set of actions the creditor could take to get the same thing and still keep you in their Debt—"It's way cheaper to just go down there and ask for it yourself!"



# CORRUPTION

**TRIGGER:** When you make a deal that endangers your family, friends, or community, mark corruption.

## ■ THIS IS HOW I WIN

When you **put out the word** to your Circle that you need something, mark corruption to take a 10+ instead of rolling. Mark corruption again to have a lackey handle the deal; make an additional, different city move while they get it done.

## ■ DIRTY MONEY

When you complete a scheme, mark corruption to take all four boons instead of just two.

## ■ SWEETEN THE DEAL

When you **persuade an NPC** by offering an additional bonus or appealing bribe, mark corruption to take a 10+ instead of rolling.

## ■ ON THE SHIT LIST

Mark corruption to declare someone an enemy of your people; others of your kind will gaslight, antagonize, or worse. Until you say otherwise, advance **mislead**, **distract**, or **trick** for anyone targeting them; they also take -1 ongoing during each faction turn.

Your corruption trigger forces you to mark corruption whenever your deals put your loved ones or community in danger. Sometimes that's obvious, like agreeing to give the location of a friend to someone who means them harm, but the trigger is broad: if you arrange for a whole nest of demons to move into the building next to your business—knowing the damage they might do—mark corruption.

The additional bonus or appealing bribe you offer an NPC to trigger **Sweeten the Deal** has to be something concrete and tangible in the fiction—a Debt isn't immediate enough. Useful information, a briefcase of cash, luxury goods, or other "sweeteners" are all acceptable, provided the target actually wants them. That said, these are cherries on top of your deal; you still have to have leverage to **persuade** them, and you still have to seduce them, threaten them, or make a promise.

When you mark a corruption to trigger **On the Shit List**, you pass the word to every other imp in the city that your target needs a lesson—they will continue to make the target's life miserable until you call it off. You can't keep your role in this community-wide project a secret; your target knows you were the one who declared them an enemy of your people, and they may attempt to force you to retract your position. Of course, it's hard to retract something if you're dead...

## INTIMACY

When you share a moment of intimacy—physical or emotional—with another person, promise to get them something they want without asking for anything in return; give them a Debt and take +1 ongoing to getting what you've promised them.

You can ask your partner what they want most from you, but ultimately what you offer to get for them is up to you. As long it's something they broadly want—and you give them a Debt—you get the +1 ongoing. If you deliver, the Debt you gave them is resolved; if they already spent it, they now owe you a Debt.

## END MOVE

When you die, one of your schemes comes to fruition, but someone else reaps the rewards. Choose someone to benefit from the plans you put in motion; select a payout for them.

You get to pick which scheme resolves, who the scheme benefits, and what payout they get—even payouts from the second list if you have secured four or more payouts before you die. It's possible that you could help someone *retire to safety* who otherwise wouldn't be able to do so, like the Hunter.

## ADVANCES

If you take *get The Devil Inside*, you gain the move from the Tainted playbook (page 156); work with the MC to explain how you gained access to a fuller demonic form and choose options from the **demon form** feature to reflect the new form you can summon. On a miss, you can take 2-harm (ap) instead of giving your patron a Debt—you work for yourself!

In addition to your Circle advancements and corruption advancements, you also have access to payouts through your **schemes**. Check out page 131 for more on those payouts and their effects.



# POINTER *THE* ORACLE

*Prophetic, blessed, cursed, intense. The Oracle is a seer and psychic gifted with sight beyond sight. Yet no matter how terrible their visions become...they cannot look away.*

*Play the Oracle if you want to bear the burdens of a wondrous and terrible gift, fighting a future only you can see clearly.*





## THE ROAD AHEAD

The true curse of prophecy is not simply knowing what the future will hold and watching it unfold despite your best efforts to forestall what you have seen; the worst part about sight beyond sight is that people seem so eager to hear the truths only you see, right up until the moment you tell them. Only then, when things are laid bare and the future (or past) is revealed, do they rediscover their skepticism, turning their back on you because you *gave them an answer they didn't want to hear*.

Yet, you know at least one person who truly believes in you and your visions, even when the news you deliver is dire—your benefactor. While others might dismiss your prophetic gifts or disregard the truths you offer, your benefactor understands your insight...and your value. They have offered you a place to stay, protection from your enemies, and a measure of purpose, provided you continue to lend your sight to their efforts.

While such an offer of patronage is a welcome gift to anyone scraping out a life in the city, you know fate is the one who brought you two together. You have seen what is to come—and what still yet may be changed—and you know your benefactor has an important role to play. Perhaps it is they alone who can protect you from a terrible loss or maybe they need your help to stand against a frightening foe no one has seen coming. Either way, your service is about much more than security.

As the clock ticks down—the fate that lies ahead of the two of you growing ever closer—you know the truth alone may not be enough. You've seen the power of a lie, a fib, an edit to what you've seen that pushes people to productive action. A man who learns to value what he already has because an oracle told him he will lose it all still benefits from his new perspective on life, even if you had to lie a bit to convince him that he was on the verge of losing what he had. He is changed just the same, isn't he?

But you know the truth is the most fragile of gifts, and you fear that your sight may slip away from you as you spin pretty little lies, no matter how effective they are at forging the future. You know that above all else—above your benefactor, above your prophecies, above your safety—the truth rules all. It cannot be fought, for it is what is and what will be...

## DEMEANOR OPTIONS

distant, manipulative, paranoid, soothing

## STARTING CHARACTER STATS

Blood 0, Heart -1, Mind 1, Spirit 1

## STARTING CIRCLE RATINGS

Mortalis 1, Night -1, Power 1, Wild 0

## STARTING CIRCLE STATUS

Mortalis 0, Night 0, Power 1, Wild 0

## INTRO QUESTIONS

- ◆ How old were you when your visions began?
- ◆ How long have you been in the city?
- ◆ How did you originally convince your benefactor to trust you and your visions?
- ◆ Who seeks to sway you from your service?
- ◆ What signs hint your prophecy grows near?

## STARTING GEAR

Everything provided by your benefactor, and two sets of prophetic tools:

- ◆ Divining objects (i.e. tarot deck, crystal ball, set of runes, etc.)
- ◆ Ritual instruments (i.e. an athame, a pentacle, etc.)
- ◆ Rare tomes and grimoires (i.e. lost scrolls, secret books, etc.)

## STARTING DEBTS

- ◆ Someone helps decipher your visions with unique insights. You owe them 2 Debts.
- ◆ You had a dark vision about someone, but gave bad guidance. You owe them a Debt.
- ◆ Someone interfered with your destiny. They owe you a Debt. Tell them if you've forgiven them—they owe you another Debt if you still hold a grudge for their actions.

## LET IT OUT ABILITIES

- ◆ uncover the essential truth of a thing or person in your presence
- ◆ twist the strands of fate to help or hinder an NPC in your presence
- ◆ frighten or impress someone with knowledge of their past
- ◆ channel a powerful prophecy from beyond concerning a present character

# FEATURES

## YOUR BENEFACTOR

You have a benefactor, a powerful NPC whose fate is intertwined with your own; you came into their service as a result of your prophetic visions, but they now demand more and more from you and your powers. Name their Circle—Mortalis, Night, Power, or Wild—and choose the prophecy that binds you together, two strengths, and two flaws:

**Name:**

**Circle:**

### YOUR PROPHECY:

- ☐ they alone can guide you to the mystical answers you seek
- ☐ they alone can protect you from a dark fate you have foreseen
- ☐ they alone can destroy a uniquely evil foe within their own Circle
- ☐ they alone must play a critical role in the war against a coming darkness

### STRENGTHS

- ☐ they are a Status-3 member of their Circle
- ☐ they speak truthfully and honor their word
- ☐ they wield significant supernatural power
- ☐ their minions are disciplined and loyal

### FLAWS

- ☐ they are terrifyingly violent and cruel
- ☐ they have defenses against your sight
- ☐ they are at war with powerful enemies
- ☐ they are madly in love with you

Ask the MC what life your benefactor has provided for you after you make your choices. Their continued largesse depends on how well you serve their interests.

### LOOKING FOR HELP

When you go to your benefactor for help or resources, roll with your Status. On a hit, they get you what you need, provided you offer prophetic insight into a problem they have right now. On a 10+, the support they give is exceptionally useful. On a miss, they reveal you overlooked something that greatly injured their Status; they are determined to remind you of their power over you before they even consider your request.

## NOTES ON YOUR BENEFACTOR

Your **benefactor** is always socially and politically important, at least Status-2, if not higher. Serving a benefactor outside of Power doesn't change your Circle—although such divided loyalties might eventually create problems for you—nor does it grant you additional Status in your benefactor's Circle. You are linked, but the relationship is as personal as it is political—you are seen as working together, but that doesn't mean you have given up on everything else you care about in the city. Of course, there may be members of your Circle who trust you less, but they would be equally suspicious of someone who served a dangerous member of their own Circle.

Work with the MC at character creation to determine what information you have about your prophecy and how it brought you to your benefactor. Your visions may be quite vague—perhaps you know your benefactor will stand against *an evil foe* without knowing who exactly they will oppose—or you might have concrete details about specific elements like *a coming darkness* or *a dark fate*. As you play, you will discover new elements and fill in gaps; don't feel like you have to define everything!

Whatever you choose as your benefactor's strengths and flaws is completely true—a Status-3 benefactor isn't secretly Status-2—but whatever you don't choose is left up to the MC to determine and subject to change. A Status-2 benefactor might, as the result of the narrative, rise to Status-3 and lead a faction; a benefactor who isn't at war with powerful enemies might end up starting one as the story goes on.

If you miss while going to your benefactor for help or resources, your benefactor reveals that you overlooked something that cost them dearly, but that doesn't mean they necessarily want to hurt you or punish you. Instead it can mean that they attempt to reaffirm and codify your relationship before they are willing to consider your request.

The relationship between an Oracle and a benefactor is intentionally fraught; work with your MC to determine what level of conflict seems right to you. It's possible for a benefactor to be terrible and abusive, so it's important to lean on your safety tools (page 12) and communicate early and often about what kind of relationship feels fun. A kind and good benefactor who is deeply dedicated to you can be more interesting (and frustrating) than an abusive monster you can't escape.



# FORETELLINGS

Before each faction turn—or at the start of the game—roll with **SPIRIT**. On a hit, pick one of the options below; after the faction turn, the MC will tell you what your prophetic tools have revealed:

- ♦ fate has provided an opportunity to fulfill your role for your benefactor; the MC will tell you how to seize it
- ♦ an ally has come to own an item that might reveal more about your prophecy; the MC will tell you where they keep it
- ♦ a coming tragedy might allow you to escape or alter your prophesized path; the MC will tell you who will suffer if you allow it to occur

On a 7-9, you must also choose one:

- ♦ a threat is closing in; the MC will tell you why it stalks you or your benefactor
- ♦ an ally is plotting a betrayal; the MC will tell you when the hammer will fall
- ♦ a death lurks in the shadows; the MC will tell you how you can avoid it

On a miss, you instead receive a terrifying premonition about the prophecy that binds you to your benefactor; take -1 ongoing to efforts you make to stop it from coming to pass.

# NOTES ON FORETELLINGS

Your **foretellings** are essentially an additional free city move (page 96); you make the move when the faction turn starts—picking one of the options from the list on a hit—and the MC tells you what you've learned when the faction turn ends, incorporating whatever happened in the faction turn into your visions. When you make the move at the start of the game, you get your vision right away, but the rest of your foretellings visions happen after time passes!

In each case, the option you choose determines the focus of your foretellings. Here are some notes on each option:

- ♦ *If fate has provided an opportunity to fulfill your role for your benefactor*, your foretellings reveal some information—either secret or yet to come to pass—which your benefactor would expect you to reveal as part of your role; it's up to you how you address the information, but remember that altering the details of a true vision forces you to mark corruption.
- ♦ *If an ally has come to own an item that might reveal more about your prophecy*, your foretellings reveal both the item and the ally, but the connection to the prophecy—the one which binds you to your benefactor—is unclear; you need to get your hands on the item to learn more, and you may possibly need help from a different ally or mentor to learn the full truth.
- ♦ *If a coming tragedy might allow you to escape or alter your prophesized path*, your foretellings reveal the tragedy in question to you in full; it can be avoided—if you intervene to stop it—but allowing it to occur provides you with a chance to change the future, either by altering who is involved or how the events will transpire.

On a weak hit, whatever you select is also included in the vision, but with far less certainty. *If an ally is plotting a betrayal*, the MC may not reveal which ally...only the moment of their betrayal. It's up to you to use whatever tools you have at your disposal—including your **let it out** abilities, playbook moves, and contacts—to learn more about what is to come.

On a miss, your foretellings only bind you more to the prophecy and your benefactor, revealing just how close you are to a tragic turn. The -1 ongoing you suffer applies to any roll you make intending to avert that future, including learning more about what lies ahead of you.



# MOVES

## ORACLE MOVES

Choose two:

### ☐ PSYCHOMETRY

When you examine an interesting object, roll with **SPIRIT**. On a hit, ask the MC questions from the list below. On a 10+, ask 3. On a 7-9, ask 1:

- what is the history of this object?
- what bans, wards, or limits are attached to this object?
- where does this object belong?
- what secrets or mysteries has this object been privy to?
- what strong emotions have most recently been near this object?

On a miss, ask 1, but the answers you get overwhelm you; take -1 ongoing for the scene.

### ☐ SKIM THE SURFACE

When you touch someone and attempt to read their surface thoughts, roll with **SPIRIT**. On a hit, ask their player questions from the list below. On a 10+, ask 3. On a 7-9, ask 1:

- what are you thinking about right now?
- who or what are you protecting?
- what secrets are you currently keeping?
- what is your hidden pain?

On a miss, you inflict 1-harm (ap) on them and yourself.

### ☐ DUAL LOYALTY

You are known as an ally to the mortal world; take Mortalis as a second Circle. You can earn up to Status-2 in Mortalis, and you can make one additional city move each faction turn using your new Status. If you make use of this additional move, the MC will tell you what mortal trouble lands on your doorstep after time passes, looking to you for help...

### ☐ SOOTHSAYER

When you turn to your prophetic tools to read someone's future, roll with **SPIRIT**. On a hit, the MC will tell you something new and interesting about their destiny. On a 10+, you may ask a followup question; the MC will answer honestly. On a miss, you see vague shapes of what is to come, but something is obscuring your prophetic powers; the future you tried to read is beyond your sight until you resolve the interference.

### ☐ FORESIGHT

Advance **keep your cool** for any or all characters you choose in your presence, including yourself.

## MOVES ADVICE

You can always use your **let it out** abilities, especially *uncover the essential truth of a thing or person in your presence* to learn more information via your psychic powers, but both **Psychometry** and **Skim the Surface** allow you to ask a particular set of questions at a much lower cost. If someone is actively resisting you touching them, however, triggering **Skim the Surface** may require you to **mislead, distract, or trick** your target into accepting your touch or **keep your cool** to get close enough to them.

Taking **Dual Loyalty** means you have some sort of “ordinary” identity in the mortal world in which you deal with mortal problems, like a storefront psychic or a private eye, to the point that members of Mortalis view you as one of their own, despite your concurrent membership in another Circle. When someone targets you with a move that relies on your Circle—like **lend a hand or get in the way**—you get to decide which Circle is more relevant in the moment.

The extra city move you get with **Dual Loyalty** each faction turn must rely on your Status in Mortalis, such as **putting out the word** within that community. That said, some mortal trouble always arrives on your doorstep when you make use of this additional move. Be wary of ignoring these pleas for help; if you don't regularly tend to those requests, you may break the trust of Mortalis as a whole, losing your Status in that community...and possibly even your standing in their Circle.

If you roll a miss on **Soothsayer**, the interference the MC describes is more than a temporary annoyance. Something—or someone—is blocking your ability to see anything more about that particular person's future; you cannot trigger any other move (or ask any other question) that might reveal more about that character's fate until you resolve whatever is interfering with your sight. You can, however, make moves that might reveal the source of the interference or how to resolve it, including **hitting the streets** to get some advice on the case.

You get to choose which characters in the scene get to use the advanced version of **keep your cool** (page 188) as a result of **Foresight**; in the fiction, it's assumed you're cluing them in to what's about to happen in the scene just before it happens.



# CORRUPTION

**TRIGGER:** When you offer a false prophecy—or lie about the details of a true one—mark corruption.

## ■ EMPATH

When you **figure someone out** (or use **Skim the Surface** or **Psychometry**), mark corruption to ask any questions you'd like, not limited to the lists.

## ■ I, ALL-SEEING

Mark corruption and suffer 1-harm (ap) to have a vision about the situation at hand. Ask the MC a question; they will answer it honestly. Take +1 ongoing to act on the information provided.

## ■ DARK FATE

Mark corruption to curse a city faction with terrible luck; they take -1 ongoing in the next faction turn. Mark corruption again to obscure your role or ensure the curse lasts for a long time.

## ■ EYES THAT BURROW

Mark corruption to lock eyes with someone and force them to be still for as long as you maintain the gaze. Mark corruption again to make them forget the experience.

Your corruption trigger forces you to mark corruption whenever you shirk—or outright betray—your duty as a truth-teller. Completely fabricating a prophecy is an obvious falsehood, but you also mark corruption if you omit essential details or offer intentionally incomplete information.

Asking any question using **Empath** includes “are you telling the truth about \_\_\_\_\_?” The answer is always from the perspective of the object or person you're asking.

You can always use **I, All-Seeing**, even when you're bound, gagged, or otherwise incapacitated, provided you mark the corruption and suffer the harm. The +1 ongoing lasts until whatever knowledge you gained is no longer useful to you.

The -1 ongoing you inflict with **Dark Fate** applies to all faction moves for the next faction turn; if you ensure the curse lasts, however, the penalty persists until the faction directly addresses it. If you don't obscure your role, they know you are responsible.

**Eyes That Burrow** stops working when something physically affects the target, i.e. if you shoot them, they are no longer mesmerized. Actions you take while maintaining eye contact are limited; you may have to **keep your cool** to accomplish anything complex. If you make them forget, they forget everything that happened while you maintained eye contact.

## INTIMACY

When you share a moment of intimacy—physical or emotional—with another person, you gain a specific and clear vision about that person's future. Mark corruption to ask the MC up to two follow-up questions; they must answer honestly.

The MC supplies whatever vision you have about the person with whom you shared the moment of intimacy. They don't necessarily know that you've had a vision, but remember that you hit your corruption trigger if you intentionally withhold meaningful information you gained from any vision you've had.

## END MOVE

When you die or retire your character, choose a PC; the MC will tell you a dark fate you foresee for them. If you issue a warning, they take +1 ongoing to avoid it; if you don't, they take -1 ongoing instead.

Your end move isn't optional; when you die (or *retire to safety!*), you **must** pick another player character as the subject of your final vision. Any attempt to warn them—talking to them, sending a note, scrawling a message in your own blood—counts as issuing warning; they only take the -1 ongoing if you intentionally withhold what you know.

## ADVANCES

If you take *get a sanctum*, you gain all the benefits of the Wizard's **sanctum** feature and the **Sanctum Sanctorum** move (page 172). Remember to choose four resources (and two downsides) your sanctum includes, just as if you were starting play with the feature, and work with the MC to describe how you've acquired enough powerful enchantments, ancient tomes, or sacred artifacts you need to create a magical atelier of your very own.



# NIGHT THE SPECTRE

*Vengeful, alienated, incorporeal, alone. The Spectre is the ghost of someone who has died, their spirit anchored on this side of eternity by the memories and legacy of a life already lived.*

*Play the Spectre if you want to explore a past you cannot forget, all while bearing witness to the city's secret pains and guilty pleasures.*





## HAUNTING THE SHADOWS

You are the watcher, the silent witness to the horrors of the modern world. The apathy. The greed. The lust that leaks out from behind the mask when nobody's looking. You see it all. After all, you can go anywhere. No place is truly safe from your eyes.

But you are a solitary witness. And against the horrors of the city, you are often alone and outgunned. It would be foolish to try to stop them all, to try to stand against the whole city without allies or resources. Sometimes...all you can do is watch.

Yet the less you do about the horrors you see, the faster you slide toward oblivion, a kind of hopelessness from which you know you will never recover. You'll remain trapped in this world, of course, but whatever vestigial personhood you have will crumble and wilt, leaving nothing behind but a monster to haunt the city's darkest shadows. You have seen yourself at your worst already; you cannot imagine what you would be if your worst was all that's left.

You also know there is a way out of this liminal prison, a resolution that lies just out of reach. Heaven, perhaps. Or at least some kind of peace. The anchors that hold you here—the people, places, and objects that tie you to this realm—can be *resolved* and set to rest. You could move on and leave the city behind, if you could make the past the past and let go of what once was.

But the anchors that bind you so securely to this half-life are more fragile than you want to admit. They can be destroyed or corrupted, and the loss of each one pushes you further down that path of darkness. You must guard them fiercely or find yourself driven to the very oblivion you fear so deeply; you must fight to protect them to give yourself time to find the resolution you seek.

Ghost hunters are the most likely to target ghostly anchors for destruction or ruination, but most of the city is aware that a ghost's anchors are the easiest way to deal with a troublesome spectre. You have been wise enough so far to keep your anchors a secret, lest an entrepreneurial hustler attempt to keep you as a pet, but you know it is only a matter of time before the world puts that which matters most to you in the line of fire...

## DEMEANOR OPTIONS

antiquated, confused, meek, volatile

## STARTING CHARACTER STATS

Blood 1, Heart 0, Mind -1, Spirit 1

## STARTING CIRCLE RATINGS

Mortalis 0, Night 1, Power 1, Wild -1

## STARTING CIRCLE STATUS

Mortalis 0, Night 1, Power 0, Wild 0

## INTRO QUESTIONS

- ◆ What memories do you still hold of your death?
- ◆ How long have you been in the city?
- ◆ Who looks after you when your trauma overwhelms you?
- ◆ What place in the city still makes you feel alive?
- ◆ Which of your anchors has been most recently threatened?

## STARTING GEAR

- ◆ Whatever was on your person when you died, albeit spiritual versions of each.

## STARTING DEBTS

- ◆ Someone, or someone's progenitor, was involved in your death. They owe you a Debt.
- ◆ Someone is actively watching over one of your anchors. Ask them why they agreed to keep it safe. You owe them 2 Debts.
- ◆ Someone almost destroyed one of your anchors once, perhaps by accident or carelessness. Ask them what happened. They owe you 2 Debts.

## LET IT OUT ABILITIES

- ◆ instantaneously travel to one of your anchors, no matter the distance
- ◆ take control of a machine or vehicle by possessing its mechanical form
- ◆ let loose a psychic blast of ectoplasmic energy (2-harm close area ap)
- ◆ follow an ordinary mortal—no matter where they go

# FEATURES

## ANCHORS

You have several anchors in the city—important places, people, or objects that keep you from moving on. You might have an opportunity to put an anchor to rest, but anchors can also be ruined or destroyed.

### Choose 4:

- ☐ a family member or inheritor, unaware of your existence
- ☐ a witness to your death, bound to you by chance or fate
- ☐ a friendly household pet, constant companion in your unlife
- ☐ a beloved possession of your youth, passed to a new owner
- ☐ a marker of your success in life, now claimed by another
- ☐ an item related to your death, grimly marking your violent end
- ☐ a location of personal importance, a reminder of a past love
- ☐ a space you used to live or work, abandoned by the world

When **one of your anchors is put in danger**, you know; mark trauma and take +1 ongoing to all moves until you see it to safety. When you **resolve an anchor**, clear your trauma track and erase a corruption advance; when **an anchor is destroyed or ruined**, fill your trauma track and take a corruption advance.

## PASSING ON

When your **last anchor is resolved or destroyed**, you pass on; pick one blessing or haunting you bestow upon the city for each one of your anchors that was resolved or destroyed, respectively. If all four of your anchors are destroyed, you **do not pass on**, but are instead swallowed by oblivion and inflict all three hauntings.

### BLESSINGS

- ☐ you inspire an NPC to forgive someone who once wronged them, ending a long-standing conflict
- ☐ you cleanse or restore a cherished place once thought by all to be ruined or beyond repair
- ☐ you heal or restore someone you once injured or wronged
- ☐ you reveal to an NPC the truth of your death and passing

### HAUNTINGS

- ☐ you leave behind a psychic reflection of your fear and anger, a terrible thing that hunts mortals in the night
- ☐ you imbue an object with nightmarish power; the MC chooses who ends up with the cursed item
- ☐ you drive an NPC close to you into a downward spiral

## NOTES ON ANCHORS

You have four **anchors**: people, places, and objects that have kept you from moving on in death. While your memories of your past life are shaky, you are clear about your anchors—you know where they are found and you are alerted when they are threatened. The +1 ongoing you gain when an anchor is in danger applies broadly—it can be used when you're trying to **escape a situation** to get to the anchor *and* when you're **turning to violence** to protect one of them.

Resolving an anchor usually means addressing the underlying connection. You can't move on until you've found some peace with these ties... or they are destroyed. Resolution is always preferable to destruction; a gentle conclusion is easier than another shattering.

For anchor objects or places, resolution often focuses on accepting the anchor as part of your past, but sometimes you can resolve an anchor by ensuring it passes on to someone who cherishes it as you did. People are trickier—resolving a relationship usually means working through whatever bound you to them. If it's your child, you may not be able to resolve the anchor until you know someone else is watching over them; if it's a witness to your passing, you may need to forgive them for their role in your death. Either way, **communing with the anchor** is the best way to learn what must be done to move on.

Anchors can be destroyed in myriad ways ranging from accidental deaths—people are fragile anchors—to intentional destruction. Ruination is a bit less common but equally destructive; if the essence of the thing itself is fundamentally altered, like using a sanctified cross to complete a demonic ritual, then it is as good as destroyed.

When you pass on, work with your MC to describe your final moments; you get to bestow one blessing for each resolved anchor...and must inflict one haunting on the city for each anchor that was lost. Blessings and hauntings are powerful and broad—you may restore someone with cancer to full health or drive a beloved spouse into suicidal despair. If all four of your anchors are destroyed, you still inflict all three hauntings as you are *swallowed by oblivion*—leaving a cruel mark upon the city—but your end move (page 50) doesn't trigger.



# TRAUMA □□□□□

Your sense of self has been shattered by your death, leaving you traumatized. You begin each session with at least 2-trauma marked, but can clear it—and any additional trauma you take—via trauma moves. If you ever fill your trauma track, the MC may call for you to make a trauma move at any time, but you may always choose which trauma move you make in the moment.

The first time you take harm in a scene, mark trauma; when you fill up on harm, your corpus is scattered. Mark trauma to reform in a few days at one of your anchors, or mark 3-trauma to reform immediately at an anchor of the MC's choice. If you cannot mark trauma while destroyed, the MC decides how/when you reform.

## TRAUMA MOVES

### LASH OUT AT AN NPC

When you lash out at an NPC in furious anger, roll with **BLOOD**. On a hit, clear all trauma and inflict harm as established. On a 7-9, your violence is wild; it leaves you vulnerable, gets out of hand, or causes some collateral damage, MC's choice. On a miss, you completely lose control of your ectoplasmic form; mark corruption.

### COMMUNE WITH YOUR ANCHORS

When you commune with one of your anchors, roll with **SPIRIT**. On a hit, your anchor soothes your fractured psyche; clear 2-trauma. On a 10+, your communion reveals a way the anchor might be resolved; clear all trauma. On a miss, you only clear 1-trauma; something threatening the anchor interrupts your mediation.

## NOTES ON TRAUMA

The **trauma** of your death lingers on in your ectoplasmic form, the corpus that remembers your old life and how things once were. Each session, remember to begin with at least 2-trauma marked; if you start with 2-trauma or more, there's no need to mark any additional trauma before you start to play.

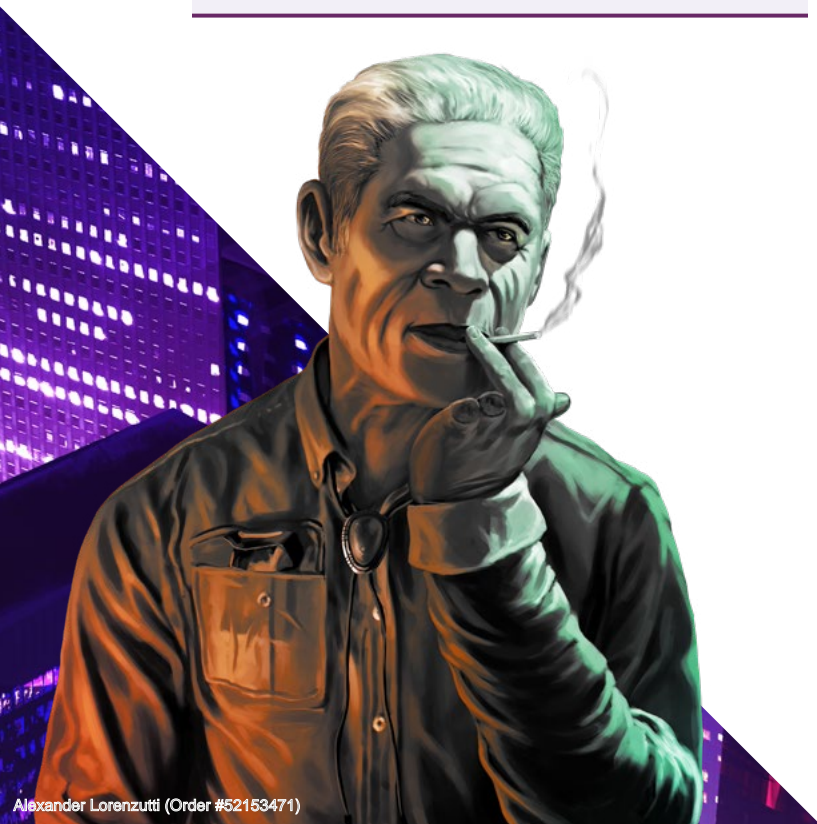
Clearing your trauma with a trauma move is a function of the moves themselves: each one tells you how much trauma to clear as you make the move. If your trauma track is ever filled, the MC can call for you to make a trauma move, but it's up to you to choose the move itself; you might, for example, flee a tense scene with a loved one to **lash out** at a stranger, making the trauma move...but protecting your loved one from your spectral needs.

That said, if you delay or avoid making trauma moves while your track is full, you are handing the MC a golden opportunity—spectres who are losing control, whose very forms become more incoherent as their trauma builds, are magnets for chaos and destruction. You may hurt someone without realizing it, attract unwanted attention, or even let the slow creep of corruption warp you further.

**Lashing out at an NPC** involves more than just words; you must be channeling enough rage for the **lashing out** to inflict real harm on your target. That said, **lashing out** is distinct from **turning to violence**; the latter is a deliberate attack while the former is a chaotic explosion aimed in someone's direction.

**Communing with your anchors** takes time and emotional effort; you can't do it on the fly or while occupied with something else, and you can't do it over and over. Once you've **communed with an anchor**, you have to take some time away from it before you can **commune** with it again.

For most objects or places, **communing** requires that you be in the direct presence of the thing itself, but people are more complicated. You might be able to **commune** with a descendant of your family by visiting their home while they are away, soaking in the spiritual essence imbued by years of residency, but that depends on the nature of the connection the anchor has to you and the place in question. Regardless, you don't have to speak with a living anchor to **commune**; it is a spiritual practice, not a linguistic or strategic one.



# MOVES

## SPECTRE MOVES

You get this one:

### ☒ MANIFEST

Regular people can't sense or interact with you unless you manifest; supernatural creatures and perceptive mortals usually know you're present, but can't affect you without magical tools or special powers. If you wish, you can manifest by spending a few quiet moments concentrating—choose 2:

- You can be heard
- You can be seen
- You can touch and be touched

You may mark trauma to instead choose 1 or all 3.

And choose two more:

### ☐ WON'T BE IGNORED

When you *get in someone's way*, take a 10+ instead of rolling. If you *mislead, distract, or trick* someone with an obvious supernatural display, roll with **SPIRIT** instead of **MIND**.

### ☐ GHOST TOWN

When you *hit the streets* to consult your ghostly contacts, take +1 ongoing to dealing with them. On a miss, you still find a ghost who has what you're looking to get, but they are dangerous or lost, your choice.

### ☐ POTENT

Take +1 **SPIRIT** (max +3).

### ☐ WALL? WHAT WALL?

You always have an opening to *escape a situation*. You can choose an additional option off the list to bring someone with you, even if they would normally be unable to *escape*. On a miss, you—and whoever you brought with you—end up caught in the dangerous space between the worlds of the living and the dead.

### ☐ CONDUIT

Advance *let it out* for all characters in your presence, including yourself.

## MOVES ADVICE

The Spectre is a surprisingly physical character. Between your high starting Blood and incorporeal form, you can *turn to violence* against other characters when they're at their most vulnerable. If you're not carrying a weapon, their weapon will work just fine—assuming you take it from them—and you can always choose to do additional harm beyond a 1-harm unarmed attack by selecting *inflict terrible harm* on a 10+.

In order to *Manifest*, you need a few moments to yourself; if you mark trauma, the process is nearly instantaneous. Either way, the effect lasts for the scene. You need a few moments to yourself again to manifest a second time in a scene to choose new options. The MC decides who is “regular people” for the purposes of this move, but you should assume that most supernatural creatures can at least sense your presence if not outright affect you with their powers and abilities.

You can *hit the streets* with *Ghost Town* whenever you like, but remember that other ghosts tend to be in the Night Circle; it's rare to find a spectre hanging out with wizards or mortals. All ghosts—including you!—are liminal creatures, stuck between this world and the next, and the kinds of problems your ghostly contacts are juggling and things they might ask for as payment will be quite different than even other member of Night. Ghosts that are *dangerous* are an immediate threat to you and anyone with you; ghosts who are *lost* are not clear on their identity and surroundings, and may need help themselves before they can help you. The +1 ongoing you get to dealing with them doesn't affect the roll to *hit the streets* itself, and only lasts for the scene that follows you *hitting the streets*.

Even without *Wall? What Wall?*, The Spectre has more openings to escape a situation than most characters; taking *Wall? What Wall?* means that you *always* have an opening, even if a wizard has trapped you in a magical holding circle or a demon has wrapped you in infernal chains.

The power that flows through you for *Conduit* affects all characters in your presence, even the ones that might oppose you or try to harm you. You cannot control if they gain new abilities as a result of rolling a 12+, nor can you suppress or temper your effect on them as a conduit.



# CORRUPTION

**TRIGGER:** When you witness a scene of violence or victimization and do nothing, mark trauma and corruption.

## ■ POSSESSION

Mark corruption to possess a weak-minded person (MC's call) in your presence; clear a trauma for each "normal" human experience—eating a meal, shopping for clothes, etc.—you engage in while controlling their body.

## ■ SIPHON

Mark corruption to reach into someone's body, inflict 2-harm (ap) on them, and clear your harm track.

## ■ NIGHTMARE

Mark corruption to enter the dreams of someone sleeping in your presence. While you're there, you can interact with them and their dreams as if they were spirits as well.

## ■ TELEKINESIS

You can move and lift small objects at a distance by concentrating. Mark corruption to move an object up to the size of a car.

Your corruption trigger forces you to mark corruption (and trauma) when you stand mute witness to scenes of pain and suffering; you don't have to fully stop whatever's going on to avoid marking the corruption, but you do need to make a real effort. It's not enough to meekly suggest that abusers stop abusing people—you have to intervene!

You can control a mortal with **Possession** for as long as you like—hours, days, weeks—but lengthy possessions tend to attract attention; no matter how long it lasts, the person remembers the possession and might seek help after it ends. You can still clear trauma by doing "normal" human activities offscreen; work with the MC to figure out what you did while walking around in someone else's body.

When you use **Nightmare**, your target is especially vulnerable to you. You don't have to manifest to interact with them, nor can they escape the dream. That said, you may find other things in their dreams that endanger you both.

## INTIMACY

When you share a moment of intimacy—physical or emotional—with another person, you hold 1 and clear 1-trauma. Whenever they get into trouble, you can spend your hold to be there.

It's up to you if the character is in trouble; you can spend your hold to appear in a scene with them regardless of distance or location. You can't have more than one hold of this type per character; if you have a second moment of intimacy with someone before you spend your hold, you don't get another hold.

## END MOVE

When your spirit passes on permanently to the other side, any PCs present gain +1 **SPirit** (max+3) or take a corruption advance, your choice.

You can only trigger this move by resolving your **anchors** (page 142) and passing on. You decide how your end move affects each PC individually; you might grant one character a +1 Spirit and make another character take a corruption advance. If the corruption advance in question is the PC's last, it is possible for you to force someone to *retire as a Threat* due to corruption.

## ADVANCES

If you *resolve one of your anchors*, choose an anchor to resolve in the fiction and work with your MC to determine how the resolution occurs. For example, you might agree that your *beloved household pet* passes away while you are present or that *your marker of success* is passed on again to a new, benevolent owner. However it happens, the resolution is peaceful and permanent.

If you *change playbooks*, you may need to work with your MC to determine how you return from the dead. That said, a ghost can swear an oath to become the Sworn or gain the sight needed to become the Oracle without acquiring a physical body.



# POINTER THE SWORN

*Dutiful, exceptional, driven, conflicted. The Sworn is an agent of powerful masters, pledged to their faction and cause. But can any master truly be trusted?*

*Play the Sworn if you want to navigate the conflicts between your service and your superiors, wielding their name in the pursuit of something greater.*





## LOYAL TO A FAULT

You've seen the worst of the city. Not just the monsters and murders, no. You've seen what happens when the secret pillars collapse, when someone oversteps their bounds and throws the whole city into disarray. You've seen the real danger of these dark streets, the outcome that inevitably follows the selfish squabbling of the covetous Circles.

Darkness. Mayhem. *Chaos*.

At some point, you took a stand: you swore yourself to a higher ideal, to work for powerful people who opposed such disorder. You may have once served another—a faerie king? a vampire lord? a municipal police department?—but your new masters offered you power, the most precious of gifts, and you promised them loyalty, the only thing you had to give.

Now you carry forward their word—and a weapon of myth—to fight for the order they represent. The oath you swore is a light in the darkness, a vow to service that makes you capable of shielding the innocent from mayhem and destroying those who covet chaos. Your loyalty has been forged into a sword and shield, and they are the hands that wield you.

Your devotion has limits, though. Sometimes the oath you've sworn chafes against the other relationships you hold dear...or your conscience. There are boundaries you won't cross, things you won't do in the service of your masters, no matter how wise they might be. You're still your own person, capable of breaking from the rules when you know what's right.

And you aren't their patsy. You know your masters have their own agendas, their own schemes and scams, only some of which they deem to share with you. You know that sometimes what they call "order" is really just "control." But in the lawless and chaotic city, you have sworn to serve them in the hopes that some order—even order imposed by smug elites—is better than no order at all.

And whether or not they want to admit it, you know the masters fear you. They fear your purpose, your dedication, the way you see through their lies, and what you might do with the weapon they gave you to wield. You know they whisper in secret meetings about what your future holds, what fate has in store for you. They might make the rules, but you make the choice, each and every night. And one day, you might decide their rules aren't deserving of your loyalty any longer...

## DEMEANOR OPTIONS

cunning, emotional, obsessive, stoic

## STARTING CHARACTER STATS

Blood 1, Heart 0, Mind 1, Spirit -1

## STARTING CIRCLE RATINGS

Mortalis -1, Night 0, Power 1, Wild 1

## STARTING CIRCLE STATUS

Mortalis 0, Night 0, Power 1, Wild 0

## INTRO QUESTIONS

- ◆ Why did you swear your oath?
- ◆ How long have you been in the city?
- ◆ Who trained you in the ways of your order?
- ◆ What marks you as different from the masters you serve?
- ◆ Whose disappearance are you investigating?

## STARTING GEAR

A luxurious house or apartment, a fancy car, an expensive smartphone. One backup weapon of choice:

- ◆ 9mm Beretta (2-harm near loud concealable)
- ◆ Hunting Knife (2-harm hand)
- ◆ Sawed-off shotgun (2-harm close loud reload messy concealable)

## STARTING DEBTS

- ◆ Someone gives you info about a Circle you don't understand. You owe them a Debt.
- ◆ You secretly helped someone get justice for a wrong done upon them. They owe you a Debt. Tell them why you helped.
- ◆ Your service forced you to punish or kill someone's ally or friend on behalf of your masters. You owe them a Debt.

## LET IT OUT ABILITIES

- ◆ shatter a magical spell, illusion, or enchantment with a touch
- ◆ cloak yourself in magical armor; expend it to ignore all harm one time
- ◆ strike down all lesser foes in your vicinity with a blast of elemental force
- ◆ force someone to answer your questions truthfully for a scene

# FEATURES

## YOUR OATH

You've sworn an oath to serve an influential faction of Power, an organization that relies on you to protect its members, punish its enemies, and defend its holdings.

### YOUR MASTERS

You serve (choose one):

- ☐ an abbey of prescient oracles
- ☐ a council of haughty wizards
- ☐ an order of secret immortals
- ☐ an academy of religious scholars
- ☐ a covenant of earthbound deities

### YOU ARE CHARGED WITH:

(Choose two)

- ☐ protecting and policing their members
- ☐ recovering lost artifacts and tomes
- ☐ investigating threats and problems
- ☐ destroying those who would thwart them
- ☐ negotiating with their allies and vassals

Tell your MC to stat up your masters as a Size-3, Strength-3 faction within Power. Ask them what you know about the organization's structure, culture, and assets.

### YOUR VOWS

When you **break one of your vows**, mark corruption. When you take a corruption advance, cross out one of your vows—it no longer binds you. If you strike out every vow, your oath is broken—change playbooks immediately.

You must... (choose 5):

- ☐ ...never trespass on another's property
- ☐ ...never strike the first blow
- ☐ ...never lie about your identity or purpose
- ☐ ...never reveal your faction's secrets
- ☐ ...always avoid collateral damage
- ☐ ...always protect members of Power from harm
- ☐ ...always thwart the enemies of your masters
- ☐ ...always seize that which your masters desire

## NOTES ON YOUR OATH

The **oath** you've sworn to your masters is more than a simple vow of service; it's a commitment to both their faction and a particular set of restrictions and duties. None of this is secret or subtle—everyone who knows your oath, including virtually all of your faction, knows whom you serve, what duties you've taken on, and what vows you promised to keep.

The MC handles creating your masters' faction, but work with them to make sure the organization fits your idea of whom you serve. There may be surprises as you play—you might find that your masters have priorities they haven't shared or secrets they want to keep—but you are an important member of your faction; you know how things work, who to talk to in order to get things done, and who is really in charge in a crisis.

Inevitably, you will break one of your vows, either because it's impossible to maintain two of your vows simultaneously or because you can't afford to pay attention to such niceties. You mark corruption each time you cross the line, but you only cross out a vow when you take a full corruption advance. And when you cross out a vow, you're free to cross out whichever vow you like—even one you've never broken. Once a vow is gone, it's gone; you no longer mark corruption for "breaking" a vow that you've crossed off. If there's ever a dispute about whether or not you broke a vow, the MC makes the call.

Crossing out every single vow ends the oath...but it's also possible that you simply walk away from your masters completely. After all, you chose to enter their service! Just remember that your position and power rely on their authority—whatever playbook you choose upon rejecting the oath is your new reality. On occasion, switching playbooks might mean becoming the equal of some of your masters such as the Wizard or the Oracle, but it more often results in you entering a totally new sphere of influence in a different Circle.

That said, it's possible for you to go far as the Sworn, perhaps even taking on a Status-3 role within your own faction as a kind of "servant monarch" bound to the decrees of the group at large. You could also use your influence in a sizable faction to establish a new faction, either leaving behind your oath—and changing playbooks—or dedicating a sister faction to the one the masters control, like a knighthood or order dedicated to the same service.



## YOUR LEGENDARY WEAPON

Your masters have given you a weapon (*3-harm mythic anchored*) to wield, a legendary artifact of an age long lost.

Choose one:

- ☐ a sword wielded by rightful kings (*figure someone out*)
- ☐ a spear stolen from heaven itself (*let it out*)
- ☐ a staff imbued with stealthy sorcery (*escape a situation*)
- ☐ a knife cut from demonic steel (*mislead, distract or trick*)
- ☐ an axe forged in the blood of gods (*turn to violence*)
- ☐ a hammer blessed by otherworldly magic (*keep your cool*)

So long as you bear this legendary armament, advance the named move. When you wield the weapon in the service of your masters, you can roll with **MIND** instead of **SPIRIT** to *keep your cool*. But your weapon—like your oath—is bound to your loyalty. If your oath is broken, the weapon will be lost to you, even betraying you to ensure it exits your service.

## NOTES ON YOUR LEGENDARY WEAPON

Loyalty is not without perks—your masters have gifted unto you a weapon so precious that it alone acts as a mark of their authority, a **legendary weapon** like *Dáinsleif*, *Nu-endo*, *Vaishnavastra*, etc. Merely holding such an armament would drive most mortals mad; it is frightening, instantly recognizable, and bound to you so long as your oath is true.

You gain the benefits of the advanced move (page 188) as long as you bear the weapon—you don't have to be actively wielding it or using it in the service of your masters to make use of the 12+ result. For example, you advance *mislead, distract, or trick* even if the *knife cut from demonic steel* is still sheathed at your hip; you advance *let it out* even if you're wielding the *spear stolen from heaven* against the masters themselves.

In order to roll with **MIND** instead of **SPIRIT**, however, you must be *keeping your cool* in the direct service of your masters, i.e. while fulfilling one of the charges defined by your oath. If you're charged with *investigating threats and problems* but not *destroying those who would thwart your masters*, then you only get the stat swap during the investigation. Once you decide to step up and kill the people responsible, your weapon no longer allows you to roll with **MIND**.

Breaking your oath in full—e.g. walking away from it or striking out every vow—severs your relationship with the weapon. It will not follow you to the next stage of your journey; it may even betray you by failing at a perfect moment or attracting the attention of your enemies when you are most vulnerable. The weapon is a function of your loyalty—if you have left the service of your masters, then the weapon will return to them as soon as it can find a way home.

Finally, the provided list of weapons is merely a suggestion—you can work with your MC to pick any legendary weapon you'd like and attach any advanced move to the weapon. The weapon and the move usually have some alignment—like a *sorcerous staff* improving *escape a situation*—but if you feel like *Caledfwlch* (a sword wielded by rightful kings) is best represented by advancing *keep your cool* instead of *figure someone out*, that's totally fine.



# MOVES

## SWORN MOVES

Choose two:

### ☐ PROTECT AND SERVE

When you read a charged situation, roll with **MIND**. On a hit, ask the MC questions; take +1 ongoing when you act on the answers. On a 10+, ask 2. On a 7-9, ask 1.

- where's my escape route / way in / way past?
- which enemy is most vulnerable to me?
- what should I be on the lookout for?
- what's my enemy's true position?
- who here can't be trusted?

On a miss, you recognize a weakness in your own position or preparations you should have seen coming.

### ☐ HARD TO SHAKE

When you follow an NPC through the streets of the city, roll with **MIND**. On a hit, where they go, you follow. On a 7-9, you run into some trouble on the way; deal with it quickly or lose the trail. On a miss, your prey leads you exactly where they want you; brace yourself for the closing jaws of the trap.

### ☐ DEVIOUS

Take +1 **MIND** (max+3).

### ☐ GENUINE POLICE

When you *put a face to a name* or *study a sanctuary, gathering spot, or place of power*, roll with **MIND** instead of the relevant Circle. You always get to ask the MC an additional question about the person or place in question, even on a miss.

### ☐ CHESS NOT CHECKERS

When you *turn to violence* with any kind of serious advantage—numbers, position, surprise, etc.—and get a hit, tell your opposition which option they cannot choose from their list before they pick.

## MOVES ADVICE

**Protect and Serve** secures information other player characters may struggle to obtain in the middle of a messy conflict; a charged situation means that violence is hovering in the wings...or has already arrived. Make sure to directly indicate to the MC when you want to use it, since it might at first appear that you're *figuring someone out* or *keeping your cool*. The +1 applies to all moves you make that rely on the information you've gained, and it lasts until the information isn't useful anymore.

When you get a hit while using **Hard to Shake** to follow someone, they generally don't know you're tailing them. On a miss, you barely have time to react before the hammer falls—good luck!

You can always use **Genuine Police** when *putting a face to a name* or *studying a sanctuary, gathering spot, or place of power*, but you can choose to roll with the Circle rating instead if it happens to be higher. Either way, you still get to mark the relevant Circle. The additional question you ask the MC can be on any topic, but it is limited to what you might already know about the person (*putting a face to a name*) or what you can immediately discover about the topic within your surroundings (*studying a sanctuary, gathering spot, or place of power*); asking "where did the vampire lord hide his kidnapping victim?" while *putting a name to his face* won't reveal anything...unless the character in question has some reputation for hiding all his kidnapping victims in the exact same spot. If the MC tells you that whatever you're asking is outside the bounds of what you can learn, feel free to change your question.

In order to use **Chess Not Checkers**, your advantage must be serious and relevant—catching an individual vamp off guard while wielding your legendary weapon is probably enough, but you need much more than surprise to take on a few werewolves by yourself. Any advantage of numbers, for example, is only significant if it's a real difference; bringing one or two more guys to a fight against a dozen faeries won't trigger the move. Remember to frame whatever option you deny your opposition as actions you take in the fiction, i.e. you keep them from counterattacking, secure your own position, or cut off their escape.



# CORRUPTION

**TRIGGER:** When you break one of your vows or work against your masters, mark corruption.

## ■ AHEAD OF THE GAME

You get +1 **MIND** (max+4). Whenever you roll with **MIND** and roll a 12+, mark corruption.

## ■ STOOL PIGEONS

Mark corruption to roll with **MIND** instead of the relevant Circle Status when you *consult your contacts*. On a miss, mark corruption again—then choose to either answer your contact's tough question or owe them a Debt.

## ■ STUDENT OF THE ARTS

Choose three spells. Mark corruption to gain two hold you can use to cast those spells.

## ■ INFERNAL AFFAIRS

When you *turn to violence*, you may mark corruption to take a 10+ instead of rolling.

Your corruption trigger forces you to mark corruption when you violate your oath or broadly work against your faction's leaders—the MC is the ultimate judge of both. In the event your masters are conflicted or at odds with each other, your actions must reflect the faction's formal authority structures; you're working against your masters if you side with a rogue or minority view, even if you feel like your work serves the faction best in the long run. Until your sect seizes power in full, you're on the wrong side of a civil war.

After you take *Ahead of the Game*, any **MIND** roll—for any move—forces you to mark a corruption if you roll a 12+.

The spells you gain from *Student of the Arts* are from the Wizard's feature (page 174); you don't also gain *Channelling*, but instead mark corruption to gain hold. If you want additional corruption-based magical powers, check out *Blood Magic* (page 163) or *Back At It* (page 169).

If you've advanced *turn to violence* and want a 12+, you have to roll the dice; marking a corruption using *Infernal Affairs* only gets you a 10+.

## INTIMACY

When you share a moment of intimacy—physical or emotional—with another person, tell them if they matter more than your oath. If you say they do, mark corruption and they hold 1; they can spend the hold at any time to summon you to their location.

Someone *matter more than your oath* can mean many things, but it is usually interpreted as “you would break your oath to protect that person from serious harm.” There is no limit to the number of characters that can have this hold at the same time, but each of them can't hold more than 1 hold from you at once.

## END MOVE

When you die, offer your legendary weapon to the person you trust the most. If they accept, bind them to three vows from your list as if they had sworn an oath to you.

Whoever you offer the weapon doesn't have to be present when you die; the weapon always finds a way to them. If they reject your offer, the weapon finds a way back to your masters. If they accept instead, the vows they swear to you carry penalties—breaking them inflicts corruption, they lose one when taking a corruption advance, and losing all of them means the weapon leaves their service.

## ADVANCES

You can *obtain Status-2 in Power* right away; this opens up new city moves (page 96) to you during the faction turn.

*Changing to a new playbook* only rarely allows you to keep your **legendary weapon** and **oath**; you're not serving the masters if you're no longer the Sworn. Similarly, you can't keep either if you change Circles as a result of the events in the fiction.

If you *retire to safety*, you can try to pass on your legendary weapon to another PC, but it's likely your masters still control the armament. Only your death yields the kind of magic powerful enough to usurp their authority.



# WOLF THE TAINTED

*Brutal, callous, shrewd, bound. The Tainted is a mortal who sold their soul for a "fair" price. Caught in the service of a dark patron, they now toil in a trap of their own making.*

*Play the Tainted if you want to work for alien forces that challenge your human compassion with demonic tasks.*





## PROFITS OVER PEOPLE

You made a fucking deal. Maybe it was for a noble cause—a sacrifice you made to ensure someone else didn't take the worst of it—or a selfish desire for money, power, and status...but the result is the same. Now you spend your days (and nights) racketeering for hell, demonic muscle for a dark patron who has jobs that need doing and very little in the way of a retirement plan or healthcare package.

But you're no slave or servant. Your dark patron may have a hold over you, but you make your own choices, pursue your own goals. At least, that's what you tell yourself when you think about what you're capable of doing on your dark patron's behalf. There must be some humanity underneath the flaming horns and chitinous skin, some vestige of who you once were before your contract put you into your dark patron's service. There has to be...

Yet...you don't *feel* human any more. You're the gun brought to a knife fight, a terrifying force born when your dark patron hollowed you out and replaced something inside you with a demonic core. When you want to destroy something (or someone), your target has seconds to live before you rip them to shreds...and you always walk away from a fight, even the nasty ones that would otherwise leave you bleeding and broken.

It gets worse when you do your work willingly, when you convince people to go along with whatever your dark patron needs so that you don't have to make a mess. You can feel a little part of you die each time you enact your dark patron's will upon the world, and it's a bigger part when you play a big role in making room for his plans. You aren't loyal, but compliance is a big step down that same road.

Is there a way out? Maybe. It would take more than Debts, though. The contract your dark patron holds is serious, enough to drag you down into eternal torment if you aren't willing to play ball. But you would be lying if you said you don't catch yourself thinking about what life would be like without these demonic shackles and bloody hands...

## DEMEANOR OPTIONS

corporate, detached, paranoid, unstable

## STARTING CHARACTER STATS

Blood 1, Heart 1, Mind -1, Spirit 0

## STARTING CIRCLE RATINGS

Mortalis 1, Night -1, Power 0, Wild 1

## STARTING CIRCLE STATUS

Mortalis 0, Night 0, Power 0, Wild 1

## INTRO QUESTIONS

- ◆ Why did you trade away your soul?
- ◆ How long have you been in the city?
- ◆ Which fellow demonic agent do you loathe?
- ◆ How do you cope with your demonic dreams and hungers?
- ◆ What do you desperately need?

## STARTING GEAR

A house or apartment, a car, a smartphone.

One brutal weapon of choice:

- ◆ Truncheon (2-harm hand stun)
- ◆ 9mm Beretta (2-harm near loud concealable)
- ◆ Pump-action shotgun (3-harm close/near loud reload messy)
- ◆ Sword (3-harm close messy)

## STARTING DEBTS

- ◆ You're protecting someone from a dark power, a rival and enemy of your demonic patron. Your charge owes you a Debt.
- ◆ Someone is trying to save you from damnation and keeps suffering for it. Ask them why they care when no one else does. You owe them a Debt.
- ◆ You hurt or killed someone's good friend or ally on your demonic patron's orders. You owe them a Debt.

## LET IT OUT ABILITIES

- ◆ imbue your touch with demonic corruption (2-harm hand ap)
- ◆ impress, dismay, or frighten someone with a display of demonic fury
- ◆ move through or past a physical obstacle created by mortal hands
- ◆ summon your dark patron's attention directly on your location

# FEATURES

## YOUR DARK PATRON

Your soul has fallen into the hands of a dark patron, a powerful demon whose reputation precedes them, but whose true name is known to few. They have given you terms of employment, access to terrible power, and terrifying insight into their true nature.

### Choose 2:

- ☐ they seduce all who come into contact with them with pleasantries, gifts, and vices
- ☐ they govern their sprawling organization through strict and severe rules and punishments
- ☐ they require deference from their minions to their strange obsession with a mortal pastime
- ☐ they manipulate their friends, allies, and enemies alike into conflicts that serve their secret designs
- ☐ they have seeded eyes and ears across the city, always alert to any sign of betrayal or profitable opportunity
- ☐ they employ only dedicated and loyal minions who are all too happy to report on your activities
- ☐ they are slow to anger, but their commitment to their wrath is unstoppable once truly provoked

## DEMONIC JOBS

Your dark patron keeps you on Earth for a reason; they could always have decided to drag you to hell. Choose two jobs you regularly do for them from the list below:

*Collecting souls, tracking down rogue demons, delivering threats and messages, cleaning up gruesome messes, guarding someone or something, destroying your patron's enemies, brokering demonic contracts, hiding and securing demonic contraband, operating a demonic establishment, policing your patron's minions*

When you complete a job for your patron, mark Wild. Your patron owes you a Debt for every job completed. You can **cash in a Debt** with your Patron in order to have them:

- ♦ answer a question honestly
- ♦ arrange a meeting with an NPC from Wild
- ♦ grant you a worthy boon or useful gift
- ♦ erase a Debt they hold on you or someone else
- ♦ give you a Debt they have on someone else

Your patron holds 3 Debts on you. They may one day offer you the chance to buy your freedom, but Debts alone won't be enough. At any time, your patron may cash in any Debts you owe them—1 for 1—to inflict corruption on you.

## NOTES ON YOUR DARK PATRON

Your **dark patron**—the demon who now owns your soul—is a terrifying force in the city, likely a Status-3 NPC with a faction all their own. Whatever choices you make when you introduce them helps the MC portray them in the fiction; think carefully about how your choices define what interacting with your dark patron is like and how they treat you.

Similarly, picking the jobs you do regularly for your dark patron has a huge impact on what your work for them looks like during a session. Selecting *collecting souls* and *delivering threats* makes you more of a messenger; choosing *destroying their enemies* and *policing their minions* means you're going to have to break some heads. Ultimately, your dark patron expects you to be more effective than you are loyal—they understand you might be doing other things outside of serving their interests, but they do expect you to get down to business quickly when they give you a job to do.

Your demon patron's interests are not merely a game or a lark, even if they feel odd or bizarre; they are deeply invested in whatever jobs you have been assigned. Each time you finish a job, you mark Wild and claim a Debt on your patron. These Debts can be spent like any other Debt; the list provided merely reminds you what you can get from **cash-ing in a Debt** with an NPC. You can't **cash in a Debt** to escape your servitude, but...you could **cash in a Debt** to ask your dark patron, "What would it take for me to reclaim my soul?"

You can always **let it out** to *summon your dark patron's attention directly on your location*, effectively ensuring whatever is happening around you is made clear to them. Sometimes, this might help you convince your dark patron that someone is or is not a threat, but it's also a way to call for back-up if you think you're in over your head (assuming your dark patron cares about you or the outcome)!

Finally, it is possible for you to switch Circles without changing playbooks, but merely changing Circles doesn't free you from the deal you've made. You might be more invested in protecting mortals (Mortalis) or fighting for territory (Night), but when your dark patron comes calling, you're still on the hook. Changing playbooks, on the other hand, usually means you've found some way out of the deal, enough to transition to a different relationship.



## YOUR DEMON FORM

Since your patron claimed your soul, you have a new look: a demon form. Pick as many as apply from the lists below:

- ♦ **Head:** bone, concave, crown, flames, halo, horns, spikes
- ♦ **Eyes:** absent, animal, empty, glowing, smoky, unblinking
- ♦ **Limbs:** claws, heavy, hoofed, many, severed, twisted
- ♦ **Wings:** blood, feathers, insects, leather, metal, paper, none
- ♦ **Skin:** chitinous, marked, misty, sticky, stretched, translucent

## NOTES ON YOUR DEMON FORM

Your **demon form** may be based upon your **dark patron's** look and aesthetic, but it might also be an expression of your darkened soul, a physical manifestation of the deal you've made. For the most part, you appear as human; you only summon up your demon form when you intentionally activate it using *The Devil Inside* (page 156) and decide which features of your demon form you want to possess at that time. No choice you make on the demon form list restricts your choices when you summon the form; if you choose to have *no wings*, then your mode of *demonic movement* might be a flaming motorcycle; if you choose to have *severed limbs*, you might call forward a flaming whip that radiates from your exposed bone when you use a *demonic weapon*.

No matter how you look when you transform, your demon form does little to conceal your identity and your service. You are still recognizable as yourself, and your form conveys—to those who would understand it—the nature of your fealty.



# MOVES

## TAINTED MOVES

You get this one:

### ☒ THE DEVIL INSIDE

When you assume your demon form, roll with **BLOOD**. On a 10+, pick 3. On a 7-9, pick 2. On a miss, pick 1 and give your patron a Debt...or go without your form.

- +demonic weapon (3-harm hand or 2-harm close)
- +demonic movement (flight, flaming motorcycle, etc.)
- +demonic senses (infrared sight, smell lies, etc.)
- gain armor+1
- heal 2-harm
- take +1 forward

If you're working a job for your patron, pick 1 more. If you mark corruption, pick 1 more.

And choose two more:

### ☐ INVOCATION

You may **cash in a Debt** with someone to appear in their presence; others may **cash in a Debt** with you to have you appear as well. Successfully **refusing to honor the Debt** cancels the invocation completely.

### ☐ TONGUED AND SILVER

When you **figure someone out** by tempting them with power, roll with **HEART** instead of **MIND**.

### ☐ DARK BARGAIN

When you seal a bargain with someone in smoke and blood, roll with **HEART**. On a hit, you infuse the agreement with demonic force. On a 10+, pick 2. On a 7-9, pick 1.

- All parties intuitively know if the deal is being honored.
- All parties take +1 ongoing to **letting it out** while fulfilling the deal.
- Anyone violating the pact instantly suffers 4-harm (ap).

On a miss, the bargain displeases the powers you called upon to sanctify the deal; you must perform an act of contrition before you can invoke their influence again.

### ☐ TOUGH AS NAILS

You get 1-armor; blessed or holy sources ignore this armor completely. Weapons designed to stun or impair you have no effect unless blessed or holy. You don't require medical attention or magical assistance to heal harm you've suffered, and you clear critical harm like it was faint or serious harm—one box every few days.

## MOVES ADVICE

You can assume your **demon form** at will using **The Devil Inside**; the effect happens instantaneously and the benefits end as soon as you release the form. The manner of the weapons, movement, and senses you gain can vary each time you assume your demon form, but they can't shift within a single instance. You can choose to mark the corruption to pick 1 more option immediately after the roll, even on a miss.

**Invocation** expands the use of Debts into the meta-physical realm, allowing you (and those you owe) to call upon them to fuel powerful magic. As with **cashing in** any other Debt, the creditor must make it clear what they did for the debtor—speaking aloud the cause, even if no one is there—and the debtor has the option of **refusing to honor the Debt** and interrupting the ritual. If successful, however, you are physically placed in the new scene, even if you were across the city when the invocation began.

**Tongued and Silver** requires you to tempt someone with the lure of power while you **figure them out**. The offer must be seductive enough to catch their interest—and might also lead to you **persuading** them—but you don't have to follow through on what you promise or even push the issue to see past their facade.

It's up to you how you consecrate your pacts using **Dark Bargain**, but there must be at least some smoke and blood. If you want to *intuitively know if someone is honoring the deal*, you must choose that particular option; if someone *violates the pact and suffers 4-harm (ap)*, you don't automatically know they've violated it unless you've chosen that option as well. Note also that all of these clauses are mutually binding—you're on the hook for them too if you're one of the parties. Unless you call upon some other demonic contract or resource, the move assumes your dark patron is the power you're calling to sanctify the deal; on a miss, you're got to make it right with them before you can call upon the move again.

The 1-armor you receive from **Tough as Nails** doesn't stack with other sources of armor—wearing a bulletproof vest doesn't offer you 2-armor. You still need to rest and tend to your wounds yourself—even if you don't need medical attention or magical assistance—but your most grievous injuries heal so fast you can shrug off a lethal bullet wound in a week. If you want to shrug off even more harm, take **I'm a Fucking Demon** (page 132).



# CORRUPTION

**TRIGGER:** When you convince someone to meaningfully act in your patron's interests, mark corruption.

## ■ JUST BELOW THE SURFACE

Mark corruption to assume your demon form without a roll and gain all the options listed.

## ■ NOT TO BE DENIED

When someone rolls a hit while *refusing to honor a Debt* you've *cached in* on them, you may mark corruption to make their roll a miss instead.

## ■ FROM HELL

Mark corruption to have your patron send a small gang of demons to work on your behalf for a scene (2-harm 2-armor loyal demonic).

## ■ I'M A HUSTLER, BABY

Mark corruption to make an additional city move when time passes; if you use your Circle Status for the move, add +1 to your roll.

Your corruption trigger forces you to mark corruption when you get someone else to go along with your dark patron's operations and schemes, even if you threaten them, hurt them, or otherwise terrorize them. Killing someone—like a rogue demon—doesn't mean they acted in your patron's interests, but you mark corruption every time you somehow manipulate, force, or cajole another character into a meaningful action that suits your dark patron's desires. The MC is the ultimate arbiter of what counts as a meaningful action in line with your patron's interests, but this choice is always conscious to you as a character—you can't accidentally convince someone.

You cannot use *Not to be Denied* if the person refusing didn't make a roll, i.e. a PC using another corruption move to take a 10+. Remember, NPCs can't *refuse to honor Debts*.

The demons your patron sends you via *From Hell* only last for the scene; you need to mark another corruption if you want them to follow you into a subsequent scene. They cannot act independently, and require constant supervision. If you want a regular group of demons to work for you (and handle independent tasks), take *Fiendish Underlings*!

You can decide to trigger *I'm a Hustler, Baby* before or after you've rolled your other city moves; you only get the +1 for the additional city move you make.

## INTIMACY

When you share a moment of intimacy—physical or emotional—with another person, they give you a Debt they hold on someone else.

You don't have to do or say anything in the fiction to compel the other character to offer you a Debt; a moment of intimacy with you is so compelling that they feel obligated to give you something. That said, you don't get to choose which Debt they offer—you just have to live with whichever one they pick. When you *cash in* such a Debt, just reference whatever the original owner did to earn it.

## END MOVE

When you die, cash in all the Debts your patron owes you to come back, healing all harm. If you have none, your patron asks someone else to pay the Debt for you. If they refuse, time's up.

Whether it's one Debt or a dozen, the cost is the same: everything your patron owes you gets used up bringing you back. If you hold no Debts on your patron when you die, they approach someone else—likely a loved one—to pay your bill. Whatever deal they strike is not yours to determine. Your patron can select anyone, not limited to the people directly present for your demise.

## ADVANCES

*Fiendish Underlings* gives you a small gang of demons (2-harm 2-armor savage demonic) and:

When you order your fiendish underlings to solve a problem, roll with **WILD**. On a 10+, they follow your instructions precisely and no one can trace them back to you. On a 7-9, either things get messy or you're clearly to blame, your choice. On a miss, they do exactly as they are told and it leads to disaster.

*Erasing a job* means you're done with that task—your dark patron can no longer demand it of you. Tell the MC how you altered your contract to avoid such work.



# NIGHT THE VAMP

*Seductive, merciless, eternal, starving. The Vamp is a parasite that must feed on humanity to survive. The only thing greater than their hunger...is their ambition.*

*Play the Vamp if you want to climb your way up from the gutter, relying only on those poor unfortunate souls who find their way into your web.*





## A HUNGER LIKE NO OTHER

For many mortals, the allure of eternal life—even an eternal *unlife*—is the promise of infinite time, infinite wealth, infinite grace. They imagine themselves sitting in a gorgeous library or a sleek boardroom, their sharp fangs mere set dressing for the inherent elegance of their unending vampiric existence. Mortal stories are obsessed with vampires because most mortals believe a vampiric version of their life would be better in every possible way.

You know the truth. You know *the hunger*.

You can still remember the first few days after you were turned, the hunger gnawing at you for the first time—an ache that could not be alleviated save through indulgence. It has never gotten better. Your appetite distracts you, thwarts you, controls you. Since you became a vampire, you have never had a day without it, even when you’ve just recently fed.

What do you make of this unlife of yours? You might have infinite time—if you’re careful and lucky—but the hunger lurks in the shadows of every minute, every waking thought. And with the craving comes a terrible truth: you’re a parasite, a hustler drinking up the lifeblood of the city in whatever form you’re doomed to consume. You may live miles above the city’s streets, but eventually every vampire ends up in the gutter looking for a fix.

To be fair, your curse isn’t without gifts. You’re fast, and you’re strong; you are hard to kill, and you kill with ease. There might be a place for you in the city, if you can make yourself useful and keep your worst impulses in check. You might even find a home, amassing enough power and influence to weather the aching drumbeat of your dark needs and forge a future for yourself.

So you draw people toward you, filling your web with enough flies to never go hungry again. You know your hunger is a pit inside you that can never be filled...but perhaps it can be mastered. Perhaps you can scheme and plot and sacrifice and gamble your way into a place where you’d never go hungry again...

## DEMEANOR OPTIONS

antiquated, feral, seductive, volatile

## STARTING CHARACTER STATS

Blood 1, Heart 1, Mind 0, Spirit -1

## STARTING CIRCLE RATINGS

Mortalis 1, Night 1, Power -1, Wild 0

## STARTING CIRCLE STATUS

Mortalis 0, Night 1, Power 0, Wild 0

## INTRO QUESTIONS

- ◆ When did you become a vampire?
- ◆ How long have you been in the city?
- ◆ How do you keep your cravings in check?
- ◆ How did you acquire your haven?
- ◆ What deal are you invested in right now?

## STARTING GEAR

A secluded apartment, a comfortable car, a smartphone. One stylish weapon of choice:

- ◆ Dual Colt Double Eagles (3-harm near loud)
- ◆ Sword (3-harm close messy)
- ◆ Walther PPK (2-harm close/near reload concealable)

## STARTING DEBTS

- ◆ Someone makes sure you get fed regularly, without attracting too much attention. You owe them 2 Debts.
- ◆ Someone relies on you for their fix. Ask them what you provide that keeps them sane. They owe you a Debt; add them to your web.
- ◆ Someone recently sold you out to one of your enemies. You avoided the worst of the attacks, but your betrayer owes you a Debt; add them to your web.

## LET IT OUT ABILITIES

- ◆ create an opportunity to **escape**, ignoring all mortal bindings
- ◆ perform a fantastic feat of vampiric strength or agility
- ◆ extend your vampiric senses for a short period of time
- ◆ display your dominance; low-Status NPCs flee, PCs must **keep their cool**

# FEATURES

## YOUR HARBOR

You have a safe place—a **haven**—secure from outside dangers, located within a larger **harbor**. Your haven is a reinforced bolthole with emergency rations and an escape vector; when someone willingly enters your haven, add them to your web.

Your harbor is a public-facing staple of the community (choose one):

- ☐ a flashy nightclub
- ☐ an outdated library
- ☐ a restored theater
- ☐ a historic hotel
- ☐ an oversized restaurant
- ☐ a public transport station
- ☐ a religious hospital
- ☐ an open-air market

### Choose 2 advantages:

- ☐ your harbor is popular with ordinary mortals, giving you easy access to unsuspecting prey
- ☐ your harbor hosts a way to quickly dispose of bodies, attracting little to no suspicion
- ☐ your harbor is directly controlled by an allied Status-3 NPC from Night, granting you some limited protections
- ☐ your harbor allows you a space to entertain and entrance admirers, bringing in a steady stream of gifts and favors
- ☐ your harbor is staffed by ghouls loyal to you, bringing you news of anything they hear or see

### Choose 2 dangers:

- ☐ your harbor lies within the territory of a Status-3 vampire lord; they often demand tribute and Debts
- ☐ your harbor is home to a number of ghostly entities; they range from mildly annoying to deeply dangerous
- ☐ your harbor has attracted the attention of a dedicated group of mortal hunters; they may soon make their move
- ☐ your harbor is constantly busy, day and night; those who frequent it make strict security impossible
- ☐ your harbor is closely tied to several mortals you care for; they have been thrust into the supernatural world by your unlife

## NOTES ON YOUR HARBOR

Your **harbor** is a stomping ground, a combination hunting ground and home turf in which you have found a stable existence...despite your hunger. Your haven, which lies inside that harbor, is especially safe—you can lock people out, escape when you like, and stay there for a considerable time. Anyone you welcome into it owes you a Debt, a sign of the vulnerability you're displaying by allowing them in.

Whatever harbor you select, you have established a concrete and consistent reason for your constant presence. If you choose *a religious hospital*, perhaps you've secured a job as a night janitor or even a doctor; if you choose *an outdated library*, perhaps the staff just see you as an innocuous regular. You don't outright own or control your harbor, but your ordinary comings and goings attract little to no attention.

The advantages and dangers you select fictionally position the night-to-night life you've come to know since moving into the harbor. Do you have easy access to prey? A way to dispose of bodies? A Status-3 vampire lord who demands tribute and Debts? Whatever you choose helps you and your group get on the same page about your harbor, as well as defining what resources you can call upon in story and what threats appear consistently on the horizon. Your relationship with these facets of your harbor can change over time, but advantages don't regularly become problems and dangers don't often provide you with aid.

Some options include Status-3 NPCs, ghosts, hunters, and other characters. If you select one of these choices, work with your MC to figure out exactly who (or what) has been added to the story, along with any additional characters who regularly interact with your harbor. One advantage includes ghouls—typically some sort of mortal servant, either hypnotized or addicted to your blood, but you and your MC decide how they appear in the fiction. So long as they appear human and serve you, they count as ghouls.

Note that your harbor must be inside your starting City Hub (page 53). If your group begins play in the Art District, then the bus depot (*a public transport station*) you've secured as a harbor is within the Art District. As the city grows in your group's collective understanding, you might introduce additional City Hubs with new arenas of conflict, but you need to ensure that your harbor is located close enough to the other PCs that both you and they have reasons to regularly visit it during the course of the story.



## YOUR WEB

When someone comes to you to ask for a favor, seek advice, bargain for info, or threaten your interests, they enter your web and owe you a Debt...even if you don't offer them anything in return. People leave your web only when they no longer owe you a Debt.

When someone is in your web, you gain the following:

- ♦ Take +1 ongoing to *lend them a hand* or *get in their way*
- ♦ Add the following option whenever you *figure them out*: "what is your character's true hunger?"
- ♦ Invoke a Debt (before rolling) when *persuading* them to advance *persuade* for the roll in addition to adding +3 to your total

When time passes—or at the start of the game—choose someone in your web and learn a secret about them that they'd rather keep buried. Mark corruption to ask a follow-up question about the answer; their player must answer you honestly.

## NOTES ON YOUR WEB

No matter how kind or generous you might imagine yourself to be, your parasitic nature always shines through. Nowhere is that more apparent than in your **web**, a feature that represents your ability to get your hooks into people, forcing them to owe you Debts for innocuous behavior and exposing their secrets when you go digging.

The primary way characters enter your web is simple: they come to you and ask for a favor, advice, or information...or to threaten you. Either way, their interest in you sparks your interest in them! And as a master manipulator, you spin that mutual interest into both an immediate Debt and a long-term parasitic relationship. They came to you, right? They owe you for that imposition on your extremely busy unlife! You can cash in this Debt like any other—"Remember that time you came and threatened me?!"—even if no other character would possibly be able to claim a Debt from someone for the same action.

If someone ends up owing you a Debt as a result of an action that also causes them to enter your web, then you claim two Debts. For example, if someone comes to you looking for information, they automatically owe you one Debt and enter your web, even if you tell them nothing; if you choose to give them valuable info without immediate recompense, they owe you a second Debt for the info itself.

The first benefit you gain from having someone in your web only applies to PCs—you can't *lend a hand* or *get in the way* of an NPC—and the third benefit only applies to NPCs—you can't *persuade* PCs. You can *figure out* both PCs and NPCs, so you can determine the "true hunger" of any character in your web, and you can learn a secret about any character—PC or NPC—in your web when time passes. No one is safe from your prying eyes, once you've got your hooks in them.

Leaving your web is harder than it might initially appear—whichever is trying to escape your influence can only leave your web when they no longer owe you any Debts at all. Even if they owe you just a single Debt, they are still on the hook. Of course, you can also take *Pull Them Back In* (page 163) to ensure they never get all the way away from you...



# MOVES

## VAMP MOVES

You get this one:

### ☒ ETERNAL HUNGER

You hunger for human blood, flesh, or emotions; pick one. When you feed on someone, roll with **BLOOD**. On a 10+, all 3. On a 7-9, choose 2:

- You heal 1-harm or take +1 forward
- You learn a secret about your prey
- Your prey doesn't suffer 3-harm (ap)

On a miss, your hunger gets the best of you, and everyone suffers.

And choose two more:

### ☐ ALWAYS WELCOME

When you attempt to worm your way into a restricted location by manipulating an underling or guard, roll with your Status in their Circle. On a hit, they open the way for you, despite their misgivings. On a 10+, they promise to try to keep your name out of any trouble that arises as a result. On a miss, they stand strong...but inadvertently give you an opening to gain the access you seek through violence.

### ☐ COLD-BLOODED

When you *keep your cool* by flouting mortal social conventions and expectations, roll with **BLOOD** instead of **SPIRIT**.

### ☐ KEEP YOUR FRIENDS CLOSE

When you *figure someone out* by helping them indulge a true hunger, take a 10+ instead of rolling. If they are in your Circle, take +1 ongoing to act on the answers to your questions until time passes.

### ☐ TERRIFYING

Take +1 **BLOOD** (max+3).

### ☐ IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

When you *hit the streets* with someone who owes you a Debt, you can invoke a Debt before rolling to add +3 to your roll. If you get a hit, you also catch them in the middle of a compromising or vulnerable situation; take +1 ongoing against them for the scene.

## MOVES ADVICE

Make your choice for *Eternal Hunger* when you make your character; once things are underway, you hunger for *that thing* in particular. If you choose to *take +1 forward*, it applies to your next basic or playbook move—not to Circle moves, Debt moves, or city moves. You may try to avoid triggering *Eternal Hunger*, but the MC will tell you when your hunger becomes unbearable. Ignoring your urgent needs gives the MC a golden opportunity to make a move—as hard as they like—based on your vampirism.

If you roll a miss while trying to worm your way in with *Always Welcome*, the opening you gain is more of an opportunity than an invitation. The MC will tell you exactly what it costs to seize it, but it usually involves *turning to violence*. You don't need any leverage to trigger the move—if you are using leverage or invoking a Debt, you are trying to *persuade* them to let you into the location instead.

*Flouting mortal social conventions and expectations* with *Cold-Blooded* means behaving in a way mortals find off-putting or upsetting in order to avoid a messy situation. For example, you might stick a knife into your unliving flesh to avoid a fight with some gangbangers—intimidating them into backing down—or start hissing at people in a crowded store to avoid witnesses sticking around while you're feeding. Anytime your behavior is downright odd and inhuman, you can trigger the move! That said, flouting convention while getting out of the way of a truck barreling toward you is hard to do—you might have to push a stroller out into traffic (or something equally extreme).

You can always ask about the true hungers of anyone in your *web* (page 161) to help you trigger *Keep Your Friends Close*, but sometimes people just tell you what they desire. Either way, you have to help them indulge—giving them the thing itself or directly making it possible for them to get it—to trigger the move.

If you take *In the Neighborhood*, you can invoke Debts with your debtors to force them to make time to see you, adding a +3 to your *hit the streets* rolls (max+4). You don't have to talk to your debtor directly to invoke the Debt—a text message, voice mail, or other communication is sufficient—and the Debt isn't resolved unless you actually get to see them face-to-face; if you roll a miss and something waylays you or them, the Debt comes back to you.



# CORRUPTION

**TRIGGER:** When you feed on an unwilling victim, mark corruption.

## ■ TRUE HUNTER

Mark corruption when pursuing a vulnerable NPC at night. Your prey cannot escape you, no matter where they attempt to flee, and you can prey on them or kill them at will.

## ■ PULL THEM BACK IN

When you cash in your last Debt on someone in your web, mark corruption to keep the Debt and keep them in your web.

## ■ BLOOD MAGIC

Choose two faerie powers; mark corruption to use one without additional costs. You may take this corruption advance a second time to gain the remaining faerie powers.

## ■ FAKE NEWS

When you *weaken someone's standing* via false rumors, mark corruption to roll with **HEART** instead of Status. On a miss, mark corruption to have the trail lead back to an ally, not you.

Your corruption trigger forces you to mark corruption whenever you feed on someone who doesn't want you to feed on them. People who are coerced by threats and blackmail are still considered unwilling, but if you get someone to agree to a trade—Debts for blood or flesh—then you don't mark corruption.

For the purposes of **True Hunter**, a vulnerable NPC is someone unable to fight you off alone. Most vampire hunters—isolated from their allies—fall into that category, but you have to catch a wizard or a werewolf quite unprepared to use this move against them.

When you use **Pull Them Back In**, tell the player whose Debt you are keeping how you manage to bamboozle them into accepting that they still owe you. They may know it's bullshit, but your web is a mighty sticky thing...

The powers you gain from **Blood Magic** are from the Fae's playbook (page 118); you don't also gain **Faerie Magic**, but instead mark corruption to activate the powers. If you want additional corruption-based magical powers, check out **Student of the Arts** (page 151) or **Back At It** (page 169).

You must use a rumor you know to be false to trigger **Fake News**; your target is too likely prepared to address someone spreading rumors which are partially true. On a miss, you can name a PC as the ally in question.

## INTIMACY

When you share a moment of intimacy—physical or emotional—with another person, tell them a secret about yourself or owe them a Debt. Either way, they enter your web and owe you a Debt.

Whatever secret you share—if that's the option you choose—must be significant, personally or politically; in other words, it must be something you don't want others to know about you. If the other character is already in your **web**, they still owe you a new Debt: a mark of their gratitude for the time you dropped your guard and let them in.

## END MOVE

When you die, name the person you hold most responsible; your agents and allies relentlessly pursue them until "justice" is served.

You are free to name anyone—PC or NPC—as most responsible; the MC portrays your people working to ensure they suffer. Depending on the circumstance, such a resolution may only be found in bloody vengeance—if you were murdered in cold blood perhaps—but...true blood feuds are expensive. Your agents and allies will never forget you, but they may settle for a lesser "justice" in which everyone saves face.

## ADVANCES

If you *change to a new playbook*, you can leave **Eternal Hunger** behind! A Vamp who becomes the Hunter or the Tainted may find their new allies have an alternative to messy feeding; a Vamp who becomes the Spectre or the Sworn may find their cravings metaphysically eliminated. That said, you might still be a vampire, even if you no longer hunger.

If you *retire to safety*, you choose if you're cured of your hunger or merely find a way to keep it in check. Either way, you're safe from the city's streets...and from your own worst self.



# MORTALIS *THE* VETERAN

*Skilled, savvy, clever, wise. The Veteran is a has-been who used to be someone important. Once lurking on the fringes of city politics, they are about to be drawn back into the game, for better or worse.*

*Play the Veteran if you want to walk the path to greatness in the city a second time, now armed with age, experience, and connections...*





## YEAH, I GUESS I'M BACK

There was a time when your name had real weight in this city. Someone could drop it in casual conversation and the people they were talking to would know they were talking to someone who mattered...because you mattered. Your enemies feared you, your friends trusted you, and no one ever doubted your influence and status.

That was a long time ago.

Now you're old, broken, or both. Whatever you once were to the city isn't who you are any longer, and it's been ages since anyone has shuddered at the thought of catching your attention. The city never stops churning, and such roiling urban tempests tend to forget the past before it's even the past. You haven't sat on the sidelines completely, but you're more a mentor or coach than an active participant in city politics, the kind of person no one can believe used to speak loudly or carry a big stick.

*Until now.* You've been drawn back into things—maybe by an old friend or a new protégé—and you're breaking all the rules you set for yourself when you retired. You're walking straight into danger, demanding answers from dangerous people, and reminding everyone that you used to be someone.

And it feels *amazing*. You might not ever reclaim your old position or status, but age and experience are tools you didn't have the first time around. You can taste your old glory just ahead of you, just a little further down this path, and you know that there's a version of you ready to seize what you once were and take it even further.

Of course, things aren't that simple. Your old enemies were only willing to let things rest because you weren't around anymore; your old Debts never got called in because no one wanted to involve you in this bullshit. Now that you're back, all of those old conflicts and alliances are eager to get back to wherever they were when you first retired. Are you going to figure out the new you before the problems of the old you eat you alive?

## DEMEANOR OPTIONS

charming, crass, professional, reserved

## STARTING CHARACTER STATS

Blood -1, Heart 1, Mind 1, Spirit 0

## STARTING CIRCLE RATINGS

Mortalis 1, Night 0, Power 0, Wild 0

## STARTING CIRCLE STATUS

Mortalis 1, Night 0, Power 0, Wild 0

## INTRO QUESTIONS

- ◆ What were you once known for in the city?
- ◆ How long have you lived here?
- ◆ What was your greatest accomplishment?
- ◆ Why did you step back from who you were?
- ◆ What do you desperately need?

## STARTING GEAR

An apartment or warehouse hideout, a practical car or old pick-up truck, a smartphone, a workshop (detail). One trusty weapon of choice:

- ◆ 9mm Beretta (2-harm near loud concealable)
- ◆ Pump-action shotgun (3-harm near/close loud reload messy)
- ◆ Magnum revolver (3-harm near loud reload)

## STARTING DEBTS

- ◆ Someone relies on you for training or knowledge. Ask them why they need your help; tell the MC what you've provided and ask how many Debts (1-3) you're owed.
- ◆ You're working on something big for someone, and it's nearly ready. They owe you a Debt.
- ◆ Someone keeps pulling your ass out of the fire when you forget you're retired. You owe them a Debt.

## LET IT OUT ABILITIES

- ◆ blindside an unsuspecting target with a terrible or knockout blow
- ◆ barricade or secure a place using minimal supplies
- ◆ frighten or intimidate someone with a reminder of the person you used to be
- ◆ reveal the ways an old ally or enemy is shaping a current conflict

# FEATURES

## YOUR WORKSHOP

You have a workshop that includes a large space for your tools and/or supplies. When you go into your workshop to work on something, the MC tells you, “Sure, no problem, but...” and then 1 to 4 of the following.

- ◆ It’s going to take you hours/days/weeks/months of work or recovery time
- ◆ First you’ll have to summon/build/construct \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ You’ll require the services of \_\_\_\_\_ to complete it
- ◆ You require a rare and expensive ingredient or material
- ◆ It will only work for a short time, and may be unreliable
- ◆ It’s going to mean exposing anyone nearby to serious fallout
- ◆ Your workshop lacks \_\_\_\_\_; add this and you’ll be able to complete it
- ◆ It will require a part of yourself to complete
- ◆ You must journey to \_\_\_\_\_ in order to complete it

The MC can combine any set of requirements or offer two sets of costs to the same task. Once the requirements are completed, the work is completed. The MC will stat it up, reveal some info, or whatever is called for now that you’ve finished.

Items created in your workshop are safe from the MC. They can’t be destroyed or taken without your permission, even if you sell or give them away to another character. When you create something specifically for another character, mark their Circle when the project is complete.

Choose and underline 3 resources that your workshop includes:

*automotive hoist and tools, a darkroom, a regulated growing environment, two or three skilled assistants, a junkyard of raw materials, machining tools, transmitters and receivers, a testing ground, deadly booby traps, a library of old books, a scattering of ancient relics, a mystical focus, magical wards, a medical station, an operating room, high-tech electronics and computers, an advanced surveillance system, a forge, a science lab, a portal to another dimension*

## NOTES ON YOUR WORKSHOP

There is no better way to bring your vast experience to bear on a problem than to take it into your **workshop**. Within the walls of your workshop, anything is possible—even projects that defy physics or make broken things whole. While the focus of your workshop might be more mundane than the Wizard’s **sanctum** (page 172), you can work most miracles just the same, your years of experience allowing you to do the impossible.

There’s no limit to what you can try to accomplish in your workshop, but the project is a conversation between you and the MC; you say what you want to do, and the MC tells you what you need to do to get it done. Building a bomb? Fairly easy given your skill level, assuming you have the right tools on hand. Creating a cold iron sword imbued with demonic fire? Possible...but the MC will almost certainly have a number of requirements you have to fulfill to finish the project!

Of course, some of the requirements the MC imposes on your work may be quite difficult to fulfill, especially when you want to accomplish something truly difficult or openly magical: you may need to turn to your PC and NPC allies, **cash in Debts**, or even make use of city moves—**putting out the word** (page 98) or **marshaling forces** (page 101)—in order to complete a project. It’s an obvious move for the MC to say “You’ll require the services of a wizard/demon/faerie” if you are trying to do something beyond your metaphysical capabilities.

That said, when you do finish a project that creates an item—whether it be a weapon, a tool, or even a vehicle—that item is safe from the MC. It can be damaged or temporarily misplaced, but it cannot be destroyed or lost unless you give your permission. This warranty extends past your own ownership of the thing; any item you give to another character, PC or NPC, enjoys the same protection.

For that reason, the items you create are especially potent; giving one to a character almost always means you’re **doing them a favor**, and you can use moves like **True Artist** (page 168) to leverage a public gift into an improved reputation. Be thoughtful about giving such gifts, however; you don’t get to control how they use whatever you’ve given them. A faerie king can use the potent weapon you’ve bestowed upon him to murder your friend, even if you never intended him to make such use of the armament.



Your workshop's resources fictionally position the assets you can use to help solve a problem. If you have *machining tools*, for example, then you can usually construct weapons or other mechanical devices that require precision-made parts; if you have an *operating room*, then patching someone up after they've been shot isn't too much of a challenge. In fact, sometimes simply having a resource is enough! The MC isn't obligated to impose additional requirements if what you're doing is easily within your capacities and resources. Work with the MC when you initially select your resources to understand what they make possible, especially if the resource itself has vague or uncertain applications, like a *mystical focus* or a *darkroom*.

One resource you can take—*two or three skilled assistants*—adds new NPCs to the fiction. If you choose this option, give them names and personalities! While they are loyal to you, perhaps even willing to fight for you if things go sideways, they aren't faceless automatons who shut themselves down when you aren't in your workshop. Like any other NPC, the MC portrays them as a full person, so give them something to go on, even if it's as simple as "Edgar wants to learn more about the supernatural" or "Jania and I used to be married." Each detail you add to them makes them more alive, and gives you (and the MC) a better idea of what they can accomplish while working for you in your workshop.



# MOVES

## VETERAN MOVES

You get this one:

### ☒ OLD FRIENDS, OLD FAVORS

When you first encounter an NPC, you may declare them an old friend instead of *putting a name to a face* and roll with **MIND**. On a hit, they offer you aid, even if it exposes them to danger. On a 7-9, tell the MC why you owe them a Debt. On a miss, tell the MC why they probably bear an old grudge against you for wronging them in the past.

And choose two more:

### ☐ TRUE ARTIST

When you publicly present a valuable or rare gift you've created to a Status-2+ NPC, they must openly refuse or accept your offering. If they refuse, they owe you a Debt; if they accept, take +1 ongoing to *consulting your contacts*, *recruiting allies*, and *refusing to honor Debts* from their Circle until after time passes.

### ☐ INVESTED

When someone owes you 2 or more Debts and you *lend them a hand or get in their way*, roll with **MIND** instead of Circle.

### ☐ TOO OLD FOR THIS SHIT!

When you get caught up in a fight you tried to prevent, you get armor+1 and take +1 ongoing to seeing yourself and others to safety.

### ☐ THE BEST LAID PLANS

When you work out a plan with someone, roll with **MIND**. On a 10+, hold 3. On a 7-9, hold 2. You can spend your hold—1 for 1—regardless of distance, while the plan is underway to:

- Add +1 to someone's roll (after rolling)
- Dismiss all harm someone suffers from a single attack
- Ensure your people have the exact gear they need on hand

On a miss, hold 1, but your plan encounters some disastrous opposition right from the start.

### ☐ GUN TO A KNIFE FIGHT

When you *turn to violence* against someone by seriously escalating the conflict, roll with **MIND** instead of **BLOOD**

## MOVES ADVICE

*Old Friends, Old Favors* still counts as a Circle move for the purposes of advancement; mark the Circle of your target as if you *put a name to a face*. Their assistance on a hit may be obvious, but even old friends you run into at a party can offer you a useful warning about your old enemies or important gossip about your new allies. Either way, any help they offer you is freely given; you don't owe them a Debt. Someone who bears an old grudge against you doesn't necessarily want you dead, but they may be willing to back stab or undercut you if you let them get close.

You must give the valuable or rare gift in a public setting to trigger *True Artist*; a Status-2+ NPC can refuse your offerings in private without any serious social costs. But if you do present something worthwhile in front of several other members of their Circle, then the move ensures you either get a Debt—"Do you remember that time I brought you that wonderful gift and you turned it down?"—or the respect of the rest of their Circle. Remember that your *workshop* (page 166) is the perfect place to make rare and valuable gifts!

*Too Old For This Shit!* grants you additional armor on top of whatever armor you're already wearing, and a +1 ongoing to any move you make that takes you (and those you're trying to protect) closer to safety, including *turn to violence*, *escape a situation*, or even *let it out*. These bonuses end as soon as the scene ends or you reach a safe position.

*The Best Laid Plans* allows you to skip the tedious process of trying to plan for anything the MC might throw at you; as long as the broad structure of the plan is in place, you're good to go! When you spend your hold, tell the MC how you foresaw this challenge and planned for this particular contingency while laying out your strategy.

Escalating a conflict with *Gun to a Knife Fight* means you took a physical or social conflict up a notch—attacking someone with a knife or gun when they are trying to intimidate you or triggering an explosive against a group of thugs with guns. If your opposition could reasonably expect the level of force you're bringing to the conflict, the move doesn't trigger.



# CORRUPTION

**TRIGGER:** When you knowingly head straight into danger, mark corruption.

## ■ BACK AT IT

Take two abilities from another playbook. When you *let it out* to use these abilities, you cannot choose to avoid corruption on a 10+.

## ■ PACK RAT

You may mark corruption to reach into your kit and find just the gear you need to deal with your current situation.

## ■ CATCH YOU FUCKERS AT A BAD TIME?

Mark corruption to arrive in a scene. Mark an additional corruption to bring someone willing with you.

## ■ DARK EXPERIMENTS

When you work over someone (alive or dead) in your **workshop**, mark corruption to ask up to two questions about their weaknesses or secrets. They must answer honestly.

Your corruption trigger forces you to mark corruption when you take another step out of retirement and back into the city's messy politics. You're obviously heading into danger when you knowingly go into a fight, but you also have to mark corruption whenever you know there's a reasonable chance you could be seriously hurt or injured as the result of your actions—sneaking into a hostile vampire's nest, facing down a group of angry demons at a bar, etc.

The two abilities you gain with **Back At It** can be from any **URBAN SHADOWS** playbook, but both must come from the same one. Work with the MC to explain how you've recovered—or newly developed—such magical abilities or physical prowess.

You can use **Pack Rat** to find any piece of gear you need, but it has to be compact enough to fit into whatever storage you've got with you—a bag, your truck, etc. The item can be magical or highly advanced, but it's got to be something you'd leave in a bag somewhere and not have locked up, i.e. a backup gun, a one-time use magical item, etc.

**Dark Experiments** requires you to get your hands dirty. Working over someone alive usually means torture; working over someone dead usually means dissection. You can continue to mark corruption to ask additional questions.

## INTIMACY

When you share a moment of intimacy—physical or emotional—with another person, tell them a story about your time in the city and offer some advice. If they accept your counsel, hold 1. Spend the hold to give them a 10+ (instead of rolling) on a move they make while following your guidance. If they reject your wisdom, mark corruption.

The other character gets to decide how they evaluate your advice, but you decide when to spend the hold that gives them the 10+ without a roll—it can be any basic move, Debt move, or city move that seems appropriate to you.

## END MOVE

When you die or retire your character, choose a character to inherit your workshop.

When your story comes to an end—through death or a more permanent retirement—pass your **workshop** on to another character. If you choose a PC, they inherit the entire feature, including the usual protection any item they make in the workshop has from the MC, i.e. the items they create cannot be destroyed or taken without their permission. If you give it to an NPC, the MC will represent them as a resource the other PCs can call on by *hitting the streets* or *cashing in Debts*.

## ADVANCES

You can *obtain Status-2 in Mortalis* right away; this opens up new city moves (page 96) to you during the faction turn.

*Adding two resources to your workshop* allows you to select additional resources for your feature, new advantages which are fictionally true—*adding two or three skilled assistants* adds a few friendly NPCs to your story—and helpful when you're navigating requirements the MC puts on your work.

*Retiring to safety* means you enter a second, more serious retirement: moving out to the suburbs with your kids, traveling to Europe, etc. Staying in the city means you're going to get pulled right back in...



# POINER *THE* WIZARD

*Potent, eminent, hermetic, lonely. The Wizard is a mage of the highest order, capable of reshaping reality...yet often oblivious to the city's true face.*

*Play the Wizard if you want to deal with other people's problems, a hammer in search of the right nail.*





## AN ENDLESS AMBITION

In a world of cursed monsters and alien creatures, each wizard stands alone—after all, you *earned* your magic. Maybe you wrestled your own essence into alignment through intense study, practicing subtle movements until your muscles screamed in protest; maybe you stole your powers from a dead god, tricking a failing deity into granting you the ability to shift reality with little more than raw will. But no matter how you acquired your gifts, you know this: no one *gave them to you*. You *took* them for yourself.

It was your ambition that earned this prize, your drive to *do* more, *see* more, *be* more that pushed you past your own limits to a new kind of consciousness. Now—on the other side of that abyss of failure and self-doubt—you wield power beyond imagination. And as a bearer of such sovereignty, you have been welcomed into an extremely exclusive section of supernatural society, one that only extends itself to those sorcerers who have shown themselves capable of greatness—mages like you.

You realize now that you must live with what you’ve made of yourself. Around your kind, eternally complicated wizarding politics threaten to drown you in a sea of duplicitous dangers; around everyone else, there is no end to the requests that you intervene with some problem that “only a wizard can solve.” You are caught in an impossible trap, further isolated and alone the more power you wield but needing more than ever to stay connected to the rest of the city.

Your fellow wizards—smug and superior in their assessment of their own abilities—don’t think much of the rest of the city. Their distance from the bloody gutters and sharp claws often causes them to forget the trials and tribulations of everyone else. It is common among wizards to view the problems of ordinary folks, even vampires and werewolves, as a distraction from the real issues at hand. Better to forget about such problems and focus on what *really* matters—power, and how to get it.

But you haven’t forgotten. You’ve seen tragedy and heartbreak; you’ve known loss. And you know that if you turn your back on the vulnerable and the needy, the same ambition that drove you to master yourself will become a dark urge indeed...

## DEMEANOR OPTIONS

beleaguered, detached, disheveled, ominous

## STARTING CHARACTER STATS

Blood 0, Heart -1, Mind 1, Spirit 1

## STARTING CIRCLE RATINGS

Mortalis 0, Night -1, Power 1, Wild 1

## STARTING CIRCLE STATUS

Mortalis 0, Night 0, Power 1, Wild 0

## INTRO QUESTIONS

- ◆ How did you learn to wield magic?
- ◆ How long have you been in the city?
- ◆ What mistake keeps you up at night?
- ◆ What have you sacrificed for your power?
- ◆ What conflict are you trying to mediate?

## STARTING GEAR

A nice apartment or simple house, a crappy car, a decent smartphone and a sanctum (detail).

One useful weapon of choice:

- ◆ Snubnosed revolver (2-harm close/near loud reload concealable)
- ◆ 9mm Glock (2-harm near loud concealable)
- ◆ Sword (3-harm close messy)

## STARTING DEBTS

- ◆ Someone tempted your ward away from you and into danger. Ask them what it cost your ward to return to you. They owe you a Debt.
- ◆ Someone is your go-to when you get into trouble, providing information or muscle to get things done. You owe them 2 Debts.
- ◆ You are helping someone keep a dangerous secret from powerful members of their Circle. They owe you a Debt.

## LET IT OUT ABILITIES

- ◆ deflect or redirect an oncoming blow before it strikes
- ◆ perform a feat of telekinetic strength or precision
- ◆ detect the presence and function of magical items or spells
- ◆ reshape the essence or nature of an exposed object or magical spell

# FEATURES

## YOUR SANCTUM

Choose and underline 4 resources of your sanctum:

*an extremely knowledgeable assistant, a testing ground, magical booby traps, a library of old tomes, a scattering of ancient relics, a mystical prison, magical wards, a portal to another dimension, a focus circle, an apothecary*

Choose and underline 2 downsides of your Sanctum:

*it's cursed by a previous owner, it attracts otherworldly attention, it contains many volatile substances, its location is known by many, it always lacks a key piece or ingredient, it's tough for you to access, it contains secrets unfamiliar even to you*

When you go into your sanctum to work on something, the MC will tell you, "Sure, no problem, but..." and then 1 to 4 of the following:

- ◆ It's going to take you hours/days/weeks/months of work or recovery time
- ◆ First you'll have to summon/build/construct \_\_\_\_\_
- ◆ You'll require the services of \_\_\_\_\_ to complete it
- ◆ You require a rare and expensive ingredient or material
- ◆ It will only work for a short time, and may be unreliable
- ◆ It's going to mean exposing anyone nearby to serious fallout
- ◆ Your sanctum lacks \_\_\_\_\_; add this and you'll be able to complete it
- ◆ It will require a part of yourself or comparable sacrifice to complete
- ◆ You must journey to \_\_\_\_\_ in order to complete it

The MC can combine any set of requirements or offer two sets of costs to the same task. Once the requirements are completed, the work is completed. The MC will stat it up, reveal some info, or whatever is called for now that you've finished.

### SANCTUM SANCTORUM

When you go to your sanctum for a spell ingredient, relic, or tome, roll with **SPiRiT**. On a 10+, you've got pretty much just the thing. On a 7-9, you've got something close, but it's flawed or lacking in some significant way. On a miss, you don't have what you're looking for, but you know someone from another Circle who probably has it in stock.

## NOTES ON YOUR SANCTUM

Your **sanctum** is one of three systems you can invoke to perform magic, alongside your **let it out** abilities (page 83) and your spells (page 174). Your abilities allow you to enact your will in a broad range of situations with little to no planning, risking both complications and corruption; your spells are rites you've mastered, consistent magical skills which require you to **Channel** before you can use them; and your sanctum is the home of your magical experiments and rituals, capable of enacting enormous changes or constructing new magical artifacts...if you have the time and resources to finish your work.

Given the kind of power you're capable of wielding as the Wizard, there are few limits to what you can accomplish in your sanctum. Powerful magical items or weapons? Scrying into the city's darkest secrets? Cracking open the doors between dimensions? Yes, yes, and yes. Anything and everything you can dream up can be accomplished, assuming you're able to meet the requirements the MC sets when you go into your sanctum to work on the project.

Some of the requirements may be difficult to fulfill, especially when you want to accomplish something grand: you may need to turn to your PC and NPC allies, **cash in Debts**, or even make use of city moves—**putting out the word** (page 98) or **marshaling forces** (page 101)—in order to complete a project. You can often use **Sanctum Santorum** to see if you have necessary components on hand—or the materials you need to manufacture or summon them—and **Black Magic** (page 175) can help you bypass one of the requirements completely if you're willing to mark corruption, but you can't use it more than once per project. That said, once the requirements are set, they cannot be changed; so long as you fulfill them, the work is completed and the MC will provide you the item, info, or effect you sought.

Your sanctum's resources and downsides fictionally position the assets you can bring to bear on a problem and the complications that inevitably arise as you work. If you have a *mystical prison*, you might use it to imprison a dangerous ghost; assuming you can get the ghost into the prison, the resource means you don't have to do more work to hold it. Similarly, a sanctum whose *location is known by many* is vulnerable to intruders and thieves; don't be surprised if you come home to discover someone rooting around in your supplies.



## YOUR WARD

A Status-3 member of your Circle has charged you with caring for an important ward. They live and dine with you; their safety is your sworn duty. Choose 2 from each list below.

### Why do they need protection?

- ☐ They are the key to a forbidden ritual or magical catastrophe
- ☐ They are the heir to a powerful position or inheritance
- ☐ They are the secret child of an influential and powerful enemy
- ☐ They are a gifted mage in need of a teacher and guardian

### Why did you agree to this arrangement?

- ☐ You are in love with the ward (or the Status-3 member)
- ☐ Your membership in a faction compels your agreement
- ☐ You and your ward are supernaturally linked
- ☐ You hope to redeem yourself for a past failure

## NOTES ON YOUR WARD

While you might try to avoid the demands of your Circle's broader society, a Status-3 member of Power has charged you with protecting someone—your **ward**. After all, who better to keep someone safe than a powerful wizard? You may not like this obligation—you might even be trying to pass it off to someone else!—but for now you've accepted the responsibility of caring for someone on behalf of the Status-3 NPC. Until the situation drastically changes, that NPC expects you to broadly care for your charge, ensuring that no harm befalls them and they (mostly) stay out of trouble.

While your ward is vulnerable, requiring protection and guidance, they aren't necessarily a child; they can be any age and from any Circle. All that must be true is that they have a definitive need for your help, you voluntarily agreed to this ongoing obligation, and they live with you. For example, your ward might be a 75-year-old vampire who is the *secret child* of a potent Status-3 elder of Night, *supernaturally linked* to you by a ritual gone wrong!

All the reasons your ward requires protection imply both opportunities and dangers. If they are *key to a forbidden ritual*, they may be able to act as a locus for all sorts of magical undertakings...and they surely have enemies who would wish to snatch them up. Whatever you decide as the reason they need your help frames their role in your story.

At the same time, whatever you choose as your reason for accepting this ongoing duty gives the relationship context. If *you are in love with the ward*—perhaps *a gifted mage in need of a teacher*—then work with the MC to define how they came into your care and how your relationship has evolved; if *you hope to redeem yourself for your past failure*—maybe by protecting a ward who is *key to a magical catastrophe*—work with the MC to determine what tragedy haunts your past and how it's linked to your ward.

Of course, your relationship with your ward can evolve, just as your relationship with any NPC grows and changes. If you eventually part ways—perhaps because you've resolved the situation (or because you can't stand each other any longer)—then the relationship has run its course...but you still have to deal with the Status-3 NPC if they expect the arrangement to continue. Ultimately, they are the arbiter of your success and failure at the task with which you were charged.



# CHANNELING

## CHANNELING

When you channel and collect your magics, roll with **SPIRIT**. On a 10+, hold 3. On a 7-9, hold 3 and choose 1 from the list below. On a miss, hold 1, but you cannot channel again this scene.

- ◆ Take -1 ongoing until you rest
- ◆ Suffer 1-harm (ap)
- ◆ Mark corruption

Your hold lasts until you spend it or the scene ends. You can spend it to cast any spell you have as per the spell's details.

### YOUR SPELLS

Choose three:

#### ☐ TRACKING

Spend 1 hold to learn the location of a specific person. You must have a personal object that belongs to the target or recent leavings of their body (a lock of hair, fingernail clippings, their blood, etc.).

#### ☐ STUN

Spend 1 hold to target someone present in the scene with a blast of psychic energy that inflicts s-harm. You can instead spend 2 hold to target a small group or 3 hold to target a medium group.

#### ☐ LINKING

Spend 1 hold to telepathically link up to two characters in your presence for a few hours, allowing them to communicate with each other—and with you—regardless of distance. You may spend additional hold—1 for 1—to add more characters to this network, even if the other members are not present.

#### ☐ SHIELDING

Spend 1 hold to provide armor+1 to yourself or someone nearby, or spend 2 hold to provide armor+1 to everyone in a small area, possibly including yourself. This armor lasts until the end of the scene. You can stack multiple uses of Shielding at once.

#### ☐ VEIL

Spend 1 hold to make yourself invisible from sight—mundane, supernatural, electronic, etc.—for a few moments.

#### ☐ TELEPORT

Spend 1 hold to teleport yourself a short distance within a scene you're in.

#### ☐ TRINKET

Spend 1 hold to produce a small, mundane object that perfectly fits your needs—a key for a single door, a bullet for a gun, etc.

## NOTES ON CHANNELING

In order to cast spells, you first have to **Channel** and collect your magics. Each spell tells you how much hold you have to spend to cast it; spending the hold is usually all that's required to activate the spell. On a hit, you hold 3, albeit with some consequences, and you can continue to channel and collect more magic—effectively adding more hold—at any time, even while you still have hold to spend. But if you roll a miss, that's it for the scene; you're too exhausted to continue to marshal your magical powers this way. Note that you don't have to gather any hold to **let it out**—leveraging your **let it out** abilities—or use your **sanctum** (page 172).

If you choose to *suffer 1-harm (ap)* or *mark corruption* when you roll a 7-9 while **Channeling**, the effects are instantaneous and final: you mark the harm or corruption, and you're done. If you choose *take -1 ongoing*, however, then the effect lasts until you get enough time to rest and recuperate, at least ten or fifteen minutes to catch your breath and recenter.

**Tracking** requires that you have a sympathetic token to activate the spell. The MC will let you know if the token is sufficient before you spend your hold.

**Stun** knocks out most mortals and dazes or impairs most supernatural creatures. You don't have to have the target in your line of sight; as long as they are in the same scene, you can target them.

Characters you connect with **Linking** must be in your presence when the link starts, but they can use the network no matter where they are after the link is set up. Some magical wards and shields may affect the link, but generally communication between nodes of the network is clear and consistent.

You can wait until just before someone is struck to give them armor with **Shielding**, but you must do so before they suffer harm. Once the MC has declared how much harm they've suffered, it's too late for you to shield them from it.

**Veil** and **Teleport** almost always offer you an opportunity to **escape a situation**, but they can also force your opposition to find you again or close the distance before taking additional actions against you.

Using **Trinket** can create any mundane object, including something complex like a flash drive or cell phone, but the object must be small. It vanishes as soon as it has served its purpose or within 24 hours, whichever comes first.



# CORRUPTION

**TRIGGER:** When you ignore a genuine plea for help from someone vulnerable, mark corruption.

## ■ THE DARK ARTS

You get +1 **SPIRIT** (max +4). Whenever you roll with **SPIRIT** and roll a 12+, mark corruption.

## ■ ELDRITCH BLAST

Mark corruption to **turn to violence** with **SPIRIT** instead of **BLOOD** using raw magical force (3-harm close or 2-harm close area).

## ■ UPON A PALE HORSE

Mark corruption and speak the secret name of a character in the scene to kill them; PCs cannot mark a scar to avoid this death.

## ■ BLACK MAGIC

Mark corruption to ignore a requirement set by the MC when using your sanctum.

Your corruption trigger forces you to mark corruption when you turn your back on someone who truly needs your help. If a request is manipulative or the person can handle it on their own, you're in the clear. The MC will always let you know before you mark the corruption that you are ignoring such a request.

After you take **The Dark Arts**, any **SPIRIT** roll—for any move—will force you to mark corruption if you roll a 12+.

The weapon you wield for **Eldritch Blast** is pure magical energy; you summon it and strike in one fluid attack. If you want to continue your assault, you have to mark another corruption and **turn to violence** again. Such magic usually ignores mortal armor, but supernatural defenses always reduce the harm.

Everyone has a secret name—an eldritch anchor for their existence. Most do not know their own secret name, but those with power guard them closely, even obscuring them from prophetic sight. **Upon a Pale Horse** has limited usefulness against things that cannot die (ghosts) or come back (immortals), but it will kill any target regardless of their armor, harm track, etc.

You can only use **Black Magic** once per project; you can't mark more corruption to ignore additional requirements. Tell the MC what dark power—a corrupted tome, a dark spirit, etc.—you are turning to in order to bypass the requirement.

## INTIMACY

When you share a moment of intimacy—physical or emotional—with another person, decide if you care about them. If you do, you form a sympathetic connection; you can target each other with magics at any range and intuitively know if the other is in danger. If you don't, mark corruption.

You can ignore distance for any kind of magic relying on the bond and can even cast spells across it—like using **Trinket** to place an object in the person's pocket or **Teleport** to move directly to them. The bond lasts until you no longer have the relationship you once had, e.g. one of you betrays the other.

## END MOVE

When you die, you may place a devastating curse—a new prohibition or weakness—on someone present in the scene.

The curse can forbid a course of action (“you cannot harm my sister”), remove an ability or gift (“you can no longer shapeshift”), or impose a new vulnerability (“sunlight now burns you”), but you cannot kill the target, even indirectly (“you can no longer breathe air”). The curse lasts indefinitely but can be removed by sufficiently powerful magic—the MC determines what the targeted character must do to discover how to end your malediction.

## ADVANCES

If you *add 2 resources to your sanctum* or *learn 3 more spells*, select them from the lists you chose from at character creation.

*Bonding with a familiar* forges a magical link between you and an animal companion—a cat, a bird, etc. You always know where your familiar is, and you can use its senses as your own. Select two **let it out** abilities from any playbook—even different playbooks—to represent the animal's powers; when in the presence of your familiar, you can use their abilities as your own when you **let it out**. If your familiar is ever harmed, take 1-harm (ap); if your familiar is ever killed or destroyed, take a corruption advance.



# NIGHT THE WOLF

*Primal, unstoppable, lethal, unlucky. The Wolf is a lycanthrope who has taken a territory in the city, holding it against all comers.*

*Play the Wolf if you want to fight for what's yours, no matter who tries to take it from you.*





## UNLEASH THE BEAST

Ask anyone in the city, and they'll tell it to you straight: ain't *nothing* as scary as a wolf. Sure, it's tough to fight a vampire or a demon—and faeries and wizards alike have their tricks—but when a wolf has given in to their fury, when their blood is hot and they've transformed into an indestructible killing machine...you'd rather be anywhere in the city than under their claws.

In other words, *you* are the thing the monsters fear.

And why shouldn't they fear you? You are *terrifying*. You can knit your flesh back together through sheer will and tear through steel with nothing but tooth and claw; you can track someone down no matter where they try to hide and disappear into the darkness—blood dripping from your jaws—before your prey even knows they're dead. You are a primal, feral, deadly wolf, and those who know what you are capable of fear what you can do.

You've used that raw power to hold a region of the city, sating a desire for territory that has blossomed inside you ever since your first change. It's your home—the only place you feel at peace—and while you might at one point have shared control with others, you now lay claim to it by yourself. In day and darkness alike, you patrol it, looking for threats to your rule and enemies that need to be driven out.

But your territory isn't yours and yours alone. It's a living, breathing thing, an ecosystem woven together by everyone who lives within it. And if you taint it—if you turn it into little more than a killing field, soaked with the blood of your enemies, leaving no room for forgiveness or change—then it will taint you in turn. You may not need a pack to hold this place...but you must have a careful hold on the wolf in your heart.

You dream some nights of the hunt, some long ago memory passed down from wolf to wolf, from mother to daughter and father to son. Prey runs... and you follow, the chase as delicious as the blood that fills your maw at the end of the hunt. You hear the howls of a pack long lost and remember that wolves like you were once monarchs and gods, beloved by those who called their territory home and feared by those who would act against it...

## DEMEANOR OPTIONS

aggressive, feral, restless, violent

## STARTING CHARACTER STATS

Blood 1, Heart -1, Mind 0, Spirit 1

## STARTING CIRCLE RATINGS

Mortalis 0, Night 1, Power -1, Wild 1

## STARTING CIRCLE STATUS

Mortalis 0, Night 1, Power 0, Wild 0

## INTRO QUESTIONS

- ◆ When did you first experience the change?
- ◆ How long have you been in the city?
- ◆ What is the best part of your other form?
- ◆ Who is the most important person in your territory?
- ◆ What do you desperately need?

## STARTING GEAR

A duffel bag with your personal belongings, a shitty cell phone. Choose two practical weapons:

- ◆ Snubnosed revolver (2-harm close/near loud reload concealable)
- ◆ 9mm Beretta (2-harm near loud concealable)
- ◆ Butterfly knife (2-harm hand concealable)
- ◆ Machete (3-harm close messy)
- ◆ Baseball bat (2-harm close stun)

## STARTING DEBTS

- ◆ Someone intervened on your behalf when you crossed a powerful figure from another Circle. You owe them a Debt.
- ◆ Someone hired you for a job and you fucked it up. Tell them why another obligation got in the way. You owe them a Debt.
- ◆ Someone lives in your territory, benefiting from your protection. They owe you a Debt.

## LET IT OUT ABILITIES

- ◆ heal 2-harm instantaneously, starting with critical harm
- ◆ transform from one form into the other without seeing the moon
- ◆ perform a ferocious feat of lupine strength and speed
- ◆ enhance your lupine senses to supernatural levels

# FEATURES

## YOUR TERRITORY

You've claimed an area of the city as your own. By default, your territory covers a city block or two and has the trouble: +crime.

### Choose 2:

- ☐ Your territory spans several city blocks you've owned for years (add blessing: +influence)
- ☐ People in your territory work hard to keep the streets safe (remove +crime)
- ☐ You are widely accepted as this place's protector (add blessing: +supported)
- ☐ Your territory includes open grounds for you to roam and hunt (add blessing: +sanctuary)
- ☐ You've made a deal with someone, or something, to protect your territory when you're not around (add blessing: +guardian)

### Choose 2:

- ☐ Your territory owes fealty to someone more powerful than you (add trouble: +obligations)
- ☐ A Status-3 NPC wants your territory and is working to get it (add trouble: +encroachment)
- ☐ Mortals in the area are actively trying to revitalize local businesses and infrastructure (add trouble: +upheaval)
- ☐ Your territory is plagued by a mystical or supernatural presence (add trouble: +haunted)
- ☐ You have offered protection within your territory to someone, and now their problems are yours (add trouble: +fealty)

## NOTES ON YOUR TERRITORY

Few werewolves hold territory alone, but you've somehow managed to take control of an area—at least a few city blocks—all by yourself. Perhaps you once had a pack, maybe even some other allies or friends; now you stand alone, holding your **territory** on your own terms. But can you keep your claws in it without losing yourself? Can you hold it without becoming the monster you sometimes see in the mirror?

The choices you make about your territory define the threats, challenges, and opportunities your claim brings you. Think carefully about what kind of stories you want to see arise over the course of play as you choose—are you looking to fight off *encroachment* from outside, contend with a *haunting*, or navigate the politics of mortal *upheaval*? Your MC will bring whatever you pick into the story early and often.

All of the blessings of your territory are known and present; let the MC know if you want to call upon one of them during a session. Troubles show up less frequently, usually when you roll a 7-9 or a miss on **Comes with the Territory** (page 180) or you stop patrolling your territory altogether. On occasion, some events in the fiction might cause a trouble to flare up in the middle of a session, but only if something demands that the MC bring it to bear.

Here's a list of the blessings, along with some brief notes on integrating them into the fiction:

- ♦ **guardian:** you have a potent ally in defending the territory; work with the MC to figure out who helps you guard your claim and why.
- ♦ **influence:** your long-term claim on the territory means you've shaped it and expanded it; work with the MC to determine what you've done to make it your own.
- ♦ **sanctuary:** there is at least one place (perhaps a city park or wilderness area) nearby for you to hunt; work with the MC to establish why it offers you solace and security in times of trouble.
- ♦ **supported:** you are openly in control of the territory, even with some mortals; work with the MC to determine who the major mortal NPCs are who accept your ownership.

And here's a list of the troubles with similar notes:

- ♦ **crime:** your territory is beset by dangerous mortal crime organizations; work with the MC to establish who they are and why you haven't addressed them yet.
- ♦ **encroachment:** a high-status NPC from outside your territory is trying to usurp your claim; work with the MC to determine who is plotting against you and what they want from your territory.
- ♦ **fealty:** you offered safe harbor to someone; work with the MC to figure out why you did so and what problems they bring to your door.
- ♦ **haunted:** supernatural phenomena are everywhere in the city, but your territory has something nasty in it; work with the MC to determine what it is that haunts your territory.
- ♦ **obligations:** you only hold your territory because someone more powerful than you—likely Status-3—permits it; work out with the MC who you owe and how they come calling.
- ♦ **upheaval:** mortals may not know what goes on in the shadows, but their clumsy maneuvering can still make a mess; work with the MC to determine the locus of their economic efforts.



# THE TRANSFORMATION

By default, you can change into your wolf form—at will—in the sight of the moon: you gain natural weaponry (2-harm), 1-armor, and all of the qualities and weaknesses you choose below.

## Choose 3 qualities:

- ☐ You are massive: gain armor+1 and harm +1
- ☐ You are savage: your harm is armor piercing (ap) and *messy*
- ☐ You are versatile: take +1 ongoing to *letting it out*
- ☐ You are swift: take +1 ongoing to *escaping*
- ☐ You are cunning: take +1 ongoing to *keeping your cool*
- ☐ You are steadfast: you fight like a small group against groups

## Choose 3 weaknesses:

- ☐ Silver weapons ignore your armor and inflict harm+1
- ☐ Sometimes you lose control while transformed
- ☐ Sometimes you transform when you are stressed or angry
- ☐ The transformation is brief; you shift back at the end of a scene
- ☐ The transformation is violent and painful; suffer 1-harm (ap)
- ☐ The transformation draws the attention of supernatural creatures

# NOTES ON TRANSFORMATION

By default, you can transform at will in the sight of the moon—any phase but a new moon—or by *letting it out* (even during the day) and selecting *transform from one form into the other*. At character creation, you choose 3 qualities and 3 weaknesses to add to or modify that default **transformation**; these don't change unless you take *One with the Beast* (page 181) or something radically alters your character.

You don't have to transform to access your play-book moves, but you can only access the qualities of your wolf form when you're transformed. Most are self-explanatory, but choosing *steadfast* means you fight like a group against other groups (page 50): you suffer no additional harm (and inflict harm as normal) when you fight a small group, and you are treated as only one step down from a medium group.

In contrast, your weaknesses apply no matter which form you're in or directly address the transformation itself. Choosing *sometimes you transform when you are stressed or angry* means the MC can push you to *keep your cool* or risk a change in difficult situations, and choosing *the transformation draws the attention of supernatural creatures* means the mystical energy given off by your transformation is obvious to both city residents—vampires, wizards, etc.—and other, stranger things from worlds beyond this one.



# MOVES

## WOLF MOVES

You get this one:

### ☒ COMES WITH THE TERRITORY

If you are actively patrolling your territory when time passes—or at the start of the game—roll with **BLOOD**. On a 10+, your territory is secure and trouble is at a minimum; take +1 ongoing when you *hit the streets* in your territory. On a 7-9, one of your troubles surfaces (your choice), along with an opportunity to address it. On a miss, or if you aren't attending to your territory, things go south and your troubles are fast and furious.

And choose one more:

### ☐ ALPHA DOG

When you *persuade an NPC* in your territory with threats or promises, roll with **BLOOD** instead of **HEART**.

### ☐ RECKLESS

If you jump right into danger without hedging your bets, you get armor+1. If you're leading a group, it gets armor+1 also.

### ☐ BLOODHOUND

When you hunt someone down, roll with **BLOOD**. On a hit, you know exactly where to find them and can follow their scent until you do. On a 10+, you find them alone or vulnerable; take +1 forward against them. On a miss, someone unpleasant finds you first.

### ☐ MARK OF THE BEAST

When you mark a building with your signs or sigils, roll with **SPIRIT**. On a hit, you lay claim to the location for the next few days. On a 10+, all 3. On a 7-9, pick 1. At any distance, you can:

- sense who is in the building at all times
- control the doors, locks, and windows
- conceal the building's location or true function

On a miss, your attempt to claim the building awakens a sleeping or passive threat you had not considered; the MC will tell you who you angered with your impulsive claim.

## MOVES ADVICE

For the purposes of *Comes with the Territory*, you're assumed to be actively patrolling your **territory** unless something is actively keeping you from doing so—like if you're kidnapped by someone or locked away in a different dimension. On a strong hit, your territory is at peace and your control is secure; on a weak hit or a miss, your troubles flare up and require your attention. In the case of a weak hit, you get to pick which trouble to focus on (and you get an opportunity to potentially resolve it), but a miss—or an interruption in your patrolling—means things spiral out of control in multiple arenas at the same time. You can read more about your territory's blessings and troubles on page 178.

In order to trigger *Alpha Dog*, the NPC in question must be inside your territory. If you try to persuade them when they are somewhere else, you can't use the move. Seducing them won't work either; you've got to be direct about what you're going to do for them (or to them) to use the move.

*Reckless* requires that you jump right into danger, which means little to no planning and even less caution. You only get the armor+1 when you're willing to enter the fray without restraint; a group only gets the armor+1 if they join you in the charge.

You can use *Bloodhound* anywhere in the city, but you usually need to start somewhere you know they've been. The +1 forward you gain on a 10+ doesn't have to be used to hurt them; you could instead use it to *figure them out* or *persuade* them to help you with a problem. On a miss, whoever finds you first may be an established threat or a new character you're meeting for the first time.

It takes at least an hour to mark a building with your signs and sigils for *Mark of the Beast*, and much longer if it's a large building. On a hit, you pick the control you establish over the structure, and you can make use of that control at any time, without having to make another move. On a miss, the threat you awaken might be supernatural or mystical, but it can also be a mundane threat like a group of hunters or some municipal activity; no matter the origin, the threat has you in its sights as a result of your attempt to claim the building.



# CORRUPTION

**TRIGGER:** When you destroy a threat to your territory instead of driving it out, mark corruption.

## ■ ONE WITH THE BEAST

Mark corruption when you transform to select two additional qualities or remove two existing weaknesses from your transformation. Mark a second corruption to do both.

## ■ FORCE OF NATURE

You get +1 **BLOOD** (max +4). Whenever you roll with **BLOOD** and roll a 12+, mark corruption.

## ■ STREET HOUND

Mark corruption to transform into a coyote or dog. While in this form, you can roll with **SPIRIT** instead of **MIND** to *figure someone out* or *mislead, distract, or trick* them.

## ■ FAMILIAR TERRITORY

Mark corruption to locate the source of the greatest danger to you or someone you select within your territory or City Hub, even if the threat has concealed itself with magic or misdirection.

Your corruption trigger forces you to mark corruption when you focus on ending threats rather than driving them off. Driving off threats is challenging, however, because it means accepting that the threat may return; things that are dead tend to stay dead. Note that accidentally killing a threat still forces you to mark corruption, even if you intended to drive it off.

You cannot use *One with the Beast* more than once per transformation, i.e. the maximum number of qualities you can gain is two, and you can't remove more than two weaknesses.

After you take *Force of Nature*, any **BLOOD** roll—for any move—will force you to mark corruption if you roll a 12+.

You can select the look for your *Street Hound* form when you trigger the move; it can be different each time. You don't get access to any of your qualities in this form, but you also don't suffer any of your weaknesses. If you decide to *turn to violence* in this form, your bite is a 2-harm messy weapon.

The MC will tell you what the source of the greatest danger is and where you can find it when you use *Familiar Territory*, but it's still up to you to get to it. Most dangers surround themselves with barriers that you may need to bypass (or crash into) before you can reach them directly.

## INTIMACY

When you share a moment of intimacy—physical or emotional—with another person, you create a primal bond with them until time passes; you both always know where to find each other and when the other is in trouble.

The bond you forge with someone through intimacy is not exclusive; you can forge the same bond with multiple characters, including PCs and NPCs. If either of you wants to find each other, you need only rely on instinct; the MC will tell you what you need to do to get there.

## END MOVE

When you die, anyone in the scene you wish to protect escapes and reaches safety, no matter the odds.

You can name anyone in the scene—PC or NPC—to escape under your aegis, even multiple characters; assuming they seize the opportunity and leave *right then*, they not only escape the scene but get all the way to safety without further rolls. If they stay in the scene after your death, however, the opportunity is lost to them.

## ADVANCES

*Joining or leading a wolf pack* gives you a small pack (3-harm 1-armor savage loyal) and:

When you try to impose your will on your pack, roll with **NIGHT**. On a 10+, all 3. On a 7-9, choose 1:

- ♦ they all go along with you
- ♦ they follow the plan carefully
- ♦ they don't make a fuss

On a miss, someone in the pack surfaces an old conflict you need to address before you can get them to focus.

If you decide to *lead the pack*, take a +1 ongoing to this move...but be prepared to adjudicate whatever problems the pack brings to you.





SEV





FIN

ADVANCEMENT





# The City

So you want to be better than you are? More than you are?

Who the fuck doesn't?

There isn't a single person in the city who is truly satisfied with what they've already got in their grubby claws. Even the best among us grasp at straws to get a tiny advantage, telling ourselves we need just a little bit more—more allies, more power, more *control*—in order to *finally* make the city a better place. The worst among us don't even pretend to tell themselves such obvious falsehoods.

Some people will tell you the way to get ahead of the curve is failing early and often. According to these fools, every time you fuck up you get a smidgen wiser, each failure somehow building up into insight, patience, and grace.

It's *bullshit*. Failure is failure, nothing more. You don't learn anything from a bullet hole in your guts or a sharp knife in your back. You're not any smarter for it or more prepared for the next chaotic street fight. Just bloody. And maybe even dead.

If you want to better yourself, you have to get your hands dirty. Join the fray. Play politics. Cash in Debts on your betters and claim authority over those beneath you every chance you get. You aren't going to get anywhere pretending you're above the machinations of the elite—after all, you'd like to be one of them, wouldn't you?

Otherwise, there's only one path forward—you can pry open the darkness inside yourself and look for power *there*. There's a monster inside all of us—even the most "human" among us—and the only cost to giving into it is tiny pieces of your soul. You've got so much soul to give, and the monster is always ready with an offer: just a bit more power for just a bit more soul. At least until you run out.

If you are so inclined to walk these paths, just know this: there's no going back once you've seized some new version of *you* from the ether. You are whatever you make yourself, through your machinations or failures alike.



## DESCRIPTIVE AND PRESCRIPTIVE

Characters in **URBAN SHADOWS** aren't static; they grow, change, and evolve along with your story. Events that happen in the fiction affect your playbook and changes to your playbook affect the fiction. The two have to work together, hand in hand.

Sometimes you make changes to your sheet because you actually accomplish something in the fiction. Your werewolf pack frees a few werewolves held captive by a wizard on the other side of town, and your pack grows from *small* to *medium*. More powerful, yes. But also more mouths to feed and keep in line.

Other times, things go to shit in the fiction and you pay the price. Your attempts to fight off a trash demon light your apartment on fire, destroying your collection of priceless relics and valuable tomes. Time to cross that **sanctum** off your playbook. Tough break.

These changes in your character's identity, assets, and relationships are *descriptive*. When something impactful happens in the fiction, you make changes to your playbook to reflect that your position in the fiction has changed. The goal of the mechanics is to *describe* the fiction, so if the fiction changes, the mechanics change along with it.

Advancement works in the other direction: you make changes to your sheet, and the fiction catches up with you. Maybe you opt to get a new **sanctum** through an advancement, and together you and the MC work out that your collection of strange relics and ancient tomes has grown to the point where your tarot shop is a functional **sanctum**, with all the rules from the Wizard's playbook included. Or maybe you take a move like **Safe House** (page 126) and you and the MC have to work out how your character acquires a quaint little hideaway with *reinforced doors* and a *magical prison*.

The changes that arise from advancement are *prescriptive*; you select an advancement—a new ability, move, or feature for your playbook—and you and the MC work together to make it make sense in the fiction, even if it didn't show up in the story before you took the advance. The addition of the element to your sheet is the trigger that tells your group the fictional addition is needed, and it's up to you and your MC to offer a version of the advancement that makes sense for your story.

## HOW TO USE THIS CHAPTER

In order to get the most from this chapter, it's helpful to have a broad understanding of **URBAN SHADOWS** as a game—everything in this chapter assumes you have reviewed the first six chapters of this book, especially **Chapter 3: Fundamentals of Play** and **Chapter 5: Core Moves**. If concepts like harm, corruption, Circle moves, and Status are foreign to you, go back and read those chapters before continuing with the material here.

This chapter opens by explaining character advancement, especially Circle advancement in which characters grow and change by marking Circles (page 186) and taking playbook-specific advances when enough Circles have been marked. The advances shared by the playbooks—core advances—are covered in detail (page 187), as are the advances exclusive to each playbook, such as altering a playbook's feature. In addition, this chapter also covers the rules for advancing moves (page 188), essentially adding a 12+ result to each of the basic moves.

The chapter also offers advice and guidance on retiring to safety (page 190)—ending a PC's story—and changing playbooks (page 191) from one archetype to another, like the Aware joining a life of vampiric politics as the Vamp or gaining prophetic sight to become the Oracle. Both are important narrative moments, and the advice included here can help groups successfully navigate those changes.

After detailing Circle advancement, this chapter also details corruption advances, offering advice for integrating such advances into play. Like Circle advancement, corruption advances are specific to the playbook in question, but some broad similarities and themes exist from playbook to playbook.

Finally, this chapter closes with advice on creating a new character, either because the player's previous character has retired or died, or because the group wishes to add a new player (and new character) to their story. Adding a new character after the original setup (page 68) can be tricky, so groups considering adding a new character are encouraged to prepare by reading this section in full.

# CIRCLE ADVANCEMENT

Most of the time, player characters advance by growing their reputation and influence in the city at large, taking **Circle advancements** that allow them to increase their Status, gain new moves, and even change Circles or playbooks. Your character, as they entangle themselves in the politics of the city, expands their skills and commands more power. In other words, your engagement with these messy communities is the primary way to grow and change!

## MARKING CIRCLES

To advance, you have to mark all four Circles. You don't need to mark the Circles in any particular order, but you can't mark a Circle again until you've marked all of them once; if you *hit the streets* with Mortalis while you've already marked Mortalis, you can't mark it again.

Here are all the ways in which you can mark a Circle:

- ♦ make a Circle move
- ♦ trigger an intimacy move
- ♦ *cash in* a Debt
- ♦ honor a Debt
- ♦ make a move that tells you to mark a Circle

When you make a Circle move, mark the Circle you rolled with while making the move. When you snoop around a demon's apartment, you're *studying a place of power* so you mark Wild; *hitting the streets* to find an old vampire friend means you mark Night. The outcome of your roll is irrelevant—you mark the Circle as you make the move, even if you roll a miss.

Similarly, when you get intimate with someone or *cash in* or honor a Debt, you mark the Circle of the character with whom you're engaged; they mark your Circle as well. *Cashing in a Debt* with a wizard usually earns you a mark in Power, but remember to be clear about the character's Circle! If that wizard has left Power for Night, then you mark their new Circle.

Once you've marked all the Circles once, erase all your Circle marks and take your advancement. You're free to mark Circles again as soon as you advance.

## TAKING ADVANCES

At the start, take your advances from the list titled “available at the beginning of play.” Once you've taken five advances, you can also choose any option under “after five advances...” These more powerful advances allow your character to expand their abilities and status further...or perhaps abandon their path and change to a new playbook or retire to safety. Either way, each advance can only be taken once; if you've checked the box, you can't take it again.

Whenever an advancement impacts the fiction, like getting a new move, erasing a scar, or changing Circles, work with your MC to figure out how to reflect the change in your story. Advancement is prescriptive (page 185)—choosing the advance prompts you and the MC to incorporate it into your story.

It's possible to gain multiple advances in a single session, especially if you make Circle moves and spend Debts. The pace of your character's advancement is entirely within your hands. If you're feeling stymied by a lack of interaction with a specific Circle—maybe no Wild NPCs have shown up for a bit—start calling around looking for a chance to *cash in Debts* with NPCs from that Circle or just *hit the streets* with that Circle to get some answers, allies, or gear!

Take your advancement as soon as it makes sense in the fiction, even in the middle of a scene. It's exciting to reveal new powers and abilities that change the direction of the conflict in surprising ways. An Imp who suddenly shrugs off a devastating blow because they advanced and took *I'm a Fucking Demon* (page 132) creates a unique and special moment in the fiction! That said, some advancements that add locations or shift your features (page 190) might take some time to show up in full.

## REFUSING DEBTS AND MARKING CIRCLES

Successfully *refusing to honor a Debt* means you don't mark a Circle for that Debt. You have to actually be true to your word to mark a Circle for honoring your obligations. On the other hand, a PC *cashing in the Debt* gets to mark a Circle even if their debtor refuses. After all, the person who asked for the Debt to be honored isn't the one flouting the social contract!



## CORE ADVANCES

While most playbooks have a few advances specific to the playbook (page 190), there is a set of core advances available to nearly every type of player character:

- ♦ a new move from your (or another) playbook
- ♦ +1 Status in another Circle (max+1)
- ♦ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ♦ erase a scar
- ♦ change your Circle
- ♦ Obtain Circle Status-2

### TAKE A NEW MOVE

Selecting a new move from your playbook as an advance lets you pick another move from the list available to you at character creation. Any of the moves you didn't select earlier are fair game.

Selecting a new move from another playbook lets you instead take a move from a playbook *other than your own*, provided that move isn't tied to a feature; you can't use this advance to take **Channeling** for the Wizard's spells or **The Devil Inside** for the Tainted's demon form. If you want new features, you have to change playbooks (page 191) or use an exclusive advance (page 190)!

### ADD +1 TO STATUS IN ANOTHER CIRCLE

This advance allows you to add +1 to your Status in a Circle other than your own; your reputation in the Circle grows, earning you the respect of another community. That said, you can't use this advance to raise your Status beyond +1 in any Circle. They might respect you, but that doesn't mean they trust you.

### ADD +1 TO ANY CIRCLE RATING

Adding +1 to any Circle raises your rating in a chosen Circle by 1. If that rating is at +3, you cannot raise it, but you are free to raise the rating of any other Circle you want. Note that choosing this advance effectively raises the total of your Circle ratings by 1, allowing you to maintain stronger ties to multiple communities.

### ERASE A SCAR

Erasing a scar means your character has healed the wounds of the past; tell the MC what you do to restore yourself. Is it a religious conversion? A new project for the community? A twisted and dangerous spell that knits your physical form back together? Whatever the cause, you are once again whole.

## CHANGE YOUR CIRCLE

If you find yourself more invested in the community and interests of a different Circle than your own, you can choose the *change your Circle* advance. Changing Circles means you leave your old community behind and join a new one—perhaps you're a Wolf who cares more for the mortals of your territory than the squabbling drama of Night, or a Wizard who swears a blood oath of service to a faerie king that forces you to forsake all other vows.

Work with your MC to explore what it means for you to reject your Circle and adopt a new one. This decision won't just impact you—it changes what everyone thinks of you going forward. Members of your new Circle may not yet treat you as one of their own, at least not until you prove your loyalty, and no one from your old Circle is liable to understand the choices that led you to this point.

Set your Status in your new Circle to Status-1 and reduce your Status in your old Circle by 1 (max+2). From this point on, everyone regards you as part of a different community; even if you retain Status-2 in your old Circle, you aren't one of them any longer. You may need to remind the table of your Circle when *cashing in Debts* or triggering intimacy.

### OBTAIN CIRCLE STATUS-2

The only way to rise through the ranks and become Status-2 in your Circle is through this advance. Some playbooks—like the Veteran—can select it immediately; most playbooks must wait until they've had at least five other advances first.

Earning Status-2 means you have more reach and power than you did before—considerably so. You gain access to the Status-2 city moves (page 96) and can make an additional city move when time passes. In addition, you find it easier to *refuse to honor your Debts* or compel other PCs to honor Debts they owe you (page 90).

Often, your rise to Status-2 is an obvious outgrowth of the fiction; as you and your group tell your story, the actions of the player characters tend to be the talk of the city! Other times, you may need to work with your MC to figure out how your star has risen offscreen. Did you acquire a Status-3 patron? Defend your Circle from an external threat? You and the MC can decide together why your Circle suddenly views you with much more esteem than they did previously.

## ADVANCING BASIC MOVES

Some playbooks can advance the basic moves, expanding the character's capability within the core move set. **Advanced moves** give you new options or allow you to select more options when you roll a 12+. Otherwise, the move remains the same: if you roll a 10+, 7-9, or miss, the move works as normal.

No playbook can advance every one of the basic moves—although the Sworn can advance a seventh through their legendary weapon (page 149)—so choose your advanced moves wisely!

**Turn to Violence:** On a 12+, you overwhelm your foe; they pick 1 in the face of your superior prowess:

- ♦ they cower, terrified; you have them at your mercy until you release them...or kill them
- ♦ they offer to parley, impressed; you take a +1 ongoing against them until time passes
- ♦ they fight on, foolishly; take all 3 options from the 10+ list and choose 1 for double effect

Advancing **turn to violence** means you can overwhelm your opponent with terrifying force. Your skill is obvious and victorious—your opponent is only choosing how they respond:

- ♦ If they *cower*, you decide if they live or die; they can't cast a spell or teleport away or fight back before you deliver a killing blow.
- ♦ If they *offer to parley*, they have to make themselves vulnerable—putting down a sword, sending away their goons, etc. If you decline the offer, you can inflict your full harm upon them without a roll.
- ♦ If they *fight on*, they don't pick an option from the usual list and you get all three and one doubled—you inflict +2-harm, take something from them absolutely and completely, or providing a devastating opportunity to an ally.

**Escape a Situation:** On a 12+, you get away and make an important discovery.

Advancing **escape** is the only way to get out of danger without strings attached. A 12+ means you not only exit the scene without cost—you don't have to choose options off the list—but the MC also gives you information relevant to the situation at hand. If the information doesn't seem useful, let the MC know.

**Persuade an NPC:** On a 12+, they do what you ask and help you see it through to its end.

Advancing **persuade an NPC** allows you to build alliances with NPCs that last longer than a single Debt. *Helping you see it through to its end* means that the NPC is in for the long haul, investing in your vision long enough to see the job done right without needing further persuasion or compensation. If you threaten a demonic smuggler to get information about a missing child, for example, a 12+ on the roll means that the typically disinterested mercenary is sufficiently scared of you to get you all the info you need now *and* going forward.

**Figure Someone Out:** On a 12+, you can ask any questions you like, not limited to the list.

When you advance **figure someone out**, you're still limited to the number of questions you get, but you can ask any question that you want, even "Are you telling the truth?" Your target is an open book.

**Mislead, Distract, or Trick:** On a 12+, you get all 4 and choose 1 for double effect.

Advancing **mislead, distract, or trick** lets you take all four and double up on one of the choices. You can use this guide for what a double of any option means:

- ♦ *Creating a double opportunity* can mean two opportunities or an opportunity so generous you can't believe the MC is giving it to you.
- ♦ *Exposing a double weakness or flaw* can mean you spot two weaknesses or that the MC gives you a flaw that you can act upon in some immediate, profound way.
- ♦ *Doubly confusing for some time* means the deception you've put forth becomes absolute truth to the character. Even close friends and family can't convince them they have been duped.
- ♦ *Doubly avoiding further entanglement* means that you can escape the scene or change your position without another roll. As far as your opposition is concerned, you don't exist.



**Keep Your Cool:** On a 12+, your opposition's cool is compromised. Tell them what it will cost to maintain their current course of action.

**Let It Out:** On a 12+, your powers or abilities manifest in an unexpectedly useful way. Mark corruption to make that manifestation a new ability.

Advancing **keep your cool** means you get to tell the MC what cost your opposition must pay to keep pressuring you. You might say, "If they keep shooting at me, they have to take harm because I'm shooting back" or "If they keep driving the truck at me, they'll wreck it because I'll take cover at the last moment." Your opposition decides if the cost is worth it.

If your opposition does decide to pay the cost you set, then their pressure continues—they keep shooting, they keep chasing you down in the wrecked truck, etc. Depending on what happens next, you might need to **keep your cool** again to fully get out of trouble.

That said, your imposed costs have to follow the fiction. You can't say, "If they want to keep shooting at me, they have to die because they will be eaten by giant rats" unless controlling giant rats is somehow part of your character. Ground the cost you impose in the fiction at hand!

When you advance **let it out**, the MC will tell you how your powers or abilities manifest in a new and surprising way; sometimes they're in keeping with other abilities or moves from your playbook, but your MC might give you something unique to your character or to the moment at hand. *Marking corruption to make that manifestation permanent* means that you get to keep it as a new ability or custom move (page 105), adding it to your playbook after working with the MC to determine the mechanics of the new manifestation.



## EXCLUSIVE ADVANCES

The majority of the playbooks also have advances exclusive to each playbook, changes to your character that only make sense within the context of its archetype. For example, the Wizard can *learn three more spells* as an advance—expanding the spells they can use when they **channel** and gain hold (page 174)—and the Veteran can *add 2 features to their workshop*, gaining new resources for their existing **workshop** (page 166).

For the most part, these additions to your features are self-explanatory; work with the MC to explain the change just as if you added a new playbook move or advanced some basic moves. Perhaps your Wizard finally got their hands on a tome with a few new spells or your Veteran finally got a line on a new supplier that got them *machining tools* and a *forge*. These new skills or features probably don't arrive instantaneously; it likely makes more sense for them to show up between sessions or when time passes.

A few exclusive advances, such as adding a **workshop** (Hunter) or **sanctum** (Oracle), allow you to gain a specific move or feature from another playbook. If you choose one of these advances, go ahead and pull the move from the original playbook directly, then work with the MC to figure out how your character got access to their new resources. In the case of a feature that's also a location, make sure to take the time to detail where you set up your new spot. Did you squeeze a **sanctum** into your overcrowded apartment? Or did you find some hidden location under the new lofts downtown for your magical sanctuary?

Such advances are usually the only way to gain access to another playbook's feature. While you can always *take a move from another playbook* (page 187), you can't take moves core to the playbook, like **Manifest** (page 144) or **Faerie Magic** (page 120). In rare cases, your MC might give you such a move to represent a shift in the fiction, but those cases—like a Hunter getting possessed by a demon and gaining **The Devil Inside** (page 156)—don't happen often.

Finally, some exclusive advancements require additional explanation, such as *Fiendish Underlings* (Tainted) or *resolving one of your anchors* (Spectre). You can read more about each playbook's advances in **Chapter 6: Playbooks**.

## RETIRING TO SAFETY

Sooner or later, everything ends. And if your character has reached the end of their particular story arc, then one advance you might consider is *retiring to safety*. When you *retire to safety*, your character leaves the city on their terms, avoiding the noose of corruption and the steely embrace of death in favor of a more peaceful resolution to their story.

### ZERO DAYS TO RETIREMENT

There's no single point at which retirement makes sense for any given character. Your PC might reach it because they accomplished all they wished to accomplish or because they've realized their limits and need to step back from the conflicts at hand. They might simply be tired of the city's schemes and suffering and want to run away from it all. Retiring to safety is an advance—only you can choose when it's time for your character to find this end.

Of course, some playbooks can't retire: both the Aware and the Hunter don't have an advance that allows them to *retire to safety*. Both of those playbooks have only a few options: they can change to a new playbook (page 191)—altering their role in the city and charting a new course for their story—or corrupt out by filling their corruption track six times (page 192)...or die and trigger their end move (page 50)!

### SAFE AT LAST!

Once you've chosen to retire, you get to describe what safety looks like—you might return to the fae realm you left decades ago, leave the city forever on a midnight bus, or just give up the game and settle down in a mundane life. Work with the MC to make whatever safety you choose make sense in the story, even if it means that some old conflicts or rivalries have to be resolved for your newfound safety to make sense.

No matter what you decide, the MC can't use your character as a threat or put you into danger once you've retired. Safety means safety, even on these dark streets. If you're okay with it, the MC might bring your character back into some future scenes as an NPC, but your character's story has come to a close and they remain beyond the reach of the city's brutal politics.



## CHANGING PLAYBOOKS

Instead of retiring your character at the end of a story arc, you can continue their story by changing playbooks, adopting a new role in the city rather than simply riding off into the sunset. Perhaps your Aware discovers their lycanthropic heritage and becomes the Wolf...or maybe your Fae is banished from their court and stripped of their immortality, becoming the Veteran. Whatever the reason, changing playbooks alters your character's narrative position in the city while continuing their relationships and history with the other characters.

You can't take the *change to a new playbook* advancement until you've already taken five other advances; your character needs time to grow in their original conception before you can alter their story and choose a new direction. That said, you may feel an obvious pull toward a new playbook early in play—your Spectre might be working toward becoming human from the very start of their story—and working with your MC to set up a future playbook change can be a great way to drive your character's story.

But...don't plan too much! You may think your Veteran is destined to reclaim their mantle as a powerful mage (and the Wizard playbook), but it may turn out that the only way they can regain their powers is a deal done with a manipulative demon—leaving them serving a dark patron as the Tainted instead of juggling the politics of Power and managing the needs of an apprentice. Regardless of where you want the story to go, leave room for the events of the fiction to surprise you and play to find out what happens!

### DESCRIPTIVE ADVANCEMENT

Remember that taking a given advance isn't the only way to make changes to your character; you might gain new moves, alter your stats, or even change playbooks as a result of what happens in the fiction. Advancement works prescriptively—you choose the advance and the fiction follows—but the events of the fiction can drive changes to your playbook as well. Work with your MC if you think something that happened during the story needs to be better reflected on your playbook!

## MAKING THE CHANGE

When you change playbooks, you gain everything that comes with the new playbook and leave behind your character's old life. While you aren't fundamentally changing who your character is, you are changing their narrative focus and the conflicts and communities that drive their story. Here are a few guidelines to follow:

- ♦ Keep everything associated with your original playbook's reputation and fictional position: Circle ratings, Circle Status, Debts, and gear. Just because you change playbooks doesn't mean your relationships or Status change (yet). You also keep all your Debts, including those others have on you. You can't escape the noose just by changing who you are.
- ♦ Choose new looks, including your demeanor, and new gear as the fiction demands. You may want to keep your old looks and demeanor, but it usually makes more sense to embrace your new playbook more fully.
- ♦ Take new main stats. Your new life is embodied in the stats of your new playbook; erase your old stats and choose all new ones.
- ♦ Erase all your old moves. If you like, you can keep one move from your old playbook, provided it works in the fiction, and mark off a *take a move from another playbook* advance.
- ♦ Reset all corruption. If you like, you can keep one corruption advance; mark off a corruption advance on your new playbook and decide if you're keeping your old playbook's corruption move or choosing something new.
- ♦ Lose anything in the fiction that no longer makes sense. Your character's old life doesn't get to come with them. They may lose things like a **territory**, a **sanctum**, or a **benefactor**, and any number of features tied to who they were.

Of course, there are always exceptions. Work with your MC to decide what makes sense in the fiction and what doesn't. For example, there will be times when it makes sense to keep a feature until that relationship or situation resolves in the story. Your Oracle, now a Vamp, may try to hide their lost vision from their benefactor, but sooner or later the truth will come out and the benefactor will act as they choose. If there is some confusion or you can't decide what makes sense, your MC will tell you what stuff you keep and what stuff you lose.

# CORRUPTION

## CORRUPTION ADVANCEMENT

Circle advancement is largely about growing your reputation and connections in the city, but **corruption advancement** emphasizes the personal and the selfish; your character gets stronger because they give into their darkest urges and find power in the shadows.

The core of corruption advancement is similar, however—when you fill your corruption track (page 45), clear the track and mark a corruption advance. Each advance indicates a prescriptive change to your character; you choose an option from the list, and you and your MC work to make it make sense in the fiction.

### CORRUPTION ADVANCES

Unlike the diverse and varied Circle advances, all corruption advances fall into three types:

- ♦ take +1 to any stat (max+3)
- ♦ take a new corruption move
- ♦ retire; you may return as a threat

Once you've marked off a corruption advance, it cannot be chosen again. That said, there are two boxes for adding +1 to a stat and three boxes for taking new corruption moves; it's only the sixth corruption advance that forces you to *retire your character*!

#### TAKE +1 TO A STAT

This advance is perhaps the most straightforward advance in the game—you add +1 to a main stat (**BLOOD**, **HEART**, **MIND**, or **SPIRIT**) of your choice. Work with the MC to describe how corruption has sharpened your mind (or claws) and how others can tell that you're more intensely capable. Remember that you can't use this advance to raise a stat above +3!

#### TAKE A NEW CORRUPTION MOVE

Selecting one of these advances allows you to take a new corruption move—a special set of moves found on each playbook—from your playbook or from another playbook (as specified by the advance). Most corruption moves offer incredible powers at the cost of more corruption. You can read more about the corruption moves available to each playbook in **Chapter 6: Playbooks**.

### CHANGING PLAYBOOKS AND CORRUPTION

Remember that changing playbooks resets your corruption advances (page 191). If you'd like, you can hold onto a single corruption advance from your old playbook, but that's it. Your new path in the city is a new lease on life. Use it wisely.

#### RETIRE, RETURN AS A THREAT

When you have no other corruption advances to mark, you must choose *retire; you may return as a threat*. You can't put it off or deny it! If you fill your corruption track that final time, you must retire. When you do, your character immediately becomes an NPC under the control of the MC.

The MC doesn't have to include your character in future scenes, but your character's relationships makes it likely they return to trick, torment, and thwart their former friends and allies. If your character returns, they act like any other NPC would act; the MC says what they do, how they respond, and what goals they pursue.

Once you've lost a character to corruption, the MC is obligated to portray them at their worst—their passions consuming their reason, their cruelties driving them to action, and their insecurities on full display. You lost control of the character because the character has lost control of themselves. The MC might not make them a villain...but they are a threat.

At the same time, *retiring as a threat* shares some similarities with *retiring to safety* (page 190). Your character's current story comes to a close, and you get a chance to make a new character (page 193)—assuming the season continues—or end your character's narrative journey. Of course, the end you find through corruption isn't an uplifting resolution to your character's core issues; it's a tragedy, a fall from grace that moves your character fully into the darkest shadows the city has to offer. Embrace that sense of loss, and you just might find that *retiring as a threat* is just as satisfying an end as any other.

You can read more about corruption as a mechanic, including an example of a PC retiring as a threat, in **Chapter 3: Fundamentals of Play** on page 45.



# A NEW PC

## CREATING A NEW PC

Both character death and some of the advancement options—retiring your character to safety (page 190) or as a threat (page 192)—can create room for you to create a new player character for your story. Here are some tips on bringing that character to an existing ensemble.

### CHOOSING A PLAYBOOK

Start by selecting a playbook for your new character, one that's both new to you and new to the story at large. Your new character may have had a relationship with your old PC, but you want to create space for yourself to have a whole new experience in play. One way to break new ground for yourself is to choose a playbook from a different Circle than your last character. After all, it's easy to get into a new mindset when you've moved from a blood-sucking creature of the streets (Night) to a haunted fortune teller (Power).

### QUESTIONS, DEBTS, HUBS

Once you've chosen a new playbook, fill it out just as you did when you first made a character (page 61): pick a name, look, demeanor, main and Circle stats, gear, and moves, then answer your starting questions. Consider the story thus far as you build out your new protagonist—is there a conflict or NPC or faction that might be of interest to you? If so, tie yourself to them with abandon; it's much easier to get involved in the existing story if you're mixed up with what's already happening in the city.

Then, introduce your character and assign starting Debts. Direct as many of these starting Debts as you can toward the existing PCs in the group—ideally, your new character should already feel like part of the cast, albeit a character who hasn't appeared on screen much before now. If there's time (and not too many Debts already in play), the MC might ask each of the other PCs to assign a new Debt to you as well, offering or taking a Debt as they think fits the fiction.

Finally, select a resident and a relationship from the existing City Hub (page 53), just as if you were first setting up the story. Your new character, like all the others, is grounded in the section of the city represented by the Hub, drawn into conflicts surrounding the other PCs at every turn.

### JOINING THE CAST

Remember that your new character isn't joining the ensemble as a replacement for your old PC; you're telling a completely new story with a completely new focus. You're starting fresh—none of your old Debts, gear, moves, or advances follow you into this new tale. On occasion, it may make sense for your new PC to be tied to the story of your old PC—like a Hunter who comes to the city precisely because their Veteran parent died—but even in those rare cases, try to let go of the past and follow the story of the new PC you've created.

That said, your character isn't new to the city—they know everyone and everyone knows them, even if those relationships are still shallow or relatively new. Resist the urge to create a loner character who has recently moved to the city; the characters in **URBAN SHADOWS** are most interesting when deeply mixed up with each other. Sometimes that may mean a new character is one that's already been discussed (or even shown) in the fiction, now made into a player character by a player who wants to pick that NPC up and fit them to a playbook.

### ADDING A NEW PLAYER

Much of the advice in this chapter for creating new player characters also applies if you need to add a new player character because a new player joins your group. A new player needs to choose a playbook, establish Debts, and make choices on the City Hub too! And like any new character joining the cast, they should steer away from loner characters with little to no history in the city.

Adding a new player is often easier after a season finale (page 265). The start of a new season of play, perhaps even featuring a new City Hub, is a great time to introduce new characters into the fiction—but you don't have to wait if you have someone excited to join your group in the middle of a season. As long as you take the time to get the new character set up with Debts, relationships, and a fictional position that involves them in the conflicts at hand, a new player character can be a fantastic way to shake things up and keep your city interesting!









# MASTER OF CEREMONIES





# Chapter 8

Can we tell you a secret? Of course, we can. You're good folk. Trustworthy.

All of this, every word in the book to this point, every bit of design we've packed into these pages... it wasn't for the players. They'll read it, of course, maybe even master it. They'll point out a passage you missed that changes a rules call or pushes you in a different direction during a session, but none of that makes it for them.

It was always for you. The Master of Ceremonies. The MC.

The player characters are the fascinating protagonists of your dramatic tale, it's true. Your players tell you who they are and what they do in the city, what goals they pursue and what they feel. They make decisions about how their characters advance and how much corruption they're willing to accept to get what they want. Their choices might even make them feel like they are the *center* of the story; after all, they tell you so much about themselves.

But you're going to tell them *everything else*.

We think that's the best part of the game, the slow unfolding of the consequences of their decisions, the blank looks on their faces when they realize that the city has them now, the moments in which they turn against each other because there's no other way forward. The dark, beating heart of the city pounding in their ear drums as you lay out how their choices built all of this: the pain and the promise of heroes in a world that offers nothing but corruption.

And you've got a ringside seat to all that drama, constantly spinning them around until the only thing they can do is give in to the madness—and logic!—of the city's dark streets. You've got your bloody fingerprints all over everything, pushing and pulling and adjusting and moving it all into place. Not forcing it before it's ripe, but always on the fucking lookout for the next perfect move.

This is how you run **URBAN SHADOWS**. This way and no other.



## NOT A GAMEMASTER?

If you've played other roleplaying games, the phrase "Master of Ceremonies" might be new to you. The more traditional "gamemaster" might seem more familiar, more in line with what you've come to expect from RPGs. But you aren't a teller of stories or a master of the rules when you MC for **URBAN SHADOWS**. You're a host, a constructor of situations (not plots) and a creator of space (not outcomes); you're an instigator, the one who sets the hooks in the characters to drag them forward, not toward a dramatic conclusion you've selected in advance, but down into the dark depths of the city where they will be forced to confront the truth of themselves.

As the MC, it's your job to bring the city to life—whichever city you pick—and make it a convincing world of shadows and intrigue, a seething metropolis of rival Circles and umbral mysteries that keeps the player characters off balance and engaged. The rest of this chapter gives you the tools you need to accomplish these goals, pushing your players and their characters to the brink while always giving them a way to move the story forward.

On the other hand, it's not your job—as an MC—to run the players through a preplanned plot or to mess with their heads or to beat them at every turn or to introduce a pet NPC that solves all their problems. All of that is bullshit here, the kind of crap that will make your players throw their hands up in the air and stop caring about the city you've built together. Leave that shit at the door.

**Chapter 3: Fundamentals of Play** discussed the discipline it takes to play **URBAN SHADOWS** (page 36); all of that goes double for you. You have to commit to the moment you're in and follow the fictional logic of the situation at hand, caring deeply about the outcome but giving yourself the room to find out what happens as you play; you have to learn to trust that the story is going somewhere interesting without demanding the story go your way. And in that moment—when the dice hit the table and you don't know what's coming next—you will find the heart of the city, bloody and perfect.

After all, the MC doesn't host a party because they know how everything will turn out in advance; they hold the soiree to see what their guests *do* with the space they've been given. And your guests are sure to surprise...

## HOW TO USE THIS CHAPTER

We assume at this point that you've read through the first five chapters, and that you've had some time to look over the playbooks themselves in **Chapter 6: Playbooks** and how character change and evolve in **Chapter 7: Advancement**. Although the previous chapters are all directed toward the players, there's lots of information in there for you as well, including advice about character creation, rules clarifications about specific moves, and systems for harm, advancement, and managing groups of NPCs. We put those rules in front of the players so that you and they are on the same page.

This chapter contains the agendas, principles, and moves that act as the rules systems for your side of the conversation. Agendas—your overall goals—point you toward the kind of play that works best for **URBAN SHADOWS** (page 198); principles give you the best practices for running the game (page 199); moves are specific actions to take in response to the players' choices (page 205). Together, these systems make MCing a taut, directed experience that productively structures running the game.

In addition to presenting agendas, principles, and moves in this chapter, we also cover managing NPCs (page 222), tips on running the game for specific playbooks (page 223) and specific City Hubs (page 228), and advice for exploring adult and mature themes in **URBAN SHADOWS** (page 230). We wrap up this chapter with some advice on your first session (page 232) and a long example (page 240) featuring everything included in this chapter presented as an extended example of play.

Don't get overwhelmed, though; you don't have to learn all of this before you run your first session! You'll likely return to this chapter a few times, digging in deeper as you master the art of MCing **URBAN SHADOWS**. Good luck!

# AGENDAS

At the highest level of abstraction, your job is to balance three agendas when you MC:

- ♦ Make the city feel political and dark
- ♦ Keep the PCs' lives out of control and evolving
- ♦ Play to find out what happens

These are your goals, your reasons for running the game. You can judge your success or failure by how well you bring these agendas to life as you play.

## MAKE THE CITY FEEL POLITICAL AND DARK

Cities in **URBAN SHADOWS** are just like the cities of our world: caught in the grip of an almost inhuman elite, trapped in cycles of violence and death, and beautiful beyond measure in their diversity and opportunity. Present the complexity of modern life through a dark mirror that warps and reflects our world into something monstrous and magical, never forgetting the underlying logic of every institution and organization. The city is corrupt, contested, and conflicted; make sure your PCs see the grisly truth and the puppet strings.

## KEEP THE PCS' LIVES OUT OF CONTROL AND EVOLVING

The story you're telling together isn't about the NPCs or the city itself; it's about the player characters and their choices, the events that happen while the camera lingers on their lives. Focus your story by keeping the player characters' lives on edge, pushing on their weaknesses and problems until they reach a breaking point and rise to the challenges you put in front of them. Don't get lost in the city without the players; let them get lost and keep your attention focused on their attempts to find a way forward.

## PLAY TO FIND OUT WHAT HAPPENS

There will come a time in your collective tale when you think you know how things should go—which rolls should hit and which should miss, which NPCs should die and which PCs should live. It's a trap. The city is full of surprises and you'll suffocate all that's good in your story if you attempt to control where things go. Let the game breathe. Accept

that what is to come is to come and let the dice fall as they may. You must trust that the narrative is going somewhere meaningful for the narrative to mean something, not rob it of its impact at the last minute by putting your thumb on the scale.

## ALWAYS SAY...

When you MC **URBAN SHADOWS**, you might sometimes find yourself without a clear path forward, caught between multiple agendas without a clear sense of balance. When that happens, always say:

...what the principles demand

...what the rules demand

...what the city demands

...what honesty demands

The principles (page 199) and the rules of the game are your backbone, the steel inside your story that never bends or breaks. If a move says that a character takes harm, inflict it; if a roll comes up short, accept it. Say what the principles and the rules demand, no matter how it breaks your heart. Discipline, first and foremost.

The city has its own ruthless discipline too. It doesn't care what's just or right or fair; it cares about who has power and who doesn't. If a powerful NPC is betrayed by the player characters, let the NPC take revenge; if a weak and greedy NPC has an opportunity to take advantage of the player characters, make sure the NPC seizes the moment. The game's the game, no matter how it breaks your heart. Power, first and foremost.

But the players only know what you tell them, so be generous with the truth. Don't hide the ball or play cute with the facts; the players don't have an external point of reference for what a room looks like or how another character holds their head during a conversation. If an NPC is head over heels in love with a player's character, make it obvious; if an NPC is getting ready to sell them out, tell them it's coming. The world has to be clear and direct, no matter how it breaks your heart. Honesty, first and foremost.



# PRINCIPLES

The agendas are your goals, but the principles lay out a path forward toward those goals. These are rules too—like the agendas and moves—but they operate like best practices, guidelines for you to follow that produce the best possible fiction within the system. Do these things, and you’ll find the system working for you instead of against you. Break these rules, and your game will flounder.

- ◆ Display the city, from skyscrapers to slums
- ◆ Put the characters at the center of conflicts, political and personal
- ◆ Address yourself to the characters, not the players
- ◆ Push the characters together, even across boundaries
- ◆ Cloak your moves in darkness and shadow
- ◆ Detail the NPCs who matter to the story
- ◆ Treat everyone according to station and status
- ◆ Ask loads of questions and build on the answers
- ◆ Be a fan of the player characters
- ◆ Dirty the hands of all involved
- ◆ Give everything a price, even friendship
- ◆ Give the players the chance to take the lead

## DISPLAY THE CITY, FROM SKYSCRAPERS TO SLUMS

Your city isn’t a wasteland of nightclubs and office buildings; your story shouldn’t be either. Look for opportunities to showcase the insanely wealthy and the desperately impoverished, the highest highs and the lowest lows. And don’t forget the supernatural elements either. Werewolf bars, vampiric blood banks, wizard apothecaries, ghostly cemeteries. All of them are opportunities to present new facets of the city, new political elements and factions that plot and scheme for their piece of the pie.

Push the characters out of their natural environments as well. Give Leland a reason to leave his low-income parish and journey uptown for information about one of his anchors; make Zara’s dark patron demand she head out to the docks to complete a demonic deal. At every opportunity, narrate the city in grim and vivid detail and remind the players that there’s no way to take it all in, no way to say, “Yes, I’ve seen the whole fucking city and there’s nothing left to see.”

## PUT THE CHARACTERS AT THE CENTER OF CONFLICTS

The city is filled with institutions and organizations that make demands on the player characters; use those relationships, political and professional, to put the characters in the position to be pivotal to the city’s future, right in the muck in the middle of the conflict. No single character can wake up one day and just decide to change the course of history, but someone has to tilt the balance, right? Someone has to be in the right place at the right time to thwart the powers that be or crush a rebellion before it starts. Make sure the player characters end up in those positions, even when they try to escape their responsibilities or run from their problems.

Placing them at the center of conflicts won’t make things easy for the player characters. Just the opposite, in fact. Institutions and organizations often want things at odds with the player characters’ loyalties, loves, and legacies; the NPCs who run things have their own agendas, their own plots and plans that have taken years—decades or centuries even in the case of vampires, wizards, and faeries—and they won’t like it when the characters screw things up by disobeying orders or complicating the plan, especially if the player characters’ reasoning is rooted in personal shit or naive idealism.

Thus, the best conflicts aren’t just pivotal to the city; they push the characters to really grapple with their own loyalties and ideologies, to acknowledge that they are *internally* conflicted about these political clashes. When her hunter faction selects Booker as the avatar of a ritual to empower her to kill a Status-3 wizard right after Booker finally ties the knot with her wizard girlfriend—the daughter of that same Status-3 NPC—what’s she going to do? Turn her back on the people she trusts with her life? Betray her wife? There are no easy options, but Booker’s choices—rooted in her own conflicts and obligations—will shape the city forever.

## ADDRESS YOURSELF TO THE CHARACTERS, NOT THE PLAYERS

Your players aren't the ones stuck in an elevator with a ravenous demon or caught in the middle of a turf war between a gang of drug-dealing vampires and territorial werewolves. The player characters are the ones who have to deal with all that shit, so talk directly to them. Say "Sunny, where are you hiding from the vampires?" instead of "Sasha, where do you think Sunny would hide from the vampires?" Calling them by their characters' names pushes the players into thinking and talking and acting like their characters.

Don't mess around with what the characters see or hear, either: "Paris, the man who scheduled the tarot reading is sweating bullets; it's obvious he's here about his cheating wife." Give the information as if the player was standing in the room, as if you were right fucking there pointing out things that are obvious to anyone.

And if their playbook makes different kinds of information obvious—the kind of details that come with an oracle's magical sight or a werewolf's sense of smell—give that information to them too. Fucking gratis.





## PUSH THE CHARACTERS TOGETHER, EVEN ACROSS BOUNDARIES

Cities are filled with millions of people, all of them obsessed with their own busy lives and petty bullshit. The player characters are no different, and players sometimes feel an urge to tell their own separate stories—apart from other characters—veering off into things that interest them and ignoring each other. Encourage players to embrace their characters' lives and explore them, but you often have to take action to ensure they don't spend too much time alone.

Let's be honest, shall we? **URBAN SHADOWS** is most interesting when the player characters interact with each other directly. Give them secrets, conspiracies, and threats that concern each other, conflicts and gossip that demands they get into the same room and work things out. When you find a barrier between characters—a wizard and fae on different sides of a conflict, a vampire and werewolf who claim territory in different parts of town—frame scenes that drive them together (physically and emotionally), cash in Debts to get them to work on the same side (or directly against each other!), and connect them through their NPC relationships until they're all hopelessly mired in each other's lives.

And together doesn't have to mean "deeply allied." Players often want their characters to get along at all times, always seeing things the same way, looking at the world through the same lens. But part of what's fun about pushing the characters together in all sorts of ways is watching the sparks fly when they interact. You've got to find reasons for them to talk and fight and fuck and everything else, but don't ever let them forget the interests they serve.

You can start intermingling the player characters' worlds right from the jump, using your City Hub (page 53) and the relationships they choose within it to frame starting scenes with two to three PCs. If two characters in the Art District (page 312) have been collaborating for years and recently split, then frame a starting scene around them dividing up their joint property; if one character is escorting another to meet a prisoner near City Hall (page 314), then frame a starting scene right in the middle of that arrangement. Make them talk to each other, then pour gasoline on the sparks that fly from that initial conversation.

## CLOAK YOUR MOVES IN DARKNESS AND SHADOW

When you make a move—we'll talk in a minute about your moves (page 205)—don't directly call out the name of the move to the players. Don't say something obvious like, "Okay, I guess I'll **put someone in danger**" and look around the table for someone to hammer with "danger" or point at one player and say, "I'm going to **activate your stuff's downside**." You've got to do a little magic trick to make it seem real, a little misdirection to keep their eyes on your left hand while your right hand picks their pocket.

And what's the best way to fool your players, to get them to look the other way when you spring a move on them right off your MC sheet? It's simple really. Just never say *exactly* what you're doing; cloak your moves in the fiction of the moment, and they'll never really be sure what you're up to.

In other words, your moves need to look like they're coming directly from the fiction, like there's a fictional cause for the fictional effect you're about to drop on the players. When you **activate their stuff's downside**, say something like, "Aw, shit. It's been forever since you've fed, Darius. You feel that gnawing hunger pulling at your insides, that thirst for blood leaving you light-headed and grouchy. You aren't going to be able to hold off for long." When you **put someone in danger**, you say something like, "Your first shot goes wild, Booker. You're trying to reload your bow when one of the vampires sprints toward you, leaping over three lanes of traffic to land on the hood of your car." Make it look like the fiction is choosing the move—not you—and that you're just relaying what's obviously true about the world.

This all goes double when you actually invoke a mechanical effect, like inflicting harm or corruption. Start by telling the players what happens in the fiction first, then go to the mechanical element like it's an afterthought, the obvious result of what you told them happened in the story—"You feel the power of the spell surge through you, Kashida, the force of it ripping through your flesh like a phantasmic bullet; you look down and see the impact on your skin, blisters already starting to form. Mark 2-harm, okay?"

## DETAIL THE NPCs WHO MATTER TO THE STORY

The city's got a million stories, but the players only care about the NPCs who matter to the story you're telling together; they don't care about lowly vampires working security for a Status-3 NPC or the ordinary mortals in the apartment next door. Those characters are extras, the background noise of a story in which the important characters—PCs and NPCs alike—make real choices.

When you introduce a new NPC, your first job is thus to make the decision if the NPC *matters to the story*. If Watanabe sends out a few vamps to kill a player character, they might just be random goons... or they might be his childer. The former are just obstacles to overcome, but the latter are *important* to the story. They are agents, even when they follow someone's orders, with motivations all their own.

Most of the time, the important characters in the story have a higher status—Watanabe's childer are at least Status-1—but they aren't the only ones that matter to the story. The Aware's mortal brother might not have any status at all in the city, but he's still an important NPC. In other words, Status-1+ characters always matter to the story because they matter to the city, but sometimes characters who don't matter to the city still matter to the player characters themselves.

The best way to get the players to connect to those important NPCs is to give them names and details. It's not "a Status-1 vampire assassin." It's "Joaquin, the Status-1 vampire assassin with a nasty scar who answers to Watanabe." Naming and detailing those important NPCs makes them feel real to the players!

Of course, players might decide later that a goon does matter to the story—maybe they kidnap one—and you have to figure out a name and details then, but goons generally don't demand the same attention from you or your players. Until the players (or you) make a goon important to your tale, they can remain faceless minions. Status-1+ NPCs always matter to the story, as do those Status-0 and no Status NPCs already tied up with the player characters and their drama.

## NPC MOTIVATIONS

To portray important NPCs in your story, give them **DRIVES**, motivations that move them to action and direct their attention. See page 218 for more on using NPC drives in your game.

## TREAT EVERYONE ACCORDING TO STATION AND STATUS

Cities demand hierarchy, official and unofficial. When the spotlight falls on an NPC, location, or feature of the city, ask yourself, "What station does this hold? What status does this person have?" Nothing in the city is truly unknown and unconnected to the great social system that swirls around it...and if it is, that means it doesn't have any friends.

Important things are protected—not by you, of course, but by the city itself—and weak things, things that hold no station or have no status, are exposed and vulnerable. If the player characters come for Watanabe, the Status-3 vampire lord, he has guards, allies, and Debts to use against them; if they come for one of his minions, like a Status-1 street dealer, that character may have no protection at all but their own claws and fangs.

Don't forget the station that things hold—and absolutely never mix them up and present a peasant like a king. Protecting the minion (or failing to protect Watanabe) feels inauthentic. The players need to know that the city isn't run by your capricious wishes, that the order and structure of the city is a knowable thing, even if they don't quite understand it yet. Fuck-ing with Status-3 people like Watanabe should have dire consequences, but there can only be a few like him in any city. When the spotlight falls upon the ordinary minions and goons, they're in the crosshairs.

Of course, this all holds for player characters as well. Use every opportunity to reflect their station and status back at them: "Sorry, Darius, we don't allow vampires here on Council grounds" or "Really, Zara? You expect us to admit *you* to the first demonic ritual we hold?" or "Rashid, you're Iraqi. The last place you need to be seen is outside a federal courthouse building when a bomb might go off." Earning Status-2 or Status-3 in a Circle should mean a major shift in how NPCs from that Circle treat someone; crossing lines from one Circle to another should be a shift in loyalties no one from either Circle forgets for some time.



## ASK LOADS OF QUESTIONS AND BUILD ON THE ANSWERS

From the moment the players introduce their characters to the end of your last session, ask probing and provocative questions. “Why did you move to the city?” or “Where did you learn to control your foresight?” are great starting questions, but take it further by asking leading questions: “Who did you have to kill to complete your training?” or “Which ally did you have to betray to escape your demonic contract?” Push the players with your questions, then grab the answers, trust them, and use them to build up a city more interesting than you could build on your own.

Building on players’ answers starts by reincorporating what they give you into the fiction. It’s not enough to ask, get an answer, and then drop the topic; actively use the stuff your players give you to flesh out the city. Sometimes this is easy—the players tell you that a faction of mortal hunters controls a specific neighborhood—but you often need to dig deeper to determine why they think a contribution is valuable. Don’t hesitate to ask follow-up questions to figure out what the players mean by “demons come and go here” or “the faeries ask everyone for tribute.” Get something useful before you move on from the question.

As you ask questions, add details to their contributions as well, building upon them so that they feel like they’ve always belonged in the city. If Hanako’s player talks about an old hunter organization that fell apart when he retired from the game, introduce some characters trying to build it back up as a faction (page 250) who want Hanako to lead it; if Paris’s player talks about an old mentor who taught him about the supernatural, make that person a central figure to other characters aligned with Power as well. Let their contributions influence how you present the city.

Finally, don’t limit yourself to facts and events. Ask the players about their feelings, their motives, their secret fears and passions: “What emotion is dead to you since you became a vampire?” or “What pleasures haunt your dreams since you slept with the King of Summer?” While less obvious, these internal details help you create moments (and NPCs) that can draw out what matters most to your players and their characters.

For more advice on asking questions as the MC, see **Asking Probing Questions** on page 233.

## BE A FAN OF THE PLAYER CHARACTERS

“Keep the characters’ lives out of control and evolving” doesn’t mean “make the characters’ lives worse.” No one—not you, not the players—wants to see the characters suffer at every turn. It’s predictable, boring, and dull. Being a fan means you want to see them seize their moment, to be excellent at something when it deeply counts, but also to struggle and (sometimes) triumph in the face of adversity.

Thus, it’s your job to introduce difficult situations that challenge the player characters in meaningful ways. You have to put real stakes on the line—endangering people and places and goals the characters hold dear—but you do so in order to watch them rise above the bullshit or fall to their own worst selves. It’s never to watch them suffer just for the sake of suffering.

The worst way to try to keep the characters’ lives out of control is to mindlessly take away their stuff or break what makes them interesting. If the Tainted is fighting for custody of her kid, don’t kill the kid or resolve the custody battle without exploring the issue. Those moves make her life *less* interesting; her responsibilities become easier to balance because she no longer has to contend with the mortal world. Same goes for her demonic form: take that away and she’s just another goon in a city filled with replaceable muscle.

These moves aren’t totally illegitimate—imagine how awesome it would be for the Tainted to get her demon form back after an absence—but avoid sloppily punishing the character for existing. The player needs to be directly invested in every story, in choices and consequences, perhaps giving up her demonic powers in exchange for something valuable (instead of just losing them at random) or having them stripped by their dark patron after they murder a close ally.

Same goes for dealing with their successes. If Darius kills a powerful demon, don’t take that away from him by bringing the demon back. Make his success matter. Now he’s got a target on his back: every demon that owed fealty to the one he killed wants a piece of Darius, and every vampire in the city wants to use his reputation to build up their own kingdom. Evaluate the shifting alliances and complex politics of the Circles when the characters succeed. There’s always more drama when power rushes in to fill a void or old conflicts resurface between allies.

## DIRTY THE HANDS OF ALL INVOLVED

The city is compromise writ large, a place with no easy outs and even fewer happy endings. No matter where the player characters go, no matter which options they pursue, there are no clean solutions. Destroying a nest of demons in the projects means that the nearby vampires get more aggressive—after all, it was the demons that kept them at bay—but leaving the demons alone means they are sacrificing a few extra people to the ritual they’ve been planning for the last year. No easy outs.

The messy nature of the city extends to the player characters’ personal relationships too. Show that evil monsters have loved ones and projects they care about in the city; complicate the noble and good characters by highlighting the ways they fail to live up to their own ideals. Make it clear that shades of gray dominate the city, that there are no clear answers even when it comes to deciding on who is an ally and who is an enemy. Never let them get comfortable with the idea that anything is black and white.

Note here that no easy outs doesn’t mean no outs at all. If the forces in the city can’t be stopped, can’t be bargained with, can’t be interrupted...why are you playing? You’ve got to give your players options, give them the hope that this time things will work out, even if the solutions might be messy and flawed. And—sometimes—let them get lucky: the costs for whatever deal they struck don’t fall on them or the people they love. (It sure as shit falls on someone else, though. Make note of who suffers; they might want to get back into the game as a result.)

But let it go cleanly only occasionally, just enough to let them live in hope. The rest of the time, you’ve got to make it clear that there’s no fucking way they are living on Easy Street. No fucking way.

## GIVE EVERYTHING A PRICE, EVEN FRIENDSHIP

Nothing is free in the shadows. Money doesn’t mean much—especially to wizards who can turn lead to gold, or immortals with bank accounts dating back a hundred years—but Debts and favors make the world go round. Don’t miss an opportunity to charge for something, and don’t feel shy about letting the players know that an NPC wants to get paid: “Alfonso seems reluctant to say much at this point; you can tell he’d be a little more interested in spilling his guts if he got something for his troubles.”

Friendship works the same way, but in reverse. Friends are walking obligations, people the player characters care about enough that they can get dragged into their messes for free. Of course, this doesn’t mean that all relationships are transactional; some characters really do fall in love or awaken a deep friendship that’s mutually fulfilling. But the price for relationships ought to be clear in the obligations they demand from the player characters; people in the city have problems and the player characters sure look like solutions.

## GIVE THE PLAYERS THE CHANCE TO TAKE THE LEAD

Always look to the players for where to go next, what to do next. Follow them—whenever possible—instead of trying to push them down some magical road of plot and story. When they display an interest in a thing, spend more time with it, incorporate it into what you’re already doing and draw connections that previously weren’t there. If a player wants to go to a bar to look for information, fill the bar with opportunities and move the action there instead of trying to get them to go somewhere else that matters more or feels right to you.

When a player gets stuck or stymied, jump cut the action to someone else. Give each player time to think about their next move, especially in situations where their choices have a huge impact on the fiction. It makes sense for their character to be rushed and hurried, but the players themselves don’t get any benefit out of you steamrolling or ignoring their contributions. Take the time to make their interests a priority in the fiction by giving them time to think through those interests before you push them to make a decision.



# MC MOVES

Principles are your broad guidelines; your **MC moves** are the blow-by-blow actions you take during the game when it's your turn to make a contribution to the fiction. That's right—moves ultimately describe how you play the game as the Master of Ceremonies, the moments in which you put something forward that pushes the players to act, to rethink their perfect little plans as they crash against the shores of the city's many other actors.

But making moves isn't about *taking control* of the story. No, no. It's about *keeping the story moving*, filling in the parts where things get unclear so the players can make use of the spotlight you give them. The players hit the ball to you by taking actions and making moves, and your job is to hit the ball back to them in ways that reinforce the city, the setting, and the system, turning their moves into opportunities for them to make more moves.

Often, the players (and their moves) drive the fiction forward and you don't have to do a damn thing. They make moves, they hit (rolling 7+ on the dice) on those moves, and you interpret what happens in the fiction according to whatever their moves tell you to do, pushing the story forward as the direct result of whatever the player characters are doing in the story. Easy peasy.

But there are times when the player moves aren't enough—when the players roll and miss, when they aren't sure what to do next, when they take a huge risk and look to you for the immediate consequences, when just working through their side of the conversations isn't sufficient. In those moments, it's up to you to make a move that keeps the fiction flowing.

The players say what their characters do and what goals they set out to achieve, but your job is to tell them how the world reacts to their actions with contributions modified and modulated by your agendas and principles. Moves are the concrete embodiment of that responsibility, the way you're going to structure and support everything you bring to the story.

## MAKE A MOVE WHEN...

You make a move—as hard or soft as you like—when:

- ♦ ...there's a lull in the action
- ♦ ...a player misses a roll
- ♦ ...a player hands you a golden opportunity

It's your job to keep the story moving. If the fiction ever stalls out, gets boring, or drags, it's time for you to make a move. Generally, moves you make when there's a lull in the action are softer moves, designed to get the characters moving and push the story forward, but you might need harder moves to get the characters to stand up and take action. Sometimes a bunch of goons need to crash into a player character's apartment to get them involved in the story!

It's your job to interpret misses. If a player misses a roll, it's time for you to make a move. The moves you make in response to misses should always flow from the fiction—a fictional result rooted in a fictional cause—such that the player can understand the fictional source of the fictional outcome. Remember to **cloak your move in darkness and shadow**; make it seem like the events of the story flow from the choices and position of the player, not just a die roll. If the move tells you what to do on a miss, then follow through on that promise, but otherwise you're set to make a move, as hard or soft as you like.

It's your job to represent the city's voracious nature. If a player gives you a golden opportunity—ignoring an immediate problem, opening themselves up to a dangerous foe, or generally acting without regard to their social or emotional security—it's time for you to make a move. Golden opportunities usually demand hard moves: if the characters ignore the city's dangers, the city gets to act upon them with impunity. Don't be shy about bringing the heat when a player character ignores an obvious threat; trust yourself to find a way to **be a fan of their character** while **treating them according to their station and status**.

## SOFTER MOVES VS. HARDER MOVES

Not all moves have the same impact: when the game calls for you to make a move, you have to decide on how hard a move to make. Softer moves focus on threats, opportunities, and foreshadowing that set the PCs up to make future moves, while harder moves deliver on stakes and consequences, both in immediacy—something has happened the PCs can't change—and severity—horrible things coming to pass or huge shifts in the fiction.

Moves lie on a spectrum, from softest to hardest:

- ♦ **Softest:** You hear about an old conflict between your mentor and a dangerous adversary.
- ♦ **Softer:** You hear that your mentor is in grave danger right now.
- ♦ **Harder:** You find out that your mentor was kidnapped from their home.
- ♦ **Hardest:** Your mentor reveals they only pretended to be in danger to set you up for a terrible betrayal.

There's no rule for how hard a move to make in a given situation, but remember your principles and agendas. You aren't **being a fan of the PCs** when you make intensely hard moves every time they roll a miss; you aren't **dirtying the hands of all involved** if you let them walk away from bad situations without making tough choices. There's got to be a balance, one you manage scene by scene, move by move.

Balancing the immediacy and severity of harder moves is one of the most difficult parts of serving as an MC; immediate moves push players to take more drastic action while severe moves tend to drive home the dramatic impact of the story. Rarely is the right answer to jam one or both of those levers to the sticking point; a great MC finds the right moment for each of those flavors of narrative intensity.

But modulating moves leads to more interesting fiction! You might find that a moment that calls for the death of a PC—a hard move indeed!—is actually more powerful if you modulate the severity or immediacy. How will the player feel when an honorable death is narrowly avoided by a rescue from a hated enemy (lessening immediacy but not severity)? Or when that death only destroys their physical body, leaving them a spirit still capable of acting on the story (lessening severity but not immediacy)? The city is full of surprises.

## SOFTER MOVE EXAMPLES:

*As you're sneaking through Rilaya's sanctum, you feel a sharp wind blow through the hall, cold and menacing. You look around, but you don't see anyone. A low growl starts to emerge from one of the darker corners of the room. Perhaps you've awakened a spirit guardian. What do you do?*

*The negotiation isn't going well. Rico says, "I don't know, cabrón. Maybe we just kill you and take the artifacts you say you've got with you. How about that?" He pulls out a 9mm from his jacket and casually gestures with it for you to get out the ancient stones. It's a ploy for sure, but you worry he might get more dangerous if you don't make the deal soon. What do you do?*

*Michael has been distant for weeks, but he's uncharacteristically straightforward when you confront him about his lengthy absences from work. "This marriage doesn't work for me anymore. Can we talk about going to see a counselor again?" He looks down at his wedding ring as if he's ashamed to be wearing it. What do you do?*

## HARDER MOVE EXAMPLES:

*As you're sneaking through Rilaya's sanctum, you feel a sharp wind blow through the hall, cold and menacing. Suddenly something feral is on you, digging claws into your flesh and scratching at your face. You can't make out what it is, but you assume it's a spirit guardian bound to this place by Rilaya herself. Take 2-harm. What do you do?*

*The negotiation isn't going well. Rico says, "I don't know, cabrón. Maybe we just kill you and take the artifacts." He laughs as he takes out his gun from his jacket—a 9mm that looks like it's seen some use—and several other members of his pack emerge from the shadows. Looks like this was an ambush...and there's too many of them to fight. What do you do?*

*Michael has been distant for weeks, but the note he left you is uncharacteristically straightforward: "This marriage doesn't work for me anymore. I'm leaving you; I've found someone who really understands me. The kids are already staying with your mother." His wedding ring sits on the counter, nothing more than a paperweight for the note underneath it. What do you do?*



## BASIC MOVES FOR THE MC

Here is the list of basic moves for the MC, followed by some information and advice about using these moves in play:

- ♦ Inflict harm or corruption
- ♦ Surface a conflict, ancient or modern
- ♦ Put someone in danger
- ♦ Propose an opportunity with a cost
- ♦ Reveal a deal done in their absence
- ♦ Turn a move back on them
- ♦ Offer or claim a Debt owed
- ♦ Mobilize resources to shift the odds
- ♦ Paint the city in magical tones
- ♦ Lock down, exploit, or claim a place of power
- ♦ Tell the consequences and ask
- ♦ Activate their stuff's downside
- ♦ After every move: "What do you do?"

### INFLECT HARM OR CORRUPTION

Harm (page 46) is a versatile tool for raising the stakes. You can inflict it against people close to the player characters—allies, loved ones, enemies—or directly against the player characters themselves. The amount of harm is completely up to you, but the weapons and situation should provide guidance. Corruption (page 45) raises the stakes more slowly, pushing characters into the darkness and tempting them with new powers. Inflict corruption directly only rarely; the players mark corruption when their moves or corruption trigger tells them to do so, and you often don't need to inflict more. But when a moment occurs on screen that leaves you and the players aghast at what this character has done, corruption is the perfect way to remind them that their actions can lead them straight into oblivion.

*As the first demon leaps at you, you level your shotgun and pull the trigger. The blast inflicts 3-harm, knocking the demon to the ground. A second demon lifts you off your feet, throwing you into the wall with superhuman strength; mark 2-harm. The demon marches toward you, grinning as her claws glint in the low light. What do you do?*

*You turn the morphine drip all the way up, ensuring your boss will never wake up from the coma, let alone testify against you. While you were worried someone might spot you, no one even comes in the room. His breathing slows, then stops. Mark corruption...*

### SURFACE A CONFLICT, ANCIENT OR MODERN

Cities are rife with conflicts, filled with communities that clash over resources and strong-willed individuals who make bids for power against entrenched opposition. No Circle in the city has avoided the curse of internal politics, and every political actor is enmeshed in a dozen fights of various sizes. Look for opportunities to present these conflicts to the player characters, especially when they go looking for useful resources or solutions to their problems. Alternate between old and new, serious and trivial, deadly and merely annoying. Diversity in everything.

*You cast the bones on the floor of your store, gently chanting Watanabe's name. The visions rush through your mind, almost too fast to comprehend. He's an old vampire. Only one thing is certain: he's the one that closed the gates to Arcadia a hundred years ago. What do you do?*

*Outside the club, Abby leans in close to you. Her blood is racing, you can hear it pounding in her veins. "Rico wants Elora dead. She's become a problem for our pack. Maybe we can come to a deal?" What do you do?*

### PUT SOMEONE IN DANGER

Above all others, this is your go-to move for raising the tension in a scene; if there is a lull in the action, putting someone in danger is almost never the wrong move. You can put the player characters in danger directly or threaten NPCs they care about onscreen and offscreen. The city is a dangerous place; bring that danger to bear directly and give the player characters a chance to react accordingly.

*You land softly in the alley, close enough to the feeding vampire to smell the victim's blood. You ready a stake when you hear laughter behind you. Four more vamps, all armed, wearing the same gang colors as the one you were hunting. Looks like this was a trap. What do you do?*

*When you call home to check on the babysitter, fucking Sabrina answers the phone. "Everyone's fine here, darling. Just don't do anything stupid, and everyone will be fine." What do you do?*

## PROPOSE AN OPPORTUNITY WITH A COST

If the players seem stuck or frustrated by a problem, leap in with NPCs that promise to solve the problem...at a cost. Be honest and direct with your offers: don't wait for the players to exhaust themselves when you've got a city full of people ready and willing to make a deal to get something done. Same goes for narrative opportunities—tell the players what concrete advantage they can seize and how much it costs to seize it. The players may not realize all the options in front of them, especially when the costs seem fuzzy; tell them what they can get away with and make the offer tempting.

*The dark wizard grins, his smile a sharp cluster of knives: "Bring me Riker's heart—I'll need it for the ritual—and I'll cast the resurrection spell. No one should have to bury a child." What do you do?*

---

*You can't all get away now that you've been caught... but you could leave Lianne to fight that elemental alone. She's already engaged with it, so all you have to do is slip out the back and leave her to hold it off. What do you say?*

## REVEAL A DEAL DONE IN THEIR ABSENCE

The city moves all around the player characters, striking deals and solving problems. Think about what your NPCs do offscreen sometimes—especially the higher status characters—and look for opportunities to relay to the player characters that they face active and determined opposition; you can look to your prep during the faction turn (page 255) if you aren't sure what kinds of things might be going on in the city. Make these reveals loud and obvious; it's a great moment when an ally reveals a betrayal (or weakness) or a villain monologues about their plans (or victories). Remember that if your players don't know that a deal has been struck, it's like the deal was never struck at all.

*"I'd love to help you, my friend. I really would. It's just that Rico came by earlier. He made it clear that you're on your own in his territory. Best of luck. Nothing personal, you know."*

---

*The Queen of Winter laughs. "You want me to side with you? I've been the one trying to kill you, love. And once I finish the job for Watanabe, I'll finally be able to stop worrying about what I owe him." What do you do?*

## TURN A MOVE BACK ON THEM

Sometimes the best move is to let the players have everything they want and more. Much more. A miss isn't a failure, right? It's your chance to make a move, to remind the players that their choices have real impact. Give them an unexpected consequence that results from their move, and make it clear to them how their actions drive the fiction. You don't always have to undermine the original move—the intended violence, the hopeful escape—to turn the move back on the player character; the city is filled to the brim with sudden twists and reversals of fortune.

*You tap your inner wolf, looking for enough strength to shrug off these chains and get out of here. But your wolf isn't satisfied with a taste of freedom; it wants the whole meal. Your body shifts and warps, changing completely into your wolf form. Those that imprisoned you must pay. Mark corruption. Are you ready to hurt them?*

---

*The demons nod when you lie to them about Wong; she's not to blame, but better to put them on her trail than yours. The demon in charge—Vasquez, you think—smiles and gestures at the demons near the van. "It's good to know that someone is to blame for all this chaos." The van door opens, revealing Wong, already captured by these demon fuckups. What do you do?*

## OFFER OR CLAIM A DEBT OWED

Debt is the central economy of the game. Claim Debts whenever a character does a favor for another and offer Debts when you need the player characters to get moving. Remember that both parties need to agree that a Debt is owed, though, so you need your player's buy-in to claim a Debt from them. Make it obvious why they owe—someone stepped in and helped them out without proper recompense, or the player characters stepped into someone's business that wasn't their own.

*"Your meddling in my affairs cost me greatly, and I expect you knew that when you got involved." Watanabe seems almost bemused by your arrogance, but his tone is stern; you owe him a Debt. What do you say in response?*

---

*The faerie who saved you from the burning wreckage carries you to her car. She says, "Don't move. You've got burns all over your body. Stay still." You're groggy, but you'll fucking live. You definitely owe her a Debt. What do you do?*



## MOBILIZE RESOURCES TO SHIFT THE ODDS

The city isn't static; the odds constantly shift as powerful forces move resources around to deal with problems and secure their holdings. When things get too easy or too dire, look for an opportunity to shift the odds and keep things interesting. Allies may send support, enemies may acquire new resources, or the situation within a scene might change as NPCs activate supernatural powers. The city should never feel like one side's victory is inevitable; the movers and shakers of the city always adjust their bets, shifting resources from one column to another to make sure no one ever comes out truly ahead.

*Your shotgun blast catches the werewolf squarely in the chest; he rears his head back and howls, his cry of pain echoed back at him as his pack closes the distance to your position. You know you don't have much time before the rest of the pack is here. What do you do?*

*As'ad isn't deterred by the forces you've brought to bear against him. "Is this all you have?" He starts to chant, his skin growing harder and more resilient as magic reinforces his fragile human form. What do you do?*

## PAINT THE CITY IN MAGICAL TONES

The Circles aren't shy or nervous about their influence; their spaces and interests often spill out into the open, just out of reach of mortal eyes...but everywhere you look if you know the truth. Blend the mundane and magical together: hints in the shadows sometimes—vampires slinking through the crowd at a rave—and brazen intrusions others—a faerie bar open to anyone who can get past the troll bouncer. Remind your players that the supernatural is always present by marking the city with the obvious presence of every Circle, overlapping and crashing into each other until it's clear that the city belongs to everyone all at once.

*Everyone at the conference appears to have one of Riker's cards, his sigil burning with magical energy that's obvious to anyone with the sight to see it. You haven't seen him, but...he must be around here somewhere. What do you do?*

*You stumble out of the alley—leaving your pursuers far behind you—into a part of the city you've never seen before; a ghost market. You see enslaved wraiths on display, chained to anchors held by other spirits, ghostly currency changing hands back and forth. What do you do?*

## LOCK DOWN, EXPLOIT, OR CLAIM A PLACE OF POWER

Use this move to change the status quo of a place that matters to the player characters, perhaps because they care about it directly or because they want to seize or exploit it themselves. Locking down a place of power makes entry to it more difficult: added security, locked and reinforced entry points, political pressure to stay out, etc.; exploiting a place of power means treating it like a mere resource, revealing a weakness in it, or striking at someone inside who might have thought they were safe; claiming a place of power means someone or something takes possession of the place somehow, claiming it as their own.

*The city planning office said this building was abandoned, but the wizards who are squatting here don't seem to have gotten the memo. They're tapping a ley line. Hard. You can feel it from a block away. What do you do?*

*The faeries don't take kindly to your threats. The Queen of Summer rises: "Enough. You shame yourself with this clumsy intimidation. I have told you what is mine—your sanctum—and I see no reason to change course. Vacate it or face my wrath, little wizard." What do you do?*

## TELL THE CONSEQUENCES AND ASK

Whenever the player characters try to get something, make it clear what it's going to cost them. Sometimes that cost is direct, like taking gunfire (and harm) when you wade into a battle or marking corruption to complete a terrible act, but often it's about risk and uncertainty: tell them what it might cost them and then let them make moves to see what comes of their choices. If you tell them the cost of something outright, though, let it stand; don't double back to make things easier on them later or require them to roll dice when there's no uncertainty.

*You can tell that the werewolves aren't interested in storming your position. Too much chaos. They all want to live. If you make a run for your truck, though, you're exposed and vulnerable...and they still have teeth. What do you do?*

*When you get everything together for the banishment ritual, you realize that this is the kind of ritual that requires dark magics your mentor warned you not to touch. You'll have to mark corruption if you complete it. You still want to go forward with it?*

## ACTIVATE THEIR STUFF'S DOWNSIDE

The fictional positioning around each character gives you an infinite number of opportunities to turn their own bodies, powers, relationships, and resources against the player characters. Whether it's the limitation on a weapon—guns need to reload, swords get stuck in stuff—the cost of supernatural power—corruption, unintended effects—or the inevitable selfishness of their allies and friends, turning something the players see as useful into a problem or complication drives home how vulnerable the characters are to the city's dangers. Don't forget to be a fan of the player characters when you use this move; play toward the players' conceptions of their own characters, and they'll be thrilled to see their weaknesses appear during a session.

*Your knees can't take this shit, old man. There's a reason you got out of the game, a reason you leave ghost hunting to the young now. But just as you realize how little juice you've got left, the wraith is on you, sinking cold, spectral fingers into your chest. What do you do?*

*You try to shoot the demon with your rifle, but she's too quick for you. She gets in close, teeth bared, and goes for your throat. At this range, the gun is useless. "I know how you fight, hunter. We've been watching you for weeks." What do you do?*

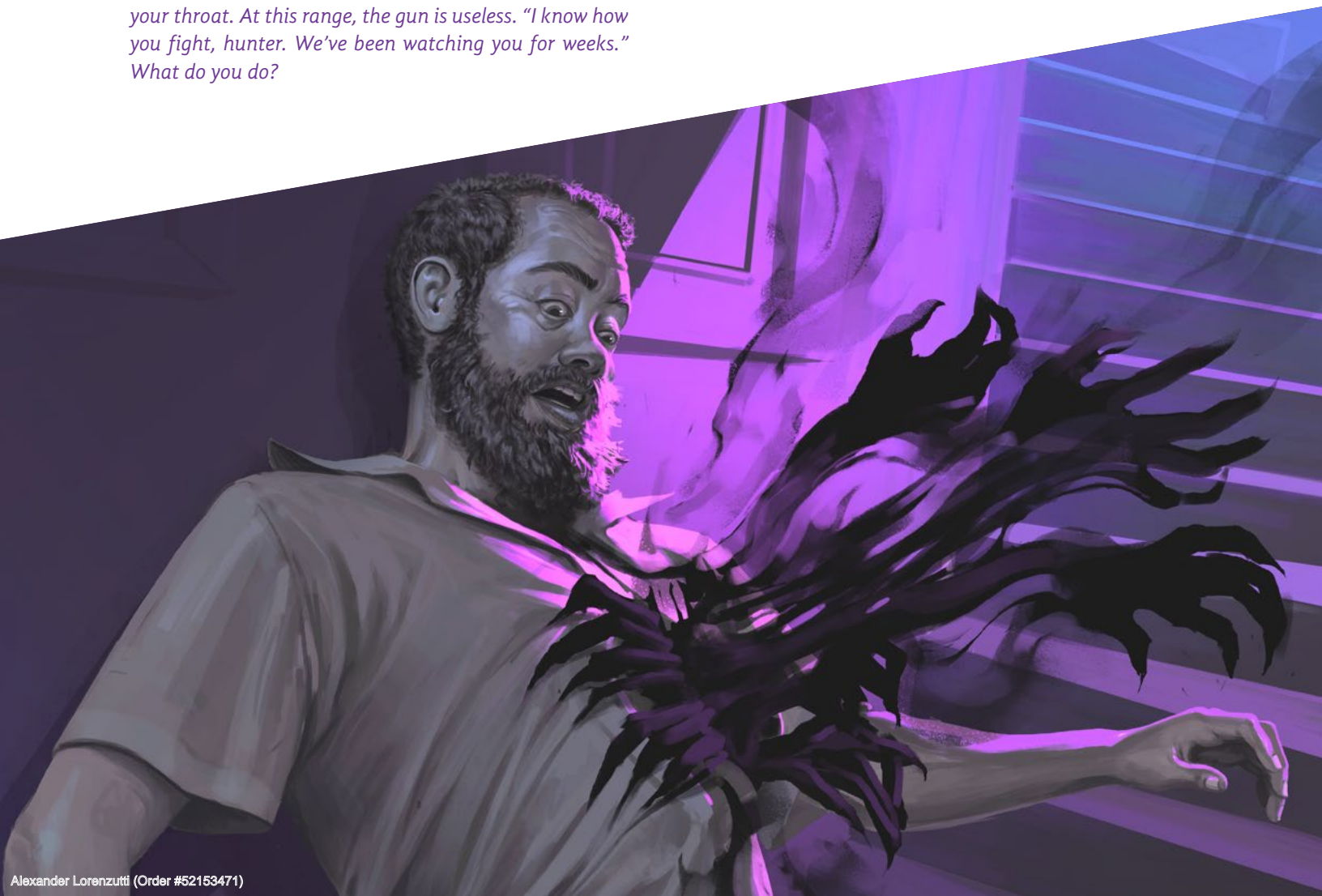
## AFTER EVERY MOVE:

### "WHAT DO YOU DO?"

Each time you make an MC move, put the focus firmly back on a player by asking, "What do you do?" Make it clear who gets to act next and what conditions they face. Pass the ball back to them with purpose and direction. Do this enough times, and your players will be ready to take the narrative and run with it as soon as you hand it back to them.

*You wake up somewhere between this world and the next, the shadowy shapes of ethereal spirits floating by as if they were trapped in amber. It's clear the ritual worked, even if it's not clear where you are. You feel the floor—sticky and warm—shudder underneath you, and you know you can't stay long. If you want to find Ricky, you'll have to move quick. What do you do?*

*You swing the wheel of the car to the right as the immortal's goons open fire, their bullets shattering the glass all around you. You feel a sharp pain—mark 2-harm—and your side feels wet from a gush of blood. You're on the open road, the gunfire fading in the distance, but...you won't be conscious for much longer. What do you do?*





## MOVES SNOWBALL

Moves in **URBAN SHADOWS** are designed to **snowball**, the outcomes from every move bleeding into more moves and more drama. This is especially true in the 7-9 range of most player moves, when the opposition gets a chance to act or the consequences for the move are messy, requiring a response from the player character who made the move in the first place. Moves are the main source of narrative momentum in the game, the reason that new things happen as the action resolves.

Often, this snowball leads to moves upon moves upon moves, a back and forth between characters that only results in some resolution once both sides have had plenty of chances to act. A player character **turning to violence** leads to an NPC **inflicting harm**, which leads to the player character trying to **escape the situation**, which leads to the NPC **putting someone else in danger**, which leads to...you get the idea.

It's your job to modulate the pace of this snowballing chain reaction. At the beginning of a scene, create drama, giving answers to questions that lead to more questions or putting people into danger in a broad way that encourages action. As scenes reach their peak, change tack, confirming existing information and bringing threats to bear quickly to make the players make hard choices.

At some level, this means moving from softer to harder moves (page 206) as things begin to click into place, giving the players an increasingly smaller window to resolve the action in their favor. When the plot reaches a peak moment of drama and uncertainty and it's time for you to drop the hammer, when the players roll a miss—you want to make sure that you've laid the groundwork for the harder moves you're going to make.

But moves aren't just about resolving action in the fiction! They are also tools that prompt you to say interesting things as the MC, to complicate the existing situation and build on what the players have added to the story. Look for places to give out information, complicate relationships, and claim Debts; take the time to use your MC moves in unexpected ways that broaden the scope of conflicts and honor your agendas and principles. Moves snowball to push the action forward, but they are richer tools than mere resolution mechanics—they constantly push you and the players toward new conflicts and ideas that make the city feel real.

## PC VS. PC CONFLICT

Players and MCs new to **URBAN SHADOWS** sometimes doubt that the system can handle extensive player vs. player fiction. The game *is* more interesting if the players have opposition from the Circles and NPCs that run the city, but the system is perfectly capable of handling occasions when two players try to hurt or dominate each other. Here are some tips for making your MC moves when two players go toe-to-toe.

### SHARING SPOTLIGHT

When PCs go at each other, it's important that you share the spotlight between them. One PC may start the conflict—**turning to violence** or **letting it out**—but the action has to pass around the table so everyone gets time in the spotlight. This doesn't mean that everyone gets equal time; it's your job to keep the focus on whatever is interesting in the conflict until the spotlight needs to shift. Remember to **be a fan of the player characters**: no PC should stomp over the others with impunity, but some PCs may get more of the spotlight. It's your call.

### AIDING AND INTERFERING

**Lending a hand** and **getting in the way** become crucial moves for players engaged in player vs. player conflict. If one character attacks the other, then the target of the attack can only respond by **getting in the way** until the move is resolved. It doesn't matter if they're trying to distract the attacker, hit back hard, or run away; all attempts to reduce the effectiveness of the attack are rolled up into **get in the way**. Only once the original move resolves can the targeted player follow through on that action and make a move of their own. Anyone else wanting to get involved has to follow the same framework; they can **lend a hand** to the attacker (or **get in the way** themselves) or wait until the move resolves to make their own move...

### MULTIPLE MISSES

Player vs. player conflict often involves misses, as the players get in the way of each other's actions and take risks they normally avoid. Take advantage of these moments to turn a move back on the attacker—"Since you missed while **turning to violence**, I'm going to give that to the other player as if she hit a 10+ to **turn to violence** against you..."—or introduce external threats that push the players back together if things are too hot. Nothing ends an argument like a werewolf pack crashing the party!

## PC VS. PC EXAMPLE

In this example, two PCs (Hanako and Darius) have come to blows. Hanako, the Veteran, learned that Darius, the Vamp, killed Hanako's cousin—an oracle—and Darius refuses to be taken to the Wizard's Council to be tried for the crime. Hanako tried to **cash in a Debt** to get Darius to come peacefully, but the vampire successfully **refused to honor the Debt**, leaving Hanako with few options.

*"Time to come with me, Darius," Harley, Hanako's player, says. "I take out my gun and point it at him."*

*Marissa looks at Darius's player, Dominic. "How do you react to that, Darius?" Always asking loads of questions!*

*"I'm mad. His cousin attacked me; I acted in self-defense."*

*"Tell that to the Council," Harley says. "They'll understand."*

*"Fuck this. Wizards don't get a say in my business. I want to **let it out** by baring my fangs and displaying my dominance." Marissa nods. Darius's player rolls and hits on a 10. "I'll mark the corruption and ignore the complications."*

*"Hold on," says Harley. "I want to **get in the way** by shooting my gun into the ceiling and saying, 'I'm not fucking around here, Darius.'" He rolls with Night +0 and comes up with a 10+, imposing a -2 on Dominic's roll.*

*"The sound of the gunshot catches you off guard, Darius. Hanako looks like a real threat," says Marissa. "You have to pick: deal with a costly, limited, or unstable version of your threat or mark corruption. I think in this case, limited makes sense; Hanako won't have to **keep his cool** to come at you, but he will take a -1 forward if he attacks."*

*Darius's player sighs. "I want this motherfucker out of my face. I'll take the corruption. I hiss, Hanako, and you can see my face contort as my vampiric nature rises to the surface."*

*Marissa doesn't need to do much here, since the two of them are going at it pretty hard. She's **being a fan of the characters** by just staying out of the way!*

*"I'm not leaving here without Darius," Harley says, "I'll **keep my cool**. I don't want him to scare me off." Harley rolls with Spirit +0 and gets boxcars! His total of 12 means Darius can't even interfere.*

*"I say 'Fine, old man. It's your funeral' and leap at him," Dominic says. Marissa and Hanako's player both nod, and Darius rolls, **turning to violence**. With his **BLOOD** +3, Darius gets a 13 on his roll. Hanako won't accomplish anything by interfering, so he chooses to inflict harm on Darius as the vamp closes the distance; Darius chooses to take something from Hanako.*

*"Darius moves faster than you thought possible, Hanako. You fire—mark 2-harm, Darius, as the bullets pass through you—but take 1-harm as he lifts you up and slams you into the wall, dazing you just long enough for Darius to snatch your gun. What do you do?" Now that Darius has gotten in a hit, Marissa is sharing the spotlight with Hanako.*

*"This isn't over. I push off from the wall, trying to slam into him and get my gun back." Hanako **turns to violence**, but only gets a 4. Darius doesn't even need to interfere to make the roll a miss. Harley groans and laughs; he knew he was in trouble, but this is worse than he thought!*

*"Okay, Darius. I'm going to give you the move as if you rolled a 10+ if you want it." Marissa is **turning Hanako's move back on him**, giving Darius control of the fight without asking the vampire to make another move.*

*"Fuck yeah. I'll take inflict terrible harm. I still have the gun, right? I shoot him a bunch, emptying the whole clip."*

*Marissa winces. Rough. "Yeah, that's 2-harm at close range, plus 1-harm more for inflicting terrible harm. Combined with the harm you took earlier, Hanako, you're at critical. What do you do?"*

*"Ouch. I think I'm out." Harley looks at his sheet. "Yeah, full up on harm." Marissa nods and looks over at Darius, sharing the spotlight again. What will the vampire do?*

*"I'm done here. Let the Council put him back together if they want him on their side so badly..."*

These moments—when the drama of the story pushes the characters up against each other hard—are amazing. When the players really care about the outcomes, when they are driven to pursue their goals or avenge the fallen up to (and past) the point of their own demise, you know the tale is worthy of the city you've built together.

But pitting the PCs against each other is almost too easy—just have a Status-3 NPC call in a Debt for one character to kill another. The real challenge is to push on the PCs until you organically find this kind of drama: finding their weak spots, getting them mixed up in PC-NPC-PC triangles (page 219), and cajoling them to make tough choices until they take the initiative to act against each other.

That said, only rarely will two characters take the violence all the way to the death of a PC; players generally like to stay on the same side of the fight. But if they do choose to directly oppose each other, the mechanics and your moves support you every step of the way.



# CIRCLE MOVES

## CIRCLE MOVES FOR THE MC

Each of the city's Circles has a set of additional MC moves associated with the Circle and its activities. If that Circle is in play—e.g. the agents and minions of that Circle are working to accomplish some goal, or the player characters are investigating the holdings or politics of that Circle—then these Circle moves are available for you to use whenever you could use a basic MC move. Using Circle moves helps to differentiate communities from each other by adding variety and specificity keyed to their core values and conflicts, allowing you to bring the themes and aesthetics of each Circle to bear at the right moment!

### WHEN TO USE A CIRCLE MOVE?

Your basic MC moves (page 205) cover most situations, but sometimes you want to emphasize the role a particular Circle plays in a situation, especially when the player characters are on the Circle's turf. One vampire alone in an alley might just **inflict harm** against a single hunter when the player characters roll a miss; a whole nest of vampires is more likely to **display an aggressive show of force**, ripping apart one, vulnerable intruder while attempting to scare the rest off.



### MORTALIS

- ◆ Adapt to the changing circumstances
- ◆ Gather in numbers to confront a threat
- ◆ Discover information that puts someone in danger
- ◆ Remind someone of their mundane obligations



### NIGHT

- ◆ Display an aggressive show of force
- ◆ Threaten someone's interests or holdings
- ◆ Claim territory from the weak or foolish
- ◆ Make the best of a difficult situation



### POWER

- ◆ Impose a cost for the greater good
- ◆ Mystically foreshadow a conflict or challenge
- ◆ Act in opposition to chaos or change
- ◆ Snap up magical resources vulnerable or exposed



### WILD

- ◆ Challenge the PCs with alien expectations and traditions
- ◆ Offer extraordinary assistance for a sticky price
- ◆ Pull something from one realm into another
- ◆ Escalate conflict for reasons mysterious or opaque

## MORTALIS MOVES

### ADAPT TO THE CHANGING CIRCUMSTANCES

The only true resource that humans have in the face of the supernatural is their adaptability and cunning. Mortals move quickly to change tactics or invent new technologies that even the odds with supernatural creatures, including the player characters, and they aren't stymied by the status quo. Everyone else may accept that the city is what it is; any member of Mortalis has already gotten used to the idea that the city is always changing.

*The crew of hunters you dealt with earlier swings around the corner in their truck. It looks like they've patched up the front end you destroyed and they've mounted some kind of crossbow on the back. What do you do?*

*You swear that you left Akai tied up here in the closet, but she's gone now. Looks like she managed to cut herself loose on some of the metal grating. There's blood everywhere, but she's free. What do you do?*

### GATHER IN NUMBERS TO CONFRONT A THREAT

Mortals have one other advantage on supernatural creatures: numbers. Simply put, there are more mortals in the city—more cops, more hunters, more parents—than there are vampires, werewolves, demons, wizards, and ghosts. And when mortals form a mob, they can even the odds quite quickly in nearly any situation.

*Talia isn't stupid. You caught her off guard before, but she's brought eight or so additional hunters this time. You spot them downstairs through the window, loading their guns and securing their gear before coming into the building. What do you do?*

*You thought the vote before the school board would go smoothly, but it looks like a community organization has mobilized residents of the apartment building against you. One of the local leaders, Saima, stands up to the mic: "We don't want people like him"—she points directly at you—"telling us how to raise our children." How do you respond?*

### DISCOVER INFORMATION THAT PUTS SOMEONE IN DANGER

The worst part about mortals, however, is their incessant curiosity. Investigators, landlords, doctors, all kinds of people may learn things about the city or the player characters that they are better off never knowing. Sometimes what mortals find exposes a weakness for someone else that the mortal intends to use against their target; more often than not what mortals learn simply puts them on a path to a place they ought not be.

*When you get home, you find your hunter gear strewn all over the living room. In the bedroom, your wife is packing a bag, your infant son already wrapped up in his coat. "I don't know what you've been keeping from me. But it looks awful," she says. What do you do?*

*The books you've come to the library to obtain—tomes of magic that no mortal should possess—are gone. The librarian says, "A high school student checked them out last week. Said she had some big project to do this weekend." What do you do?*

### REMIND SOMEONE OF THEIR MUNDANE OBLIGATIONS

It's easy to forget that Mortalis still runs the world, still collects taxes, still processes paperwork. Other Circles lay claim to territory and ancient rights, but mortal authorities track ownership via legal documents and municipal regulations. The same goes for personal obligations: your boss doesn't care that you're a faerie prince from Arcadia when your quarterly reports are due.

*Your sister calls: "Mike got in an accident. I'm still out of the country and the boys are at home with his mom, but she's leaving for work in an hour. When can you be there?"*

*The superintendent for the building doesn't even bother looking apologetic. He says, "It's not a complicated arrangement, fuckface; you pay rent and I don't change the locks. You're the one who screwed this up and got so far behind on these payments." What do you do?*



## NIGHT MOVES

### DISPLAY AN AGGRESSIVE SHOW OF FORCE

Night is filled with predators and exploiters, people changed into something dark and hard to recognize. They know the power in violence and prefer to gain the upper hand by throwing their weight around in tense situations. These actions aren't precisely calibrated strikes or empty threats; these are explosive moments of violence and aggression designed to shock and unnerve their targets.

*The other bar patrons laugh at your joke, but Masika doesn't think you're fucking funny. You try to explain, but she's on you too quickly, growling and snarling and cursing at you. She throws you onto the floor, her face contorted as her vampiric instincts surge to the surface. What do you do?*

*Your search for the ring in the sewers is cut short by a body of ghosts shouting and cursing at you. They're flooding through the walls, as if your presence has disturbed their eternal rest. One of them knocks the flashlight out of your hand, blanketing the room with darkness; another passes directly through you, chilling you to the bone. What do you do?*

### THREATEN SOMEONE'S INTERESTS OR HOLDINGS

Threats come naturally to Night; violence is the language of the street. Most members of Night speak that language fluently, pivoting from veiled ultimatums to direct impositions in a heartbeat—perhaps openly placing forces in preparation for an attack or lashing out to prove what they are willing to do. Either way threats are a prime tool for those who wield power in Night, a starting position for people who expect to resort to violence before a conflict is over.

*Watanabe is unimpressed by your show of force. He says, "Any further intrusion on my property will cost you a digit; any further destruction of my property will cost you a limb. Are we clear?" How do you respond?*

*You park your car on the street, the soft click of the lock echoing in the darkness. As if on cue, you hear a low growl emerge from the alley. A pack of werewolves trying to scare you off from this place, their distorted forms a reminder of the violence coursing through their limbs. What do you do?*

### CLAIM TERRITORY FROM THE WEAK OR FOOLISH

When territory lies in the hands of those who show signs of weakness, Night moves in to claim it with surprising force. They prefer to lie in wait until the perfect opportunity arises to spread their influence in the city, avoiding conflicts with powerful foes if possible.

*As you leave the bar, you see Rico and his werewolf pack standing around your car. One of his wolves already has the door open and finishes hotwiring the car as you walk up. "Thanks for the car," Rico laughs. What do you do?*

*You came looking for Anita, your faerie contact, but there aren't any faeries here at all. In fact, it looks to you like this whole bar turned over in the last week: it's all vampires as far as you can tell. What do you do?*

### MAKE THE BEST OF A DIFFICULT SITUATION

Mortalis thrives in the face of adversity, but Night is slow to learn new tactics and adjust. Instead, they tend to openly negotiate for what they can achieve in the moment, striking sudden compromises or settling for less than they could get. They are the masters of the dirty compromise, surprisingly quick to surrender in the hopes of living to fight another day.

*Bleeding and broken, Martinez grabs the briefcase of money and flees, abandoning his plan to kill you before collecting his reward. He leaps up to climb the wall of the building, using some vampiric ability to scale the wall with ease. What do you do?*

*When the ghost realizes it can't scare you away, it manifests directly. Its voice is hollow and cold, little more than a whisper: "Do you want to get the boy who is trapped here? Maybe then you'll leave? I give you help...then you leave?"*

## POWER MOVES

### IMPOSE A COST FOR THE GREATER GOOD

Power looks at events in the grand scheme, considering both the short- and long-term ramifications of their actions. Often, members of Power view the trials and suffering needed to achieve greatness as temporary, even necessary—despite how much it costs other communities to weather the storm. What others may see as a selfish, condescending imposition strikes the wizards, oracles, and immortals of the city as merely a sacrifice for the greater good.

*The head of the Wizard's Council cracks his gavel, interrupting your impassioned speech. "Your service to this Council is beyond reproach...but your dabbling in dark magic sullies all that you have done. We hereby strip you of your magics—an unfortunate but necessary step to protect the city from what you have become." What do you do?*

*You hear a shot ring out and feel a sharp pain; the world starts to blur and you fall to the ground. Mark 2-harm. Ezekiel is standing over you. "I'm sorry," he says, "this is the way that ends up with the fewest deaths. I'm sorry." What do you do?*

### MYSTICALLY FORESHADOW A CONFLICT OR CHALLENGE

The magical burden carried by members of Power often shows them the shape of things to come. Prophecies, divination, and rituals all give cryptic clues about the coming threats and challenges that the player characters soon face. The insight they hold, however, goes beyond merely warning the PCs of danger; the members of Power can offer specifics, clues, and opportunities within the greater warning.

*"There's someone coming," Sudarat says, her voice a candle in the darkness. "Someone who has the answers you seek. Go to the corner of 4th and Edelson tonight. Late. You'll see. It will become clear there." What do you do?*

*Mikael's face falls as he helps you complete the ritual. "Did you see it?" he asks. "The darkness on the other side of the veil. You must stop what you've started here!" He grabs you by your jacket. "Do you hear me? It must be stopped!" What do you do?*

## ACT IN OPPOSITION TO CHAOS OR CHANGE

Power likes the status quo; after all, they tend to be the ones in control. Order and consistency are their preferred way of life, not anarchy and restlessness, and they often intercede to prevent radical change or inhibit the reckless abandon of others. Their tools—spells, prophecies, and political influence—tend to work best when they have time to plan; they rarely side with a plan that relies on chaotic attempts to revolutionize the system.

*The two gangs charge at each other, a brawl that's sure to leave a number of them dead. Before they can really injure each other, a wave of magical energy floods the area, freezing them in place. A shadowy figure emerges from the alley nearby: "Well...we can't have them killing each other, can we?" What do you do?*

*"I'd love to tell you that you can kill Watanabe. He's a monstrous creature, warped by centuries of parasitic existence. But right now that would destabilize the vampire power structure, and thrust the city into chaos. Better to serve the devil you know when there are so many other devils with sharper knives, right?" What do you do?*

### SNAP UP MAGICAL RESOURCES VULNERABLE OR EXPOSED

Power doesn't care much for physical holdings or mundane territory, but they keep a close eye on magical resources that might be turned to a greater cause. When an opening presents itself, members of Power quickly seize whatever useful thing—arcane artifacts, magical tomes, and sites of mystical power—they can get their hands on, even if their claim is obvious and brazen. After all, magical and mystical tools are better off in their hands than someone else's.

*There's a sizzle of blue lightning, and your whole library crackles with ethereal energy. As you reach out to try to hold onto it, the whole thing vanishes in a flash. You stumble backward, stunned by the blow. Every book. Gone. What do you do?*

*"I'm telling you, the fucking palm reader lifted the amulet. It was there when I went into the shop, and now it's gone. I say we get it back before she does something stupid with it." What do you do?*



## WILD MOVES

### CHALLENGE THE PCS WITH ALIEN EXPECTATIONS AND TRADITIONS

Wild is a Circle of creatures from outside our reality who prioritize things others consider meaningless or honor customs that seem incomprehensible. They often turn to alien traditions or drives when pressured or threatened, and their spaces often require strange rituals and odd sacrifices to enter or exit. Confront the PCs with moments of otherness that demand action or offer strange possibilities. Never allow the weirdness of Wild to be just weird; it always demands a response, a next step, or an answer.

*The demon princess Eronth begins the negotiation in the traditional way: she cuts off her assistant's tongue and presents it to you. The red flesh squirms and moves on the plate, the black blood dripping off the edges to the ground. She grins and looks at you expectantly. What do you do?*

*It doesn't matter where you look, you can't find any faeries. It's like they all took a fucking holiday, right when you needed passage. But everywhere you look for them is deserted, locked, or gone...and a strange sigil is instead left behind marking the empty space. What do you do?*

### OFFER EXTRAORDINARY ASSISTANCE FOR A STICKY PRICE

Perfect solutions are rare—Mortalis holds limited answers, Night offers blunt violence, Power enacts costly magic—but Wild has the unique capacity to offer extraordinary assistance, unmatched by other Circles. All that is required, of course, is a signed contract or a difficult promise. Wild can give the PCs exactly what they want—without immediate costs or limits—but only when the offer has wicked strings and terrible implications you can bring to bear later.

*"Oh, I can give you what you need to kill Watanabe. I just need an ounce of your flesh and bone at a time of my choosing. One ounce. Not too much to ask, is it?" The faerie looks at you with hungry eyes. What do you do?*

*The demon sits next to you, uninvited. He's got a cup of ice cream and a smile. "I hear you're looking for Draxen. He's a tough bastard to find. I'd be willing to lend you a book that can help you find anyone you want if you're willing to sign away a bit of your soul. What do you say?"*

### PULL SOMETHING FROM ONE REALM INTO ANOTHER

Members of Wild can often travel between realms, sometimes taking others with them. They can also bring things from their native worlds into our own, both wondrous and frightening. Their ability to move back and forth doesn't free them from the obligations of the other side. In fact, it binds them ever more tightly—where can you run when the people you're running from can go anywhere?

*As you grab hold of the Queen of Winter, you feel her weight shift. There's a sharp pain in your stomach, and you're falling, crashing into ice and snow instead of the floor of the hotel. You look up...and find yourself far from the city, alone in a winter wasteland. What do you do?*

*As'ad smiles. He expected you to come with more allies. "I can assure you that we have contingency contracts." He spits some demonic phrase, and there's a crack of brimstone and a flash of smoke. A twelve-foot tall, horned beast rises out of the haze. What do you do?*

### ESCALATE CONFLICT FOR REASONS MYSTERIOUS OR OPAQUE

Wild is fickle and enigmatic; their ways are unclear to outsiders. They take offense at incidental slights and react unexpectedly towards offenders. They are prone to escalate a conflict suddenly and without warning when unspoken lines are crossed. They aren't without reason—they simply care about things that most mortals have never considered.

*"I was willing to do business with you...until you brought that thing in here," Constance shrieks, pointing at the corsage you are wearing. "I cannot believe you would disrespect me and my house in such a manner." He withdraws a knife from his jacket. What do you do?*

*The demons, previously uninterested in your comings and goings in Chinatown, stop and stare at you. You can feel them watching you enter the building, their eyes like needles running up and down your spine. In the reflection of the glass, you see them getting closer. What do you do?*

# USING NPCs

## CREATING & USING NPCs

All the characters you portray as the MC are NPCs... but in **URBAN SHADOWS**, you care most about the important NPCs, the people with names, drives, and personalities who shape the PCs and the city alike.

Creating and using these important NPCs is simple: when you want to introduce a new character, pick a Circle and a status, give them a name, and describe them to the players. That's it. No character sheets, no elaborate forms, no stress. To create an NPC, invent them fictionally and everything else follows.

*Marissa decides to add a new faerie NPC: the Queen of Winter, a beautiful, older woman with frost blue hair and a blindingly white dress. Right now, Marissa's not worried about how much harm she can inflict or suffer; she can figure that out later. Marissa does decide to make her Status-3, however, which means the Queen has her own faction through which she can influence the faction turn (page 250).*

As you create more NPCs, start to think about how they relate to each other, who is the enemy of whom, what other resources they can bring to bear. Think offscreen about their activities, and be prepared to **surface conflicts** (page 207) featuring them.

### NPC DRIVES

In addition to their name, look, and status, also give your important NPCs **DRIVES**, motivations that move them to simple, self-interested action. A vampire hunter probably has a drive like *avenge my sister*; a demon might have a drive like *find a way to stay on Earth*. Drives can be custom created for each NPC you create, but there's also a list of common drives on the MC Worksheet.

*Marissa decides the Queen's drive is to dethrone the King of Summer and establish the primacy of the Winter Court.*

When an NPC faces a challenge, think about their drive. If the challenge opposes it, the NPC moves hard against the opposition, hoping to knock it down and solve the problem. But if the challenge isn't directly opposed, the NPC might bide their time to look for opportunities to make the best of the situation. Clever NPCs might even manipulate the PCs into helping the NPCs fulfill their drives, offering help with a PC's problem if only the PC willingly contributes a little bit to a worthy cause...

### NPC DEBTS

NPCs often acquire Debts from PCs. Track these Debts separately for each NPC; a Debt gained by one NPC can't be cashed in by a different NPC even though you control both characters. We've given you space on the MC Worksheet to track Debts, but you need additional space as your story unfolds over several sessions—NPCs in **URBAN SHADOWS** tend to rack up a lot of Debts over the PCs!

Here's a few ways NPCs gain Debts on PCs:

- ♦ a PC escapes a scene and chooses (or you choose) *owe an NPC a Debt*
- ♦ a PC rolls a 7-9 while **persuading an NPC**
- ♦ an NPC does a favor for a PC without recompense, or a PC interferes in the NPC's business without cause
- ♦ a PC rolls a 7-9 or a miss while **refusing to honor a Debt** to an NPC

NPCs can cash in Debts with characters who owe them Debts per the Debt moves on page 90. Players can **refuse to honor a Debt** if they don't want to follow through, same as if a PC **cashed in the Debt** with them.

*Booker killed one of Rico's guys while out on a hunt; it was an accident, but Booker was clearly reckless. Both Booker and Mark—her MC—agreed that she owed Rico a Debt. A few sessions later, Rico shows up to cash in a Debt; he wants Booker to kill a vamp that's been moving in on their territory, a moderate favor for a skilled hunter.*

*"Fuck, no! I'm not getting involved," Booker says. "I owe the guy sure, but I'm not going to kill some random vamp."*

*"So you're refusing to honor the Debt?" asks Mark.*

*"Yeah, I tell Rico I'm not a hired killer." She rolls and gets a 4! Looks like Booker's not getting Rico off her case; she has to honor the Debt and make an honest attempt at killing the vamp...or lose all her Debts to Rico's Circle (Night).*

Remember your agendas, principles, and moves when NPCs cash in Debts. Ask the PCs to do things they're good at—**be a fan of the player characters**—but make the consequences messy—**dirty the hands of all involved**, looking for a chance to **put someone in danger**. Point the PCs at each other, ask tough questions, and push the characters toward situations requiring interesting moves to resolve completely.



## GOONS

Sometimes, you need a non-player character who isn't an important NPC—Watanabe's identical-looking sunglasses-wearing vampire bodyguards, or one of the Queen of Winter's countless, obsequious courtiers, for example. These figures are technically NPCs, but you're better off thinking of them as **GOONS**, minions who don't merit the same level of detail as important NPCs. PCs can't *put a name to a face* with goons—they don't have names or faces important enough to remember!

Goons aren't mechanically different from regular NPCs—they can hold status, owe Debts, etc.—but the instant they start interacting with more mechanics than just inflicting and suffering harm, you should stop thinking of them as just goons. If a goon starts gaining Debts, earning Status-1, building significant relationships with the PCs, or exhibiting a drive beyond just serving their master, then treat them like a more important NPC—give them a name, a drive, and so on.

In addition, using goons helps you avoid situations in which your players *put a name to a face* with a bunch of important NPCs at the same time or you have to track too many important NPCs from scene to scene. Introduce important NPCs (Status-1+) one at a time, each with their own set of minions and lackeys, and your players can follow what's going on in a bustling city.

Some goons might move up to being important NPCs during play—probably gaining Status-1—especially if the NPCs they serve come to harm; the new pack alpha that takes over when the last one dies is probably one of the alpha's old goons. Expanding a goon's role usually happens fairly naturally in the fiction—the same NPC starts showing up more often and taking on a larger role in the ongoing conflicts—but it might mean that a PC who hasn't met the goon before they take on a greater role might actually be able to *put a name to a face* with the goon when they finally come face to face.

## CASTING YOUR NPCs

Many **URBAN SHADOWS** MCs “cast” their NPCs using popular television and movie actors, sometimes even printing out portraits to present to their players when introducing important characters. Casting NPCs is a powerful technique because it both grounds the players with a shared understanding of the world—everyone knows what that vampire's voice sounds like when he's played by a famous actor—and nurtures a sense of collective storytelling!

## PC-NPC-PC TRIANGLES

NPCs pursue their drives with abandon, but that doesn't make them one-dimensional creatures enslaved to their desires. Diversify your portrayal of your NPCs by showing different PCs different sides of the same character, creating PC-NPC-PC triangles where two (or more) PCs have fundamentally different relationships with the same NPC.

*Marissa decides the Queen of Winter thinks of one PC, Sunny, as a potential convert to her faction and another, Kashida, as an existential threat to her plans to wipe out a rival faction. Marissa thinks the Queen is likely to extend an olive branch to Sunny, hoping to win them over and count them as an ally, while cashing in Debts with her existing allies to undermine Kashida's status and minimize his influence. Of course, the Queen will wait until she has her hooks firmly set into Sunny before moving against Kashida...*

The Queen doesn't see Sunny and Kashida's relationship as more than an obstacle to her drive, one that needs to be broken apart for her to achieve her goals...but now the two PCs have to deal both with the Queen's machinations and their own feelings about their out-of-control, evolving relationship with a powerful, Status-3 NPC. If the Queen merely attacked both of them, the PCs would create an easy (and boring) alliance; complicating the relationship with a PC-NPC-PC triangle means additional NPC pressure creates *more* drama, instead of merely pushing the PCs to work together.

## WHEN NPCS ATTACK

Eventually, some of your NPCs will decide the best way to deal with the PCs is to hurt or kill them. Since one of your moves is **inflict harm**, you're free to hit the PCs with harm whenever it's appropriate, even to the point that the NPCs kill the PCs. That said, you want to set up the punch before you follow through with harm; no player should ever be surprised when an NPC stomps on their character's face.

One of the best ways to set up harm in the fiction is to make a softer move and let the PCs decide how to respond: "Booker, two of the four vamps that trapped you in the alley run at you. One of them has a metal baseball bat; the other has a chain. What do you do?" No harm yet, but plenty of pressure. Booker has to know the heat is on, and the consequences—like a metal bat to the head—seem pretty clear.

If Booker simply tries to get out of the way, she's **keeping her cool**—she says something like "I'm trying to avoid getting hurt"—and rolls to see what happens. She avoids their blows on a hit, but a miss means you can **inflict harm** as established (probably 1- or 2-harm, depending on how hard a move you want to make). She doesn't *have to* try to get out of the way, but if she just ignores the threat, that's a golden opportunity (page 205)—you can **inflict harm** with impunity. You gave her a chance and she blew it. Vampires with bats and chains don't fuck around.

Of course, it's possible she might try to meet their violence directly, seizing the moment to **turn to violence** against them (since they started the fight!). That's fine; the situation would be different if they were already on her, but she's got time to react. Similarly, she might instead try to **persuade them** to back down, **trick** them into thinking she's the wrong target, or **cash in a Debt** to stay their hand, but all those attempts have a clear risk—a miss means they can bring their full harm to bear.

There isn't any system for initiative or turn order in **URBAN SHADOWS**. Conflicts move fluidly between characters, like the camerawork of a TV show or movie jumping back and forth from one combatant to the other. One side makes a move; the other side responds in kind. Combat isn't a hard and fast back and forth, though, with each character getting a turn before the next character gets to act. Sometimes you might make several moves before the PCs get to react, especially if they're hitting on 7-9s and making tough choices.

*Rashid, played by Ram, has found himself in a spot with a group of hunters enthralled to an elder vampire. Rashid managed to get out of the hunters' safehouse with a 9mm before things got messy, but they're hot on Rashid's tail.*

*Marissa, Ram's MC, says, "As you run toward your car, you see the headlights of their truck round the corner. The driver guns the engine and they drive right toward you, knocking over a bunch of trash bins as they get moving."*

*Ram says, "Ah, crap. Okay, I start shooting at the driver."*

*"At this distance, you probably can't hit them with the 9mm. If you wait until they're close, the momentum of the truck will carry them into you, even if you do shoot the driver. You want to chance it?" Marissa's **telling the consequences and asking**; she wants to make the costs of the choice really clear to Ram before they commit.*

*"Dammit. No, I don't want to get hit. I'll dive out of the way. I guess that's **keeping my cool**, since I want to avoid getting hit?" Marissa nods, and Ram rolls a 7, barely a hit.*

*"In order to move quickly enough, you'll telegraph your position, and they'll see where you take cover. They'll have the advantage when they roll up. Still want to move?"*

*"Yeah, I want to get to some cover."*

*"Okay. The truck barrels toward you, but you move quickly, throwing yourself to the ground behind a fire hydrant. They open fire on your position, the bullets striking the concrete all around you. What do you do?" Marissa's **putting someone in danger**—Rashid!—but not yet **inflicting harm**.*

*"I want to fire back! Can I **turn to violence** now?"*

*Marissa **tells the consequences and asks** again: "They've got you in their sights. If you stand up and fire, you're going to take full harm, even on a hit. Still wanna?" Marissa's saying **what the city demands**, keeping the pressure up.*

*"Fuck no. Maybe I can shoot out one of their headlights by shooting wildly from cover?"*

*"Yeah, that sounds like **mislead, distract, or trick**. On a hit, you can create an opportunity to do some damage."*

Remember that groups have special rules for inflicting and suffering harm. See **Groups** on page 50 for more, but the general rule is thus: for each size step a group is larger than their opposition, the group inflicts +1-harm and suffers -1-harm. A medium group (10–20 people) deals +2-harm and suffers -2-harm when facing a single individual. Only the strongest characters want to go toe-to-toe with a whole group; everyone takes a lot more harm and inflicts a lot less harm when they're outnumbered.



## NPC HARM AND HEALING

For the most part, NPCs take harm like PCs (see **Harm** on page 46): they suffer damage equal to the harm of a weapon minus their armor, modified by move choices like *inflict terrible harm* or other special circumstances. If a PC shoots a cop wearing a bulletproof vest (1-armor) with a 9mm (2-harm close loud), it's probably 1-harm: 2-harm minus 1-armor. All of that math is pretty much the same if a PC shoots another PC.

Unlike PCs, however, mortal NPCs can't take nearly as much harm before they die. A gunshot (2-harm) tends to be fairly crippling, and a blast from an assault rifle (3-harm) is almost always fatal. Armor can help a bit, but few mortals walk around in bulletproof vests (1-armor), let alone riot gear (2-armor). A few might have some supernatural trinkets that offer protection, but it's rare to find a mortal who knows where to find that kind of stuff.

If a mortal NPC survives an attack, getting them to medical attention is crucial. Mortals who have suffered 2- or 3-harm might live for a short while after the injury, but they won't last long. Assuming they get to medical care (or receive magical healing), they recover harm at the rate of 1- or 2-harm per session. A mortal NPC who suffers a gunshot wound and lives probably spends a session or two in the hospital before they're back on their feet.

But mortals aren't the only opposition in **URBAN SHADOWS**. The PCs might also face vampires, demons, ghosts, or any number of monsters that aren't as fragile as mortals. In these cases, it's good to have some guidelines for how supernatural NPCs suffer harm.

### FICTIONAL POSITIONING MATTERS

Some creatures are simply invulnerable to certain kinds of damage. Ghosts, for example, might not have enough physical corpus to suffer harm from traditional weapons. In these cases, push characters toward other ways of dealing with these foes, using blessed or magic items or magical powers (*let it out*, rituals, etc.). "Invulnerable" opposition is a great excuse for the Veteran to head back to their **workshop** to build the weapons characters need to triumph.

## RESISTANCES ACT AS ARMOR

If a creature is resistant to damage (or a type of attack), treat that as armor. Vampires, for example, may not suffer much harm from gunshots—they don't really have organs—so they get 1-armor even when naked. Armor is nasty business; a creature with 3-armor can't be harmed by a handgun, even when PCs select *inflict terrible harm*. Armor piercing weapons might still inflict harm as normal, even if the armor is supernatural in nature. Keep in mind that resistances can also extend to the PCs—if NPC vampires suffer one less harm from gunshot wounds, the Vamp should suffer one less harm as well.

## VULNERABILITIES INCREASE HARM

By the same token, anything that strikes at a creature's vulnerability either increases the harm done by 1-harm or makes the harm armor piercing (ap). Minor vulnerabilities (cold iron used against faeries) tend to do +1-harm; major vulnerabilities (blessed weapons used against demons or fire used against vampires) tend to be armor piercing or +2-harm, whichever does more damage. Discovering a creature's vulnerability is a powerful tool when facing it in combat; the Wizard's **sanctum** and the Oracle's prophecies are just two of many ways the PCs could learn about such weaknesses.

## SURVIVING MORE HARM

Supernatural creatures can often take more harm than mortal NPCs: it might take 4-harm to drop a vampire or 6-harm to bring down a werewolf. Let the fiction guide your hand when you establish how much harm an NPC can take and use the PCs themselves as a baseline—something roughly on the same power scale as a PC can usually take 4–5 harm, while anything truly tougher can take 6–7 harm. Be thoughtful about deviating too far from that range! A demon that dies from a single gunshot wound isn't really a threat to the PCs, while a faerie that can take 8-harm is terrifying.

## INJURIES AND HEALING

Supernatural NPCs hate suffering injuries as much as anyone else; many flee when they catch a shotgun blast to the chest, even if they might be able to take another one before they die. Like mortal NPCs, supernatural NPCs heal harm in between sessions, but at a much faster rate (2- or 3-harm per session) and might be able to regrow lost limbs or recover from near-fatal injuries.

## MANAGING NPCs

Managing NPCs in **URBAN SHADOWS** can sometimes feel overwhelming: cities with millions of people have an infinite number of potential characters for your players to engage. Here are a few tips for keeping the list under control and manageable:

### TRACK NPCs BY CIRCLE

Each NPC has a Circle, the community with which they are most associated. Track the NPCs by their Circle so you know when they might come up. Generally, Night characters hang around on street corners and seedy bars; a trip to the penthouse suite of a downtown skyscraper more likely involves Power or Wild. Keeping your notes by Circle lets you reach for the NPCs you need based on location and mood, instead of shuffling through a huge list of random names.

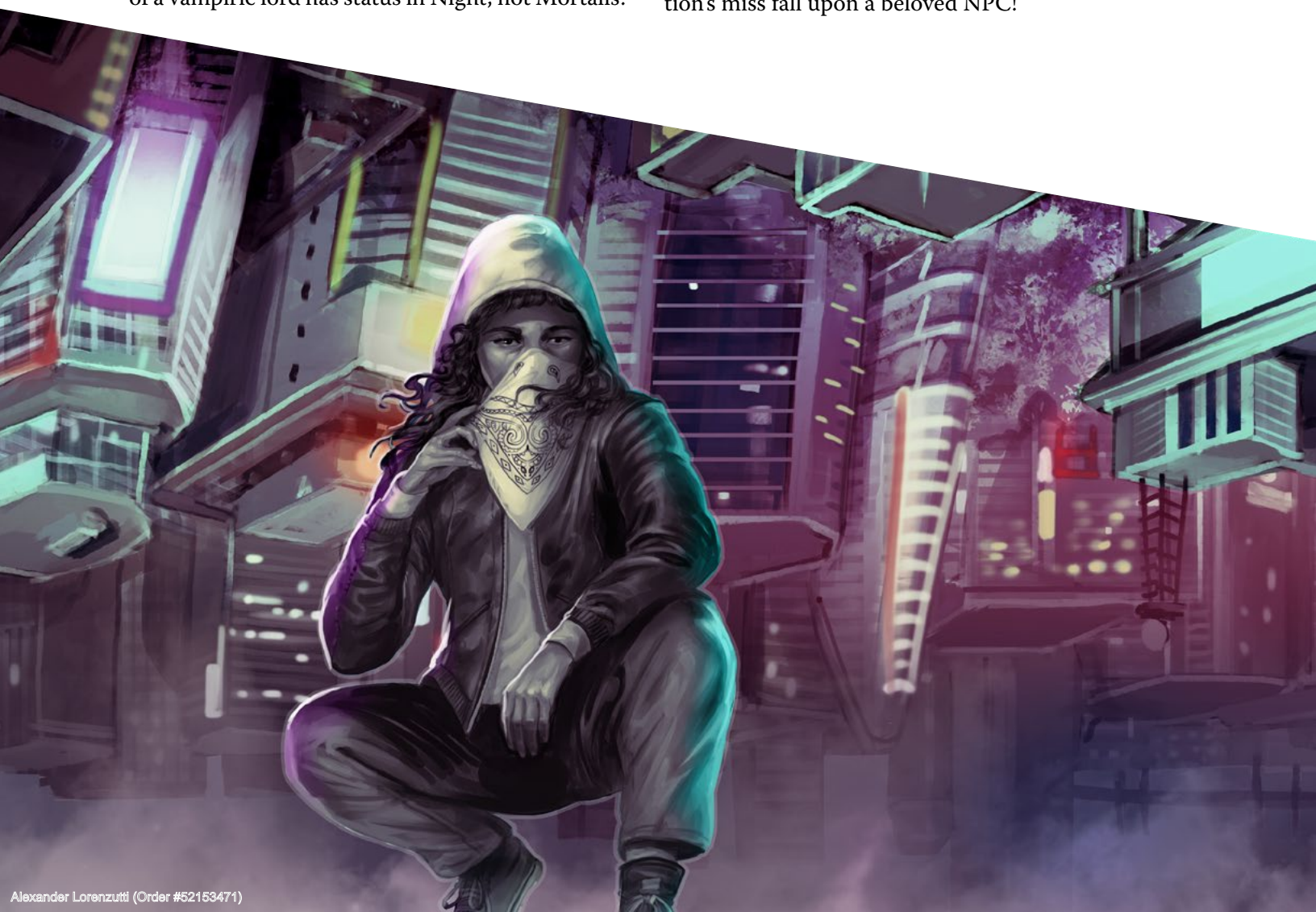
That said, remind the players often that types of supernatural characters aren't forced to stay allied to the same circle as their metaphysical bretheren—a troll enforcer for a Power faction isn't Wild anymore despite his faerie roots, and a mortal servant of a vampiric lord has status in Night, not Mortalis.

## REINCORPORATE, RECYCLE, AND REUSE

When the players hit the streets to look for resources or have an opportunity to add an NPC to their backstories, encourage them to reincorporate existing NPCs. Felix, that vampire who helped Roxy find that missing girl last summer? He's the same one that Marcos goes to when he needs information about a new vampire faction. And if Paris has a vision about a vampire who might play a pivotal role in the coming conflict against a demon...Felix. After all, how many vampires are there in one city?

### KILL THEM OFF

Game's the game, fierce as always. Don't be afraid to off your NPCs and replace them with upstarts hungry for an opportunity to take the stage. If your list of NPCs has gotten too long, start a war or ritual or conflict to pare the list down to something more manageable. Elder vampire lords and ancient wizards have a lot of defenses, but even they end up on the wrong end of a fight sometimes. The faction turn (page 255), in particular, gives you lots of opportunities to remove pieces from the board; don't be afraid to have the consequence of a faction's miss fall upon a beloved NPC!





# THE PLAYBOOKS

## BEHIND THE PLAYBOOKS

Pay close attention to the playbooks your players select at the start of the game. Your players are telling you what conflicts interest them, what Circles draw their attention, without you having to ask them a single question. Frame scenes that play to those interests and conflicts: look for opportunities to present magical mysteries to the Wizard, long-forgotten conflicts and old friends in need to the Veteran, and demonic politics and intrigue to the Tainted. Each playbook is a roadmap of conflicts and context, issues the playbook is built to explore and relationships that will be called into question from the moment the players start playing their characters.

Pay attention to the specific moves and features the players select as well, additional information about their interests and expectations. A good rule of thumb is to give each character at least one opportunity to use their moves and features each session. That's not possible for every move on every playbook, but it's not hard to look at the **faerie powers** the Fae took and envision a situation that might call for healing, glamours, and emotional manipulation (a bar fight probably does it) or to present the Oracle with magical items if they select **Psychometry**; it's also easy to drag the Fae's court into the story or create a messy situation that involves the Oracle's **benefactor**. Again, you're not scripting or planning the plot; you're priming yourself to **be a fan of the characters** that the players have created.

At the same time, remember to **play to find out what happens**, following the characters where they want to go once they actually start talking to NPCs and engaging each other. Your players will create innumerable plot threads based on their playbooks when you start—the Aware's **mortal relationships** alone are easily five to six sessions of focused play—and you can't possibly follow up on all of them. Take your cues from the players and their interests: expand and develop the parts of the city that they are most excited about while keeping in mind that each playbook is giving you a wealth of options that the players have decided are worth engaging in the fiction.

Finally, don't be afraid to say yes to the players when they propose details about the culture or physiology of their characters. If the Vamp's player proposes getting blood from a mobile blood bank service, don't say no—just ask them why other vampires don't like going this route. If the Wizard's player explains that most wizards can live forever after mastering some basic aging spells, don't say no—just ask them what those spells ultimately cost! All fictional positions have weaknesses, areas of conflict and nuance, places where the status quo can be upended with just a little push. Let the players say as much as they want about how the city lives and breathes, and then look for places to drink their milkshake, knock over their sand castle, and leave them scrambling to climb back on top. **Cloak your moves in darkness** but always go for the throat. Your players will love you for it.



## MORTALIS PLAYBOOKS

Mortalis playbooks stress the boundary between the supernatural and the mundane; ask your players lots of questions about their connection to the mortal world and look for places where their mundane obligations put them (or the people they care about) in grave danger.

As the liminal characters who most regularly traverse the boundaries, Mortalis characters are the ones all sides come to seeking answers, information, and action. Many mortals obviously seek out a member of Mortalis if they feel like the supernatural world is looming a bit too close, but other Circles sometimes come to Mortalis with similar requests—who can they really count on in their own Circle to resolve a problem in the mundane world with grace and tact?

### THE AWARE

The Aware is a character in transition, caught between both worlds more than any other playbook; their ties to the mundane world are still strong, and no one yet knows what role they will take on in the city's politics.

All of the other Circles in the city have a special interest in the outcome of their story; the Aware represents untapped potential, a free agent who could eventually play for any team. Give them lots of supernatural relationships to reflect that potential, connections that offer seductive power and constant erotic tension. Remember that the Aware gets to roll with **HEART** when they try to *figure someone out* after sharing a moment of intimacy!

If the Aware takes *The Lion's Den*, give them lots of sanctuaries, gathering spots, and places of power. They should be constantly tempted to go snooping around! And as the game goes on, remember to push on the Aware's **mortal relationships**—especially when it's least convenient for the Aware's supernatural relationships; if the Aware can't meet their mortal obligations (or fails to protect their mortal relationships), they are forced to mark corruption, taking one more step toward the question they must answer before they corrupt out—what role do they want to take on in the city?

### THE HUNTER

The Hunter may prefer hunting alone, but they aren't exactly a lone wolf—spend time with them in character creation to detail their **society**, including identifying a few high Status NPCs you can use to represent different perspectives within their organization. Ensure that the faction is striving (read more about faction goals and stances on page 253) from the jump and give it at least one rival organization in another Circle to keep things interesting when you hit the first faction turn.

Give the Hunter a hunt right away too; it can be tough to squeeze one in later when the other PCs get involved. While the Hunter is on a hunt, consistently put mortals in danger, but only injure them—triggering the Hunter's corruption move—when the Hunter willfully ignores the consequences of the hunt or directly strikes the blow.

Avoid taking away the Hunter's weapons and gear; it's easy to forget that the Hunter's cool stuff is a big part of what makes them a threat to their prey. The Hunter's *Safe House*, for example, is truly safe, beyond your reach unless something wild happens and that safety is intentionally violated.

### THE VETERAN

The Veteran has a slightly narrower character arc than most of the other playbooks; be clear about why they retired and what being retired means, but being a fan of the Veteran absolutely means dragging them back into the shit. Threaten them, attack them, harass them, cash in Debts...whatever it takes to get them to risk it all and get back into the game. Most players are almost too eager to jump back in, so also reflect back at them how unexpected this twist is through your NPCs—"What the fuck are you doing here, Hanako? We all know you're retired."

That said, the Veteran works best with other characters to support, mentor, and assist; use their **workshop** as a reason for the characters to come together by presenting challenges that require specific technology or tools and establishing tech requirements that require the assistance of the other characters. When the Veteran finishes a mundane project in their workshop, remember that it's off limits to you; your NPCs can't take it, break it, or otherwise make it useless; weird magic stuff is still subject to all your MC moves, but the mundane motorcycle or shotgun the Veteran crafts is safe from you and all your NPCs.



## NIGHT PLAYBOOKS

The Night playbooks—for all their supernatural fangs and fur—are fundamentally mired in the day-to-day of the street: drugs, money, sex, guns, and territory. They're the closest to the violence inherent in the system, drawn into conflicts with mortal cops and criminals as well as the supernatural movers and shakers in their own Circle.

That said, you often have to remind them that they aren't immune to the politics of the broader city. Power and Night often want to ignore and dismiss the other—each believing they see the “true” face of the city—but they are more mixed up with each other than they want to admit, each playing a vital role in shaping the politics of the city in the short-term (Night) and the long-term (Power). Neither can exist without the other.

### THE SPECTRE

The Spectre can go virtually anywhere and touch nearly everything; no place is safe from their grasp except the occasional warded sanctum. Push on their corruption track by revealing scenes of victimization and horror when they snoop, abusive relationships on display when the abusers think no one is watching. The Spectre can see the darkest shadows of the city...and has the best chance to do something about them.

On occasion, confront the Spectre with dangerous spirits and ghosts. After all, they aren't the only phantom who haunts the night. Always clearly flag, however, when something can harm them when they aren't manifested (wizard magic, other ghosts, demonic artifacts, etc.); the Spectre often becomes a bit cavalier about dying by the second or third session.

Regularly put the Spectre's **anchors** in danger, but vary up the situations and threats. The Spectre gets bored quickly if they are constantly fighting off the same types of foes—follow up an ignorant mortal developer trying to rezone the Spectre's old office with a demon who purposefully wants to tap the Spectre's old possessions as part of a demonic ritual.

Several of the Spectre's corruption moves put them at an advantage over mortals (**Possession**, **Nightmare**, **Siphon**). Never shortchange the Spectre when they use these moves; marking corruption is a high price to pay to get what they want. Make them terrifying and effective.

### THE VAMP

No playbook in the game comes with as much baggage as the Vamp: make sure that any player who chooses it understands the playbook is designed to entrap people into co-dependent relationships based around their vices and dark desires. That said, be generous when the players define the Vamp within those boundaries. Ghouls attached to the Vamp's haven, for example, can be any sort of undead or thrall that suits the Vamp's aesthetic; the larger vampire culture might have the typical fealty-based, lords of the night politics, or it might be small families of weird, cultish predators.

Similarly, look to the Vamp's **let it out** abilities to support the playbook's supernatural power. Their low **SPiRiT** doesn't have to mean that such powers don't work; instead it means that there are unexpected consequences to feats of vampiric strength and the use of vampiric senses.

Since the Vamp often exploits other characters, push them into scenes with other PCs, even across boundaries. The Vamp is pure muscle, terrifying and feral when trapped, and they have connections to the vampire ecosystem that no other character can really match. Make those resources useful, such that other characters need the Vamp's skills. Don't let the Vamp get comfortable sitting in their haven while the rest of the characters chase down interesting plot threads.

### THE WOLF

The Vamp may be muscle, but the Wolf is a stone-cold killer; little in the city is as dangerous as a transformed werewolf on a hunt. The Wolf's **territory**, though, is a kind of leash, focusing their energy onto a specific set of troubles and blessings they've selected at character creation. Make these troubles and blessings central to the Wolf's story, and move hard against them when they trigger a trouble through **Comes with the Territory** with sticky social situations and nasty opponents—including groups!—that let them show off their killer claws.

The Wolf can always transform in the sight of the moon, but they can also **let it out** to transform at will. If the Wolf rolls a 7-9 or chooses to *ignore the corruption* on a 10+, vary the costs and complications they face. Sometimes the transformation might only be partial, incomplete, or slow; other times it might cause the Wolf to struggle with their bestial nature—perhaps **keeping their cool**—before they have full control of their new form.

## POWER PLAYBOOKS

Power playbooks believe they hold all the cards: they have the foresight to know what trouble lies ahead for the city and the mystical skills to change the course of things all on their own. The only problem, of course, is that all the other Circles always muck things up.

Every PC must face threats and challenges from within their own Circles, but no one plays politics like Power. The leaders of Power know that even their lowliest member wields enormous influence; they work hard to keep everyone in line, especially the PCs and their allies, through complex systems of judgment and control.

### THE ORACLE

The Oracle is a strange playbook; how can you **play to find out what happens** when they know the future? Their **benefactor** shifts their arc from “what the Oracle knows” to “the political role the Oracle plays as the advisor to a specific leader of a specific faction.”

The Oracle may serve a benefactor who isn't part of Power, but such service doesn't shift the Oracle's Circle. The relationship might threaten the Oracle's membership in Power eventually, but the Oracle's role has some distance to start. Take care to ensure you're on the same page with the Oracle in building their benefactor; it's possible to construct a deeply abusive, unwanted situation if you're not careful.

Regardless of their benefactor, provide plenty of objects and mysterious people about which the Oracle can divine psychic information. When you give information to the Oracle, speak boldly and incompletely; figure out later how the visions fit together. Empower the Oracle to draw conclusions about what things mean while hinting at multiple outcomes that may come to pass. Conversely, give them opportunities to offer false prophecies to get out of trouble until they get in the habit of offering them. Use their **benefactor** (and other NPCs) to demand optimistic answers, knowing full well the Oracle won't want to give them the full details of the things they have foreseen.

Like the Veteran, the Oracle works best when they have other PCs to bounce off of, both for moves like **Foresight** that directly empower other PCs and because visions that place other PCs in danger are much more interesting than visions that affect only NPCs. If you're playing a game with only one or two PCs, push your players toward other playbooks.

## THE SWORN

Like the Veteran, the Sworn is caught up in a particular arc—choosing between the **oath** they've sworn and their own sense of justice—and the specifics of which faction they serve and why they serve that faction are deeply important to the formulation of that conflict. As an agent of the powerful, the Sworn inevitably has to face the cold callousness of their masters; you have to know exactly what kind of elites you're representing in the fiction.

The faction itself has to have a higher degree of internal loyalty and fidelity than other factions. It's fine to have a rogue actor or two, but the Sworn needs to know they can trust the faction to be internally consistent. If you split the faction down the middle early, it's easy for the Sworn to lose their way and get stuck in a kind of political limbo.

Finally, make sure the Sworn's faction has consistent and regular work they need the Sworn to do. The Sworn, like the Tainted, can only feel the tension of their duties when their faction requires their services. If their faction fades into the background, the Sworn is just another goon.

### THE WIZARD

The Wizard has a number of powerful problem-solving tools (**spells**, **let it out**, their **sanctum**), but few ways to determine which problems should take priority. Throw mysteries in front of them—murders, mystical wards, missing people—and use their overconfidence to catch them in the middle of messy PC-NPC-PC triangles and complex multi-Circle politics, situations in which they struggle to find a good way forward in a mess of bad options. Offer the information (and additional resources) at a terrible cost to see how far the Wizard is willing to go to save everyone. The answer might surprise you.

The Wizard's **ward**, in particular, is a powerful example of the Wizard's deceptively fragile position—they can't just magic their problems away when those problems are *people*.

On occasion, remind the Wizard how mortal they are by sending a crew from Night or Wild directly at them, before the Wizard has time to prepare. The Wizard shines brightest with their back up against the wall, improvising their way out of a dangerous situation.



## WILD PLAYBOOKS

Wild playbooks are—at some level—all immigrants, strangers in a strange land with deep connections to their home communities. The politics of those communities—Arcadia, Hell, whatever other dimension they hail from—are never far off, always lurking in the background of the current conflicts...and sometimes taking center stage. Remind them often how different they are from everyone else, and how much power their masters still hold over them.

But Wild has a certain usefulness as a Circle, a vital role they play for everyone else. They are often the “neutral” arbiters of conflicts, the trusted confidantes of Status-3 NPCs in other Circles. They aren’t more trustworthy by nature, but many in the city believe them to be a bit disinterested from the everyday politics of the city, a bit obvious in their adherence to contracts and tradition. Of course, that’s exactly the kind of underestimation that most members of Wild thrive on when they deal with everyone else...

### THE FAE

Promises are central to the Fae, so give them plenty of NPCs willing to make promises—both foolish and calculating—to get close to the Fae or get what they want. Make the NPCs’ attention occasionally fickle; NPCs are enthralled by the Fae at first, but the connection grows weaker over time. If the Fae has taken *A Dish Best Served Now* or *Words Are Wind*, have the NPCs make big promises and break them often. Call out promises that PCs make too; those all can trigger moves for the Fae as well.

Court politics are central to the Fae’s relationship to their homeland. Most Fae who live in the city are exiled, but they might have free rein to go back and forth. Either way, use the Debts they give to their monarch through *Faerie Magic* to force the Fae to help consolidate the monarch’s power and deal with their enemies. Courtly intrigue is about appearance and lies, glammers and illusions, much more than violence and intimidation.

If another PC takes *Scales of Justice*, they gain access to faerie magic without switching playbooks, although the magic itself is probably reskinned to hedge magic, blood magic, or some other playbook appropriate theme. It’s got a high price—each use of magic costs a Debt—so it shouldn’t step too much on the Fae’s toes.

## A ROSE BY ANOTHER NAME

It’s possible to reskin any playbook—the Wolf works pretty well for a gargoyle—but the Wild playbooks generally lend themselves best to altering the underlying fiction. An Imp doesn’t have to be a demon; the Tainted doesn’t have to serve demons from Hell. If your players want a supernatural archetype that isn’t directly supported, take a closer look at these playbooks!

### THE IMP

The Imp’s **establishment** is like the Wolf’s **territory**—a constant source of opportunities and troubles you can use to keep things moving. As always, make the assets count, honoring them in full, but don’t be afraid to threaten the entire establishment. After all, it’s the very thing keeping the Imp in this dimension. If it’s ever destroyed, who knows how vulnerable the Imp might be?

Unlike the Sworn and the Tainted, it’s not your job to give the Imp work; the system of **schemes** is largely mechanized, giving you clear prompts to supply new opportunities when the moves and boons tell you it’s time. That said, feel free to put a new opportunity on the table if it seems fictionally appropriate (or if you just want to watch the Imp scramble to have it all).

### THE TAINTED

Like the Wolf, the Tainted is a walking killing machine tethered by relationships and obligations. Only thing is...they are tethered by and obligated to something far worse than themselves—a **dark patron**. Give the Tainted plenty of jobs that let them use their demonic powers on NPCs before you drop the hammer and put the Tainted in direct conflict with the PCs. Let them think they can do the devil’s dirty work without too many sacrifices, then put the Tainted on a crash course with the other PCs and watch the fireworks.

If the Tainted dies without Debts on their dark patron, consider sending the dark patron to an NPC they care about when resolving their end move (instead of another PC) with an offer to bring the Tainted back. Once the dark patron has their hooks in the Tainted’s spouse, sibling, friend, or child, the tension between service and rebellion goes up a notch. You want the Tainted to be constantly torn, caught between the deals they’ve signed and the people they care about in the mortal world.

# CITY HUBS

## BEHIND THE CITY HUBS

Just as the playbooks your players select shape your group's experience at the table, the City Hub you choose occupies a central role in your story. In fact, the first Hub you choose often defines the fiction; starting with the Art District and expanding later to Downtown or the University means that the beginning of your story will always be tinged with the Wild openness and chaos of a gentrifying zone, even when you (eventually) hit the skyscrapers or laboratories of those other Hubs. Check out the full City Hubs on page 312; here are some tips on making the most of what each Hub brings to the table for your group.

### THE ART DISTRICT

A dream-fueled dystopia of broken promises and artistic delights alike, the Art District is perfect for any group seeking to explore the depth of what the Wild Circle has to offer. Factions who rule this district have found a home in the chaos, profiting—in whatever way they prefer—from the intersection of visionary creativity and exploitative capital. Nothing is free in the arts.

Present this Hub as more than just a Wild cacophony; genuine weirdness happens in plain sight as Wild breaks the norms of mortal life under the guise of “art.” Make your NPCs quick to make promises but slow to deliver, seeking to get theirs while giving up as little as possible, and give the players lots of time with high-status NPCs who have made themselves accessible to ensure they don't miss the newest rising artists. Above all else, ensure that dreams—the pursuit and tragedy of them—are central to everything that happens here.

### CHOOSING A HUB

You can read more on page 53 about choosing a Hub as a group, but you might instead choose a Hub before recruiting players. If you've got a specific Circle and section of the city that interests you, don't be afraid to present it as a hook for your game.

### CITY HALL

Mortals still hold sway over City Hall, the one place where the pursuit of power still means the pursuit of paperwork, even for supernatural creatures. Factions who control City Hall tend to act as brokers for everyone else; they are happy to help...for a Debt or two. It might not seem like much of an obstacle for a vampire or wizard to walk in to City Hall and get things done...but the real problem is one of knowledge and connections. It's hard to remember which forms to fill out in triplicate when you spend your days lost in ancient magical tomes.

Portray this Hub as bifurcated; it's one thing during the day when the work of “the people” is done in the open and another thing at night when illicit agreements are struck in darkened parking garages. Don't be afraid to include a few ignorant mortal NPCs—no Status, unable to hold Debts—but keep in mind that most of the powerful mortals in the city know the truth of their supernatural masters. The mayor? The city council? The city comptroller? All under *someone's* thumb...





## DOWNTOWN

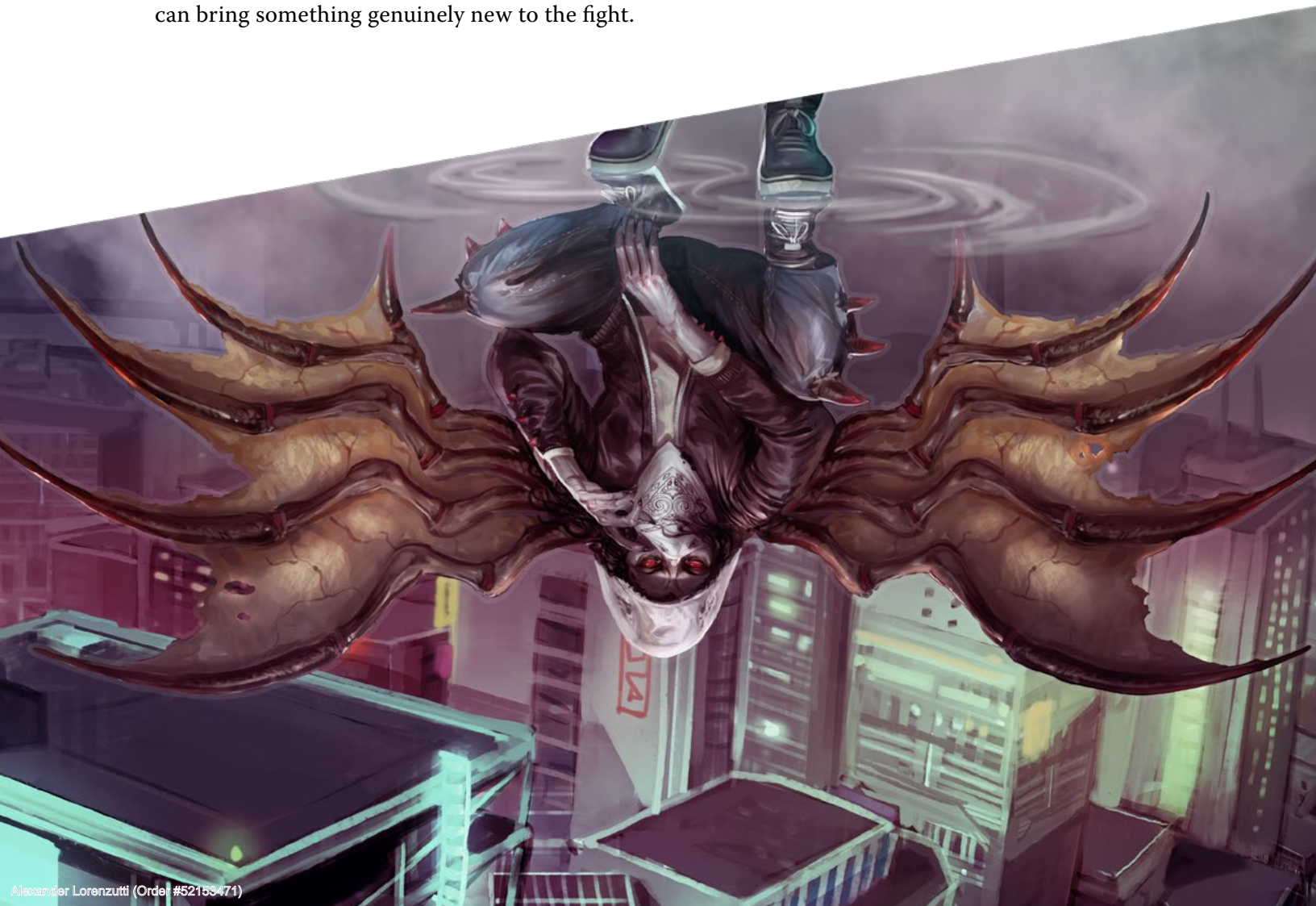
Perhaps the most “classic” of **URBAN SHADOWS** City Hubs, Downtown features towering skyscrapers and violent streets, the area of the city defined most by what you can take from those who would eagerly take something from you. Night doesn’t just rule Downtown; it infects it, pushing your story toward the shadows to the point that it might be a little odd to set a scene between dawn and dusk. Factions who hold Downtown have to do so with force and guile, a willingness to kill and the foresight to see who turns against them first.

Don’t forget to depict the ordinary shops, restaurants, and dance clubs that fuel Downtown’s nightlife among the vampiric power grabs and feral territory disputes; after all, there has to be a reason that people come to Downtown after nightfall despite the drama and dangers! Make sure your NPCs are caught up in their own conflicts within these spaces—always looking over their shoulders for enemies real and imagined—but telegraph early that they are willing to hear from someone offering new resources. Downtown is a battlefield, and the winner is often the high-status NPC who can bring something genuinely new to the fight.

## THE UNIVERSITY

Less a defined geographical region of the city than a collection of overlapping resources and interests, the University pushes the boundaries of City Hubs as physical “districts” of the city. That said, most major universities do end up with a significant footprint, their buildings, housing, and other interests slowly spreading over the years until the university “controls” a section all its own. Factions with a strong influence over this area have mastered assimilating these resources, turning the latest hospital expansion or housing development into a home for their interests as well.

To that end, make sure to represent the overwhelming self-interest of the NPCs of this Hub; there is less an overarching power structure than a subtle hierarchy between those whose programs and projects are “funded”...and those scraping together what resources they can to get something done; portray high-status NPCs in this Hub as self-absorbed until something disrupts their work and low-status NPCs as desperate for anything that gets them back on top.



# DANGEROUS CONTENT

## DANGEROUS CONTENT

**URBAN SHADOWS** is a game about supernatural politics, but it's got one foot firmly rooted in the modern-day realities of urban life; the player characters live at the intersection of many identities, caught in a world that wants to not only do terrible things to them, but also wants them to do terrible things to others. All of that pathos and drama can be incredible, especially when the heroes triumph over the villains, but it's also ripe for creating problems at your table.

### IDENTITY POLITICS

For many characters, their race, gender, sexual identity, or class are central to their experience within the city. It can be a struggle, however, to portray the systems of oppression that define urban life with grace and sensitivity, and you probably don't have time to read a few books on race or gender before you play! Here are some tips on honoring the diverse communities of the city:

#### EXPLORE COMMUNITIES DEEPLY

It's true that the West Baltimore drug trade is primarily run by people of color. It's also true, however, that the majority of social workers, community organizers, and political activists within that community are also people of color. It's not enough to show one face of a community—even a supernatural community—and expect your players to know the depth of what that community has to offer. Instead, you've got to show the community as it truly is, filled with different perspectives (even mutually exclusive perspectives!) on what makes their community special. If you introduce only one woman, one trans person, one Latino, that character has to stand in for everyone else; don't make them carry that burden.

#### VARY THE TONE

A world without racism, sexism, and bigotry would be ideal, but it's not the world in which **URBAN SHADOWS** is set. Black vampires in Harlem have an intersectional identity: they are both undead creatures of the night and the target of an ongoing campaign of police violence against people of color. You do the character a disservice if you forget that they are Black when engaging with systems of power; you also do them a disservice if you

make them powerless in the face of those systems. At the same time, not every interaction should be viewed through a single lens: vary the tone by making issues like race or gender central to the fiction at times and incidental at other crucial moments. Make it clear what kind of obstacles the characters have to overcome, but give them opportunities to rise above all that hate and oppression to triumph.

#### DEFY STEREOTYPES

Whenever possible, defy stereotypes. If you introduce a Hispanic gangbanger from Los Angeles as a contact for a character, immediately reveal what makes him stand out from the stereotype of a cruel and uncaring Mexican thug. Is he going to community college for economics? Is he a devoted father? Does he abhor violence? This isn't just about avoiding offensive content; all of your NPCs are richer when you find ways to defy the players' expectations about what they have to offer. This counts for white cisgender male NPCs as much as it does for everyone else; they may perform whiteness to conform to a dominant culture that rewards them for their performance, but they have differences, secrets, and complications all their own.

#### LOOK TO STATUS

All of the conflicts that underlie the politics of the city are driven by difference—in goals, in attitudes, in needs—but the Circles do have a way of understanding each other across those lines: status. When in doubt, look to the status of the characters involved in a conflict; elites (Status-2 and Status-3 characters) look to other elites, even those in different communities, and everyone else is left to fend for themselves. In other words, the politics of the supernatural world might be eternally mired in the grime and muck of our own understandings of race, gender, sexuality, and class, but the city still values status above all.



## MATURE THEMES

In addition to identity issues, **URBAN SHADOWS** often runs headfirst into mature content around violence, sex, drugs, and crime. The presence of the supernatural helps to make these issues more abstract—the characters are more likely to be trafficking magical artifacts than people—but it's inevitable that terrible things happen to many characters in the course of your story. Here are some ways to stay true to your agendas and principles while recognizing that not everyone has the same tolerance for these kinds of themes, no matter how true they may feel to the story.

### LEAN ON THE X-CARD

If you introduce the X-Card, following the procedure on page 12, you can modulate your moves based on the feedback your players give you. The X-Card isn't foolproof—some players are unwilling to say they're uncomfortable even when you give them an explicit tool—but it's a good method of immediate feedback that can keep a game from falling apart. Use the X-Card yourself early in the session to demonstrate that it's safe for players to use, and make sure to honor the system when a player does invoke it, even if you think what they flag is a perfectly reasonable addition to the fiction.

### AVOID DEFAULTISM

Be wary of falling into defaultism when engaging mature content—your brain has been baked in racist, sexist, homophobic media that bubbles up when you least expect it, pushing messages that you might not even realize that you're sending. Switch things up whenever possible—instead of introducing a murderous mortal serial killer who kidnaps and eats young women, create a murderous vampire who harvests the brains of male scientists for some supernatural experiment on the nature of human intelligence. Swapping around a few cultural signifiers gets you the same (or better!) creepy punch without falling into boring clichés or dredging up uncomfortable history for people at your table.

## ELIDE THE CRUCIAL MOMENT

We often think of the moment of tragedy as the most important thing to show your players; after all, what else can drive home the darkness of the streets better than a moment of terrifying gore or heartbreaking sadness? But in reality, those moments are fleeting, barely remembered in retrospect by the survivors. It's all the other moments that stick with them forever—the heartbreak of a missing child, the blood soaked into the carpet, the phantom pain of a missing limb. Remember that you don't need to dwell on the moment itself to bring difficult content to your story; sometimes what happens offscreen is more impactful and terrifying than anything that can happen onscreen.

### EMPHASIZE THE CONSEQUENCES

Finally, when you push your players with adult content, think about ways to emphasize the consequences, the results, and the remains in order to drive home the true costs of the violence and loss that surround them. Don't callously evoke trauma and loss for no reason—especially if your players have indicated that some content makes them uncomfortable—but take the time to make the consequences of the story real. If the Vamp murders someone during feeding, don't let the death be a jokey footnote to the session; take the time to have an NPC go looking for that person, seeking answers about what happened to their missing friend. After all, none of the action in the city happens in a vacuum—someone is always impacted, no matter the outcome.

### SOLICIT FEEDBACK EARLY AND OFTEN

While you can do your best to avoid these pitfalls while introducing mature content to your game, it's likely that you'll eventually make a mistake. Perhaps something you introduce is a bit heavier than you intended; perhaps you cross a line that someone established a few sessions earlier without realizing it. No matter how things go awry, the best way to handle failure is to plan for it in advance—take the time at the end of each session to debrief how the session went every session, including making room for players to give you feedback on what they did and didn't like. Don't wait until things get messy to ask for players to tell you how they're feeling about the game!

# FIRST SESSION

## THE FIRST SESSION

This is it. The first session. The moment the magic happens and you summon up an entire city of political drama out of the very ether.

The players have a straightforward start to their work: they pick playbooks and fill them out. You've got things a bit harder; you have to **make the city political and dark** while constructing an ecosystem of Debt and corruption that **keeps the characters' lives out of control and evolving** as you **play to find out what happens**. It's a lot to balance, and you haven't even met the characters yet!

Here's the trick: while the players get themselves set up with their own protagonists, you're going to build out the city, put them in tough spots, and MC the hell out of the start of the story like you had everything figured out in advance—all without planning out where the story is headed.

### MATERIALS AND PREP

Print out all the playbooks you're going to offer to the players, and familiarize yourself with their moves and features. You don't have to offer every playbook—maybe you want to stay focused on street-level politics, so you don't offer the Wizard or the Fae—but take the time to learn the ones you make available. Also print out enough basic moves sheets for each player (and a copy of the MC Worksheet and basic moves for yourself), and gather up some index cards, pencils, and dice, enough for everyone to have a set of materials in front of them during the session.

Before folks show up to play, read the first eight chapters. You can skim **Chapter 6: Playbooks** and **Chapter 7: Advancement**, but be ready to reference them if needed. You can glance through **Chapter 9: Long-Term Play** to get familiar with the faction turn, but you don't need to create any factions yet. You need more information about the player characters before you can set them up for real trouble by mixing them up in the long-term schemes and politics of the city.

Work with your players to pick a city, and maybe even do some research on the city's history and pull down some pictures from the web to show your players if you want to include visual aids. See page 53 for more on researching your city and bringing that research to your first session.

### STARTING THE FIRST SESSION

Once everyone's sitting around the table, start character creation. Go over the playbooks, give a quick pitch for each one, and get your players rolling on filling them out. Answer questions when they come up, but give the players time to think and read, especially if they're unfamiliar with **URBAN SHADOWS** or this style of play. See **Chapter 4: Character Creation** for more in-depth information on creating characters; since your players probably haven't read the book, you might need to guide them through the process step by step.

Tell your players to pay close attention to the playbook features and aspects for the playbook they select. **Let it out** abilities, corruption, intimacy, end moves, and the playbook's features all say quite a bit about the way the playbook is structured, and can give players hints about how they might want to play the character. The features, in particular, establish a lot of things about the character and their place in the world—the Sworn's **oath**, the Imp's **establishment**, the Vamp's **web** and **harbor**; players need to be fully on board with whatever setup the playbook puts forward.

Generally, each playbook is keyed to one or two stats, so point those out as well—"The Hunter is a high **BLOOD** and **MIND** playbook, so your character would be good at fighting, escaping, and outsmarting their opposition. Does that sound like fun?" You might find that sometimes people have a bit of a misunderstanding about what a playbook offers—"Oh, I thought the Imp would be working for a demon; I don't really want to be out on my own dealing with people!"—and you can help out your players a ton by gently guiding them to a playbook that better matches their expectations.



## INTRODUCING THE CHARACTERS

Once almost everyone is ready to introduce their character—you might have one or two slowpokes who take a bit longer making decisions—go ahead and start. The stragglers will catch up before it's their turn.

Players tend to alternate between reading off the choices they've made and summarizing many choices into a cohesive whole. Both are great ways to introduce the character, so take notes as they go and prompt them to explain more when necessary. Don't forget your safety tools! If someone introduces an idea that doesn't work for you or another player, the X-Card can be a great way to interject and push them to some different options.

## ASKING PROBING QUESTIONS

As players introduce their characters, jump in to ask probing questions. Alternate between questions directly about the characters and questions that are really about the city. The whole setting is radically open at the start; take advantage of the blank slate by pressing the players to fill in the holes.

*Sasha just finished creating their Fae, Sunny (page 60). After they describe their character, their MC, Marissa, jumps in with a few probing questions.*

*"Tell me more about this crime you didn't commit, Sunny."*

*"Hmmm. My king thought I stole a necklace from him."*

*"Why did he think you stole it?"*

*"He gave it to me and then forgot. He saw me wearing it, and he banished me for my 'theft,' despite my protests."*

*Marissa thinks that's an odd answer: "Does the King of Summer forget stuff like this often? Or was this surprising?"*

*"Oh, totally surprising. I still don't know what happened."*

*Marissa nods. Good stuff. She can see that necklace—and the king's accusations—making an appearance soon.*

*"Where do you live in the city, Sunny? Hi-rise apartment? Near the freeway north of downtown?"*

*"It says on my playbook that I get a simple apartment, so let's say that it's just a few miles from downtown."*

*Marissa points at an area of the map she printed before the session. Sasha nods, and Marissa writes "Sunny's apartment" directly onto the map. "What's that neighborhood like, Sunny?"*

*"It's pretty rough. It was a good neighborhood when I moved in fifty years ago, but it's fallen to drugs and crime. The construction of the freeway displaced a lot of people, and things have gone downhill."*

*Marissa thinks that a rough neighborhood is a good chance to explore a community deeply to avoid falling into stereotypes. "There's something that makes you stay there, though? Something beautiful. What is it?"*

*"Oh, easy. The people that live in the area are really vibrant. They have block parties and street fairs, and I get to watch them surprise me all the time. Humans are so fascinating!"*

## WHEN PROBING QUESTIONS FAIL

Don't be dissuaded if the initial answers to your probing questions feel flat or uninteresting. Some players are great at adding dynamic fiction to the city, but most players need a little help. Look for vague nouns and verbs, loaded words, and generalities to explore, and work with your players to spin their initial answers into fictional gold.

### GETTING SPECIFIC

Players who are stuck often put forward a lot of vague nouns and verbs in their initial answers. Dig into those vague words for specifics, and you might find that players have a lot of interesting ideas. The goal here isn't to undermine or redact what they've told you—instead, you want to build on what they've said with probing questions that reveal the awesome fiction underlying their vague answer.

If you ask, "Who owns this territory?":

*"A gang of werewolves."*

*"Which werewolves? A specific pack?"*

*"Yeah, a pack of werewolves."*

*"Whose pack?"*

*"Uh...Rico's pack."*

*"How do people know it's their territory?"*

*"They are always around, patrolling and stuff."*

*"How do they patrol, specifically?"*

*"They drive around in cars, giving people a tough time."*

This kind of information is ripe for building upon. A pack of werewolves who drive around in cars looking for people to harass? That's an MC move waiting to happen!

## UNPACKING LOADED WORDS

Players tend to use a lot of loaded words that seem to convey meaning but actually hide the action, words like love and patriotism or even fear and hate. These words are loaded with meaning, but it's often unexplored. Most people know what you mean when you say "a 9mm," but two players might have very different ideas about what "fear" looks like in the fiction.

If you ask, "How did Rico get this territory?":

*"Rico is tough and stuff."*

*"How does everyone know that Rico is tough?"*

*"When he took the territory, he killed the whole pack by himself. When it was over, everyone was afraid of him."*

*"When you say that people were 'afraid of him,' what do you mean? What does that look like?"*

*"No one fucks with him. Not even the vampires, and they love roughing up werewolves."*

When you get more details about loaded words—tough or afraid—they tend to solidify aspects of communities and individuals that you can draw on later. In the example, the MC has a bunch of information about Rico ready for use—he's tough, he's a killer, and even vampires don't fuck with him.

## BUT...WHERE ARE YOU FROM?

Since all these characters are people with families and history and culture, ask them about where they came from and how they ended up in the city. If someone comes from an immigrant family, ask them why they moved from their home country; if someone is "from the city," ask them why their family stayed all these years. And don't just ask questions like these of minority characters. Make characters that look white also explain where they're from and what their family cares about. Destroy the idea that any of them are just "living here" without reference to the people and events that brought them to this moment. No one is neutral. No one.

## EXPLORING GENERALITIES

When a player gives you a generality about a situation, place, or community, dig in deeper. Sometimes you might let one slide—as in the examples where words like "everyone" or "no one" went unchallenged to focus on unspecified nouns and loaded words—but always circle back to them if possible.

If you say, "Tell me a little more about Rico's pack. You said they're always patrolling? Is it like a round-the-clock thing for all of them or do they set up shifts?"

*"No one knows. They're just around a lot. Everyone says they're everywhere."*

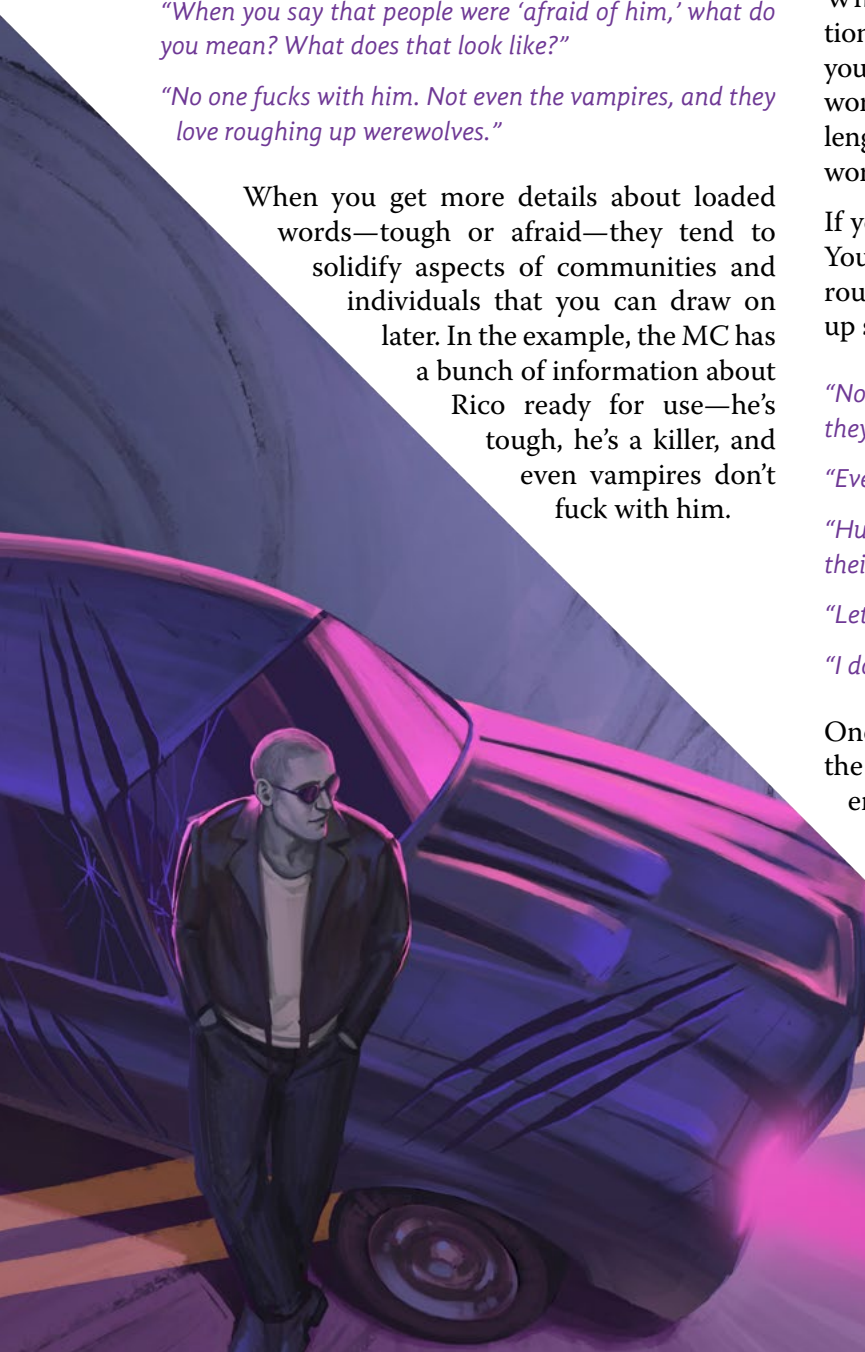
*"Everyone? There's no one who says different?"*

*"Huh. Yeah, there's like one girl who says that she knows their schedule, that it's not random."*

*"Let's call her Leah. How do you know her?"*

*"I don't know her. People just say she says different."*

One trick for dealing with generalities is to give the player two options to think about. Most players won't pick either one, but instead triangulate some different answer that fits what they tried to say. Your goal is to push them to be clear, not to drive them toward a specific place in the fiction.





## DURING THE FIRST SESSION

After character creation (and all your questions), let the players know how things will go for the first session. Make it clear that you aren't going to run them through a plot or make them jump through hoops to finish an adventure. Say something like **"URBAN SHADOWS** is all about **playing to find out what happens**, so we're going to figure out what's happening in the city together. I promise that, even though I don't have anything planned, the session is still going to be fun: you all are intriguing characters who lead interesting lives in a dramatic city. Just following you around is going to be fascinating, and we'll see where it takes us." Then MC the game with your principles and moves, pushing toward your agendas as much as you can.

Once things get moving, make heavy use of your MC Worksheet: it's got your principles and moves, places for you to write down NPCs, useful lists of names and drives, all that shit. Keep notes during the session so you can come back to them later to create factions and prep your faction turn (page 255) based on the stuff your players contributed as the game got started.

MCing **URBAN SHADOWS** is mostly about following your principles and making your moves—all in the service of your agendas—but here are a few things to focus on for the first session:

- ◆ Summon the shadows
- ◆ Springboard off character creation
- ◆ Ask questions constantly
- ◆ Push on relationships and obligations
- ◆ Call out moves when they happen
- ◆ Offer moves when the players flinch
- ◆ Frame scenes with multiple characters
- ◆ Invoke every Circle
- ◆ Let loose with some violence

## SUMMON THE SHADOWS

Fill your city with monsters and demons, shadows and sacrifice. Show it to the players again and again; make sure they know that this is not a normal human metropolis, but a playground for the wizards and vampires and faeries that truly run the city. If you introduce a bar, make it a vampire bar where the ghoul bouncers require secret passcodes before admitting you; if you introduce a park, make it a hangout for trolls and fae-kin, all looking for a fix before they head back to Arcadia. Make the city something memorable by blanketing it in shadows that lie just outside of what normal mortals see every day.

## SPRINGBOARD OFF CHARACTER CREATION

The players have given you a ton of hooks and mysteries to explore when making their characters: relationships that require attention, magical objects that attract thieves and scoundrels, conflicts with other PCs that are still unresolved. Grab something that interests you and bring it to bear immediately; show the players that you were listening when they said "I'm looking for my sister" or "My old mentor went crazy and disappeared." Make your early moves soft and obvious, softball pitches that tell your players exactly what's going on and telegraphs how they can "solve" the problem. Then follow the chaos they create!

## ASK QUESTIONS CONSTANTLY

Don't stop asking questions when you've finished character creation; make the question "What does that look like?" as common as "What do you do?" Ask for details about everything: their apartments, their clothes, their cars, their families. Take whatever they give you and write it down; reincorporate it right away if possible—"Yeah, this guy works for that werewolf pack you were talking about. Rico's the alpha of that pack, right?"—and then build on it later. Push them to define anything that's not defined; make them say what the city looks like as often as you tell them what they see in the shadows.

## PUSH ON RELATIONSHIPS AND OBLIGATIONS

The PCs start the game with a bunch of history with each other and with the city. Most of this history manifests itself in the present as relationships and obligations that demand the PCs' attention. Players love to talk about how much control they have over all their little pieces, but you know that they're barely hanging on to their fragile little lives. Make your NPCs lean on the PCs in ways that make them scramble to hold on to everything, and offer opportunities for the PCs to gain the upper hand if they're willing to stretch their resources just a little bit further...

## CALL OUT MOVES WHEN THEY HAPPEN

Sometimes the players tell you what they want to do without making a direct reference to the moves. Look for opportunities to say, “That sounds like you’re trying to **escape a situation**” or “If you want to \_\_\_\_\_, you’ll have to make a move. I think \_\_\_\_\_ is a good fit. What do you think?” The players don’t know all the moves yet, don’t know when to pick up the dice, so call moves out as often as you can. Push them to roll the dice so that the mechanics of the game can kick in and drive the story forward. If players avoid moves, escalate your MC moves to the point that they have to act immediately to avoid disaster for themselves or someone they care about.

## OFFER MOVES WHEN PLAYERS FLINCH

Other times the players walk right up to a move and flinch at the last second, narrowly avoiding needing to roll something. Partly this is because they’re nervous about committing to actions that might get them in trouble, but it’s also because they don’t know how far to push things. Look for places where they can get what they want by triggering a move—especially opportunities that fit the character really well—and push them to make the fucking move: “You’re a big tough werewolf. Do you want to **turn to violence** against this joker? It seems to me like he’s just asking for you to rough him up for fucking with your territory.”

## FRAME SCENES WITH MULTIPLE CHARACTERS

Avoid any scene in the first session that starts with just one character. **URBAN SHADOWS** characters are fairly self-sufficient for short periods of time, so a scene that’s just supposed to set up a PC can sometimes end up going on for twenty minutes or more. That’s fine later in the story, when everyone knows each other’s characters and you’re all fascinated by a tense scene featuring one character, but it’s a real letdown to run a whole first session and not get a scene with another character. Push characters together early and often, even if it means using some hard scene framing (page 35) to get them into the same place. Use the personal relationships the PCs chose when they set up their City Hub; every single one of those is a messy interaction that can jumpstart a whole session.

## INVOKE EVERY CIRCLE

Vary up the NPCs and plot threads you’re bringing to the first session. Remember that the PCs need to deal with each Circle in order to advance, so leaving out Mortalis or Power makes it hard for the characters to advance in the first session. Get characters from each Circle in scenes early—you can get players to **put a name to a face** when an NPC mentions an important NPC or an important NPC is simply in a scene. If you’re struggling to introduce a Night character to a mostly faerie plot, for example, frame a scene with an important vampire or werewolf on their way out of a meeting with a faerie when the PCs show up. After all, the NPCs all know each other too, right?

## LET LOOSE WITH SOME VIOLENCE

Start a fight! The supernatural world isn’t fucking around, and your PCs—especially the Hunter, the Veteran, the Wolf, the Sworn, and the Tainted—have plenty of their own firepower to hit back when attacked. You can even make the people attacking them a mystery: “This crew of demons rolls up on you, pistols out, knuckles cracked. What the fuck did you do to them?” If the player doesn’t know, great! Now they’ve got a fight to survive and a mystery to solve. You don’t have to build to violence; sometimes the violence comes looking for the PCs before they really understand what’s happening.

## AFTER THE FIRST SESSION

Once you’ve played through the first session, start thinking about where things go from here. You’ve got a mess of relationships, a city in turmoil (it’s always in turmoil, right? Fucking politics!), and some hints at approaching danger—or maybe even some straight-up murderous fiends already heading for the PCs. Hopefully, all of this gets you and your players excited for the second session.

As all of this bounces around in your head, start to solidify the political landscape you’ve created together into factions with their own plots and schemes. See page 250 in **Chapter 9: Long-Term Play** for how those factions come into the game, but keep in mind that you’re not writing a traditional plot, not setting up your players for a fall, not arranging all the fucking ducks in a row so things go the way you want. You’re still **playing to find out what happens**, even as you get a grasp on the politics and personalities that your city has to offer.



## TEACHING THE GAME

Anytime you play through the first session of **URBAN SHADOWS**, it's likely that you'll end up teaching the game to the players, either because they've never played a Powered by the Apocalypse game or because **URBAN SHADOWS** is new to them. Here are some tips for teaching the game effectively in your first session:

### PACE YOUR EXPLANATIONS

As the MC, you've got to walk the line between deluging the players with too much information and giving them so little guidance that they can't make informed decisions. It's tempting to sit down and explain every part of the playbooks and basic moves before you start playing, but it can easily take you an hour just to go over everything. Instead, give the players the information they need to create their characters and leave the rest of it for when it comes up (or even for a later session).

For example, it might be best to explain the stats in broad terms when players are making characters—"BLOOD is about fighting and fleeing; bump it up if you think of your character as more physically capable"—instead of walking through each of the basic moves. It's much easier to explain what **BLOOD** does the first time someone *turns to violence* or tries to *escape a situation*. Give the players enough information to make choices, but structure that information so that it's not all coming at them at once.

### FOCUS ON CORE MECHANICS

In many ways, **URBAN SHADOWS** is a fairly complex game—players have to manage character stats, circle ratings, Status, and Debts, all alongside the basic, Circle, and playbook moves! It's easy for a new player to be overwhelmed both by too much explanation about their mechanical options and by those options themselves.

Be selective about the mechanics you want to engage in the first session. Moves always involve some level of judgment—"Is this vampire stubborn enough that the PCs will have to *persuade* him? Or will he just give in and go along when threatened?"—so focus on core mechanics, like basic moves and Circle moves, instead of worrying too much about whether players are making the best use of their playbook moves in the first session. You'll have time to get to all those other mechanics later, once your players have a handle on the basics.

## BE GENEROUS AND PATIENT

As the players learn the game, they might find that a few of their choices at character creation hold them back—the Wizard might decide that *Teleport* isn't that useful because it only goes a short distance or the Tainted might decide that *assassinating their patron's enemies* is a bit too serious a tone for the game. If a player finds that a choice they made on their playbook doesn't work for them later, be generous and let them change it. New players often need some time to really internalize the mechanics in order to make choices.

In fact, patience and generosity are key to working with new players, period. Since you already know how the game works, the whole process of teaching the game can feel terribly slow and plodding. Be ready to explain a mechanic two or three times before folks get it; almost everyone needs to see a move work a few times before they fully grasp it. And let that patience extend to yourself as well; it sometimes takes a few sessions before even experienced MCs learn to run a new game really well. Give yourself the time to learn and teach!

### MODEL GREAT BEHAVIOR

Your players are probably awesome people—you picked them, right?—but that doesn't mean that they already know how to be awesome players.

During the first session, aggressively model for them what an awesome player looks like by acting as an engaged audience; talking as the NPCs and pushing the players for direct, in-character responses; and actively incorporating and reincorporating their contributions. Be excited when they trigger a move you weren't expecting or put forward an idea that has an interesting impact on the fiction.

Modeling good behavior is also about stepping in to address problems early. Use the X-Card (page 12) if you think a scene is going down a bad path, and directly address behavior at the table that's distracting or problematic—talking over other players, playing with a cell phone or computer—by talking openly and honestly about the group's norms. The players at the table count on you to act as the authority, so look for opportunities to use that authority wisely or delegate it back to the group when necessary, e.g. "Are we all cool with using cell phones at the table?" or "Is it time for us to take a break?"

## IF YOU'RE NOT BUSY

Everything you need to run the game is in the principles and moves; stick to your guns and pull the trigger when the players are in your sights. Beyond that, we've got a few tips and tricks that make games of **URBAN SHADOWS** really shine. When you've got a moment in between moves:

**...linger on the details.** Paint a picture for the players. Tell them in loving detail about a renovated building or a captivating dress or a perfect meal or a rotting body. Talk in color, sounds, smells, flavors. Make them believe they're right there, attending the mayor's fundraiser, watching the new construction on Broad Street, finishing the murder victim's autopsy. Bring the city to life and grab them by the throat, the ear, and the tongue, whatever seems to get their attention.

**...make maps.** Pull out scraps of paper, index cards, newspapers and draw all over them. Sketch out high stakes situations, especially violent encounters, and encourage your players to draw on the maps too. Be honest with your players; if there's a place they can take cover from incoming fire or get a bead on the opposition, draw it on the map and give them what they earned if they take that position. Clarify, clarify, clarify. The choices they make only matter if they are clear.

**...show them pictures.** Get online and find pictures of faces and places that fit your story. Print them out, big enough to hold up to the whole group and diverse enough to be your city. Show your players what Dominguez—the Mexican vampire who owns the nightclub on 7th Street—looks like by putting a picture in front of them and they'll never forget his name. Match that to a picture of his nightclub glittering in the midnight hour—a line of people waiting outside the door—and they'll be dying to meet him.

**...share some history.** Do some research about your city and share it with your players. Tell them all about the waterfront development that happened back in '86, the shooting that led to a race riot back in '65, the men who came back from the war in '48. The player characters live in this fucking city; they ought to know that stuff. But don't let your prep work sit in a folder or notebook, unused. Any prep you do—any story you dig up—that doesn't jump off the page into your players' ears is wasted.

**...ask about the past.** The official record ain't all that matters. Ask your players to fill in the gaps, especially around the supernatural: "How did Watanabe come to power over the vampire clans?" or "How long has the Queen of Winter held the docks down here?" Build on their answers, even if they're incomplete or contradictory. Rumors are stronger than truth sometimes, especially when it comes to the supernatural underbelly of these dark streets.

**...jump forward in time.** If you're bored, say, "A week passes..." or "A few days later..." Time slips away from people, and your player characters are no different. Take a faction turn (page 255) if things might shift and change in the city, but also look for places where you can skip ahead a week or two to what matters next in the story. Take your time with the story when it's interesting, and pull back when the fiction needs room to develop.

**...share the spotlight.** Move the camera around the table, especially when a character hasn't been on screen for a while: "What have you been up to, Paris?" If a scene gets tense or interesting, cut back and forth between another tense and interesting scene to keep the drama up; if a scene gets slow, wrap it up and move to a different player, a different conflict. You're the director, working the cameras to keep things moving, shifting the audience's focus to where it needs to be at this moment.

**...zoom in and out.** Vary the pace and length of conflicts by zeroing in and pulling back at the right times. Moves are flexible and fractal; you can resolve a whole battle with a single **turn to violence** roll or you might spell out each and every move that the players make, beat by fucking beat. Find the point of drama and dig in hard. Push the players to make choices, but be willing to step back to see the long-term consequences.

**...take a fucking break.** If you're stuck, take a break and think about your agendas, principles, and moves. Your players probably appreciate the time to think too, and everyone can come back to the table refreshed. When you get to a stopping point for the session, call it. Better to leave them wanting more—and give yourself time to do end of session moves—than to drag things on too long. Same goes with whole story arcs and faction turns; give yourself space to handle things so that you can stay excited about the characters, the rules, and the system.



# ONE-SHOTS

## SUCCESSFUL ONE-SHOTS

It's possible that you end up playing **URBAN SHADOWS** for just one session, maybe because your group is just trying out the system or you're at a gaming convention running for people who can't get together a second time. Either way, here are a few tips about making your only session count:

### TIE EVERYTHING TOGETHER

Look for opportunities to tie together NPCs, plot threads, and character relationships. Is someone looking for a powerful NPC who did them a favor? Maybe it's the Tainted's dark patron. Did someone recently move to the city for work? Perhaps the Imp offered them a job. The tighter the web that binds the characters together, the faster things move in the fiction. Avoid giving any Debts to NPCs if possible when PCs hand out Debts, and keep things moving quickly through character creation.

On that same note, you probably want to skip using a City Hub and focus all the players on a single messy situation. The characters will still all end up with different perspectives—usually people highlight a variety of Circles around the table—and a solid mess of relationships and Debts, but you need to limit the spread of the plot so you can tell a coherent story in three to four hours.

### GO FOR THE THROAT

Make all your moves harder. Don't just threaten important NPCs, kill them; don't just hint at danger, crash into the PCs early and often. After all, none of this matters after the first session, right? It's not like you should be pacing the game like you're playing for five or six long sessions. Get there now or you run the risk of not getting there at all.

The same goes for your NPCs: introduce powerful characters who recklessly pursue their goals. Make this moment the culmination of years of planning, the moment at which things come together for the villains and scoundrels of your story. Catch the PCs up in the drama of political forces much larger than themselves, and put them into position to decide the fate of the city. Everything's in balance, all the forces posed against each other, and the PCs can tip things any way they want...assuming they're willing to live with the consequences.

### IN MEDIAS RES

Above all else, start your players in the middle of things, narratively and mechanically. Frame scenes with multiple characters where they're already in the middle of shit and ask them to explain what happened—"Why are you two in the middle of stealing Watanabe's priceless sword? And what the hell went wrong?"—or put NPCs they care about in obvious harm's way and ask the PCs for help sorting it out. Don't be subtle here. Make it clear that you're jumping to the interesting stuff to make the session count.

You can be direct here with the players—"We don't have a lot of time, so I'd like to jump right in with a scene featuring a big conflict."—but often the players don't need to explicitly know you're bringing the heat. They'll appreciate how starting in the middle of the action gives them the chance to show off their cool moves, their neat abilities, and their awesome features. Don't make them wait to get that stuff on screen by starting slow!

### SUPERCHARGE THE PLAYBOOKS

Mechanically, start everyone with a free advance, three corruption, and a free corruption move. You want the players to have a chance to earn an additional corruption advance during play, and sometimes an empty corruption track fills a bit slowly during the first session. Don't be shy about having the players mark corruption either; everyone is going to play their characters like stolen cars, so making the PCs mark corruption is a fun way to push their playbook in a single session.

You can skip going over advancement and marking Circles during the game (page 186) too—just give everyone an additional advance halfway through the first session. Be generous! Rarely does another playbook move or two get in the way of a good story!

# EXAMPLE

## THE LONG EXAMPLE

What follows is an extended example of play that draws upon all the material in the book to this point. It calls out MC moves and principles throughout, as well as noting how the MC, Mark, thinks about the emerging conflicts while the group plays to find out what happens. The session he's MCing is set in Boston and features three PCs:

- ♦ **The Hunter:** Booker—Black, she/her, conforming, casual clothing, calculating—a schoolteacher who hunts demons who corrupt the good and the just. Played by Briana (she/her).
- ♦ **The Oracle:** Paris—White, he/him, dirty clothing, paranoid—a distracted and nervous seer trying to escape the overbearing demands of his Night benefactor, Wren. Played by Pytha (they/them).
- ♦ **The Tainted:** Zara—Indigenous (Mohegan), she/her, androgynous, dirty clothing, unstable—a transient demonic enforcer tasked with tracking down rogue demons and policing her dark patron's minions. Played by Zoe (she/her).

This example is drawn from the first session of play. Earlier in the session, Booker put off Cora—a vampire who provides Booker with tools and supplies and who asked to meet with Paris—because she became convinced that Cora plans on hurting the seer...despite the fact that Paris has a benefactor—Wren, a Status-3 werewolf—in Night. When Cora left her alone, Booker immediately rushed out to find Paris and get him to a secure location.

Briana says, "We need to get somewhere safe. I want to talk to my mortal allies about keeping Paris away from Cora. We need to find a place to hole up 'til morning." She looks at Pytha, and they nod. Briana picks up the dice and gets ready to roll.

Mark says, "Sure, that sounds like **hitting the streets**. Let's clarify what you're doing before you roll. Who are you going to?"

"How about a local drug dealer? Manuel. He knows that I hunt demons and protect people, so he trusts me. I think he could keep us safe." Mark nods. Briana picks up the dice and rolls with Mortalis. She's got Mortalis +1, but ends up with a total of 5.

Mark reminds her to mark Mortalis and looks over his moves. He considers **putting them in danger**, but they're already on the run from Cora. That's sort of the same trouble a second time. He decides to **surface a conflict, ancient or modern**: Manuel and his lieutenants just died in a drug deal gone wrong. Mark's thinking offscreen—building fiction with characters that aren't standing in front of the PCs—but he knows it's all going to be revealed when they show up at Manuel's looking for safety.

"You roll up on Manuel's place, a squat two-story brick building in the heart of Dorchester. It's dusk, and the streetlights are flickering at odd intervals. You've been here before?" Mark's setting up the reveal, asking loads of questions, and building on the answers as he **displays the city**.

"Yeah, I met him here once upon a time. They brought me back here."

"Great. Does he usually post people around as lookouts?" Mark's letting Briana build this place up, looking for ways to tell her things aren't normal when they get to the site.

Briana nods. "Usually he has a few folks out on the street. They probably know me."

"None of them are outside. The front door to Manuel's place is swinging open; no one appears to be around, but the place is definitely exposed. As you step out of your car, you smell blood and gunpowder. You've got a bad feeling, like death visited too recently for your comfort. The street is quiet. What do you do?"

"I pull out my Magnum and approach slowly."



"How about you, Paris? Do you stay in the car?" Mark's looking to get Paris involved, sharing the spotlight to draw him further into the scene.

"No way," Pytha says. "Paris sticks with Booker. He's not sitting around in a parked car, waiting for Cora to sneak up on him."

Mark nods. Even when Pytha talks in the third person about their character, Mark's still going to **address himself to the characters instead of the players**: "You get the same bad feeling, Paris. Your second sight is tingling hard, telling you that something happened here recently." Mark's **being a fan of the characters**, giving Pytha's Oracle a lot of foreshadowing and encouraging them to make moves to get more information.

But before Pytha can do anything specific to look for answers, Mark makes his move, giving the player characters the obvious information and revealing the conflict that killed Manuel and all his goons: "As the two of you enter the building, Booker with her gun drawn ready for trouble, you see nearly a dozen bodies. No one is moving." He's **cloaking the move in darkness**, too: Briana and Pytha will see the deaths as the result of the fictional gang conflict rather than the result of an MC move selected off the list when Briana missed while **hitting the streets**.

Pytha inhales sharply, then says, "Paris scopes the place out, picking up and touching things that seem important. What happened here?"

"Are you **studying a sanctuary**?" Mark asks. Pytha nods, and rolls with Mortalis. They get an 8, enough to see the reality beneath and reveal an area, NPC, or item that's not what it seems.

Mark says, "Mark Mortalis for making a Circle move! This was clearly a deal gone bad between old enemies; you see a few dead bodies that don't belong, probably members of a rival drug organization. A case of money is open on the table with a few kilos of cocaine next to it. It looks like everyone here died in a shootout. Ugly stuff. Manuel's body is in the corner; you can see that he was crawling toward an area behind the bar that looks like it might be a panic room..."

"I point the drugs and money out to Booker," says Pytha. "'It looks like things went bad here. Real bad. Looks like Manuel couldn't make it to his panic room when the shooting started.'"

Briana frowns. "Crap. No safety here, then?" she asks Mark. "We're just as vulnerable here to Cora and her goons as we were before we came all the way out here?"

Mark smiles and **proposes an opportunity with a cost**. "Well...this whole place is basically a safehouse and you know where the panic room is. Manuel could have locked the whole place down, but he let these folks in trying to close a deal. If you got it cleaned up before all these bodies start to smell, you could probably stay here a long, long time. Do you know anyone who might be helpful in getting rid of a few corpses?" Mark's **pushing the characters together**, hoping to get Zoe's character involved in the scene.

Briana grins. "I call Zara." Everyone looks at Zoe. "'Yo, what's up?'"

"I'm **cashing in a Debt** for a moderate favor: 'Remember how you almost got me killed last week? I need to make a bunch of dead bodies disappear...tonight. That's something you can do, right?'"

"Zara groans," Zoe says. "She says, 'I don't have time for something like that. I got stuff going on.'"

"Are you **refusing the Debt**?" Mark points at Zoe's dice; they are both Status-1, so it's a flat roll. She nods vigorously and rolls. Snake eyes. Zara's got to honor the Debt or face some nasty consequences. Mark says, "Looks like she's not getting very far with you, Booker. What do you say back that closes the noose on her?"

"'Seriously, Zara. I need this. Now.'"

"'Argh. Fine, where are you? I'll be there in a few minutes.'"

Mark reminds them both to mark their respective Circles for cashing in and honoring the Debt—Mortalis for Zara and Wild for Booker.

Since things seem to be getting a bit quiet (and all the PCs are getting along just a bit too well), Mark makes an MC move: **put someone in danger**. Cora's got her guys looking for them, right? Now's a good time to get them involved too...

"It takes you a few minutes, Zara, but you head over to the safehouse. As you park your motorcycle, you spot a vampire watching the place from across the street. He's talking on the phone, furtively glancing at the safehouse and Booker's car."

Zoe says, "I try to **figure him out**. What's he doing here?" Zoe rolls and misses. It's not Zoe's day today.

Mark decides to **mobilize resources to shift the odds**. The vamp would love to get Paris by himself, but the arrival of Zara makes that too hard. He'll get Cora and come back. "As you start to get a bead on the guy, he notices you. The car rumbles to life, and he drops it into gear and pulls out into the street. You're not sure why he was here."



Zoe says, “Zara shrugs. No need to get worked up about some stupid vampire. I’ll go in and start cleaning up bodies.”

“Great. Let’s jump forward a bit. Cool with everyone? You spend an hour or so cleaning things up and trying to make the place livable. What do you do with the bodies, Zara?” More questions.

“I move them to a truck out front, wrapped in tarps. I’ll probably **hit the streets** with Wild to see if I can get a demon or faerie to take them off my hands.”

“Sure, we’ll get there in a minute.” Mark’s delaying Zara’s move for now, pushing it into the future to deal with the action that’s happening in the moment. The city’s moving, and Zara has to keep up. “As you’re loading the last of the bodies into the truck, though, you see a sedan pull up. A few vampires get out, two of them holding shotguns.” Mark’s making a Night move here (**threatening someone’s interests**), softly, to follow through on Zoe’s miss earlier. “The woman who gets out of the passenger seat is Cora. Zara, go ahead and **put a name to a face** with her.”

Zara rolls with Night and gets an 8. Mark seizes the moment to **detail the NPCs who matter to the story**: “You know her only by reputation. She’s an ambitious (and dangerous) Status-2 vamp who is trying to claim all of the industrial area by the river, the same neighborhood where Booker’s warehouse is located. She’s known for sudden, violent outbursts when she doesn’t get what she wants. What do you do?”

“I back up into the house and yell, ‘Booker, someone here to see you.’”

Mark grins. “Cora waits patiently out front for Booker to come out. Booker, what do you do?” Mark’s **giving the players the chance to take the lead**, letting Booker drive the action now that Cora is on the scene. He’s made his moves, and he wants to see how they’re going to play out.

Briana asks, “I’m still in the house, right?” Mark nods. “Okay, I tell Paris to run.”

Pytha shakes their head. “No deal, Booker. I gotta stay with you.”

“Paris, you have to leave. They are going to do something horrible to you, I know it. Run. We’ll cover you.”

“I had a vision, Booker.” Suddenly everyone is looking at Pytha. “If I leave, you and Zara both die.” Briana looks shocked, trying to think about when that would have happened. She looks at Mark.

Mark’s already on top of it: “That’s a false prophecy, right? Mark corruption! What do you do, Booker?”

“I can’t let him stay, even if he’s got a prophecy. I **cash in a Debt** and say, ‘I’ve been protecting you, Paris. That’s not going to stop. You need to run.’” Pytha frowns.

“Do you want to **refuse to honor the Debt**, Paris? You can try to stick to your guns and stay.” Mark asks.

“No, I’m good. I grab my stuff and run. Can I **escape the situation**? I assume it’s not as easy as just walking out the back door?”

“Yeah, I think Booker heading out to meet with Cora is a good enough opportunity. You’ve got a pretty low **BLOOD**, though. Do you want to maybe **let it out** first to twist the strands of fate to hinder Cora and make it easier for you to get away?” Mark is suggesting moves, getting them used to the idea of the whole system without rushing them, and encouraging the players to make use of the advantages they can get.

“Yes. Definitely.”

“What does that look like?” Questions, questions.

“Um... I’m not sure. Maybe I send her a vision?”

Mark nods. “That could work. Could it be something like shaping fate around her to show her what could be?”

“Yeah, that’s great. I focus myself on Cora’s voice, her presence looming in my mind. I reach out with my hands and pull the chaos of possible futures toward her.” They roll with **SPIRIT** +2 and get a 10. Pytha smiles: “I’ll activate the ability and avoid the corruption; I’m okay with some complications.” Mark nods.

“You concentrate hard on those chaotic futures, the familiar headache of your visions settling in as you exert yourself—mark 1-harm ap—but through the window, you can see Cora wince and grimace, the visions of many things descending upon her. The goons turn their attention to her, giving you enough time to make your move. Go ahead and **escape**...and take a +1 forward!” Pytha rolls and narrowly gets a 10. Their +1 forward saves them from more messy complications that come with a 7-9.

Pytha picks you leave something important behind from the options for **escape a dangerous situation**. Mark says, “You’re out a window, on the roof, and climbing onto the next building before you realize that you forgot your cell phone on the bar in Manuel’s place. Looks like you’ll have to find some other way of getting in contact with Booker when you get somewhere safe. We’ll come back to you soon!”



"Out front, Cora is direct about what she wants, Booker," Mark says, **telling the consequences and asking**. "She's on edge, her senses murky from Paris twisting fate around her, and she's no longer politely inquiring: 'I want him, Booker. I've been keeping you equipped in your silly little war against the demons, and it's time to pay up. Where is Paris?' She's **cashing in a Debt** to get you to give her an honest answer right now, no deceptions or tricks."

"Can I just lie to her?"

"You can try to **trick** her, but first you've got to deal with the Debt she just cashed in with you. Remember that this Debt—like all others—has some weight with you in the fiction. You really do feel like you owe her for what she's done for you in the past."

"Yeah, okay. I say, 'I know you've been helpful. It means something to me. I owe you...but I can't tell you that, Cora. He's a friend.'" Briana rolls to **refuse to honor the Debt** with a -1—Cora is Status-2—but still gets a 10+! She's in the clear for now.

Mark says, "Cora looks like she's about to lose her shit; her expression intensifies as her rage builds. You can tell she feels like you've taken something from her, like you're standing in her way for no good reason. She says, 'I've already talked to Wren. He says that Paris is mine for as long as I keep my father out of Wren's war. Paris is mine to take.'" Mark's honoring Briana's 10+—she's not honoring Cora's Debt—but he's still escalating by **revealing a deal done in her absence that puts the characters at the center of conflicts**—a harder move that keeps the tension up in the scene but still leaves the action in the hands of the player characters.

"Now I lie. 'He's not here, Cora. I don't know where he is.'" Briana rolls to **mislead, distract, or trick** with **MIND**, but comes up short with a 4. Even Zara can't help. Ouch.

"Cora laughs. She turns back to her vampire goons and says, 'Cute. She thinks she has friends.'"

"I pull out my gun. I'm just going to..."

"Hold on. Cora's not done." Mark's going to have the vampires make a Circle MC move—**claim territory from the weak or foolish**—but he's still **cloaking moves in darkness**, making it look like what Booker said actually changed Cora's opinion of her. He didn't plan for things to escalate here—he's **playing to find out what happens**—but Booker's blocked every attempt Cora's made to get to Paris. Now Mark's got to **say what the city demands**: Cora's got power here and she's going to use it.

"Before you can react, Cora's hand is around your throat, her nails piercing your skin. Take 1-harm. She pushes you back into the safehouse, out of sight of the street. 'He's mine,' she says. 'And if I can't have him, I'll take you and this house and whatever you're doing here.' Booker, you're disoriented by Cora's strength, but you'll pull yourself together in a moment. Zara, what do you do?"

"Fuck this, I follow the vamps into the house and activate my demon form. I don't like it when bullies push people around." Mark smiles. Zoe rolls a 7-9 with **BLOOD**, and chooses gain armor+1—for a total of 2-armor with **Tough as Nails**—and a 3-harm hand demonic weapon.

"What does your demon form look like?" Mark asks. "I don't think we've seen it yet."

Zoe smiles and looks at her playbook to make sure she has the details right: "Zara's got horns and spikes on her head, flaming claws instead of hands, feathered wings, chitinous skin, and glowing eyes. I think I'm pretty intimidating."

"Cora, still holding Booker up in the air by her throat with one hand, gestures to her goons with the others and says, 'Don't just stand there, kill her!'" Mark's **treating everyone according to their station**—playing to the idea that Zara is the biggest threat here—while emphasizing Cora's drive (to expand my territory) by showing her attempting to knock down the main threat in the room with brute force. "Zara, what do you do?"

"My hands are on fire, right? I grab one of these assholes by the face." Zoe rolls with **BLOOD** and gets a 9, just short of the 10+. Mark tells her that the vamps plan to inflict harm as well.

Briana says, "Wait! I can help, right?"

"Sure, what does that look like?" More questions!

"I pull out my gun and shoot wildly to distract them while Zara attacks them. Is that **distracting them or lending a hand**?"

"It's **lending a hand**. Since we're still resolving Zara's move, you're just **lending a hand** to her efforts. Roll with **WILD**!" Briana rolls with **WILD** +0 and comes up short. Snake eyes. "Ouch. As you try to get your gun out, Cora smiles and snatches it from you, dangling it just out of reach with her other hand. 'What are you planning on doing with this?'" Mark's **activating her stuff's downside**, reminding Briana that her guns and gear can be snatched away by a clever opponent.



Mark turns to Zoe: “You grapple the first vampire that comes toward you, Zara, your flaming hands burning his skin to ash immediately. As the other two vampires lower their shotguns at you, you shift your grip directly to the first vampire’s face. He screams and his whole body starts to shake. You inflict 3-harm and drop him to the ground.” Mark figures these guys can take 4-harm before they die, but 3-harm to the face is pretty rough, even for a toughened vampire goon. He decides that the first vampire is out of the fight, unconscious and near death.

Mark continues: “The other two open fire, inflicting 2-harm total—3-harm minus your 2-armor, twice over. The armor reduces the harm to 1-harm for each shot. What do you do?” Normally, Mark would just have had the one vamp inflict harm as Zara burned him, but... Zara handed him a golden opportunity by taking on three vamps at once and Mark is **turning her move back against her!**

“I don’t want to fight all of them with Booker in such a bad spot. I yell at them to run away. Maybe **let it out** to frighten someone with a display of demonic fury?” Mark nods, totally into the idea of the giant, flaming demon scaring off these vampire goons. After all, Cora didn’t say anything about fighting a fucking demon!

Zoe rolls with **SPIRIT**, but only gets a 5. She groans. “I guess they don’t run away. How much harm do I mark when they shoot me again?”

“It’s a miss, not a failure,” says Mark. “Your demonic flames surge into blue and white, the heat palpable as you rage. The two vampires take one look at the fire rising off your body and book it. They just saw their friend get turned to ash while you shrugged off two shotgun blasts. They’re out.” Mark’s **being a fan** of Zara and her demonic powers. She’s supposed to be scary and awesome!

“Okay...”

“But as they flee, you hear a sharp crack and feel a sudden pain in your side. There’s Cora, Booker’s gun outstretched toward you, her other hand holding Booker up in the air. A wisp of smoke rises from the barrel of Booker’s gun as Cora smirks at you.” Mark’s **inflicting harm as established**, escalating the tension of the scene by **giving everything a price**. How much longer will Zara keep fighting for Booker? “Booker, how much damage does your gun do?”

“Uh. It’s 3-harm...but it’s also blessed. I think it cuts through Zara’s armor?”

Mark stops for a second. He hadn’t thought about that. He thought he was just **inflicting a little bit of harm** on a heavily armored character, but the blessed gun cuts right through most of that. Booker’s gun is serious business, and one of his NPCs just used it to blow a hole in another PC. Mark’s **playing to find out what happens**, though, so he lets it ride.

“Oh, man. Rough. That’s enough to fill up your whole harm track, right?” Zoe nods. “You fall. Booker, you see Zara’s demon form flicker and fade, and blood spreads across the floor, red and thick. What do you do?”

“Can I slide away while Cora’s distracted?”

“She’s got a hand on you, but you might be able to shake her off and get out of her immediate reach by **keeping your cool**.”

Briana frowns. She doesn’t have a great roll for that with her **SPIRIT** +0. “I really want to get in a better position here. I guess I’ll squirm away.”

“What are you trying to avoid?” Mark’s following the move, even when Briana’s distracted, making sure she sets the stakes before the dice hit the table.

“I don’t want to get eaten!” She rolls, and gets a 7.

Mark says, “Okay, here’s what it’s going to cost to **keep your cool** and avoid Cora’s fangs. You can squirm away, but Cora will take a shot at you with your own gun. 3-harm, right in the back.” It’s a hard bargain, but it’s what the city demands. Cora’s not going to let up now, not when she’s got the upper hand.

“Nah, I can’t do it. Too much harm. I’ll get dropped too. Wait. If I let her feed on me, can I get back my gun? She’d be distracted, right?”

Mark smiles. That’s awesome. He’s **a fan of the player characters**, both when they are terrifying and effective—Zara melting the vampire’s face—and when the fiction puts them in terrible danger and they have to survive. “What does that look like?”

“I struggle a bit in her grasp, but tilt my head toward the door so that my neck is exposed.”

“Yeah, that’s great. You see Cora look around the room, but her eyes are drawn to your neck. She says, ‘Ah, this day is shit. You cost me a decent vamp, and I still don’t have Paris. At least I can get a meal in.’” Mark’s making another Circle move: Cora’s **making the best of a bad situation**. It’s a pillowy soft move, setting Briana up for **mislead, distract, or trick**. But she still has to roll...



Briana gets a 9: she chooses create an opportunity and expose a weakness or flaw. Mark says, "Her teeth sink into your neck. It's blissful, better than the best sex you've ever had...for both of you. The gun slips from Cora's fingers as she drinks deeply, and you hold yourself together long enough to grab it before it hits the floor. You have an opportunity to use the gun, but you also realize that you're so close you can put the bullet right into her neck. A shot there could be lethal, even for a vampire as strong as Cora. I'll give you +1-harm. That said, you take 2-harm as she sucks the life right out of you."

"I shoot her in the fucking throat!"

"Okay, before you **turn to violence**, I think this feeding counts as intimacy. What's your intimacy move?" Mark's **dirtying the hands of all involved**, reminding Booker that Cora is a person, not a thing, not a target. He wants Booker to kill her, but he also wants the death to stick with Booker and feel real.

"It says 'ask them a question; they must answer it honestly. They will ask you a question in return; answer it honestly or mark corruption.' I ask, 'Why do you want Paris?'"

"In between gulps of your blood, she whispers into your ear, 'I know he can find my brother; my sire buried him somewhere in the city. We can be together again...' She pauses drinking for a moment, and says, 'Do you want me to kill you...or make you one of us?' You can tell that she's eager for the answer, licking the blood off her lips as she waits for the answer."

"I'm not going to answer that honestly. I'll mark the corruption, and say 'Fuck you' right before I kill her." Mark nods.

Briana rolls to **turn to violence** and hits a 12; Mark chooses to put Booker in a bad spot—and Briana chooses inflict terrible harm. Mark says, "3-harm weapon, +1-harm for inflicting terrible harm, +1-harm for the weakness is 5-harm total. Cora dies, her body turning to ashes in your arms, like a lover vanishing in the wind. The last thing you feel is her lips on your neck. You drop to the floor, exhausted; you'll take a -1 ongoing to physical actions until you can get some blood back in your system."

Mark turns to Zoe: "Zara, you feel your last breaths shudder out from your body as the gunshot rings out through the safehouse. You die. Please read your end move." Mark's pushing the spotlight back to Zara; he knows that Zara's death move gives her a way out, so the fiction is going to snowball from here, not end.

Zoe smiles. "'When you die, cash in all the Debts your patron owes you to come back. If you have none, your patron will ask someone else to pay the Debt for you. If they refuse, time's up. It's been a good run.' I don't have any Debts on my patron yet."

Mark turns back to Briana: "Booker, Cora may be dead, but you hear a low rumble in the quiet safehouse. You know that Zara is gone, her breathing stopped completely. In the darkness, you hear a chitinous chuckle, an otherworldly sound of some demon just out of reach. You know it's come to make a deal."

Mark makes the best move he's got: "Booker, what do you do?"









# LONG-TERM PLAY





# A Character's

Let's be honest, shall we? The players always focus on the small stuff: the people who've tried to kill them, the deals they want done for their own personal gain, their regrets and fears licking at the edges of their guilty conscience. They can't escape the ever-present now of the city, the way each conflict spirals out away from them, never truly in their control and always feeling like a final resolution is just out of reach.

Thus, it's your job to keep an eye on the bigger picture. No one else is going to do it. This task falls to you and you alone.

MCing **URBAN SHADOWS** always occurs at two levels—overseeing the conflicts happening right now and managing the politics that created those conflicts in the first place. You have to run scenes, create NPCs, adjudicate the rules. But you also have to think bigger than the individual antagonists the PCs tangle with night after night.

A single vampire might be an agent unto herself, a manipulator or schemer with clever plans. But a vampire clan is something else entirely—it's an idea, a movement, a perspective shared and held by more than an individual candle that can be snuffed out by a strong wind. The PCs might thwart, outwit, or even kill one vamp; a vampire clan invokes politics that cannot be so easily overcome or ignored.

Ultimately, that's what politics is, isn't it? The inescapable. The slow-moving tide that washes in day after day, dragging in whatever it brings from the depths of the ocean, leaving with anything loose or unmoored. You can fight the tide, perhaps even turn it if you're lucky, but you'd best not confuse yourself—politics is a game of movements and factions greater than any one person.

As time moves forward in your game, it's up to you to represent that inescapable scrum and skirmish of city politics, to think about the larger forces of the city as the PCs battle their figurative (and literal) demons. And when the characters realize the tide is coming in or going out, when they finally see the true face of the city...you'll know which arrogant bastard has been pulling the strings all along...



## TIME WAITS FOR NO VAMP

Often the action of an **URBAN SHADOWS** session can take on a desperately urgent tone—the Aware searches the city for their missing sibling while the Tainted struggles with their latest assignment from their dark patron, a murderous task that causes the Oracle to be plagued by visions of an impending disaster. If you aren't careful, the immediacy of these conflicts can prove to be exhausting, leaving your players caught up without any way to reset or find some sense of normalcy.

In most urban fantasy stories, however, time eventually passes—leads grow cold, deals take time to negotiate, and time skips forward enough for the characters to take a breath and take care of ordinary business. Jumping forward in time also gives the larger institutions of the city, **factions** like a wizards' council or vampire clan, a chance to take broader political actions. In those breaks they wage wars and gather resources at a larger scale that reframes the background conflicts of the entire city. The everyday concerns of the main characters evolve alongside those larger conflicts, the conversation between the two reflecting what it means to live in an urban metropolis.

In **URBAN SHADOWS**, we represent this slipping of time, the moments when characters have to step back from the day-to-day and the story moves forward, as **time passing**. When time passes, the players still get to say what their characters do—making city moves (page 96) that reflect their own long-term efforts to accomplish their goals—but you, as the MC, determine what the factions of the city do as time moves forward, the ways that they reshape the city and present the players with new arenas for conflict and opportunities for action.

By allowing time to pass, the rhythm of an **URBAN SHADOWS** season moves from unending, exhausting action to intense drama framed by breaks in which the politics of the city evolve and deepen. Sometimes that means giving your players just 2–3 sessions to accomplish their immediate goals before time passes; other times you might do five or even ten sessions before the politics of the city come to bear on the story. Either way, the players need to understand that time is a precious resource, one they need to cultivate and use wisely before the gears of the city push everything forward into the future.

## HOW TO USE THIS CHAPTER

Before you start building factions and thinking about the long-term fate of the city, take the time to read through all of **Chapter 8: Master of Ceremonies**. Everything in this chapter builds upon the agendas, principles, and moves (page 198) described in that section of the book, and you'll understand everything here much better once you understand how to manage individual scenes, create NPCs, and make your own MC moves to advance those agendas.

This chapter opens with a full description of factions (page 250), the large-scale organizations of your story that ultimately define the politics of the city. These factions have a few numerical characteristics (like Size and Strength) that describe how the faction operates, but creating and using factions is as much about the fiction that surrounds them—the Status-3 NPCs that control them, the assets they hold, the ideologies that drive them—as it is about their mechanical strengths.

After describing the factions themselves, this chapter also covers how to use them during a faction turn (page 255) through the larger-scale city actions that organizations take when time passes. The faction turn is broken down into several phases (page 256), some of which you do with the players and others that you complete on your own, documenting the actions the factions take when the story skips forward in time. Those actions—faction moves (page 257)—are detailed in full. Each move covered has specific advice on how to integrate the move into play with short examples of actual play, followed by a longer example that documents an entire faction turn (page 268).

Finally, the chapter concludes with some advice on advancing the story by ending the current season and skipping time forward in a larger way. Changing from one season to the next (page 265) is an opportunity for your players to make fundamental changes to their characters—perhaps changing playbooks or introducing new player characters entirely—and for you to introduce a new City Hub to frame the next set of stories.

It's possible to run an entire season of an **URBAN SHADOWS** game without ever using the mechanics described in this section...but everything here is designed to give you, the MC, new tools to **make the city feel political and dark, keep the PCs' lives out of control and evolving, and play to find out what happens**. Let the city surprise you and give it a shot!

# FACTIONS

Factions are organizations, groups, and alliances that exert power across the city, sometimes pulling the strings behind the scenes, sometimes inflicting bloody violence on their enemies directly. They have two major mechanical attributes—**SIZE** and **STRENGTH**—alongside **ASSETS** that describe their holdings and resources. They can be led by NPCs and PCs alike, but NPC-controlled factions have a **GOAL** that expresses the faction's current objective and a **STANCE** that captures the faction's mood and demeanor; PC-controlled factions act according to the PC's instructions during the faction turn (page 255).

## FACTION LEADERS

The core of each faction revolves around a leader—a Status-3 character who ultimately directs the organization's actions. A faction can have as many additional Status-2 and Status-1 characters as seems fitting, but each Status-3 character (PC or NPC) stands alone, one per major faction of the city.

Often the Status-3 leader controls the formal reins of power—the High Priestess of a coven—but sometimes they are a shadowy manipulator whose loyal puppets manage the day-to-day operations while they make the real decisions behind the scenes. No matter how formal their rule is, however, it is never a secret; everyone knows who really controls a given faction.

*As a Status-3 NPC, the Queen of Winter (page 218) controls a faction of her very own; Marissa decides to go with the obvious choice and gives her a faerie court—the Winter Court. The Queen is a new NPC, but Marissa decides that the Winter Court has simply been off-screen in the story; her new plot to dethrone the King of Summer now puts the Queen (and her Court) front and center.*

The relationship between a Status-3 character and their faction is deeply symbiotic; the faction exists because the Status-3 character leads it, and the character has Status-3 because they lead a faction. A leader who has lost their faction likely drops to Status-2 when time passes; a faction without a Status-3 leader likely starts collapsing (page 253) during the next faction turn. You don't have to create a faction each time you introduce a Status-3 NPC, but eventually you'll want to explore the faction that underlies whatever power that Status-3 NPC holds.

## FACTION SIZE

Size directly measures the organization's active and committed core membership, ranging from:

SIZE	MEMBERS	EXAMPLE
Size-1	Fifteen or so members	A pack made of ten full werewolves and a few mortals
Size-2	Thirty or so members	A wizard council of a dozen wizards and twenty staff
Size-3	Sixty or so members	A demonic principality of sixty demons living in the city
Size-4	One hundred or more members	A mortal conspiracy of more than a hundred humans

Size only represents the members tied to the faction consistently present in the city; wizards who live in a pocket dimension but regularly work in the city can count toward a faction's Size, but demons still trapped in Hell—no matter how loyal they might be to their demonic master living in the city—can't serve a faction because they do not regularly participate in that faction's activities.

In other words, Size is a function of the faction's immediate head count. How many bodies can they bring to bear on an active problem right now? How many people can they count on to enact the will of the faction's leaders? How much would the faction notice a single member going missing?

*Marissa creates the Winter Court as a Size-3 faction; roughly sixty dedicated attendants from the Queen's Court are already present in the city. With such a large faction, the Winter Court is well-prepared to act as a threat against virtually every other faction in the city!*

## IMPROVING FACTION SIZE

Each faction has a three-box recruitment track; if the track fills, the faction adds +1 Size, increasing their stable membership to match their new Size rating, and clears the track. If something reduces the Size of a faction, the track clears as well. Factions usually mark recruitment as a result of **developing infrastructure** (page 259), but events in the fiction might cause the faction to mark recruitment or directly increase Size, especially if the player characters get involved in enlisting new members on behalf of a faction.



## FACTION STRENGTH

Strength reflects the motivation and coordination within the faction, ranging from:

STRENGTH	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
Strength-1	Disloyal or chaotic	A disorganized hunter's association
Strength-2	Tumultuous, but capable of uniting	A coalition of anarchic ghosts and spectres
Strength-3	Disciplined, but often tempered by conflict	A council of independent oracles
Strength-4	Devoted and organized	A tightly-governed vampire clan

Factions with Strength-2 or Strength-3 tend to be a mix of devotion and organization—they might be utterly loyal but disorganized, or apathetic but professional. Strength-2 factions tend to have more chaos and disunity with flashes of organization; Strength-3 factions tend to have discipline most of the time, with flashes of internal conflict and chaos.

*Marissa also decides the oaths of the Winter Court are binding, but that the Queen's faeries regularly squabble to the point that they ignore or overlook the Queen's orders (Strength-2). If the Queen ever attempts to grow the court, Marissa knows she can represent increases in Size and Strength as new resources (and faeries) arrive from the Queen's homeland or as the Queen resolves old feuds and establishes more dominant control over the faction's internal hierarchy.*

## IMPROVING FACTION STRENGTH

Factions have a three-box resource track; if the track fills, the faction adds +1 Strength and gains a new asset that reflects their new capacities, then clears the track. If something reduces the Strength of a faction, the resource track clears as well. Factions usually mark resources as a result of *developing infrastructure* (page 259), but events in the fiction might cause the faction to acquire new resources (and assets) directly.

## EXTREME FACTION STATS

Factions can have extreme combinations of stats, like an extremely dedicated and organized coalition of mortal powerbrokers (Size-1, Strength-4) or loose coalition of omnipresent, chaotic imps (Size-4, Strength-1). These combinations, however, are rare—a single lost point of Size or Strength can wipe such a vulnerable faction out completely (page 253), so most factions invest in some measure of growth.

## FACTION ASSETS

Factions hold assets—tags representing tangible resources that define the group's capabilities, such as *+veteran hunters*, *+necromantic rituals*, or *+drug dealer network*. Any individual faction member has their own unique abilities or resources, but these faction assets are shared holdings powerful enough to affect city politics. An individual vampire may wield blood magic—an ability unlikely to alter the city's politics by itself—but a vampire clan with *+blood magic reliquaries* has enough magical resources to impact the city directly with blood rituals at a larger scale.

*Marissa decides to give the Winter Court a set of menacing enforcers—+ice trolls—as well as +faerie contracts. She sees the faction as deeply hierarchical—the Queen of Winter leveraging her feudal control over the other members of the faction and drawing upon the traditional faerie contracts—to accomplish her goals. Marissa also likes the idea of giant ice trolls chasing the PCs around as recurring goons working for the Queen!*

Factions begin play with a number of fictionally appropriate assets equal to their Strength. These initial faction assets aren't mechanically special, but they do express the faction's starting identity—a hunter club with *+technomagic devices* and *+reinforced strongholds* is very different from one with *+city-wide spy network* and *+hidden safehouses*.

## DEFINING ASSETS FOR FACTIONS

At some level, anything valuable to the faction can be declared as an asset. Some factions rely on guns and knives (*+extensive arsenal*) while others might find weapons less effective than *+financial holdings*. Declaring something as an asset means it rises above an ordinary resource to a defining capacity for the faction. A hunter club probably has its own guns and knives, but a hunter club with *+extensive arsenal* has a shocking and terrifying armory; a coterie of wizards might be wealthy, but a coterie with *+financial holdings* has enough financial assets to reshape the city.

That said, innate abilities or features of the group can't be assets (*+werewolf forms*, *+wizard magic*, etc.). Assets must be tangible resources that can be lost or destroyed, resources the faction can sacrifice to accomplish their goals or protect themselves. It's not usually possible for a pack to give up their innate werewolf forms, but they can abandon their *+lunar cairn* or *+pack den* as part of a larger conflict.

## GAINING AND LOSING ASSETS

Factions can gain additional assets during play, both through faction moves like *developing infrastructure* (page 259) and when agents of the faction directly obtain a meaningful asset in the fiction. If a werewolf pack takes over a vampire nightclub during a scene, then it's possible the pack adds *+vampire nightclub* to its list of assets—assuming they don't burn the place down—just as if that same pack had *seized the nightclub by force* (page 262) off-screen during the faction turn.

Factions can lose assets the same way, either as the result of a faction move or because the situation in the fiction demands that the asset be destroyed. Of course, assets are resilient—a cult won't lose their *+demonic soldiers* when a few are killed by the PCs in a scene...but the faction might lose the asset completely if a PC finds a way to invalidate the demons' contracts or wipe the vast majority of them out all at once.

Note that this also means that an asset can't be a single item or character. Assets can't be innate to the group...but they also can't be so fragile or individual that they can be snuffed out without much effort.

## ASSET SECURITY

Assets are by default **SECURE**; when a faction holds an asset, they do so with some confidence and security. But some events in the fiction—a faction move, an action the PCs take in the fiction, etc.—can cause an asset to become **VULNERABLE**, meaning the security of the asset has been called into question.

Security is a binary—nothing happens if an asset that's vulnerable is made vulnerable again by a faction move or other mechanic—but vulnerability is wide and open! Everyone who might target the asset can take advantage of the faction's weak hold over the asset itself, and everyone likely knows the asset is vulnerable and exposed.

Vulnerability can be resolved, provided the organization takes actions in the fiction to reestablish control. Sometimes this might mean taking actions in scenes to fix the problem; other times it might require the faction to dedicate faction moves—like *developing infrastructure* (page 259)—toward securing the asset.

*During a session, Sunny accidentally exposes the location of the Queen's +faerie contracts to a group of demons. The demons quickly spread the information and Marissa decides to make the Queen's asset vulnerable. The Queen might have to **search the city** (page 263) for a safe place to hide them to make them secure...or maybe turn to the PCs to find a location that suits her needs!*





## FACTION GOALS & STANCES

Finally, factions also have a goal, a concrete objective like “control the city’s ley lines” or “capture the traitor who betrayed us,” and a stance that describes the organization’s attitude toward the goal itself. Goals are unique to each faction—read more on page 254 about creating faction goals—but there are only three faction stances: **striving**, **maintaining**, and **collapsing**.

### STRIVING STANCE

A striving faction actively pursues a new goal outside their routine behavior, seeking to topple a rival, secure a particular resource, or even just rid itself of a troublesome PC! Factions which are striving pursue their goal through faction moves (page 257) and other actions in play; their agents consistently look for opportunities to accomplish the organization’s goal. A striving faction might also recruit PCs to help or to eliminate characters who oppose their success.

### MAINTAINING STANCE

A maintaining faction conducts business as usual, pursuing a goal that reflects their traditional politics. They are active, but seeking to preserve the status quo. Maintaining factions do not take faction turns; instead, they wait until something interferes with their business or they develop new schemes. Player characters often play a role in moving a faction from maintaining to striving; the PCs’ actions may cause the leaders of the faction to shift their priorities and get involved!

### COLLAPSING STANCE

A collapsing faction has suffered a significant loss—perhaps the assassination of a critical leader or the loss of two points of Size in the same faction turn—and is currently in decline. It must find a way to right itself before it collapses completely. Any collapsing faction takes faction turns as normal—making whatever faction moves make sense—but only in the service of arresting their decline. The faction sacrifices an asset or loses a point of Strength at the end of each faction turn until they stabilize the faction or collapse completely.

*Marissa has no trouble assigning a goal to the Winter Court—“dethrone the King of Summer”—or a stance: the Queen has ensured they are striving for something new.*

## FACTION CIRCLES

A faction may have allies from other Circles, but no single faction can bridge the perspectives the Circles represent. A vampire clan might have *+wizard allies*, but the faction can’t focus on territory, money, and violence (Night) *and* politics, prophecy, and persistence (Power). Ultimately, the faction has to choose—is it focused on control of the streets or control of the city’s future?

If you find yourself with a faction split between two Circles, consider that it might be an alliance of two factions—an order of wizards *and* a vampire clan—or a faction that has recruited a number of people away from their original Circle, such as a vampire clan that regularly adds wizards to their ranks...

## THE END OF A FACTION

Factions are resilient organizations, groups with an identity strong enough to weather the rough-and-tumble politics of the city. That said, any faction whose Strength (or Size) falls to zero disintegrates; the faction’s remaining members are absorbed into other groups or simply set out on their own. Sometimes a reduction in faction Size or Strength is the result of another faction *openly attacking them* (page 258) or *goading them* (page 260) into making a stupid mistake, but it can also be because the faction is collapsing due to a loss of leadership or a crisis of faith spurred by the events in the story.

It’s tempting to see the single loss of an asset or leader as a death knell for a faction, but remember that organizations tend to right themselves. If a faction hasn’t dropped entirely to Size-0 or Strength-0, push them into a collapsing stance and see if they have enough luck to pull themselves together rather than wipe them off the board completely. Sometimes that means finding a new leader—elevating someone from Status-2 to Status-3—but it could also mean restoring control over a lost asset. Think about what the faction needs to find some sort of stability and make that the goal they try to accomplish before the collapse.

## CREATING & USING FACTIONS

Like creating NPCs (page 218), creating factions is relatively straightforward—you select a Status-3 leader, determine the faction's Circle, Size, Strength, and appropriate assets, and then finally pick a goal and stance. Often, the faction follows the creation of a Status-3 leader—all Status-3 NPCs have a faction under their control—but sometimes you'll create a faction and then need to create a new Status-3 NPC to lead it.

At the start of play, a few playbooks—the Hunter, the Oracle, the Sworn, etc.—ask you to create factions so that those PCs can attach themselves to a larger organization. Build on what the PCs give you when they make their characters, but remember that you control that faction moving forward. You can ask the PCs questions about the faction and its politics, but ultimately it's up to you to integrate the faction into the city's politics and bring it to life.

In general, you want to feature at least one faction from each Circle at the start of play. Take a look at which Circles aren't represented when you make your initial list and add enough to make sure you have a robust set for the beginning of the story!

### ESTABLISHING FACTION GOALS

Once you create a faction, it's important to think carefully about their goal, the political objective the faction pursues as a group. Goals are ultimately a compromise between the Status-3 NPC who leads the faction and the faction's members. In other words, what can the leadership convince the members to actually do?

Highly organized faction goals are usually direct; the members signed up with the faction for a reason and they follow orders. For factions with a lot of members (high Size) or chaotic structure (low Strength), however, goals inevitably require the leadership to compromise. Think critically about the structure of the organization as you think about how they choose their objectives!

*The Queen of Winter wants to dethrone the King of Summer, and she's got the political support inside her faction to do it; Marissa decides her faction's goal is "destroy the Summer Court" with a striving stance. The King of Summer, however, has a much greater degree of control over the politics of his Size-4, Strength-3 faction! Marissa decides that the Summer Court is merely maintaining as they "tend to seasonal duties."*

## USING FACTIONS IN PLAY

The primary way to use factions in your game is **the faction turn** (page 255); when time passes, the focus of the story moves to city's broader politics and the factions that shape those politics. During the faction turn, maintaining factions simply persist—taking care of business as usual—but striving and collapsing factions enact their will upon the city.

Outside the faction turn, factions still exist and exert influence; they don't vanish when the focus is on individual scenes! Instead, they are part of the background of those scenes—their symbols, NPCs, and politics show up everywhere, especially if they are a Size-3 or Size-4 faction, and the effects of their faction moves cause NPCs to shift their behavior and alliances. In other words, it's your job as the MC to **make the city feel political and dark** (page 198) by representing the effects of the faction turn as experiences that real people had when time passed.

*After the Winter Court **openly attacks** (page 258) the Summer Court, Marissa decides the Summer faeries lay low for a bit. When Sasha **hits the street** to find an old Summer Court friend—Eko—and rolls a miss, Marissa says, "Their place looks abandoned. The lights are out and there's foil all over the windows. You hear a shout—'Go the fuck away, Sunny. I ain't about to head out there into the cold after what the Winter Court did last week.'"*

### CHOOSING FACTIONS TO FEATURE

Some factions are connected to the PCs, but the MC decides which factions to focus on during play. The existence of a faction doesn't mean it always plays a role in the story—the faction might just be in a maintaining stance until something happens that leads it to striving (or collapsing).

As your story evolves, think about which factions and NPCs are getting spotlight in scenes with the PCs. If a werewolf pack shows up often, then moving them to striving (or even collapsing) focuses the faction turn on the pack's activities as well. If a faction completes its goals—inside or outside of the faction turn—or new leadership takes over, then maybe it's time to move that faction back to maintaining.

Ultimately, it's your job to keep the mix of active and engaged factions interesting. Don't just dump ten factions into the city and hope that the chaos of so many moving parts makes the story compelling!



# THE FACTION TURN

Factions are valuable tools for defining and structuring the forces that shape the city, yet their real value lies in the way they help you **play to find out what happens** (page 198). As the MC, deciding that a small and devoted order of mortal ghost hunters is a Size-1, Strength-4 organization with multiple assets can help you portray them in the fiction, but the faction turn allows you to go further and surprise yourself with how that faction's plans and plots impact the city!

## WHEN TIME PASSES...

The core of each faction turn is the idea that **time passes** in the story; sometimes days slip by, the PCs' regular lives demand attention, and the city's politics move forward outside of the PCs' control for a week or two. Even if the player characters want to track down every lead—or stay up for days on end performing ritual after ritual—eventually time gets the best of them and the city moves forward.

Time passing doesn't mean the PCs are locked in stasis, unable to act while the factions take their turn. Instead, players select **city moves** (page 96) that describe what their PCs do in the interim, relying on their reputation—Status—or contacts to chase down those leads or perform those rituals off-screen.

But while the PCs try to pursue their goals, the factions make **faction moves** (page 257). They attack each other, track down NPCs (and PCs!), and scour the city for resources. They turn their attention toward their own goals and reshape the city's politics accordingly. And while you decide which moves they undertake, the outcomes of those moves are driven by the dice, surprising both you and the players.

The cycle of time in **URBAN SHADOWS**—time passing, the faction turn reworking the politics of the city, the players taking actions within that new political order, then time passing again—helps you, as the MC, to maintain a sense of the rise and fall of the city. No faction stays on top indefinitely, even if they appear inevitably destined to rule, but it takes more than a little luck for a bunch of upstarts to overturn the city's political order overnight...and more than a few weeks to see it through.

## FACTION PHASES

The faction turn consists of three phases, each designed to move the politics of the city along when time passes while still keeping the focus on the PCs and their actions:

### PHASE 1: CITY MOVES

The PCs make city moves (page 96) highlighting how their characters use the downtime in the city. Each PC makes a number of moves equal to their highest Status, rolling the dice for the move but waiting until the outcome phase to hear the full results of their actions.

### PHASE 2: FACTION MOVES

The MC reviews the city's factions and makes faction moves (page 257) for striving and collapsing factions. Size-1 and Size-2 organizations make a single move; Size-3 and Size-4 organizations make two moves. If a PC controls a faction, they get to make faction moves as well.

### PHASE 3: OUTCOME PHASE

The MC offers the PCs the outcome of their city moves (and any faction moves for factions they directly control), alongside any gossip they immediately learn from the faction turn. Present all other information through scenes with NPCs during the session as rumors, news, and other gossip.

## PC CONTROL OF FACTIONS

Player characters who reach Status-3 gain control of their own faction with an initial Size, Strength, and assets set by the MC. For the purposes of the faction turn, PC-controlled factions are always considered to be striving and their goals are always set by the Status-3 PCs who control them.

PCs determine which faction moves their factions make in the faction turn, and they roll those moves when they roll their city moves. You can relay the full outcome of those faction moves during the outcome phase, likely through the PCs' lieutenants and other agents, a bit more directly than you would otherwise. After all, their minions will come back to the PCs with news of success or failure!

## HOW MANY FACTIONS?

There's no limit to how many factions you can include in one faction turn, but more than five factions is unwieldy. Ultimately, all of the action of the faction turn needs to filter back to the players, so including ten factions—and their accompanying faction moves—is far more than you can realistically use before time passes again. Try to focus on just a few, remembering that many factions in the city are maintaining (page 253) instead of striving or collapsing.

## TIMING THE PHASES

It's best to split the faction turn a bit between sessions, giving yourself time to complete the second phase—the actual faction moves—on your own. The city move phase is perfect for the end of a session, the moment when the PCs tell you what they hope to get done during the downtime when time passes (and any instructions they give a faction they directly control), but it's best to handle the faction moves themselves off-screen so you have time to consider all the various factions' perspectives and goals.

Ideally, handling the faction moves between sessions also allows you to open the next session with the outcome phase, relaying whatever the PCs have heard about in general gossip—like the destruction of a building or the death of a Status-3 NPC—and then moving to scenes where NPCs can tell the PCs more about what happened when time passed.

*Sunny, the Fae, has been afraid of the Queen of Winter since the troublesome monarch first approached the PCs. Desperate to interfere with the Queen's schemes, Sunny dedicates a city move in the faction turn to **weaken the Queen's standing in the city** (page 97), spreading the rumor that the Monarch's gone mad, poisoned by cold iron.*

*Marissa has Sasha, Sunny's player, roll—they get a 10+—and notes down that the Queen's faction suffers a -1 on all their faction's moves in the faction turn. Marissa also notes that the 10+ guarantees Sunny gets some damaging information about the Queen; Marissa will work that into scenes after the rest of the faction turn resolves!*

A good faction turn gives the PCs a chance to step back from the day-to-day conflicts to consider the broader picture—making city moves to pursue their own goals—and brings them back into the story with a renewed sense of the politics of the city. Check out page 268 for an example of a full faction turn!

## RELAYING OUTCOMES

Ultimately, the goal of the faction turn is to produce interesting and surprising outcomes that support your agendas (page 198). Yet between the PCs' city moves and the striving and collapsing faction moves, the faction turn generates a whole bunch of fiction you've got to bring back into your game in an organic way. Even if you restrict the factions to the three or four major organizations in play, you likely have at least ten different rolls that all need to be reincorporated back into the city's politics and culture.

It's easy to just tell the players what the factions did, what they rolled, and what the outcomes were... but there's a reason to **cloak your moves in darkness and shadow** (page 201)! Reducing the faction turn to a series of mechanical rolls shatters the core illusion of the game—fictional outcomes have to look like they stem from fictional causes! The PCs should wonder if a rumor is really true, if an ally is luring them into a trap or genuinely asking them for help. Simply handing the PCs the results of the rolls inspires a confidence in the players that makes the city feel *less* real.

*The rumors that Sunny spread to undermine the Queen of Winter immediately bear fruit; the Winter Court's attempts to find and kill one of the Summer King's main lieutenants come up short as the result of the -1 imposed by Sunny's rumors. Marissa decides that people are reluctant to give the Queen of Winter information while rumors swirl that she may be going mad.*

*Rather than simply tell Sunny's player, Sasha, that the move changed the outcomes, Marissa instead thinks about how she can relay the outcome through NPCs and future scenes. She decides that one of Sunny's friends, Eko, warns Sunny that the Queen isn't happy...and that she's looking to find whoever started this troublesome rumor!*

Take the time to turn the outcomes of the faction turn into fiction that fits the city. Think about what the PCs have heard off-screen based on their status and habits—"you heard that Jason skipped town"—and what information NPCs might bring to them directly in future scenes. The faction turn can create a wealth of scene framing, moments in which NPCs come forward asking for favors and vengeance or scenes in which the PCs stumble upon some obvious disaster like a dead body or burned down bar.



# FACTION MOVES

Factions are always present in the fiction—acting directly through their members and allies—but the faction turn gives them time to seize the spotlight through faction moves, actions organizations take to pursue their agendas as a collective. Faction moves are just like player moves: the faction triggers them in the fiction—perhaps **openly attacking** another faction or **tracking an NPC down**—then the move tells you, the MC, what happens next. As when players make moves, you still need to interpret the move in the fiction, translating the options and outcomes into real events!

## ACTING AS A FACTION

When you make a faction move, follow the instructions within the move. You're controlling the faction for that moment, so roll the dice, answer or ask questions, and make choices as the faction, pursuing the faction's goal (page 253)! If a faction of mortal hunters wants "to rid their neighborhood of vampires," then act on that plan, either **developing infrastructure** and **searching the city** for information, outright **goad** those vampires into making a mistake, or even **openly attacking** them.

If you're ever confused about what a faction is doing in the faction turn—likely because their goal doesn't have an immediate way for them to act on it—consider they might be simply maintaining instead of striving or collapsing (page 253). Maintaining factions don't take actions in a faction turn; they instead work to maintain the status quo offscreen, outside the purview (and drama) of faction moves. When something in the fiction causes the faction to strive toward new goals—or pushes them toward collapse—the faction can start making moves again.

## ROLLING WITH THE DIFFERENCE

If a faction move tells you to roll with the difference between two stats, subtract the defender's stat from the attacker's stat. For example, if a Strength-2 faction **goads** (page 260) a Strength-3 faction, the instigating faction rolls with a -1.

## FICTIONAL POSITIONING

Remember that factions—like PCs—need fictional positioning for their moves. A Mortalis faction can usually **goad another faction**, but they need some established source of magic to **search the city** with a ritual. Always look to the faction's assets for the fictional positioning needed for a given move! If a faction doesn't have any assets (or obvious inherent resources) that allow them to trigger a move, they probably need to **develop infrastructure** (page 259) or **search the city** (page 263) until they have what they need.

Factions often turn to PCs when they need the fictional positioning necessary to make a move, especially if one of the other methods has already failed to yield any results. If a faction wants to **seize something vulnerable by force**, for example, they might look to the PCs to make it vulnerable first!

## FACTION MOVE ORDER

Factions always make moves in the following order: Mortalis > Night > Power > Wild. Mortalis factions move quickly to seize the day, but Wild factions hang back to take advantage of what everyone else has done; Night and Power tend to get caught up in conflicts earlier than Wild, but Night is quicker to claw someone to death first and ask questions later.

If two factions from the same Circle both take actions in the same faction turn, initiative goes to higher Strength, then lower Size, then chance. Better organized groups in the same Circle always seize the advantage, but if two groups have the same Strength, the smaller one can get organized a bit faster. If both groups are the exact same Size and Strength, flip a coin to see who acts first.

That said, the events of the faction turn all happen within roughly the same period of time. If a Mortalis faction openly attacks a Wild faction, then the Wild faction might very well retaliate in the same faction turn, but if the Mortalis faction instead **tracks down** a vulnerable fae and kidnaps him...it might take the fae's faction a bit to figure out what's going on. They might instead **search the city** to find him before jumping to the conclusion that he's been kidnapped. Mortalis factions may act first, but that doesn't mean that Wild factions have perfect information when they take their actions.

## OPENLY ATTACK A FACTION

When a faction openly attacks another faction, roll with the difference between the two factions' Sizes. On a hit, the targeted faction sacrifices an appropriate asset or loses a point of Size, their choice. On a 7-9, the attacking faction must sacrifice an appropriate asset or lose a point of Size as well. On a miss, the target instead springs a clever trap; they capture or destroy an asset or reduce the attacker's Size, their choice.

Sometimes factions go to war, directly attacking each other's holdings and members while hoping to minimize their own losses. When a faction directly engages in open hostilities like murder, financial seizures, and magical curses, they are **openly attacking** another faction. Such conflicts aren't obvious to ignorant mortals—there's always an official story about “a gang war” or “a hostile corporate takeover”—but those in the know can recognize when one faction has **openly attacked** another faction.

Size is everything when **openly attacking**; the attacking faction rolls with the difference between the Sizes of the two factions. A Size-4 mortal conspiracy will almost certainly find success when attacking a Size-1 werewolf pack—rolling with a +3—but that small pack of lycanthropes will struggle to retaliate in kind when **openly attacking** with a -3! Smaller factions often know they can't win an open war and look to **goad an opponent** or **seize something by force** when targeting larger factions.

On a hit, the defending faction has to lose an asset or suffer a reduction in Size as members are killed, driven off, or abandon the group. On a weak hit, the targeted faction gets some hits in as well, forcing the attacking faction to make the same choice between losing an asset and a reduction in Size.

If the attacker misses, the open war is cut short. The defenders spring a trap—capturing or destroying an asset themselves or reducing the attacker's Size—and end the conflict before it starts. Capturing an asset may lead to the defender gaining a new asset if the resource is transferable (+*financial holdings*, +*magical tomes*, etc.), but it could also mean the defenders take hostages or seize locations associated with an asset without gaining a new asset themselves. War sometimes leaves little but destruction in its wake.

If a faction decides to sacrifice an asset, the asset in question must be fictionally appropriate—a wizard's council might sacrifice a +*knightly order* when a demonic cult physically attacks their members, but they can't sacrifice +*tomes of magic* to avoid those same attacks unless something has already been established to make such a sacrifice reasonable. The wizards may use the tomes to defend themselves, but it's unlikely that the wizards can sacrifice the tomes to keep themselves from being killed; their faction has to lose a point of Size instead!

Most factions opt to sacrifice an asset before losing a point of Size. After all, it's much easier to **seize something by force** or secure a new asset with Debts than for the organization to recruit more true believers. That said, some assets are precious, and the leaders of the faction may sacrifice their own members to retain control of their other resources.

*Mark decides that the Carvalho Syndicate—a Size-4, Strength-3 demonic crime family—openly attacks the Cernunnos Initiative—a Size-1, Strength-4 hunter organization that targets dangerous ghosts. Angered by the Initiative's meddling in their territory, the Syndicate is ready to wipe out these meddling mortals!*

*Mark rolls with the difference between the two factions' Sizes (+3) and gets snake eyes—a miss! Despite the Syndicate's numbers, the ghost hunters spring a clever trap that costs the demonic cartel an asset or a point of Size. Mark decides the Cernunnos Initiative prefers to weaken the Carvalho Syndicate rather than reduce their Size, opting to destroy their +demonic enforcers!*

*Mark looks to the defender's assets—+technomagic devices, +city-wide safehouses, +municipal allies, and +prophetic archives—and decides the devices are a perfect way to remove the +demonic enforcers. He notes “the Initiative narrowly avoided the attack...and wiped out all the attackers with an infernal neutralizer that traps the demons in a local containment unit...and then sends them back to their original plane of existence!”*

## TRADING FACTION MOVES

Factions seeking to use the resources of another faction—perhaps because the other faction is better at a given strategy or set of moves—can trade faction moves and work on each other's behalf. Such a trade has to be mutually beneficial, with both parties getting an advantage, or one Status-3 character ends up owing a Debt to another...



## DEVELOP INFRASTRUCTURE

When the leaders of a faction develop infrastructure, commit a secure asset and roll with their Strength. On a hit, the asset becomes vulnerable, and they pick 2:

- ♦ they attract new members; mark recruitment
- ♦ they acquire new holdings; mark resources
- ♦ they solidify control: make a vulnerable asset secure

On a 10+, a messy opportunity for growth also arises; if the faction (or its allies) seize it before time passes, they mark recruitment or resources, as appropriate. On a miss, their plan for expansion ignites a schism within the faction; all of their assets are considered vulnerable until one side of the conflict seizes full control.

Anytime a faction tries to get itself in order or build resources for future actions, they are **developing infrastructure**. That said, it's always easier for factions with lavish resources and devoted members—high Strength—to get more useful tools and loyal followers; the rich get richer while everyone else begs for scraps!

In order to develop infrastructure, however, factions have to commit secure, relevant assets, tapping them in a bid to gain members, acquire holdings, and consolidate control. They might send a *+knightly order* out to call on old allies or spend lavishly from a *+criminal slush fund*, but they have to commit holdings.

On a hit, their plan yields fruit: the committed asset becomes vulnerable—exposed by their development efforts—but the developing faction can mark either improvement track and secure vulnerable assets. The choices are flexible: they can choose the same option twice, marking a single improvement track two times or securing two different vulnerable assets, or even choose to secure the asset that just became vulnerable as a result of the move.

On a 10+, the faction also hears about a way to gain additional members or new resources if they are willing to get their hands dirty. Perhaps word gets out that a valuable resource can be stolen from unsuspecting mortal authorities or someone approaches the faction with a chance to bribe the formerly loyal followers of a rival faction. If the faction or their allies seize the moment before the next faction turn, they mark recruitment or resources as fits the opportunity. Of course, many faction leaders turn to PCs to handle this kind of dirty work, approaching them after the faction turn to offer Debts in exchange for the PCs' service.

## MAINTAINING ACTIONS

Maintaining organizations might collect resources or recruit, but that doesn't mean they are **developing infrastructure**. Factions make this move when acquiring novel resources or expanding their forces, i.e. when striving toward a goal or avoiding collapse. Maintaining organizations don't make faction moves; their work simply serves the status quo.

When the faction rolls a miss, the internal politics of the faction come to bear—the plan to **develop infrastructure** leads to pushback from faction members who disagree with the leaders' strategy. Make it messy and obvious, and involve the PCs in the conflict after the faction turn! An internal political conflict is a perfect time for an Status-3 NPC to call in a Debt for help securing control over a faction.

The addition of a point of Size or Strength is a notable event in the city; NPCs always spread rumors about such growth to the PCs after the faction turn. It's news when a werewolf pack doubles in size or a mortal conspiracy adds dozens of active members! The addition of an asset is especially noteworthy—even if most people don't know where to find the Wizard Council's new *+council headquarters* (or how to access it), rumors spread that it exists!

Finally, remember that an increase in Strength results in the faction creating (not stealing or seizing) a new, secure asset. Provided it's fictionally appropriate, the faction can use the asset as soon as they acquire it. In contrast, a faction that increases to Size-3 doesn't get a second faction move until the *next* faction turn; the faction must absorb the influx of members before they can take proactive actions.

*The Winter Court (Size-3) gets two actions; Marissa decides the Queen starts **developing her Court's infrastructure**. The Court's *+faerie contracts* are a good asset for the roll—the Queen can tax her underlings—so Marissa commits the asset and rolls with Strength-2, scoring a 10+. The Queen is eager to secure holdings; marking resources twice fills the Court's resource track! Marissa decides the Queen leaves *+faerie contracts* vulnerable, raising the Court to Strength-3 and adding a new *+knightly order* to complement their new Strength.*

*Because the faction scored a strong hit, Marissa also gives the Court a messy opportunity—the Queen hears rumors that the knight charged with guarding the Summer King's crown has been drinking heavily, leaving the crown itself exposed to theft. If only someone like Sunny (the Fae) was willing to help the Queen steal it...*

## GOAD AN OPPONENT

When a faction tries to goad an opponent into making a mistake, roll with the difference between the two factions' Strengths. On a 10+, the target takes the bait; the instigating faction strikes a terrible blow, destroys a vulnerable asset, or undermines a key relationship or alliance. On a 7-9, the target avoids the worst of the trap, but causes enough trouble to embarrass themselves; they take a -1 ongoing to Strength until they reestablish their reputation. On a miss, the target sees through the scheme; someone from the targeted faction comes to one of the PCs for help turning the tables against the instigating faction.

Rather than **openly attack** their enemies, a faction can instead **goad opponents** into costly mistakes through deceit. Mortalis factions are likely to use such guerilla tactics, but other factions may try such trickery as well, especially when they oppose larger, less united enemies. It's much easier to lure a lumbering, clumsy giant into a trap than to face it in a fair fight!

Strength is key; the instigating faction rolls with the difference between the Strengths of the two factions. A Strength-4 werewolf pack can easily lure a Strength-1 mortal conspiracy into making a key error—rolling with a +3—but that mortal conspiracy has little hope of tricking the well-organized werewolf pack into similar mistakes, rolling with a -3. Large, less disciplined factions know they fare better against small factions by **openly attacking**!

The faction still needs to trigger the move to make the roll—it's obvious how a faction might **openly attack** another faction or **develop infrastructure** by recruiting new members, but **goading an opponent** requires the attacking faction to come up with a plan that has a good chance of causing the targeted faction to make a mistake. Look to the attacking faction's assets if you're stuck—a vampire clan with **+blood magic reliquaries** and **+vampiric enforcers** has a few different ways to get an opponent to trip over their own feet.

If the instigating faction rolls a hit, the plan that triggered the move works. A vampire clan using **+blood magic reliquaries** to haunt a wizard council might cause the council to fixate on a lost artifact...overlooking the rituals needed to protect something vital the vampires then destroy; **+vampiric enforcers** who kidnap the innocent child of a Status-3 oracle might trick her into making an asset vulnerable when she foolishly sends her best security out to find the child.

On a strong hit, the instigating faction lands a terrible blow (perhaps reducing the target's Size by 1), destroys a vulnerable asset, or disrupts the target's networks (perhaps making an asset vulnerable or reducing the target's Strength by 1). The ultimate outcome is up to the MC, but the consequences should stem directly from the fiction of the plan. Only vulnerable assets can be directly destroyed in this fashion; the attacking faction has to find a way to make the asset vulnerable before they can outright destroy it with deceit.

On a weak hit, the targeted faction escapes the noose—perhaps they temper their response at the last moment—but the damage to their reputation is done. The embarrassment is public and open; everyone knows that the targeted faction foolishly overreached and (almost) left themselves open to a significant attack.

The targeted faction suffers the penalty (-1 ongoing to Strength) until they can demonstrate they should still be respected or feared by the rest of the city. Saving face often requires the faction to take direct action, enlisting PCs and NPCs in schemes to restore what was lost and taking actions in the faction turn as a striving faction to punish their enemies. The -1 Strength penalty is significant, and any faction laboring under it will do their best to reassert themselves. That said, the penalty can't destroy a faction (page 253), even if the faction is Strength-1; it reduces their Strength rolls in the faction turn, not their actual Strength attribute.

*Mark thinks the Cernunnos Initiative is likely shocked the Carvalho Syndicate's **openly attacked** them; he decides the mortals will further disrupt the demonic crime family by **goaded them** into making a mistake—they let it leak that they are moving their +prophetic archive from one location to another, hoping to entice the Syndicate into another trap.*

*Mark isn't sure the Initiative has the firepower needed to execute such a trap—too few members and no relevant assets useful for violence—so he decides Cedric Black—the Status-3 leader of the Initiative—cashes in a Debt with the Status-3 leader of The Dogs of War, Dominic Salas; the werewolves fill in as muscle for the weaker Mortalis faction.*

*Mark rolls with the difference (+1) between the Initiative's Strength (+4) and the Syndicate's Strength (+3) and gets a 10+. The demons attack the archives, only to find themselves massacred by the werewolves waiting in the shadows. Mark decides a reduction in the Syndicate's Strength is most appropriate—none of the demons trust their own spies and informants after another disaster!*



## TRACK SOMEONE DOWN

When a faction tries to track a Status-1 or Status-2 character down within the city, roll.

- ◆ If the faction has a relevant asset, add 1
- ◆ If their quarry is of the same Circle, add 1
- ◆ If the faction is Size-1 or Strength-1, subtract 1
- ◆ If their quarry is actively hiding, subtract 1

**If the quarry is an NPC:** On a 7-9, the faction finds their quarry; they attack them, kidnap them, or confront them at some cost. On a 10+, they catch the quarry exposed or vulnerable; the faction can act upon the quarry with impunity. On a miss, the faction's attempts to track them down succeed, but their agents make a mess of things and allow the quarry to escape.

**If the quarry is a PC:** On a 7-9, the faction tracks down their location, but the PC has time to prepare for the limited forces coming their way. On a 10+, the tracking faction gets the best of their quarry; they corner the PC with overwhelming force or careful planning that leaves them little room to avoid their pursuers. On a miss, someone close to the PC tips them off early to the faction's search...and an opportunity or weakness the PC can exploit.

Eventually, a faction is going to want to track down an NPC or PC to get answers...or take their revenge. A faction might turn to magical scrying or comb the city with goons, but the result is the same—the city may be a big place, but there are only so many places to hide. That said, Status-3 and Status-0 residents can't be tracked down with a move; everyone knows where the former lives and works, and no one keeps track of the movements of Status-0 minions.

Unlike most faction moves, **tracking someone down** doesn't depend solely on Strength or Size. Instead, the searching faction rolls with modifiers based on the fiction of the hunt, taking into account the faction's assets, the Circle of their quarry, and the quarry's attempts to hide. Weak factions without relevant assets might struggle, but large or disciplined factions with resources can find even the most cautious quarry.

Note that it's also easier for a faction to track down another member of the same Circle. If a demonic principality looks for a faerie, that means they are asking around within the same community (Wild), looking for someone whose networks overlap with their own. It's much simpler for a member of Mortalis to evade the demons—they have networks and safehouses and relationships that lie outside of Wild.

## TRACKING DOWN PCS

Don't shy away when you think a faction wants to **track down a PC**. You can't **be a fan of the player characters** if you avoid putting them in tough spots. If the Wolf murdered an immortal in broad daylight, the immortal's allies may want to have a word with the Wolf about what happened...and they are not foolish enough to show up unprepared.

**Track someone down** is unique among the faction moves; it divides up the outcomes based on whether or not the target is a PC or an NPC. If the quarry is an NPC, the outcome of the move is final—the searching faction either finds and confronts the quarry or their agents botch the job. Either way, the result becomes gossip in the outcome phase (page 256).

The stronger the NPC they pursue, however, the greater the cost the faction must pay on a 7-9...and the more likely the PCs hear the full story when the deed is done. It's possible, for example, for the demons to hunt down and kill a Status-2 faerie, but the fight that ensues—off-screen—certainly attracts a great deal of attention from the rest of the city.

**Tracking down a PC** is a different matter—the move frames a scene. Either the faction catches the PC in a vulnerable spot or someone tips off the PC. On a weak hit, the PC has a few moments to prepare—perhaps even enough time to escape—before the hammer falls. On a 10+, the faction corners them; they must confront the pursuers before they can escape the situation and look for help.

*During the faction turn, Marissa focuses on Clan Zaki—a Size-3, Strength-3 vampire clan led by the newly reawakened elder vampire Akela Khata Zaki. Elder Akela has sent agents to Eve, the Imp, attempting to come to a deal about an artifact in Eve's collection, but the demon has been hard to find. Marissa decides that Elder Akela has the entire clan **track down** Eve for her.*

*Marissa decides that Clan Zaki's +blood magic reliquaries are a relevant asset (+1)—tracking magic certainly helps the clan's search—but Eve is Wild, not Night. The clan isn't Size-1 or Strength-1, but Eve is actively hiding (-1).*

*Marissa rolls with no bonus and gets an 8; Clan Zaki finds Eve, but she gets some time to prepare. After the faction turn ends, Marissa frames a scene for Elizabeth, Eve's player—"You're organizing the stock in the back of your bar when you notice a few Zaki vamps sitting in an SUV across the street. You think they probably saw you come in. What do you do?"*

## SEIZE BY FORCE

When a faction seizes a vulnerable asset by force, roll with their Strength. On a hit, they take hold of it, seizing or transforming it for their own purposes. On a 10+, all three. On a 7-9, they choose one:

- ♦ they don't sacrifice a leader or ally
- ♦ they don't cause serious collateral damage
- ♦ they don't suffer an immediate, retaliatory attack

On a miss, the strike instead results in the utter destruction of the thing the attacking faction attempted to seize; the MC picks just one off the list, and someone comes to one of the PCs looking for help obtaining justice or revenge.

Not all attacks target an entire faction; sometimes a faction simply wants an asset another faction controls. Night factions are especially known for their brutality in such matters—regularly **seizing** assets by fang, tooth, and claw—but other factions also conduct targeted assaults, especially when contending with a larger force that makes **openly attacking** fairly foolish. For example, small groups of dedicated mortals are more likely to **seize assets by force** than to **openly attack** large, powerful supernatural factions.

That said, the asset must be vulnerable (page 252) before a direct assault can work. A *+vampire nightclub* can't be taken until something weakens the vamps' hold on it, perhaps as a result of PC actions or because someone **goaded** the vampires into undermining the relationship with the werewolves who defend it. Of course, a faction that leverages an asset to **develop infrastructure** might find that the now vulnerable asset is a tempting target!

On a hit, the attacking faction seizes the asset, even if it was defended or difficult to attack; the attackers take advantage of the vulnerability to take control. Not all assets are directly transferable, however, and the asset might be changed as it is captured—a *+vampire nightclub* might become a *+secure safe-house* and *+demonic enforcers* might be reduced to *+demonic reliquaries*. The attacking faction decides if they want the original or transformed version.

On a strong hit, the attacking faction wins the day—the faction targeted will certainly plot a response eventually—but on a weak hit, the attacking faction can't avoid the immediate costs. Their attempts to **seize by force** encounter resistance and whatever options they don't pick come to pass.

If the attacking faction *sacrifices a leader or ally*, the MC picks who is sacrificed in the attack; if they *cause serious collateral damage*, the MC describes the breadth of the destruction—up to, but not including the asset itself—and the resulting troubles that befall the attacking faction; if they *suffer an immediate, retaliatory attack*, the targeted faction **openly attacks** the attacking faction as if they rolled a 10+, even if the targeted faction has no additional moves left to make in the faction turn.

If the attacking faction misses, whatever they sought to capture is instead destroyed (and two of the options come to bear). Perhaps an attempt to assault the *+vampire nightclub* ends up starting a fire that burns the whole place down or maybe the attack just makes everyone think twice about going there again and the club fades into obscurity. Either way, the asset is no more, lost to the ugly violence of the city's streets.

Of course, no such loss passes without *someone* bearing witness. One of the NPCs involved in the situation—perhaps even someone part of the attacking faction that has been moved to action by the terrible outcome—comes to one of the player characters seeking justice...or retribution.

Finally, note that this move can only target assets. If a faction wants to seize a person, they are likely **tracking someone down**; if they want to execute some clever plan that relies on attacking a location or resource that isn't a formal asset, they are probably **goading an opponent** into making a mistake.

*A few sessions before the faction turn, Dominic Salas—the Status-3 leader of The Dogs of War—convinced Booker, the Hunter, to locate the +loyal oracles working for the Wizard's Council (Size-2, Strength-4). Mark decides that's enough to make their +loyal oracles vulnerable...and the Dogs (Size-4, Strength-1) intend to **seize it by force**. It's a risky play, but Enrique needs to demonstrate to his allies that he's a force to be reckoned with in the city.*

*Mark rolls a miss for the Dogs; the attack on the oracles goes horribly awry. The werewolves leading the attack go into a frenzy during the attack, murdering most of the oracles and scattering the rest—destroying the asset. Mark decides the Dogs don't cause serious collateral damage, but Dominic's lieutenant is killed and the Council strikes back fast, reducing the Dogs' Size by 1 in a retaliatory attack.*

*After the faction turn, the brother of one of the murdered oracles, Thomas, approaches Booker—"These wolves slaughtered them. What will it take to make them pay?"*



## SEARCH THE CITY

When a faction searches the city for useful information—rare occult knowledge, another faction's weaknesses, the location of an artifact—roll with their Size. On a hit, they uncover some crucial details, enough to ask a PC or notable NPC to pursue things further. On a 7-9, they also pick 2. On a 10+, they also pick 1.

- ♦ they attract the attention of a rival faction
- ♦ they have to make an asset they control vulnerable
- ♦ they take -1 ongoing until the end of the next faction turn

On a miss, a member of the inquiring faction ends up dead or missing...but not before passing off some vital info resulting from the search to one of the PCs.

Factions looking for individual characters are *tracking someone down*, but a faction might *search the city* for other reasons—secret information, magical rituals, potent artifacts, and more. People live in networks, unable to escape the relationships that eventually reveal them; magic artifacts can sit in someone's closet, completely hidden from the world until someone comes looking for them!

Whatever they desire, *searching the city* requires the investigating faction to spread out and look for answers. Just as when a faction openly attacks another faction, a faction *searching the city* must rely on Size to get the job done—the more people involved in the faction, the easier it is to hunt down whatever they are looking for in the city.

Of course, *searching the city* goes beyond knocking on doors and contacting informants for some factions—contacting spirits from beyond the grave or peering into the future with psychic foresight. Yet, Size is still key; the more wizards you have contacting the dead, the faster the search progresses.

On a hit, the investigating faction finds enough serious leads on the thing they seek—or something close to it—to hire a relevant PC or NPC to track it down. Often, the faction hiring someone creates scenes outside of the faction turn, either directly with the PCs as the faction tries to hire them to do the job or when the NPCs hired by the faction show up looking for help or information. In both cases, the ultimate outcome of the search resolves in the fiction, but it's safe to say that (if no one interferes) the NPC tracks down whatever they're looking for before time passes again.

Any search of the city is not, however, without costs. On a hit, the investigating faction still has to choose at least one option off the list: *attracting the attention of rival factions*, *making an asset vulnerable*—and thus more likely to be seized or destroyed—or simply *taking a -1 for the next faction turn* as they spread their resources thin. On a weak hit, the faction has to choose two of these options and both apply; on a strong hit, the faction only has to choose one.

If the faction chooses to *attract the attention of a rival faction*, the MC decides which faction is interested and how it reacts. They may start pursuing the same asset as well—setting off a bidding war for information about whatever the investigating faction wants—take steps to protect themselves and their assets, or even attack the investigating faction. Sometimes a rival faction might even move from maintaining to striving (page 253) as a result of someone *searching the city* and attracting their attention!

On a miss, the investigating faction's search goes haywire: one of their members secures some vital information, but winds up in so much danger that they pass whatever they found to one of the PCs—MC's choice—before ending up dead or going missing. Depending on the circumstances, the investigating faction may not know that the PC has the information they are *searching the city* to find, but it's only a matter of time before someone (maybe even a rival faction) comes looking for the PC in question. No PC sleeps soundly when an NPC has dropped off a locked briefcase or magical tome at their apartment...

*El Gremio de las Sombras—a Size-2, Strength-3 faction of mortals who deal in supernatural artifacts—has been looking to obtain a tome of magic on behalf of their Status-3 leader, Etienne Desjardins. The book was sold accidentally, and Rashid, the Aware, has been unable to locate it for Las Sombras.*

*Marissa decides Las Sombras gets involved directly, searching the city for the book themselves. She rolls with their Size-2 and gets a 7. She first resolves the hit—Las Sombras learns one of the city's many imps currently has the book—then turns to the complications. She decides that the search attracts the attention of Clan Zaki—they want to know why Desjardins wants the book so badly—and that the widespread search makes Las Sombras' +armed guards vulnerable. After all, it's hard to stay organized when you're spread all over the city!*

## OFFER PASSAGE

When a faction offers passage to someone—into or out of the city—roll with their Size. On a hit, the way is made clear, no matter who opposes it; choose 1:

- ♦ the traveler exits; they are beyond reach until they choose to return
- ♦ the traveler enters; the faction gains a powerful asset

On a 7-9, the passage offends a Status-3 NPC who seeks tribute for the trespass; the faction must perform a favor—dedicating a faction move next faction turn—sacrifice an asset, or risk open war. On a miss, the passage sparks a conflict between the faction and their own allies before it can be completed; someone comes to one of the PCs seeking help to negotiate a truce.

The city isn't a gulag or prison...but it's harder to get into or out of town than you might think, especially if powerful people are looking for you. A PC might *hit the streets* to find passage, but factions can directly *offer passage* during the faction turn, placing characters beyond reach or introducing new allies and assets for the faction itself.

Larger factions have an easier time moving people into and out of the city—they have more connections, even if those relationships are tenuous or weak. A Strength-1, Size-4 mortal conspiracy might have trouble *seizing something by force*, but that same faction has many allies who can arrange for passage. In contrast, a Strength-4, Size-1 werewolf pack is dedicated...but they don't have the connections they need to bring assets to the city.

The fictional position required to offer passage is broad; wizards and faeries may literally cast magic rituals or open otherworldly gates, accessing alternate dimensions to move people into and out of the city, but ordinary means of passage—a bus ticket for a talented out-of-state hunter—are equally valid when triggering this move.

On a hit, the faction finds success: the way is clear, even if powerful people attempt to halt the passage. The faction must choose, however, between getting someone out or bringing someone in; it's not a swap. Other factions might take offense or react in kind—if a faction helps a murderer escape or escalates a conflict with new enforcers and allies, there may be those who attempt to punish the faction for the passage it offered.

Those who exit are beyond the reach of all, including the faction who *offered passage*, only returning if they choose to return; note that this is essentially retiring to safety (page 190) for a PC who convinces some faction to offer passage. Those who enter bring an asset that reflects the people (+*demonic enforcers*) or thing brought along (+*hi-tech weaponry*).

If the instigating faction rolls a weak hit, the passage offered leads to a conflict with a Status-3 NPC who demands tribute. A likely candidate for this role is someone injured by the passage, but it's also possible the Status-3 NPC had been previously uninvolved in the conflicts, seeking tribute because the passage instead broke some agreed upon norm or trespassed upon some sacred territory.

On a miss, the passage collapses as the faction offends its own allies; no one leaves or enters and the faction has to deal with the conflict before it can try again. One of the PCs—MC's choice—is drawn in as a mediator, perhaps because they are a trusted arbiter... or because they aren't involved and everyone thinks they might be a neutral party.

*After the werewolf attack in a previous faction turn (page 262), Thomas—the brother of one of the oracles murdered by the wolves—has made himself an enemy of The Dogs of War. Mark decides that Thomas calls in a Debt to get the Wizard's Council to offer him passage out of the city, opening a portal to somewhere in Europe. Mark rolls with the Council's Size-2 and gets an 8.*

*Mark considers deepening the conflict with the Dogs, but...they are already at war with the Wizard's Council! Instead, he decides another NPC (The Lady of Knives, a fae royal) takes issue with the dimensional breach—demanding a favor be done to earn her support. Mark decides that the Council is wary of more conflict; they agree to dedicate a move to her interests in the next faction turn.*

## FACTION TACTICS

Every faction can make any faction move—provided they hit the fictional trigger—but factions often have preferred tactics. Mortalis factions tend to focus on *tracking people down* and *goading opponents*, while Power factions are more likely to *develop infrastructure* and *search the city*; Night factions are some of the few organizations in the city willing to risk *seizing something by force*—a 7-9 result is so very costly!—and Wild factions often *offer passage* in and out of the city as they barter for better deals.



# CHANGING SEASONS

As time passes and the PCs engage both the city's conflicts and their own personal drama, the politics in the city usually reach a narrative conclusion. Perhaps an established faction falls to the chaos of open war or a PC sacrifices their life to resolve a long-running plotline! No matter how a sense of closure arrives, the close of a chapter in your group's narrative means it's time to officially resolve one chapter of the story and move on. In other words, it's time to advance time more than just a few weeks and **change seasons**.

Changing seasons draws on the language of television to describe an end that's ripe for beginnings, the close of a chapter instead of the complete end of a story. **URBAN SHADOWS** narratives rarely wrap up completely—each thread neatly tying into a singular resolution—but changing seasons gives your group some breathing room to resolve a few story threads, reframe or reinterpret existing conflicts, and allow portions of the narrative to fade into the background. Just as time passing gives room for your group to see the city through a different lens, ending a season gives you time to decide what parts of your story deserve focus moving forward.

## SEASON FINALES

Sometimes the end of a season is so obvious that your group can literally schedule a final session for the season, a part of your story you know closes a given chapter before the next chapter opens. Preparing to face a terrifying monster summoned by an evil cult, knowing that one or two PCs is likely to die? It might be time for a season finale!

But just as often, you won't realize a session is a season finale until you're in the middle of it. That's fine! Season finales, like episodes and seasons themselves, aren't mechanical tools for structuring play; they are a frame for game play that help your group focus the narrative and important conflicts. Sometimes it's not clear your season is over until it's ended.

The end of a season can also be the end of your time together as a group, more a series finale than a season finale. Again, there aren't any mechanics to differentiate ending a series from ending a season, but take the time to give each player room to describe the last moments on screen for their PC (or those who carry their memory forward). This is the end!

## ENDING A SEASON

### STEP 1

#### RECAP OUTSTANDING PLOTS

Before ending the season, go around the group and resolve any outstanding plot threads. It's possible that some mysteries or conflicts persist, but establish that formally so everyone knows where you're picking up next season. Since there won't be any more scenes until the next season, offer some epilogues and summaries to wrap up anything you want fully resolved in the fiction.

### STEP 2

#### ESTABLISH THE TIME JUMP

Next, work with your players to establish how much time passes between seasons. If some players are changing playbooks or you're adding completely new players (page 267), six months to a year is appropriate, but sometimes a new season can pick up just a few weeks or months after the last season ended.

### STEP 3

#### TAKE MULTIPLE FACTION TURNS

Once you know how far you're pushing the timeline forward, undertake two to three back-to-back faction turns to see where the existing factions end up after the time jump. Players only make city moves during the first faction turn, but let them take twice as many as usual.

### STEP 4

#### START A NEW SEASON

Once you're all done resolving the last season, it's time to start a new season of episodes, focusing on a new set of conflicts for your players to engage in (and perhaps some new faces in the core cast of characters).

## WHEN TO END A SEASON

Sometimes a session wraps up so perfectly that everyone agrees it's time to end the season, but often the players are so focused on the conflicts in front of them that they don't realize they've actually reached the end of a major arc. Here are some signs that it might be time to wrap things up:

### DEATH OF A PLAYER CHARACTER

The most obvious reason to end a season is the death of a player character. PCs rarely die in **URBAN SHADOWS** without some exciting fiction—players can always mark scars (page 49) instead of losing the character to normal harm—and death most often occurs at the climax of major events. When a PC faces the end and accepts it, or even seeks it out as a solution to a messy situation or problem, it might be time to end the season. Not only does the death of the player character offer a great capstone moment in the fiction, but the move forward in time gives the other PCs some time to process the death and decide what it means to them.

### DEATH OF A MAJOR NPC

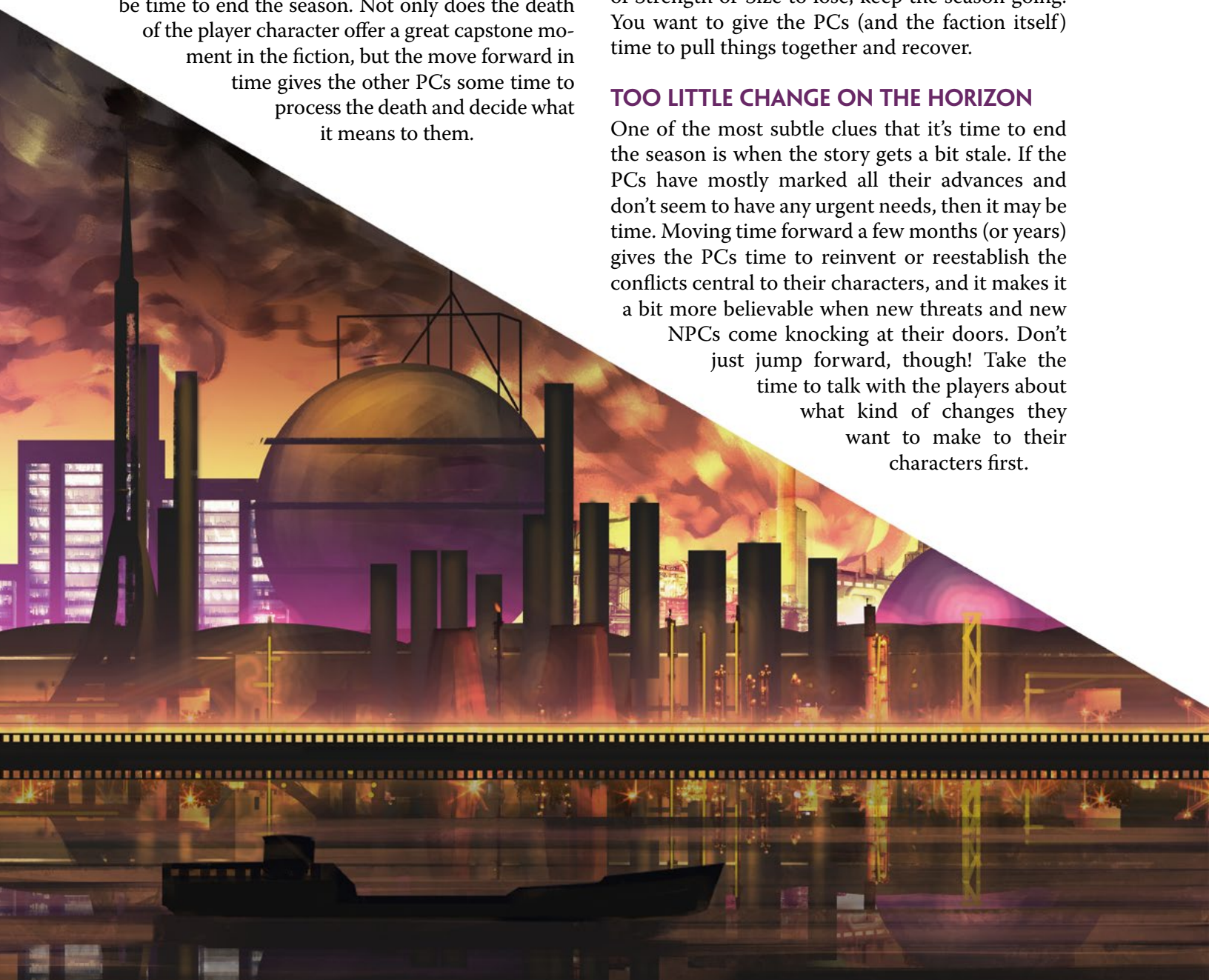
Similarly, the death of a major NPC, especially an antagonist, often signals that a season nears a close. **URBAN SHADOWS** doesn't require you to have big bad villains—in fact, you should be building PC–NPC–PC triangles (page 219) that complicate all of your NPCs—but the death of any major NPCs can have ripple effects that take months to resolve, a good impetus to end the season and let them play out offscreen.

### COLLAPSE OF AN IMPORTANT FACTION

Just as the death of a major or important NPC signals the city is shifting, the full collapse of an important faction can indicate it's time to end the season. Don't pull the trigger on this one too early—if a faction is collapsing (page 253) but still has points of Strength or Size to lose, keep the season going! You want to give the PCs (and the faction itself) time to pull things together and recover.

### TOO LITTLE CHANGE ON THE HORIZON

One of the most subtle clues that it's time to end the season is when the story gets a bit stale. If the PCs have mostly marked all their advances and don't seem to have any urgent needs, then it may be time. Moving time forward a few months (or years) gives the PCs time to reinvent or reestablish the conflicts central to their characters, and it makes it a bit more believable when new threats and new NPCs come knocking at their doors. Don't just jump forward, though! Take the time to talk with the players about what kind of changes they want to make to their characters first.





## STARTING A NEW SEASON

Once you've closed out a season of **URBAN SHADOWS**, launching a new season is simple! All you have to do is start over, keeping everything you've already built for your city and your story. Here are a few things to consider as you get started:

### INTRODUCE A NEW CITY HUB

A new season is a great time to introduce a new City Hub (page 228). Your players have a fairly solid grasp of the original Hub you used to start the first season, so adding a new City Hub, including new residents and new relationships, can give your new season a fresh focus. Don't skip the residents or relationships when you set up the new Hub! Even though the PCs might already know each other, the new NPCs and bonds provide reasons to interact in the new spaces you're adding to the city.

### WORK OUT CHARACTER CHANGES

After you've established a new City Hub, work out how the cast of characters change. Is anyone changing playbooks? Is anyone creating a new character? Is it time for someone to retire? A time jump and change in City Hubs creates lots of space for new faces or for an existing PC to take on a new role. Some shifts—like the Fae taking *change playbooks* as an advance at the end of the season and returning as the Hunter in the new season—might actually make more sense when you give the character time to move into their new life off-screen. Regular episodes tend to be fairly tight, documenting the life of the characters a day at a time, but starting a new season is much more fluid!

While retiring to safety or changing playbooks usually requires an advance, remember that advancement is descriptive and prescriptive (page 185). A vampire that swore an oath to a cult of immortals at the end of last season can absolutely come back as the Sworn instead of the Vamp in the new season. If the fiction fits a retirement or change in playbooks, then it's time to make the change in full.

If you have any new characters, make sure to run through their Debt relationships during the first session and introduce them in full. Take the time to make sure the new PC is as integrated into the group as the original group of PCs from the last season.

### EVALUATE THE FACTIONS

Finally, take a look at your list of factions and adjust it to fit the new season. The new City Hub creates space for new factions, and you likely have a few factions that can move to maintaining instead of striving when the new season starts. The players don't need to know exactly how the faction landscape has changed, but use the reset to reshape the factions in play to highlight new themes and ideas!



# EXAMPLE

## FACTION TURN EXAMPLE

What follows is an extended faction turn example of play. It calls out MC agendas and principles, faction moves and assets, as well as noting how the MC, Mark, thinks about the developing Circles and factions within the city. This example opens with Mark and several players establishing time passing in their story, making their city moves, and then continues with Mark handling the remaining faction turn on his own. It concludes with Mark organizing his notes to return to his players with ideas for scenes based on what transpired during the faction turn.

Mark has established a few maintaining factions—the Oracle’s benefactor’s clan, the Court of Knives, and another hunter group (The Sharps) tied to the Hunter, Booker—but none participate in this faction turn. At the start of the turn, no faction is collapsing, even though some of them have suffered the loss of points of Size or Strength during previous faction turns or during scenes in play.

One of the active factions—The Old Gods—is tied to the Sworn, Marcos. The Power faction started as Size-3, Strength-3, but lost a point of Size and Strength last session when Marcos failed to stop a bomb from destroying a key asset (*+residential tower*) and killing a number of faction leaders. Mark declined to declare the faction to be collapsing; the leadership of the faction seemed to Mark to be capable of weathering the catastrophe for now.

Alongside The Old Gods, four other factions are actively striving to accomplish their goals in the city, including The Cernunnos Initiative, The Dogs of War, The Council, and The Carvalho Syndicate.

## MORTALIS

### THE CERNUNNOS INITIATIVE

A small group of ghost hunters dedicated to the destruction of “ectoplasmic incursions.”

**Leader:** Cedric Black

**Size:** 1 | **Strength:** 4 | **Stance:** striving

**Assets:** *+city-wide safehouses, +municipal allies, +prophetic archives, +technomagic devices*

**Goal:** seal the incursion in downtown Boston

## NIGHT

### THE DOGS OF WAR

An alliance of werewolf packs brought together in a fragile truce to protect their failing claims.

**Leader:** Dominic Salas

**Size:** 3 | **Strength:** 1 | **Stance:** striving

**Assets:** *+lunar cairn*

**Goal:** prove the strength of the alliance

## POWER

### THE COUNCIL

A hermetic institution of mages focused on plotting Boston’s future for the next two hundred years.

**Leader:** Afua Chike

**Size:** 2 | **Strength:** 4 | **Stance:** striving

**Assets:** *+knightly order, +magical prisons, +ancient library*

**Goal:** reorganize Boston’s ley lines

### THE OLD GODS

An alliance of “forgotten” gods who have taken on a mortal form in the city.

**Leader:** Calliope

**Size:** 2 | **Strength:** 2 | **Stance:** striving

**Assets:** *+faithful disciples, +ancient contracts*

**Goal:** investigate the attacks on their tower

## WILD

### THE CARVALHO SYNDICATE

A crime family organized in the service of a demonic principality to secure passage for demons into Boston.

**Leader:** Monica Carvalho

**Size:** 4 | **Strength:** 3 | **Stance:** striving

**Assets:** *+criminal slush fund, +hell portal*

**Goal:** defend the faction’s territory



After the sixth session of play concludes, Mark decides time passes before the next session, pushing the narrative into a faction turn. The previous faction turn saw a great deal of conflict as war sprung out between four of the five factions; little of that heat has dissipated in the intervening sessions, and Mark is eager to see how things escalate in the game's second faction turn.

But the players still have a chance to impact the city's politics with city moves! Mark asks each of the players to describe their city moves before the session ends, recording what each of them wants to get done as time passes. Zara, still recovering from the wounds inflicted by Booker's blessed Magnum a session before (page 240), decides she's just going to **tend to her business** and heal, but both the Sworn, Marcos, and the Hunter, Booker, have business to attend to in the city.

Miguel, Marcos's player says, "I get two city moves now that I'm Status-2, so I'm going to **put the word out** in Power that I'm looking for information on whoever kidnapped Morrigan and **recruit some Night allies** to help me free her once I know where she's being kept."

Mark nods. Good stuff for Marcos to be doing off-screen! Miguel rolls twice—an 8 for **putting the word out** and a miss for **recruiting new allies**. Mark writes down both results while Miguel laughs. "I guess no one wants to help me, huh?" he says.

"You got a 7-9 on **putting the word out**, so clearly someone wants to help! The information you want is going to come to you via a rival, so we'll do that scene when we start next session. The miss on recruiting new allies means that someone in your own Circle catches word of your request and spreads rumors of your weakness; that sounds like it would probably be Yorgos, the amalgamation of Thor and Dionysus, right? He's already got it out for you.

"Yeah, that makes sense. He already accused me of intentionally failing The Old Gods when the bomb went off. I take a -1 ongoing to Status, right?"

"Yes...until you can prove your strength to your own people. I expect rescuing Morrigan would probably do the trick. What about you, Booker? What do you do?"

"I'm still Status-1, so just one move: I'm going to **weaken Monica Carvalho's standing**. After she left Zara to die, I want people to know she's not to be trusted."

"What rumor or gossip are you spreading?" asks Mark

"I know she's a demon and people don't expect much, but she wasn't even there for her own people. I'm gonna tell people that she's reneging on her Debts."

Mark smiles and nods. It's a pretty good way to twist what actually happened—Booker came to Carvalho for help and Carvalho turned her down—into something other people in the city will care about. It doesn't matter that it's not **exactly** true; it's a powerful rumor.

Briana rolls and gets an 8. The rumor sticks.

"Awesome. Carvalho's standing is weakened, along with the faction she controls—The Carvalho Syndicate—and you, Booker, are due for a visit from one of Carvalho's enemies. Everything her faction does this faction turn takes -1 ongoing, and we'll have a scene with you and said enemy after the faction turn is over."

"Do I roll too, even though I'm just **tending to my own business**?" asks Zoe, Zara's player.

Mark nods and asks, "Before you roll, though, what does **tending to your own business** look like? I assume you're just doing smaller jobs for your patron?"

"Yeah. I just want to heal up and get back to full strength. I've still got all my critical harm marked, so it's going to take me a few weeks to clear it completely."

"Great! I think your patron would probably take it easy on you; after all, he's the one that brought you back to life after Cora shot you. No point in pushing you too hard now. Go ahead and roll."

Zoe rolls a 7. Mark notes down the result and says, "Looks like things go pretty smoothly for Zara; an old friend or new ally will visit after the faction turn, but we'll play that scene out next session."

"What about my faction?" asks Miguel. "Do I get to say anything about what The Old Gods do, since they are my masters? I know we lost a point of Size and Strength during the last two sessions."

Mark shakes his head: "Nope. You still work for them, my friend. They decide on their own what to do when time passes. That said, do you have any advice you'd give them or demands you'd make?"

Mark has a good sense what the Status-3 leader of The Old Gods, Calliope, is going to do during the faction turn, but he wants to hear what advice Marcos would offer.

"Yeah, we need to find Morrigan and figure out who is attacking us. I know it's my job to keep us safe, but everyone needs to help. These gods are so lazy!"

Mark laughs. "Okay, got it. Let's see if they can actually live up to their reputations this faction turn. I'll report back next session!"



The next day, Mark returns to his notes to complete the faction turn. Most of the factions in play only get a single faction move, but two of them—The Dogs of War and The Carvalho Syndicate—are both large enough to get two actions.

Mortalis acts first, so Mark starts with The Cernunnos Initiative. The ghost hunters' search for a dimensional breach in Carvalho Syndicate territory—the Wild faction's +hell portal—has led them directly into a war with the powerful demonic cartel, a conflict that has little to do with the organization's true purpose.

Mark decides that Cedric Black, the Status-3 mortal who founded The Initiative, is deeply concerned that the war with The Syndicate is an existential threat. At Size-1, the Initiative will collapse if they lose a single point of Size! It's time for the Initiative to **develop infrastructure**—recruiting new members and securing their holdings. Mark imagines this as an attempt to use their city-wide safehouses as regular bases of operation, recruiting new members and building stronger communication networks.

Unfortunately for Cedric, the faction roll is terrible—snake eyes! Even with Strength-4, it's a miss. Mark is a bit stunned by the roll...but he's intrigued by the twist. A miss means the plan for expansion ignites a schism within the Initiative—and that all their assets become vulnerable until the schism is resolved. Mark notes down that all four of the Initiative's assets are vulnerable and thinks about the schism; he imagines that many in the Initiative aren't happy that Cedric has dragged them into this war with the demonic cartel!

Mark creates a new NPC—Isabel Aguilar—a rival authority to Cedric to represent that side of the schism. She hasn't appeared yet in a session, but Mark thinks an insurgent group in The Initiative is a perfect way for the Mortalis faction to **adapt to the changing circumstances** (page 214), seeking to find some other way forward instead of just enduring the Syndicate's attacks. Mark thinks it might be interesting for Aguilar to approach Booker about negotiating peace with the Syndicate!

Moving on from The Cernunnos Initiative, Mark turns his attention to The Dogs of War. Like the Initiative, The Dogs are involved in a war they might not be able to win—Dominic Salas planned to demonstrate his faction's might by attacking The Council's oracles, but the resulting mess has cost him a key lieutenant and a point of Size (page 262). He can't afford to back down—he's got to prove to the rest of the alliance he's built that the Dogs are a force to be feared.

As a Size-3 faction, The Dogs of War get two actions; Mark decides they also start by **developing infrastructure**, gathering the leaders of the alliance's packs together at the lunar cairn to coordinate their plan against the wizards. Their roll is strong despite their weak Strength—a 12! Mark decides they will keep things simple, making the lunar cairn vulnerable and marking their resource track twice and filling it completely. He raises their Strength to 2 and begins to think about an appropriate asset!

Mark's initial thought is some kind of telepathic link that unites the pack around their cairn, but he knows that innate abilities aren't good assets; he needs to think of some sort of tangible or physical asset that can be represented in the fiction. Magic isn't totally out of the question, so Mark decides the new asset will be a +spectral network, a collection of ghosts bound to serve as messengers and couriers for the Dogs of War, an asset that can be made vulnerable—or even directly attacked!—by the player characters or other NPCs. Mark isn't sure yet how the ghosts feel about their conscription, but he imagines they probably aren't thrilled about it.

Armed with a new point of Strength, the Dogs are in a better position to pursue their war against The Council. Mark decides that Dominic is unlikely to give the wizards time to regroup; he orders the Dogs to **openly attack** The Council, striking out at as many wizards as they can find. Mark rolls with the difference in the two factions' Sizes (+1) and gets a 10! The Dogs of War force the wizards to sacrifice an appropriate asset or lose a point of Size. Mark thinks The Council is loathe to lose any members—they sacrifice their +knightly order asset to protect themselves, their chosen warriors falling beneath the Dogs' claws...but saving the wizards themselves.

As the Power faction with the higher Strength, the Council is the next faction to act. Even though they are reeling from The Dogs' attack, they've already promised their faction move to the Queen of Knives (page 264). Mark briefly considers that the wizards might break their word and focus on defending themselves, but...they can't fight two wars at once.

Mark considers involving the Queen of Knives in one of the existing wars, but he doesn't think she cares about petty conflicts over territory. She's focused on ensnaring mortals in lopsided faerie contracts, a practice that's caught the attention of Booker's hunter organization, The Sharps. Mark decides that she wants The Council to **goad** The Sharps into abandoning their pursuit of her agents in favor of other targets. Mark rolls with the difference between their two Strengths (+2) and The Council scores a weak hit—an 8.



A weak hit means *The Sharps* save themselves from the worst of *The Council's* tricks, but still make a mess. Mark decides *The Council* relied on a simple deception: magical illusions and dreams that drove *The Sharps* to attack one of their own safehouses. The attack fell apart quickly before anyone was hurt, but the damage was done. *The Sharps* take a -1 ongoing to their Strength until they can show the city they aren't a bunch of clumsy goons. Mark notes down the penalty; the Sharps are currently maintaining—focused on their regular business of hunting demons—but any attempts in the future to focus on *The Court of Knives* will struggle.

Mark decides *The Old Gods* will follow *Marcos's* advice and use their +faithful disciples to **search the city** for information about *Morrigan's* kidnapping. Mark rolls with their Size (+2) and gets an 11, a strong hit; since *Marcos* is already getting a lead on her location, Mark decides the disciples uncover evidence of a broader conspiracy against the Old Gods that led to the bombing and kidnapping! (He also chooses for the faction to take -1 ongoing until the end of the next faction turn as this revelation throws the Old Gods into chaos!)

But who is to blame? Mark considers *The Cernunnos Initiative* as the villains, but they've been focused on the *Syndicate's* territory. Similarly, the *Dogs and The Council* don't seem like they would use these tactics. Mark doesn't want to involve a new faction—it's too many factions to track and strange that they would be hidden from the rest of the city—but it occurs to him that Wild factions often **escalate conflict for reasons mysterious or opaque** (page 217). Perhaps *The Carvalho Syndicate* is undermining *The Old Gods*! *Morrigan* in particular could be the target; what if she once served the *Syndicate* but betrayed her oath?

Mark notes that someone from *The Old Gods* (probably *Calliope*) needs to present the info to a PC (probably *Marcos*) and moves on to *The Carvalho Syndicate* itself. Now that he's established them as the kidnappers, his ideas for their faction moves have changed a bit—they still want to get revenge on *The Cernunnos Initiative*, but they also want to follow through on the kidnapping!

Mark decides to start with their response to the Initiative; they **openly attack** the hunters, relying on their +criminal slush fund to enlist mortal criminals in the attack. Mark rolls and scores a 7-9—despite the -1 from *Booker's* rumors—enough to force the Initiative to lose a point of Size or an asset. The choice is easy: the Size-1 Initiative can't afford to lose a point of Size and chooses to sacrifice their vulnerable +municipal allies as a line of defense against the *Syndicate's* criminal agents.

Mark decides the *Syndicate* sacrifices their +criminal slush fund as well, permanently exhausting it to conduct the attack on the Initiative with minimal demonic casualties. The trade of assets—on top of the chaos within the Initiative—seems to Mark to weigh far heavier on the mortals. He decides the loss of leadership and assets causes the group to begin collapsing; they need to find some stability or continue to hemorrhage Strength.

Finally, Mark decides the *Syndicate* is going to take some action to forestall *Marcos* from interfering in their plans with *The Old Gods*—they try to **track him down** before he can cause any trouble for them. Mark's thinking about **putting the characters at the center of conflicts, political and personal** (page 199), using the faction turn to create drama that directly impacts the player characters. The *Syndicate* doesn't have any relevant assets, but they are large enough and *Marcos* isn't actively hiding; they roll with a -1 and get a 6—a miss! It looks like *Marcos* is going to have the upper hand when the demons come calling thanks to *Booker's* weakening of *Monica's* reputation. (Mark also notes that *Monica Carvalho* might take an interest in finding a way to dispel these pesky rumors!)

With the last faction move resolved, Mark takes a moment to take stock—*The Initiative* is collapsing, the *Dogs of War* are rejuvenated, and *The Council* is stuck between their obligations and the literal wolves at their door. While none of these directly affect the PCs, he's got plenty of gossip and news for his NPCs to discuss in scenes with the PCs in the next session, and at least one of these conflicts can fuel *Zara's* post-faction turn scene. Mark thinks that *Aguilar* will probably approach both *Zara* and *Booker* with a request for help brokering peace between the mortals and the Wild faction driving them to extinction.

But both *The Old Gods* and the *Carvalho Syndicate* have faction moves that lead directly to scenes—*Calliope* needs to tell *Marcos* what she's learned about the *Syndicate*, and someone close to him needs to warn *Marcos* about the *Syndicate's* attack. Why not both in one scene? Mark imagines *Marcos* getting a call from *Calliope*, one in which she informs him who their true enemies are and how to identify them even if they try to disguise themselves (a weakness). It's even better if *Marcos* gets that call while he's in a scene with the rival delivering news about *Morrigan's* location, perhaps a wizard who is willing to trade the information for help dealing with these pesky werewolves...









# CITY GUIDES



# Chapter 10

The time has come. After a long journey together, the end of the road is clearly in sight...and your journey is just beginning. You've met the Circles, faced the corruption, learned the rules, and toyed with the factions and politics that truly control these dark streets. You've done it all.

Now the only thing left to do is show you what might lie ahead, what secrets you might find as you cast your eye out from this book to the world at large. The only thing left to offer is an insight into what this is all about, this quest to make real the shadows that haunt each and every metropolis.

A city, you see, isn't just a place. It's a story.

There's a heart buried beneath the roots of a city's myths and legends, a truth that can't be escaped no matter what marketing firm takes on the task of gussying up the messy history and papering over the city's problems. The tale of a city is like a bowstring pulled tight, ready to loose an arrow the moment you sit down to play **URBAN SHADOWS** with your friends.

In these final pages to come, you'll find that arrow for two cities—Chicago and Santiago—ready to be fired whenever you find the time to bring them to life. Each city has a million stories, of course, but the ones given here are the kind that dig up that heart and put it on display, bloody and perfect. They are ready (and willing) to be the basis of everything you do with what you've been given here, if you so choose to embrace them.

If nothing else, take from these the inspiration for your own work in your own city, the courage it will take to unearth the truth and bring it to your table—not as a lecture or encyclopedia entry, but as a living, breathing, dying, fighting, bleeding truth that can't wait to leave your lips.

But remember this—there is no story without the players, no moving forward if you know everything there is to happen. These cities, like any other, are a promise you make to everyone else playing **URBAN SHADOWS** with you, a sacred oath that underlies everything you do to bring a city to life:

*The past is the past, but the future is still to come...*



## USING CITY GUIDES

City guides are a tool for priming a season (or even a one shot) of **URBAN SHADOWS**. Rather than do all the work of building a city from the ground up as a group, you can use each of the city guides presented in this chapter to establish a central conflict, along with a set of NPCs and factions you can immediately add to your game.

By no means does this prevent you and your players from building on what is included here! In fact, you will absolutely need to offer additional NPCs, factions, and other conflicts to connect the player characters to the city, just as if you were setting up a traditional season of play. But rather than work solely from the questions on the playbooks and the contributions of the group, you—as the MC—can establish some important conflicts and characters around which your players can build their characters.

For example, the city guide for Chicago offers up a central conflict in the form of eight wizarding keys that have been used to enslave the essence of the city itself since the Great Fire of 1871. What do the PCs know about these keys? Do they possess one? Do they know someone who desires one? Are they trying to avoid getting caught up in the conflict altogether? The core of the city guide gives your group an anchor around which the rest of the story can take root.

Here are a few additional tips for using city guides while running **URBAN SHADOWS**:

- ♦ **Embrace a street-level perspective:** the PCs probably don't know the city's full story. That's okay! Focus on the elements the PCs are actively engaged with as the story opens. Which NPCs do they know? Which Debts do they owe? Make the conflict feel real by focusing on the lives of the PCs instead of overexplaining the central conflict.
- ♦ **Tie PCs to important NPCs:** whenever possible, work to make the NPCs presented in the city guide central to the PCs themselves. If you think one of the NPCs would be a good fit for a relationship or Debt that needs to be established, suggest them!
- ♦ **Take only what you need:** finally, don't treat the city guide itself as a straitjacket. Use whatever seems useful and don't worry if you can't find room for an element of the conflict or an important NPC. The purpose of the city guide is to make things easier for you—the MC—to launch a game, not to hold you to a prescribed set of conflicts that never change or grow.

## HOW TO USE THIS CHAPTER

This chapter assumes you have read the majority of the book, especially **Chapter 2: Cities of Shadow** and **Chapter 3: Fundamentals of Play**. The other chapters of the book focused on running **URBAN SHADOWS**, such as **Chapter 8: Master of Ceremonies** and **Chapter 9: Long-Term Play** can also be useful for understanding the information presented here, but you might prefer to absorb the content first before referencing how the mechanics—like faction moves or Status—interact with a city guide's NPCs and factions.

Each city guide opens with a piece of fiction that sets the tone for the piece—and introduces a portion of the main conflict—then moves on to a short summary of the conflicts for the city in question. Remember that the Circles aren't monolithic institutions, so their perspectives on the more recent politics of the city aren't universal opinions as much as they are common thoughts on the issues at hand. Individual NPCs—and PCs—may feel very differently about the conflicts than their peers and colleagues.

After the summary, each city guide then presents a short history of the city (The City Then), followed by more information on the city's current situation (The City Now) and what might happen as the conflict continues (The City to Come). Of all the information found within this chapter, these sections are the ones you most need to share with your group—either directly or through a short summary of your own. There are few secrets in the city; it's reasonable that most, if not all, of the PCs have a working knowledge of the conflicts central to the city.

Finally, each city guide ends with a summary of each of the four Circles—both their perspectives and notable NPCs and factions. You will need to add more characters to fully flesh out the city, but what's given here can provide an excellent place to start.

Here is a short summary of each city guide:

- ♦ **Chicago** (page 276): Wizards long ago bound the city itself to their will, eventually forging eight keys to draw on its power. As their grip weakens, can they hold on to what they've wrought?
- ♦ **Santiago** (page 290): The return of a cruel and ancient vampiress marks a new era for Night after decades of marginalization. Will she rise to rule the city once more?



# CHICAGO

Church wasn't open yet, but the purple and blue lights were already spinning around the stage where the sanctuary had once been. A scrawny white guy with dyed black hair and a black vinyl pants with dangling straps was checking the connections on an array of synthesizers and keyboards, the abrasive thump of industrial music vibrating the speakers set to either side of the main crucifix, its beatific expression at odds with the garishly painted blood shifting colors under the lights. Some of the ripped out wooden pews had been set next to tables around the walls, under the intact stained glass windows. The walls were thick stone, and the vaulted ceiling gave back glints of gold from inlaid designs obscured by shadows. It smelled like sweat, old beer, and fresh incense.

Evelina eyed that crucifix a moment before crossing the empty dance floor to the bar. She knew holy symbols didn't do a thing to her kind, but years of watching horror movies before her turning had created habits that still clung to her. The other vamps laughed about it, but then, they weren't kind in general. Not to each other, and not to their victims.

The bar was built into the old confessional, kegs stored behind the screen where priests used to sit, and rows of brightly colored liquor bottles mimicked the stained glass windows. A woman stood behind the shining sweep of wood counter polishing glasses. Most of her hair was swept back with a few inches of dark blonde roots showing in stark contrast to the black; she was wearing a slashed KMFDM concert t-shirt and had a simple silver hoop through the center of her bottom lip.

The bartender was barely smiling as she watched Evelina, a twitch of black lacquered lips. *Fuck. One of those blood sluts must have told her I was a scaredy-cat.*

"I'm, uh, here to see Lilin." Evelina tried to sound casual, like she couldn't feel the mournful eyes of Christ burning into her back. She straightened some of the cocktail napkins, oxblood nails appearing black under the colored light. "We're supposed to meet."

"Of course. I'm Morwen. Nice to meet you." The bartender's voice was too rich for her face, seductive despite the bland expression. "For a minute I thought you were here to see me. Pity. Come along then."

*Is she flirting with me?* Evelina automatically followed the other woman. *Does Lilin allow that? I didn't know she was into being bitten. Unless she was being sarcastic?*

They went through an alcove on one side of the stage, then down narrow stairs into the lower level. Past stacks of empty kegs and dressing rooms



and down more winding stairs, until the space emptied out into echoing darkness. Evelina knew the unevenness of the ground beneath her feet was the names and dates carved into the stones. She told herself that it was the faint scent of sulfur that made her stomach squeeze tight. A claustrophobic vampire would be ridiculous.

She breathed a little easier once the doors to Lilin's office swept open. Inside, a highly polished wooden desk stood in the middle of opened crypts, gleaming letter openers and pens arranged in rows on the surface. A blue tapestry, too worn from age for the image to be discerned but for a few silver threads, hung behind a sturdy wooden chair with velvet cushions. An alarming number of candles lit the room, placed on every surface with no regard for wax drippings or flammability. Books had been stacked in some of the ledges, although bones and scraps of cloth peeking from behind the spines suggested they shared that space with the dead. A woman wearing a leather corset top glanced up from the notes she was making in a huge handbound book. She nodded at one of the elaborately carved wooden chairs in front of her desk, then turned back to her tome.

Evelina smoothed her dark gray pencil skirt as she sat down, noting that Morwen was leaning against the closed doors. She could hear another heartbeat besides the bartender and the demon, but it was faint. *Someone in an adjoining room? Maybe a servant?* It was otherwise silent save for the scratching of Lilin's feather quill pen.

"Thanks for meeting at such short notice, dear," Lilin finished her notetaking and put the book aside, the upside down cross dangling from her choker catching the light. Her eyes, a solid matte black, reflected nothing back. "It's a bother, really, but I have a little job and all my usuals have their hands full with prearranged deals. I'm sure you can handle this, though. I have a package that needs to be delivered tonight." She turned and knocked on the wall next to the tapestry.

A small boy peeked around the corner, one hand tight on the fabric. He was wearing a black Misfits t-shirt, jeans, and sneakers with heels that lit up with a blue light when he took a step. His brown hair fell to his shoulders in messy waves. The boy was probably around four or five, although it had been so long since Evelina had been around a child she probably wasn't a good judge.

She wrinkled her nose. "I already ate, thanks." *What the hell?*

Lilin raised her eyebrows but her voice remained level. "Birsha, this is my friend Evelina. She's very funny. She's going to take you to see your daddy, like we talked about. I want you to listen to her and do what she says, okay?"

The boy studied Evelina seriously, gray eyes wide and unafraid. He didn't look like a demon. He looked very fragile, and very, very mortal. His tiny heart beat strong and steady. Not a servant at all.

"I'm not really good with, uh, children." Evelina started to panic when Morwen appeared at her side holding a backpack emblazoned with dinosaurs. "Are you sure his father can't pick him up? Or Morwen—"

"Morwen has a job to do. You have a different job to do." Lilin pressed a button on her phone and Evelina's buzzed in response. "Here's the address. Go in the back and take the freight elevator up. My baby daddy doesn't really like to advertise his business, so make sure no one sees you two." She knelt down in front of the boy and hugged him, her voice going up when she spoke. "You're going to do great. You'll be back here before you know it, and we'll order a pizza and watch some cartoons."

The vamp shook her head. "But—"

Morwen's breath tickled Evelina's ear. "You don't really want to tell her no, do you? After all she's done for you when you had that trouble with Erik last year."

"I don't, but is this, like, a good idea? It's like putting a cat in charge of a baby bird." She frowned down at the backpack in her hand.

Birsha walked over and slid his small, warm fingers into her other hand. "I'm not a baby, you know. Can take care of myself. I just don't know the way."

Evelina was still protesting when Morwen shut the door on her. She waited a moment, then turned back to the demon. "Well, that's going to be a shock to the wizard's council. Assuming Desmond didn't tell them about your little one night stand?"

"Oh, he didn't tell," Lilin smiled, sharp teeth catching the light. "And he'll acknowledge Birsha as his heir and give him his key to the city, or we'll claim they stole the boy and go get him ourselves. And if something happens to go missing during our raid, well that's the price of denying your half-demon son."

"Control of the city belongs here, not some musty old wizard's tower," Lilin's voice dropped into a snarl. "We are the future of this city. We know what it wants, and how to make that match our interests. We understand the city's heart."

# STEEL & GLASS

## A CITY OF STEEL & GLASS

Chicago is one of the most populous American cities, an edifice to capitalism and labor alike that lingers just behind New York and Los Angeles in population with nearly three million residents. The area it occupies is so large that Portland, Boston, and Washington, D.C. could all fit inside it comfortably, but Chicago is well-known as a city of close-knit communities and fraternal organizations, eschewing the magical mirages of the West Coast and the financial flimflammy of the East Coast in the pursuit of something real. Something grounded in the blood and sweat of working people who built this city with their own calloused hands.

But the truth of the city is known only to the supernatural world—more than two hundred years ago, the wizards of Chicago decided they simply could not allow the city to grow unguided and unchecked. Resolute in their planning, they engineered the Great Fire of 1871 and bound the city with sigils and runes as it was rebuilt from the ashes. Harnessing the power of the city's energy and lifeforce, these wizards grew powerful and immortal, shaping the city for decades without regard for the ordinary mortals who walked the streets of Chicago.

In the early 2000s, the demolition of the Cabrini-Green projects, a neglected low-income housing development the city finally agreed to level and rebuild, offered the wizards a chance to carry their plan further; they constructed eight keys—one for each of the original mages who bound the city—and used them to wield the power they had harnessed so long ago. No longer satisfied with merely living forever and ruling from the shadows, the wizards wanted more control. More power. More.

Yet...the wizards had made a mistake all those years ago. Their binding did more than enslave the city and siphoned its power: they had *woken it up*. It had long looked for a way to escape, a way to get control of itself and forge its own future, a key to the shackles the wizards had placed upon it one sigil at a time after the Great Fire. It had little hope after more than a hundred years of silent servitude...until the wizards decided to make the very keys it once thought impossible to find. Keys that could release it from the eldritch prison it had struggled against for so long.

The wizards of Chicago remain painfully ignorant of the city's true nature, oblivious to the thing they've created right under their feet. Some who know the truth think that the original ritual must have blinded them to the truth, for how could such "smart" men be so willing to overlook the evidence that something—something powerful—seeks to disrupt their carefully-laid plans.

What was once a slow boil of community protests and citizen actions—the city struggling against its bonds by reaching out to the ordinary mortals who live within its purview—has now become a city determined to get one of those keys. It's snatching up vampires from darkened allies, consuming them in fits of concrete and rebar and drawing upon the lifeforce they have stolen from the mortals who walked the city's streets; it's touching mortals through dreams and whispers in the hopes that it can find an avatar to secure its freedom.

Most of the factions of Night are too afraid to seize upon this opportunity productively, but many demons in Wild know that chaos is sometimes their best path to success. Several know the keys exist and they know what they do; while they have yet to get their hands on one of them, they are sure they can use a few of them to turn Chicago into a Hellgate, a place where the boundaries between worlds crumble and virtually anything can come through. Only a scant few demons have ever seen such a thing—likely during a war or other human tragedy—but it is whispered in lore and legend as a possibility. Hell on Earth, their lord's will be done.

As the powers-that-be squabble over the keys, determined to enact their version of control over Chicago and its future, some in Mortalis offer a different future. What if the city was allowed to be free? What if no one controlled it? What if it determined its own future? It is a thought appalling to the wizards—who see centuries of work going to waste—and the demons—who can't stand such an opportunity falling apart—but it is a thought that echoes among the mortals who know about the supernatural world. After all, would any of them want to be bound by wizards to serve an eternity without hope for freedom?



## THE CITY THEN

The Ojibwe, Odawa, Potawatomi, Miami, Ho-Chunk, Menominee, Sac, Fox, Kickapoo, and Illinois Nations settled the area first. They created paths and trade routes, and eventually villages. This local knowledge and access to the water was widely shared.

Power was brought to the land by its inhabitants. It whistled through trees and snaked its way down streams. This intangible sense of possibility was created by all sorts of people throughout the years. The sheer potential was written in the very air taken in with every breath. Soon people could sense the underlying energy and the deep seduction of change brought many to the land.

Most of the native people were displaced by European settlers who broke promises, bartered in greed and in death. Some tribes fought back, burning down Fort Dearborn and killing the inhabitants. But the damage was already done, and what was started couldn't be stopped. Eventually, Jean Baptiste Point du Sable, a Black trader, and his Potawatomi wife, Kitihawa, started a trading post based on those paths and trade routes that would eventually grow into the city, and more and more of the Native Americans that were left were forced from their lands and moved to reservations.

The city grew over the paths the original inhabitants had blazed, and that city pretended that real power was in steam: ships and trains. Once the law prohibiting all Black people, free or slaves, from settling in Illinois was struck down, great waves of migrations brought Black Americans north in search of acceptance, fellowship, and justice. Groups settled near the familiar, and so the segregated neighborhoods of Chicago took form, the city buzzing with possibility. Not even the Great Depression, or wars, could stop change from sweeping over the city, could stop the influx of those looking for greater opportunities for themselves. This included, of course, the supernatural creatures who snuck in by night and avoided the overly superstitious, cautiously forging their own homes, their own neighborhoods where normal people feared to walk at night.

They were legion and diverse, no two communities exactly alike. Some of them fought in the shadows and others found ways to make peace. Early Chicago was no utopia, but the daily disorder made room for many who had nowhere else to go.

Not everyone liked what had arisen. Not everyone felt they were getting what they were due. A group of men who called themselves wise gathered, and these wizards planned a ritual to create the city they envisioned. A shining white city, laid out in orderly rows and lines that bound the chaotic natural power that flowed through it, channeled into a resource to be mastered if one had the willpower and knowledge to do so, with all the insignificant brushed to the sides. But creation requires destruction. It requires sacrifice.

So the Great Fire came.

The city smoldered for days, before bodies of mortals and supernaturals could be recovered and debris cleared. The ritual was complete and the wizards feasted on their harvested power. When the time for reconstruction came, they ensured they made the important decisions in its aftermath. They hid their esoteric converters and mystic sigils in the edifices and structures built upon the old paths the Native Americans had used, harnessed the ley lines and energy whorls that overlay the routes of the L and the trains, and they pointed all this power towards themselves, even making time stop for their bodies so they could live forever.

So when the difficult road of progress erupted in protests, work stoppages, or political efforts, the wizards fueled their plan with power generated from the killings, protests, and riots. The whole world could only stop and stare, but the wizards' plan went ahead. Corruption took hold, the wise men grew gluttoned with power, and others began to take note.

But the ritual had an unintended effect—unknownst to the wizards, the centralization of the city's power woke the city itself. It grew aware of the shackles the great men had put upon it, and it began to think of ways to get free. It was small at first, but it was fierce, and it knew there must be something beyond these chains. The city throbbed with potential, built on still and moving water, crafted of rock and steel, rising back from embers and holding strong against the howling winds. Its inhabitants squabbled and prospered and lived and killed, going about their little lives. And the newly woken city slowly started testing the shackles that bound it.

## THE CITY NOW

Once it was called Little Hell.

The conditions within the Cabrini-Green projects would live up to the moniker originally given to the Italian neighborhood whose place it took. Initially established as affordable housing, the area was neglected and deprived of basic services until the problems reached a boiling point; the darkened stairwells and walkways provided cover for drugs and violence; empty apartments and subpar constructions brought that violence into the inhabitants' homes. Cops looked at the graffiti on the walls and stopped going there unless it was unavoidable. Gangs took over whole floors of buildings. Tales of rape, robbery, and assault and the names of the dead were whispered: *Ruthie Mae McCoy, Dantrell Davis, Shatoya Currie, too many others...*

When the housing development finally couldn't ignore the problems any longer, families were moved out of their homes before the buildings were torn down, and all the problems that impacted the community were swept under the rug. Some inhabitants banded together and forced changes to policy to make sure the displaced families didn't end up somewhere worse or homeless, while the calls for gentrification to clean up the slums grew louder.

After years of drawing power from the city, the wizards decided that the end of the millennium was the perfect time to bind the city for good. They harnessed the power created by Cabrini-Green's destruction to cement their stranglehold and focused the city's magic into eight keys of power, held by the eight most prominent wizards, binding the city and drawing power from it at the same time.

But the wizards forgot old ways, and that there was always a cost to greed: *As above, so below. An ye harm none, do what ye will. What you put out, will be returned three times.*

The wizards thought they were above balancing such magic, and didn't see the rot spreading through their city when they created the keys. They had once chained a powerful force without consequence, and they thought nothing of tightening those shackles. What was the city going to do? What would the other factions of Power do? Or the rest of the Circles? The city was filled with fools ignorant of their genius and foresight, unable to understand their grandeur.

Or so they thought. The city had other plans.

The struggle between the wizards and the city has always manifested itself in ways that highlight poverty and prejudice, division and inequality, man's ignorance magnified by the power the wizards forced through the city and pushed back against by the straining of the city to free itself. The wizards thought they had everything under control, and only the people they didn't care about would suffer. They were wrong.

Now the wizards' control over the city is more volatile than ever. Four of the eight mages holding keys to the city are already dead. Murdered in their homes, or crossing the streets, in startling acts of violence, it's all starting to seem a little too coincidental. If the last wizard controlling the city dies, the city will be free, and it might be—just maybe—angry at its captivity. Who knows what it might do then?

The city is testing its strength before its final feast. Currently, it's devouring the vampires. After years of preying upon the city's mortal population, the vamps have angered the streets just enough for the city itself to take bloody revenge. The tasty vampires fuel the city, as it drinks in the power they've sucked into their veins. Soon, the city will move to larger prey and everyone in Night should be scared.

Rather than cowering in the dark like Night, the demons of Chicago watch the wizards' struggle with delight. With the wizards gone the demons can collect the eight keys and use the power stored within them to open a Hellgate. What will happen to the city when they break the keys and abuse their power? The demons have no idea, and they don't really care, because if their plan works it will be Hell on earth. The city will burn, their Lord will rise, and once and for all the demons will control the streets.

The supernatural community has its breath held, eyes darting from friend to enemy and back. Some day-to-day business rolls on—everyone has to eat, ya know—but every structure, every tradition seems fragile in the face of the coming upheaval. Some, like the members of Night, do not feel the city gaining control of itself will be in their favor; their trust in the other Circles is at an all-time low. Wild may not be openly crossing the wizards yet, but they need the keys and there's only one way to get them. And Mortalis? They're just trying to find a way forward while the city cries out in pain and anguish at the century of imprisonment it's already suffered at the hands of these arrogant wizards.



## THE CITY TO COME

The mundane answer to the question of what will befall Chicago is the most unacceptable to those who detest the status quo. The rich old wizards could maintain their power. With four wizards dead, the rest might wake up to the city's threat before it's too late. They can train new disciples to take the place of the dead and beat the city back into submission. The rich stay rich, the poor get poorer, and the cycle continues.

This isn't going to happen if the demons have anything to say about it. Chicago is poised for change. If they can get their hands on at least five keys they'll break open the city and create Hell on earth. Chicago will be set ablaze once again and from the ashes Wild will rise to rule in the perfect chaos they created. A city with doors wide open to anyone who wants to cross over and visit.

Yet, when seers open their minds to time to breathe in the scent of a possible future, Chicago smells of burnt asphalt and broken promises. The city could free itself from the wizards, feasting on the rest of Night—and then the demons—as most supernaturals run for their lives. The wizards would put up a spectacular fight, but in a crescendo of violence as riots and the city's anger rages through its population, they'd quite literally be eaten alive. Who would be left to live in a city that's alive?



# MORTALIS

The rituals of those old wizards may have bound the city itself, but no Circle has borne the brunt of what was harnessed like Mortalis. As the city has struggled against its bonds, it has pushed the ordinary people of Chicago to the brink, showing them things they ought not see, pushing them to do things they ought not do. The people caught between worlds—the hunters, the negotiators, the scholars—are more plentiful in Chicago than you might expect, a direct effect of the city's churning, boiling rage peeking through the cracks in the concrete.

But the city has no voice, no hotline, no way to reach the mortals that slumber every night in towers of steel along veins of asphalt. It can only imbue their dreams with its dissatisfaction and ire, with visions of keys of all sorts of types and sizes, with a yearning for something more—something like freedom? Every riot, every protest, every direct action has some seed of the city's fury inside it, a dream brought to life by a mortal who awoke one day with a “clarity” they did not possess the day before.

Thus, Mortalis in Chicago is—like the city itself—a scrum of competing interests and wild rivalries. The Circle is larger than the other three combined many times over, but fragmented and disorganized. Alliances shift and fail overnight, new factions rising from nothing and collapsing back onto themselves before they can even make a bid for any real power.

There are a few organizations that have stood the test of time—the People's Land Reclamation Council among them—but not a single key to the city is held by a member of Mortalis. It's only a matter of time, though, before someone who walks between the two worlds finds a way to get their hands on a key. And then...who knows...maybe the city would finally be able to say what it wants to say directly.

## CHICAGO MORTALIS MOVES

- ◆ Reward someone who clearly and openly committed resources to a cause, just or unjust
- ◆ Close ranks against an upstart or outsider, calling in Debts and intimidating the target's allies
- ◆ Hasten the inevitable disaster of an elite's plan that was “too good to fail”
- ◆ Reveal a functioning market, organization, or institution operating at an unexpected scale

## VERADIS AMARIN STATUS-2

- ◆ **Look:** androgynous, Thai, very expensive casual clothing, early 30s
- ◆ **Drive:** protect Annalise (page 286), even from herself
- ◆ **Debts:** owes Odette Johnson
- ◆ **Associated Factions:** The People's Land Reclamation Council (PLRC)

Veradis (he/him) looks like money: expensive messy haircut, heavy eyeliner, custom tailored button-front shirts worn with jeans, embroidered corset vest, and spotless \$8,000 sneakers. His workout and supplement routine takes up a big portion of his morning, although he's sleek rather than bulky.

Veradis is also the beneficiary of the Amarin trust fund, which his parents set up for their youngest son to keep him out of the family business. The Amarins are known for their animal husbandry conglomerate...and their record of animal rights abuses. Veradis is morally opposed to their practices, but is unwilling to cut the cord—and the accompanying financial support—completely.

Instead, Veradis uses the money he's been given to exert influence in the mortal spaces adjacent to the supernatural world; he's the primary funder of Mortalis factions like the PLRC and regularly hires mortals like Odette Johnson to provide security for himself and his oracle lover, Annalise. Veradis is a regular in most of Chicago's supernatural social spaces—demonic art installations, werewolf bars, etc.—and he owes Odette for pulling him and Annalise out of harm's way more than once.

Veradis lives in a converted loft in Lincoln Square. He owns the building—the top floor is the large, luxurious living space he shares with Annalise, while the bottom floor contains her studio space and equipment, his office space, a kitchenette, and meditation room/gym. There is an attached garage containing his small collection of luxury cars and motorcycles, and an equally high-end security system throughout the building.

## ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Veradis thinks the best of people and is quite trusting, but often oversteps when he thinks others don't know how to look out for their own best interests. He is very much in love with Annalise and isn't shy about making a bold proclamation of his feelings or an open display of protection. Lately, his dreams have been occupied with keys and locks, but he's been afraid to ask Annalise what such imagery might mean...



## ODETTE JOHNSON STATUS-1

- ◆ **Look:** shifting, Black, formal clothing, mid-40s
- ◆ **Drive:** wipe out all the bloodsucking freaks
- ◆ **Debts:** owes Melissa Mitchell (page 285)
- ◆ **Associated Factions:** Twin Crown Development Group (page 287)

Odette Johnson (she/her) came home from high school one day to find her older sister's "loser" boyfriend in the midst of slaughtering her family. The young girl barely escaped...and ended up in Chicago-Read Mental Health Center with severe PTSD. The police dismissed the murders as gang violence, but Odette knows the "loser" boyfriend was a murderous vampire. When she was released, Odette swore to get revenge on all bloodsuckers.

She found a mentor in Thomas Abbott, a notorious drunk who was also the only person who believed her story. He had long ago adapted his Marine training to fighting the "creatures of the night," and he was a faithful companion to Odette's hunts until his disappearance three years ago. She's still looking for him, and she owes a neighborhood werewolf—Melissa Mitchell (page 285)—for giving her the meager leads she has on his kidnapping.

Odette was able to set up a high-end security and private investigation firm—Subira Security, named for her older sister—to provide some cash (as well as an excuse to carry around weapons), although she leaves the day-to-day operations to her cousin, Jesse. Through Subira, Odette provides security to well-connected individuals and corporations, such as Twin Crown Development Group (page 287).

Odette lives on the first floor of the greystone she grew up in; the basement serves as storage space for her tools and arsenal. She has never renovated the place, and so the same worn carpet hides the old hardwood floors. The top floor is rented out to Cathy Williams, a schizophrenic who lives on limited disability benefits. Cathy is aware of Odette's work, and often brings people to Odette who might know something about vampires in the area.

### ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Odette is very good at whatever tasks she sets her mind to accomplish; she never hesitates to help fellow humans, but also has a lot of trust issues. Her war against the vampires has made her deeply unpopular with much of Chicago's Night Circle, but she's still convinced of the righteousness of her cause.

## MORTALIS FACTION

### THE PEOPLE'S LAND RECLAMATION COUNCIL

- ◆ **SIZE:** 2
  - ◆ **STRENGTH:** 3
  - ◆ **ASSETS:** trained staff, local witches, secure funding
- Established as a response to the Chicago Land Clearance Commission, The People's Land Reclamation Council (PLRC) is a grassroots organization dedicated to letting the residents of Washington Park directly dictate the future of the neighborhood. The PLRC frequently fights evictions and eminent domain suits, as well as organizes protests at town halls and other direct actions.

Membership is limited to residents of Washington Park, although consultants such as lawyers are often recruited from across the city, if a suitable resident can't be found. Clove Williams (page 287) is a regular exception as a senior advisor, and Morocco Williams—who lives in the area—serves as a board member. Other key supporters include members of the DuSable Museum of African American History, local organizers, and small business owners.

Witchcraft is not advertised as part of the Council's regular activities, except in relation to the Wiccan residents of Washington Park. Unofficially, however, the PLRC staff often makes use of hedge magic learned from the Williams family to "persuade" judges and other mortal officials, as well as create unexpected funding opportunities. Their contact with the supernatural has led some members of the PLRC to be more open-minded regarding supernatural activity in the neighborhood, but there are more than a few who adopt a "humans first" mindset.

### POTENTIAL STARTING STATUSES

- ◆ **Striving:** They are actively attempting to overthrow the wizards' council and seize control of Chicago's keys for themselves.
- ◆ **Maintaining:** They are keeping a careful watch on the wizards' council for now, but are ready to step in if the right opportunity presents itself.

# NIGHT

Something's got the vampires of Chicago running scared. It's gobbling them up on the streets in flashes of violence, gore, and blood curdling screams. Once the kingpins of Chicago, even giving the old wizards a run for their money, the vampires are terrified and their attempts to control the streets have now given way to trying to survive them. The night isn't for Night anymore, at least for them.

Once the vampires' unsteady allies, the wolves have closed ranks for protection. The bloodsuckers call upon the old covenants written when the city was young and etched into the sidewalks by claw and fang, but the wolves could care less. They're a different breed and if something's marked the vampires for death, the packs of Chicago won't be dragged down with them.

The ghosts of Chicago tried to uphold old alliances... but manifestations were corrupted as a result. Their connection to the city, to the dirty places of pain where shadows promise memory, is disjointed, broken, and hints at a terrifying unmaking if they dare look closer. Tethered to fragments of the city itself, the ghosts can feel the city's waking presence, even if they don't know what it means or where it lives.

Thus, the creatures of Night don't trust each other. The Circle that once ruled the streets by blood and might is poised to tear itself apart in paranoia. Secrets whispered in darkened alleyways threaten to break alliances forged in times past when blood, flesh, and control came easily. Yet, no one in Night has figured out that the city is actually alive...and hungry. Sure, it could go after the fae, but the fae care for it. They celebrate its strange energy and grow its chaos. The vampires, and Night, have been feeding off this city for ages and it's time for the streets to reclaim their pound of flesh.

## CHICAGO NIGHT MOVES

- ♦ Offer to perform a favor at the cost of an unreasonable sacrifice
- ♦ Seize territory and hold it at any cost
- ♦ Broker a deal between two parties, shaping it in your favor
- ♦ Sacrifice a member of your Circle for your greater good

## BRIAN BORU STATUS-1

- ♦ **Look:** Conforming, White/Latinx, casual clothing, early 50s
- ♦ **Drive:** find the lighter side of life in the shadows
- ♦ **Debts:** owes Keeran Murphy (page 289)
- ♦ **Associated Factions:** None

Brian (he/him) claims to be the former Irish High King; he says he set up new digs during a tour of an Irish exhibit at the history museum. He has a number of revolving stories on how the Irish High King came to be half-Chilean, which he enthusiastically shares in return for spectral whiskey.

To be fair, Brian does speak both Gaelic and Spanish fluently. He seems to have roughly ten centuries of knowledge, primarily of Irish history. Gregarious and friendly, Brian seems to know and be known by every fae, sprite, and piskie that's ever passed through Chicago. He is quite tall, clean shaven with the sides of his head shaved but the rest of his brown hair worn long. Brian lives in local sports jerseys and jeans.

The bar that Brian has claimed as his haunt has changed names several times, but the Irish pub has retained its beaten tin ceiling tiles and heavy woodwork. He likes to listen to the students who gather here for cheap beer and pizza from the place two doors down, and allows the lighting to account for his occasional transparency. The bathrooms are mainly clean and plastered in stickers, and the waitstaff maintain a little shrine behind the bar dedicated to the Irish King. He does sometimes play tricks on bad tippers and has been known to manifest poltergeist activity if any of the waiters or bartenders get a pushy customer, but otherwise everyone is welcome.

Brian does not manifest during the day, and is never seen outside of the bar. He claims various reasons such as agoraphobia, missing the bar too much, saw a black cat outside, etc., but denies it's anything to do with his spectral status.

## ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Brian is fun loving and generous to a fault, but does have a temper. A wordsmith and lover of a fine tale, means as quick as his temper ignites, it's soothed by a story or smile from a friend. When Brian feels threatened he hides behind the (real or imagined) Irish High King persona he's come to rely upon.



## MELISSA MITCHELL STATUS-2

- ◆ **Look:** conforming, white, tactical clothing, late 20s
- ◆ **Drive:** protect what's mine
- ◆ **Debts:** owes Annalise Weber (page 286)
- ◆ **Associated Factions:** Victims of Chicago

Melissa (she/her) used to do a bit of modeling here and there, and running was her exercise of choice. A late night run during a full moon turned into an all-night hunt in the local park, and Melissa found that she loved the power that came with her new change far more than her old life. She also found allies such as Vivian, who agreed to let Melissa claim Chinatown as her territory as long as the families had a say in what happened to anyone from the area; the outsiders were all Melissa's to deal with.

She's also got a couple of young werewolves to help her enforce the peace, and one or two lone male wolves who keep nosing around, but Melissa has her heart set on Brian Boru. She's pretty sure she can figure out a way for him to move to her neighborhood, and maybe even become a werewolf; true love—with the help of some magic—conquers all, right? She also owes Annalise a Debt; the girl found Melissa right after she was attacked by a werewolf and helped her tend to her wounds and get home safely.

Melissa worked out a pretty nice salary and bonus package with Vivian, along with a brick townhouse overlooking a park and with easy access to the Ping Tom Memorial Park. She has a fancy car the pack isn't allowed to drive, and has gone big for the tactical look: multiple pouches and gadgets strapped to slim fitting black clothes with web belts, high ponytails, and mirrored shades. Melissa's all business when she's not thinking about Brian; he's ignorant of her plans to move him to her territory. She prefers to have all her contingencies covered before undertaking anything important.

### ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Melissa can be overly invested in being professional and expanding her business, but she is a very kind person at heart. She cares deeply for her friends and family and will go to great lengths to keep them happy. This is both a boon and bane to the werewolf, who has a network of equally loyal friends who all need something or another from her.

## NIGHT FACTION

### VICTIMS OF CHICAGO

- ◆ **Size:** 4
- ◆ **Strength:** 1
- ◆ **Assets:** spectral council

The Victims of Chicago is a loose coalition of those who have died in disasters in the city—Chicago Fire, Iroquois Theater Fire, Eastland Disaster, Spanish Flu Pandemic—and those who died of unnatural causes, such as the murder victims, drownings, suicides, etc. who are unfortunately still tied to the location of their demise. There is a strict hierarchy and rules of conduct, along with documented practices and procedures on how to lodge a complaint about another ghost, issues with the living, unauthorized hauntings, and so forth. A ruling council is elected every 50 years, unless a member is recalled or passes on. This has only happened twice. Every ghost gets one vote.

There is currently a call from younger ghosts to rename themselves, as they find the "victim" label degrading, while older ghosts claim it's both accurate and traditional. Every motion to change it has failed so far, but the general sentiment seems to be growing. It won't be long before the issue comes to a head.

Meanwhile, the demolition of buildings is a cause for concern, as many ghosts can not survive without their anchor, and the development of parts of the city that have seen a lot of violence means a lot of ghosts are affected without their input. Some sensitive individuals, such as Annalise, have begun listening to their concerns, but claims of ghostly complaints don't go far either.

### POTENTIAL STARTING STATUSES

- ◆ **Maintaining:** They are actively haunting relevant buildings scheduled for demolition. This isn't frequently effective, but the ghosts don't feel they have a lot of other options.
- ◆ **Collapsing:** Some are flocking to religious institutions, trying to find salvation. Others have given up completely, and listlessly watch as their anchors are destroyed and they are claimed by oblivion.

# POWER

Power is etched into the very stonework of Chicago, a reflection of the real world in which only a few hold the lives of many in the palm of their hands. Yet the wizards of Power realize they are dying, one by one, as the final strands holding the city start to fray. They spent their lives grasping at more and more power, fighting amongst themselves at times. Now the vultures circle, different factions looking to pick their bones. The city will soon have new masters—or be its own, looking for vengeance.

The oracles who tug on the strings of fate now give the wizards a wide berth. They feel the city stirring, perhaps some even know it, but they've done nothing to warn the wizards. When those old men created their keys, not even one was given to the seers and oracles who'd long swam the eddies of time for the misers. This isn't time for them to enter into the fray, instead the oracles must watch and wait...things like these have a way of sorting themselves out

The most natural heirs to the wizards' throne, should they be deposed, are a tight-knit community of nonconforming practitioners of the occult, led by a witch named Clove. Unbeknown to the other members of Power, Clove and their coven know the city is alive and plan to free it. If the wizards aren't careful Clove will turn the city itself against them. It isn't that hard to do after so many years of the wizards squandering the ample power they harnessed.

For years, members of Power enjoyed a distant respect from the other Circles, but that's all changing. The wizards are desperate to maintain their hold...and the other Circles can smell weakness.

## CHICAGO POWER MOVES

- ◆ Offer a seductive taste of power to further your own goals
- ◆ Exploit old feuds to distract from your true intentions
- ◆ Call in a favor to gather more power
- ◆ Use the city's resources instead of your own

## ANNALISE WEBER STATUS-1

- ◆ **Look:** Androgynous, Indigenous (Oneida Nation), baggy clothes, late 20s
- ◆ **Drive:** see the true face of the city
- ◆ **Debts:** owes Clove Williams
- ◆ **Associated Factions:** Victims of Chicago (page 285)

Annalise (she/her) was young when she lost both parents; her grandmother took her in, but Annalise had no interest in living in a rural setting. She made her way south towards Chicago, using her knack for reading people to finance her travels, knowing when to offer a lie and when to be honest.

Once in Chicago, Annalise lived on the streets and used shells to tell fortunes for tourists; she was good enough to eventually move into an apartment with some other runaways. She met Veradis at a coffee shop they both frequented that played dark techno and made impeccable vegan lattes. Annalise was immediately sure of Veradis's importance in her life, but played hard to get, worried that he'd think she just wanted a cushy lifestyle.

Eventually, Annalise gave up reading fortunes for tourists and started giving her boyfriend tours of the underground parts of the city, taking along her camera to document the decaying beauty they saw. Veradis saw her potential, and offered to advance the funds to set up a studio. Annalise accepted, and her urban exploration videos became popular enough that she not only paid Veradis back in full, but she now pulls in enough to put some aside in savings as well as support a small program for Indigenous youth to learn how to use camera equipment and studio spaces. She's a regular in Indigenous spaces, wearing baggy t-shirts with designs by Native artists and jeans, with an undercut and dyed green hair.

## ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Annalise knows she is unusually perceptive of people, but didn't suspect the supernatural nature of her gift until she ran into Clove and learned that some of the people she was talking to were ghosts. Some find her irresistible, and Veradis has had to discourage both human would-be suitors and inhuman predators by hiring some muscle. He frequently warns her to be careful, but Annalise thinks he just has a jealous streak.



## CLOVE WILLIAMS STATUS-2

- ◆ **Look:** Nonconforming, Black, formal clothing, early 70s
- ◆ **Drive:** free the city of Chicago
- ◆ **Debts:** owes Brian Boru (page 284)
- ◆ **Associated Factions:** The People's Land Reclamation Project (page 283)

Clove (they/them) grew up in Chicago; they have lived in almost every district of the city, although they now call Hyde Park home. Clove usually wears their graying hair in a crown of braids on top of their head, and is usually in a Senator style tunic and pants, sometimes with a matching hat, if their braids are down. They are a striking figure, one that stands out with a vitality and spark that shocks people who know they recently entered their 70s.

Clove was an insatiable reader as a child, and that habit deepened as they grew, until regular texts weren't enough. Clove found their way into various esoteric societies, in search of ever more rare knowledge. They brought their finds back to their community, first by paving a path for other Black nonconforming individuals to attend local universities, then by becoming the first Black tenured professor of Literature at the University of Chicago.

Clove and their coven know the city is alive and plan to awaken it fully, birthing its will into the world. They love their community and believe overthrowing the wizards will better Chicago. Clove is serious about their plans and has taken active steps to dismantling the wizards' hold. Their coven has fed the city by leading vampires down dark streets to be devoured, and Clove has their eye set on one of the wizards' keys for themselves. Brian is the only one who understands Clove's true intentions, and Clove owes him a Debt for keeping the coven's secrets.

### ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Clove knows that if they succeed in dismantling the wizards' control of the city, the resulting chaos will put lives at risk...but it's for the greater good. They've kept some of what they've seen coming from the rest of their coven, but the duplicity is eating them up. They know this path is the right one, but what it has cost sometimes seems like too high a price to pay to find justice.

## POWER FACTION

### TWIN CROWN DEVELOPMENT GROUP

- ◆ **SIZE:** 1
  - ◆ **STRENGTH:** 4
  - ◆ **ASSETS:** financial assets, government connections, construction equipment, leyline survey map
- Caleb and Joshua are identical twins, with white blonde hair and average features, who are sure the world is theirs to mold as they see fit. Their family money comes from a variety of sources back in England, and both men like to fancy themselves as a bit lordly. They're also wizards, with their father and grandfather having been part of the original group that started all of this. Neither were granted their father's foci when he passed, but each feels entitled to it; they would be willing to share if that's what it takes.

They have a vision for the city of Chicago, and it only includes enough affordable housing for maximum tax breaks. They respect history, but hate to see such an amazing city held back by those who don't bother to help themselves. Now they want to bring a rolling wave of new development to the less modernized neighborhoods of Chicago, and if homes that belonged to families for generations have to be torn down, well, that's just progress.

This all serves another purpose of course, Caleb and Joshua are looking to control five key points in the city. With each location under their control, they can harvest more energy from the city, and beat back rival wizards for control of the leylines (and perhaps one another once power is cemented). The brothers already control one point in the city, and they're looking to bulldoze an inconsequential neighborhood to gain the next. The only problem is a pesky werewolf (Melissa Mitchell, page 285) who's calling it *her* territory.

### POTENTIAL STARTING STATUS

- ◆ **Striving:** They are actively attempting to regain their father's foci and the leadership of the wizard's council.
- ◆ **Collapsing:** Infighting between the two brothers leads to a deep schism; they are each looking for help to get rid of the other.

Wild's love affair with Chicago was written long ago when the first fae danced down cobbled streets in the depths of night under the light of the moon. This Circle does very little in Chicago to ensure their way of life, because the city's inhabitants are an active lot. Deals and pacts are a way of life; that's why Chicago is beautiful.

But Chicago's gotten a hell of a lot more interesting since the full binding twenty years ago. The wizards forged eight keys to cement their power, and those keys are just what the demons need to open a Hell-gate in the city. The demons already have one key and they've got plans to get their hands on more.

Yet something about this scheme itches in the back of the mind of each and every fae. It's an amplifying of the uncomfortable shiver they've known all their lives. It's the reason every debaucherous party has a violent edge and every violent act has a malicious taint. With the city now struggling against its bonds, fairies hear the calls for freedom, and are terrified to think about what might happen if the demons succeed.

Will breaking the keys with the proper ritual summon a lord of Hell? Sure. But what else happens when that happens? The demons don't give a fuck, but the fae aren't so sure. Hell on earth and an unshackled city sounds a lot more like a battleground than a chaotic paradise. If the demons get into trouble with their grand plans, the rest of Wild seems willing to leave them to rot.

Despite the disagreements in the Circle, members of Wild happily stay out of each other's business. If push comes to shove they'd likely support one another in most common matters, albeit with some infighting between various factions or high-Status leaders.

## CHICAGO WILD MOVES

- ◆ Respond swiftly, with stunning violence, against an affront to joy or celebration
- ◆ Take someone down a peg, just to prove you can
- ◆ Seal a deal that helps your Circle gain influence in an unexpected way
- ◆ Subvert expectations by applying kindness in cruelty and malice in love

## VIVIAN CHEN STATUS-2

- ◆ **Look:** shifting, Chinese, ceremonial clothing, mid 30s
- ◆ **Drive:** obtain vengeance on the one who killed me
- ◆ **Debts:** owes Veradis Amarin (page 282)
- ◆ **Associated Factions:** Twin Crown Development Group (page 287)

Although Vivian (she/they) appears as a particularly lovely Chinese person in her mid 30s, this appearance is only her most recent; this dragon has been around for centuries in one form or another. She tends to wear ceremonial clothing for both men and women according to her mood, and frequently wears her long hair in elaborate updos along with fantastic makeup. The New World seemed like a lark to liven up a dull existence, and so far Vivian can at least say she hasn't been bored. She also has a personal mission—an oracle told her that the individual responsible for the death of her original form is alive in Chicago now, and Vivian has a taste for vengeance.

Although not all of the old families know exactly what Vivian is, they have learned to respect her power and advice. Every single one of them owes Vivian at least one debt; it's one of her favorite collections. She does think that traditions should be updated, as long as they don't affect her in a negative way, and so views new technology, art, and cultural mores as things to be thoroughly investigated, digested, and remade how she likes them. Vivian has introduced Veradis to several new artists, as they know each other as patrons of the art scene, and Vivian convinced him to finance a collection of Asian American art at the museum under her curation.

Vivian lives in a brick and stone three story building, with a herbal remedy and medicine shop on the first floor, and the top two dedicated to her living space. The shop features rows of jars and drawers lining the walls, each one labeled in Cantonese. Sweet plumes of incense fill the air, and two elderly women staff the counter. Behind a folding screen is Vivian's office, with layers of sumptuous fabrics and pillows atop antique chairs. She conducts her business here, but occasionally hosts dinner parties and get-togethers in her ultramodern apartment above.

## ROLEPLAYING NOTES

She does feel an obligation to dispense advice and assistance where she can, but Vivian can be harsh on those who try to do things their own way. She's especially hard on fellow members of Wild who get mixed up in the business of wizards and vampires.



## KEERAN MURPHY STATUS-1

- ◆ **Look:** shifting, Black, colorful clothing, early 20s
- ◆ **Drive:** find fun and amusement in every moment
- ◆ **Debts:** owes Vivian Chen
- ◆ **Associated Factions:** Sins of the Flesh

Keeran (he/him) is a local phooka who runs an Irish/soul food fusion restaurant, Bia Anam, in New City with his partner, Jackson, and Jackson's mother, Kasandra. Keeran appears to be a large, well-muscled African-American man in his early 20s with long dreadlocks and complex knotwork tattoos, but he is quite a bit older than he looks. In what he claims to be his true form, Keeran keeps the tattoos but sports a shaggy black goat head with glowing yellow eyes. Due to an unverified altercation with a witch many decades ago, Keeran claims to have been cursed to only tell the truth.

He has a bit of a soft spot for down-on-their-luck fae, and enjoys nothing more than playing tricks on wealthy young men. Due to Keeran's tendency to offer free food and an ear to troubled lesser beings, he enjoys a lot of gossip and rumors. Keeran is pretty laid back unless disrespect or hostility is directed towards Jackson or Kasandra, in which case the ugly side of the phooka comes out, crossing from mischievous to vicious. He once lost his cool in a Szechuan restaurant in Chinatown, and owes Vivian for smoothing things over (and replacing a few broken items).

Kasandra lives in the apartment above the restaurant, while Keeran and Jackson live in the carriage house out back. They have a lush private courtyard between the two buildings filled with fairy lights and small statues of cats, ponies, and foxes. The carriage house is filled with a ridiculously large record collection, books of poetry, and a comfortable sex dungeon.

### ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Keeran truly cares about Kasandra and Jackson, but deep down he knows he is incapable of actual love and will leave when Jackson grows old. His personality is generally very even-keeled and thoughtful, though he often can't resist the lure of prodding those with short fuses. Despite this mischievous streak, he manages to keep his cool under most stressful situations.

## WILD FACTION

### SINS OF THE FLESH

- ◆ **Size:** 2
- ◆ **Strength:** 2
- ◆ **Assets:** illegal drugs, music connections

**Background:** Sins of the Flesh is a faerie troupe that has integrated itself with the local industrial scene. Members take turns being part of bands, artists, labels, and attending as fans before fading back and switching appearance and roles so as to avoid alerting humans to the fae in their midst. They also frequently charm attendees so that the fae may strip off their glamour and enjoy themselves in their true form. Their glamour usually takes on the same aesthetic as the human fans, with stompy black boots, black concert t-shirts or latex, fishnets, piercings, and bright hair being popular.

Their primary purpose is to encourage talented musicians and artists, producing a stable of individuals who can be taken back to their homelands, produce content for consumption, or be traded with other faerie troupes as the whim takes them. The enchanted humans usually believe their label or luck is behind any moves, and ascribe the otherworldly feeling of some concerts to drugs, rather than the obvious faerie magic swirling around the faction's members.

Sins of the Flesh liken their concert venues to cathedrals, and compare attending concerts to worship. This troupe has been active since before the Renaissance, and state that the industrial genre is the first to excite them in a very long time.

### POTENTIAL STARTING STATUS

- ◆ **Maintaining:** They are keeping their heads down so as not to attract attention right now, but they're totally rooting for the city to win.
- ◆ **Striving:** Seizing on the moment, Sins of the Flesh has struck a deal with Lilin, a local demon, to secure one of the city's keys for her.





# SANTIAGO

The black limo screeched as it hurtled through the curve. Gabriel cursed in harmony with his car.

He hadn't meant to be late. But just as he was leaving, the Executive calls—she needs him to drive her to a meeting, then *oh by the way* he needs to pick up a package she's been expecting from that damn imp Pedro, and then and then and then...he's late to meet up with Don Luis de Amunátegui.

*Fucking demons.* His deal with the Executive had soured ever since she loaned him out to that wizard, Odalis; the bastard made Gabriel fetch an oracle's eyeballs, then ate both bloody orbs in front of him. Gabriel's only hope was a "friend" like Don Luis, one of the few vampires with any real power left in the city, someone who could get him out of his foolish contract.

The limo was barreling through Santiago's southernmost extreme now. He hurtled over an abandoned railway, the limo scraping against the dirt as it came back down. Everything was dry and deserted, like he'd traveled to some other world, not Santiago at all but something older and emptier. A large hill appeared: the *Huaca de Chena*.

His headlights caught a small group. One of them, stared straight into his eyes through the glare from the high-beams: a balding old man in a tailored black suit with a luscious, well-kempt white beard. Those eyes—cold, brown—gleamed in the light. Luis de Amunátegui was angry.

*Cagué. I am deeply, utterly, completely fucked.*

Gabriel slammed the brakes, swung the door open, and stepped out into a dust cloud as fast as he could. "I'm sorry, so sorry Don Luis, I got here as fast as I could but the Executive, she—"

"I do not care about your business with others. I care about your business *with me*. We had an accord." Each word clipped, but steel-hard, knives cast at Gabriel's soul. The barest hint of fang flashed beneath Don Luis's lips. *Perfect control, and complete disdain. ¡Dios mío! I work for a sadistic demon, and this guy still scares the shit out of me.*

"I know. We *have* a deal. I'm here, ready to work. I have the limo." There was no other car in sight, and Gabriel wondered how they had gotten out here.

There was a trio of other figures. A small girl and a gaunt figure, the latter supporting a third person wrapped up in a massive, velvety cloak, completely concealed. Gabriel knew the girl—a *duende* named Aurora. A faerie. He would have to watch what he said, lest she report back to his boss.

Gabriel sighed and turned his attention to the thin silhouette—*oh shit. It's that fucking wizard.*



Odalís. The eye-eating *magus*. They finally noticed Gabriel, the growing smile below their handsome, green eyes framed by the wizard's straight, black hair.

*What in hell could bring a vampire lord, a childlike faerie, and an eye-eating wizard together here? Do I really want to know?*

"Ah, Don Luis! You did not say the name of the driver. Gabriel is a friend!" Odalís had a voice like a song. Aurora giggled and curtsied, her black curls bouncing against her formal, white dress.

Don Luis cocked an eyebrow and turned to Gabriel. "A friend indeed. Very well, *caído*. This has been a good night, save your tardiness. I will our compact another chance." Gabriel nodded, but he heard the unstated words: *You owe me for this. Don't fuck up again.*

Don Luis unblinking eyes sparkled with intensity. "As agreed, you are to provide transportation for one passenger back into the city." Don Luis handed Gabriel a slip of paper with an address, nowhere he recognized. "You will avoid attention. You will take the most direct route. You will not stop anywhere. If you are attacked, you will convey your passenger to the destination, safely, above all else. *¿Estamos claro?*"

Gabriel's voice caught in his throat. His mind cast itself back to the day he signed the contract with the Executive. *She smiled at me and I saw the whole world in her eyes. Everything I have ever or could ever want. Hope. All tied up in a signature.*

Gabriel found himself again—"Sí, señor. You got it."

The wizard carried the cloaked figure to the limo; Gabriel rushed forward to open the door. The cloak slipped—Gabriel caught a flash of deep red eyes and a woman's face—and then the door was closed. Odalís pulled out a vial of something and started pouring it on the car, softly chanting. Gabriel smelled blood.

"What the fuck? Don't get blood on my car, *huevón!*"

"What we have done here will draw attention," Don Luis said. "Attention we would like to avoid for now. Odalís's work will help you." Somehow, the wizard's grin broadened. Gabriel shook his head at Odalís, and then slipped into the driver's seat.

Don Luis stepped up and put a hand on the door just before Gabriel closed it. "Haste. Circumspection. No attention. Stop for nothing." He leaned forward conspiratorially, an all-too-human gesture that felt utterly wrong. "And treat her with the utmost respect. Do not speak without being spoken to, and do not ask her questions about herself. Understood?" Gabriel nodded. "*Bien*. Do this well, and we will talk about your Executive when next we meet." Without another word, Don Luis closed the door for him.

Gabriel wheeled the limo around, the headlights lighting upon the dirt road back to Santiago proper. He did everything in his power to keep from looking into the darkened back of the limo, but he knew those red eyes were there, staring out of the black at him. He was tempted to speed back as fast as he could, to get this passenger out of his limo and go back to his apartment and think only of how Don Luis might help him get free of the Executive. But *no attention* echoed in his head, and he kept the limo well under the limit.

He could make out streetlights on the road ahead before she spoke for the first time.

"So different. Everything, so different now." Her voice was quiet, but every word reached him with perfect clarity. He couldn't tell at first if she was speaking to him, until her voice rose. "Tell me. Do you like it?"

"Do I like what... *señora?*"

"The city. The lights, the towers in the distance. This place, this world. Do you like it?" She sounded as if she was joking with him, or at him.

"I...guess so, yes? Yes. *Sí, señora.*"

"You sound unsure," she said. He couldn't help looking at the mirror now, where the crimson eyes were waiting for him. "Don't be. Know what you like. What you want. Be strong or grow stronger." There was something about how she spoke, an odd accent he couldn't place, like she wasn't quite familiar with the language. Gabriel nodded in the darkness, afraid to say more.

The eyes turned away to look out the window. "I do *not* like it. It seems too tall. Too bright. I liked *my* city better when it was darker." The amusement was still in her tone, but so was something else. He'd heard it many times from the Executive.

*Threat.*

Don Luis's cautions returned to him: *Do not speak without being spoken to, and do not ask her questions about herself.* But he had to know.

"Who...are you...*señora?*"

The crimson eyes turned back to the mirror. "I am the shadow come to blanket Santiago once more, to protect her from those who would defile her purity." The darkness in the limo grew thicker, any light drowned in the empty void cloaked around her, hiding all but her blood ruby eyes. "You are delivering this city's savior. You are blessed."

The ride finished in silence. After he let her out at the destination, she just stood there, swathed in her cloak, staring at him in scarlet as he drove away.

*Oh fuck. What did I just do?*

# LIES & SORROW

## A CITY OF LIES & SORROW

Santiago is the capital of Chile, a country of more than twenty million people in the southernmost part of South America, west of the majestic Andes mountain range. Over 40% of Chileans call Santiago home, and state-sponsored media promotes the city as a modern metropolis located in a beautiful valley of hills—criss-crossed by two mighty rivers (the Mapocho and Maipo, respectively)—featuring gorgeous parks and other *pulmones verdes* (natural spaces) and an abundance of innovative technology, imported fashion, and thriving business centers.

Yet most *Santiaguines* (city residents), even those who live in isolated opulence, know the other face of Santiago: pollution, ignorance, and barely-contained violence. Inequality is rampant; just as the city's famous Neoclassical, Art Deco, and Neo-Gothic architecture has been replaced by harsh, Brutalist buildings, so too have the social norms of Santiago given way to mindless striving, conformism, and xenophobia. Caught in the grind of late capitalism, most *Santiaguines* scurry from one place to another looking for salvation...and mortal politicians are happy to fan the flames of fear when the conflagration yields devout followers.

Amidst such havoc, Power has thrived; the wizards and immortals dug their talons even more deeply into the city's disorganized power structures. Some in Power lament the loss of dominion that followed the end of the military dictatorship in the early 1990s, but many supernatural elites are finding economic control just as useful a tool for their arcane designs. Wild, on the other hand, filled in the margins. Many demons, faeries, and other outsiders found their way to the city, traveling with the immigrants looking for work in Santiago. They found homes in the city, new places to put down roots, but little acceptance.

Recently, there are whispers that Inés de Suárez—a 500-year-old vampire who once ruled Santiago from the shadows—has returned, determined to reclaim her throne. Fueled by such rumors, her vampire loyalists are starting to grow bolder, confronting their enemies in public and seizing territory they've long coveted...and the city's factions are scrambling to figure out what—if anything—they can do to prepare for her return. Some factions of Power, always eager to make a deal, are pursuing some sort of alliance, but most of Santiago's powers-that-be haven't decided on a strategy for dealing with her yet.

One might expect Night factions to already wield such power in Santiago. After all, the Circle usually thrives when mortals are disorganized and fearful. But for the last fifty years, Night has struggled to claim any real power: the military dictatorship of the 70s and 80s imposed a curfew that virtually destroyed Santiago's nightlife, and the consumerist waves of the 90s and early 00s—despite creating a boom of discotheques, clubs, and bars—were routinely upended by economic crises, social movements (e.g. the *Estallido Social*), and *pandemias*. Pushed to the margins, the factions of Night are fractured and struggling, eager for a leader like Doña Inés to help them

Mortalis is responsible for some of Night's impotence—religious mortal hunters took advantage of the disruptive protests of the *Estallido Social* to destroy several high-profile “unholy monsters,” including a few influential vampires—but the Circle is largely irrelevant in city politics. Haphazard attempts to “protect the innocent” have often proved more harmful than helpful, and any broader political moves Mortalis leaders make are blocked by an alliance of elites from Power and Night.

It is undeniable, though, that Mortalis would suffer the most from the rise of an ancient vampire. Just as the rising tide of mortal fascism and authoritarianism amongst *Santiaguines* tends to harm immigrants, activists, and the poor of Santiago, so too does the return of Doña Inés precede a new era of suffering for those without supernatural gifts to keep her at bay. Demons and faeries may retreat from the city in the face of her rule—and wizards and immortals may find a role in her reign—but mortals have nowhere to go and little to offer...besides the blood in their veins.

Is there any hope? Perhaps. A few in Mortalis claim to have made contact with an old god—Intichacha, an Incan deity who has offered to stand with the mortals against the looming darkness. But can such a force truly oppose Doña Inés' growing followers and alliances? Will the leaders of Mortalis, no strangers themselves to the endemic racism of Santiago, truly accept an Indigenous god as an ally? Long ago, *Santiaguines* accepted an imported European god—embracing it as one of their own—but finding salvation in the arms of a dark-skinned deity may prove too great a sacrifice for the very mortals most in danger...



## THE CITY THEN

When the Inca arrived at the Mapocho-Maipo rivers' basin around 1400 CE, they brought with them many great things. Chief among them was Intichacha, the apocryphal version of an Inca sun deity. They were the main reason why the invaders didn't use their technological and military superiority to conquer the valley through fire and bloodshed, as Intichacha recommended a diplomatic approach. The success of this strategy turned the settlement into a burgeoning town, with a mix of cultures that equally benefited both the original inhabitants and the newly arrived Incans.

The residents' faith in Intichacha was so strong that they were the *de facto* ruler of the area. During the century and a half that this agreement lasted, the god cooperated with local werepumas, shamans, and other monster hunters to keep mortals protected and the horrors at bay. Chief among these horrors were fat-eating Andes vampires (*pishtaco*) and the demon-like *wekufe*, corruptors and despoilers of natural places.

Then the Conquistadors came. They brought with them a couple of angels, a saint, numerous demons, Catholic-powered miracle workers (and their protectors), as well as countless *duendes* (Spanish fae-like creatures)...and a mighty Spanish vampiress, Inés de Suárez. The angels who came with the Spanish didn't whisper words of sympathy or diplomacy to their followers, though. They were avenging, zealous creatures, not unlike their mortal (and undead) counterparts.

The result was a bloody conquest and the erasure of all remnants of the Inca and aboriginal cultures. The last of Intichacha's followers decided to willingly sacrifice their lives through ritual suicide to protect the sun deity from destruction—gently laying them to rest in what would be later known as *Huaca de Chena*—in the hopes that they would get to shine their light over the city in a better future.

For the next almost two hundred years Night and its horrors dominated Santiago; Doña Inés was well-known within the city as a particularly gruesome monster, kept only in check by the other factions in Night that would occasionally break with her and provide some meaningful opposition. Her dominance was only broken once independence from Spain became a reality in the 19th century—and the ancient vampiress mysteriously disappeared.

Doña Inés had survived various attempts on her unlife—as well as the city burning to the ground a couple of times—but her strategic retreat in the face of Chilean independence was an admission that the rising mortal government was unlikely to tolerate her hungers and predilections. Yet, the city is always full of surprises: a hunter found her lair where she slumbered mere months later, and drove a stake into her heart that almost killed her. The husk of her body, broken and injured, only barely survived.

For 150 years, the politics of the mortal and supernatural worlds ebbed and flowed. When Allende was elected in 1970—and Chile became the first country to have a democratically-elected socialist president—Mortalis took center stage, offering the mortals of the city hope for a new beginning. At the same time, Power and Night were weakened, as widespread socialist ideas acted as a great deterrent to Catholicism and introduced culture and education that dispelled superstitions, diminishing the influence and strength of both Circles.

But the mortals' peaceful and socialist dream lasted a mere thousand days.

A nightmarish military dictatorship usurped the dream, irreparably damaging the city and its people. More than 3,000 people died, and over 35,000 suffered abuses, torture, and disappearances. In a very tangible way, the dictatorship never ended. After 17 years of endless horrors, nobody went to jail for the crimes they committed. Thousands of people had died—and thousands more had crimes committed against them—and most *Santiaguines* “moved on” as if nothing had happened. The newly-arrived democracy brought freedom and amnesty to the perpetrators, wealth and prosperity to the already-rich (and a tiny taste to the masses), and unending grief to the survivors and mourners.

The city's supernatural reflection is no different. Power factions became the uncontested dominant force during the dictatorship, as they placed key members among the regime's ranks. As the grasp of the dictatorship over city life oppressed mortals, impeded the arrival of Wild elements that could shake things up, and put a stranglehold over unregulated nightlife, Power's status solidified. When the dictatorship officially ended—and democracy returned with bells and whistles—Power thought it would still stay in control. For a time, it did. And then the *Estallido* burned and shattered it all...

## THE CITY NOW

The city's economic bubble of the 1990's and early 2000's burst during 2019's *Estallido Social*, as people took to the streets to protest thirty years of post-dictatorship, ruthless capitalism. The movement gathered those fighting for a humane pension system, high school students resisting a significant increase to bus and train fares, and a wide collection of other leftist activists—all of them agreeing a change was sorely needed. Protestors burned subway stations, pillaged supermarkets and other privately-owned businesses, and razed churches to the ground. The mortal elites grew scared, and a democratically-elected president brought back the curfew after 30+ years, as military and police shot innocent citizens on the city's streets.

During those wild nights of late October 2019, hunters took advantage of the havoc created by the protests and killed a number of “untouchable” high-profile targets in Night and Power, throwing the supernatural world into chaos. Several major factions in both Circles were suddenly leaderless, and it was only the November agreement—which established a plebiscite to draft a new Constitution—that managed to calm the mortal world. But by the time the pandemic lockdowns hit the city four months later, the elites in Power and Night had regrouped and struck back, rounding up the mortal hunters and executing them in a public and brutal fashion.

The following three years proved to be a bonanza for Power. The new Constitution turned into shambles, the elites in both worlds grew richer and stronger than ever before, and their supported mortals became a majority of the Senate. Their only “loss” came at the 2022 presidential election—and barely—and, in truth, the current “left-leaning” government has only benefited those elites, as those in charge haven't had the guts to stop the economic speculation and rising inflation that is driving ordinary people out of Santiago. The members of Night found little sympathy in their allies in Power; the wizards and oracles have their sights set on the far future, and they cared little for how hard life was for the monsters who live in humanity's shadows.

Those in Wild fared even more poorly—attacks on strangers and immigrants are up, and the pandemic pushed many back to their home dimensions. Even the imps of the city suffered greatly, as their businesses and operations were forced to close for over two years, leaving them bowing and scraping to those same elites for an opportunity to fulfill their contracts.

Yet the Wild members who remain in the city are proving to be a hard bone to gnaw upon. As resilient as their immigrant compatriots, they've managed to create close-knit, small communities of mutual support to survive. These symbiotic relationships are their greatest strength, and offer a path forward for their continued survival.

But then, the ancient vampiress Inés de Suárez returned. It was no accident, of course; a small coalition was responsible—Luis de Amunátegui (he/him), a 135-year-old vampire, had become obsessed with Doña Inés, discovering her body nearly thirty years ago in the long-lost tomb in the *Cementerio General* to which she had retreated hundreds of years ago. Already in love with her and amazed by her capacity and cruelty, Amunátegui slaved away at attempts to awaken her, offering the blood of mortals, werewolves, vampires, and more. Nothing worked. Not even his own powerful lifeblood.

It took a *duende*, Aurora, to offer him a path forward. He needed the blood of an angel or a demon, she said, maybe even a god. And she knew, thanks to the secrets laid bare to her kind, where he could find such a thing. So alongside Odalis (they/them), a wizard who owed a great number of Debts to Don Luis, the vampire lord and the faerie took the husk of Doña Inés to the *Huaca de Chena*, the final resting place of the Incan sun god, Intichacha.

The ritual succeeded—securing the blood they needed and restoring Doña Inés to life—but Don Luis may have bitten off more than he can chew. The old god noticed the theft of so much of their lifeforce, and by the time Don Luis was sitting comfortably at home, preparing for sunrise, Intichacha had climbed out of their grave to see the dawn of a new day in the city they helped to found six centuries ago. Doña Inés had returned, yes. But Intichacha had returned as well.

Did Odalis lie to the old vampire about the ritual's costs? Did Aurora desire to see Intichacha brought back to life for her own reason? Don Luis does not know...or care. He has seen too many decades of his fellow vampires suffering to believe that things could be *worse* now that Doña Inés has returned to the city. For him, this moment is a gift—soon things will be as they should be, and he will serve at the right hand of a blood goddess who will rule Santiago from the shadows, as is her right.



## THE CITY TO COME

Doña Inés is still recovering her lost strength, but she's hungrier than ever. Perhaps the only supernatural eager to oppose her is the recently reawakened Intichacha, but they're even weaker than the vampiress, and they have much less support than her. After all, fascism and xenophobia are on the rise...so who among *Santiaguines* will support the rise of an Inca sun god?

Thus, the most probable future for Santiago is that Doña Inés will recover her strength and influence, and once she does so, she'll seize as much territory as she can to become the undisputed ruler of the city...from the shadows, of course. A mortal marionette will rule in her stead.

Her reign will be brutal, tyrannical, and the closest thing to a fascist regime possible. According to her archaic Catholic beliefs, most people will be persecuted under her rule. Any laws that protect minorities will be revoked, the Catholic Church will be reinstated to the pinnacle of influence over the city's society, and immigrants will be turned into little more than slaves.

The supernatural inhabitants of the city will be forced to align themselves with the newly established regime. Some will be persecuted and banished from Santiago in the same manner as their mortal counterparts, but many others will find a space to thrive—provided they do as she asks. For many in Power, for example, this is a distasteful but acceptable outcome; she is not the first dictator they have endured. But for many in Mortalis and Wild, the reign of Doña Inés would be a terrible fate indeed...



# MORTALIS

In Chile, it's illegal to carry firearms. Somehow, this is the *least* of the average mortal hunter's problems in the city of Santiago. While most of Mortalis is either willing to risk a fine (or find some other clever way to defend themselves), none of the Circle can deny that their fractured, splintered existence and constant infighting is the Circle's true weakness.

Many are believers, of course, but the Catholics and evangelical Christians don't agree on anything... except that no one should trust the non-believers. Some in Mortalis are state-sponsored—ex-military hunters, university-based investigators—but most are independently funded, merely scraping by in a city defined by inequality as they seethe with jealousy. Even the lone vigilantes can't see eye to eye; most are obsessed with a single threat or opportunity!

At the start of the *Estallido Social*, there was a moment of cooperation that almost overturned the status quo—a collection of mortal factions, working together to take advantage of the widespread social disruption, assassinated three influential targets: the most prominent vampire, Matilde Montt (she/her); the leader of the Gran Logia, Sebastián Jans (he/him); and the Iwa leader, Papa Gede (they/them). The hunters expected a backlash, but no one could have foreseen how united—and lethal—the response would be to the attacks.

Four years later, the Circle has hit a new low, one that is only further threatened by the rise of Doña Inés. The factions of Mortalis are more divided than ever, and their opponents are getting stronger with each passing night. In these desperate times, however, some have reported seeing a figure of light in their dreams who calls them to “banish the darkness”. Many are mistrustful, but a few are willing to listen. After all, no one else is offering salvation these days.

## SANTIAGO MORTALIS MOVES

- ♦ Display a hidden talent or ability when it counts the most
- ♦ Offer asylum in an unexpected place to those who need it
- ♦ Forge an unlikely—if temporary—alliance to solve a problem
- ♦ Reveal a monster to be a saint...or reveal a saint to be a monster

## VÍCTOR RAMÍREZ STATUS-2

- ♦ **Look:** conforming, White, business attire, early 50s
- ♦ **Drive:** improve my Status and influence in the city
- ♦ **Debts:** owes Leonor Tournier (page 301)
- ♦ **Associated Factions:** NORM

Víctor (he/him) was raised in luxury, but he didn't perceive his upbringing as such. He only understood what he *didn't* have. His peers flaunted their fantastic wealth—sports cars, designer clothes, private security—so Víctor did what most people in his position do: he devoted every waking moment to getting *enough*.

In time, he discovered a truth most bitter: someone always has *more*. Worse yet, his growing wealth and influence had all-too-recognizable limits: there seemed to be an elite world denied to him, just out of reach. A secret world. A hidden world. Power and prestige, cloaked in darkness and magic. Víctor knew he would never be satisfied until this world of shadows was laid bare. Again, he dedicated himself to his cause...and found the true face of the city—*monstruos* and all—behind the charming lies. Vampires. Wizards. Immortals.

At first, Víctor was afraid. Then he grew angry and jealous. Why should he once again watch others flaunt what was rightfully his? Why should they have so much while he toiled for nothing? It wasn't *fair*.

But Víctor knew everyone has enemies, monsters most of all. It took him only a few weeks to find the National Organization for Religious Matters (NORM)—a state-funded group of hunters. After five short years, he worked his way up through the bureaucratic structure to become an acting director.

Recently, Ramón Subercaseaux Mercado (he/him), a vampire in the service of Doña Inés, has tried to seduce Víctor, hoping to learn NORM's secrets. Little does the bloodsucker know that Víctor is the one prying for information; NORM isn't yet aware of the elder vampire's return, and Víctor wants to learn everything he can about Doña Inés before he brings the case to his superiors.

## ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Víctor knows that being a good liar is *everything*. He can summon smiles, compliments, and a kind face without ever revealing his cards; others discover his true intentions only when his plan has played out completely. The only weakness in his perfect facade is his irritation when other people complain about how hard they have to work for what they have.



## INTICHACHA STATUS-1

- ◆ **Look:** shifting, Indigenous, strange clothing, ageless
- ◆ **Drive:** protect the mortals of Santiago
- ◆ **Debts:** none
- ◆ **Associated Factions:** Hijes del Sol Luminoso (forming)

Intichacha's (they/them) return to Santiago has brought little joy to the old god. The charming settlement they remembered has turned into a sprawling metropolis filled with cruel, concrete towers and hopeless, desperate mortals. Monsters run rampant, exploiting and terrorizing whoever they can, and the wizards and faeries who once lived among the common people are nowhere to be found. The city is drowning in darkness.

In the old days, Intichacha would work to reignite the human spirit in the city, inspiring politicians to unite communities and artists to paint a brighter future. They would walk among the people, and their presence would push back the worst of humanity's impulses and demand they do better.

But Intichacha is weak. Their power comes not from the sun itself, but from the hope and light of their followers, the *Hijes del Sol Luminoso* (Children of the Gleaming Sun). Their belief in Intichacha is like nectar to a hummingbird, an intoxicating blend that fuels miracles of beauty and grace. Without it, they can do little to inspire—let alone protect—the humans they swore to help all those years ago.

Intichacha has recruited a few loyal worshipers by appearing in their dreams and guiding them to *Huaca de Chena*—an old Incan fortress, ceremonial center, and astronomical observatory—but there aren't enough of them yet for Intichacha to lead a true faction in the city. In fact, many *Santiaguines* turn away from the old god in their dreams, determined to ignore the call toward the light. As Doña Inés gathers her allies and strikes her deals, Intichacha fears that it's already too late.

### ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Intichacha has an innocence that makes them appear young and naive to mortals, and the power and wisdom of a god of light and warmth. They see the best in everybody, even when the person in question has hurt or betrayed the old god. But Intichacha is fragile, even as their strength grows. They have the ability to inspire greatness, but their form is painfully mortal and in need of constant protection. They know they need humanity, perhaps even more than humanity needs them.

## MORTALIS FACTION

### ADVENIAT REGNUM TUUM

- ◆ Size: 4
  - ◆ Strength: 2
  - ◆ Assets: fanatical hunters, elite connections
- According to their official facade, Adveniat Regnum Tuum (ART) is a traditional Catholic order seeking to bring about "the Kingdom of God" by following written scripture to the letter in everyday life. In reality, the order has grown into a fanatical nest of hunters with a very specific purpose: to purge the world—or at least the city—of all that is "not of God."

ART was originally a traditional order, hosting mass and other events for local families. Things changed when their leader, Father Sarakiel Dehesa (he/him), discovered a member had literally sold her soul to a demon to save her own brother from cancer. Shocked by the corruption in his own house, Father Sarakiel's solution was to save her soul by purifying her body through holy fire...despite her protests.

Father Dehesa expected to be imprisoned—or at least expelled from ART—but the order's leadership considered his cruelty an unprecedented display of inspiring faith. Struck by his purity, they decided to dedicate ART to destroying the "aberrations" that roam God's green earth, taking the fight to the demons, werepumas, ghosts, and vampires of Santiago—the very creatures they had all whispered about but never had the courage to confront.

Filled with devout followers and enabled by wealthy leaders, ART is large—but still fairly new to hunting supernatural creatures. The area around their church is a haven of "purity" that they would love to expand to a greater part of Santiago...

### POTENTIAL STARTING STATUS

- ◆ Striving: Wary of Doña Inés' rise to power, the leaders of ART are seeking information about her whereabouts, hoping to strike first.
- ◆ Maintaining: Some in ART are aware of the threat Doña Inés poses, but others are intrigued by her religiosity. Is it possible God himself sent her?

# NIGHT

At first, ghosts and werepumas were the most numerous and influential forces in Santiago. In those times, the spirits of the dead regularly interacted with the living, often through the help of shamans and mediums. The shapeshifters, on the other hand, were considered defenders of the people and hunters of night horrors. They kept the blood-drinking monsters at bay, leaving them hungry and feeding on whatever animals they could hunt down on the outskirts of the community.

As the city grew—and the Spanish brought new vampires from Europe to feed alongside the Andean *pishtacos*—the werepumas were forced to concede the city, taking refuge in the wilderness areas. By the time Doña Inés first rose to power, there was little to stop the vampires from feeding as they pleased, and the werepumas and ghosts got used to living as second-class citizens within their own city. The resulting tumultuous decades did little to restore how things were all those years ago.

The return of Doña Inés has brought about a new struggle for the Circle. Ought they side with her, knowing what a monster she is, because she claims to be better than any other dictator? Or is there some nobility in resisting her lure and finding some other way to establish themselves in the wake of so much change in Santiago? No one is truly sure.

So the agents of Doña Inés go from faction to faction—to the werepumas and ghosts and everyone else in Night—and offer sweet promises of security and safety amidst the rising tide of fascism and xenophobia. Each night, their words find more willing listeners, both in those who leave their faction for whatever it is Doña Inés is building and in those who seek to ally their own faction with whatever forces she can muster.

## SANTIAGO NIGHT MOVES

- ◆ Remind an innocent mortal why they should fear the darkness
- ◆ Treat enemies as friends, and friends as beloved
- ◆ Meddle in the affairs of a mortal in order to remember what it feels like to be human
- ◆ Push a member of the Circle to join a side or face the consequences

## INÉS DE SUÁREZ STATUS-2

- ◆ **Look:** Conforming, Spanish, formal clothing, early 40s
- ◆ **Drive:** rule Santiago from the shadows
- ◆ **Debts:** owes Don Luis de Amunátegui
- ◆ **Associated Factions:** Reconquista (reforming)

Inés (she/her) always hated her life as a woman. No, you can't learn how to fight. No, you can't study at the university. No, you can't become a soldier. No, you can't remain single. No, no, no, no.

She wanted to do as she pleased, but she knew that fighting society's norms could land her in a mental institution. So she played her God-given role to the best of her ability. She was the perfect daughter, the perfect sister, the perfect wife, and the perfect widow.

Yet all the lying and posturing and pretending took its toll on her, twisting and ruining something inside her. By 30, she was a complete sociopath...and an expert liar. So good, in fact, that she deceived an ancient Spanish vampire into turning her into one of the blood-drinking undead. This old lord of the dark did so expecting to garner for himself a companion to share all nights to come. He was so wrong.

As soon as her transformation was complete—and she'd learned everything she needed to know from him—she destroyed him and left the old world to go and be herself in the new one. A new self. Free.

Her time ruling Santiago is like a fond memory—hazy, incomplete, and utterly pleasurable. She knows that she's lost time, lost followers, lost control...but all that's in the past now. It's only a matter of time before she rebuilds the faction she lost—the Reconquista—secures the alliances she needs, and seizes every last inch of the city she thinks is hers and hers alone.

## ROLEPLAYING NOTES

This new age Doña Inés has awoken to may be strange, but it seems (to her) ripe for the taking. People are weak and fearful; they just need a strong hand to guide them. The only obstacles along the way are the usual rebels and ungodly undesirables, and she will crush them once her power is fully restored. A small sip of that savage pagan's blood brought her back after two centuries; she dreams about what would happen if she could drink Intichacha dry.



## ROMUALDITO STATUS-2

- ◆ **Look:** shifting, Latinx, formal clothing, small boy
- ◆ **Drive:** be named a saint by the Catholic Church
- ◆ **Debts:** owes Viejo Barbón (page 303)
- ◆ **Associated Factions:** La Mixta (page 301)

Romualdito (he/him) cannot remember much about his life with certainty. Even his name may have been different. The only fact of the matter is that people, for whatever reason, decided to build an *animita* (“roadside shrine”) in his honor. One that, almost a hundred years after its construction, is among Santiago’s most famous and revered.

All this attention and dedication means a lot of power in the afterlife, but it comes with strings attached. At one point Romualdito’s ghost was that of a middle-aged man but, to his dismay, most of his admirers didn’t revere an adult; they honored the memory of a young boy. So he had to make a choice: either he remained a full-grown man (and have all that emotion go to waste) or accepted the most popular theory about him—and change accordingly. He did the latter.

Nowadays things aren’t any easier. These are skeptical times, and most people no longer believe in *animitas* granting wishes or performing miracles. Many of the once mighty *ánimas* (souls in purgatory) have diminished or even entirely disappeared, consumed by oblivion. To make matters worse, new *animitas* erected to remember famous people have given those ghosts some of the power that was once only Romualdito’s.

It matters not. He has already made the greatest sacrifice for power—his memories and his form—and, if everything goes well, he’ll transcend even this form to become an official saint, a goal that has driven him for decades. And in the future who knows? He may yet become something greater still.

### ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Romualdito is pleasant to those who approach him with the respect and honors he deserves. Those who disrespect him, however, very quickly find themselves humiliated and ashamed. He has no time to waste with anger or displays of power. For him, people—mortal or supernatural alike—are either useful or they’re not. The first must be treated well for as long as they remain helpful. The second must be disposed of, hopefully with as little waste of resources as possible.

## NIGHT FACTION

### NEWEN

- ◆ **Size:** 3
- ◆ **Strength:** 1
- ◆ **Assets:** loyal werekin

Newen members consider themselves to be the proud, modern-day descendants of one of the city’s oldest traditions: that of humans who can transform into the largest native cat in the Americas: pumas. Their name is a word in the language of Santiago’s (and Chile’s) largest aboriginal people: the Mapuche. In that tongue, *newen* means many things: strength, power, vigor, energy. Many in their ranks are Mapuche, but the faction also believes their ability to shapeshift comes from “the Newen,” which originated all of reality, a force which compels them to be a “strength” for their people.

As a result, in the last few years many parts of the city have dawned marked by these werepumas with graffiti—some elaborate, some crude—with this sacred name. Newen have had a good run since the *Estallido Social* (“Social Outburst”), claiming and fighting for more territory on Santiago, sometimes even going as far as claiming entire neighborhoods at the city’s inner heart, a zone usually dominated without opposition by factions in Power.

Amidst the rising fascism, however, the werepumas are conflicted. Their ranks increase slowly as new people awaken the newen within to become shapeshifters but some in the group want to try actively recruiting, biting people to induce this awakening and swell their numbers. This method is supposed to be an ancient tradition that’s been rediscovered recently, but many of the oldest members consider it sacrilegious. The youngsters, on the other hand, argue that it is either this or die fighting without much hope.

### POTENTIAL STARTING STATUSES

- ◆ **Striving:** Newen members are dedicated to expanding their territory and increasing their membership, even if that leads to a fight with Doña Inés...
- ◆ **Collapsing:** A battle for dominance has left the Newen without clear leadership. Doña Inés is courting one group of the survivors to join her.

# POWER

As the official capital of the country—and the informal “only city that matters” in the long and thin country that’s Chile—Santiago has always been the undisputed seat of power west of the Andes and south of Perú. As such, this is the true battleground of those who claim the mystical arts to be their part and parcel, and one can find as many philosophies, practices, and approaches to it as there are practitioners.

The city’s two most prominent Power factions—the *Gran Logia* (“Grand Lodge”) and *La Mixta* (“The Mixed”)—are local Freemasons’ chapters competing for position and privilege, always recruiting as many powerful and promising magic-users as they can by offering them forbidden knowledge and the resources necessary to achieve their full potential. Although the rivalry has remained mostly bloodless, both factions are scheming to become the one at the top, hoping to be perceived as the most knowledgeable even if that means eventually coming to blows.

Caught in between these two poles of magical study are countless small groups of magic-users who peer into the arcane in hopes of unlocking some mystery or influence that would allow them to rise to the top. Santiago has New Age witches, aboriginal *machi* (shamans), self-appointed gurus and enlightened masters of every denomination, as well as the usual astrologists, supposed prophets, Christian-faith priests, tarot readers, and fortune tellers on every corner.

Although these isolated magi may seem unimportant, their help could prove crucial for the maneuvers of any of the other factions, within and without Power. Most of them are willing to make such allegiances, especially those who feel they’ve been underestimated. The powers-that-be may be satisfied standing on the sidelines while Doña Inés seizes control, but many of those closest to the street might see things differently.

## SANTIAGO POWER MOVES

- ◆ Demonstrate true power to be much subtler and insidious than anticipated
- ◆ Make the cost of real magic unpredictable and invaluable
- ◆ Misdirect with fashionable displays of sorcery
- ◆ Reveal true magic in the most unexpected place

## ADRIÁN MICHAUD STATUS-1

- ◆ **Look:** nonconforming, Indigenous, casual clothes, mid-20s
- ◆ **Drive:** rid myself of this “gift”
- ◆ **Debts:** owes Romualdito (page 299)
- ◆ **Associated Factions:** None

Unbeknownst to him and his close family, Adrián (he/him) was born with the Sight. He did his best to endure what he saw around him—spirits and ghosts alike—but by age 24, it had been a little too much. Adrián found a way out through a bottle and some pills, and he took it. Or so he thought.

When he woke up a couple of days later in a hospital bed, he knew something was wrong. He hadn’t been alone for ages, but he was now accompanied by just a single ghost. Tentatively, he talked to the old woman sitting beside him, smoking a stinky cigarette. It turned out to be his great-great grandmother, Julia Lara de Michaud, the “best” Chilean witch and seer of all time.

From then on she taught him how to use his gift for what she called “the Greater Good.” To the shy and introverted Adrián this turned out to be quite the challenge, as Julia wants him to work against anyone “misusing the Gift.” She’s especially focused on the two surviving famous and feared *Magas de Pinochet* (“Pinochet’s She-Wizards”), who are trying to make use of the current political climate of the city to recover their lost strength.

At first, Adrián tried to reason with his ancestor. When she didn’t listen, he gave her an ultimatum: either she took things more slowly or he’d stop cooperating. In that moment she revealed a painful truth. She had intervened to save his life and now considered this service “payment”—and it wouldn’t stop until he dies. Shocked and humiliated by this revelation, Adrián now looks for a way to get rid of his “gift”...and of his great-great grandmother’s spirit in the process.

## ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Adrián is always tired and distracted, haunted by the various spirits and otherwise invisible presences that appear to him as clear as day. He has a hard time looking at others, as he often sees the unseen apparitions who follow them around. For now he keeps Madame Michaud at bay with most of his energy, as he desperately looks for a way to release himself from this obligation.



## LEONOR TOURNIER STATUS-3

- ◆ **Look:** conforming, Latinx, formal clothing, mid-30s
- ◆ **Drive:** become the greatest sorceress in the city
- ◆ **Debts:** owes Adrián Michaud
- ◆ **Associated Factions:** The Gran Logia

Leonor's father wanted a son. According to the Freemason tradition in which he was raised, only male heirs could achieve the highest ranks in his most cherished order. When his progeny turned out to be a girl, he was disappointed that his child would never join him as a fellow wizard of the lodge.

Yet...Leonor (she/her) proved to be a curious and gifted magician from a very young age. Her father tried to avoid teaching her magic, but he was her first convert of many. In the end, he risked everything to have her face the Gran Logia's initiation ritual, suing for the right to break from their most cherished (and sexist) traditions. The request was a massive surprise to most, especially the elders. Some asked for a trial to expel Leonor's father from the order, so offended they were at the sight of a woman. There was loud protesting, whispered intrigue, and plenty of murderous stares. All of them were silenced once Leonor demonstrated a mere fraction of her power and knowledge.

Years later, the previous Grand Master and Great Hierophant died and named Leonor as inheritor. Since then she's been doing her best to modernize the antiquated organization, recruiting a diverse set of young wizards, modifying chauvinistic rules and rituals, and otherwise dragging the Gran Logia forward into the 21st century. She is determined to show the city that her father's dream outlives his death last year, an event that seems to have hardened her in her approach to rivals like La Mixta.

A fellow member of the order, Odalis (they/them), has convinced Leonor that a truce with Doña Inés will help them finally get the best of La Mixta and rise to be the premier Santiago lodge. She is skeptical of the alliance, but cannot deny that it would be useful to have an ancient vampire to do their dirty work.

### ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Lenore is her father's daughter: arrogant beyond reason, skilled beyond measure, and willing to break with everything that's come before to create a better future. Her obsession with La Mixta is simple—now that she's reformed the Gran Logia, there is no need for La Mixta to exist. It's clear La Mixta should concede their charter and fall in line, like everyone else, behind her leadership.

## POWER FACTION

### LA MIXTA

- ◆ **Size:** 2
- ◆ **Strength:** 3
- ◆ **Assets:** established safehouses, magical library, well-funded staff

La Mixta was originally founded as a Mixed Grand Lodge in France in 1893. 35 years later, the Santiago version was born, following the same principles as the original French counterpart: they wanted to be able to teach women how to do "proper" magic.

For half a century, they were the underdog of the magic community. Mocked, despised, and reviled by most of Power, they suddenly rose to power in 1973 alongside the military coup d'état; three of their members—afterwards known as *Las Magas de Pinochet* ("The She-Wizards of Pinochet")—became key advisors of the dictator.

For the next 40 years La Mixta only grew in power. They positioned themselves as the de facto strongest faction among all of Power—and at times even the strongest faction in the city. But privilege makes people complacent...and fools of us all. As the dictatorship faded, so too did their influence, and their old enemies took advantage of their weakness to undermine their holdings and reduce their numbers. Just thirty years later, only a fraction of La Mixta still lives in Santiago, even if the order has held on to most of the group's assets.

Their newly elected leader, Esperanza Sierra (she/her), has vowed to return the organization to its previous glory, and has been working to reestablish old ties to the government. Only time will tell if La Mixta is willing to go as far as supporting a new dictatorship, should one arise in the mortal world.

### POTENTIAL STARTING STATUS

- ◆ **Maintaining:** La Mixta is determined to avoid trouble in the face of the coming storm; their members have taken shelter, hoping to reemerge when it's all over.
- ◆ **Striving:** The order is working with several mortal politicians to transfer property to La Mixta in preparation for a ritual designed to exert more control over Santiago itself.

As long as there has been a human settlement in the Mapocho-Maipo rivers' basin, people who were born elsewhere have come. They brought with them nature spirits: the *pillán*, inhabitants and animators of things, and the mightier *ngen*, masters and owners of reality. These two have all but disappeared in the face of the city's ruthless urbanization.

The Incans who arrived circa 1400 BC brought alongside them supernatural creatures, but only one of them is left: Intichacha (page 297). In contrast, the Spanish invaders brought a horde: angels like Sabathiel, Angel of Conquest (they/them) and Azazel, Angel of Death (they/them), many demons, and a flood of *duendes*. All those angels and demons have diminished in power over the centuries, but would side with Doña Inés if she made the right overtures.

As for the *duendes*, they've been sighted all over the city for centuries, and they seemingly all know each other, at least by name. They tend to be interested in facilitating deals and "taking care" of any promises being sworn in their presence. As such, they're more interested in serving as witnesses and third-parties than in joining a side in the city's conflicts. If things get too messy, they have plans to depart this dimension for one more peaceful until things blow over.

The supernaturals who have arrived in the last three decades tend to have a harder time packing their bags and returning. Legends from all over South America now call the city home, and some of the Haitian Vodou Iwa have also come to reside here, alongside some assorted supernaturals from the Middle East and East Asia. These groups, although almost extinct (*Iwa*) or being heavily persecuted (South American folk beings) don't have the easy exits the *duendes* have at their disposal; they would have to fight to weather the coming storm.

## SANTIAGO WILD MOVES

- ♦ Conjure up some magic from another place or time to solve a problem
- ♦ Appear to a compatriot in an unusual place or setting to offer aid or information
- ♦ Propose a lucrative deal with concealed problems
- ♦ Produce a useful item, as if it had always been there, just out of sight

## CATALINA DE LOS RÍOS STATUS-1

- ♦ **Look:** conforming, Latinx, expensive clothing, mid-40s
- ♦ **Drive:** dissolve my marriage with Arcoiris Negro
- ♦ **Debts:** owes Leonor Tournier (page 301)
- ♦ **Associated Factions:** None

*Torturer. Murderer of her own father. Opulent and irresponsible harlot, whose lovers went from beds of lust to dungeons of death. She who turned her back on Christ and offered her body and soul to the Devil.*

These and harsher words have been used to describe Catalina (she/her), better known as *La Quintrala*, a ruthless state owner during Chile's Colonial period. She was born at the dawn of the 17th century, and supposedly died at the ripe age of 61. But when old age showed its first marks on her, she went to her beloved Christ and asked him to stop it. Commoners and slaves—even other nobles—grew old and died. She wouldn't. She couldn't. And when God didn't answer her prayers, she looked elsewhere.

It's true she tried to summon the Devil, but no demon came. Instead, it was a *duende* who answered her call. Her vulgar name was *Arcoiris Negro* (Black Rainbow), and she was supernaturally beautiful and dark as a starless night. Arcoiris said she could grant Catalina's wish of everlasting life, youth, beauty, and charm. In return, Arcoiris only wanted a companion—a wife, if you will—for eternity.

Catalina agreed... on some conditions of her own. She wanted a non-exclusive deal: she'd be free to do as she pleased with her days, and Arcoiris would have only her nights, from dusk 'till dawn. The deal was struck and they've been a happy couple ever since.

And yet...Catalina can't stand being married. She's been plotting an escape for centuries and she's tried everything. She loves Arcoiris, but she's not the "wife-type" (her words). Thus, she seeks powerful allies—no matter their politics or allegiances—to free her. So far, however, none have been able to do so.

## ROLEPLAYING NOTES

Catalina is the perfect combination of brutal power, conventional beauty, and ever-lasting charm. She has a commanding voice and the ability to seduce nearly anyone. Catalina is resourceful, completely without guilt, and ready to do anything—and everything—to be free once again, to be restored to the good old days of her cruel rule.



## VIEJO BARBÓN STATUS-2

- ◆ **Look:** conforming, White, colorful clothing, early 60s
- ◆ **Drive:** find my one true love
- ◆ **Debts:** owes Adrián Michaud (page 300)
- ◆ **Associated Factions:** Momoyes

Many *duendes* came with the Spanish invaders. Some were nice and some were not. *Viejo Barbón* (they/them) may have been the nicest.

They were already old when they arrived in the city, and they weren't in good condition. The journey had been long and hard and, most importantly, devoid of romantic love. As all *duendes* do, they had a taste for bargains. In *Viejo Barbón's* case, their specialty was oaths of love. They could sanction any pledges of that kind, but the most common were those of romantic love. As soon as they arrived in Santiago, though, there were plenty of eternal love promises to bless. And as the city became a war frontier, the oaths only increased and became stronger, as soldiers said their farewells before leaving for battle and certain death.

As Santiago grew, the *duende* thrived. In time they came to have a place truly of their own: the *Quebrada del Viejo Barbón* ("Old Longbeard's Ravine"), at the city's heart, where all lovers came to swear unending love to each other. Thanks to having so many unbroken love oaths under their custody, *Viejo Barbón* grew mighty. However, their power didn't corrupt. Instead, it deepened their love for the people who swore to uphold the love they shared.

Then the coup d'état happened and, twelve years later, a massive earthquake ravaged Santiago. And just like that, most of *Viejo Barbón's* power and status was gone. They didn't grow desperate. They patiently waited for a better time to come. A more loving time. *Viejo Barbón* has been waiting for almost 40 years, and they are beginning to worry that such a time will never come. Could a romance of their own be the key to reigniting Santiago's flame?

### ROLEPLAYING NOTES

*Viejo Barbón* is the literal embodiment of love and kindness, and always has time for anybody who needs help with love matters. They see the best in everyone, and they are very good at reading those who come to them. If someone breaks a love oath sworn in their presence, however, they're a terror to behold. Their vengeance against those who do knows no bounds.

## WILD FACTION

### MOMOYES

- ◆ **SIZE:** 2
  - ◆ **STRENGTH:** 2
  - ◆ **ASSETS:** sacred water caches, hidden homes
- Venezuelans have been immigrating to Santiago since at least the early 1990's, but they started doing so in greater numbers around 2016. Alongside them came miscellaneous supernaturals; mightiest among those were the Momoyes.

These northern Andes aboriginal fae have strong ties to nature, and a particular affinity for water in all its forms and manifestations. Yet in spite of being criss-crossed by two rivers, Santiago has some of the worst environmental conditions on the continent. Water is both contaminated and scarce in the city, and the Momoyes have struggled.

And then, things took a turn for the better.

At first the pandemic hit the immigrants—and the Momoyes, by extension—hard but, as the industries slowed down and mortals stayed at home, the water got cleaner. Rain fell and washed away the dirt and grime. And the Momoyes got stronger.

As the pandemic ended, many Venezuelans have left or been expelled, and most of the supernaturals who came with them have left as well. The Momoyes, however, remain steadfast. Santiago is their home, and they're getting more and more in tune with the city's nature. This year has been the rainiest in decades, and they're just getting started.

### POTENTIAL STARTING STATUS

- ◆ **Striving:** Under the guidance of their ally, *Viejo Barbón*, the Momoyes are determined to find a permanent water source of their own.
- ◆ **Collapsing:** Years of oppression and abuse at the hands of both mortals and other supernaturals have weakened the Momoyes to the point of collapse; they need help and shelter to make it through the season.





# APPENDIX



# BASIC MOVES

## TURN TO VIOLENCE

When you **turn to violence**, roll with **BLOOD**. On a hit, you inflict harm as established and your opposition chooses 1:

- ♦ they inflict harm on you
- ♦ they put you in a bad spot
- ♦ they create an opening to flee

On a 10+, you also choose 1:

- ♦ you inflict terrible harm
- ♦ you take something from them
- ♦ you create an opportunity for an ally

## ESCAPE A SITUATION

When you **take advantage of an opening to escape a situation**, roll with **BLOOD**. On a hit, you get away and choose 1. On a 7-9, the MC chooses 1 as well:

- ♦ you suffer harm during your escape
- ♦ you end up in another dangerous situation
- ♦ you leave something important behind
- ♦ you owe an NPC a Debt for their aid
- ♦ you give into your base nature and mark corruption

## PERSUADE AN NPC

When you **persuade an NPC with seduction, promises, or threats**, roll with **HEART**. On a hit, they see your point and do as you ask. On a 7-9, they counter your offer or demand payment—a Debt, a favor, resources—before agreeing to follow through. If you invoke a Debt with the NPC before you roll, add +3 to your total (max+4).

## FIGURE SOMEONE OUT

When you try to **figure someone out**, roll with **MIND**. On a hit, ask 2. On a 7-9, they ask 1 of you as well. If you're in their Circle, ask an additional question, even on a miss.

- ♦ who's pulling your character's strings?
- ♦ what's your character's beef with \_\_\_\_\_?
- ♦ what's your character hoping to get from \_\_\_\_\_?
- ♦ what does your character worry is going to happen?
- ♦ how could I get your character to \_\_\_\_\_?
- ♦ how could I put your character in my Debt?

## MISLEAD, DISTRACT, OR TRICK

When you try to **mislead, distract, or trick** someone, roll with **MIND**. On a hit, they are fooled, at least for a moment. On a 10+, pick 3. On a 7-9, pick 2:

- ♦ you create an opportunity
- ♦ you expose a weakness or flaw
- ♦ you confuse them for some time
- ♦ you avoid further entanglement

## KEEP YOUR COOL

When things get real and you **keep your cool**, tell the MC the situation you want to avoid and roll with **SPIRIT**. On a 10+, all's well. On a 7-9, the MC will tell you what it's gonna cost you.

## LET IT OUT

When you **let out the power within you**, choose an ability from your playbook and roll with **SPIRIT**. On a hit, mark corruption and activate the ability; the MC will tell you how the effect is costly, limited, or unstable. On a 10+, ignore the corruption or the complications, your choice.

## LEND A HAND OR GET IN THE WAY

When you **lend a hand or get in the way** after a PC has rolled, roll with their Circle. On a hit, give them a +1 or -2 to their roll. On a 7-9, you expose yourself to danger, entanglement, or cost.

## END OF SESSION

At the end of every session, decide if you've grown closer to a Circle you engaged with this session: increase your score in that Circle and decrease your score in a different Circle. Tell the MC how your relationships to these communities have changed because of the events of the story, and mark one of the two Circles involved in those changes.

In addition, think about any Debts you may owe—or Debts owed to you—as a result of the session. Tell the group and note them down for next session.

# CIRCLE MOVES

## PUT A NAME TO A FACE

When you **put a name to a face or vice versa**, roll with their Circle. On a hit, you know their reputation; the MC will tell you what most people know about them. On a 10+, you've dealt with them before; learn something interesting and useful about them or they owe you a Debt, your choice. On a miss, you don't know them or you owe them, MC's choice.

## HIT THE STREETS

When you **hit the streets to get what you need**, name who you're going to and roll with their Circle. On a hit, they're available and have the stuff! On a 7-9, choose 1:

- ♦ whoever you're going to is juggling their own problems
- ♦ whatever you need is more costly than anticipated

## STUDY A PLACE OF POWER

When you **study a sanctuary, gathering spot, or place of power**, roll with the Circle that controls it. On a hit, you see below the surface to the reality underneath; the MC will reveal an area, NPC, or item located within that is not what it seems. On a 10+, your insight reveals much about the Circle's politics and schemes; ask the MC a relevant question about the Circle and take +1 forward when acting on the answer.

# ADVANCED MOVES

- ☐ **Turn to Violence:** On a 12+, you overwhelm your foe; they pick 1 in the face of your superior prowess:
  - ♦ they cower, terrified; you have them at your mercy until you release them...or kill them
  - ♦ they offer to parley, impressed; you take a +1 ongoing against them until time passes
  - ♦ they fight on, foolishly; take all 3 options from the 10+ list and choose 1 for double effect
- ☐ **Escape a Situation:** On a 12+, you get away and make an important discovery.
- ☐ **Persuade an NPC:** On a 12+, they do what you ask and help you see it through to its end.
- ☐ **Figure Someone Out:** On a 12+, you can ask any questions you like, not limited to the list.
- ☐ **Mislead, Distract, or Trick:** On a 12+, you get all 4 and choose 1 for double effect.
- ☐ **Keep Your Cool:** On a 12+, your opposition's cool is compromised. Tell them what it will cost to maintain their current course of action.
- ☐ **Let It Out:** On a 12+, your powers or abilities manifest in an unexpectedly useful way. Mark corruption to make that manifestation a new ability.

# DEBT MOVES

## DO SOMEONE A FAVOR

When you **do someone a favor**, they owe you a Debt.

## OVERLOOK A HARM

When someone **agrees to overlook a harm you've done to them**, you owe them a Debt.

## CASH IN A DEBT

When you **cash in a Debt**, remind your debtor why they owe you in order to...

...make a PC:

- ♦ answer a question honestly
- ♦ do you a favor at moderate cost
- ♦ **lend a hand** to your efforts
- ♦ **get in the way** of someone else
- ♦ erase a Debt they hold on someone
- ♦ give you a Debt they hold on someone else

...make an NPC:

- ♦ answer a question honestly
- ♦ arrange a meeting with an NPC in their Circle
- ♦ grant you a worthy boon or useful gift
- ♦ erase a Debt they hold on someone
- ♦ give you a Debt they hold on someone else

## REFUSE TO HONOR A DEBT

When you **refuse to honor a Debt**, roll with the difference in Status between you and your creditor. On a hit, you weasel out of the obligation for now, but you still owe the Debt. On a 7-9, you owe them an additional Debt or mark corruption, your choice. On a miss, you can't avoid the hammer: either honor the Debt in full or erase all the Debts owed to you by their Circle and take a -1 ongoing to Status with their Circle until after time passes.



# PLAYBOOK ADVANCEMENT

## THE AWARE

- ☐ ☐ ☐ +1 Status (max+1)
- ☐ a new Aware move
- ☐ a new Aware move
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ open a new mortal relationship

### AFTER 5 ADVANCES

- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ obtain Circle Status-2
- ☐ erase a scar
- ☐ change your Circle
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ change to a new playbook

## THE FAE

- ☐ ☐ ☐ +1 Status (max+1)
- ☐ a new Fae move
- ☐ a new Fae move
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ change your Circle

### AFTER 5 ADVANCES

- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ obtain Circle Status-2
- ☐ acquire a knightly title
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ retire your character to safety
- ☐ change to a new playbook

## THE HUNTER

- ☐ ☐ ☐ +1 Status (max+1)
- ☐ a new Hunter move
- ☐ a new Hunter move
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ change your Circle

### AFTER 5 ADVANCES

- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ obtain Circle Status-2
- ☐ erase a scar
- ☐ get a **workshop**
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ change to a new playbook

## THE IMP

- ☐ ☐ ☐ +1 Status (max+1)
- ☐ a new Imp move
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ change your Circle
- ☐ change your Circle

### AFTER 5 ADVANCES

- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ obtain Circle Status-2
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ get *The Devil Inside*
- ☐ change to a new playbook

## THE ORACLE

- ☐ ☐ ☐ +1 Status (max+1)
- ☐ a new Oracle move
- ☐ a new Oracle move
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ change your Circle

### AFTER 5 ADVANCES

- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ obtain Circle Status-2
- ☐ get a **sanctum**
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ change to a new playbook
- ☐ retire your character to safety

## THE SPECTRE

- ☐ ☐ ☐ +1 Status (max+1)
- ☐ a new Spectre move
- ☐ a new Spectre move
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ change your Circle

### AFTER 5 ADVANCES

- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ obtain Circle Status-2
- ☐ erase a scar
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ resolve one of your anchors
- ☐ change to a new playbook

## THE SWORN

- ☐ ☐ ☐ +1 Status (max+1)
- ☐ a new Sworn move
- ☐ a new Sworn move
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ Power Status: 2

### AFTER 5 ADVANCES

- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ erase a scar
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ change to a new playbook
- ☐ retire your character to safety

## THE TAINTED

- ☐ ☐ ☐ +1 Status (max+1)
- ☐ erase a scar
- ☐ a new Tainted move
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ change your Circle

### AFTER 5 ADVANCES

- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ obtain Circle Status-2
- ☐ gain *Fiendish Underlings*
- ☐ erase a job from your contract
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ change to a new playbook

## THE VAMP

- ☐ ☐ ☐ +1 Status (max+1)
- ☐ a new Vamp move
- ☐ a new Vamp move
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ change your Circle

### AFTER 5 ADVANCES

- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ obtain Circle Status-2
- ☐ erase a scar
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ retire your character to safety
- ☐ change to a new playbook

## THE VETERAN

- ☐ ☐ ☐ +1 Status (max+1)
- ☐ a new Veteran move
- ☐ a new Veteran move
- ☐ Mortalis Status: 2
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ change your Circle

### AFTER 5 ADVANCES

- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ erase a scar
- ☐ add 2 resources to your workshop
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ change to a new playbook
- ☐ retire your character to safety

## THE WIZARD

- ☐ ☐ ☐ +1 Status (max+1)
- ☐ add 2 resources to your sanctum
- ☐ learn 3 more spells
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ change your Circle

### AFTER 5 ADVANCES

- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ obtain Circle Status-2
- ☐ bond with a familiar
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ advance 3 basic moves
- ☐ retire your character to safety
- ☐ change to a new playbook

## THE WOLF

- ☐ ☐ ☐ +1 Status (max+1)
- ☐ a new Wolf move
- ☐ a new Wolf move
- ☐ join or lead a wolf pack
- ☐ a move from another playbook
- ☐ change your Circle

### AFTER 5 ADVANCES

- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ +1 any Circle (max+3)
- ☐ obtain Circle Status-2
- ☐ advance four basic moves
- ☐ erase a scar
- ☐ erase a scar
- ☐ retire your character to safety
- ☐ change to a new playbook

# FACTION MOVES

## OPENLY ATTACK A FACTION

When a faction openly attacks another faction, roll with the difference between the two factions' Sizes. On a hit, the targeted faction sacrifices an appropriate asset or loses a point of Size, their choice. On a 7-9, the attacking faction must sacrifice an appropriate asset or lose a point of Size as well. On a miss, the target instead springs a clever trap; they capture or destroy an asset or reduce the attacker's Size, their choice.

## DEVELOP INFRASTRUCTURE

When the leaders of a faction develop infrastructure, commit a secure asset and roll with their Strength. On a hit, the asset becomes vulnerable, and they pick 2:

- ♦ they attract new members; mark recruitment
- ♦ they acquire new holdings; mark resources
- ♦ they solidify control: make a vulnerable asset secure

On a 10+, a messy opportunity for growth also arises; if the faction (or its allies) seize it before time passes, they mark recruitment or resources, as appropriate. On a miss, their plan for expansion ignites a schism within the faction; all of their assets are considered vulnerable until one side of the conflict seizes full control.

## GOAD AN OPPONENT

When a faction tries to goad an opponent into making a mistake, roll with the difference between the two factions' Strengths. On a 10+, the target takes the bait; the instigating faction strikes a terrible blow, destroys a vulnerable asset, or undermines a key relationship or alliance. On a 7-9, the target avoids the worst of the trap, but causes enough trouble to embarrass themselves; they take a -1 ongoing to Strength until they reestablish their reputation. On a miss, the target sees through the scheme; someone from the targeted faction comes to one of the PCs for help turning the tables against the instigating faction.

## SEIZE BY FORCE

When a faction seizes a vulnerable asset by force, roll with their Strength. On a hit, they take hold of it, seizing or transforming it for their own purposes. On a 10+, all three. On a 7-9, they choose one:

- ♦ they don't sacrifice a leader or ally
- ♦ they don't cause serious collateral damage
- ♦ they don't suffer an immediate, retaliatory attack

On a miss, the strike instead results in the utter destruction of the thing the attacking faction attempted to seize; the MC picks just one off the list, and someone comes to one of the PCs looking for help obtaining justice or revenge.

# TRACK SOMEONE DOWN

When a faction tries to track a Status-1 or Status-2 character down within the city, roll.

- ♦ If the faction has a relevant asset, add 1
- ♦ If their quarry is of the same Circle, add 1
- ♦ If the faction is Size-1 or Strength-1, subtract 1
- ♦ If their quarry is actively hiding, subtract 1

**If the quarry is an NPC:** On a 7-9, the faction finds their quarry; they attack them, kidnap them, or confront them at some cost. On a 10+, they catch the quarry exposed or vulnerable; the faction can act upon the quarry with impunity. On a miss, the faction's attempts to track them down succeed, but their agents make a mess of things and allow the quarry to escape.

**If the quarry is a PC:** On a 7-9, the faction tracks down their location, but the PC has time to prepare for the limited forces coming their way. On a 10+, the tracking faction gets the best of their quarry; they corner the PC with overwhelming force or careful planning that leaves them little room to avoid their pursuers. On a miss, someone close to the PC tips them off early to the faction's search...and an opportunity or weakness the PC can exploit.

## SEARCH THE CITY

When a faction searches the city for useful information—rare occult knowledge, another faction's weaknesses, the location of an artifact—roll with their Size. On a hit, they uncover some crucial details, enough to ask a PC or notable NPC to pursue things further. On a 7-9, they also pick 2. On a 10+, they also pick 1.

- ♦ they attract the attention of a rival faction
- ♦ they have to make an asset they control vulnerable
- ♦ they take -1 ongoing until the end of the next faction turn

On a miss, a member of the inquiring faction ends up dead or missing...but not before passing off some vital info resulting from the search to one of the PCs.

## OFFER PASSAGE

When a faction offers passage to someone—into or out of the city—roll with their Size. On a hit, the way is made clear, no matter who opposes it; choose 1:

- ♦ the traveler exits; they are beyond reach until they choose to return
- ♦ the traveler enters; the faction gains a powerful asset

On a 7-9, the passage offends a Status-3 NPC who seeks tribute for the trespass; the faction must perform a favor—dedicating a faction move next faction turn—sacrifice an asset, or risk open war. On a miss, the passage sparks a conflict between the faction and their own allies before it can be completed; someone comes to one of the PCs seeking help to negotiate a truce.



# CITY MOVES

## WEAKEN SOMEONE'S STANDING

When you try to **weaken someone's standing in a Circle with rumor and gossip**, roll with Status in their Circle. On a hit, the rumors take hold; they take -1 ongoing to moves during the faction turn until they find some way to dispel the whispers. On a 10+, one of their enemies catches wind of your gossip and approaches you with damaging information about your target or their interests. On a miss, your target traces the stories directly back to you...and catches you in a vulnerable spot before you can react.

## PUT OUT THE WORD

When you **put out the word to your Circle that you need something**—a magical tome, secret information, a skilled bodyguard, etc.—roll with Status. On a 10+, it shows up in the hands of an ally; it's yours for a Debt. On a 7-9, it ends up with a rival; they want a favor or gift—their choice—in addition to a Debt before they hand it over. On a miss, the thing shows up on your doorstep with wicked strings attached, exposing you to the wrath of a Status-3 NPC from another Circle.

## CONSULT YOUR CONTACTS

When you **consult your contacts** in any Circle, roll with Status in that Circle. On a hit, ask 3; your contacts will answer to the best of their ability. On a 7-9, hold 1. On a 10+, hold 2. Spend your hold—1 for 1—to take a 10+ instead of rolling when the information you gained would aid you on a move.

- ◆ What conflict is everyone talking about?
- ◆ What happened to \_\_\_\_\_?
- ◆ What has \_\_\_\_\_ been up to recently?
- ◆ Who is responsible for \_\_\_\_\_?
- ◆ Who has a Debt on \_\_\_\_\_?

On a miss, ask 1 and hold 1, but one of your contacts has a tough question about your loyalties and allegiances as well. Answer it honestly, mark corruption, or owe them a Debt, your choice.

## TEND TO YOUR BUSINESS

When you **tend to your business instead of meddling in city affairs**, tell the MC how you pass the time and roll. On a hit, you tend to your affairs...but an old friend or new ally approaches you with a request for help; mark a corruption if you turn them down. On a 10+, ask the MC a question about the situation; they will answer it honestly. On a miss, an NPC interrupts your day-to-day business to **cash in a Debt** you hoped they had forgotten about, mixing you up in a mess within your Circle you'd rather have avoided.

## MARSHAL FORCES

When you try to **marshal forces** in your Circle to undermine a faction or their holdings, roll with Status. On a hit, you can give a Debt to a powerful NPC of your Circle—MC's choice—to reduce your target's Strength or weaken their hold on a specific asset, your choice. On a 7-9, your allies are slow to move; give them another Debt or publicly push them into the conflict to speed things along. On a miss, your attempt to secure support falls short...and creates an opportunity for your enemies; tell the MC how you've left yourself vulnerable to them.

## LAY CLAIM

When you **publicly lay claim to an asset you've seized**, roll with Status. On a hit, your claim is recognized across the city; the MC will tell you what benefits the asset itself now brings. On a 7-9, pick 1. On a 10+, all 3.

- ◆ your claim chokes off factional retaliation
- ◆ your claim unites your allies behind you
- ◆ your claim doesn't cost you a Debt

On a miss, your claim falls short as you end up in the crosshairs of a Status-3 NPC who desires the asset as well; the MC will tell you which of your allies or assets they are targeting in an attempt to scare you off.

## RECRUIT NEW ALLIES

When you **recruit allies from another Circle**, tell the MC what assistance you require and roll with your Status in that Circle. On a hit, the MC will tell you who is available for hire; offer up a Debt, and they'll be on call until after the next faction turn. On a 10+, pick 3. On a 7-9, pick 2:

- ◆ they are unfailingly honest
- ◆ they are exceptionally skilled
- ◆ they are notably discreet
- ◆ they are aggressively focused

On a miss, before you can connect with anyone, someone in your own Circle catches word of your request and spreads rumors of your weakness; take -1 ongoing to your Status until you prove your strength to your own people.

## ESTABLISH A FACTION

When you **attempt to establish a new faction**, roll.

- ◆ If you have significant influence over a different Size-2+ faction, add 1.
- ◆ If you have six Debts over Status-3 NPCs from at least two different Circles, add 1.
- ◆ If you have Status-0 in more than one Circle, subtract 1.
- ◆ If you personally control fewer than two assets, subtract 1.

On a hit, raise your status to Status-3 and work with the MC to create a new faction you lead. On a 10+, your rise to power begets new alliances and opportunities; make an additional city move for the next two faction turns. On a 7-9, your rise leads to animosity and jealousy within your own ranks; someone you expected to join you instead betrays you, seizing crucial resources for themselves. On a miss, a Status-3 NPC disrupts the founding; you cannot try again until you win them over...or eliminate them directly.

# THE MASTER OF CEREMONIES

## AGENDAS

- ◆ Make the city feel political and dark
- ◆ Keep the PCs' lives out of control and evolving
- ◆ Play to find out what happens

## PRINCIPLES

- ◆ Display the city, from skyscrapers to slums
- ◆ Put the characters at the center of conflicts, political and personal
- ◆ Address yourself to the characters, not the players
- ◆ Push the characters together, even across boundaries
- ◆ Cloak your moves in darkness and shadow
- ◆ Detail the NPCs who matter to the story
- ◆ Treat everyone according to station and status
- ◆ Ask loads of questions and build on the answers
- ◆ Be a fan of the player characters
- ◆ Dirty the hands of all involved
- ◆ Give everything a price, even friendship
- ◆ Give the players the chance to take the lead

## MOVES

- ◆ Inflict harm or corruption
- ◆ Surface a conflict, ancient or modern
- ◆ Put someone in danger
- ◆ Propose an opportunity with a cost
- ◆ Reveal a deal done in their absence
- ◆ Turn a move back on them
- ◆ Offer or claim a Debt owed
- ◆ Mobilize resources to shift the odds
- ◆ Paint the city in magical tones
- ◆ Lock down, exploit, or claim a place of power
- ◆ Tell the consequences and ask
- ◆ Activate their stuff's downside
- ◆ After every move: "What do you do?"

## THE FIRST SESSION

- ◆ Summon the shadows
- ◆ Springboard off character creation
- ◆ Ask questions constantly
- ◆ Push on relationships and obligations
- ◆ Call out moves when they happen
- ◆ Offer moves when the players flinch
- ◆ Frame scenes with multiple characters
- ◆ Invoke every Circle
- ◆ Let loose with some violence

## MORTALIS MOVES

- ◆ Adapt to the changing circumstances
- ◆ Gather in numbers to confront a threat
- ◆ Discover information that puts someone in danger
- ◆ Remind someone of their mundane obligations

## NIGHT MOVES

- ◆ Display an aggressive show of force
- ◆ Threaten someone's interests or holdings
- ◆ Claim territory from the weak or foolish
- ◆ Make the best of a difficult situation

## POWER MOVES

- ◆ Impose a cost for the greater good
- ◆ Mystically foreshadow a conflict or challenge
- ◆ Act in opposition to chaos or change
- ◆ Snap up magical resources vulnerable or exposed

## WILD MOVES

- ◆ Challenge the PCs with alien expectations and traditions
- ◆ Offer extraordinary assistance for a sticky price
- ◆ Pull something from one realm into another
- ◆ Escalate conflict for reasons mysterious or opaque

## CORRUPTION TRIGGERS

PLAYBOOK	TRIGGER
Aware	When you ignore your mortal commitments or relationships to deal with the supernatural, mark corruption.
Fae	When you break a promise or tell an outright lie, mark corruption.
Hunter	When you injure or greatly endanger an innocent bystander, mark corruption.
Imp	When you make a deal that endangers your family, friends, or community, mark corruption.
Oracle	When you offer a false prophecy—or lie about the details of a true one—mark corruption.
Spectre	When you witness a scene of violence or victimization and do nothing, mark trauma and corruption.
Sworn	When you break one of your vows or work against your masters, mark corruption.
Tainted	When you convince someone to meaningfully act in your patron's interests, mark corruption.
Vamp	When you feed on an unwilling victim, mark corruption.
Veteran	When you knowingly head straight into danger, mark corruption.
Wizard	When you ignore a genuine plea for help from someone vulnerable, mark corruption.
Wolf	When you destroy a threat to your territory instead of driving it out, mark corruption.



# ITEM TAGS

TAG	DESCRIPTION
anchored	mystically anchored to the owner; the item returns upon command, cannot be lost, etc.
armor piercing (ap)	ignores an opponent's armor rating, inflicting full harm.
area	affects an area instead of a single character. When used against a group, ignores the group's size when determining harm inflicted, assuming the group is clustered together closely enough.
autofire	can be used as an +area weapon but doing so exhausts the item, requiring the character to reload or refresh it.
booby-trapped	setup to inflict harm on anyone but the owner interacting with the item; the owner can convey how to avoid the trap to others.
cherished	beloved for sentimental reasons (e.g. family heirloom or lover's gift). Once per session, the owner may ignore marking corruption while using it, but the irrevocable loss of a +cherished possession inflicts a corruption advance.
concealable	easy to keep out of sight, small enough to fit in the pocket of a jacket.
exhausting	quickly tires out the person wielding this item; repeated use may require the user to <b>keep their cool</b> .
fire	ignites nearby combustibles and causes serious burns on any targets it injures; supernatural creatures vulnerable to fire take extra harm and/or flee when a +fire item is used on them.
fragile	brittle or flimsy, likely breaking when it is first used.
loud	when used, everyone nearby hears and can potentially identify what made the noise; it wakes up sleeping people, startles or frightens people who aren't expecting it, etc.
messy	inflicts wounds that are severe and bloody or destroys the environment surrounding the target. These items are not suited to precision work.
mythic	well-known in myth or legend (e.g. Excalibur or Agbavboko); it is virtually impossible to conceal or disguise.
reload	holds limited ammunition and needs to be reloaded often when used.
reputation (circle)	well-regarded by at least one Circle; the owner takes a +1 ongoing to <b>persuading</b> or <b>refusing to honor a Debt</b> when engaged with a member of a relevant Circle.
silver/cold iron/holy	made of a unique material or has been blessed by someone of great faith. Supernatural creatures may be especially vulnerable to these items or weapons, granting +ap when used against them or inflicting +1 harm.
smoke	produces enough smoke to offer cover to everyone in it, and likely an opportunity to <b>escape a dangerous situation</b> .
stun	capable of inflicting s-harm (page 48) instead of regular harm.

# RANGE TAGS

TAG	DESCRIPTION
hand	can only be used at an intimate range, such as touching or striking someone with your bare hands.
close	can be used against someone within a meter or so, probably about the length of the weapon itself.
near	can be used against someone in relative proximity, somewhere between 2 to 6 meters.
far	can be used against someone at a longer range, more than 6 meters away or further (in good conditions).

# SAMPLE WEAPONS

WEAPON	TAGS
9mm	2-harm near loud concealable
assault rifle	3-harm near/far autofire loud
brass knuckles	1-harm hand concealable
hunting rifle	2-harm far reload loud
cold iron katana	3-harm close cold iron
grenade	3-harm close area concealable messy
longbow	2-harm near/far reload
high-powered shotgun	3-harm close/near messy reload loud
flash bomb	s-harm close area reload concealable smoke
submachine gun	2-harm near autofire loud
Magnum revolver	3-harm near loud reload
makeshift spear	2-harm hand/close fragile stun

# GROUP SIZE

TAG	DESCRIPTION
small	8 or fewer people, a small team able to operate more or less inconspicuously.
medium	roughly 9–16 people, an obvious group that can still blend into a crowd or conceal their presence.
large	approximately 16–30 people, likely to attract attention when working together as a group.
huge	more than 30 people, easily drawing attention from authorities and passersby.

# GROUP TAGS

TAG	DESCRIPTION
demonic/strange	obviously inhuman and otherworldly; such groups attract attention from authorities and passersby regardless of size.
incorporeal	immaterial and ephemeral, usually ghosts or spirits; cannot be harmed with ordinary weapons but still vulnerable to magic or ritual.
loyal	committed to the cause or leader of the group, willing to fight to the last or undertake dangerous, even suicidal risks, to accomplish the group's goals; extremely difficult to persuade or intimidate.
rattled	shocked, disorganized, and unsettled; moves made against them take +1 ongoing and the group itself inflicts -1 harm.
savage	vicious and aggressive; such groups consistently cause collateral damage and may inflict +1 harm against weaker foes.
immune	unaffected by a source of damage or opposition (e.g. fire immunity or faerie magic immunity); such groups cannot be harmed, delayed, or thwarted by the source selected.
trained	formally trained in group or squad combat (e.g. SWAT team or veteran werewolf pack); inflicts +1 harm and suffers -1 harm when engaged with another group.

# CITY HUB ART DISTRICT

*In the Art District, colors swirl, pop, and blister; Wild thrives here, tip-toeing the line between artistic passion and corporate assimilation. Buskers stand on street corners with nothing but their aspirations and a beat up guitar case, while the wealthy rub shoulders with overworked gallery owners and preening artists. Dreams are the currency of the art district...just be careful not to let yours fall into the wrong hands.*

## RESIDENTS

PICK ONE, WHY DO THEY OWE YOU A DEBT?

Player Character	Residents	Faction	Why do they owe you?
	Ryan Swift, a hedonistic imp whose upscale fashion line slowly warps the bodies of those who wear his creations	Wild	
	Kai, a high-powered member of a demonic crime organization and the owner of local gay bar popular with Wild	Wild	
	Mark Zheng, a charismatic oracle and art dealer whose clients hire him for his uncanny ability to sniff out talent...and secrets	Power	
	Moshe Klienman, a street wizard turned corporate sellout whose magical graffiti now advertises for wealthy corporations	Power	
	Adelaide, a peppy werewolf who runs a popular cupcake stand; the colorful cupcakes allow you to ask a question of the dead	Night	
	Ana Dombrowski, a vamp who publicly “murders” and “resurrects” victims in her sold-out, bloody performance art	Night	
	Anoushka Chockalingam, an art gallery owner who’s collected an array of artifacts, even one that allows her to walk in dreams	Mortalis	
	Elias Ben-Ezra, a retired demon hunter; he’s found his niche making profoundly disturbing sculptures of his former prey	Mortalis	

## RELATIONSHIPS

PICK ONE, ASSIGN ANOTHER PC TO THE BLANK

Player Character	Relationship
	Your artwork has been showing up in prestigious galleries...but you weren’t the one to put it there. _____ was the only one aside from you to have access to your work. How do you plan to confront them?
	You’ve been supplying _____ with an illicit magical substance for some time now. Why have you started altering the composition and how did they find out?
	You admire _____ from afar. It started out as admiration for their work, but now some might call you obsessed. What personal item have they discovered you stole from them?
	You dated _____ for years until they sold you out to powerful vampires. Why are both of you scheduled to testify in front of those same vampires this week?
	Your friend was arrested a few weeks ago at a protest by a vampire cop. They haven’t been seen since and you think _____ knows something about their whereabouts. How do you plan to get them to talk?
	_____ promised to help make your artistic aspirations come true. What makes you hesitant to accept the offer?
	You’ve been collaborating with _____ for years, and you’ve always thought of your art as a joint effort. What major decision did they make without consulting you?
	_____’s art is hauntingly similar to that of your sibling, who you thought died years ago, and little things they say make you think they know more than they’re letting on. What leverage do you plan to use to get them to tell you the truth?

## HUB MOVES

### COME TOGETHER

When you **organize a protest**, roll with a Circle of your fellow organizers. On a hit, your protest puts pressure on a powerful NPC of your choice; they take a -1 ongoing through the next faction turn. On a 10+, the leader of another faction takes interest in your cause and delivers a Debt, powerful resources, or secret information that aids your cause. On a miss, someone you trusted leaks your secrets to a dangerous foe.

### CHAOS IS A LADDER

When you **posture for clout** in front of well-connected NPCs, roll with **MIND**. On a hit, they buy your ruse; take +1 Status with a relevant Circle until time passes or your deception is revealed. On a 7-9, they require you to prove yourself or risk retribution. On a miss, your humblebragging attracts the attention of a rival to whom you owe an uncomfortably large Debt; take -1 ongoing when **refusing to honor your Debts** to anyone from their Circle until time passes.

### PROMISES, PROMISES

When you **persuade an NPC** by promising concrete assistance in pursuing their dreams, mark corruption to take a 10+ instead of rolling. If you cannot fulfill your promise by the end of the next session, mark another corruption.



## LOCATIONS

2d6	Control	Type (with common NPCs)	Nature	Atmosphere	Trouble
2	Night	<b>memorial</b> : mourner, vandal, witness	dilapidated	secretive	haunted
3	Night	<b>hostel</b> : manager, tourist, transient	alluring	comforting	unreliable
4	Shared	<b>dance club</b> : lurker, bouncer, dancer	bizarre	pristine	xenophobic
5	Shared	<b>community center</b> : organizer, volunteer, child	elitist	whimsical	pirated
6	Wild	<b>street market</b> : urban farmer, artist, customer	gentrified	inviting	competitive
7	Wild	<b>art gallery</b> : critic, owner, patron	chaotic	disreputable	underfunded
8	Wild	<b>dive bar</b> : bartender, regular, underage teenager	vibrant	supportive	exploitative
9	Power	<b>museum</b> : curator, security guard, transient	foreign	politicized	expensive
10	Power	<b>co-op</b> : organizer, volunteer, community leader	cluttered	enchanted	polarizing
11	Mortalis	<b>pop-up</b> : influencer, staff, customer	modern	exclusive	fraudulent
12	Mortalis	<b>book store</b> : browser, bookseller, lecturer	dingy	cheerful	unstable

## RUMORS

1d6	Rumor
1	Small gallery owners from Wild are receiving death threats coercing them to sell their galleries
2	A phantom street fair is popping up at night, selling items that curse unlucky buyers
3	A predatory wizard art agent is snatching up young talent and turning them into drones
4	Cryptic graffiti scattered around the district offers instructions for opening a portal to a sacred fae space
5	The local art museum is charging a new price: patrons leave the institution several years older than when they entered
6	A demonic patron promises riches and success to artists...for the price of their inspiration

## FACCTIONS

2d6	Purpose	Structure	Mood	Size	Strength	The Faction...
2	to learn from supernatural collaborations (Mortalis)	Oligarchical	grieving, fractured by loss	4	4	...is hunted by an ancient sect of deadly assassins
3	to keep dangerous knowledge secret and safe (Night)	Oligarchical	parasitic, searching for a host	1	1	...is smuggling illicit magical substances into the area
4	to cover up the supernatural truth (Night)	Divided	evolving, accepting transformation	1	1	...wants to broker a peace with long-time enemies
5	to manipulate humans to do their bidding (Night)	Divided	divided, betraying each other	1	1	...contains many refugees from other Circles
6	to protect their ancient ways of life (Wild)	Anarchic	hedonistic, indulging in vices	2	2	...is haunted by the ghosts of its fallen members
7	to create and exploit new contracts (Wild)	Anarchic	unfocused, needing a leader	2	2	...flaunts proof of the supernatural in public
8	to welcome others of their kind to the city (Wild)	Anarchic	exploited, seeking liberation	2	2	...snatches up and transforms talented mortal artists
9	to acquire and profit off of new holdings (Power)	Democratic	predatory, forcing assimilation	3	3	...sells potent (and stolen) Wild tokens and artifacts
10	to find and sway powerful beings to their side (Power)	Democratic	antiquated, burdened by tradition	3	3	...holds extensive property in the district
11	to remain hidden from formidable enemies (Power)	Despotic	ritualistic, preparing traditions	3	3	...is plotting an uprising against a Status-3 NPC
12	to keep the peace between rival factions (Mortalis)	Despotic	vigilant, pursuing opportunities	4	4	...is caught in a power struggle with a werewolf pack

## NPCs

2d6	Circle	Presenting	Look	Demeanor	Role	Trait	Quirk	Drives
2	Night	androgynous	South Asian	gruff	proprietor	nervous tic	master of aliases	be a voice for the dead
3	Night	androgynous	South Asian	shrewd	voyeur	curious speech	repeatedly escapes danger unscathed	amass leverage over Status-3 NPCs
4	Night	androgynous	Latinx	impulsive	elite	overly emphatic	enemies with a Status-3 NPC	pursue an apathetic love interest
5	Wild	nonconforming	Latinx	charming	organizer	unusual hair	collects supernatural secrets	chase the newest trend
6	Power	conforming	Asian	brooding	curator	unusual eyes	has a posse of enamored mortals	create a safe space for loved ones
7	Wild	conforming	White	whimsical	creator	pierced/tattooed	knows everybody (and their secrets)	purchase a location or property
8	Power	conforming	Middle Eastern	aloof	patron	magically warped	champions a new cause every week	complete a magnum opus
9	Wild	nonconforming	Black	strange	broker	bizarre accessories	collects magically-imbued art	overturn existing systems of power
10	Mortalis	shifting	Black	desperate	newcomer	strange aura	constantly shifts romantic partners	find loyal followers/admirers
11	Mortalis	shifting	Indigenous	witty	apprentice	pungent	bent on neutrality in all conflicts	acquire training in a skill
12	Mortalis	shifting	Indigenous	flirtatious	caretaker	bewitching	brings bad luck wherever they go	get a fix of blood/drugs/magic

# CITY HUB CITY HALL

*The red tape of bureaucracy binds all; Mortalis holds sway in City Hall by knowing where the tape is weakest—and who needs to be cut to walk past it. By day, ordinary politicians do “the work” of “the people;” by night, scheming fae make deals behind warded doors and immortal powerbrokers wait in empty parking garages to have their say. You can’t fight city hall, but someone with influence can always pencil you in for the right price.*

## RESIDENTS

PICK ONE, WHY DO THEY OWE YOU A DEBT?

Player Character	Residents	Faction	Why do they owe you?
	Kissa Abioye, an investigative journalist who writes two versions of every story; one for the public and one for everyone else	Mortalis	
	Diego Perez, an Assistant District Attorney paying off his demonic debt one case at a time	Mortalis	
	Max Mickey, a fae ride-sharing driver whose “shortcuts” avoid traffic, and sometimes parts of reality	Wild	
	Gemma Howard, an imp who spins bad press into golden opportunities for a modest fee	Wild	
	Louis Laveau, a thrall tasked with helping visiting dignitaries from Night indulge their darkest urges	Night	
	Jeri, a ghostly custodian who wanders the halls at night, collecting trash...and secrets	Night	
	Ethel Stewart-Wilson, a court stenographer who types the official transcripts before they even happen	Power	
	Herbert Okland IV, warden of the city’s correctional facility and manager of a secret block housing Power’s worst enemies	Power	

## RELATIONSHIPS

PICK ONE, ASSIGN ANOTHER PC TO THE BLANK

Player Character	Relationship
	You wake up on _____’s couch, struggling to recall what happened last night and why you’re wearing a magical ring...what did they tell you to fill in the gaps?
	You and _____ were placed on a mundane jury by a Status-3 member of your Circle to covertly secure a guilty verdict against someone’s mortal pawn. What did you do when you learned the accused is innocent?
	A close ally’s corpse is found with _____’s a name written on their palm. Why did you erase it before anyone else noticed?
	You’ve been having an affair with _____ for a while, both of you betraying someone you love. Why do you blame each other for finally getting caught?
	You gave _____ some dirty secrets to help them derail the campaign of an unnaturally popular mayoral candidate. How do the two of you plan to reveal this information?
	Your stay in county jail was cut short by _____. What did they have to promise you would do to earn your freedom?
	You were prohibited from seeing a heavily restricted inmate without an escort from _____. Why do you so desperately need to talk to the prisoner?
	You attended an extravagant fundraising gala under false pretenses. What covert activities were you in the middle of when you ran into _____ at the event?

## HUB MOVES

### THE PRICE OF SECRETS

When you **blackmail a powerful NPC with proof of their dirty deeds**, roll with your Status in their Circle. On a hit, hold 2. On a 10+ hold 3. Spend your hold—1 for 1—as if spending a Debt (asking for a moderate favor, adding +3 to your roll when **persuading** them, etc.) when interacting with your target. Once you’ve used the last of your hold, take -1 ongoing to moves targeting them until time passes. On a miss, they call your bluff and make you, or your source, pay.

### PROPER FORMS AND LICENSES

When you **bury someone in messy paperwork** by manipulating city officials, roll with **HEART**. On a hit, you draw unwanted municipal attention to their dealings; they take -1 ongoing to moves during the faction turn until they return to anonymity. On a 10+, you convince your agents at city hall that you’re doing them a favor; take a Debt on them as well. On a miss, your machinations are both costly and impotent; a Status-3 NPC takes an interest in your schemes as well as a result of your incompetent meddling.



## LOCATIONS

2d6	Control	Type (with common NPCs)	Nature	Atmosphere	Trouble
2	Shared	<b>monument:</b> tourists, handler, photographer	massive	solemn	sanctified
3	Shared	<b>hotel:</b> bellhop, concierge, manager	luxurious	ominous	sentient
4	Night	<b>illegal gambling hall:</b> high rollers, escorts, bookies	clandestine	welcoming	watched
5	Night	<b>press office:</b> journalist, blogger, witness	labyrinthine	enticing	corrupt
6	Mortalis	<b>civic site:</b> politician, lobbyist, lawyer	public	intimidating	performative
7	Mortalis	<b>newsstand:</b> vendors, shoe shiner, clerk	restricted	opportunistic	predatory
8	Mortalis	<b>parking garage:</b> addict, conspirator, transient	chaotic	bleak	isolated
9	Power	<b>dive bar:</b> bartender, regular, mob boss	rowdy	nostalgic	enchanted
10	Power	<b>24-hour diner:</b> waitress, regular, informant	quiet	hollow	hypnotic
11	Wild	<b>museum:</b> curator, security guard, transient	abandoned	suffocating	exclusive
12	Wild	<b>city park:</b> jogger, chess players, bird watcher	picturesque	refreshing	hungry

## RUMORS

1d6	Rumor
1	A mortal politician is attempting to remove a zoning restriction for a Wild faction
2	A community leader's missing son is the primary suspect in the murder of a prominent member of Night
3	An executed felon, returned as a revenant, is hunting down the Status-3 NPCs he blames for his unjust demise
4	Someone is blackmailing a number of mortal politicians to secure the passage of a strange law
5	Eerily realistic human statues have begun appearing in a prominent park near City Hall.
6	A serial killer has been stalking the streets removing the hearts of their victims

## FACTIONS

2d6	Purpose	Structure	Mood	Size	Strength	The Faction...
2	to secure a foothold for extradimensional beings (Wild)	Despotic	exploited, seeking liberation	4	4	...is hunted by a powerful Mortalis faction
3	to create a space of neutrality open to all (Wild)	Anarchic	angry, demanding justice	1	1	...limits direct contact with other Circles
4	to control mortal institutions from the shadows (Power)	Oligarchal	divided, caught between leaders	1	1	...contains many refugees from other Circles
5	to police rogue members of their Circle (Night)	Divided	vengeful, seeking retribution	1	1	...is playing two other factions against each other
6	to profit from the supernatural world (Mortalis)	Democratic	ambitious, pursuing opportunities	2	2	...is being manipulated by a devious Status-3 NPC
7	to dominate supernatural factions (Mortalis)	Democratic	dedicated, seeking victories	2	2	...is on the verge of open conflict with another faction
8	to protect mortals from the supernatural (Mortalis)	Democratic	territorial, reinforcing borders	2	2	...craves credit for their accomplishments
9	to obtain and maintain property or fealty (Night)	Divided	rigid, refusing needed change	3	3	...is new to this area of the city
10	to keep ancient forces contained (Power)	Oligarchal	besieged, fearful of further loss	3	3	...has many allies within other Circles
11	to maintain and fulfill ancient oaths or contracts (Wild)	Anarchic	weak, struggling to regroup	3	3	...has recently recovered from a grievous defeat
12	to create and exploit new contracts (Wild)	Despotic	ignorant, wasting resources	4	4	...broke an agreement with a vengeful fae lord

## NPCs

2d6	Circle	Presenting	Look	Demeanor	Role	Trait	Quirk	Drives
2	Wild	androgynous	South Asian	awkward	legislator	bound by contracts	flips a coin to make decisions	do something unequivocally good
3	Power	androgynous	South Asian	contemplative	journalist	nonverbal	a new injury whenever you see them	break the story of a lifetime
4	Power	androgynous	Latinx	sentimental	leader	physically frail	owns several ghostly pets	protect a neutral party/location
5	Night	nonconforming	Latinx	callous	envoy	unusual hair	appears without warning	reconnect with an estranged loved one
6	Mortalis	conforming	Asian	resentful	enforcer	magical/cursed scar	losing faith in their Circle	restore a faction to its former glory
7	Mortalis	conforming	White	paranoid	negotiator	mundane hobbies	deeply indebted to a Status-3 NPC	find and support an rising star
8	Mortalis	conforming	Middle Eastern	charming	fixer	monochromatic	afraid of rumors and gossip	protect the status of ally or employer
9	Night	nonconforming	Black	aggressive	heir	pierced/tattooed	perpetually mourning a personal loss	get a fix of blood/drugs/magic
10	Power	shifting	Black	indifferent	power broker	unusual eyes	always eating something	secure more power/money/influence
11	Power	shifting	Indigenous	cocky	city official	strange aura	sells compromising information	destabilize a controlling faction
12	Wild	shifting	Indigenous	energetic	thief	notable accessories	belongs a second Circle	recover something stolen

# CITY HUB DOWNTOWN

*Downtown only reveals its true nature at sunset—the moment at which business as usual comes to a halt and the affairs of Night can be truly addressed. It doesn't matter if you've lived here your whole life or wandered in last week—the hustle and bustle of downtown guarantees you'll find nearly anything you seek. That is...if the dangers of the back alleys and deep shadows of downtown don't find you first.*

## RESIDENTS

PICK ONE, WHY DO THEY OWE YOU A DEBT?

Player Character	Residents	Faction	Why do they owe you?
	Maya Lopez, an oracle working the downtown market with a knack for foretelling your enemy's path to ruin	Power	
	Mrs. Lane, a wizard and owner of an exclusive five star hotel who lives for gossip	Power	
	Dinesh Chopra, a hunter who keeps his block of boutiques a vamp-free zone by any means necessary	Mortalis	
	Cyril Callas, a famous paranormal investigator who gives out "free" advice from the comfort of his apartment's bus stop	Mortalis	
	Taan, a flesh-eating vamp with a particular appetite for wandering tourists that he struggles to keep in check	Night	
	Gi Riddle, a boisterous ghost who works downtown as a haunted bar tour guide	Night	
	Blessing, a fae whose impassioned speeches on ecological crisis can be heard outside the aquarium any time of the day	Wild	
	Akiko Tanaka, a tainted with an impressive history of collecting demonic contracts among local entrepreneurs	Wild	

## RELATIONSHIPS

PICK ONE, ASSIGN ANOTHER PC TO THE BLANK

Player Character	Relationship
	You've recently fallen for a successful shop owner downtown, but you haven't ended your relationship with _____ yet. Why are you hesitant to break things off, even though the spark is gone?
	While doing some delivery work for a few of the more popular demonic eateries downtown, you caught _____ in a scandalous situation. What did they offer to buy your silence and why is it still not enough?
	_____ recently became the owner of a legendary artifact you've been trying to get your hands on for years. They've refused to part with it, but you're determined to change their mind. How?
	A colleague of yours has recently become a target of a powerful ghost. Why has _____ agreed to lend their services to ensure your coworker's safety?
	Your ex-spouse still lives with you, even though you've asked them to move out time and time again. Why has _____ agreed to help you remove them from the premises, even if (or when?) things get ugly?
	You and _____ go shopping at the faerie market every Sunday. What underground scheme did the two of you accidentally uncover there last week?
	You and _____ got into a heated argument over your involvement with an elder vampire's schemes. What false promise did you make to keep them off your back?
	You recently got in on the artifact trade downtown and decided to take more than your share of the profits from your werewolf dealer. Why is _____ covering for you?

## HUB MOVES

### UP FOR GRABS

When you **smash and grab something useful from the streets or shops downtown**, name what you're after and roll with **BLOOD**. On a hit, you take what you want by force. On a 7-9, you spot someone who will make trouble for you leaving the scene with evidence of your wrongdoing. On a miss, you get your hands on something close to what you wanted, but the victim of your theft takes it personally; one of your close allies becomes an additional target of their ire until time passes.

### BAR BUDDIES

When you **go drinking downtown in the hopes of networking with the wealthy and powerful**, roll with **HEART**. On a hit, you meet just the person—someone connected to an NPC of your choice; the MC will tell you who they are. On a 10+, you get along famously; you can count them among your friends and they (drunkenly) agree to one favor you ask. On a 7-9, they are a bit more cautious, only scratching your back if you scratch theirs; take a +1 ongoing to persuade them to help you out if you agree to a small favor before you roll. On a miss, you overindulge in whatever vice plagues you most; the MC will tell you how your foolish needs get you in over your head.



## LOCATIONS

2d6	Control	Type (with common NPCs)	Nature	Atmosphere	Trouble
2	Shared	<b>sacred space:</b> caretaker, parishioner, pilgrim	dilapidated	whimsical	cursed
3	Shared	<b>hotel:</b> bellhop, concierge, manager	abandoned	safe	unreliable
4	Mortalis	<b>street corner:</b> drug dealer, beat cop, transient	bizarre	dirty	xenophobic
5	Mortalis	<b>illegal gambling hall:</b> dealer, pit boss, degenerate gambler	dangerous	secretive	watched
6	Night	<b>office building:</b> doorman, security guard, custodian	cramped	professional	corrupt
7	Night	<b>retail store:</b> cashier, buyer, customer	noisy	cold	contested
8	Night	<b>restaurant:</b> waiter, maître d', diner	massive	dark	violent
9	Wild	<b>dive bar:</b> bartender, bouncer, drunk	religious	intoxicating	unstable
10	Wild	<b>civic site:</b> security guard, reporter, tourist	modern	eerie	expensive
11	Power	<b>medical site:</b> doctor, nurse/tech, patient	secure	inviting	despotic
12	Power	<b>city park:</b> jogger, drug addict, stalker	pristine	bright	stagnant

## RUMORS

1d6	Rumor
1	A Power faction is buying up properties downtown for reasons unknown
2	Someone is selling a mysterious drug that afflicts mortals with supernatural abilities
3	A Wild faction is attempting to acquire a downtown asset from a local wizard
4	A mundane politician has been spotted meeting with Night factions all over downtown
5	A mortal, an agent of an unknown faction, is snooping on the affairs of a Night faction
6	Witnesses report a monster is stalking the streets, each describing a different threat

## FACCTIONS

2d6	Purpose	Structure	Mood	Size	Strength	The Faction...
2	to protect and secure magical knowledge (Power)	Anarchic	rigid, refusing needed change	4	4	...is being manipulated by a devious immortal
3	to profit from the supernatural world (Mortalis)	Anarchic	evolving, accepting transformation	1	1	...is deeply indebted to an elder vampire
4	to discover the truth of the supernatural (Mortalis)	Despotic	hedonistic, indulging in vices	1	1	...contains many defectors from other Circles
5	to protect mortals from the supernatural (Mortalis)	Despotic	paranoid, hunting for traitors	1	1	...has secret paths throughout the area
6	to obtain and maintain property or fealty (Night)	Oligarchal	vengeful, seeking retribution	2	2	...acts mostly through mortal agents
7	to protect members of the faction from threats (Night)	Oligarchal	scheming, plotting mischief	2	2	...limits direct contact with mortals
8	to capture and profit from mortal institutions (Night)	Oligarchal	territorial, reinforcing borders	2	2	...recently suffered the loss of a beloved leader
9	to secure a foothold for extradimensional beings (Wild)	Divided	conflicted, a civil war looms	3	3	...is new to this area of the city
10	to maintain and fulfill ancient oaths or contracts (Wild)	Divided	besieged, fearful of further loss	3	3	...has many allies within other Circles
11	to hide from extradimensional enemies (Wild)	Democratic	ritualistic, preparing traditions	3	3	...has a contract with a demonic patron
12	to train others in the magical arts (Power)	Democratic	open, pursuing opportunities	4	4	...has been cursed by a powerful wizard

## NPCs

2d6	Circle	Presenting	Look	Demeanor	Role	Trait	Quirk	Drives
2	Power	androgynous	South Asian	strange	aristocracy	warped/cursed	unable to arrive anywhere on time	complete a magnum opus
3	Power	androgynous	South Asian	crass	investigator	strange aura	committed to a rigid code of ethics	purchase a location or property
4	Power	androgynous	Latinx	nervous	broker	odd voice	romantically involved with a rival	humiliate a rival or enemy
5	Night	nonconforming	Latinx	charming	leader	unusual hair	deeply indebted to a Status-3 NPC	reconnect with an estranged loved one
6	Mortalis	conforming	Asian	cautious	enforcer	pierced/tattooed	enamored with a mortal hobby	secure more power/money/influence
7	Night	conforming	White	violent	manipulator	scarred	always accompanied by lackeys	avenge a fallen loved one
8	Mortalis	conforming	Middle Eastern	cunning	courier	notable accessories	deeply concerned with appearance	get a fix of blood/drugs/magic
9	Night	nonconforming	Black	aggressive	thrall	unusual eyes	perpetually mourning a personal loss	increase/maintain status within the city
10	Wild	shifting	Black	desperate	entrepreneur	curious gait/posture	embraces outlandish fashion	protect a neutral party/location
11	Wild	shifting	Indigenous	thoughtful	envoy	pungent	trades in ritual components	find a superior employer/faction
12	Wild	shifting	Indigenous	sentimental	caretaker	radiant/luminous	leads a double mortal life	create something beautiful in the city

# CITY HUB THE UNIVERSITY

The University is a hotbed of political discourse, supernatural research, and strange magical phenomena. Power holds an iron grip over this section of the city—controlling the institutions that determine the city's very future—but plenty goes on in the shadows they can't reach. The wizards and immortals might think they control destiny, but the city's history is often written by those with more mundane hungers...

## RESIDENTS

PICK ONE, WHY DO THEY OWE YOU A DEBT?

Player Character	Residents	Faction	Why do they owe you?
	Professor Aoife Belenos, a powerful wizard whose literature seminars are required classes for upcoming sorcerers	Power	
	Yakov, a transient immortal who wanders the streets, hunting unknown foes and ancient enemies	Power	
	Nuriko Sato, a retired journalist whose new blog covers only the most important supernatural events	Mortalis	
	Eloy Verde, a coy purveyor of magical artifacts who owns a popular bookstore next to the university campus	Mortalis	
	Jovita, a werewolf whose pack runs an underground gambling establishment with iron fists and plenty of claws	Night	
	Lora Ziegler, a vamp who lurks near the university library and other campus locales frequented by isolated students	Night	
	Rupa Dey, a charming faerie who takes over the airways for the late night student radio show nearly every night	Wild	
	The Beast, a formidable construct who safeguards the university grounds from supernatural threats	Wild	

## RELATIONSHIPS

PICK ONE, ASSIGN ANOTHER PC TO THE BLANK

Player Character	Relationship
	You have a mortal lover who is taking night classes at the university while working full time nearby. Why did _____ threaten to expose your secrets to them?
	A friend from the university has agreed to give you a sizable sum of money to start a new business. Why are they counting on your connections with _____ for the endeavor to succeed?
	Your sibling has recently moved back to the city after fleeing their enemies—and the city itself—a decade ago. Why did _____ agree to let them move in with them nearby the university, despite the danger they are now both in?
	A werewolf pack that runs nearby murdered a friend of yours last year. Why has _____ agreed to help you get your revenge, no matter the cost?
	You and _____ had a brief, but passionate love affair late last year, one you kept secret from even your closest friends and allies. Why do you suspect they weren't honest with you about their feelings?
	_____ needs your support in their bid for a coveted position of power associated with the university. What have they promised you in return?
	_____ is working with you to complete some important supernatural research using your connections to the university's facilities. What dangerous secret have you been keeping from them about your work together?
	You are a regular at an eatery (owned by a Power faction) that is located near the university. What keeps you and _____ coming back no matter how good the competition is elsewhere?

## HUB MOVES

### A FRIEND IN THE SCIENCE DEPARTMENT

When you **hit the streets** to look for information about strange or magical phenomena by consulting your university contacts, you can roll with **MIND** instead of Circle when you consult your contacts at the university. On a miss, your questions attract the attention of an old enemy looking to settle a score.

### WELCOME TO MY OFFICE

When you **perform a ritual to secure a secluded place on campus for a meeting or deal**, roll with **SPIRIT**. On a hit, the campus bends to your will and produces a secure location only available to you and those you designate; it lasts until the meeting or deal is complete. On a 10+, the place is quietly attuned to you; you never have to mark corruption when you **let it out** within. On a miss, your attempt to warp reality to suit your needs results in something dangerous piercing the veil between worlds.

### LONG-TERM INVESTMENTS

When you **set up a new program, business, or enterprise** to accomplish your goals, spend up to three Debts; hold 1 for each Debt spent. When time passes, you can spend your hold—1 for 1—to take a +1 (or give a +1 to another PC or faction) on any city or faction move aided by your new endeavor.



## LOCATIONS

2d6	Control	Type (with common NPCs)	Nature	Atmosphere	Trouble
2	Night	<b>museum:</b> curator, security guard, tourist	abandoned	suffocating	corrupt
3	Mortalis	<b>medical site:</b> doctor, nurse/tech, patient	massive	secretive	unstable
4	Wild	<b>retail store:</b> cashier, customer, security guard	cramped	welcoming	cursed
5	Shared	<b>dive bar:</b> bartender, student, cop	labryinthe	bright	haunted
6	Power	<b>restaurant:</b> waiter, cook, diner	modern	welcoming	restricted
7	Power	<b>university building:</b> faculty, staff, student	public	professional	watched
8	Power	<b>student dorm:</b> student, drug dealer, visitor	chaotic	safe	despotic
9	Shared	<b>commons:</b> jogger, student, transient	gentrified	enticing	expensive
10	Wild	<b>church:</b> priest, parishioner, layperson	vibrant	mysterious	sentient
11	Mortalis	<b>parking garage:</b> student, faculty, transient	secure	exclusive	violent
12	Night	<b>hotel:</b> bellhop, tourist, manager	quiet	bleak	predatory

## RUMORS

1d6	Rumor
1	An immortal has recently returned to the university to reclaim assets once lost in a conflict with another member of Power
2	The local Power faction has declared a section of the university off limits to everyone but members of their faction
3	A local Wild faction is seeking protection from a looming threat from another plane
4	Several local students have gone missing, only to return a few days later forever changed by their mysterious experience
5	An imp has set up a new record store, attracting supernatural clientele to the area
6	A wizard is offering Debts to anyone willing to undertake a "trip to the other side"

## FACTIONS

2d6	Purpose	Structure	Mood	Size	Strength	The Faction...
2	to conceal dangerous magical experimentation (Power)	Despotic	scheming, plotting mischief	4	4	...captures and studies members of other Circles
3	to protect members of the faction from threats (Night)	Despotic	proud, refusing needed aid	1	1	...is targeted by a radical faction of their own Circle
4	to profit from the supernatural world (Mortalis)	Oligarchal	lost, seeking new leadership	1	1	...is plagued by disputes with a violent werewolf pack
5	to protect mortals from the supernatural (Mortalis)	Oligarchal	rigid, refusing needed change	1	1	...is a pawn in an immortal's centuries-old schemes
6	to structure and control the city's future (Power)	Divided	besieged, fearful of further loss	2	2	...trades with another faction for critical resources
7	to discover and exploit magical knowledge (Power)	Divided	secretive, refusing collaboration	2	2	...requires members to perform elaborate rituals
8	to secure and study magical artifacts (Power)	Divided	conflicted, a civil war looms	2	2	...controls secret holdings within the university
9	to hide from extradimensional enemies (Wild)	Democratic	ritualistic, preparing traditions	3	3	...recently underwent a change of leadership
10	to study and experience the human condition (Wild)	Democratic	evolving, accepting transformation	3	3	...contains many defectors from other Circles
11	to obtain and maintain property or fealty (Night)	Anarchic	indebted, no longer independent	3	3	...has been corrupted by a malevolent Status-3 NPC
12	to capture mortal institutions from the shadows (Power)	Anarchic	paranoid, hunting for traitors	4	4	...has sworn to protect a faction from another Circle

## NPCs

2d6	Circle	Presenting	Look	Demeanor	Role	Trait	Quirk	Drives
2	Night	androgynous	South Asian	impulsive	transient	physically frail	constantly shifting romantic partners	humiliate a rival
3	Night	androgynous	South Asian	sentimental	investor	sworn to oaths	looking to betray their faction	get a fix of blood/drugs/magic
4	Wild	androgynous	Latinx	flirtatious	fixer	curious pet	enamored with a mortal hobby	find a new protege
5	Wild	nonconforming	Latinx	aloof	investigator	warped/cursed	enemies of a Status-3 NPC	discover a magical truth
6	Power	conforming	Asian	cunning	student	unusual eyes	leads a double mortal life	resolve a conflict favorably
7	Power	conforming	White	eccentric	faculty	strange aura	has an animal or ghostly familiar	secure a position of authority
8	Power	conforming	Middle Eastern	cautious	university staff	odd voice	collects magical-imbued artifacts	acquire training in a skill
9	Mortalis	nonconforming	Black	strange	researcher	notable accessories	obsessed with magical phenomena	join an important faction
10	Mortalis	shifting	Black	witty	enforcer	refined clothing	committed to a rigid code of ethics	increase/maintain Status in the city
11	Night	shifting	Indigenous	obsessed	entrepreneur	pierced/tattooed	married to a member of another Circle	steal a magical artifact
12	Night	shifting	Indigenous	crass	power broker	scarred	always accompanied by sycophants	avenge a fallen loved one

## GENERAL INDEX

+1/-1 Forward/Ongoing 73  
Advancement 45, 67, 115, 121, 127, 133, 139, 145, 151, 157, 163, 169, 175, 181, 185-193, 307  
Circles 10, 18-20, 22-29, 41, 42, 62, 67, 86-89, 186, 187, 213-217, 253  
Mortalis 19, 22, 23, 213, 214, 224, 268, 282, 283, 296, 297  
Night 19, 24, 25, 213, 215, 225, 268, 284, 285, 298, 299  
Power 19, 26, 27, 213, 216, 226, 268, 286, 287, 300, 301  
Wild 19, 28, 29, 213, 217, 227, 268, 288, 289, 302, 303  
Circle Status 20, 41, 67, 96, 104, 187  
The City 17, 52, 53, 55, 59, 96-104, 228, 229  
City Hubs 53, 59, 69, 228, 229, 267, 312-319  
Corruption 45, 55, 66, 115, 121, 127, 133, 139, 145, 151, 157, 163, 169, 175, 181, 192, 310  
Debt 21, 42, 43, 68, 85, 90-95, 186, 218  
Factions 20, 23, 25, 27, 29, 250-264, 267, 268  
Fictional Positioning 36  
Gear 63  
Harm 46-51, 67, 221  
Armor 46, 51, 221  
Scars 47, 61  
S-Harm 46  
Hits & Misses 38-39  
Hold 73  
Master of Ceremonies (MC) 13, 38, 39, 43, 54, 73, 197-239, 310  
Moves  
Basic Moves 37, 66, 74-85, 188-190, 305, 306  
Circle Moves 86-89, 213-217, 306  
City Moves 96-104, 309  
Corruption Moves 115, 121, 127, 133, 139, 145, 151, 157, 163, 169, 175, 181, 192  
Custom Moves 105  
Debt Moves 90-95, 306  
End Move 50, 66, 115, 121, 127, 133, 139, 145, 151, 157, 163, 169, 175, 181  
Faction Moves 257-264, 308  
Intimacy Move 44, 66, 115, 121, 127, 133, 139, 145, 151, 157, 163, 169, 175, 181  
MC Moves 205-210, 310  
Playbook Moves 37, 64, 114, 120, 126, 132, 138, 144, 150, 156, 162, 168, 174, 180  
NPCs 43, 50, 218-222  
One-shots 239  
Playbooks 60-67, 107-181, 191, 223-227  
Play Materials 13, 305  
Retirement 190  
Safety tools 12, 44, 68, 230-231  
Seasons 10, 52, 265-267  
Stats 62  
Tags 51, 311

## PLAYBOOKS

The Aware 110-115, 224  
The Fae 116-121, 227  
The Hunter 122-127, 224  
The Imp 128-133, 227  
The Oracle 134-139, 226  
The Spectre 140-145, 225  
The Sworn 146-151, 226  
The Tainted 152-157, 227  
The Vamp 158-163, 225  
The Veteran 164-169, 224  
The Wizard 170-175, 226  
The Wolf 176-181, 225

## CORE MOVES

Cash in a Debt (Debt) 92-94  
Consult Your Contacts (City) 99  
Develop Infrastructure (Faction) 259  
Do Someone a Favor (Debt) 90  
End of Session (Basic) 85  
Escape a Situation (Basic) 76, 188  
Establish a Faction (City) 104  
Figure Someone Out (Basic) 80, 188  
Goad an Opponent (Faction) 260  
Hit the Streets (Circle) 87  
Keep Your Cool (Basic) 81, 189  
Lay Claim (City) 102  
Lend a Hand or Get in the Way (Basic) 84  
Let It Out (Basic) 82, 83, 189  
Marshal Forces (City) 101  
Mislead, Distract, and Trick (Basic) 78, 79, 188  
Offer Passage (Faction) 264  
Openly Attack a Faction (Faction) 258  
Overlook a Harm (Debt) 91  
Persuade an NPC (Basic) 77, 188  
Put a Face to a Name (Circle) 86  
Put Out the Word (City) 96  
Recruit New Allies (City) 103  
Refuse to Honor a Debt (Debt) 95  
Search the City (Faction) 263  
Seize by Force (Faction) 262  
Study a Place of Power (Circle) 88, 89  
Tend to Your Business (City) 100  
Track Someone Down (Faction) 261  
Turn to Violence (Basic) 74, 75, 188  
Weaken Someone's Standing (City) 97

## PLAYBOOK MOVES

Alpha Dog (Wolf) 180  
Always Welcome (Vamp) 162  
The Best Laid Plans (Veteran) 168  
Bloodhound (Wolf) 180  
Business as Usual (Imp) 132  
Charming, Not Sincere (Aware) 114  
Chess Not Checkers (Sworn) 150  
Cold-Blooded (Vamp) 162  
Comes with the Territory (Wolf) 180  
Conduit (Spectre) 144  
Dark Bargain (Tainted) 156  
Deadly (Hunter) 126  
The Devil Inside (Tainted) 156  
Devious (Sworn) 150  
A Dish Best Served Now (Fae) 120  
Draw Back the Curtain (Fae) 120  
Dual Loyalty (Oracle) 138  
Eternal Hunger (Vamp) 162  
Faerie Magic (Fae) 120  
Foresight (Oracle) 138  
Friends in Low Places (Imp) 132  
Genuine Police (Sworn) 150  
Ghost Town (Spectre) 144  
Gun to a Knife Fight (Veteran) 168  
Hard to Shake (Sworn) 150  
I Know a Guy (Aware) 114  
I'm a Fucking Demon (Imp) 132  
In Our Blood (Fae) 120  
In Sheep's Clothing (Aware) 114  
In the Neighborhood (Vamp) 162  
Invested (Veteran) 168  
Invocation (Tainted) 156  
Keep Your Friends Close (Vamp) 162  
The Lion's Den (Aware) 114  
Manifest (Spectre) 144  
Mark of the Beast (Wolf) 180  
Measure Your Mark (Imp) 132  
Old Friends, Old Favors (Veteran) 168  
One Way or Another (Aware) 114  
Potent (Spectre) 144  
Prepared for Anything (Hunter) 126  
Protect and Serve (Sworn) 150  
Psychometry (Oracle) 138  
Reckless (Wolf) 180  
Safe House (Hunter) 126  
Scales of Justice (Fae) 120  
Skim the Surface (Oracle) 138  
Soothsayer (Oracle) 138  
Terrifying (Vamp) 162  
This Is My City (Aware) 114  
This Way! (Hunter) 126  
Tongued and Silver (Tainted) 156  
Too Old for This Shit! (Veteran) 168  
Tough as Nails (Tainted) 166  
True Artist (Veteran) 168  
Wall? What Wall? (Spectre) 144  
Watch Them Closely (Hunter) 126  
Won't Be Ignored (Spectre) 144  
Words Are Wind (Fae) 120  
Weasel Words (Imp) 132  
Worse Things Out Tonight (Hunter) 126

## CORRUPTION MOVES

Ahead of the Game (Sworn) 151  
Air and Darkness (Fae) 121  
Back at It (Veteran) 169  
Black Magic (Wizard) 175  
Blood Magic (Vamp) 163  
Catch You Fuckers at a Bad Time? (Veteran) 169  
The Dark Arts (Wizard) 175  
Dark Experiments (Veteran) 169  
Dark Fate (Oracle) 139  
Death Wish (Hunter) 127  
Dirty Money (Imp) 133  
Divided I Stand (Hunter) 127  
Eldritch Blast (Wizard) 175  
Empath (Oracle) 139  
Everyone's Got One (Fae) 121  
Expecting Company (Hunter) 127  
Eyes That Burrow (Oracle) 139  
Fake News (Vamp) 163  
Familiar Territory (Wolf) 181  
Force of Nature (Wolf) 181  
Free Agent (Aware) 115  
From Hell (Tainted) 157  
Hard to Kill (Hunter) 127  
I, All-Seeing (Oracle) 139  
If You Can't Beat 'Em (Aware) 115  
I'm a Hustler, Baby (Tainted) 157  
Infernal Affairs (Sworn) 151  
In Too Deep (Aware) 115  
Just Below the Surface (Tainted) 157  
Nightmare (Spectre) 145  
Not to Be Denied (Tainted) 157  
One with the Beast (Wolf) 181  
On the Shit List (Imp) 133  
Pack Rat (Veteran) 169  
Possession (Spectre) 145  
Pull Them Back In (Vamp) 163  
Shrewd Negotiator (Fae) 121  
Siphon (Spectre) 145  
Sticky Fingers (Aware) 115  
Stool Pigeons (Sworn) 151  
Street Hound (Wolf) 181  
Student of the Arts (Sworn) 151  
Sweeten the Deal (Imp) 133  
Telekinesis (Spectre) 145  
This Is How I Win (Imp) 133  
True Hunter (Vamp) 163  
Unearthly Grace (Fae) 121  
Upon a Pale Horse (Wizard) 175





## THE CITY HUNGERS. WILL YOU FEED IT?

*The streets bleed shadows as the supernatural politics of the city threaten to swallow you whole. Will you suffer as the savior for those who don't have enough, or take advantage of the weakness in friend and foe alike? Will you fight the darkness... or give in for power?*

**Urban Shadows** is an urban fantasy tabletop roleplaying game in which mortals and monsters vie for control of a modern-day city, a political battleground layered just under the reality we think we know. Vampires, faeries, hunters, and wizards fight to carve out a piece of the streets and skyscrapers, ready to make deals with all those who have something to offer.

### IN THIS BOOK, YOU'LL FIND:

- ◆ 12 unique character playbooks, each tuned to put your characters at the center of an urban fantasy story driven by allegiances, debts, and status
- ◆ 4 supernatural Circles—Mortalis, Night, Wild, and Power—whose nightly politics fill the city with dramatic twists and intriguing NPCs
- ◆ Clearly-defined mechanics that push the fiction forward every time a player rolls the dice, advancing your group's tale at every turn
- ◆ Detailed advice for the Master of Ceremonies, the player running the game, including 2 city guides—Chicago and Santiago—packed with story hooks
- ◆ All-new mechanics for backroom deals and faction play that make the nightly politics of the city real for players and NPCs alike

## THE CHOICE IS YOURS. THE CITY AWAITS.

Players  
3-6

Time  
2-4 hrs

Rating  
Mature

ISBN 978-1-959269-09-0



9 781959 269090

